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VOL. 4655

AFTER THE VERDICT

BY

ROBERT HICHENS

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. 1

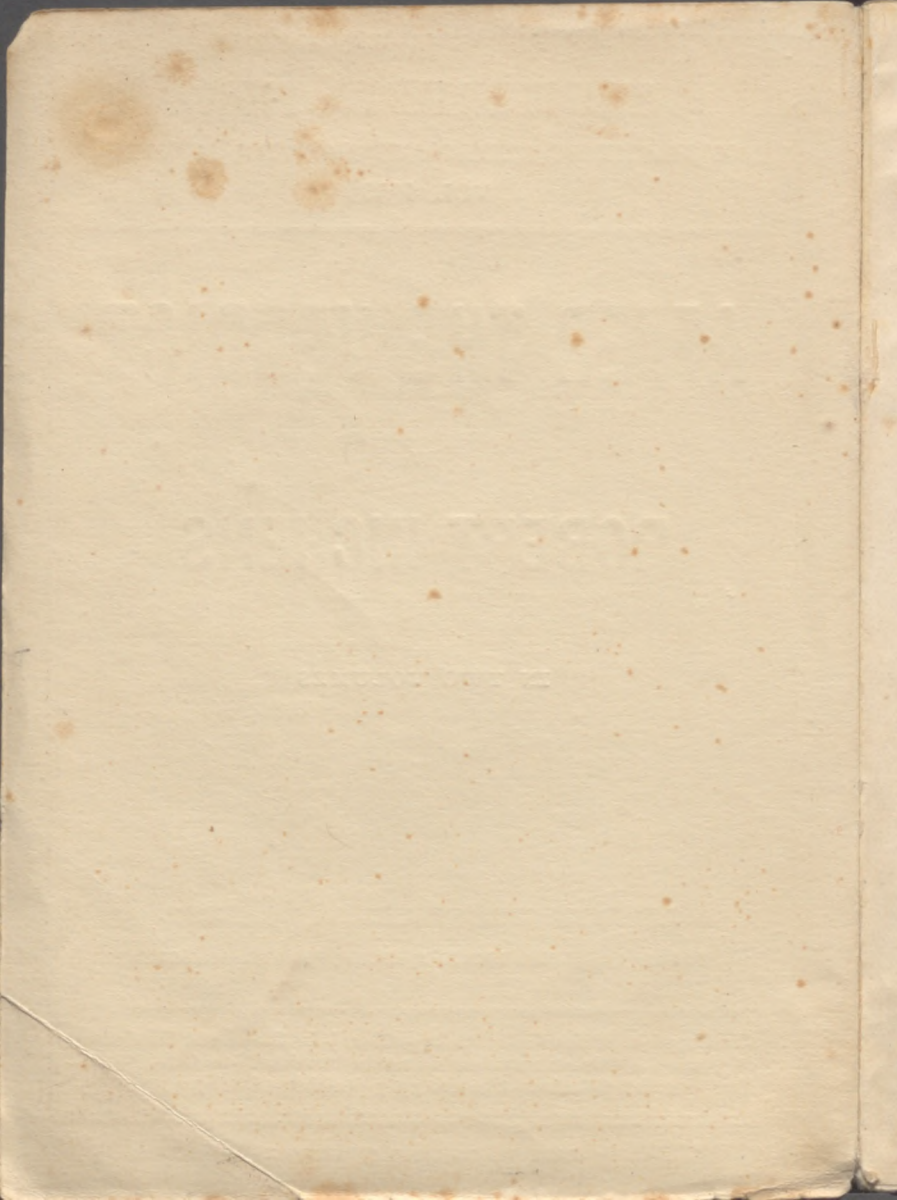


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AFTER THE VERDICT

BY

ROBERT HICHENS

AUTHOR OF

"THE GARDEN OF ALLAH," "THE CALL OF THE BLOOD,
ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1924

AFTER
THE VERDICT

BY
ROBERT HIGGINS

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The Prologue

AFTER THE VERDICT

BOOK I THE VERDICT

I

It was a warm and bright morning of May, and London looked cheerful, radiant almost. The streets were crowded with shopping women, and with women gazing into the shops longing, yet not daring, to buy. In the City the business of the day had begun, and the magnates of finance were getting out of motors in front of their offices, or were opening the letters brought by the first post as they talked to their clerks and secretaries. All over the town the telephones were buzzing, and eager people were getting "put through" to each other. At King's Club the lawn-tennis courts were full of players, and many of the "cracks" were practising in anticipation of the Wimbledon tournament. Babies were streaming into the Parks in perambulators, pushed forward by chattering nurses. Little boys and girls were playing ball in Kensington Gardens, or sailing boats on the Round Pond and the Serpentine. On the tan-covered riding track in Hyde Park many people, men, women and children, were enjoying a healthy morning gallop in the sunshine.

The back windows of some of the houses in the Knightsbridge district look on to Hyde Park, and on this May morning, in one of these houses, a woman of sixty was sitting at an open window watching the life below her.

She was about the middle height. Her hair was still dark

in many places, though streaked here and there with grey. Her figure was thin and wiry. Her face was not handsome. Indeed, most people who knew her thought she had a "plain face." The features of it were not specially irregular. The nose was fairly straight and not thick. The mouth was kindly and generous. The chin was firm without being heavy. The eyes, though small and set unusually far apart, were luminous and intelligent. They were even brilliantly clever eyes; and the brows above them were delicately arched, smooth and delicate. Nevertheless, the face was, perhaps, plain. It had an oddly flattened look about the cheeks, was rather too broad, and even suggested to some critical observers "a Mongolian type."

Nevertheless, Mrs. Baratrie had no Mongolian blood in her, so far as she herself, or anyone else, knew. On both sides of the family she was British. Her Mother had been a Cornishwoman of good birth, her Father a Londoner, the son of a respected Banker, and himself a Banker of repute. She had married John Baratrie, a successful landscape painter who had become an R.A., and was now a widow with one child, a son of thirty-three.

Clive Baratrie; that was her son's full name. (For his parents had only given him one Christian name.)

Clive Baratrie.

As Mrs. Baratrie gazed out of her window in the Knightsbridge house that morning she wondered how many of the happy people in the Park had that name, her son's name, on their lips.

To her just then every one looked strangely happy, and not only happy but full of a certain carelessness which only goes with a light heart. That young officer on the big-boned, raking bay horse with the white star on its forehead—he was alone, yet he looked in tearing spirits as he went thundering by, sitting his horse with the firm and elastic ease of a man at home across country. Surely he had nothing to

trouble about. The war was over and he was alive. Probably he would never fight in another war. Youth was his, health, and no doubt a good name.

"A good name!"

The woman at the open window murmured the words to herself as the rider disappeared among the trees in the direction of Hyde Park Corner.

What quantities of children were riding! There was a party of schoolgirls with a riding-master; big black bows, hard hats, and under the hats rosy, smiling faces. Even the riding-master, a thin, middle-aged man, with a lined face and narrow-lipped mouth, looked almost jovial in spite of the intent "horsiness" which marked him out for what he was. He was talking quite vivaciously with the plump little girl on the roan pony who was carefully learning to trot. And the galloping boys, and the smart, firm, young women with their perfect habits, and their air of lively, slightly hard self-control, and the slim, larky young men, and even the veterans, judges, politicians, old soldiers, lawyers, business men retired from City life—how cheery they all looked as they walked, or trotted, or cantered by, breathing in health from the soft air and the bright, warm sun-rays. Summer was coming. The English year was turning gaily towards the sun. Summer was coming with its green happiness, with the long procession of its dancing joys: the Derby, Ascot, Wimbledon, Henley, the Fourth of June at Eton, polo Matches at Hurlingham, the country lawn-tennis tournaments, Eastbourne, Hythe, Sidmouth, Folkestone, the regattas, the cricket matches, "Canterbury Week," and other "weeks" of healthy outdoor revelry all over the dear sport-loving country. Happiness, happiness everywhere! London that morning seemed to Mrs. Baratrie to be quivering with happiness and with joyous anticipation.

"And my boy is being tried at the Old Bailey for murder."

That was what she said to herself as she sat by the open window.

She was a woman with good brains. (Sometimes she had thought of them, but without conceit, as too good.) She was a woman who had faced life and studied it. She was a woman who, when all was going well for her, had often thought over the cruel possibilities of life, the terrible chances, and had imagined herself overtaken by one of them. And yet now, after weeks, months even, of mental and spiritual travail, she said to herself:

“But—it’s incredible!”

Incredible that she out of all the Mothers in London should have been chosen to go through what she was now going through! Incredible that the boy she had given birth to, and known intimately, and loved passionately for thirty-three years, should now, at this moment, be on his trial for murder! And then she told herself that the fact was that she had never really faced life till now, that she had only imagined she was facing it. From afar she had watched its tragedies and had thought that she realised and understood them. But she had not realised or understood them. She had not understood anything.

As she sat very still in her armchair she knew, or thought she knew, that this bright May day had been marked out to be the most terrific day in her life. She was sixty now. If she lived for forty years more, lived to be a hundred, she could surely never know such another day, of concentrated strangeness and anguish. The pain of a vital uncertainty gnawed her, a pain really in the mind but which seemed to be also at work, as if with teeth, in the body. For the verdict on Clive was expected that day. Some time before night-fall she would almost certainly know whether the man who had been her baby was going to be hanged by the neck or not. She would almost certainly know, but now she did not know. Would she sleep that night?

She wondered again how many of all those happy people in the Park were talking about Clive, were discussing his character, his life, his connection with the dead Mrs. Sabine, his probable fate. A great many, no doubt. For the case had lasted several days and had roused intense public interest. Whatever happened, whether Clive was killed by a hangman, or was given his freedom, his name would always be known to that monster, the Public, and would always be inseparably connected with death. Wherever he went he would be pointed out as "Baratry, the man who was tried at the Old Bailey for the murder of Mrs. Sabine."

And then for a moment Mrs. Baratry dared something. She dared to think of Clive acquitted. But would not even that—wonderful, glorious, longed-for, prayed-for event—would not even that be a tragedy? She thought intensely about her son, his character, his will-power, his temperament, his philosophy of life. Set free, what would he do?

There were two things a man might do, freed after such a trial as Clive had endured, was enduring now. He might have the courage to take up his life where he had left it off, to go on with it from that point as if nothing had happened; to remain among the people who knew him and the countless people who knew about him, to continue his interrupted work, to frequent his clubs as before, to go into society, tread the familiar streets; he might have the courage to "carry on." Or he might not have the courage. In the latter event he might, though pronounced innocent of any crime, give up everything, change his name, disappear into the void of the unknown, an innocent coward. He might go to some place where he had no friends, no acquaintances, and begin a new life as some one else.

If Clive were acquitted, which would he do? Would the proclamation of his own innocence, publicly asserted by the Jury, and thus driven into the mind of the mob, enable him to endure the horrible burden of publicity which he would

have to carry somehow to the end of his days? Or would he shrink away into the shades, beaten by Fate?

Mrs. Baratrie did not know. But—there was Vivian.

When Mrs. Baratrie thought about Vivian she felt that she was treading on firmer ground. That was strange. But was not almost everything in life strange? Vivian was so marked, so definite in her strong and brilliant youth. It was difficult to doubt when thinking of her. And her conduct all through this hideous business had been extraordinary. It had astonished every one, even Mrs. Baratrie, who had always believed in Vivian's strength of character and moral courage. A great athlete speaking of Vivian had once said: "That girl has the tournament temperament!" Vivian had shown the tournament temperament through all this tragic affair of Clive. She had "carried on" gloriously; she was carrying on at this moment. For she had said to Mrs. Baratrie on the previous day:

"Why should I alter my life? Clive is innocent. I know it. I believe in the justice of God. I believe Clive will be acquitted. I would go to the Old Bailey, but he has begged me not to go. Very well! Then I shall go to King's as usual, and practise for Wimbledon, and meet all my friends. I haven't promised to marry a murderer, but an innocent man. I'm not ashamed of Clive because this hideous thing has come upon him. I shall go to King's and play to win."

And Mrs. Baratrie was certain that Vivian was at King's Club now playing to win. Vivian was extraordinary. What would they say at King's? What would Jim Gordon say? He would surely not believe that Vivian could do that on such a day, loving Clive. He would surely not be able to understand such a way of loving. He would think that he had a chance even if Clive were acquitted. And yet he must be wishing for a verdict of guilty. He was not a bad fellow. Most people would certainly call Jim Gordon a very good fellow. But human nature is human nature. He must be

hoping, in that inmost place of the soul where all things go naked, that Clive would never come out into the free world again. For Clive had taken Vivian from Jim Gordon. Gordon and she had never been engaged, certainly. But if Clive had not come into Vivian's life she would have married Jim Gordon. Mrs. Baratrie was certain of that. Clive had taken her away.

The sunlight grew stronger; the heat of the day was increasing. Summer was in the air. The heat in the Old Bailey, packed with staring humanity, must be intense. Imaginatively Mrs. Baratrie realised the scene and shuddered. And cold came upon her, the cold of a great fear. Suddenly she felt desperate. She leaned from the window and looked down.

The room in which she was, her own sitting-room in which she "did" things, was on the third floor of the house. Now, looking down, she saw beneath her brown earth and grass. Although it was brilliantly fine now, it had rained hard in the night. A falling body would make a dent in that earth, but the resistance of the earth to the body would surely be enough to make an end of things here for the one who fell.

It was a temptation, a terrible temptation.

The fact that it was so seemed to prove to Mrs. Baratrie that she had a coward's heart. And yet she had "kept up" wonderfully till this moment. Every one who knew her had said so, and every one, she believed, had honestly thought so. She had not shown the peculiar dashing intrepidity of Vivian. But she was sixty and Vivian was barely twenty-three and had marvellous health. She could not be expected to bear a burden in quite that young way. But she had carried her load without flinching. Clive had no reason to be ashamed of his Mother.

Nevertheless, perhaps he had doubted her. For he had told her that if he saw her in the Court during his trial he might lose his nerve. He had begged her to keep away.

But he had also exacted a promise from Vivian to keep away from the Court, and he could not possibly have doubted Vivian's courage. Perhaps, though, when dealing with her case, he had had another, subtle reason. He loved Vivian with the intensity of a secretly flaming nature. There is a horrible indignity in being caged in the dock; something almost animal about it! Clive was extremely sensitive. Perhaps he could not bear the girl he loved to see the poor, quivering human animal set in its cage among the insolently free. And the memory of it might remain with her through all her life, the hateful memory—if she saw! He could not have doubted Vivian, but he had, perhaps, doubted his Mother, had thought she might "break down," make a scene, do something wild or tragic, show her motherhood suddenly naked, that sacred thing which should always wear its delicate veil even when alone with the son. Perhaps he had detected the weak spot in her character, the weak spot which now held her at gaze, fascinated by the look of the earth down there below her at the verge of the Park.

Life which could be so happy could be so horrible! And always the black nightmare lay at the edge of the golden dream. And no one ever knew how long joy, or peace, or even merely normal security, would last.

At that moment Mrs. Baratrie was enveloped by temptation. In her life of sixty years, certainly not free from temptations, she had never before been assailed as she was assailed now. Hitherto she had sometimes felt herself touched, perhaps pulled at softly, drawn forward subtly, as if by a hand. But now it was as if strong, almost titanic arms and hands grasped and held her. And an imperious voice in her ears said: "Go down! Go down, and in less than a minute you will be out of it all, away, free from it for ever, safe on the other side."

She got up and left the window. She turned her back on it and looked about the familiar room in which she had

passed lately so many frightful hours. Many of her favourite books were there ranged in cream-coloured shelves. The upright piano she had carefully chosen was there with a "Canterbury" holding scores beside it. On the walls hung a few good water-colours. The large inlaid Italian writing-table was covered with letters and papers. On the floor was a dim, and very old, Oriental carpet. A glass case full of blocks of amber and jade glowed in the sunlight. Some roses looked innocent and remote in bowls of blue and white china. A half-finished piece of embroidery lay on the arm of the dull red sofa.

Mrs. Baratrie stood and stared at these things, and they seemed terrible to her, because of the associations she now had with everything in that room.

It was in that room that she had heard of Clive's arrest on the charge of having murdered Mrs. Sabine. And since then the room and everything in it had been closely linked with her Calvary.

She stood motionless for a moment. She was struggling to escape from those arms which still held her. She thought of Clive—if she did it. She thought of Vivian. How horrified Vivian would be! But there would be contempt in her horror. For to Vivian suicide under any circumstances would mean weakness, if it did not mean madness. But there was something which Vivian did not know, which Clive did not know, which no one knew. Mrs. Baratrie alone knew that she had a terrible reason for going.

But if she did that, if she went down, Clive might surely suspect the secret of which she had never spoken, at which she had never hinted, the secret which she had carried with her to the other world, or to the nothingness in which few men and fewer women believe. And how terribly cruel it would be to leave Clive with that suspicion. It, and her hideous departure, would poison his life, if he were allowed to live.

Poison! Mrs. Sabine!

Mrs. Baratrie trembled a little. Then she turned and went softly back to the window. At that moment something in her certainly gave way, the something which in the normal sane human being inhibits. She went back to the window and leaned out again. Her eyes were fixed on the earth below. Her mind was intent on that bit of earth. How deep would the dent be, the dent which her body would make down there?

The schoolgirls were going by on the tan again, at a canter now. Their black bows were bobbing up and down. They had still much to learn of horsemanship. But they were enjoying themselves. Their laughter sounded clearly in the sunshine. The riding-master was flourishing his crop. The small maiden on the roan pony was holding on to her pummel. Not the right thing to do! But she was very young and must be forgiven.

Forgiven!

"I shall surely be forgiven!" Mrs. Baratrie thought. "And if I am not it can't be helped. The arms and hands are too strong for me. I can't resist them. They have got me and they mean to throw me down. It's their will, not my own, that I am going to obey. That dent—it must be made. And only my body can make it."

And she stretched out over the window-sill. At that moment it almost seemed to her as if already she were out of the only world she had ever known. There was a sudden curious fading of everything from her consciousness. Memories seemed to retreat in her mind. She still knew she was a Mother. She still knew that her son was being tried for murder. She still knew that he loved Vivian and that Vivian loved him. But the meaning of motherhood, honour and love was lessened for her. Whatever happened here on this earth was not of great importance, though perhaps it seemed so to man deprived of vision. All that was really important lay beyond.

She grasped the window-sill with both hands and made ready to go.

Just then she heard what sounded to her like a very distant tapping. It was really a knocking on the door of her room. Though it sounded far off, it startled her and recalled her to a sharper consciousness of herself and her surroundings. She remembered that on coming into the room she had locked the door, wishing to make certain of solitude.

Tap, tap, tap!

She drew in from the window and took her hands from the sill. At that moment a feeling of frustration combined with intense irritation swept over her. But she was now definitely back in ordinary, horrible life.

She stood still for a moment, then crossed the room slowly and unlocked the door.

A thin, narrow-shouldered man, with kind, respectable grey eyes, a pointed white nose, and smooth brown hair, stood outside looking miserable and upset. This was Kingston, Mrs. Baratrie's butler.

"What is it, Kingston? I said I didn't wish to be disturbed."

"I know, Ma'am. I beg pardon. On such a day——"

The grey eyes examined her—surely with suspicion. For a moment she felt almost guilty.

"I beg pardon, but Mr. Archie Denys has come with a message from Miss Denys, and he begged to see you. He said Miss Denys had made a point of it that he should see you, Ma'am. He really insisted, and as it was from Miss Denys, I didn't like to . . ."

"Yes, yes!"

For a moment Mrs. Baratrie said nothing more. Her eyes had gone again to the open window. Had Kingston guessed? Or did he suspect? The impulse had died away in her. She believed that it would never come back. A fatalistic conviction possessed her that she had been deliberately stopped

from doing what she had been going to do. Kingston had been sent at the critical moment. It was meant that she should "go through with it." Very well!

"I'll go down to Mr. Denys," she said. "Where is he?"

"In the drawing-room, Ma'am."

Mrs. Baratrie looked once more at the window, and thought: "That dent will never be made." Then she left the room.

In the long drawing-room on the first floor she found Vivian's young brother waiting with a letter for her in his hand.

Archie Denys was just twenty. He had a clear, pale complexion, large, yellowish brown eyes, and tremendously thick black hair, which was brushed back from his low forehead without a parting. Slim, fairly tall, and well built, he looked full of nervous energy and quick intelligence. His expression was generally gay, and he was a lively boy, fond of games, dancing and athletics. But to-day he looked stiff, self-conscious, and indeed almost hostile, though it was evident that he was trying to seem natural.

"Good morning, Archie," said Mrs. Baratrie. "Won't you sit down?"

"Oh, I mustn't stay, Mrs. Baratrie. I'm sure you—that is—it's only that Vivian wanted me to give you this personally. She said the servant mightn't remember on a day like—that is, they might possibly forget to give it you. She made me promise."

He held out the letter. Then he added almost sullenly, and looking down at the carpet:

"Vivian's playing tennis at King's with Jim Gordon, Mrs. Littlethwaite and Kemmis the Californian champion. He's just come over, and this is his first day on the courts."

"Is it?"

"Yes. Not that you'll care to—I mean not that that sort of thing could interest you."

"They're practising for Wimbledon, I suppose?"

"Yes, that's it."

For a moment Mrs. Baratrie's eyes met the boy's eyes, and she knew exactly how he was feeling. Archie adored his sister. And his adoration was mingled with pride. He was tremendously proud of her. Her skill in games, which was even greater than his own, fascinated him. And now that she was one of the finest lawn-tennis players in England, and had won many prizes abroad on the Riviera, and had been seriously written about by lawn-tennis experts in the big daily papers as a probable winner at Wimbledon, her growing celebrity secretly almost intoxicated him. She was making the name of Denys famous. And Clive Baratrie! What was he doing to the name of Denys?

"Poor boy! What would he give if only Clive had never met Vivian!" thought Mrs. Baratrie.

Archie was secretly writhing under the scandal and publicity in which his beloved sister was involved, and Mrs. Baratrie knew it. She saw it in the boy's stiff, almost hostile manner; she read it in his eyes; she heard it in his constrained young voice.

"I'll just read Vivian's letter," she said.

"Yes," said Archie, and bit his lip.

Mrs. Baratrie opened the letter, sat down and read it.

"DEAREST MUM,—

"Archie will bring you this. It is only to say I shall be with you this afternoon. You and I must be together at the End. I gather that we may know somewhere round about five. But I feel that I know already. As I told you, I believe in the justice of God. Sometimes it may be slow in coming, but this time I am nearly sure it is not going to be a laggard. I knelt for a long time last night and pressed my hands against my closed eyes. And my prayer was only, 'Tell me, tell me about to-morrow!' Then I saw a strong yellow light come out of the darkness. It was almost like the blaze of a sun we don't know in England. And I felt—it's all right.

But of course I am coming to be with you at the End. Don't shiver. Don't be afraid. Don't doubt. I am doing what I said I should do. I am going to King's. People will say I am heartless. They don't know. Do they, Mum? My heart's with you and Clive. Archie brings this. Dear old Archie! He can't understand. You know what boy's pride is. And he loves me in a way that's gloriously English. If he's impossible try to forgive him.

"VIVIAN."

Mrs. Baratrie looked up from this letter to the boy standing stiffly before her, biting his lip nervously, and holding one brown hand tightly with the other. Everything to-day seemed to her extraordinary, or not natural. A moment ago she had, she supposed, been on the verge of committing suicide. There had been no premeditation about it. It had been a sudden awful impulse. A butler—what an emissary of Fate or of God!—had prevented her from killing herself, and now here she was in her drawing-room thinking about a boy's misery, understanding, and even sympathising with, a boy's proud pain. What else did this day hold for her, of the prosaic, the unexpected, or the horrible?

"Won't you sit down for a minute, Archie?" she said.

He looked at her doubtfully, wrinkling his forehead. Then he said, with an effort at politeness:

"Rather—of course!"

And he sat down at once not far from her.

"I know how you are feeling," said Mrs. Baratrie.

Archie flushed scarlet, flushed to the roots of his hair.

"Oh, but—I'm not feeling anything! I mean I'm not feeling anything special!" he said, hesitating, almost stammering.

"Well, Archie, I am!" said Mrs. Baratrie. "This is a difficult day for me to live through."

She spoke quietly, without any strong note of self-pity.

"Oh, Mrs. Baratrie, I know! Please don't think I don't understand. I feel for you with all my heart. Anyone would, and I do."

She shook her head.

"No, Archie. That's not quite true. Your feeling is about Vivian and yourself, and I quite understand it. This awful thing is like a net flung out"—she made a gesture with both hands—"and Vivian and you are caught in it. And it's cruel, it's horrible for you. But think of Vivian! I forgot her just now——"

She paused, and fixed her eyes on the boy. He stared at her, and fear dawned in his eyes.

"Forgot her!" he said, as she was silent. "How d'you mean?"

"I forgot her when I went to the window."

"Well, I don't understand . . ."

"Never mind! But now I'm thinking of Vivian. She is wonderful."

"I—I think she's a bit too wonderful!" muttered the boy, and he ground his teeth.

"Too wonderful? Why?"

"She oughtn't to have shown at King's to-day. I told her so. I tried to make her see—but she wouldn't."

"I think she was right to go, feeling as she does."

Archie said nothing. His face was grim and looked almost old. He had crossed one leg over the other, and held his hands clasped round his left knee. The flush was still on his face.

"What has Vivian to be ashamed of?" added Mrs. Baratrie.

"Vi! Nothing, of course!" said Archie sharply.

"Then why should she alter her life?"

"Well, I don't think it's the moment to—God knows what Jim Gordon and all the tennis crowd will make of it."

"Jim Gordon—ah!" said Mrs. Baratrie, with a sudden

touch of irrepressible bitterness. "You're very fond of Jim Gordon, aren't you?"

"I don't know about fond. I think he's a jolly fine chap, and I'm keen on his play. He's taught me a lot too."

"Lawn-tennis isn't everything!"

"No, of course not. But Jim isn't only a crack. He's an all-round man."

"Archie, do you hate Clive?"

Archie started violently and threw out his hands.

"Mrs. Baratrie! How could I——"

"Oh yes, you might. It would probably be very natural."

"Well, I don't."

"You mean that?"

"I do. I swear it. But——"

"Yes?"

"But—but—oh, I do *hate* Vi being mixed up in it all! Oh God! It's too filthy! It's too rotten! My sister—and *Vi*! It makes me absolutely sick!"

He had got on his feet. His eyes were full of tears. Angrily he tried to brush them away.

"You can't understand what it is—seeing her name all over the place in these vile papers. Damn the papers! What right have people to know all about my sister and Clive? What has it to do with the case? What has it to do with Mrs. Sabine and Clive? If I could get at those hounds of reporters . . ."

He choked. His hands were clenched. It was evident that he was on the verge of losing all self-control. And Mrs. Baratrie remembered her crisis a few minutes ago in the room upstairs. She, Archie! And how was Clive bearing this horror to-day? For a moment she shut her eyes and saw Clive in the dock.

"They have no decency, no pity! They drag out everything. They——"

"Archie, if Clive is innocent all this isn't his fault, is it?"

"No. I never said it was."

"If he is found guilty he will disappear. You will never be troubled with him again."

"You don't suppose I want Clive to be condemned?" Archie exclaimed, almost with passion.

"Hush! Of course not. And if he is not condemned? If he is released? That's what is tormenting you, isn't it?"

Archie looked at Mrs. Baratrie, came a step towards her, stopped, then suddenly came up to her and laid one hand on her arm.

"Oh, Mrs. Baratrie, whatever happens Vi mustn't do it! She mustn't marry Clive. You know that. He's your son, I know, and perhaps I'm a beast for saying it. But I can't help it. Don't let Vi marry Clive, for God's sake! I want him to be acquitted. I swear I do. I'd do anything—I'd—I'd pray for it, I would really, only praying isn't in my line. But Clive mustn't marry Vi."

"Clive will probably never marry anyone," said Mrs. Baratrie, in a low, dry voice.

Archie took his hand from her arm.

"Beg pardon!" he said. "I know—I know I oughtn't to have"—a pause, then—"It's too awful to-day!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Baratrie. "It's too awful for us all."

She was no longer looking at Archie. For a moment there was a dead silence in the room. Then she heard a movement, the opening and closing of a door.

Archie had gone. She sat where she was and again looked at Vivian's letter. Her eyes fell on the words:

"I believe in the justice of God."

II.

ALL the agony of a boy's self-consciousness and passionate preoccupation with the opinions of those who to him represent the world had been in Archie's cry, "God knows what

Jim Gordon and all the tennis crowd will make of it!" To him, and even to his much more remarkable sister, Vivian, the "tennis crowd" meant a great deal. They knew either well, or fairly well, almost all the leading players of the game they both delighted and excelled in. And they spent a great part of the summer in travelling about playing in the big tournaments.

Their Father, Henry Denys, was a rich Banker, and although himself a normal sort of man, and inclined to be rather old-fashioned in his own way of life, was very easy-going and disposed to allow plenty of latitude to others, even if they were his own children. One of his theories was that young people should never be forced into a mould. "Let them develop in their own way!" said Henry Denys. "Let them grow in the direction which is natural to them." If a boy showed a love of the classics, the disposition of a student, then by all means let him go to Oxford or Cambridge. If, on the other hand, he seemed commercial in his instincts and attracted towards the business side of life, then into business with him in good time, directly the public-school education which Mr. Denys considered essential for every English boy' who proposed to go through life behaving in all circumstances like a gentleman, was over. If a bias towards art, or music, seemed uppermost in the young fellow, then away with him to the Slade or the Royal College of Music. And if the basis of his nature seemed to be a passion for athletics and games? Ah, just there Henry Denys's only son, Archie, came in very definitely! Archie was crazy about games, and so was his only sister. He had not wanted to go to the University, and when he left Harrow his Father had had him down to the Bank, where he had been instructed in some of the mysteries. He had proved to be as sharp as a needle, and had soon shown that, later on, he was likely to be of use as a partner in the firm. But meanwhile he had developed an extraordinary aptitude for lawn-tennis, and his good-natured

Father had allowed him the time necessary for the improvement of himself in this pastime, which, to Archie, was an intensely serious and tremendously important business on which great issues hung.

And now had come the lure of the tournaments, and the new wonder of Vivian's fame as a player, and on the top of all this the terrific scandal of Clive's trial for murder.

When he had left Mrs. Baratrie's house Archie stood for a moment in the brilliant sunshine facing the roar of the traffic through Knightsbridge. He felt almost dazed after his outburst in Mrs. Baratrie's drawing-room. He was conscious of shame and of desperate unhappiness. In his young opinion his conduct just now had been disgraceful. What on earth would Jim Gordon have thought of it if he had witnessed it? He, Archie, had lost his head. He had almost shouted; he had sworn; he had very nearly cried before a woman. It was unbelievable. Yes, but it had happened! And then he had made that desperate appeal about Clive to Clive's Mother, and on that day of all days, when no one knew whether Clive might not be sentenced to hanging! He had done all these things after the training he had had as a tournament player, after all Jim Gordon's drastic attention to his morale.

Jim Gordon was very keen on morale, and his perfect sportsman, Archie's ideal, was not the sort of fellow you run across every day. Archie remembered at this moment many of Jim's injunctions, and pithy sayings, delivered rather sternly and inflexibly with a stiff upper lip.

"Never get flustered!"

That was one of them. Others were: "Never show emotion on the court"; "Fight all the time"; "Never let anyone know you are worried"; "A fine defeat is better than a hollow victory"; "Lose your nerve and you've lost the match even if your opponent isn't in your class"; "Never pay any attention to what the gallery is thinking, but keep all your mind on the game"; "Under all circumstances hold your

nerve"; "Don't be sensational"; "The man who isn't a gentleman in defeat is never a gentleman"; "Keep a stout heart and a thin body"; "Watch out for your bad temper"; "Never bluster even if you lose a match through a wrong decision"; "Never default unless you're too ill to go on the Court"; "Never say die, and you may live to be a crack."

What would Jim have thought if he had been in Mrs. Baratrie's drawing-room five minutes ago? Archie felt a longing to go away somewhere and hide. But what would Jim think of that? The boy wanted to redeem that ugly little bit of the past, with its vehemence, its unchecked emotion, its horrible revelation of temperament and sensitiveness, and he could only think of one way of doing it just then. He hailed a taxi-cab and told the man to drive to King's Club. If Vivian showed up there, so would he. It would be agony to him to meet the tennis crowd to-day. He felt unfit for a moral effort. He felt unable to wear a mask. He was on the edge of his nerves. But he would face it out as a punishment for what had just happened at Mrs. Baratrie's.

What a queer woman she was! He couldn't understand her thoroughly. Something in her eyes that day had frightened him, when she had spoken about forgetting Vivian and going to the window. Why shouldn't she go to the window? Her eyes had looked almost sinister just then, and he had felt half afraid of her. Not afraid in the physical sense, of course, but in quite another way, a more subtle way.

Hulloh! Close to King's! There was Mrs. Vernon Charlesworth, the great champion, walking to the club. She, at any rate, never showed emotion. Her strong, rather sad face was almost exactly like a mask. The expression of it seldom changed. Archie had seen her win a great match, which had run to thirty games in the last set, by sheer pluck and will-power, and never even smile when it was over. And he had seen her lose magnificently once at Wimbledon on the Centre

Court before the pick of London. That day she had smiled as she congratulated her victorious opponent. What a woman! She saw him in his cab and bowed. As he took off his hat he thought:

"She'll nerve me!"

At the entrance to King's he paid off the cab, then waited a minute. Mrs. Charlesworth, walking with a slow and easy stride, came round the corner. Archie thought he would like to go in with her. She was a tonic.

"Going to play?" she said, in a rather deep and lingering voice, as she came up.

"No, I don't think so. But my sister's here!"

"Is she?"

There was no surprise on that powerful, but strangely inexpressive, face. Archie felt slightly relieved. Perhaps people——

"What are you doing, Mrs. Charlesworth?" he asked, with deep respect.

"A women's four. I play with Elizabeth Saxby against Mrs. Carton and Mrs. O'Brian."

"By Jove! That'll be worth seeing. Some game that!"

"Elizabeth Saxby and I play together in the Women's Doubles at Wimbledon this year."

"You ought to win them."

"We may come up against your sister."

"Oh—I don't know!"

Suddenly Clive, the Old Bailey, a Judge in wig and robes, a horrible thing called the Black Cap, surged up in Archie's mind as floating seaweed surges up on a smoothly rolling wave. And again he felt desperate. Why were they, Vi and he, victims? The selfishness of the thought was so natural that he did not resent it. By Wimbledon Clive might be mouldering in a murderer's grave.

"Perhaps Vi may not be at Wimbledon this year," he added, not looking at Mrs. Charlesworth.

"I hope she will. She's developed into a wonderful player. Her foot-work is practically perfect now, and her overhead has come on extraordinarily since last year."

She walked off to the dressing-rooms.

"And that's the girl Clive has plunged into all this!"

Useless to say to Archie, useless for him to say to himself, that it was, perhaps, not Clive's fault. Archie did not believe Clive was guilty. He could not believe such a thing. But he did think, he felt he knew, that Clive had been terribly injudicious, had contributed to the bringing of all this world-wide scandal on himself, and all this misery on others, including especially Vivian and Archie Denys. For if it had not been for the dreadful connection with Mrs. Sabine——

But it was no use following again that miserable train of thought. All that was done and it could never be undone.

There were many people at King's that day, and Archie thought they all looked at him curiously. Many of them he knew, of course, and probably they all knew him by sight, knew who he was. Practically the whole lawn-tennis world was acquainted with the "Denys Pair." Seeking for Vivian, and holding his young head higher than usual, in an effort to counteract the intense and painful self-consciousness which possessed him, he stared across the big lawn. All the Courts were full up. He saw pretty Lady Dartree with her snow-white hair playing in a mixed doubles; the famous Long brothers hard at work in a men's four; little Winby, who must have played in tournaments for at least thirty years, giving instruction to young Harold Duncan; Mrs. Delane, marvellous on the backhand, dealing faithfully with Millie Simpson's terrible chops. Four Orientals were playing, deadly men who never seemed to tire, who never seemed to care whether they were winning or losing, but who certainly never stepped on the Court without intending to win. Archie wished that he had their power of absolutely concealing thought. One of them, Mera Pandit, he had seen win the London Covered

Court Lawn-tennis Championship against Bob Murray last year. Bob was a wonderful player, with a big armoury of strokes, but Mera Pandit had made mince-meat of him. Almost motionless himself, and cooler than the eternal Sphinx, he had kept Bob perpetually on the move, retrieving almost impossible balls. Towards the close he had had Bob completely exhausted and at his mercy. And yet his own play had not looked remarkable. He had seemed just to keep a good length and to put the ball back persistently in the other man's court.

"Deceptive devils! That's what they are!" said Archie to himself, as he passed the four dark-skinned little fellows. "Where can Vi be?"

In the distance, on the far side of the great space near the high encircling wall, he saw a knot of people watching a mixed double. He could not see who the players were, but he guessed. Something seemed to tell him that that was Vi's four, and, pulling himself together, he made his way towards the small crowd by the wall. As he came up he was justified of his guess. The players were his sister, Jim Gordon, Mrs. Littlethwaite and Kemmis, the young Californian star who had recently arrived in England.

Those who were watching were so intent on the game that no one noticed Archie's arrival, and he stood at the back for several minutes, unobserved, but keenly, painfully observant of all that was going on in this tiny corner of life.

Mrs. Littlethwaite, called by her intimate friends "the retriever," was in Archie's opinion the best base-line player in the British Isles,—among women, of course. Her steadiness was galling to an opponent, her persistence was scarcely human. She had the great quality of being apparently always "keyed up," always keen. And she seldom, or never, turned a hair. Rather tall, very thin, and almost perfectly made, she had a pale ethereal face, large blue eyes full of watchfulness—eyes that were always on the ball—and a stag-like

head covered with a thick crop of beautiful golden hair. She spent about ten months of the year in tournament play, and had just arrived in England from Marseilles, where she had won the ladies' singles and, with Jim Gordon, the open Mixed Doubles, in the International Tournament, after playing since the beginning of January at Monte Carlo, Cannes, Nice, Menton, Beaulieu, Hyères, etc., etc., etc. Now she was settling down to the English lawn-tennis season, which would close in October with the London Covered Court Championships. Her life really was lawn-tennis, but she was a charming woman off the court, and Archie had a great admiration for her.

The Californian was her partner to-day, an immensely tall, brown, cat-like fellow, finely drawn, springy, almost diabolically alert and determined, with widely opened, piercing brown eyes and big-boned arms that had a tremendous reach. He played the modern American game, attacking all the time, all out for a win. But his attack was directed by brains. He was not merely a tough, hard-hitting youngster who cared for nothing but smashes. He was a player with a definite purpose who studied his opponent's psychology; well matched against Jim Gordon, who had, perhaps, less youthful dash, but who was the Californian's equal in relentless determination and tireless vigour.

Archie thought of the Californian as a huge, lean brown cat, a wild cat out for prey. And Jim Gordon—what was he? Difficult to say exactly! There was something both cold and fiery about Jim, something hard and burning. A clever man had once called him "a steel box full of combustibles." And there was aptness in the description.

He, too, was tall, over six foot, clean-shaven, with a darkness of suppressed hair on his face. But the look almost of wildness in the Californian—only there, by the way, when the game was on,—was met in Jim Gordon by a steady and obstinate arrogance of expression, which suggested aristo-

cratic will-power, as Mrs. Littlethwaite had once said, "in full blast." This arrogance of expression, objected to by some people, was perfectly natural to Gordon. He did not fly it as a flag in the face of the enemy, but had it with him when alone, in waking and sleeping, in his lying down and in his getting up. The expression belonged to his regular, bold and finely cut features, to the slightly sarcastic curve of his lips, to his naturally defiant grey eyes. It suited them, put the finishing touch to them. And the low brow and strong head that crowned them, with the crinkly dark hair, parted in the middle, and oddly touched at the temples with premature grey, harmonised with them so admirably that every one who looked on Jim Gordon knew him at once for an out-of-the-way handsome man.

Nevertheless, Gordon's expression and general bearing set some people against him. Others, of Archie's type, worshipped him partly because of them. These found in him the look and the air of a leader, and were awed almost by his serene severity. Gordon had the figure of a trained athlete, but there was some intellectuality in his face. The bold gaze of one who was more than competent in action was allied, in him, with the subtlety and finesse of one who was also energetic in thought. And this combination of mental strength with physical skill made him a very dangerous opponent.

Gordon was a great tennis intellect. At this time he was just thirty, at least six years older than Kemmis.

Mrs. Littlethwaite and Kemmis were playing—she behind the base line, he up at the net. Gordon was also at the net when Archie took up his position at the back of the watching people. Vivian Denys was serving.

Archie's almost desperate eyes went to Vi, but only when they had rested on the other three players, had looked hard at Mrs. Littlethwaite, Kemmis and Gordon. For Archie, though he longed, yet to-day dreaded to look on his sister.

He need not have been afraid. Whatever Vivian was feeling that morning she showed no trace of emotion, of excitement, of self-consciousness. She was wearing the lawn-tennis mask. Her face was almost strangely inexpressive, as the faces of most of those who play perpetually in big matches before multitudes of watching eyes are. She was obeying Jim Gordon's command to Archie: "Never show emotion on the Court." However severe the struggle, however tremendous the fluctuations of it, however close defeat comes on the heels of apparent victory, or victory on the heels of apparent defeat—masks, ladies and gentlemen, masks! Show no rapture, no despair, no triumph of the winner, no depression of the loser! The great match ended, the great title won or lost, a few quiet words at the net, spoken with calm, grave faces, and—the dressing-rooms!

Vivian had a smashing overhand service, unusually severe for a woman's, a service with a big twist in it. It did not always "come off," but to-day she was not making faults. Archie noted that fact with wonder. Her service game was prolonged. Kemmis and Mrs. Littlethwaite were playing magnificently. Deuce was called six times after Archie's arrival. And during that time Vivian did not serve a fault. To her brother this extraordinary competence on such a day of agony seemed almost inhuman. Was Vi made of steel? Or—could she really love Clive? Was it possible that a woman who genuinely loved a man could face her world while he was sitting in the dock awaiting a verdict carrying life and freedom, or shame and death, could face her world like that, absolute mistress of herself, absolutely at the top of her form? Perhaps Vi had made up her mind to have done with Clive, and was keeping her secret from a sense of chivalry. If Clive were condemned and paid the great penalty, she might keep it for ever. Her path would be cleared, and surely some day she would marry Jim. If Clive were exonerated and set free, then the secret would have to be told, of course.

But many innocent men had had to face such disappointments. Could Vi love Clive enough to stick to him through everything, and yet play a great game in the sunshine, a game that demanded complete concentration, readiness, swiftness, unceasing skill, on the day when his life or death hung in the balance?

An indrawn breath—the indrawn breath it seemed of all those watching in that corner of the Club Ground—marked a stage in the match. Vivian had at last won her service game. “Five games all!” called a voice. Without glancing to right or left, Vivian and Jim Gordon crossed over and prepared to receive service from the Californian.

Vivian Denys looked younger than her age. She was just twenty-three. She was fairer than her brother, and had warm brown hair which she wore cut short, but not very short, and parted in the middle of her small, alert head. Her hair had a strong ripple in it. Her smooth forehead was low. Her eyes were dark brown, large and steady. They held usually a very honest, friendly and fearless expression. Her nose was short, and straight; her chin firm and round; her mouth small and eager, her lips ever so slightly turned up at the corners. She had the wild-rose complexion which is not uncommon in England. Her figure, above the middle height but not exceptionally tall, was very slim, narrow at the hips, lithe and almost boyish. It seemed made for quickness and agility. Her fleetness of foot was abnormal. She never played a sensational game and had no tricks for the gallery. She had been brought up in a school which abhorred all tricks. But when necessary she could take a flying leap at the ball, and her rapidity for getting about the court was extraordinary. Nevertheless, like nearly all first-rate players, she usually played with a seeming absence of effort, and her knowledge of court-craft was so great that she seemed to draw the ball to where she was standing instead of being obliged to pursue it to distant parts of the

blank. She and Jim Gordon played in parallel formation about eight feet from the net when the ball was in play, whereas Mrs. Littlethwaite played from behind the base line and Kemmis at the net, except when either was serving.

The game now became even more stern than before. Mrs. Littlethwaite looked doggedly determined, as she stood with her feet well apart, bending, and staring into her opponent's court, while the Californian, stretching himself to his full height, and throwing his head back with his big mouth open and his strong white teeth bared, delivered his terrific service.

Jim Gordon's face was set like iron, and his normally arrogant expression developed into a restrained fierceness. To Archie just then he looked the very embodiment of masculine concentration, totally indifferent to spectators, oblivious of criticism, a mind and body that meant to win, a soul given wholly, almost with a sort of cold passion, to the game. And Vi? Her face was set too, and rather stern. But she looked somehow calmer than Jim, though equally concentrated. His face at the crisis was more expressive than hers, was less mask-like. And Archie faintly realised something of woman's power of drawing the shutter over the window when the desire is to hide what is going on in the room beyond. He looked at Jim's face and he felt with Jim, instinctively and almost intimately. Then he looked at his sister and wondered. Vi was more of a mystery to him than Jim could ever be, although Jim had such a marvellous hold over himself, such a truly English contempt for all emotional displays.

"Isn't Vi Denys wonderful?" murmured a feminine voice close to Archie.

He started sensitively and looked sharply to his left. Was it coming—what he had dreaded before arriving at King's, and ever since he had been there?

"To play at all to-day, and to be able to play like this!" continued the murmuring voice.

He saw the speaker, a plump, small and very chic woman

with eyeglasses, Mrs. Lorrimer, who had a house with a garden in Regent's Park, and who sometimes got up wonderful private tournaments in aid of charities in which she was interested. She was speaking to a tall young fellow in flannels, with a hawk-like face and keen dark eyes which were fixed on the players.

"Look at that volley!" added Mrs. Lorrimer, as Vivian made one of her marvellous springs and killed a difficult ball from Mrs. Littlethwaite.

There was a little uncontrollable burst of applause from the spectators.

"She's a peach!" said the young man.

"I know! But to be able to be a peach *to-day!*"

"I think it's bully!"

"Yes, but would you if you were *he?*"

"Thank God, I'm not!"

"They say she's still definitely engaged to him."

At this moment there was a movement. Vivian and Gordon had won the game against the Californian's service, and the score stood at six to five, Gordon's service. Kemmis stood back. He looked relentless as a young gladiator, but his teeth were feeling round his lower lip, and he tapped his racquet against the palm of his left hand.

"He's not accustomed to lose his service," said someone.

"He's up against it this time," said another.

"If they were to play like this at Wimbledon," said Brett Stanley, a small, sturdy man, left-handed and famous for his ground game, "Gordon and Miss Denys, Mrs. Littlethwaite and Kemmis—which would you bet on if they came up against each other in the finals?"

"Couldn't say!" returned his companion, Lord Dartree. "They're all such a determined lot that there's scarcely a pin to choose between 'em. Jove—there's a cannon ball!"

"She surely won't show at Wimbledon if he's sentenced!" murmured Mrs. Lorrimer.

Archie cleared his throat and swallowed. His hands were twitching at the side pockets of his grey jacket. His skin was tingling all over his body. Mrs. Lorrimer looked round. Gordon was just moving over to the left, and Vivian was coming to the net.

"Oh—you here!" she said, as Archie took off his hat. "It's a great game, isn't it?"

"Yes—Great!" he said, trying not to speak sullenly, and not to look guiltily intelligent.

A very faint red showed through Mrs. Lorrimer's delicate "make-up." She turned her head towards the court. Her companion glanced with his hawk-like eyes at Archie and nodded. He was a Harvard fellow over in England for the summer whom Archie knew slightly, a fine player, a good chap. But oh, how Archie hated him at that moment!

"What does *he* think of Vi?" he thought. "Would any American girl do what Vi is doing, given the same circumstances?"

And he thought of the American papers which, as he knew, had published columns about Clive's case and Clive's engagement to Vi. And he sweated, absolutely sweated, with sensitiveness.

Six five and thirty love.

Archie had watched Jim Gordon play in many tournaments, had seen him win and lose before big crowds, but—was it only a fancy—he thought that to-day, in what was only a practice match, Jim was keener to win, was more fiercely concentrated on winning, than he was when playing for a title. Jim was not quite normal to-day. That was what Archie felt. There was something unusual in Jim's look and even in his manner. It was as if his mask for once had slipped slightly awry, showing something of a face underneath that was terribly expressive. Did Jim hope still? Did he think that his chance was not quite gone yet? Or was he, too, struggling in this horrible net to which Mrs. Baratrie

had alluded, a prey to the misery of a desperate uncertainty? Surely Jim must wish for the condemnation of Clive, unless he loved Vivian enough to be absolutely unselfish. But Jim wasn't the sort of man to be unselfish in that way where a woman was concerned. He was too absolutely male for that. And Archie preferred him like that. Jim wanted Vivian, and Archie was nearly sure he would never put the happiness of Vivian with another man before the satisfaction of his own desire. Jim was surely ruthless by nature and would be ruthless even in his love. He would surely rather see Vivian go through the valley of the shadow of death and emerge at the end of it shattered into his arms than see her divinely happy with any other man. Seeing Vivian happy would only make Jim miserable and furious unless he were the happiness-giver, Archie thought. That was Jim. It must be extraordinary to want a woman as he wanted Vi. Archie could not really understand it, but he could and did respect it—this governing desire of Jim's. And now Jim wanted to win as surely he had never wanted to win before. But Mrs. Littlethwaite and Kemmis were dogged. They hung on fiercely. Deuce was called once, then again and again.

"Anyone'd think it was a final in the Centre Court at Wimbledon!" observed Lord Dartree, pulling his short grey moustache, and tilting his grey bowler to a more acute angle. "It's a ding-dong battle. That's what it is. 'Pon my word, Jim Gordon's looking quite savage. Something damned odd about this game! What is it?"

Brett Stanley approached his stubbly yellow moustache to Lord Dartree's ear and said something in a very low voice.

"Oh—ah! you think it's that! May be! May be! That one nearly broke the Retriever's wrist. How she got it back beats me. Bravo!"

'Vantage striker!

Gordon crossed to serve to the Californian. And then

he did the unforgivable thing in a doubles; he served two faults and gave his opponents the game.

Archie clenched his hands. Jim—to do such a thing! Yes, Lord Dartree was right. There was something “damned odd” about this game. Jim wasn’t really himself. But he had got himself thoroughly in hand now. Neither he nor Vivian showed the least sign of discomposure as six all was called.

Mrs. Littlethwaite said a word to Kemmis as she went to the base line to serve. He nodded and half closed his eyes, looking more like a great brown cat than ever. And suddenly, as Archie saw Mrs. Littlethwaite’s lips move, and Kemmis’s curt nod in reply, he felt, “They’re going to win.” He even felt, absurdly, that they had already won. And he was right. The last two games were a run-away almost for Mrs. Littlethwaite and Kemmis. They played up finely. But it wasn’t that which gave them the set. No. Jim Gordon for once went to pieces. Vivian was almost miraculous, playing as it were for two. But Jim couldn’t do right. He wasn’t soft. Jim was never soft, didn’t know how to be. He hit desperately hard, but the ball went wild. His hurricane shots were all out of court. Vivian’s rock-like steadiness, combined with fleet-footed brilliance, could not save them. They went down, she fighting to the last

A long murmur, a general movement; the little throng of people, released from the pleasant bondage of an intense observation, began to return to the outer life, to be aware once more of a lot of little things they had forgotten. Gordon, looking now strongly calm and self-possessed, stood by the net pole talking to Kemmis. Mrs. Littlethwaite, ethereal and delicately subdued in her triumph, was speaking to Vivian. She and Kemmis had won two sets, the first at six to four.

“But I wouldn’t bet sixpence on my form to-day for

Wimbledon," said Mrs. Littlethwaite, in her clear, unwavering soprano voice. "And Jim wasn't his own man."

She paused; then she added, with her steady blue eyes fixed on Vivian:

"But you were great, Vi!"

At this moment Archie came up, looking guilty. His walk through the little crowd had been an agony. He had noticed the curious glances, the conversations broken off abruptly at his approach, had tasted fully the bitter flavour of that day, emphasised by contact with those who knew him. His nature was writhing, but he did his best to seem manfully unconcerned as he took off his hat to Mrs. Littlethwaite and met his sister's brown eyes.

"A jolly good match," he said. "You were stunning, Mrs. Littlethwaite. You played up too, Vi. Hulloh, Jim!"

"Hulloh! I didn't know you were on the ground. The best side won. D'you know Kemmis? Kemmis, this is Miss Denys's brother, and not a bad player either."

The Californian stretched out a huge hand at the end of an almost mahogany-coloured arm, and showed his splendid teeth in a friendly and boyish smile.

"Glad to meet you!" he said, in an oddly gentle and slightly drawling voice. "Miss Denys is a player we should like on the other side. She'll come over one day likely."

The resemblance to a wild cat seemed mysteriously to have died out of him. He began to fasten his shirt with deft, though enormous, fingers.

"I'm just over," he added explanatorily. "My first visit here."

His simple modesty fascinated Archie. Such a star and no side at all!

"I hope you'll like us," said Archie. "And have all the luck while you're here."

"Had it to-day, didn't we? Gordon was generous, just gave it to us at the finish. Well, I'm off for a shower. Good-bye, Miss Denys."

"Good-bye. Please keep clear of me and my partner in the Mixed Doubles at Wimbledon."

"Well, I suppose that's on the big lap of the gods that holds such a lot of things, like a bran-pie!"

His brown face wrinkled in a big smile.

"Gordon!"

He nodded, gave Archie a kind, queer look sideways, and went off with Mrs. Littlethwaite towards the Club House.

"I like that chap!" said Archie. "Coming, Vi?"

"Yes. Good-bye, Jim!"

"I'll walk with you as far as the Club. I must have a shower too."

They turned from the net. But there were people about, people they knew. They had to speak to one and another. While they were doing it Archie itched to be away. He even longed to be away from Jim. To-day Jim disquieted him terribly. He could not meet his friend's eyes. He could not find any subject to talk about with him. There was a barrier between them. Their usual intimacy seemed to have fallen in the dust. Or was it in the mud? Jim's breakdown at the end of the set had affected Archie strangely. It had been like a revelation of something Jim meant to keep to himself.

At last they got free of the people and walked away, followed by many curious eyes, a topic for many busy tongues.

Vi did not hold her head high. Whatever Vi did she never, even by chance, tumbled into ostentation. She seemed perfectly natural, only a little stern, perhaps, a little less cheerful and vital than usual.

"You gave my note, Archie?" she asked.

"Yes."

"That's right. Did you stay long?"

"No, only a few minutes."

"See out first set?"

"Oh no. I wasn't in time."

"They beat us, but we had a rare fight. Didn't we, Jim?"

"Yes. It was a rattler. Sorry I let you down like that at the end of all things."

"That's all right. You wouldn't have done it at Wimbledon."

"Who knows? That's the fascination of the game, I suppose. One never knows what one's form's going to be. Unless one is a retriever. Jenny Littlethwaite must have an extraordinary make-up, as Kemmis would say. I've never seen her really off her game. The fact is, I believe, if she feels she would be off she scratches. And I dunno that she's far wrong. She said to me once, 'If I can't do my best I don't want to do anything at all.' Of course, once she's fairly on the court she'd play it out through a stroke of apoplexy or anything else. But I fancy she won't go on the court at all if she doesn't feel right up to the mark."

He said all this firmly, evenly, in a strong markedly tenor voice.

"The worst of it is," he added, "that most of us are apt to go all to pot without any interior warning of what's coming, as I did to-day. I thought I was all keyed up, but not a bit of it."

They had reached the gravel in front of the Club House, and stood still. Jim Gordon looked down at Vivian and seemed to hesitate for an instant.

"Well, I'll be off!"

He glanced at Archie, and must have read something in the boy's eager and unhappy eyes, for he suddenly looked rather sterner, rather more self-possessed.

"See you soon again, Vi, no doubt."

"Of course. Good-bye—old Jim."

She held out her hand. He reached out. His hand, though brown and hard in the palm, was almost delicate in shape, with thin, long fingers, a sinewy but not inartistic hand. To look at it was to think of brains and of temperament.

"Good-bye, Vivian."

"Why Vivian all of a sudden?"

"Vi—then."

He gave her hand a mighty squeeze, and his eyes went to Archie. The boy looked away. Then Jim said:

"I wish you—all that you wish for yourself—and him, Vi. I think somehow it'll be all right. But of course it's bad waiting. By God, you can play the game!"

He pulled himself up and his hand away.

"So long, Archie!"

III

WHEN Jim had gone Vivian said:

"Wait here for me, Archie, will you? And perhaps you would have a taxi called. I won't be long, five minutes or so."

"Righto!"

He managed the commonplace rejoinder, but his voice was husky and his eyes seemed accusing his sister.

"I can't help it, Archie."

"Help—what?"

"Don't act on a day like this. You know what I mean."

He said nothing more and she went away quickly. When she came back, having taken off her white tennis dress and put on a street dress, a hat and gloves, a taxi was waiting. She got into it with her brother. Just before they drove off Lord and Lady Dartree came out of the club with Mrs. Littlethwaite, whom they were going to take home to her house in Kensington in their motor. They saw Vivian and came up to speak to her.

Lady Dartree was tennis-mad. Her husband no longer played, but he knew everything there was to know about the game, and entertained all the champions at his house, Heath House, Hampstead, where he had laid down four

first-rate courts. He considered Vivian Denys the coming player among English women, and admired her almost obsequiously. She and her brother were always more than welcome at Heath House. Now he leaned one arm on the cab door and bade Vivian good-bye.

"I've been telling my wife about the game to-day," he said.

"It was quite exciting, wasn't it?"

"Pity Gordon threw it away at the end though! It wasn't his day."

A curious, almost searching look had come into his slightly bloodshot and prominent blue eyes.

"Don't let Gordon go to pieces, Miss Denys. You and he together will soon be the best combination we have over here for Mixed Doubles."

He had lowered his voice, perhaps lest Mrs. Littlethwaite should hear the last words.

"Keep him to it."

He made way for his wife, a charming woman, "the human orchid," as someone had called her, who never got out of breath when she played, and who never lost the almost miraculous smoothness and soft milky whiteness of her skin.

"Jenny says you were wonderful to-day," she said, looking in on Vivian and Archie with her lustrous, sleepy eyes. "Your grit would carry you through anything, Vivian. Lucky! That's what you are!"

"How am I lucky?" asked Vivian, but in an unwavering voice free from bitterness.

"Because you have the tournament temperament. Those who have that are the conquerors in life. Let me give you a handshake, my dear."

There was unmistakable meaning in her quiet, velvety voice. She pressed Vivian's hand.

Then Mrs. Littlethwaite took the place at the window.

She, too, stretched out her hand. There was a bond of sympathy between her and Vivian. Both worshipped courage. Both had the same type of courage. Each recognised the gleaming virtue in the other.

"Dear old Vi! Your comrades are all with you to-day. Keep going. Bless you."

"Thank you, Jenny!"

The cab drove away.

Archie had been neglected. The concentration on Vivian was singularly complete that day. But now he didn't mind it quite as he had minded it. For he felt that there was real sympathy abroad for Vivian; he felt the human heart beating for an instant, as if under his hand.

"Whatever cynics say, there are some jolly kind people about!" he said, from his corner.

Vivian was leaning back. He could only see her strong but delicate profile, and the wild-rose colour on her right cheek. For she had taken the left-hand corner of the seat.

"Aren't there?" he added.

"Yes."

After a moment of silence he said:

"I don't know, but I think there's something great about games. Lawn-tennis now—what we should miss if we didn't belong to the tennis crowd, really belong! We do get to feel for one another in a special sort of way. It's something like a big school. 'He's a Harrovian'—that means something to another Harrovian. Tell the truth, Vi, I hated your showing at King's to-day, but now I'm not so sure. You may have been right."

"I was right."

"Even Jim seemed to understand."

"I didn't do it for old Jim. I did it for Clive and myself."

Archie felt as if cold water had been thrown over him.

"Clive!" he said. "But—but would Clive understand such a thing?"

"Why not?"

"Well, I—I don't know whether I should if I had the infernal luck to be in Clive's situation, or whatever you call it—the hole Clive's in."

"Clive will understand. Jim did."

"But Jim isn't Clive!"

"They are both men, real men. And there's a lot of similarity of feeling among real men with all their differences. I know what you have been going through to-day, Archie boy. I know how you hated my playing in public. But"—she turned her face towards him, and he saw her eyes shining and veiled, as if there was a veil with light behind it—"but what I did was a proclamation of my certainty of Clive's innocence. They know I love Clive. How could I have shown there if I believed him guilty? And besides, there was something else. I had to do something to-day that obliged me to concentrate. I know Clive is innocent. But there's something I don't know. I don't know, I shan't know till this evening, whether he will be acquitted or condemned. Innocent men have been condemned. They have even been executed. What's been may be again. How am I to know?"

"But I thought——"

"Oh, Archie, I suppose there's no woman that ever lived who hasn't put up a bluff!"

"Then you——"

He paused. He dared not finish the sentence.

"Perhaps I put up a bluff to myself. I scarcely know now. Yesterday things seemed different somehow. Even early this morning when I wrote to Mum I thought I felt sure. Or I tried to think so. Archie, we sometimes try to think we think something. Most of us are self-deceivers at times, I suppose, when—especially when we have our back against the wall. Can't you understand that?"

"Yes, Vi."

"But now I feel that I don't know, can't know. I'm down on the stark truth of things, I think."

"Poor old Vi!"

"Don't pity me. I want all the love I can get, but I mustn't have any pity. That game did me good for the time."

"How could you play as you did?"

"I don't know. But I seemed to be playing for my own salvation."

"And—Jim?"

"Jim!" she said, in a different voice, a voice that sounded startled.

"What was he playing for?"

"How can I tell?"

"I am sorry for Jim," said Archie.

Vivian said nothing for a moment. Then she turned towards her brother.

"We were beaten," she said. "I wonder—I wonder if that means anything. Jim and I were beaten."

"Yes. He cracked up at the finish. Perhaps—perhaps in some ways women are stronger than we are."

His words seemed to suggest a thought to his sister.

"How was she?" she asked.

"Mrs. Baratrie?"

"Yes. It's worse for her even than for me, I think."

Archie fidgeted and turned his eyes away from his sister.

"What is it, Archie?"

"Nothing. She was all right. But once she looked odd."

"Odd? What do you mean?"

"She said something I couldn't understand."

"What was it?"

"Something about forgetting you."

"Forgetting me?"

"Yes. She said, 'I forgot Vivian when I went to the

window,' or something like that. I can't remember the exact words."

"To the window! I don't understand."

"Nor do I. I haven't an idea what she meant. But when she said it her eyes looked awfully strange, almost horrid. I went cold. But afterwards she was all right."

"I shall go to her directly after lunch," said Vivian. "I shall spend the afternoon with her."

"Are you going to stay there till—till you know, Vi?"

"Yes."

"About when d'you expect to——"

"Any time after four, I suppose. One can't tell. It depends on—the Jury sometimes take a long time."

"They might disagree, mightn't they?"

Suddenly Vivian's face quivered.

"I never thought of that! Oh, that would be too awful!"

The boy shot out a hand impulsively and took her right hand.

"I don't suppose they will!" he said, almost angrily.

At that moment, despite the bright sunshine, the cheerful noise of the busy street, he felt that they, he and she, were travelling in a nightmare; he felt an inclination to struggle, to hit out against something. But how can a man strike the void, seize the impalpable by the throat?

"Uncertainty—that's the horrible thing. If they should disagree, I don't know how I can stand it. And Clive! What will Clive do?"

For a moment she seemed desperate. Her face was distorted. Her fingers squeezed Archie's hand till they began to hurt him. He had never seen Vivian like this before. It was a revelation to him of her true feeling for Clive, and destroyed absolutely any lingering hope he still, perhaps, had cherished—hoping against hope—on behalf of his chum and his mentor, Jim. This desperation in a girl of his sister's marked strength of character meant love, a love he was still

too young to understand fully. Vivian had given her whole heart to this Clive. That was certain. Even if Clive were condemned, even if he were executed and disappeared for ever out of their lives, Jim would surely not have a chance. And he, Archie, put Jim so far above Clive!

"Cheer up, Vi! Oh, do cheer up!" he said, feeling almost frightened as he had felt for a moment in Mrs. Baratrie's drawing-room. "It will be all right. I swear it will be all right!"

"You don't know. Nobody knows."

As she spoke she drew her hand away sharply, turned her head and stared out of the window. Their cab was just turning a corner by a newspaper-shop, where placards on wooden frames were put out on the pavement against the shop-front. As they went by she had just time to see the words: "Evening Mail. Sabine Murder Case. Great Speech for the Defence."

"Ah!" she said, and then drew in her breath sharply.

"What is it?"

She did not answer.

"What was it, Vi? What did you see?"

She looked round at him.

"Clive's counsel——"

"Yes?"

"Sir Meredith Hall has made his speech for Clive. It—it calls it a great speech—on the placard."

"Shall I stop him"—he made a gesture towards the chauffeur—"and buy a paper?"

"No—no—don't! I don't want to read anything, know anything,—only the result. There's the speech for the prosecution and all the summing up. Oh, if I could see into the Judge's mind now! He knows by this time what he thinks about Clive. He has made up his mind for good or evil. He's got two futures in his hands. How awful to be a judge!"

"Here's Pont Street, Vi! Buck up! Mother may be upset if she sees——"

"She shan't see. Nobody shall see."

Mrs. Denys was waiting alone in the drawing-room for her two children. They were a little late for lunch, and she was standing near the open window from which she had just seen the cab drive up. She was such a middle-aged woman as may often be met with in England. Someone, asked what she was like, had once described her as "a simple lady," and there was truth in the description. Quite unpretentious, not particularly well educated, not remarkably clever, not exceptionally good-looking, not a brilliant talker, she was yet liked by almost every one and loved by not a few. For she was genuine, affectionate, honest in all her dealings, totally free from snobbery, and absolutely well bred. Also she had about her, as a rule, an atmosphere of serenity and peaceful contentment which emanated from her sincere and deep religious faith.

Mrs. Denys "knew God"; or so she said, quite without blasphemy or the least suspicion of arrogance. She honestly believed, joyously believed, that she had been, and was, able to enter into communion with God. He was not thought of by her as a distant Power, or as a pervading atmosphere, or as an immanent Will, or as an alarming and prodigious mystery, but quite simply as a dear, wonderful, loving and eternally faithful Friend.

She was an Anglican, neither high nor low. She usually went to church at St. Paul's Cathedral. In appearance she was moderately tall, fresh-coloured, with an oval face, smooth, rather colourless brown hair mingled with grey, brown eyes with yellow dots in them, and a mouth somehow like the mouth of a child, small, rosy, young-looking and very innocent. Most people called her "a dear woman," and she really was a dear woman.

"Well, Mother!" said Vivian, coming into the drawing-room with a calm face.

"Well, dear!"

"Are we late?"

"Only a minute. Did you have a good game?"

"Splendid!"

"Where's Archie?"

"Gone to wash his hands. Shall we go down?"

"Yes."

"I want to go to Knightsbridge immediately after lunch to be with Mum. She may need me."

"I have been thinking a great deal about her to-day, and praying for Clive," said Mrs. Denys, in her quiet, soft voice. "And this afternoon I am going to the service at St. Paul's to remember them both, and you, there."

"Dear Mother! I wish I had your absolute faith. You have been so wonderful through it all!" said Vivian, as she followed Mrs. Denys downstairs.

And this was true. Mrs. Denys had really been tried in the fire by this terrible scandal in which her child's fiancé was involved. She was one of those women who do not have to pick up their skirts to avoid the mire of life. They seem away from, out of reach of, the mire. Naturally good, inherently innocent and pure, though not ignorant—how could they be—not even inexperienced, they were surely meant, when the Plan was made, to go to death through a white and seemly life. Mrs. Denys loved naturally all things of good report, disliked naturally all coarseness, all violence, all scandal and evil report. She was one of those women who never read about horrible things in the papers, who never open a nasty book, however much it is talked about, who have no curiosity about the ugly secrets of those they come in contact with. She saw the good and wished not to see the evil. It had, therefore, been a terrible experience for her—this tragedy in which the name and the happiness of her child were involved. The mire of life, like a rising tide of oozing filth, had spread even to her doorstep, had swept as it were into the fairest chambers of her house.

And she had borne it wonderfully, with calmness, with great dignity, even—most wonderful of all—with unflinching cheerfulness. She had never been heard to say a word against Clive. She had never shown resentment against fate. She had never even allowed herself to be cast down. A horror had come into the life of the Denys family. She met it with simple intrepidity, was able to because of the Faith deeply rooted in her nature. Even now, on this day of fate, when the climax of the long, the slow-moving but ever-increasing horror was at hand, she showed no self-consciousness, no irritable anxiety. She was just as usual. The Rod and the Staff were with her, or she thought they were with such absolute conviction that it was practically the same thing.

Archie hurried in as they were sitting down to lunch. Mr. Denys was away at the Bank. He never lunched at home except on Saturdays and Sundays, unless he was taking a holiday. Archie was devoted to his Mother, and secretly admired her tremendously. Nevertheless, she sometimes irritated him. And she irritated him to-day. He was in such a condition of nervous excitement, of nervous exasperation even, that her apparent serenity, her look of quiet cheerfulness, made him feel worse. Something in him needed an answering excitement, an answering exasperation. Yet he had only just warned his sister not to show any feeling which might upset their Mother. And he knew that Mrs. Denys was really sensitive; that she felt acutely, that she was capable of suffering severely, and especially through her children or anything which affected them. Now something in him, the Devil that lives in boys, perhaps, wanted his Mother to suffer as he did, and to show it, as he had shown it that morning. When she inquired about King's, therefore, he answered in brief, gruff sentences, showing all the usual boy's peculiar dislike of imparting information about the doings of his day. Besides, what did even tennis matter on such a day as this?

How could the Mater suppose that his mind was on such a thing when Clive's fate and Vi's were being decided?

Perhaps she did not suppose such a thing; but there are moments when silence seems too dangerous to be endured, when too much truth would be released in silence. So Mrs. Denys, choosing a favourite topic, gently "made" conversation until Vivian, touched by her Mother's effort, and summoned to rescue work by Archie's reception of it, forced herself into the breach, and gave a minute account of the match she had just been playing in.

"But we had the bad luck to be beaten in both sets," she presently concluded.

And for the first time there was a sad, almost an ominous sound in her voice.

"You can't always expect to win," said Mrs. Denys serenely.

"No. But somehow to-day I thought—I had hoped we were going to."

"It was Jim's fault, not yours," said Archie.

"How was Jim?" asked Mrs. Denys, looking at her daughter.

"Not quite his own man towards the end of the match."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Denys.

After a pause she added:

"There is a great deal in Jim, I think, that doesn't appear on the surface."

"Rather!" broke in Archie.

"He represses himself almost too much."

"Oh, but a man ought to be like that!" exclaimed Archie, hot in the defence of his friend. "A man who gushes wants shooting."

"Well, I think men like him suffer a great deal by bottling everything up," said Mrs. Denys, who, gentle though she was, held firm opinions on many subjects. "And sometimes it ends in trouble."

"Trouble, Mater!" said Archie. "What on earth do you mean?"

Vivian's eyes were fixed earnestly on Mrs. Denys; evidently she shared her brother's curiosity and was waiting, like him, for an answer.

"Strong natures need an outlet, I think," said Mrs. Denys. "They need to have someone to go to when life is difficult. If they are afraid of their friends, and if they have no religion, they are in a bad way. I often wish I could do something for Jim."

Lunch was finished and on the last word Mrs. Denys got up from the table. Archie was staring at his Mother. What did she know, or suspect, about Jim? He longed to ask her, but something held him back from asking. He was aware, as he had been sometimes aware before, of a strain of feminine subtlety running through his Mother's simplicity.

"Are you going to the Bank this afternoon, Archie?" Mrs. Denys asked him at the foot of the stairs.

"Yes."

She began to ascend the stairs. Archie caught his sister by the arm.

"I can't—Vi, can I do anything more for you?"

"No, Archie boy."

"Well then——"

He hesitated.

"And you'll be away the whole afternoon?"

"With Mum—— Yes."

"Shall I come there and fetch you after—after we know?"

Vivian did not reply for a moment. She stood at the stairfoot with her hand on the oak balustrade and seemed to be thinking profoundly. At that moment, her brother guessed, she was reviewing the tremendously different possibilities of that day. If Clive were acquitted he would surely go straight to Knightsbridge, would go to the refuge of home, a free man; if he were condemned he would be hurried down the steps into the dark secrecy from which the hangman would release him. Vivian was perhaps

seeing the two men, Clive free, coming into the drawing-room at Knightsbridge; Clive sentenced, disappearing downwards between warders.

"No, Archie, better not!" she said, at last.

"But, Vi, won't you want me?"

"I'm going to tell Mother that if Clive is not acquitted I want to stay the night with Mum. She will be all alone. And I feel—since you spoke about her—that she must not be left all alone."

"Since I spoke about her?"

"Yes; there was something in what you said which made me feel that perhaps she needs me very much. I am going to her now. Good-bye, old boy."

He caught her hand almost roughly.

"Oh, Vi, when I see you again we shall know!"

"Yes, we shall know."

"How awful this waiting is!"

"It will be over very soon now."

He bent and kissed her awkwardly.

"I'm with you, Vi, old girl."

"I know. Bless you, boy."

IV

THREE-QUARTERS of an hour later Vivian drove up to Mrs. Baratrie's house in Knightsbridge. She had with her a dressing-bag containing a few things for the night in case she stayed. Would she need it? she wondered, but rather vaguely, as she got out on to the pavement. She had felt intensely, nervously alive that morning at King's Club, but since she had said good-bye to Archie and her Mother, since she had been alone though only for a short time, a change had taken place in her. And it seemed like a physical change. She felt numbed in brain and body, tired and almost dull.

The sun was now glaringly bright, and the broad road and the pavement were thronged, the former with vehicles, the latter with hurrying pedestrians. Vehement life was all about her. She heard the murmur of the voices, the roar of the traffic; she saw the passing figures, eyes glancing at her and looking away; she felt two or three unknown people brush against her inadvertently as she stood looking in her purse for the cab fare. A dog ran by, and set up a shrill yelp as someone trod on his paw. A bicycle bell rang. She heard someone say: "No, I didn't. You see——" Yet she did not at that moment feel as if she were fully and completely in life as she generally felt.

"How much? What did you say? Oh yes!"

She held out some money.

"Isn't that it? I beg your pardon."

She felt for another coin. "Is that right?"

"Yes, Mum."

Her dressing-case was taken out of the cab, and the taxi man, who looked like a foreigner of some kind, but who spoke with a faintly American accent, carried it up the short path to the door behind her. She rang the bell and turned round.

"You can put it down. Thanks. The servant will carry it in."

"Right, Mum!"

"Are you an Italian?" she said, looking at the man's dark face and curly black hair.

"Law, Mum, no. Irish, but I've lived in New York."

"Oh!"

She wondered why she had asked him. The door opened and Kingston's distressed face and thin figure appeared.

"Good afternoon, Kingston. I've brought this in case I stay the night."

"Oh—yes, Miss."

He bent and picked up the bag with a heavily veined hand.

Vivian went into the house and Kingston shut the door behind them, shut out the world. And directly the world was shut out Vivian realised the important things. The vagueness left her. She realised Mrs. Baratrie's situation, her own, Clive's, Jim's; the acute uncertainty of the moment, an uncertainty that seemed breathing and terribly alive; the passing of Time and the terror and inexorableness of its passing, as she had never realised them before.

Kingston, still holding the bag, was looking at her now and she was able to feel for him. He was a most respectable man, had been for many years in Mrs. Baratrie's service, and was now in affliction on account of the scandal in which "My house"—as he called number 3B Knightsbridge among servants—was involved. It was very awful to him to see "My house" in the papers, to know it was a perpetual subject of discussion in all the public bars of the neighbourhood. He could scarcely hold up his head among his fellow butlers. Even parlourmaids began to be "sniffy" when he met them out, as he occasionally did. If poor Mr. Clive were to be condemned he felt it would break him. He would have to go out of London. His misery, his aching pride, were plainly to be discerned in his poor pale face and small watery eyes, and Vivian was sorry for him.

"Where shall I put your bag, Miss?" he asked.

"Anywhere, in any corner. Probably I shan't want it. I only brought it in case I decide that Mrs. Baratrie wants company to-night. How is she?"

"Well, Miss, she seems much as usual *now*."

"Now?"

"This morning, when I went to tell her Mr. Archie Denys was come she was locked in, and when she opened the door she didn't seem quite herself."

"No?"

"No, Miss. If I may speak, I am very glad, we are all very glad, you have come to be with her at the last."

The final words, and the sepulchral way in which the man said them, were unpleasant to Vivian.

"Where shall I find Mrs. Baratrie?" she said abruptly.

"I will show you to the drawing-room, Miss, and go and find her. I don't quite know where she is."

"Please tell her I am here at once."

"Yes, Miss."

"And don't bother about me. I'll find my way to the drawing-room."

She went upstairs quickly, feeling driven by uneasiness. Archie's remark about Mrs. Baratrie, followed by Kingston's, had made a disagreeable impression upon her. Not every one has limitless courage. Had Mum suddenly come to an end of hers?

"If so, have I enough for two?" Vivian thought, as she opened the drawing-room door, and saw that the room was empty.

Clive did not live in his Mother's house when he was free. Only her taste was apparent in this room, which suggested an informal mind. Bookcases in recesses covered the walls. Only here and there was space left for a picture. One of these pictures was an admirable copy of Böcklin's "The Holy Wood"; another a Simeon Solomon, a youth with dark, untidy hair playing to three solemnly ardent girls on a stringed instrument, in a dim room full of shadows and dusky romance. There were also two portraits, one of John Baratrie, R.A., by Fildes, one of Clive. The latter had been painted by a young man already famous for his splendid portraits of men, Wyn Ramond.

Vivian knew where it was hanging but she did not look at it to-day. She did not dare to look at it. The furniture of this room—a big room—was comfortable and rather unusually large. The sofas and arm-chairs were deep and suggestive of repose, reading, reverie. The tables were covered with literature, with new books, and magazines,

but not with the popular magazines which shriek at the travelling public from railway bookstalls. There was a grand piano. The bare floor was stained black. There was no carpet. A Persian rug lay in front of the open fireplace. Orange-coloured curtains hung at the windows. The ceiling was covered with a silver paper. The bookcases were of dark wood. The coverings of the sofas and arm-chairs were orange-coloured and a peculiar blue-green. Mrs. Baratrie received her visitors here, but the room looked like a library and quite unlike a reception room. When people were shown into it for the first time they were usually startled. Many thought it odd, but most people liked it. There was, in fact, something cosy about the room, something suggestive of quiet, of tranquillity of spirit, of leisure, even something suggestive of dreaming. The front windows, looking on to Knightsbridge, were shut. The back windows, looking on to Hyde Park, were wide open.

Vivian was fond of this room, and had often savoured its reflective atmosphere. Although an athlete, she was not a thoughtless, irresponsible girl. She could read in a quiet hour and could love her reading. But to-day her spirit was ill at ease in this room. Something in her rebelled against its atmosphere, which was like a lie spoken about life.

"No, no, no," said the terrible inner voice. "Life is not quiet. The years are not peaceful. Repose, reflection, calm—life has little to do with them. Life is harsh, brusque, brutal, unexpected. Life is a turmoil. Life is a web of uncertainties. Useless to try to trick it, or to try to retreat from it. Useless to prepare your haven. Life will burst in, as it has burst in here, and tear you with teeth and claws."

And Mrs. Baratrie's room that day seemed to Vivian a futile attempt to get the better of Life, an attempt which she knew Life had frustrated.

She did not sit down. She walked about, then went to stand by the window which looked on the Park. And she

stood there till she heard the door open and Mrs. Baratrie came into the room.

A tall grandfather clock in the drawing-room chimed melodiously. The chime was followed by four strokes. The two women, who were sitting together on a sofa, looked at one another.

‘Four o’clock!

They had been sitting together near the open window for about an hour, sometimes talking, sometimes in a curious mutual silence, a silence of friends, of poor women suffering, of poor human beings tortured by anxiety, and, on the defensive even in such an hour, making each one her effort to hide her torture.

“The Courts usually rise at four o’clock.”

That thought was in both their minds.

“Mother——” said Vivian, and stopped.

“Yes, dear?” said Mrs. Baratrie.

“I didn’t tell you, but Mother has gone to St. Paul’s. She said she would remember us there, you, me and Clive.”

Mrs. Baratrie’s lips quivered. She did not speak for a moment. Then she said:

“I shall always love your Mother for that. I wish I had her faith, but I haven’t.”

“Mother has never had any difficulty in believing. Faith is natural to her. She can suffer, but she could never suffer as you do.”

Mrs. Baratrie looked at Vivian, and for a moment there was something furtive in her eyes.

“Do you really believe, have you always believed, felt sure that Clive would be acquitted?” she asked.

Vivian remembered her confession to Archie in the cab driving from King’s Club to Pont Street.

“You had my letter,” she said.

“Yes. And I know how truthful you are.”

Vivian looked down. She wanted to tell a lie. Perhaps at that moment she meant to tell a lie, though she hesitated. But Mrs. Baratrie's eyes were upon her, and the great crisis of her life was upon her, and somehow—she scarcely knew why—truth, absolute truth, seemed to be demanded of her. By whom? She wondered about that afterwards, and knew that the silent demand did not come from her companion in the room.

"I don't feel sure now," she said, at last. "This morning I didn't feel sure. I told Archie so. I didn't mean to tell you. But as you have asked, Mum, I must be honest with you."

"We ought to be honest, you and I, to each other to-day," said Mrs. Baratrie. "As honest as we can be."

"Yes."

"Vivian, you have told me. I'll tell you something. This morning, when Archie came, I was up in my room—you know, my little sitting-room at the back."

"Yes."

"If Archie hadn't come, if I hadn't been disturbed, I don't think I should be here now."

"Not here? What do you mean?"

"I had a sudden impulse to end it, to take my life."

"Mum!"

"Yes. It came upon me quite suddenly. It seemed to overwhelm me. I understand now how people do it, go out of it."

Vivian's hand was on hers, holding it fast.

"Kingston knocked at the door, and went on knocking. I had locked the door. The knocking seemed to recall me. I had forgotten you for the moment, your faithfulness and courage. You have stuck to Clive all through. I was going to desert him and you. I am very much ashamed of that now."

"Promise me——"

"Hush! I know the impulse will never come again, not even if Clive should be condemned."

"How can you know?"

"I can't tell you. I just feel positive."

There was a silence through which the grandfather clock ticked. Then Vivian said:

"Why did you ask me whether—about feeling sure?"

"I felt you were not sure. I wanted to see if you were being absolutely honest with me. When I found you were I felt I could tell you how weak, and almost guilty, I had been."

"Poor Mum! Thank God, Archie came. It's as if I sent a messenger ignorantly to—to stop you. How awful if he had come too late! He told me something, but I didn't quite understand."

"Archie! He didn't know anything."

"You said something to him about the window and forgetting me. And he said that just then your eyes frightened him."

She got up. Restlessness had come to her. She moved about the room for a minute. Then she said:

"We shall know very soon now. We must know very soon."

Mrs. Baratrie glanced at the clock with feverish, shining eyes.

"Probably. But——"

"What, Mum?"

"Last week I had my telephone disconnected. I couldn't bear it any longer. The incessant calls! I felt I should go mad if I had that mechanical horror in the house any longer. It frightened me as if it were an abominable person."

Vivian was standing in front of her now.

"But then—how shall we know? Is anyone coming here?"

"If Clive is acquitted he will come."

Vivian flushed violently and looked towards the door.

At that moment she was trying to feel prophetically. She gazed at the door and mentally asked it: "Will you be opened by Clive? Will Clive's hand ever be laid upon you again?" And then she looked at the familiar room, asking a question of it: "Will Clive ever sit in you again?" But in the silence she got no answer. She felt only deadness in the room, deadness of furniture, curtains, pictures. And even the multitude of books full of thoughts were dead.

"And if Clive is condemned?" she said at last, forcing her voice to be firm.

"I have forbidden Kingston to buy a paper, or any of the servants," said Mrs. Baratrie with a sort of violence. "They must keep in the house to-day."

"But——"

"If it goes the wrong way for my boy, Mr. Herries—Bob Herries—is coming here."

"The rector of St. Giles'?" said Vivian, as if surprised.

"Yes. He knows what I am, that I never go to church. But he doesn't care. No one will ever know what Bob Herries has done for me in the last few months."

"Mother goes to St. Giles's sometimes. But I didn't know——"

"I had a clergyman for a friend! Well, I have and I am thankful for him. Vivian, he is the only man I know who fulfils the law of Christ."

"Which law?"

"Bear ye one another's burdens."

"I—I wonder," Vivian looked again towards the door, "I wonder if he will come."

Mrs. Baratrie began to tremble on the sofa. Her chin quivered violently. She put up a hand to it and held it.

"Anything would be better than this!" she said, in a husky voice. "It's—it's like a terrible operation without an anæsthetic."

She got up from the sofa.

"A Judge sometimes sits far beyond the usual hour to finish a case," she said, letting her chin go.

"Yes."

"We mustn't expect—I mean if the Jury take a long time to make up their minds, it may be very late before we know."

"Yes. And the summing up is sometimes a long business. We must have patience."

"Very well!" said Mrs. Baratrie, with sudden sharpness. "Patience! patience! I hate that word. I hate it more than any other word in the dictionary! Vivian dear, forgive me! I'm a brute!"

She laid one hand on the girl's shoulder and looked searchingly into her eyes.

"You are honest with me, I know. You have told me you were not sure how it would end for Clive, that no inner voice told you how things would go. Now tell me something else."

"What is it?"

"Tell me the absolute truth."

"What is it?"

"Have you ever, even for a moment, had any doubt about Clive?"

"Doubt?"

"Have you ever thought that possibly Clive *was* guilty, that possibly he *did* kill Mrs. Sabine?"

"Never!" exclaimed Vivian, with violence.

With a brusque gesture she put up her hand, and took Mrs. Baratrie's hand from her shoulder, as if suddenly she could not bear that contact. She looked angry, indignant even, and her eyes were acutely hostile as she stood facing her friend.

"I never thought I should hear you ask such a terrible question," she said, suddenly feeling far away from her companion in misery, suddenly feeling a great loneliness enclosing her.

"But, Vivian——"

"You know—nobody knows so well as you do, except one—you know how I love Clive! And then you ask me if I have ever thought he was a murderer! And you are his Mother! What would you feel if I were to ask you such a question? Wouldn't you want to put me out of your house?"

"My dear——"

But the girl's exasperated nerves would not let her be silent. The long self-control, like a much-used garment, was beginning to wear thin as the need for it was, perhaps, drawing to an end. She broke in upon Mrs. Baratry's attempt at speech, still with violence.

"I thought you understood me better than that. I thought you had confidence in me. As if I could be such a traitress to Clive as to doubt him! I should despise, hate myself, if I could doubt him. But I have never doubted him, never. Love is knowledge and I know Clive."

"Forgive me, Vivian! Forgive me, dear! I am all on edge to-day. I scarcely know what I am saying."

"But—but you spoke deliberately. What made you?"

"I don't know. I don't know. I'm horribly sensitive. The whole world has been, is, talking about Clive. I suspect every one of perhaps thinking that horrible thing about him. Why shouldn't they? How can they tell?"

"But I am not every one. I am the woman Clive loves. And you shouldn't——"

"Hush! Hush! Vivian dear, I promise you I shall never be haunted again by any ugly doubt about you."

"How long had you thought it?"

"I never thought it. I only wondered."

"If Clive comes here to-day I am ready to marry him to-morrow," said Vivian proudly. "And if he does not come, and if it were possible to marry a man condemned, I would marry him in his cell. That is what I feel, what I know about Clive."

The clear, cold chime of the clock fell on the last word. A quarter past four.

"Vivian!" said Mrs. Baratrie, with a piteous break in her voice. "Don't let us quarrel to-day. Forgive me! Can't you understand——"

"Yes, yes, Mum! Of course I do! Of course I do!"

"Let us keep together. Don't let my foolish words divide us!"

"No, Mum, no."

Vivian put her arms impulsively round Mrs. Baratrie, and gave her a kiss.

"I'm ashamed of myself. But I do understand. It's your love of him that makes you suspicious. Oh!"

With a cry she turned. She had heard the door open behind her. Kingston stood there.

"Kingston!" said Mrs. Baratrie, in a suddenly piercing voice. "What—what is it?"

The butler held up his hand.

"It's not done yet, Ma'am. Don't think it's over."

"Then why—what is it? Tell me what it is!"

"Will you believe me, please Ma'am, when I tell you on my solemn word that poor Mr. Clive's trial is not over yet?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Mr. Herries is here, Ma'am."

Mrs. Baratrie's face became livid.

"Mr. Herries? But he was only coming if . . . Oh, Vivian!"

"Ma'am—Madam!" said Kingston, raising his voice. "Mr. Clive's trial is not over, but Mr. Herries . . ."

"Let me come in, Kingston," said a firm voice outside at this moment. "I'll put it right."

Kingston stood away by the doorpost, and a rather short, pale, clean-shaven man, with rough dark hair, and imaginative, glowing dark eyes, came in. He was dressed in dark trousers, a high black waistcoat, a round collar, and a short

dark grey jacket made of some rough material. His features were blunt, and his expression had in it a sort of wistful eagerness, except when he smiled or laughed. Then he looked humorous, even merry.

"The verdict isn't given. The trial isn't over," he said, taking Mrs. Baratrie's hand. "I sent Kingston up to prepare the way. I was afraid if you saw me first it might give you a shock."

Kingston went out looking thoroughly upset.

"What is it?" said Mrs. Baratrie.

She did not introduce Mr. Herries to Vivian. Evidently for the moment she had forgotten the girl.

"I have come to tell you that the trial can't be over much before seven o'clock. That's all. I thought you would be in suspense, expecting the result every moment, as the Courts generally rise at four. The speech for the defence was a long one."

"It was over this morning, wasn't it?" said Vivian. "I saw something on a placard before lunch."

Still Mrs. Baratrie did not introduce her and the clergyman to one another, but stood slightly trembling and gazing at the latter.

"Yes, but then there was the other speech."

"For the prosecution."

"Yes. When I came away from the Court the Judge was only beginning to sum up. And as he said he would sit till any hour in order to finish the case to-night, I came here."

He turned to Mrs. Baratrie.

"Won't you please introduce me to this lady?"

Mrs. Baratrie started violently.

"Oh, I forget things to-day! Do forgive me. This is Miss Denys—Mr. Herries."

"I am engaged to be married to Clive," said Vivian, holding out her hand.

"I know."

He took her hand. His was warm and firm, and had, she thought, a very human grasp. And in his eyes, inquiring, observant, sincere, there was a very human look. The man gave himself in his gaze and, she believed, tried to take her. He did not say any conventional words of sympathy to her, but, as he let her hand go, his eyes seemed to praise her. And suddenly she felt warmed and strengthened.

"Now I'm going back," he said, turning to Mrs. Baratrie.

"Have you come all this way only to tell us——"

"It isn't very far," he interrupted, with a smile. "Now——don't look for the verdict till"——he glanced at the clock——"towards seven. The Judge is certain to be at least two hours over the summing up, probably longer. Then the Jury have to consider their verdict. If the Court rises without a verdict being given, I will send a messenger boy at once to tell you. I won't come myself. You know why, Mrs. Baratrie!"

"Yes."

"If the verdict is given, and is adverse, I will come to tell you."

"What do you—— What do you——"

"I don't know."

"Did my boy's Counsel say all that ought to have been said for him?"

"Indeed he did. No man could have done more. I'm certain of that. Now I'll be off."

He seemed about to go without farewell greetings. A preoccupied look had come into his pale face. He moved towards the door, turned round and stood still.

"What are you both going to do during the next two hours and a half?" he asked.

"Do?" said Mrs. Baratrie.

"Yes."

"We shall wait here."

"Worst thing you could do! Get on your things and take a long walk in the Park. Take a good two hours' stretch, or more. Tire yourselves. Don't come back till you hear the clocks striking seven. St. Giles' isn't quite near enough to tell you, but others will. You're a great tennis player, Miss Denys."

"I play a lot."

"Exactly. You're a crack, I know. I follow the lawn-tennis news closely, and I'm trying to help the movement to lay down many more courts for the people in the Parks. You know the value of exercise; to the soul, of course, as well as to the body. After all, what is the body? A temporary business. But we've got to look after it, and exercise helps more than most things. I play, but jolly badly. Don't get enough time for practice. But I volley at the net, or try to!"

He smiled.

"Take her out!"—he sent a very kind look, indeed a look of almost enveloping tenderness and pity to Mrs. Baratrie—"keep her out till seven. And God bless you both."

Directly he had gone Vivian said to Mrs. Baratrie:

"Put on your hat, Mum, and let us be off."

"Yes, I will. Do you like him?"

"Yes. And I shall always like that man."

"He is not conventional."

"No; thank God. Now, Mum!"

Mrs. Baratrie went away to put on her hat. Vivian had not taken hers off. She stood at the open window waiting for Mrs. Baratrie. The soft spring day was beginning to decline. How quickly its hours had passed, with what terrible swiftness! Now the end of it, of this marked and tremendous day, was drawing near. The brightness was withdrawing stealthily, and stealthily the warmth was lessening. But for a long time yet the light day would remain. Spring and summer were surely walking hand in hand over the vast

green lawns which were the playground and the resting-place of a strange population. Voices! The Park was full of voices. And were they not all pathetic? Vivian thought so.

Imagination was busy to-day. But now her nerves felt calmer. Bob Herries had done her good. She was glad he had not sympathised with her in words, had not thought it necessary to say, "I feel deeply for you to-day," or anything of that kind. How blue, and how immeasurably deep and calm, the sky looked! To drift in that blue and to sink away—how would that be? Falling, falling, falling through immeasurable blue; dying away from the world and this life in blue! What strangeness, what release!

But love is a chain of iron to hold the soul to this world, and that chain was fastened upon Vivian.

Mrs. Baratrie came in with her hat and gloves on.

"Isn't it ridiculous?" she said, in an uneven voice. "But it seems to me almost wicked to take a walk to-day. It seems heartless. I know it isn't, but—— Come, Vivian! Bob Herries is always right. He's right because he feels intensely. He gets all the messages people send out without knowing. He got your message and mine to-day directly he came into this room. We must obey him. Perhaps movement will help me to get rid of—Vivian, I feel nausea, just ordinary physical nausea! I've come down to that. I'm in the valley of the lowest humiliation! Come! Come!"

"I think it must be time. I mean I think we ought to go back now," said Mrs. Baratrie. "Don't you, Vivian?"

They were standing on the bridge at the end of the Serpentine. They had been standing there for several minutes in silence looking at the calm water. Evening was now definitely in the sky. Both of them felt that night was waiting near at hand to envelop their world.

"Yes, Mum, I think perhaps we ought to go."

Yet they remained standing where they were with their eyes fixed on the water.

"I'm horribly afraid to go back," said Mrs. Baratrie, after a silence. "To-day I've found out definitely that I'm a coward. I didn't know it before. It's a dreadful revelation to me. I long to go away now, to run away to some place where nobody knows me, to hide, to stop my ears, never to hear anything, never to know anything more. I want to be in the dark, shut in where no one can get at me, where no one can tell me. I am in a panic, Vivian."

"But you're not going to give way to it."

"No; no, of course not. Let us go."

She drew away from the stone parapet.

"Have we time? Shall we get there by seven?"

"Yes. We needn't hurry."

They went down the road, then turned to the left and walked along at the edge of the water. There were not many people about. But they came upon one seedy old man. He was sitting on the short grass alone. He had taken off his battered old black hat and laid it beside him. With his red hands clasped round his thin knees he was sitting quite still and staring across the water. In his pale eyes there was an expression of dull wonder. As he sat there alone he seemed to be wondering at things, at his solitude, his seedy old age, himself, fate, life.

"Poor old fellow!" said Vivian, as they passed him.

"I can't pity him. I can't pity anyone this evening, not even you."

"You will get it all back. You are not your true self to-day. But by to-night everything may have changed. You may look back and wonder at yourself as you are now."

"I don't think so. I don't think so."

There was something so peculiar in Mrs. Baratrie's way of saying this, something so exasperated in the sound of her voice, that Vivian was startled.

"But you haven't made up your mind that Clive——"

"No, no; it isn't that!"

"But if he should be acquitted!"

"This day has left its mark, and all the days that have led up to it since—since the death of Mrs. Sabine. Nothing can ever erase that mark, nothing!"

"Mum—forgive me—aren't you allowing yourself to be morbid?"

"No—no!"

"Then I don't understand. Are you keeping something from me?"

"It's simply this. I have altered. And I shall never be the same woman again, the woman I was."

"But, dear——"

"Don't let us talk about it. I can't talk about it."

She hurried on, walking faster.

"Let us get home. I want to finish it. I want to know. I'm terrified, but I must know. Anything is better than this. We've got to go through it, and the sooner the better."

"Yes."

"We'll go across the grass."

"Very well."

They saw the tall houses of Knightsbridge. Mrs. Baratrie was almost running now. Vivian kept pace with her, walking with an easy, athletic stride.

"What time is it, Vivian? I don't know whether we could hear any clocks from the Park."

Vivian looked at her wrist.

"Ten minutes to seven, Mum."

"Ten minutes! Do you feel any better for the walk?"

"I did."

"But not now?"

"Oh—I don't know!"

"Bob Herries meant well. But it's all no use."

"I think it would have been much worse in the house. I am sure it would have been."

"It doesn't matter where one is, or what one is doing or not doing. We shall be home by seven——"

"But the verdict may not be given to-day."

"I know it will—I feel—I am almost sure it has been given now. Don't ask me why. I couldn't tell you."

Vivian said nothing. They turned out of the Park by a narrow side gate. The clocks of London were striking seven as they reached Mrs. Baratrie's house.

V

WITH a trembling hand, Mrs. Baratrie felt for, and presently found, her latchkey, and tried to insert it in the lock of the door.

"It seems—it won't go in!" she said, helplessly.

"Let me try, Mum."

"No. I'll do it. It's only a question of—it is always rather a difficult key. Wait a minute."

"If you turn it the other way——"

"Yes, yes. There! That's it!"

She pushed the door open. Vivian was just behind her. Mrs. Baratrie stood peering into the hall.

"Let us go in," said Vivian, urgently.

"Yes—I was only looking. . . . There's no one. I can't hear the servants."

At this moment somewhere in Knightsbridge there rose up above the noise of the traffic the cry of a newsboy, sharp and shrill, but unintelligible to the two women on the doorstep.

Mrs. Baratrie hurried into the house, as if driven by that cry.

"Come in, Vivian! Shut the door. That's it! Oh"—she looked at the hall table—"there are some telegrams . . . three!"

She stood staring at them, put out her hand, drew it back. "No, I won't open them now. I'll read them later, when—when we know. I wonder if there is anyone in the drawing-room."

She looked sideways at Vivian.

"There may be."

"Mum dear! Let us go up. It's no use——"

"I hear Kingston on the servants' stairs!"

She held up her hand.

"Didn't I?"

Vivian shook her head.

"Please—please let us go up. It's no use standing here. Or, if you like, ask Kingston. Shall I go and ask him if anyone's here?"

"No, don't, don't!"

She pulled at Vivian's arm.

"Don't disturb him. I'll—we'll go up. We'll go up. I'll—I'll leave the telegrams till later. Come!"

She went towards the staircase, but just as she was going to put her foot on the first stair she stopped.

"No, you go first, Vivian! You're my guest. You go first."

Without saying anything Vivian passed by her and went firmly up the stairs towards the first floor. But, not hearing anyone coming behind her, she looked back. Mrs. Baratrie had not moved, was standing in the hall at the foot of the staircase.

"You tell me whether there's anyone in the drawing-room," she said. "Then—then I'll come."

"Very well, Mum."

"Wait!"

"Yes?"

"If it's Bob Herries—Mr. Herries——"

"Well?"

"No, nothing! Just tell me and I'll come up."

Vivian turned her head and went on, while Mrs. Baratrie put out both her hands and held fast to the balustrade.

On the first floor of the house there was a spacious landing, carpeted, and furnished with two settees standing against the wall, and with a long Chippendale cabinet containing a collection of Wedgwood china. As Vivian turned the angle of the staircase and came in sight of this landing she saw lying on one of the settees a man's hat.

She stopped where she was and stared at it. Someone had come then. Someone, a man, was in the drawing-room. Who was it? For an instant it seemed to her that she ceased from breathing, that life stood still in her—just for an instant. Then she was again a thinking, vital woman. The hat was a quite ordinary grey hat, of the type sometimes called Hom-burg, with a broad black band round it. Quantities of men wore hats of that type in London, both in winter and summer. Clive sometimes wore such a hat. Yes, but so did thousands of other men. Mr. Herries was very unconventional. Perhaps although he was a clergyman he—— She moved, treading softly, gained the landing, went almost stealthily to the settee, picked up the hat and looked inside the crown. Her eyes fell on two small yellow letters. They were "C.B." She put the hat down and turned towards the shut door of the drawing-room. Her face had completely changed. All the colour had gone out of it. It looked drawn, peaked almost, like the face of a woman about to become a mother, terribly expressive, nude with expression, a face full of an anticipation so keen, so tremendous that it was scarcely less than savage in its intense humanity. After waiting a moment she went to the door. She laid a hand gently on the handle, then again stood quite still as if listening.

"Vivian!"

She started. The voice, a hoarse voice with a trembling in it, had come to her from below. She turned her head, then, with a brusque decision, opened the door.

Inside the room in the evening light a man was standing by the window which looked on to the Park. He turned as the door opened and showed a face mottled in patches of red and white. When he saw the girl he stood where he was and slightly lifted his arms. She went up to him without a word, took both his wrists in her two hands and looked into his eyes. She stood thus for a moment; then with a passionate movement she lifted first one of his hands, then the other, to her lips and kissed them with a greedy tenderness.

"Vi——" he murmured, in a withdrawn voice.

She dropped his hands.

"Hush!"

She put her finger on her lips, shook her head, turned and left him. Quickly she went to the head of the stairs, began to go down, turned the angle of the staircase and saw Mrs. Baratrie below her in the hall still grasping the balustrade. As Vivian appeared she looked up, she stared with terrible eyes.

"Mum—he is here!"

"Who—who is here?"

Vivian was beside her now, was holding her waist.

"Clive is here!"

The girl bent and pressed her eyes against Mrs. Baratrie's neck. She was shaking all over.

"Clive! . . . let me go—— Clive!"

Vivian took away her arm, lifted her face.

"Clive!" Mrs. Baratrie repeated, as if dazed. "Clive—where?"

Vivian pointed to the staircase.

"I—I don't believe it!"

"Mum—go to him! I tell you—go!"

She pushed Mrs. Baratrie almost roughly.

"But I don't——"

"Go!" she said angrily. "I left him for you. And now——"

"Clive! . . . You mean you have seen him—up there?"

"Yes. Yes. *Will you go?*"

And again, without knowing it, she pushed Mrs. Baratrie.

"Clive—up there! In the house—Clive!"

The words came on a deep, convulsive sigh. Then holding on to the balustrade first with one hand, then with the other, and leaning towards it with her head bending down in a way that was grotesque and pitiful, Mrs. Baratrie went slowly up the stairs, creeping like an old woman. She came to the angle, and crept round it out of sight.

When she had disappeared Vivian crossed the hall, went into the empty dining-room, where a shining oak table stood in the middle of the floor, shut the door behind her, sat down in a chair with a lyre-shaped back, leaned with both arms on the table, laid her face on the wood between them and cried. Her whole heart seemed to her to be flowing out of her in the unending tears.

The reaction had come at last. She gave up struggling. She gave up being plucky and brave, holding her love with tight reins, bearing her burden with the grit of a tough English girl, a girl who belonged to a tough race and who must live up to a certain tradition. Stretched out over that table in the empty dining-room she released herself in tears. Relief no doubt was the cause of this abrupt and complete breakdown, but as she cried she felt hot with anger, almost enraged. What cruelty they had endured through all these months, Clive, Clive's Mother, and she! What agony they had been dragged through! What horrible efforts they had had to make, wearing masks of indifference, or bravery, before the spying eyes of men! Why had they been picked out from the rest of humanity, brought into the public market-place to be stripped naked and scourged before the world? What had they done, Clive, his Mother, and she, that they should be selected for torture? It hadn't been fair! It hadn't been fair! And nothing could ever make up to them for it, no

amount of happiness, no deep and enduring peace. There would always be an unpaid score against Destiny. And she remembered some words she had said and had written, too, in her last letter to Mrs. Baratrie: "I believe in the justice of God." When she had spoken and written those words she had been thinking of the verdict. It had been given and it had been the right verdict. Clive had been pronounced innocent of the murder of Mrs. Sabine. So the justice of God had not failed. It had been done. And yet now she was full of the sense of injustice; now, and only now, she raged against the working out of God's will—if it were that—upon Clive. It was monstrous that Clive should have had to endure such prolonged torment being innocent. And to the end of his life he would be marked with the brand of it. His poor face! Those patches of red and white, those uneven patches! They showed what he had been through. And his eyes, the look in his eyes when she had stood in the doorway! She would never forget it. There had been something sublime in it, but something animal too. And it was the something animal which had gone to her heart, piercing it, calling forth from it, like blood-drops, a tenderness that had hurt her, that hurt her now. For she knew now the exquisite suffering of love which alone can truly suffer. What Clive had to forgive! And what she had to forgive for Clive! Could they ever find within themselves the power to pardon? He might, perhaps. She did not know. But she felt just then that she never could. Justice now could never repair injustice, horrible, gross injustice in the past. She had known that when she saw Clive standing in the evening light by the window alone. His face and his body had looked like the face and body of a victim. She had only fully realised what it had all meant to him, and to her, when at last she had seen him in freedom. But then she had realised, and she realised now.

"Nothing can ever make up for it, nothing, nothing!"

It was irreparable. She knew it now Clive was free. She pitied him now as she had never pitied him before. She loved him now, with a fierceness, with a hot rage, as she had never loved him before. And she hated now, as she had never hated before, those who had accused him, had branded him. The Public Prosecutor! He might be merely a representative of supposed Justice trying faithfully to do his duty. But she hated him as a man. All her reasoning powers were drowned just then in the flood of emotion. For the first time in her life she knew the longing for revenge, and was aware of passions within her whose existence she had not suspected till now.

And presently a new feeling came to her. It was a feeling of touchiness. She did not know, she had indeed no idea, how long Mrs. Baratrie had been upstairs. But now it seemed to her a very long time. She felt forgotten, abandoned in her grief and rage, not wanted. She had seen Clive first, but immediately she had given him up to his Mother. And now they had forgotten her. In her grief jealousy came to her. What was the use of loving, of being loyal, of sticking to your love in the sight of all men through good and evil report? The great moment comes and you are forgotten, put out of mind.

"They might have sent for me. I gave him to her. I kept out of the way. But I didn't think they would forget all about me."

She had lifted her head from the table. What time was it? Surely the room was beginning to get dark. She put up her hands to her eyes and cheeks. She was hot. She pressed the last tears out of her eyes and sat straight up with her elbows on the table. She was considering something with bitterness. She was considering whether she should go away, should go home. If they did not want her, why should she stay? She had seen Clive. She could not have gone away if she had not seen him. But she had seen him.

The dining-room door opened softly behind her. Ah—at last! She turned, but slowly. She did not want to seem in a hurry now she had waited so long. Kingston was there with a bottle of wine, looking at her with startled eyes. Did he know? She felt an odd, detached curiosity about that.

“I beg pardon, Miss. I didn’t know you were in.”

“We have been in for some time. Mrs. Baratrie is upstairs with Mr. Clive.”

Kingston let the bottle drop. It was smashed, and claret ran over the floor in a dark stream.

“Mr. Clive, Miss!” he stammered.

“Yes. Didn’t you know? Didn’t you let him in?”

“But—but—is it over, Miss, is it done?”

“It must be or how could he be here? Ask yourself, Kingston.”

“We didn’t know. Downstairs we didn’t know. Mrs. Baratrie made us promise to keep the house shut to-day, not to show ourselves or take in a paper. Poor Mr. Clive is free, Miss?”

“Yes, Kingston, yes. Look what you have done.”

“I couldn’t help it, Miss. I’m sorry. Poor Mr. Clive is free! I’ll go and get a cloth!”

He went out of the room.

Poor Mr. Clive—poor Mr. Clive! What odd expressions servants use. But sometimes there is truth in them.

Kingston had left the dining-room door open behind Vivian, who still sat by the table with bitterness growing in her, wondering what to do. She could not stay for ever. It was humiliating to stay forgotten. And yet how could she leave that house without seeing Clive again?

“Hush!” That was all she had said to him, the only word she had spoken. She must see him, must say—but she had kissed his poor hands. She had thought even of them as victims. She had longed to comfort and protect them, Clive’s hands.

— She heard a step in the hall. It must be Kingston coming back with the cloth. But the step passed by and ascended the staircase. And she sat on looking at the claret soaking slowly into the carpet, dark red on buff colour. Presently she heard the step again coming down, and Kingston came in looking extraordinary.

“Please go upstairs, Miss, if you will.”

He spoke with his face turned away from her.

“You are wanted, Miss. I will go and get a cloth.”

And he left the room.

“I am wanted—at last!” thought Vivian.

She could not get rid of the bitterness that was in her, but now suddenly she felt ashamed of it. Egoism at such a time! Thoughts of self in such a moment as this! That, too, the egoism, the thoughts of self, was part of the human tragedy.

She left the dining-room and went upstairs.

Mrs. Baratrie met her on the landing.

“Go in to him, dear. I am going to leave you alone together. He wants you. You can do far more for him than I can.”

“Why?”

She could not help searching Mrs. Baratrie with her eyes, asking her silently what had happened. But the face she knew so well told her little. Somehow Mrs. Baratrie had regained the self-control which she had lost. There was even something emphatic now in her self-control. Her face and her manner were still, reserved, even cold. But her pallor was almost corpse-like.

“I feel it is so,” she answered. “But I can’t explain why. If you had ever had a child perhaps you would understand.”

She paused. She seemed to have nothing more to say, yet she did not leave Vivian. The drawing-room door was ajar. Vivian did not hear any sound inside the room.

"I am going to get those telegrams," Mrs. Baratrie said at last. "And then I will go up to my room. Vivian—I suddenly feel very tired, terribly tired. Do you?"

"I scarcely know. I scarcely know what I feel now."

Mrs. Baratrie took hold of her hand.

"Do you know—they cheered him in the streets?"

"Clive!"

"Yes. He could scarcely get through the crowd. They ran beside the cab. They—they were all on his side at the end, all for him."

"The English love justice."

"And you, too!"

"I am English."

"Of course. But I was thinking of your words, 'I believe in the justice of God.' You see you were right. It has come about as you predicted it would."

She was silent. But still she did not go. Vivian began to wonder why she stayed there when Clive was waiting alone. There was something very strange in her inability to go. Had she something still to say, something she found a difficulty in saying? At last she said:

"And now there's the future to face, there's the new life."

"Yes."

She was gazing at Vivian now, but her eyes did not look observant. They held an expression of deep, brooding thoughtfulness; they suggested a weary but still intense mind heavy with thought.

"For him and you," she said.

"Yes."

Suddenly Mrs. Baratrie took the girl by the shoulders, almost as if protectively.

"You're brave," she said. "You're brave. God keep you always."

She bent down and kissed Vivian. And her lips were dry and cold. Then she turned away and went down the stairs.

VI

WHEN Vivian went into the drawing-room she found Clive Baratrie at the far end of the room near the windows that looked on to Knightsbridge. He was standing by a bookcase, and had a book open in his hand, which he had evidently just taken down. For there was a small gap in the shelf beside him. Vivian guessed that he had not wished to hear the conversation on the landing, and so had tried to fix his mind for a moment on something ready to hand. When she came in he put the book back quickly.

She shut the door. And when she had done that she realised things suddenly. It was all over. That, in a way, she had felt in the dining-room when she had broken down. But now she was sharply conscious of the future to which Mrs. Baratrie had alluded. The door was shut. Clive and she were alone in freedom. And she seemed to hear the future, like faint footsteps in the twilight. She went towards Clive, but slowly. He stood still and let her come to him without any movement towards her. And he had a moral reason for that.

Clive Baratrie was rather tall, five foot eleven, lean, and very remarkable-looking. He was not the type of man of whom it is sometimes said that he "passes in a crowd." Wherever he went he attracted notice inevitably. Some people thought him strikingly handsome, indeed almost beautiful. Others considered him too odd-looking to be handsome. But even these acknowledged that he had good features, and that there was something remarkable about him. The line of his face from brow to chin suggested the Greek type of face. The forehead was low and exceptionally broad. The hair was thick and dark brown. Nose, mouth and chin were all well formed and harmonious. The nostrils were round and often looked dilated. The mouth was neither small nor

large, and there was a hint of sensuality, even of passion, in its curve, and in the slope and size of the lips. There remained the eyes; and probably these were the feature that struck many people and caused them to describe Clive Baratrie as "odd-looking." Like his Mother's eyes, Clive Baratrie's eyes were set far apart, but whereas hers were small his were large. In colour they were very dark grey. The brows above them projected, forming two small knobs. And from beneath these knobs the eyes gazed out with an intensity which might not be abnormal, but which was certainly very unusual. They were wilful, determined and emotional eyes, and had affected many people uncomfortably. They had also attracted many people. The head in which they were set was a strong head with a somewhat marked projection at the back. As a rule the expression of the face was energetic and very observant. There were subtle hints of mysticism in it and hints of something in strong opposition to mysticism. It may be understood, therefore, that there was little calm in Clive Baratrie's appearance.

Usually he disturbed, set in motion. That, perhaps, was his mission in life.

He had a very beautiful speaking voice, strong, clear and resonant. His hands were finely shaped. They could give a grip that was startling and that was indicative of abnormal tenacity. He looked his age, thirty-three. Before the events which had led up to his trial for murder, and the trial, had taken place, he had always looked much younger than he was.

As she came up to him Vivian noticed that the usual clear whiteness of his complexion, a warm whiteness that held no hint of the livid, was still disfigured by blotches of red.

"Clive!" she said.

She looked up at him, looked at him hard. She did not put up her face to kiss him, or put out her hand to touch him. And he stood looking down on her without moving.

"Yes?"

"Is it true? Did they cheer you? Did they run with the cab?"

"Yes, they did."

"Then they were on your side?"

"It seems they were."

"And the Jury?"

"They were out for half an hour or so."

"Didn't it seem an eternity?"

"It seemed a long time."

"And now—it's all over!"

"Now it's all over!"

Then she was in his arms. It seemed that they had both waited till then, and that both had a common impulse to give way at that moment. And when she was in his arms the rage she had felt when she was alone in the dining-room came to her and possessed her again, a rage that was the more unendurable because it was impotent.

"Nothing can ever make up for it, nothing, nothing!"

She held his temples with her two hands and kissed his eyes, taking the victim into her inmost tenderness, or at least trying to take him.

"Clive—I have been down there in the dining-room, crying with rage."

"Because it's over?"

"Because it has been. I can never forgive, never."

"Forgive whom, Vi?"

"All those who have persecuted you and us, and life, destiny——"

There was another word, august, terrible, on her lips. But she did not utter it.

"Do you feel like that?" she asked, whispering.

"No."

She looked at him in wonder, met his strange eyes.

"Why not?"

"What would be the use? It has been. It can never not have been."

"No. That maddens me to-night. And all this has come since I knew you were free. Till then I was calm in a way. I—I played tennis at King's this morning. Can you believe that?"

He moved his head.

"Are you angry?"

"I know why you did that."

There was a silence. Then he said:

"Whom were you with at King's?"

"I played with Jim Gordon against—Clive!"

She had felt his arms stiffen.

"Gordon is sick to-night, very sick!"

"No, Clive!"

"Very sick. He was waiting for the empty place."

"Jim is too fine for that."

"No man is who loves like Gordon. And I don't blame him. If his and my situation had been reversed, I should have wished deep down—remember that, deep down, underneath, where the truths lie buried,—for him to go. I couldn't have helped it. Love is horribly merciless, and Gordon's nature is violent under all his self-control."

"Do you know what he said to me to-day when we parted at the Club? He said——" She repeated Gordon's parting words to her. "Wasn't that fine of him?"

"Yes. Gordon is fine. But he can't dodge his humanity."

He said no more, but drew her down on a sofa, and then was silent.

"What do you feel, Clive?" she said, at last. "You seem so calm."

"I feel fairly calm."

"I wonder you are not almost mad."

"That passes. That is at the beginning. One gets beyond that."

"Where to?"

"I shall know better later on, I believe. When you've been facing the hangman for months you go to pieces, I suppose. Probably I'm in pieces now."

She shuddered. He held her closer.

"But you seem so—so complete."

"It's all seeming, I expect."

"Did you face the crowd alone?"

"No."

"Who was with you?"

"Several of them; those who, I suppose, believed in me all through. But only one drove away with me."

"Who was that?"

"Archie."

"Archie!" said Vivian, amazed, almost unbelieving.

"Yes. I didn't know he was in Court till it was all over. When I was going out I found him by me. And he stuck to me through the crowd. I shan't forget it."

Tears ran down Vivian's cheeks. Knowing her brother as she did, his action—the thought of it, and of the love for her which must have prompted it,—moved her too much.

"Little Trump!" she said, when she could speak.

"Yes. He's got your blood in him."

"He never said he was going. I was with him this afternoon and he didn't tell me."

"Probably he didn't know. Probably it was a sudden impulse. They come—impulses, as if on wings, angels and devils. I felt it very much from Archie, because I know how he cares for Gordon, what he wishes for Gordon."

"Not now, Clive!"

"Doesn't he? How do you know?"

"Archie understands me now."

"Since when?"

"Since to-day."

"But Gordon is his great pal."

"What he has just done shows that he is on your side. Archie is a very sincere boy."

"Yes."

She felt painfully at that moment how his mind was pre-occupied with Jim Gordon, and a question, a terrible question came into her mind. Should she dare to put it to him?

"What is it you want to say?" he asked her.

He had seen the question in her eyes.

"Clive, when you were in prison, when you didn't know what the end would be, did you ever think that——"

"Go on. I want to hear."

"Did you ever think that if you were removed I should forget and marry Jim?"

"I didn't think you would ever quite forget."

"But you thought I should marry Jim!"

His arms tightened round her slim, athletic body, but he said nothing.

"You did!" she said.

"Can you condemn me for such a thing?"

"I am only—sorry."

"You can't understand what takes place in a man's brain when he has to go through what I have just been through. No one can. The imagination can't conceive of it. I'm sure of that. But—yes, when I was in prison I often saw you in Jim Gordon's arm after my execution."

He spoke with brutality, but still kept his arms closely about her.

"That's life!" he continued. "An experience such as I've just come through strips all the illusions away. Life is—going on, shedding things, forgetting things, forgetting people, loves, hatreds, passions, sorrows. It has to be so. Otherwise people who are sensitive would continually be destroyed by their miseries. Perhaps some day, if I live to be old, I shall almost forget that I have been tried for mur-

der. It doesn't seem very likely now. But I'm only thirty-three. I may live for another fifty years. And I may look back and think of all this almost as if it were something that happened to another man."

He stopped abruptly. She glanced up and saw that a dark look had come into his face.

"And yet I'm wrong," he continued. "Some things are not forgotten. As long as I live people will always remember that I am the man who was accused of murdering a woman. Do you thoroughly realise that?"

"Yes."

"And what are you going to do?"

"Do?" she said, as if not understanding.

"Yes—do. Have you realised the situation?"

"Do you mean yours?"

"Mine, and yours if you marry me."

"I have realised."

"Are you quite sure, Vivian?"

He let her go and got up from the sofa. She was amazed at his self-possession, at the lucidity of his mind. There was something new to her in him to-day, something of intellectual brutality, something—she scarcely knew—suspicious perhaps, yes, suspicious, that she had not marked in him before this great catastrophe had overtaken him. But it was difficult to believe that two hours ago he was a prisoner, sitting between warders in the midst of a crowd, waiting to know whether he was to be hanged by the neck or set free. As she listened to him, as she looked at him, she felt, as never before, the mysterious strangeness of humanity.

"Vivian, are you quite sure?"

"Yes."

"We've got to face it, you know. I'm free—yes! I'm here in Mother's drawing-room"—he looked all round, at the bookcases, the furniture, the curtains, the flowers—"with you. No one has a right to touch me now. I can go where

I like, stay here in London, travel the world. But I'm a man with a mark set on him, an indelible mark."

"How can you——"

"What?"

"But how can you think anything out to-day, after what has happened?"

"I feel like a man who's taken one of those drugs which for a time give the mind special powers. My brain's at the gallop this evening. As long as I live I shall never think more clearly and comprehensively than now. I know that. My body's tired, but not my brain. Haven't you noticed—have you ever read accounts of trials of criminals in the newspapers?"

"Now and then I have."

"Haven't you ever been surprised by reading that the accused man was perfectly calm, looked about the Court as if the proceedings had nothing to do with him, was entirely at his ease? Why, even when sentence was being pronounced on them men have been absolutely cool. Well, I understand all that now. Something comes to you. It may be abnormal. But it puts you for the time above things. That's the feeling. 'I'm above all this. All this is down below me, and I'm looking at it from a height.' When I stood in the dock to hear the verdict just now I felt quite calm; intense, but quite calm."

Shadows were gathering in the room between the long lines of books. Twilight was rapidly deepening. Clive, standing up, looked tall and very expressive in the twilight. And Vivian was aware of a great strangeness in him and in this hour. The terrific strain he had just come through had affected his mind, but not in the way that might have been expected. Instead of exhausting it had spurred his mind on. The mind, perhaps, had made such an enormous effort under the spur of necessity that it could not now cease from making an effort, could not rest, could not collapse. It must, for a time, go on.

"I dare say I shall smash up presently," he continued, after a moment. "As I said, I may be in pieces now. Who knows? But the pieces can think and understand, and grasp the future too. Have you grasped the future?"

"You must tell me, if you want to."

"It's best. I've got the trial over. This is the day of endurance, and I've still got the power to endure in me—to-day. I've been through it with Mother. I must go through it with you. You've stuck to me through all this. It's been a regular Calvary for you of course. I know that. I can't praise you, Vi, or thank you. I feel it all too much for that. And by it you've made me love you much more than I did. And that's terrible."

"Terrible?" she said, in a low voice.

"Yes. There's something terrible in everything that's carried too far. For everything there must be a point beyond which it is dangerous to go, one ought not to go. I've gone far beyond that point in my love for you. It can never be an easy love, a quiet-going love, the average love of an average man. Make no mistake about it, Vi."

He stopped. She did not speak. He moved, walked a little way up the long room on the uncarpeted black floor, turned, came back, but did not sit down. She noticed the dark stains under his wilful and emotional eyes. The twilight had surely emphasised them. His eyes seemed to be looking out from two caverns. He kept them on her as he went on:

"I loved you more than you know before all this. By what you've done and been since my arrest, the accusation against me, you've made me love you much more—desperately, in fact. There you have it. It's a tremendous business to love like that, it's a tremendous business to be loved like that. The giving is tremendous; and so must the taking be. Realise that. And then there's this to realise, what I began on—but somehow I left it; let's get back to it.

I'm a marked man. Henceforth as long as I live I stand out from the mass of men, right out. The placard is tied round my neck: 'This man was tried for murder.' And wherever I move everybody will come up and read it, and stare. You know how people stare at those whom they think are perhaps awfully wicked. It isn't mere curiosity. No; it's a kind of lust."

"But every one knows you are innocent now!"

The words came almost angrily from the girl's lips.

"They know I'm acquitted."

"But they cheered you, they ran beside your cab!"

"That was just an animal outburst. The animal loves to get loose, and when it does, and has an opportunity given it—like the end of my trial just now—well, it wallows."

"Oh—Clive!"

"That hurts you, Vi? I don't want to hurt you. God knows that. But I want to have it all out."

"Yes. Go on."

"In the future, when all this that's happened to-day has faded a bit in people's memories, there'll always be lots of men and women who, whenever they meet me, will think to themselves: 'Yes, he was acquitted, of course. But was he really guilty? Did he do it? Is that a murderer I'm looking at?'"

He was silent, always gazing at her.

"Yes, I know," she said. "I know. I think that's partly why I cried downstairs, cried with rage. I believe I thought of that, realised that."

"All the better! I want you to realise it. The terrible thing in life is to realise things too late. I don't want you to do that. I won't let you do it."

"I am sure I do realise."

"You're much younger than I am. Ten years younger."

"That isn't a very great difference between a woman and a man."

"Perhaps not. But, such as it is, it is all to my disadvantage."

Now she heard clearly the sound of bitterness in his voice, and understood how acute the suffering must be underneath his apparent calmness, his extraordinary self-government and lucidity of mind.

"In every way I am at a disadvantage," he went on. "Not only compared with you, but compared with almost every other man you could mention or think of. A woman who links her fate with mine, any woman, will be making a great sacrifice."

"Don't——"

"No, no. We'll have it all clear. A girl wants to be proud of her husband, a girl such as you are specially. How can you be proud of me?"

"I am proud of you. You have suffered terribly, though you have done no thing wrong. You have been made a martyr of and you have come out cleared. The whole world has been told you are innocent. And you have borne it all as a man should. And now—I think you are wonderful, Clive, but——"

"Don't get up, Vi. Stay there!"

"Shall I——"

"Go on!"

"I was going to say you are too wonderful."

"How—too wonderful?"

She hesitated. She felt in him something so strange that it disquieted her. She did not know what she had expected this talk to be like, this talk with her lover released, sent out into the daylight from the shadow of death; she only knew that she had not expected anything quite like this! If Clive had been terribly excited, if he had been violent, if he had broken down completely, she would, she believed, have felt more at ease than she felt now. He had told her about his condition, had explained to her that his brain

was working with an abnormal competence, given the circumstances. There was probably something morbid in the matter of his calm, his clear thinking, his desire for a thorough understanding between them in such an hour. He had just told her of the desperation in his love for her, and she had felt deeply, painfully almost, the truth of that. Yet there was something that chilled her, that made her strangely uneasy, in his demeanour and even in his determination to have things all clear between them. She wanted to interrupt him, to say, "Leave this for another time!" She wanted just to feel, and love, and pity, and console, not to understand, not to explain, not to come to decisions. She wanted to be in his arms again and to live in the present, not to look forward and plan for the future. But she was in his power. Even by what he had just gone through he dominated her. His great experience gave him just then a sort of moral authority.

"How—too wonderful?" he repeated.

"I don't know, but—but must we talk of the future? Can't you rest in the present?"

"Rest! I can't rest!"

"You ought to, my dearest, you ought to."

"Shall I ever be able to rest? I don't know. Anyhow—not now!"

He put up a hand to one of the red patches on his face, then dropped it.

"Other men are ordinary, unknown, or exceptional, celebrated, famous. A woman might be very happy with a man of either class. But I am in a class by myself. In a sort of way I am infamous."

"That's a lie!" she said, hotly. "I—I won't hear you say such things."

Tears, angry tears, had come into her eyes.

"But it is so, because men's minds are what they are."

"I don't care about that. I care for facts. You shall not say you are infamous—to-day!"

"Forgive me, Vi!"

Evidently moved by a strong impulse, he came quickly to her, sat down close to her, took a hand in his, put one arm round her shoulder.

"Let us try to be happy!" she whispered. "Do let us try to be happy—after all this. In spite of all, can't we be a little happy if we try, if we let ourselves be? You talk of people, men and women, of their minds, of their horrible eyes staring, but if you and I *know* you are innocent and have only suffered all this because of some hideous fate, isn't it enough? Can't we live for ourselves and in ourselves? Can't we, Clive?"

"Can we?"

"Yes."

"But what do you wish me to do then?"

She leaned against him, and put her free hand on his hand that was holding her.

"To do?"

"Yes. Do you wish me to—well—to stick it out?"

Again the future! She knew now that it was useless to try to draw his mind away from the future. Evidently his mind was ungovernable. Neither he nor she could control it. She moved, drew away from him a little, and looked at him.

"You mean—have you been debating——"

"Yes. That's the word. I've had time. I've debated it both ways. How I should face the hangman if it went against me, how I should face life if it went for me. Two kinds of courage! I knew I should need one of them, but I didn't know which till to-day. Now the question is—can I get hold of the kind of courage I should need if I decided to stick it out?"

"You mean——"

"To stay here in London, to live as I've been living, to

go about among all the people I know, see the fellows in the clubs and on the tennis courts, to go on with my work in the City. Have you thought about all that, what I should do if I came out?"

"No. I—I suppose I haven't been able to. I've only been thinking—'Will he be set free? Shall I ever see him again a free man?'"

"Yes—that's natural enough. But now we must think together. I might do what I've said. My name won't do much good to my firm now. But my partners have played the game. I must say that for them. They're men. Still, I shan't do them much good if I go back to them seeing what the world is. But they won't try to get me out. I know that. Harry Maynard was one of those who came out of Court with me to-day."

"There are splendid men in the world, Clive."

"And women too! But one doesn't want to try them too far. I might do that though—what I've just said. On the other hand, I might do the other thing."

"What?"

"Give it all up—the life I've been living since I came out of the Army and before I joined up."

"But, then, what would you do?"

"Well, the world's wide enough. I might leave London, get out of England altogether, start again somewhere else. Of course, I should be much worse off. But money doesn't seem much to me just now, and I could get along. I might try to work somewhere else. Or I might give up work entirely. There are little places abroad where a man can live quietly and spend moderately. There are quiet places, lonely places. I might go to one of them. I might settle down to a new life, a quiet life, where I don't know people. I might drop my name——"

"Oh!"

He heard her sigh deeply.

"Why did you do that, Vi?"

"Go on!"

"Once I saw a little place. It was in North Africa, on the coast, not far from a one-horse town called Sidi-Barka. Just a white house, in a garden of palms and big trees, looking over the sea. No one there! One could live for very little in a place like that. And no one comes there. No one would know."

No one would know. When Clive said the final words Vivian heard at last what seemed to her a sort of cry coming out of the very heart of the man whom she loved and who nevertheless seemed strange to her, strange in his composure, in his power to reflect, to weigh, to express his thought clearly. She pressed his hand between her two hands.

"I know, I understand," she said. "Don't keep me off, Clive. Let me be with you in it."

"You think I'm a coward?"

"Oh no! You aren't a coward. But you need peace. Everything of you must need peace after this. It's the only medicine for you."

"No, not the only medicine. Peace is perhaps what I need, for a bit at any rate. But I need love much more. For months I've been surrounded by the faces of those who doubted me, or who didn't doubt, who believed—well, never mind!"

He seemed to make a great effort, and added, in a changed voice:

"But I mustn't be abominably selfish, Vi. I know you are ready to marry me——"

"Yes, yes."

"But think what it means!"

"I have thought."

"Not enough perhaps. Life may be a long business for both of us. Could you stand a long life with a marked man?"

"I only want it to be long—with you."

"But there's another thing——"

He stopped. There was in his face now a look of suffering and surely of shame. He even looked for a moment horribly shy.

"What is it?"

"I don't know how to tell you."

"Why? Is it a dreadful thing?"

"You may think it so. You probably will think it so."

"Then must you tell me?"

"I must tell you before—if we are going to marry."

"Then tell me now. It's better. Otherwise I shall lie awake wondering."

"I don't think a man like me ought ever to have children. I don't think it would be fair."

She was silent. She did not move. He felt no thrill, no repulsion in her body. Her body, indeed, gave no sign. But her silence lasted till he felt afraid. He did not know how to break it. But at last it became unbearable by him. It was getting rapidly dark in the room now. Night was coming on. The hum of London sounded outside the windows which looked upon Knightsbridge. For a long time he had not been aware of this multiple sound. But in her silence he heard it. Before he had not noticed the gathering of darkness. But now he noticed it. And suddenly his nerve was shaken, and he had a sensation of nightmare. He moved abruptly, even violently.

"Well?" he said, in a sharply vibrating voice. "Haven't you——? I have told you. I had to tell you. But—you don't answer! What is it?"

Then Vivian moved too. She disengaged herself from him, took her hands away from his, moved a little away on the sofa and faced him. And he saw, even in the gathering darkness, a new look in her eyes, a look of firmness, of strong resolution.

"Clive," she said. "I think we are being morbid."

"Morbid?"

"Yes. What are you?"

"What—but you know me!"

"You are an innocent man, and you are talking like a guilty one."

"Vi!" he said.

And he got up.

"Why should you hide away? Why should you change your name, leave your country? You are just the same as all the other men in London who have never harmed anyone. Why should you not have children? What would they have to be ashamed of? Nothing. I won't let you speak like that to me any more. Dearest—it's no wonder! You have almost frightened me by your calmness, by the way you've spoken of everything, shown me you've thought of everything. But underneath it all you're bleeding. Yes—you are! The reaction's beginning. It must come. You can't avoid it. But before it's got absolute hold of you I want to say something too. I'd go anywhere with you. I'd give up anything. Giving up is simply nothing to a woman who really loves a man. It isn't really a sacrifice at all. We—we glory in that sort of unselfishness, if it is unselfishness! That little house by the sea, far away from everything! Don't you know I could be happy in it with you? But only if *you* were happy. But, Clive, you wouldn't be. If you tried, if you pretended you were another man, in the end you'd be miserable and ashamed. You'd be crouching instead of standing straight up. It couldn't be. You and I aren't made for that sort of thing. I haven't hidden all these days. To-day I was out among all the crowd that knows me. And then I and they—we didn't know the end. Now we do know. *I* knew you were innocent. Now the whole world knows. And am I, are we, to hide now? No. We must face it, Clive. We must stay here, and go on—together. It's the

only thing for such as we are to do. If you marry me, do it with your head up, and don't ask me to droop mine. I can't. It isn't in me. I should wither if I did that. And if children come I shall welcome them. You will welcome them. They will have no reason to be ashamed of their father. Perhaps you can't feel as I do to-night. Don't think me hard, Clive. When you've let yourself go, and got through what must come, and when you're out of it on the far side, I *know* you'll think as I do now. I *know* you will."

She went to him quickly, put her hands up to his shoulders and her lips to his. She kissed him many times eagerly.

"Mine!" she said. "But not in shame, not in hiding!"

And he gave way to her. Suddenly all the composure, all the poise and self-command which had amazed and almost frightened her, left him. It was as if she broke him, who had not been broken by fear of a shameful death, as if she broke him by her love.

It was quite dark now, save for the shimmer of street lights on the window-panes, the shimmer from Knights-bridge. No one had come to draw the blinds and close the curtains. For once Kingston had neglected his evening duty. Mrs. Baratrie must have told him what not to do. And she did not come. She had given her son to the woman who need not have shared what fate had sent him, but who had chosen to share it. Somewhere upstairs she was alone. She had had his first words, and then had resigned him to her who no doubt was now of more value in his life than she was. And the future—dark enough it seemed—was with Vivian. The Mother had the past.

Clive was lying stretched out on a sofa in the drawing-room. His head was low on a cushion. He lay now very still in the darkness with his head turned towards the shimmer of the street lights. The storm had passed over him and

now the stillness had come. And she, the girl who had seen his intimate abasement, the crash of his soul, sat by him with one of his hands in hers, watching, with wide-open eyes, and not speaking. Rest—that was what he needed now, what he must have for a little while. She had spoken of facing it. And that was to come. That lay in the near future. But there must be an interval in which to be still, to gather the fresh force needed for the different type of endurance, to lay down the one burthen before taking up the other. Clive would go away somewhere for a time, to a place where he was not known, and under an assumed name. He had a friend in Scotland, far up in Ross-shire, who was a bachelor and who would receive him gladly. There he could go on the Moors and on the arm of the sea which was stretched out landwards below the castle walls. He could live for a time with nature unregarded by men. And when he was ready and came back they would marry, Vivian and he. Meanwhile she would spend her summer as usual, keeping a serene face to the curious world.

That was how it was to be. Far off the white African house on the seashore might wait by the blue among its palms. They were not going to it, or to any other shelter in exile.

They were going to face it out.

Late that night a cab drove up to a house in Pont Street and Vivian got out, paid the chauffeur and rang the bell. It was answered swiftly by Archie Denys.

"Vi! It is you! I felt it was. I wouldn't let the servants sit up. Mother and Dad both thought you would stay the night at Knightsbridge. They've gone upstairs."

"I nearly did stay the night."

"Well, somehow I felt you wouldn't."

His eyes were searching her face anxiously.

"Come into Dad's room, Archie boy," she said.

"All right!"

Their Father's library, a large room, was on the ground floor at the back of the house. When they were in it Vivian said:

"Shut the door, will you!"

He shut it and came up to her, still looking anxious and strained.

"Is it all right? How does he take it?"

"Clive has been extraordinary. But—but he feels the strain now."

"He would."

"Yes. He'll go away for a time. But that is not what I wanted to speak about. No! Archie——"

"Yes, Vi?"

"Clive told me."

The boy's face reddened.

"Oh—well! I didn't mean to go near the Court, but then I thought I would. And when it was all over—there was the devil of a crowd, of course—I happened to get jostled right up against Clive coming out. For he faced it, wouldn't slip away by a side door."

"He was right to face it. It was the only thing to do."

"Yes. And then when he got to a cab I thought I might as well get away in it too. I hate a crowd. Clive didn't mind, and so that was how it was."

"I shan't forget. I shall never forget how it was."

"Oh, that's all right. By the way, there are heaps of telegrams for you."

"I'll take them up to bed, but I shan't read them to-night. I feel awfully tired, old boy."

"I bet you do. One's from Jim, I think."

"From Jim?"

"Yes; he sent one, I know."

"Have you seen Jim—since?"

"Yes. He's jolly glad for you."

After a moment she said only:

"Well, I must go to bed. Are you coming?"

"In a few minutes. I'll just have a smoke and a little think first."

"A little think?"

Her eyes questioned him. Then she said:

"I should like not to be able to think for a week. Good night, Archie boy. You know how I feel—about you."

She gave his arm a long squeeze, then touched his cheek with her lips. Suddenly he caught hold of her boyishly, almost roughly.

"Good night, Vi. God bless you, old girl. You've stuck to him wonderfully. I wanted you for Jim, but that can't be helped. I see that. Thank God, he's out!"

He gave her a confused kiss and embrace, let her go and turned shamefacedly away.

"Going to have a pipe!" he said.

"Dear old Archie!" she said.

And she left him alone to have his little think.

BOOK II
THE FIGHT

I

ON the morning after the Wimbledon Tournament, which she had played through with great success, nearly attaining the highest honours, Vivian woke after a long sleep troubled by dreams. A maid had come in with a cup of tea. She drew up the blinds. The curtains in Vivian's room were never drawn, because she liked to have fresh air always about her.

"What is it I have to do to-day?"

That was her first thought on waking.

"I have something to do, something not easy."

As the maid went out Vivian knew what it was. She drank her tea and got up at once. Before breakfast was ready she was downstairs, and went out with Timkins, her Irish terrier, for a walk up and down Pont Street. The weather was fine and hot. She wondered what it was like in Scotland. She had seen the post. There was no letter from Clive. He had allowed a fortnight to go by without writing. She would write to him after breakfast.

When she went in to breakfast her Mother was already sitting before the urn, looking fresh and serenely hopeful, after her habitual morning meditation and prayer. No one else was down. Archie was still fast asleep and Mr. Denys was not quite ready. He had gone to bed very late, having been enticed by some book, some siren of literature, into a

vigil which had lasted till the very small hours. Timkins retreated with short-tailed composure to the underworld of footstools, and was heard to heave a loud sigh indicating satisfaction with his lot. Vivian sat down, after kissing her Mother, and reached out for an egg.

"Do you feel rested?" asked Mrs. Denys, pouring out coffee for her daughter, and putting in plenty of steaming hot milk.

"Yes, Mother. I must have slept for nearly nine hours."

Mrs. Denys glanced across the urn. There was a rather watchful look in her eyes which Vivian did not miss.

"I did something yesterday, Mother, which I haven't mentioned," she said. "I only told it to Archie."

"Oh. What was it?"

"Anne Lorrimer asked me to play in a tournament at Cathcart House on the twentieth of July. I told her I couldn't promise to because of Clive. I didn't know exactly when we were going to be married."

Mrs. Denys may have been startled, but she did not show it. She continued to look fresh, serene, and quite wonderfully wholesome, though not in a dull way.

"Has Clive decided when he is coming back, dear?" she asked, without making any comment on her daughter's statement.

"No. Directly after breakfast I am going to write to him and find out. I spoke yesterday—there were others there with Anne Lorrimer—because I wished people who know me to understand the situation. And Anne will tell every one who didn't happen to hear me."

"Yes, I dare say she will," said Mrs. Denys, without any apparent sarcasm.

After a pause, during which she devoted herself to a poached egg, she said:

"I know, after all that has happened, you will wish for a quiet wedding."

"Oh yes!" said Vivian, quickly, almost sharply. "Anything else would be intolerable."

"But, dear, you *will* be married in church, won't you?"

There was a pleading sound in the Mother's voice. Vivian was silent.

"I know it may mean a little more publicity, but I should feel very sad if you and Clive were married before a registrar. But you know what I feel about these things. To me marriage is still a sacrament."

"Yes, Mother dear. And I think it is to me."

"Had you—had you thought about it?"

"About church?"

"Yes."

"I don't believe I had."

"It need not be in London. You can choose some country church where you know nobody."

"But our names—Clive's name and mine—are known everywhere."

"Yes. I suppose they are."

Mrs. Denys's smooth forehead was puckered for an instant. She put up a hand to it, almost as if she felt the physical alteration distressfully. Then she said:

"That can't be helped, and therefore it must be faced quite simply."

"Yes. Mother, if I'm married in a church I wish it to be St. Giles's, and I wish Mr. Herries to marry me to Clive. I'm going to tell Clive that in my letter. I know he will agree. We can choose an early hour for our wedding. I—I simply could not bear a crowd."

Her face was flushed to the roots of her hair.

"A crowd—the sort that would come to see *us* married—would be an absolute desecration. No, I couldn't bear that. But I will be married to Clive in church. I promise you that, Mother. And Bob Herries must marry us, if he will."

"I am sure he will. As it is to be, I should like him to

be the clergyman. There is something very fine and true, and very strong, in Mr. Herries."

"He's the soul of sincerity, Mother. And he's not afraid of anything. Most of us are afraid of lots of things. I'm a horrible coward."

"You, Vi!" said her Mother, with almost startled surprise. "No, I don't think so! I should have said just the contrary."

"You don't know me."

"I think you have proved your courage lately."

"When you pray again, pray that I may never prove my cowardice. Pray that! For I have cowardice in me. I know it, and I hate it!"

At this moment Timkins emerged from his retreat, looking blinkingly expectant. An instant later Mr. Denys came into the room.

When breakfast was over, and her Father had gone away to the Bank, Vivian went to her little sitting-room, which was on the third floor at the back of the house next to her bedroom. Archie had just gone downstairs, rather ashamed of having overslept. He, too, would be off to the Bank in a few minutes. There was no tournament on that day.

Vivian shut her sitting-room door and went at once to the writing-table. There was a photograph of Clive on it in a silver frame. It had been taken by an artist photographer in France, and was strikingly effective, dark, almost painfully expressive, full of strength and even of beauty. The eyes in the photograph looked luminous and almost mesmeric. The hair was massed above the jutting brows and suggested night in its darkness. There was a curiously tortured expression about the lips, and also a hint of sarcasm somewhere. It was altogether a disturbing photograph, though it was certainly a work of art. Vivian admired it, but she had never been able to like it, and she knew that she would hate to show it to anyone who did not know Clive, and to say, "There

is Clive Baratrie." Yet the photograph was amazingly like Clive. But there was something—what was it?

She looked at the photograph as she sat down at her writing-table and took up her pen. That man did not look as if he were destined to an easy life, as if he could ever be at ease in a humdrum life. No, he looked like a trouble-maker. Perhaps that was why she had never cared to show the photograph to people. It disturbed; it seemed to mean too much.

For a moment as she looked at it a queer delusion got hold of her. At its base she seemed to see a spectral pointed thing, like a shadowy fountain pen, moving, and it traced the two words "Claude Ormeley," the name Clive had taken to hide his identity in Scotland. They were there for an instant at the base of the photograph; then they faded away. She got up, moved the photograph to another table, then sat down to write her letter. And as some natures are held back from action by fear, it seemed to Vivian just then that she was spurred on to action by fear. Something decisive had to be done. They were drifting. And she always connected drifting in her mind with destruction.

The letter she wrote was not wholly unlike a putting down on paper, with additions, of her strong outburst to Clive after the verdict. She wrote with energy, almost with a brutality of frankness. She did not hesitate. Her pen rushed over the paper. And when the letter was finished she did not read it over. She was afraid to. Let it go just as it was. She meant it. The strong part of her, the only part she valued, meant it. And it must go up North. She thrust it into an envelope, sealed it, and again took the pen to write the name and address. But then hesitation came to her. Could she address that letter to "Claude Ormeley"? She was strongly tempted to write "Clive Baratrie" on the envelope. To do so would be the strongest assertion of her will that was possible at this moment. It would make the address accord absolutely with the letter. But it would be a defiance

of Clive. And, she supposed, it would be unpardonable. But she longed to do it; she longed so much that she sat for two or three minutes waiting before she addressed the envelope. At last, however, with a sigh she wrote the two words "Claude Ormeley." She dared not do otherwise. It would not be fair. Clive had trusted her with his secret and she had no right to reveal it under the influence of an impulse, however admirable that impulse might be. But perhaps it was the last time that she would write that name on an envelope containing a letter to Clive. If Clive was moved by her letter, if it governed him, if its truth struck home to him, surely it would be the last time.

She carried the letter to the post herself.

Three days later she received the following telegram addressed to her in Pont Street:

"Can you arrange to meet Claude Ormeley at the Tyford Arms Hotel, Tyford, Sussex, on Friday next. Station is Tyford. Will be there all day. Ormeley."

As she read this telegram she realised something. Her letter had been received. It had had its effect. But it had not governed Clive. This telegram indicated resistance. She knew now that the period in Scotland had brought about a change which perhaps she had been dreading almost unconsciously. "Claude Ormeley" was coming south, not Clive Baratrie.

She was engaged to play in a tournament near London with Jim Gordon that week. Unless she scratched she would have to be on hand on the Friday. Archie was playing too. She resolved at once to scratch and told Archie so. He looked suspicious and dismayed.

"Don't ask me why, Archie boy," she said. "I can't tell you my reason. But it's a good one. I have to go somewhere on Friday."

Archie did not ask where. But she saw in his eyes that he knew she was going to meet Clive. He only said:

"Then Jim can't play in the Mixed Doubles. He'll be left without a partner."

"I'm awfully sorry. But I must scratch. I can't help it. From now on I shall not be able to do always exactly what I like. You know why. One can't live only for oneself if one has made a promise such as I have made. And I don't want to. But I'm sorry about Jim."

And then she went to the nearest post office and telegraphed to "Claude Ormeley" in Ross-shire that she would go to Tyford on Friday.

She had never been there before. She had never even heard of the place. The ABC railway guide told her that there were several good trains down from London by which she could get to Tyford. She decided to go by a train which started at 11 a.m. Clive's telegram had reached her on Monday morning. He would doubtless have hers by Monday night, and would leave Ross-shire on the following day. Perhaps he had written to her. It was useless for her to write to him again in Scotland. Probably a letter would reach her from him within the next two or three days.

But none came. Her strong, almost brutally frank, letter produced no reply. But it was bringing Clive back. As Friday drew near she felt with increasing definiteness that it would be a day decisive for her and for Clive. He had not come back to see her in London because he could not yet make up his mind to face life again as himself. He had probably put no period to his stay in Scotland. He had just been lingering on there without coming to any conclusion about the future. Safe in his hiding-place, he had let the days go by without numbering them, held tight in the claws of reaction. Her letter must have fallen on him like a fierce blow. But she had had to write it and was glad she had sent it. Clive and she had been drifting dangerously. She knew

it now. But she knew also that the danger was not yet over. "Claude Ormeley's" telegram was witness to that. And she was being made—for a day—an accomplice in something she not only hated but was also beginning to dread. But she could not help that. Directly she had had the telegram from Ross-shire she had known that she must agree to do what it suggested. There was something she had to do and she must do it at Tyford, the place of which she had never heard till Clive's strange telegram came.

She had scratched in the tournament and had written a note of apology to Jim Gordon, a rather awkward note, for she had not been able to give her real reason for "letting him down." He had sent her a rather grim note in reply, saying, of course, that it was quite all right. What else could he say? She felt the growing wall of restraint between Jim and herself and was saddened by it. She did not want to lose him. She hated to hurt him. And sometimes she wished to "have it out" with Jim. But she had no right to do that. With Clive she had such a right, and she knew she was going to use it.

Only on the Thursday did she tell her Mother about the following day. She did not tell her exactly what had happened, or allude to "Claude Ormeley's" telegram. But she said that Clive had left the place where he had been staying since the ending of his trial, and was now close to London and wished to see her.

"I am going down to-morrow morning, Mother. I suppose I shall lunch with him. I shall be back in the evening, or perhaps in the afternoon."

"Isn't he coming back to London?" said Mrs. Denys, looking slightly surprised.

"I suppose so. He will, of course."

After a slight hesitation she added:

"This seems rather odd, I know. The fact is, Mother, that Clive has been staying up in Scotland under another

name. Now he has come south. But—well, he hasn't begun to use his own name again yet. No doubt that's why he isn't actually in London."

Vivian was surprised to see her Mother's face redden.

"I hope Clive will not go on doing that," she said, with unusual emotion.

There was even a sound as of temper in her voice.

"I cannot bear anything underhand," she added. "And that you should take part in it——"

"I know exactly how you feel, Mother."

"Do, dear, explain to Clive that we cannot be involved in anything that is the least deceitful. It is not our way, and we can't change our view of such things. The thing I value most is Truth."

"I know."

"Well, dear, forgive me if I have spoken with some heat, and perhaps rather hastily. I am sorry. Go to-morrow if you must. You know how absolutely I trust you. But do give my message to Clive."

"Mother, I am going to give my own."

"Yes?"

"It will be exactly the same as yours."

Mrs. Denys's face became suddenly serene again, and she kissed her daughter warmly.

"I know how poor Clive has suffered. I understand. Don't think me unsympathetic. It's terrible—what he has to face. I know that. He is obliged to face it. You need not. And yet you are choosing to face it with him. That must give him courage."

"I don't want Clive to draw his courage from me," said Vivian, rather sadly.

"No—no! But women can help men very much in the moral way. Sometimes I think that is our chief mission here. I believe when poor Clive sees you he will feel quite differently."

"Mother," said Vivian, in a resolute voice, "you have

helped me. I mean to bring Clive back to London with me to-morrow."

Mrs. Denys looked at her daughter. Deep affection showed in her face. But there was a shadow of sadness too.

"I wish I could get a better understanding of life," she said. "But I can trust. That is such a wonderful mercy. I don't know how people get on in this world, I don't know how they bear things, without being able to trust. That simplifies everything in a most wonderful way."

She gazed now wistfully at her child. But she did not ask the question which Vivian divined in her heart.

In the morning Vivian was up early. She had waked long before her usual hour. She put on a coat and skirt, and a small round hat, dark blue in colour, which made her look very young and almost boyish. She was feeling excited, strung up, but resolute. She was longing to see Clive again. Her whole body was longing, as well as the rest of her. Yet she felt half afraid of seeing him. A shadow, "Claude Ormely," seemed to be standing between them trying to keep them apart. She must sweep him away, must dismiss him out of their lives for ever. And then nothing would stand between her and her lover.

At breakfast no questions were asked her. She and her Mother had "had it out." Her Father of course knew in a general way how things were from her Mother. Archie looked grave. He, too, was going out of town early to play in the tournament for which she had scratched. He talked of it in a casual way with obvious boyish constraint. She knew how he hated having to go without her. But that could not be helped. It seemed difficult to take any definite, any really courageous step in life without making somebody suffer.

Her train was due to start at eleven from Waterloo, but she left the house early, soon after half-past nine. She meant to go to see Mrs. Baratrie for a few minutes on her way to the station. Unless Clive had written to tell her, or had

called in Knightsbridge on his way to Sussex, his Mother could know nothing about Vivian's plan for the day.

Vivian had seen very little of Mrs. Baratrie since the day of Clive's acquittal. After her son's departure to Scotland, Mrs. Baratrie had shut herself up and had lived the life of a hermit. She had not left London. She had preferred, it seemed, to shut London out. The long nerve-strain she had endured had evidently been too much for her strength. She had been suffering from acute neuralgia and insomnia and had been really ill. Vivian knew that. Yet she had felt distressed at being kept out with the rest of the world. She had only been let in twice, and on both these occasions she had been tormented by a feeling of not being wanted by Mrs. Baratrie, who had wrapped herself in a strange reserve, and who had seemed all the time to be "making" conversation, and, moreover, to be making it with difficulty. During both of these visits Vivian had found her hostess in a carefully darkened room. And there had been a general marked suggestion of invalidism in the house, a suggestion which, Vivian fancied, Mrs. Baratrie had been at pains to make definite. This had struck Vivian as strange. For as a rule Mrs. Baratrie was a woman who never spoke of health or sickness, and never made any fuss about herself. Indeed, Vivian had always hitherto considered her as rather Spartan than weak. Evidently the trial had broken her down, and so completely that she had ceased to pretend, had even given herself up to the empire of a sick body.

Vivian had not let Mrs. Baratrie know that she was going to look in upon her that morning. She had only decided to do it on waking.

"Can I see Mrs. Baratrie for a moment?" she said to Kingston when he opened the door. "I'm on my way to the station. I won't keep her long. How is she?"

Kingston looked doubtful, even gloomy.

"Well, Miss," he said, almost confidentially, like one

longing to share a burden. "We think she is very much altered by all this. Always alone—that can't be good for anyone! But there it is, Miss!"

He ventured to take a liberty: he actually sighed.

"If you will come up into the drawing-room, Miss, I will tell her you are here."

"Yes, and please say I am on my way to catch a train, so I can only stay a very short time, but that I'm longing to see her."

"Yes, Miss."

The drawing-room looked oddly unused, Vivian thought. The writing-table was almost prim; the books were all in their places in the shelves; no magazines lay on the tables; the piano was shut; there were no flowers about.

"Evidently she never sits in here now!"

That was Vivian's thought as she glanced about her. She did not sit down. She was sure that if Mrs. Baratrie saw her it would not be in the drawing-room. And she was right. Kingston came back in a moment and asked her to come upstairs.

"Is she up yet?" she asked.

"Oh yes, Miss, in the boudoir," said Kingston.

When Vivian came into the room she found the blinds up, the sun streaming in, and Mrs. Baratrie standing by the open window bathed in the morning light.

"Good morning, Vivian," she said. "What an early call! I was surprised when Kingston told me you were here. Are you on your way to play tennis somewhere?"

"No, Mum."

She went to Mrs. Baratrie and kissed her. She was shocked at a change she had noticed at once, but she did not show it. Mrs. Baratrie, seen now clearly in strong light, looked startlingly old. She was sixty, as Vivian knew, and had formerly looked rather younger than that. Now she looked older than she was, much older. Always thin, there

was now something wizened, something that suggested the drying up of sap, in her thinness. The withered-leaf look, so ugly and tragic in a human being, was there. Her features seemed to Vivian oddly peaked and sharpened. The skin, leathery in texture, had a suspicion of yellow in its colour. Freshness had of course gone from her. That was natural enough. But its place had been usurped by something wintry and cold that seemed to tell of the freezing mind making the body pay toll. But the eyes were not frozen. They looked out of this tragic head with a strange alertness, with a sharply watchful cleverness that was disconcerting. They seemed able to gaze deeply into the mind of the person they observed while keeping the mind behind them in hiding.

"Kingston told me you were going to catch a train."

"So I am. Are you better?"

"Yes. I've decided to be better. Sit down, if you've got a few minutes."

"I will."

She sat down. Mrs. Baratrie sat beside her, and leaned forward with her thin hands clasped round her knees in an oddly unconventional attitude. Vivian thought that her body seemed to have "fallen in." Or was it the way she sat which made her bust look so unnatural?

"Have you heard from Clive?" Vivian asked, trying hard to feel at ease and to seem so.

"Yes. I had a letter this morning. He has left Scotland. He decided to leave quite suddenly. He has gone into Sussex."

"I know. I am going to Tyford now to see him."

"Oh!"

"He telegraphed asking me to come. I mean to bring him back with me."

Mrs. Baratrie said nothing. She kept her eyes fixed on Vivian. There was a questioning look in them. They held the question which apparently she did not choose to put into words.

"Don't you think it's time he came back, Mum?"

"Time? How d'you mean—time?"

"He had to have a rest. He's had it."

"Not a very long rest!"

"Do you think it ought to be longer?"

"I don't know."

"Mum, I think if Clive rests much longer as another man it will be dangerous. I think he ought to have done with Claude Ormeley, and I am going to tell him so to-day. Don't you think I have the right to do that, as I am going to marry him?"

"You haven't changed then?"

"Surely after that afternoon—that walk we had afterwards—surely you didn't think I could?"

"I scarcely know what I thought, what I think. All my values seem to have been upset lately and I can't get back to them. Besides, human beings, all human beings, are really incalculable. In the most seemingly ordinary human being anything may happen, and quite suddenly too. I know that by myself."

Vivian looked at the open window.

"I know what you mean."

Mrs. Baratrie's lips twisted in a smile that seemed faintly satirical.

"Of course!"

"But I have not changed. Don't you agree with me about Clive?"

"I dare say you are right."

"Is that all you have to say?" Vivian said, feeling chilled and disappointed.

"I might say many things, but would it be of any use if I did? I believe I'm too old to judge, sum up situations, foresee what is best, if anything is best. Do you know—it may be the war very probably—I have the feeling that every one of my age ought to be taken up and flung on the scrap-heap? What right have we to counsel the young generation?"

None whatever. Clive's my son. I love him—well, as a Mother of my type loves an only son, an only child. The war, it's supposed, didn't take him from me."

"It's supposed?" said Vivian.

"Yes. He wasn't killed. That's what I mean."

"No."

"But it took him away from me nevertheless. Oh yes—it took him away!"

"I hope not," Vivian said, surprised, discomforted by the sound of bitterness in Mrs. Baratrie's voice.

"We old things must not struggle to hold what we once thought were our empires," continued Mrs. Baratrie. "We are like the twopenny-halfpenny monarchs who have been toppled from their thrones. I will not try to judge for Clive. I will not try to help Clive. Not because I'm hart-hearted, but because my brain—something up in my brain—tells me it would be of no use. There's something horribly clear in my brain, Vivian, something that can't be made cloudy. I have to listen to it when it talks to me, and it's been talking a great deal lately. But what about your train?"

"Oh!" Vivian said, startled. "I'd forgotten——"

"What time does it go?"

"At eleven."

"Where from?"

"Waterloo."

"You haven't too much time."

"I've got a taxi waiting."

She looked at her watch and saw she had plenty of time. Nevertheless she got up, feeling that perhaps she was in the way, that she was even, in some strange and subtle manner, uncomprehended by her, doing Mrs. Baratrie harm.

"I had better go, perhaps."

Mrs. Baratrie unclasped her hands and got up too. The strong summer light shone cruelly upon her ravaged face

and thin, too thin, figure, but she did not seem to mind it. Indeed, she stood in the light with a sort of defiance.

"My impotence isn't yours," she said. "You, and such as you, belong to after the war. The scrap-heap isn't for you. On the contrary, I suppose you are intended to make the future. It's a pretty hard task."

"If I can help to make one man's future happy and sane and fine I shall have done all I can do, Mum."

"Well, my child, you are unmistakably one of the elect. Both my heart and my brain tell me that. The war hasn't made you take to defiance and drugs. You've remained wholesome through and through. Bob Herries says you belong to the makers, not to the made. He quite loves you."

"I want him to marry me to Clive."

Suddenly Mrs. Baratrie's face changed. A door seemed to shut on something hard and satirical, to open showing tenderness and warmth. And the too clever eyes were softened by tears.

"He will, if you want him to. But he won't marry you to Claude Ormeley."

"But I'm not going to marry Claude Ormeley."

II

ON that same morning, at about the time when Vivian was in Knightsbridge with Mrs. Baratrie, "Claude Ormeley" rang the bell in the private sitting-room, or parlour, of the Tyford Arms, Sussex. He had arrived there from Scotland on the Thursday afternoon, and had found the little inn empty. Two or three times when on bicycling expeditions in pre-war days as a very young man he had stopped there to lunch or to drink a glass of shandy-gaff. And the place had remained a pleasant memory in his mind. Although not far from London, and close to a station, it seemed an "out-of-the-way" place. It was buried in the country, lost among

fields and woods. The village of Tyford was merely a hamlet, and the few houses which comprised it stood well away from the inn, almost as if afraid of its liquid attractions. No one there was likely to know who "Claude Ormeley" was, and it was extremely improbable that anyone would call there who was acquainted with Clive Baratrie. For the inn was too small and too humble to be attractive to motorists. Moreover, it stood on a by-road sunk between hedges and overgrown banks. Clive remembered it as one of those secret country inns so characteristic of England, frequented only by country people, by labourers from the fields, by passing carters and waggoners, by the village postman, grocer, baker, butcher. There he could spend two or three nights without fear of being recognised or disturbed. There he could have a long walk and conversation with Vivian. Her letter had startled him and had made him realise things. When he had read it he had known at once that this period of drifting must be brought to an end. He loved, desperately loved, a girl whose whole temperament and character were the reverse of indefinite, who could never be happy in vagueness, or at ease with indecision. Her letter had fallen on him like a blow, but it had not wholly surprised him. He knew what Vivian was.

As he waited for the tinkling bell to be answered—there was nothing electric in the inn—Clive looked round the little parlour which he had hired as a private sitting-room. Its most salient characteristic was a collection of china animals. Even here, in this remote country place, there was, or there had been, a collector, someone with a hobby, or a mania, someone hot with the acquisitive spirit. Wherever Clive looked he saw immobile animals "carried out" in china. They were lined up on the painted wooden mantelshelf, crouched on brackets, reared up on chiffoniers, stared through the glass panes of elderly cupboards. Sheep, bears, pigs, cows, elephants, monkeys, lions, giraffes, horses, and other fourfooted

creatures mingled happily together in the silent little room, regarding the horsehair prospect and the stretches of linoleum with lack-lustre painted eyes. A stuffed owl and a carefully embalmed pike in glass cases held haughtily aloof from the rest of the menagerie. Red geraniums in a long green box full of dark earth moved slightly in the breeze outside the latticed window. The quacking of some ducks was audible in the distance.

The room was on the ground floor of the inn, behind the bar and bar parlour, and looked out into a small garden full of straggling rose-bushes, sweet-peas, wallflowers, hollyhocks and sweet-williams. Beyond the garden hedge was a meadow covered with buttercups and peopled by large white sheep. Woods closed in the background. The quacking of the ducks came from a yard on the left.

"Yes, Sir?" said a voice.

Clive turned round from the window. He had been looking at the sheep and wondering at their persistent tranquillity. The landlady of the inn stood before him, a transparently pale woman of perhaps forty, or thereabouts, with thin lemon-coloured hair, whitish blue eyes, red lips that looked sticky, soft freckled hands, a flat, high-shouldered body. She had, as she had already told Clive, been born and bred in London, and had evidently never been triumphantly got hold of by the country.

"Yes, Sir?"

"Oh, Mrs. Grime"—her name, ascertained the evening before by Clive—"I'm expecting a lady from London to-day to spend a few hours. What can I have for lunch?"

"Mutton chops, Sir, potatoes, rice pudding and stewed pears."

This woman at least was decisive. There was no wandering about among various edibles. The plain facts of the situation were conveyed at once in convincing English.

"That will do, I suppose."

"Yes, Sir."

"I—I hear ducks, I believe."

"Yes, Sir, in the yard. But they'd be too fresh if I was to kill one now. You wouldn't like it, Sir, nor the lady neither."

"Let them live on!"

"Yes, Sir."

"There's a train down from London about twelve-thirty, I think you said."

"Yes, Sir. It comes in at twelve-thirty-five."

"I expect the lady will come by that. We might have lunch at one."

"Yes, Sir. A fine morning, Sir."

"Yes."

"But not much to see here, is there, Sir?"

"Perhaps not. But it's quiet, it's out of the world."

"A bit too much out of the world. As I say to my 'usband, we aren't *all* of us sheep, no, nor ducks neither!"

"That's very true. We aren't! One then!"

"Yes, Sir."

The landlady retired looking, as she probably intended, decidedly unsuited to country life.

Twelve thirty-five! It was just half-past nine now. The station, a shed and a platform, was close to the inn. Clive went to the window again and looked over the garden and the quickset hedge to the sloping meadow and the sheep.

To be unknown, hidden in calm with the one you loved, whom you had chosen, and who had chosen you! How wonderful that would be! And this pale woman who lived here, with a husband who looked a good sort of man, was dissatisfied. She wanted the roar of life, the myriad eyes that stared and took notice, the myriad tongues that gossiped and reported. Perhaps she even aspired to be a somebody, to be known.

Ah, the horror of being known!

Clive put on his hat, took a stick, and went out. He came

to a gate, opened it, and went into the meadow all yellow with buttercups. He had nearly three hours—to prepare! The landlady, looking from an upper window, presently saw him disappear slowly into the wood which bounded the meadow. He did not reappear till all the strokes of noon had sounded from the village church of Tyford. Then he emerged from the wood at the edge of the meadow, sat down under a hedge, lit a pipe and waited, watching the sheep at their endless business of making a meal among the buttercups.

Meanwhile Vivian was speeding from London in an express train, which stopped at East Grinstead, where she would have to change into the creeping train which condescended to pause for a moment at the Tyford shed and platform.

By twelve-thirty Clive was pacing up and down on this platform. He had let his pipe go out and had pocketed it. He had forgotten the sheep. He had forgotten the summer calm of the Sussex countryside. The excitement in his mind had obliterated everything except the thought of what was to come, what was to be gone through with Vivian. He was living just then in a maelstrom, the maelstrom which whirled furiously within the temple of himself.

A short, broad man, with ruddled cheeks, hairy ears, and small, unimaginative eyes of a clear watery blue, appeared in a casual manner upon the short platform. A signal dropped with a click. The train was almost due. Clive stood still. He looked at the wood which grew thickly just beyond the line on the top of the intervening bank, at the masses of fox-gloves which found a footing on the bank, at some birds, starlings perhaps, flying near to the tree-tops. He heard in some hidden place the plaintive cooing of wood-doves, a sound which suggested to him green inner places of summer where he longed to lie in hiding.

Then he heard the half-strangled whistle of a train, and saw a wreath of abominably black smoke mounting beyond

a curve of the line, heralding the future. A moment later a second-rate looking, trampish engine hove in sight with a grinding noise as of machinery and ungreased wheels. And then—he saw Vivian's face at the window of a second-class carriage, looking out for "Claude Ormeley."

In an instant he had the door open and helped her down. Another instant, a muffled shriek, a grinding and clanking, and the train had vanished, leaving them alone with the blue-eyed stationmaster-porter, the wood-doves and the foxgloves.

"Cli——" She checked herself.

She must not mention that name here! She glanced at the station man, who was observing them calmly, yet with definite interest.

"What a tiny station! One wonders why there is a station."

"Yes, but there are some houses and a church over there."

"Oh, hark at the wood-pigeons!"

She listened for a moment with her eyes on him, as if asking him to listen with her. Then she sighed:

"But where are you staying?"

"Close by. I'll show you. Good morning!"

"Good morning, Sir. Good morning, Mum."

Vivian nodded with a smile.

"What a strange profession to be porter here!"

"Yes, but one might have a worse job. That man looks quite happy."

"He ruminates, I dare say, like oxen in long grass."

"I expect he does."

"When did you arrive from Scotland?"

"Only yesterday afternoon. There is the inn."

"All by itself? Is there no village? But you said——"

"It's about a quarter of a mile away."

"But how did you ever find out this place?"

"I struck it years ago bicycling, and remembered it."

She was silent. There was an intense constraint between them and they were both of them painfully conscious of it.

"It's awfully good of you to come down here, Vi," he said, making an almost fierce effort to be natural, to break through into intimacy. "I felt I couldn't see you and talk over things in London just yet. London gives me the horrors still. I can't help it. Here we can be quiet—and—what time must you go?"

"Is there an evening train?"

"Yes. Somewhere about six, or a quarter-past. And there's another just before nine."

"We'll see. Anyhow, we've got plenty of time."

"Shall we go in?"

He looked at his watch.

"We've got about ten minutes or so before lunch. For lunch the menu is mutton chops, potatoes, rice pudding and stewed pears. I hope you can put up with it. I heard ducks quacking, and thought of something with green peas. But Mrs. Grime, the landlady, negatived the idea, before I had even translated it into a proposition."

"Is there a garden?"

"Yes, behind."

"Let us go and sit there till lunch-time. We can take a walk afterwards."

As they went into the passage the landlady met them and gave Vivian good morning.

"There's a bedroom, Ma'am, if you would like to wash your 'ands."

"Thank you."

She turned to Clive.

"Perhaps I'd better. How shall I find the garden?"

"I'll show you, Ma'am," said the landlady, who had been examining Vivian's dress and hat with intense, even greedy interest. "This way, Ma'am."

As they went up the narrow stairs Clive heard the woman say:

"As I was telling Mr. Ormeley, Ma'am, only this very morning, I was born and bred up——"

The rest was lost to him in the upper regions.

As I was telling Mr. Ormeley——

Clive wished Mrs. Grime had avoided that sentence. It had been so unnecessary to use any name. But of course she had said just the one thing that would make Vivian uncomfortable, the one thing that would add to the constraint he was feeling acutely. He went into the garden and waited. There was a wooden bench by a rose-bush. He sat down on it and took off his hat. He felt hot and almost feverish. Presently, soon, he heard steps in the house, a murmur of women talking, then the landlady's soft, slightly pretentious voice—London at odds with the country—saying, "Mr. Ormeley wanted duck, Ma'am, but as I——"

"Damn the woman!" Clive muttered, getting up from the bench.

"I'm here, Vi!"

He saw her coming out through the narrow doorway. The landlady showed behind her.

"Dinner's just ready, Mr. Ormeley, Sir."

"Thanks!" said Clive, curtly. "Shall we sit here, Vi?"

"Yes, if you like. What a dear little place!"

"That woman gets on my nerves!"

Her eyes met his.

"I can understand that she might."

"She talks too much!"

There was a sound of intense, even fierce irritation in his voice. Vivian laid a hand on his without saying anything.

"Forgive me, Vi dearest! If you knew how I want a little peace, and wherever one goes there's something—like that poor woman."

Already the constraint between them seemed beginning

to melt. Her touch had told him something her words, even her look, had not told him.

"Didn't you have peace up in Scotland?"

"In a way I suppose I did. Marriot was extraordinarily kind; delicate too. But you weren't there. What I want is peace with you, not peace alone."

"I know. I understand."

She still kept her hand on his and they were both silent. She was looking over the hedge into the meadow that stretched to the wood. It was the hottest part of the day and evidently the sheep had begun to realise that. For their large white bodies were now dotted about among the buttercups in placidly recumbent positions. They were resting in a sea of flowers, without thought, without remorse or desire.

"But I haven't come here to bring him peace but a sword."

The thought trembled through Vivian's mind and again she was conscious of weakness, and of the terrible inherent desire of love to do what the loved one wants. At that moment her heart seemed to be searching for weapons to take up against her brain.

"Those sheep haven't much to worry about," she said.

"No. Do you envy them?"

"Perhaps the most contemptible part of me does; but not the rest! After lunch let us go to the woods, shall we?"

"Yes, right away from everything. I was there this morning. I want to be there with you."

"Dinner is on the table, Mr. Ormeley, Sir."

Army words, words he had heard in tents at night, in the trenches and on the battlefield, rushed to Clive's lips, but he only said:

"Thanks. We are coming."

To Vivian he said:

"I don't know why she insists on my name——"

"It isn't your name."

"No—on the name I gave when I came here. Till you

arrived she never uttered it. Apparently it's her damned concession to the genteel. She's trying to live up to you. What do you think of the menagerie?"

Vivian looked round the tiny room and met the eyes of the beasts.

"How extraordinary! Did she collect them?"

"I don't know. Rather suggests the Ark, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

She sat down facing the window. He sat opposite to her.

"What will you and the lady drink, Sir?"

Mrs. Grime had suddenly reappeared, after a moment's retirement to the bar.

"Water for me," said Vivian.

"I'll do the same then," said Clive. "I'll ring when we've finished the chops, Mrs. Grime."

He heard the door close.

"Thank God!"

Vivian looked at the owl. Then her eyes strayed to the embalmed pike, and from it to the horsehair-covered sofa against the brown wall on which were many bunches of poppies tied with pink and blue ribbon. From tables, brackets, chiffoniers, the china animals assisted at this interview between her and "Claude Ormeley." The silence of the summer world outside was broken by a faint baaing of sheep from the meadow. The red geraniums in the dark green box on the window-ledge moved ever so little as a light breeze felt round them. A bee came to visit them winding his drowsy horn. And for the first time in her life Vivian knew the exact feeling of complete isolation with Clive.

But this was a country inn set in an English landscape, not an African villa by the sea.

"I feel extraordinary here," she said. "Don't you?"

"In what way?"

"As if we had nothing to do with all this, as if it were a setting for people absolutely unlike us."

"You think we are out of place here?"

"Somehow I feel we are. And yet generally I feel at home in a way anywhere."

"I know why you feel out of place," he said, grimly.

"Why?"

He looked at her without answering, but his eyes made her understand what he meant.

"We'll talk it all out after lunch," he said, after a long silence. "But we can't in here. Mrs. Grime may come in at any moment. And—and this room's so small—just look at the ceiling!"

"Yes, almost on our heads."

"Somehow one can't let out here even in talk. I would seem like trying to have a boxing match in a room four feet by two."

"The woods will make a better arena for us," she said, taking up his simile, but speaking soberly.

"But, Vi, I didn't really mean——"

"No—of course not. But even love must have its differences, I suppose. The marriage service doesn't speak of a husband and wife being one soul, does it?"

"No."

"Because that's impossible."

"But I want to be near you. I want to be as close up to you as possible," he said, with a sort of half-fierce despair.

"Shall I clear, Sir, and set on the rice pudding and stewed pears?"

"What's that?" said Clive, turning sharply like a man startled.

"Shall I clear, Mr. Ormeley, Sir, and set on the——"

"Oh—clear! Have you finished?"

"Yes, quite," said Vivian.

"Then please do, Mrs. Grime. And then we shall be going out."

"Will you take coffee, Sir?"

"Shall we?"

"Yes. And let us have it in the garden."

"Coffee after lunch in the garden then, please. And afterwards we shall be going for a long walk."

"Yes, Sir."

Still looking vaguely metropolitan, their lemon-coloured hostess of the inn proceeded to arrange before them the dainties supplied from her rustic kitchen.

"I am sorry we can do no better, Sir," she then said, speaking to Clive but looking hard at Vivian. "But there's precious little variety in the country, as I always says to my 'usband. In London now——"

"Exactly! Perfectly true! But this will do very well."

"Thank you, Sir."

"She's not like the sheep. She sighs perpetually after the flesh-pots of life," said Clive. "I can't think why she married a rustic innkeeper."

They had their coffee presently on the wooden bench by the rose-bush, and while Clive smoked a pipe Vivian led him to talk of his visit to Scotland, and of the life he had led at Beldrane. He was slow in beginning, and looked at her with doubtful eyes, as if wondering whether she had some hidden object in persuading him. But presently he seemed more at ease and began to speak freely. And she gathered something of the strangeness of that almost complete solitude up in the far North following, practically without any interval, the awful publicity of the preceding trial.

"It was," he said, "rather like falling through the floor of Hell into an empty space where by some mysterious means I was kept in being. That was just at first."

And he went on to tell her something of "Claude Ormeley's" life and "Claude Ormeley's" feelings. Gradually he became more frank, more like the man she had known before the catastrophe. She felt something in him reaching out for sympathy. But she felt, too, the possibility that all

this might be a preparation for something against which she must be on guard.

"Nobody who has not had an experience like mine can realise just what it was to be free from the intolerable burden of a name," he said, presently. "For of course even up there in the North they all knew about the real me."

And he related to her an experience he had had with a shepherd, whom he had come across minding his flocks on a desolate reach of pasture-land near the sea, and who had spoken to him about himself, not knowing who he was.

"He made me discuss myself," Clive said.

"Didn't you hate that?"

"Yes. But I should have hated it more if he had known who I was. Vi, with all your sympathy, all your imagination, you can't begin to realise what it is to be in my position."

"I'm not sure that I have very much imagination," she said. And there was a pathetic sound in her voice.

"I suppose we are all inclined to think we have. It may be like a sense of humour. No one will ever acknowledge the lack of a sense of humour. Mother isn't imaginative. I couldn't have got anything of that kind from her. Father—I don't know about him. But I'm a very ordinary girl, I think. But—I don't know—I sometimes believe that love supplies a woman with qualities she hasn't had till she loved. I'm sure I am more than I was when we first knew each other. But you mustn't look for extraordinary or subtle things in me."

"Shall we go to the woods?" he said.

"Yes."

She got up from the bench, pulled a branch of roses towards her from the straggling bush, and, with shut eyes, gave herself for a moment to the curious influence of scent. For a moment she was far away in a region with which human beings have nothing to do, in a region too delicate for them. When she opened her eyes and let the branch go she felt the ugly coarseness of life. But she belonged to it,

healthily belonged to it until the great inevitable change, which might be far off or quite near. And suddenly, fixing her eyes on Clive, she said:

"Isn't it strange the agonies we go through, and yet within the next hour we might be away from all this for ever?"

"You mean——"

"Death! We never know when it will come. It just came to me—that thought. But I don't know why. Which way do we go?"

"I'll show you. But we are just as likely to live another forty or fifty years."

"Didn't being in the war make you think very little of life?"

"There were times when it did. But one gets back to normal after a time."

"You won't ever be the same as before."

"No, never. That's true. But something has altered me more than the war has. It's individual experience that changes a man radically, not an experience he shares with thousands of others. I'm certain of that."

"Is it?"

"Can't you understand that? What we share is lessened to us."

"That isn't true of everything we share, I think."

They passed beyond a five-barred gate and went into the meadow, and walked silently through the grass and the butter-cups. The sheep were panting as they lay. Their white flanks heaved in the sunshine.

"Is there a gate into the wood?" she asked.

"Yes. At the far end over there by the hedge."

When they reached it she looked back. The meadow sloped gently downward from the hedge. The little inn lay in what looked from where they now stood like a green cup. Smoke rose in a thin trail from one of the squat brick chimneys. No human being was in sight. The still heat of summer seemed to have lulled the world into silence and im-

mobility. Surely every one but themselves was sleeping. Clive opened the gate and they passed into the shade of the woods.

A winding grass road lay before them, bordered by oak trees, nut trees and thickly growing tall ferns. They went on slowly, and Vivian said:

"What I think about experiences is this. A joy shared is increased to us, but a sorrow shared is lessened. I believe, at any rate, we women feel like that."

The gate was out of sight now and Clive stood still.

"Vivian!"

She knew what he wanted and let him take it; and the long pressure of his warm lips upon hers brought again to her that weakness of love, the intense desire, which was like a sin against the great gift of individuality, to give what the loved one needed, or thought that he needed, even though something in her seemed to know clearly that to do that would be like lifting poison to thirsty lips. At last, releasing herself, she said:

"That's why I want to share your sorrow. That's why I mean to share it. But don't make it difficult for me."

"Hush! We aren't far enough away yet. There are miles of these woods."

He was putting off, and putting off. She longed to come at once to the issue. But she gave in to him for the moment, and they walked on for a long time, till they came to a small clearing where woodcutters had been at work. Wood shavings were scattered over the green carpet. Some big trunks lay on the ground stripped of their bark and ready for carting away. There she stopped.

"Here is our arena!" she said.

She spoke with an attempt at lightness, at humour, and was smiling as she looked at him.

"Let us sit down here. And give me a cigarette, Clive."

"Right you are!" he said, with an obvious attempt to fall in with her assumed mood.

She sat down on some logs. He gave her a cigarette, lit it for her, lit one for himself, then sat down on the grass, leaning with one arm on her rustic seat. After a moment he took off his soft hat and laid it on the grass.

"That's better!" he said.

And he sighed.

"Do you hear the insects humming?" she said. "Life is everywhere. We can't get away from life. To try to do that would be a terrible mistake. We are born for life, to be in it and of it. And the only thing is to face it."

"In London do you mean?" he said.

And a sudden harshness had come into his voice.

"Did you hate my letter?" she asked him.

"I don't think I could ever hate a letter of yours."

"But——"

She stopped. Sitting on the tree-trunks, she was able to look down on him as he rested, half sitting, half lying, on the grass. She looked down now and a queer feeling came to her that she had never seen Clive before, that is, had never seen him completely, with all her power of insight. Beyond her power of course she could not go. But she felt as if till that moment she had never gone to its limit. She seemed just then to see him as a body, a strong, well-knit, slim body, powerful and seasoned by war and man's experiences, showing mentality, sensitiveness, too, in its male strength, and also as a spirit. The body was at rest and she felt that, though they were not yet one flesh, it belonged to her. But the spirit was uneasy, terribly restless. And, perhaps because they were in the heart of a wood, she thought of an animal, free apparently but always listening for enemies, going where it would, but for ever conscious that it must be on guard, not only against man but also against animals stronger than itself and destructive by nature. Also, for the first time, she felt that she saw jealousy like a live thing,

separate from all other qualities of man. She knew Clive's powerful jealousy in that moment.

"How long would you have stayed on in Scotland if I hadn't written?" she asked.

"I don't know."

"Could you ever have forgotten me there?"

"No."

"But while you were there we were separated, yet you might have stayed on indefinitely."

"Oh no. Not without you."

"What would you have done then?"

"Honestly I don't know. I was trying to rest. That's what it came to. And I was putting off the evil day."

"Yes?"

"Of decision. There was an unconquerable mental lethargy in me, I suppose. I imagine it may have been caused partly by physical things. But who can tell?"

"Clive, we can't go on drifting. I can't. It isn't in my nature to drift, I think. To do it would make me feel horribly small, like a waster. And I do hate wasters! I don't mind a sport who does nothing for a living. There's a place in the world for him. But a man who does nothing at all, aims at nothing, just hangs about killing time somehow, anyhow,—I can't stand that type."

"I don't cotton on to him either."

"Clive, tell me what you want. You aren't going back to Scotland?"

Instead of answering her question he said, fixing his disturbing eyes on her:

"When I was on the moors, sometimes knee-deep in heather, I often saw palm trees. And when I looked at Marriot's grey stone castle on its height I often saw a white house with cupolas."

He looked away from her and stared into the wood.

"Even Beldrane didn't seem far enough away," he said, after a moment.

"From what?"

"From everything I knew and ever had known. Up there I had an instinct to get away from it all, to push it all out, have done with it, and start again. And the instinct grew. It was growing when your letter came."

"I wish I had written sooner," she said. "I ought to have written sooner."

He did not contradict her or agree with her, but just stayed as he was and stared into the wood as if he saw something there that drew him, something far off among the trees. She noticed his strange abstraction with a feeling of anxiety that grew till it was almost desperation.

"The fact is, Clive," she said, and there was a touch of deliberate sharpness in her girlish voice, "that you ought to have gone to Scotland under your own name. You took a false step when you took the name of Claude Ormeley. I always knew it was a false step, but, dearest, I didn't like to say so. You had endured so much. But it was a mistake, Clive. Don't you see that now? There was something weak in doing it. And directly we do something weak in our lives we are on the road downhill. I'm sure of it. And now you have got accustomed to masquerading——"

She saw him wince.

"I don't like that word," he said.

"And I don't like the thing—what it implies," she said, resolutely. "I hated addressing my letters to Claude Ormeley and sneaking out to post them myself for fear anyone should guess the truth. I hated sending my telegram. I hated hearing the landlady calling you Mr. Ormeley."

"There's nothing in it!" he said, with a sort of dull obstinacy. He was looking down at the grass now, and

with his strong, nervous brown fingers was plucking at it mechanically.

"But you couldn't stand it when she said the name."

"That was because of you. I knew it would upset you. I'm accustomed to it now. I got accustomed to it up in Scotland."

"That's the danger!" she said, almost bitterly.

He stopped plucking at the grass and sat straight up, with his legs stretched out and his back against the logs.

"It would have been more dangerous if I'd stuck to my own name in the last weeks."

"Why?"

"Because I was absolutely at the end of my tether. I kept up all right till the end, even till after the end—when I was with you in Knightsbridge. If the verdict had gone the other way, if I'd been sentenced to death, I'm sure I shouldn't have flinched. I know I shouldn't. I should have been perfectly calm, master of myself. But there's a limit to a man's powers. I passed it. You saw that—when it was nearly dark. But you were able to see it. That can never be helped."

"Clive, do you mind my having seen?"

"I don't know. That depends. But no one else was going to have the chance. A man's got his pride. That kept thousands going in the trenches, that and nothing else."

"Yes, I know. I understand."

"Pride's often the lever that gets a chap's courage going. Don't forget that. It heaves him out of the ditch, and once he's up he goes over the top like what the newspapers call a 'hero.' I went over the top at the Old Bailey. But after it was all over I had to get down to the base to have a rest. That's how it was. If I hadn't had my rest I shouldn't be here now. You may depend upon that, Vi."

He stopped speaking. She did not fill up the pause. Whatever his intention was, he had succeeded in frightening

her. She felt the fear that comes to an onlooker who sees the spirit which makes a human being a separate entity, quite different from all other human beings, getting out of control. What would it do? What would it bring about? Down what path would it rush to do what deed? She could not tell.

"I had to have it, and I could only have it if I dropped my own name. Condemn me as much as you like. That's how it was."

"I don't—I couldn't condemn you," she almost whispered.

"Too much had been piled upon me," he muttered, as if to himself.

Then he looked up, shot a strange glance at her from under his prominent brows.

"Before I was arrested, before all the business of the trial came—before that, mind—I'd been through Hell."

Her thoughts busied themselves horribly about a dead woman, about Mrs. Sabine. She believed she could guess, or divine, something of what he meant. He had been, perhaps,—she was almost sure of it—the victim of a woman's love. Was he now to be her victim? Did she, if she had choice in the matter, choose that he should be the victim of her love now? Something was trying hard just then to betray the citadel that she had the instinct to keep inviolate.

"You don't mean the war?" she asked.

She had to ask that, though she felt sure to do so was useless.

"The war!" he exclaimed, with a sort of contempt.

Then he smiled.

"No; I don't mean the war."

And after a pause he added:

"Do you know all I went through in the war seems absolutely trivial to me now? When I hear people talking about the war I often feel inclined to laugh. In the war, if one suffered, one suffered with thousands upon thousands of others."

She felt as she had never felt before that Clive was conscious, painfully conscious, of a terrible loneliness. And yet had not she suffered with him? Was not she suffering with him now? But she had used the word arena. She had called this clearing in the forest their battle-ground. And in very truth subtly they were fighting. Suddenly she had an instinct that bade her sweep all the subtleties away.

"Clive, let us be perfectly frank with each other," she said. "It's the only way to happiness. You must have been thinking over things in Scotland. You have had time to think. You must know what you mean to do."

"No, I don't!"

"We had it all out, in a way, that evening at Mum's——"

He interrupted her.

"Have you seen my Mother lately?"

"I saw her to-day."

"To-day?"

"On my way to the station. I called and went in."

"I haven't seen her since I went to Scotland."

"No!"

"How does she look?" he asked.

"Not very well."

He glanced at her and away, moved, and thrust his hands into the pockets of his Norfolk jacket.

"Poor old Mater!" he said. "But—it can't be helped now!"

He looked down for a moment, then seemed to recollect, and looked again at Vivian.

"Go on, Vi!" he said.

"But it was for you to say. I told you what I felt that evening."

"Yes, we had it all out, or thought we had. And then I crashed. And now I've had time."

Suddenly he got up, still keeping his hands in his pockets, and took a few steps in the clearing, to and fro. And just

then Vivian heard wood-pigeons cooing again. He heard them too, and stopped. She could see that he was listening. Presently he turned to her. She noticed that his large eyes were very wide open. Their pupils looked dilated.

"Why shouldn't we two decide to do the unorthodox thing?" he said. "Why shouldn't we, Vi?"

"But what is that?"

He remained standing, kept his hands in his pockets, and looked steadily down on her as he spoke.

"Well, wouldn't the ordinary, orthodox thing be for me to go back to my flat in Queen Anne's Mansions, take up my life in the City, show at my clubs? And then would come our marriage in some London church, with crowds of staring women and gaping men, and in the street outside the masses, kept in some sort of order by the police, glaring and tumbling over each other to see Baratrie and the woman who was brave enough to marry him. We should have a honeymoon somewhere—wherever you liked. And on it we should create what's called 'a flutter' wherever we went. Staring curiosity would be the everlasting attendant on our poor little honeymoon. And then we should come back to London, and settle down in a flat or house of our own. I should go back to business. You would see your people, your and our friends, look after things at home, carry on with your tennis tournaments."

He stopped for a moment and his face changed, hardened, as if the last words he had said had brought to his mind a painful, a disturbing thought. Then he said, with an upward jerk of his head:

"That would be the orthodox life."

"Very well," she said quietly. "Let us call it that, though I think you have left out a great deal. We might live that life. And—the other life?"

"We might cut loose absolutely from that life. I might go out of business; losing a lot of money by that, mind

you, and becoming a man of only moderate means. I might resign from my clubs, give up my flat, not take another or a house in London. We should be married quietly. No ceremony! No fuss! Just the registrar's office and nobody knowing. And then we might cross the rubicon, Vivian, into the new world!"

A new sound had come into his voice, a new look, an intense shining look into his eyes. New—new—new! The whole man seemed in the way of being reborn under the influence of a word which had set his imagination working, his brain teeming with thoughts.

"Tell me about the new world," she said.

"It would be a world in which we should live for ourselves, not—never for the opinions of others about us. That alone would make our world new. And it wouldn't be in England. No! I love England. I fought for England, I can tell you"—he slightly reddened, though, as he said it—"more for love than the sense of honour. And lots of men did, though they don't talk about it. But as things are our new life could not be lived in England. We should go right away. We should cut the ropes that held our barque to the English quay, and we should go—out!"

He made a movement as if he wanted to take his hands out of his pockets and fling his arms wide. But, if it was so, he checked himself, did not give his desire the rein.

"We could choose where. Nothing to force us here or there. We should have our liberty, and could say: 'This shall be the place of our life. Here we'll live!' Or we could wander. We couldn't live a luxurious life, because I shouldn't be at all a rich man. But we could live a free, simple life, wandering, or settled. For instance, we could live in such a house, in such a place, as the one I spoke of to you."

"I know!" she said, realising that the villa by the sea must have long been in his mind like an obsession.

"Peace, beauty, sun, a glorious climate, sport, camping out. You hate a waster. So do I. I don't want to be that. I couldn't be a mere waster with you. No fellow could. I'd find things to do. There's always a man's work to be done by a man anywhere in the world. But we should live to ourselves as people scarcely ever do in this civilised life—as they call it. We should have time for love too. And how many people have that in cities? We should have time."

He stopped, and seemed to be silently asking her to take up the talk, to say her say. In the silence they both heard the doves again, persistent, monotonous, untiring. And their voices were like a refrain giving him right. And she listened to them. She was obliged to listen. And their voices lured her. The doves seemed his adherents, backing him up. She felt almost angry with them, and yet she was fascinated by them. Their soft, delicious egoism was strangely penetrating. They had time to love, they had the great wood to shelter them. And it could not be doubted that in their way they were happy. The mere sound of their voices told her that. As she said nothing, he presently continued:

"I made a tour in Africa once with John Campbell—you know that friend of mine who was killed in the war."

"Yes."

"It was on that tour that I saw the house I described. But before we went to Sidi-Barka we were in the South—more in the South. It was at the end of May, when there are no travellers. They're afraid of the heat. We stayed at an inn on the edge of the desert, but where there are mountains. And we went out camping after Barbary sheep and gazelle. One day I was seedy. We were changing camp, and Campbell wanted to make a long climb in the mountains which encircle a region called the plain of the gazelles. Our two hunters told us we might get a sheep up there. I wasn't up to the climb in the heat. So Campbell left me.

I stuck to the camp, and rode on mule-back over the plain to the rocky plateau where we meant to spend a few nights. I shan't forget that place. We had a long trek to get there. The heat was tremendous, and the plain was absolutely waterless, so far as I could judge. We travelled towards the mountains and gradually mounted till we struck some rocks, a turmoil of rocks with a stream leaping down them among thickets of wild oleanders, dwarf palms, myrtles and shrubs. Then we climbed to a plateau right under the lion-coloured precipices, above which Campbell was hidden somewhere with our hunters. The camp was pitched. Campbell, I must tell you, didn't get in till nightfall. I had some hours alone. At first I just sat and rested while our Arabs were busy. And then I took a stroll by the stream among the rocks, stopping now and then to sit down and take a look round. Vi, I'm not a particularly eloquent chap, and I won't let loose in description. But I'll tell you one thing. That afternoon and evening I realised what a tremendous lot we miss by living always according to plan, as most of us live, by carrying on always in the same kind of way. Really, the general run of us go through our lives wearing blinkers, I think. Year in, year out, it's the same kind of thing. And—the life that's waiting outside! There we squat most of us in our little humdrum nook ringed round by wonderful possibilities which we never attempt to profit by. I sat among the wild oleanders and dwarf palms, backed by the mountains, with the stream leaping by, and I looked out over a vast stretch of Africa, and that day I had my first real taste of the wild life, the untrammelled life, the life in the open, big, bold, healthy, free, far away from Babylon. I've never forgotten it. It seemed to sting me into joy, a kind of primitive joy. And I felt how primitive I was. I hadn't known it. I knew it then. And I simply exulted. I stood up and stretched out my arms and filled my lungs with glorious air and shouted. And I found myself shouting:

'Damn civilisation! damn civilisation!' And down below me in the vast plain of the gazelles the afternoon lights were at work. And in the distance more mountains of Africa were dreaming. I lived just then, and I knew it. I felt myself living and revelling in it. That very day I had been a bit knocked up. Now I was like a giant exulting. Your Father's got a slang word that he's rather fond of—'topping.' Well, it was topping that day when I stood up there and shouted out to the gazelles, if there were any! I topped life then and knew it. But now—what I wanted to tell you."

"Yes?"

"As I said, Campbell was very late coming into camp. To fill up the time, I had a long talk with one of the men, our tent servant, Mahmoud. He was an Arab, of course. He told me a lot of things. One thing has always stuck in my memory. I asked him if he had often camped where we were. He said that he had spent months there during the previous summer. That surprised me, and I asked him how that had come about. And then he related a romance to me. And he knew very well it was a romance too. Put briefly—he told it at great length though—it was simply this. At the close of the previous season—the last travellers generally disappear about the end of April—when the Arabs were preparing themselves for the idleness of summer, a European stranger arrived at our inn. He was a French factotum, sent on in advance of a rich Englishman, who was on the way to spend the summer—if you please—camping in the African wilderness with '*une dame*'! He was a sportsman and wanted the best Arab huntsmen to go with him. He didn't care what he spent. You can imagine the excitement among the natives. A fortune to be made in summer! Paradise opened before them. In two or three days by goods train there arrived a wonderful camp equipment from London, and—if I'm to go by what Mahmoud told me in picturesque language—the greater part of the contents of

Messrs. Fortnum & Mason's Piccadilly shop. Mahmoud and others were engaged at thundering good wages. And then the Englishman arrived with '*la dame*.' Vi, they went out to our plateau under the precipices above the plain of the gazelles, and there they lived among the wild oleanders and the dwarf palms right through the summer heats. Of course, they had every luxury and took every precaution. They had awnings rigged up, mosquito nets—a deep pool in the stream was their bath, and so on. In the evening, and at dawn, they went out after game. '*La dame*' too! According to Mahmoud, she was lovely, spirited, untiring, always gay and in good humour. It was a great romance. No doubt about that. Those two were enough for one another. '*Toujours contents! Toujours gais!*' Mahmoud repeated those words again and again. And when at last the camp had to be broken up, '*La dame pleurait*' and, according to Mahmoud, '*Monsieur il avait les larmes dans les yeux*.' Vi, Mahmoud described to me how those two, when the tents had fallen, and the train of mules was descending into the plain of the gazelles, stayed behind alone to take a last farewell of '*l'endroit du bonheur*'—as they had christened the plateau by the stream. Ever since then I have always thought of that place in the wilds as '*l'endroit du bonheur*.' Campbell's dead, poor chap! He's under a cross in French soil. He was about my best friend. But—you! To be in a place like that with you, to live in the wilds with you! To be away from it all with you! When I was there I'd never met you. But even then, after hearing Mahmoud's story, I lived my life there in imagination with '*une dame*,' the ideal woman whom I hadn't found then. Since then I've often thought of that camping-place. In fact, whenever life was difficult, or rotten, or even monotonous and dull, my mind flew to '*l'endroit du bonheur*.' When I first met you I thought of it; and when I knew you were '*la dame*' in my life, the only one, I imagined myself there

with you. In the war many times I stood among the cleaners and heard the stream going down through silence to the plain of the gazelles. But it's only been since my life has turned to black tragedy that I've understood really what '*l'endroit du bonheur*' stands for with me."

He was silent. Still the voices of the doves continued monotonously in the heart of the wood. His words, and still more his look and manner while speaking, had carried Vivian away from her immediate surroundings. She had forgotten Sussex, the wood; she had even forgotten England. A thorough English girl, she had been very little abroad. A year in Paris had brought her a good conversational knowledge of French. During the years of the war she had lived and done useful, though not very inspiring, work in England, in obedience to her Father's wish. Since the end of the war she had been abroad on the Riviera playing tennis at Cannes, and two or three other places near by. Further than France and Switzerland she had never yet been. Nor, till now, had she ever had any great desire to travel far. She had always had plenty to do, had always had what had seemed to her a full life in her own dear country.

Suddenly Clive seemed to have opened a door. She looked out through it. She realised things, a mode of life, surroundings, enticements, raptures even perhaps, which she had not realised before. Romance with her had till now been a very personal thing. Through Clive she began to connect personal romance with a larger romance of nature, far horizons, wild beauty. Something stirred her, something shook her. She felt full of sudden vibrations and almost confused. She also had a curious instinctive feeling that she was not far from danger. She heard the doves' voices now without really noticing them. But that was only for a moment.

"Couldn't we find our *endroit du bonheur*, Vi?" he said at last, as she said nothing. "Life is often short. At any rate, we never know that it won't be short. More often than

not, I suppose, it's pretty full of troubles and sorrows of all kinds. Then why shouldn't we deliberately reach out after happiness instead of just chancing things? Why shouldn't we go for happiness instead of just waiting about on the chance of happiness coming to us of its own accord? You and I could be enormously happy, I believe. But we ought to be brave."

"Brave?"

"Yes, brave enough to do what ordinary people would call the odd thing, even perhaps the wrong thing, brave enough to make our own lives after our own pattern instead of allowing them to be made for us by public opinion. For that's what it comes to with most lives."

"You mean that you want to give up everything, cut yourself off from everything, go right away from England, keep away, and start a new sort of life—perhaps in Africa?"

She spoke quietly, without excitement, almost reflectively. But she felt that she was excited and was holding herself in, as she did sometimes in a great match at tennis. Even she had on the lawn-tennis mask at that moment. But it did not deceive him. He knew that he had stirred her; he knew somehow that he had enticed her. But he knew that she did not wish to show it, did not wish him to be aware of it.

"Yes," he said, boldly.

"In spite of all I said—you remember—that day in Knightsbridge?"

"Yes."

"You have thought it all over, I suppose, and felt that you couldn't agree with what I said?"

"But you yourself said, 'Can't we live for ourselves and in ourselves?'"

"Yes. But I didn't mean merely the bodily life. There's something else than that, and surely it's independent of place. Oh, I wish those doves would stop!"

He was startled by her sudden outburst, by the sharp

change in her expression. She was frowning and looked exasperated.

"Why? Do they irritate you?"

"Yes—but never mind. Only—it's such a selfish sound."

"Well, I think I'm out for selfishness," he said, with a touch of bitterness.

By an effort of will she struck the frown from her forehead.

"Of course you long to be happy after all you have gone through," she said. "You must be greedy for happiness. And, after thinking it all over, you want to drop your name? You want to go on being Claude Ormeley?"

"I know you must think all you said in Mother's house went for nothing with me," he said reddening.

"I did mean it. It came out of *me*. I don't want to go back on it," she said, with a sort of pathos that made her seem suddenly younger.

Painfully just then she felt her own weakness, painfully she longed to find a weapon that would combat it efficiently. She knew he saw it now. She knew that he must be counting upon it to march with his desire.

"Do you want to drop your own name?" she asked.

"Don't you think we should be much happier, feel much freer both of us, if I did?"

After a very long silence, during which a hushed battle went on within Vivian, she said:

"You know I love you, Clive?"

"Yes."

"You could never doubt that?"

"I don't doubt it. How could I? You have proved your love, and without proof I knew it."

"I have tried to prove it. I am glad you don't doubt it."

"Vi, what do you mean?"

He sat down beside her, pulled his hands out of his jacket pockets and took her hands. There was a curious, obstinate expression on her face which he had never seen

there before. It made her look almost dull, far less vivid than usual. She was resolutely shutting the door on something. But he did not know that.

"Have you ever thought of what it would be to me to give up all my people, all my friends, all my interests? I should have to give them all up entirely if we carried out your plan, shouldn't I?"

He felt a creeping of cold that seemed mortal.

"Yes, I suppose you would," he said. "We should both be giving up. But it's difficult to get hold of any happiness without offering up a sacrifice, I think."

"But this would be final, wouldn't it?"

"Why?"

"I couldn't come back to see people under a false name, could I? If we did what you suggest, we should have to disappear."

"You—you could come back from time to time," he said, unevenly, almost stammering.

"But how? Under what name?"

"I haven't thought about that. One doesn't think everything out like a lawyer."

The horrible cold was still in him, and seemed to be coiling itself round his heart. He took his hands away from hers. She made a slight movement as if to follow his hands, but checked it.

"No. But still, where it's a question of a life, of two lives, surely one ought to try and think things out a little ahead."

"No doubt you're right."

"I love my people, Mother and Father and Archie. I don't want to hurt them more than I can help."

"I don't want you to hurt them."

"Clive, I must tell you. I have made a promise to Mother, and of course I must keep it."

He looked at her with sudden anxiety, fear even, in his eyes.

"A promise! What promise?"

"I promised I would be married in church. Mother feels very strongly about it; perhaps you can hardly understand how strongly. So I promised."

He said nothing, but sat still, with one hand lying over the other.

"Do you mind?"

"Oh God, Vi! I scarcely know what I mind and what I don't! It's all like a net. I'm struggling in it. That's all I know."

He spoke with violence and again got up, as if some bodily movement were absolutely necessary to him.

"I see whichever way it goes there's bound to be something wrong with it, something hopelessly wrong. Being married in church—that's nothing. That can be managed somehow, I suppose, so as to trick the dear public. You—you don't want to have the orthodox wedding, do you? I mean with bridesmaids and crowds of guests?"

"How can you ask me that?"

"I knew you couldn't, as things are with me. It isn't the wedding that matters. It's after the wedding. It's our life, perhaps for years and years. If we lived my way, I see how it would hurt you. I'm infernally selfish. All men are, I suppose. But I thought—I hoped——"

He stopped. He looked strongly excited, and miserable too.

"What?" she asked.

"Why—that perhaps you loved me enough to give up everything for me. I don't want anything but you, and safety from the mob and from the mob's abominable, flaying curiosity. And I thought perhaps—perhaps our love would be enough for you."

She had a longing then to which she would not give way, and her deliberate frustration of this longing gave her manner a coldness which she did not realise when she said:

"I might be very happy anywhere with you, Clive, but

I feel I couldn't be happy with Claude Ormeley. It must be Clive Baratrie who is my husband, my mate. It must be that, or nothing."

She spoke without excitement or apparent emotion. There was a sound as of dull obstinacy in her voice. And that sound was a great lie. She got up from the tree-trunks and stood beside him.

"Don't think that I want to pit my will against yours, Clive, or that I am just obstinately sticking to a thing because once, in a moment of excitement, I proclaimed it as my view of the matter between us. No, it isn't that."

"And the—well, what I called *l'endroit du bonheur*?—Are we never to see it?"

"Why not?"

A new eagerness came into her voice and she put her arm through his arm impulsively.

"Why not? Why shouldn't we go there for our honeymoon?"

"No!" he exclaimed, almost savagely. "No! What! You'd take me there, give me a taste of that life, and then bring me back to Babylon and all the wares of Babylon's market! No, Vi! Not even for you I'd take that chance. If it's not to be—that life I imagined, the life I've been figuring out in Scotland, then we won't touch it. It's too dangerous. I can put up with anything, but not if I'm dropped into Paradise first and then pulled out by the heels. No—no! That's done with. It was only an absurd dream and quite impracticable. The fact is, I wasn't my own man in Scotland. I haven't been my own man since I crashed. First I lived in a nightmare and then in a sort of dream. And both were equally far away from possibilities, though one certainly was a bit pleasanter than the other. We'll have an orthodox honeymoon, Vi. We'll stick to England for it. After all, a man ought to stick to his own country, especially after he's done his best for her when she was in

a tight place. And my name—I'll stick to that too. It's a good enough name, and if you've the pluck to sink your name in it, I should be a coward to drop it. And we'll have a Parson to marry us, and everything shall be fair and square and above-board."

"I want to be married by Bob Herries, Clive," she said, ignoring his sudden outburst.

Her face had become strangely pale, tragically pale almost, but her eyes rested on his without self-consciousness, steadily, with a strong, open look.

"Bob Herries! He's a splendid chap. He's a rare fellow. Yes, let him marry us if he will. In the war he was the best Padre of the lot till his health smashed up. Herries always does too much for his strength."

"Do you think Bob Herries would care to marry me to Claude Ormeley?" she said.

"Perhaps not. No, I dare say he wouldn't."

"But, Clive, let us have our *endroit du bonheur*. It needn't be far away in Africa. We can make it anywhere, where we are together. It isn't the place that matters really. It's what we are in any place, what we are to each other."

"Yes—yes! But when the world's ugly, destructive fingers feel round our nest?"

"I'm not a bit afraid of them."

"I wonder if you are afraid, or could be afraid, of anything, Vi?"

"Oh yes!"

His eyes looked a question.

"I've been afraid to-day, since we've been out here in the wood."

"But what of?"

He had asked, but she did not tell him. She dared not tell him how nearly she had fallen in with his intense and passionate wish, how nearly she had taken his arms and put them round her, and said: "Take me away, far away,

to the place of happiness, to any place where you want to be. I only want what you want. I only want to help you to forget the horrors you have been through, to bind up your wounds and tend you till you are well, as well as every other unwounded man. I'm ready to give up everything for you. You can pay me back so easily, by just being happy, by just forgetting that the blackness ever lay over you cruelly, by just loving me."

She had to hide her weakness of a woman, the weakness he would have loved and adored. And she only said:

"Let us walk. We haven't very much time. We shall have to go back this evening by one of those trains."

"We!" he said.

"Don't leave me to go back alone. Come back with me. I want you, Clive. I need you. I hate your being away."

They were walking on now slowly. They were leaving behind them the selfish sound of the doves' soft voices. The grass road narrowed. The woods closed in on them. They were in a green hermitage full of soft shadows, of delicate warmth, of the tiny forest noises which suggest small and happy activities, light and frail lives in nooks, under leaves, under grasses, among ferns and densely growing brambles. Business was going on there, the ceaseless business of life. And they could hear it faintly when they listened, like a remote and multitudinous music made by minute living instruments.

"You want me to come back to-night!" he said, after a silence.

He was obviously startled. He was, she thought, obviously reluctant. Evidently he had not thought of confronting what he would have to confront as Clive Baratrie so soon.

"Did you mean to stay on here?"

"I took the rooms for two or three days. That doesn't matter, of course."

"And when you left here, what did you mean to do?"

"I hadn't decided. I was leaving it all till I saw you."

"Clive, if you are ever going to come back—you know what I mean—come back with me to-day. Rush on the spear, and I don't think it will hurt you as much as you think."

"I expect you're right. But—my flat in Queen Anne's Mansions to-night! The hall porter, the waiters, the liftman, all the people who live in the flats—to-night! 'Baratrive's back! You know—the fellow who's just got off, the fellow tried for murder! He's back! I saw him in the hall. He lives just opposite to us.' 'What's he like?' And then descriptions, so that if they have the luck to run across me in the hall, or the lift, they'll know who it is, and be able to feast their greedy eyes. To-night—to-night!"

"Clive, it's that, or it's eternal hiding and subterfuge. You must choose. Why not choose to-day?"

She put her arm through his and laid a hand on his hand. And after a moment he said:

"Good-bye to a dream! It was perhaps a coward's dream, Vi. At any rate, it was the dream of an abominably sensitive man. Good-bye to it! And now I'll be definite. The drifting's over and done with. I'll come back with you to London this evening. Or—let's make it to-night. Let's take the late train. We'll dine among the animals. I'll smoke my pipe on the bench by the rose-bush afterwards. And then good-bye to Claude Ormeley! You're right. I know you're right. The fellow's got to go. We couldn't do with him, you and I. He's had a short life. How long is it? Days? Weeks? I seem to have lost count of time. I've lived lives and lives in the last few months. But anyhow, Claude Ormeley's life's been a short one. So—give him till the last train to-night. It won't be a very late one."

She tried to smile, to pretend to take it lightly with him. But that was difficult. For she realised through her love what he was giving up and what he had to face. And she realised his longing for "*l'endroit du bonheur*." And though

she had said to him, and though she believed, that happiness is made by what we are, and not by where we are, his words that day, and his look and manner, eager, suddenly young, impulsive, even intense, when speaking them, had stirred in her great longings which now she would have to repress.

When, as the day was declining, and the soft English landscape was losing the glittering brilliance which had defined its outlines almost sharply, and was resuming its naturally docile and unobtrusive beauty in the more delicate radiance of evening, they came out from the wood into the meadow among the feeding sheep, Vivian looked about her with eyes that were no longer quite satisfied. She loved England. She loved its look of homely peace, its garden look of fertility, its safe and not disturbing beauty, a beauty you could trust. But Clive had disturbed her love. How was that? She thought it was partly by throwing upon this garden world the shadow of his pain. England had been the place of his suffering. None of its peace was in him. Instead, from him there seemed to issue a force which affected for her the serenity she looked on, the sleeping meadows, the leafy woods, the stealing stream among the overhanging water-weeds, the little inn with its rose-bushes set about it, and the trail of pale blue and ash-grey smoke rising from its brick chimney into the primrose and faint harmonious green of the evening sky. She looked at all this, and now the serenity seemed forced, not quite sincere, not quite true. She saw it and doubted it. It had become to her an appearance, and so had lost in value. And she knew this was because of Clive. But she did not tell him so. And as they descended towards the inn among the butter-cups, and the white sheep moved softly away through the grass at their approach, she thought of a white house set in palm trees, and of lion-coloured precipices frowning over a plateau where a stream sang among wild oleanders. And she saw a great plain where gazelles moved on their tiny feet and browsed

among tamarisk bushes, and in the distance dreaming mountains of Africa. And "*P'endroit du bonheur*" seemed to her to be far away from England, very far away.

But they must face life in England. She knew that. And she put away the visions of Africa which Clive had called up before her, wishing to entice her to fall in with his creeping desires.

She and Clive—they were going to do the only possible thing; they were going to "stick it out."

A few weeks later the following paragraph appeared in a London evening paper which claimed to have a record sale:

AN INTERESTING WEDDING

A wedding of more than usual interest took place early this morning at the famous old church of St. Giles's, near the Strand, when Miss Vivian Denys, the noted lawn-tennis player, was married quietly to Mr. Clive Baratrie. It is scarcely necessary to recall that Mr. Baratrie was the central figure in the recent sensational murder trial at the Old Bailey, where he was indicted before Mr. Justice Whitecliffe for the murder of Mrs. Sabine, in whose hospital he had received treatment after being wounded in France during the war. Mr. Baratrie was of course triumphantly acquitted, and was the hero of an extraordinary demonstration of sympathy at the hands of the crowds which had gathered outside the Court to receive the first news of the verdict. Miss Denys, to whom he had been engaged before his arrest, had never faltered in her belief in her lover's innocence, and now she has crowned her devotion by becoming his wife. The wedding was kept as secret as possible, doubtless from fear of popular demonstrations. Only a few relatives and two or three close friends were in the church. And there was literally no one waiting outside. The rector, the Reverend Robert Herries, performed

the ceremony. Mr. Harry Maynard was the best man. There were no bridesmaids and there was no music. The bride was attired in a simple travelling dress. Immediately after the ceremony Mr. and Mrs. Baratrie entered a waiting motor-car and drove away to an unknown destination. On inquiry at the house of Mrs. Baratrie, the bridegroom's Mother, the butler announced that no information was available for the press. We understand, however, that after a short honeymoon Mr. and Mrs. Baratrie intend to settle in London, and that Mr. Baratrie, who is a partner in the well-known firm of Maynard, Harringay, Baratrie, and Co., Stockbrokers, means shortly to resume his business activities.

III

A CITY drowned in yellow—that was London on a certain day of the following November, when Bob Herries, after the four-o'clock weekday service at St. Giles's, slipped out of his surplice in the vestry, put on his rough blue overcoat, and after a short conversation with a thin, clean-shaven man, with a pale complexion and piercing dark eyes, picked up his hat and started for home.

The Rectory of St. Giles's was close to the big Church which stood in the very heart of London. A few steps in the fog brought Bob Herries to his door, to a fire in his study, and to his wife, whom he found making coffee for him with the unflinching interest and pleasure in small doings which was characteristic of her.

Mrs. Herries was short like her husband, and was one of those homely aristocrats whom England manages to breed for the amazement of the foreigner. The daughter of Lord Dumalley, a Baron of one of the oldest creations in England, she looked not unlike a comfortable, kind-hearted cook. She had always been fat, and she was still fat. Her round, pudgy-featured face was red, and usually looked as if it had recently

been exposed to a hot kitchen fire. She dressed anyhow, generally in black. Clear grey eyes, beautiful little hands, tiny and charming ears in which she wore two small turquoises, and an expression of childlike bonhomie, caused many people to say that she was a delightful woman, and that somehow with her "looks" didn't matter.

"I don't want Mrs. Herries changed. I like her just as she is." This remark, made by a very fastidious woman of the world, summed up the opinion most people held about the rector's wife. She was beloved, and her homeliness was an essential part of her loveliness.

The Herries pair had no children, but they had the parish, and they had friends innumerable outside the limits of the parish. Being both of them genuine lovers of humanity, and having humour without cynicism, they were for ever being needed. It was a complete mystery to not a few how they managed to find time for all those they were kind to, were warmly interested in. Sometimes they were physically tired. But their hearts never seemed to grow weary. Yet they gave their hearts an abnormal amount to do.

They met now for the first time since an early breakfast, and did not allude to the fog.

Mrs. Herries had been to afternoon church, and as she gave her husband his coffee, and smiled on his sitting down in a really comfortable, well-worn arm-chair, the sort of chair that can be a man's friend, she said:

"Did you see who was in church just now, Bob?"

"You mean Mrs. Clive, don't you?"

His wife nodded.

"Yes. I looked round the church while Heathcote was addressing us and saw her then. It was a pity Heathcote hadn't a bigger audience, but November is given to knocking things on the head. He was very nice about it, said he expected the same sort of thing at his theatre to-night. Did you speak to Mrs. Clive coming out?"

"Yes. I asked her to come in, but she couldn't."

Mrs. Herries put her pretty little hands on her fat knees, a plebeian bit of business which somehow she made attractive, almost endearing, and added:

"I'm not very happy about the Clives, Bob."

"No more am I," said her husband. "I keep on wanting to do things for them and I can't. And what's more, I don't know exactly what things I want to do. One thing, perhaps, is to abolish the past. And no man can do that. Besides, I suppose one ought not even to wish to do it. Every bit of his past ought to be of use to a man. No one on earth believes in remorse less than I do. But somehow the past does seem to hang about those dear people, the Clives, and I find myself wanting to get rid of it. Yes, I will have some more. The strength of your coffee is as the strength of ten. No wonder they talk of it in Trafalgar Square and along the Strand. Heathcote was longing to have some, but had to go to the Garrick. He said to meet a man with a swelled head who wants to get something out of him."

"What a dismal prospect!"

"He'll face it, Heathcote!"

He was now putting some tobacco into a very old and very seasoned briar pipe. As he stuffed the pipe, with the mastery of long habit, he looked into the fire with his dark inquiring eyes.

"Now men like Heathcote make things difficult for the Clives," he said.

"How? Does Mr. Heathcote know them?"

"No; but he is too interested in them. The acute interest of minds like Heathcote's keeps things alive that some people wish dead. You know I lunched with Heathcote at the Garrick the other day. It was then he said he'd speak to us in Church. Well, he brought up the subject of Mrs. Sabine's death, and talked poison till I wanted to say the annihilating word."

"Did you say it?"

"No. I thought it wiser not. Two other men were there. Besides, the topic was, I suppose, quite a legitimate one. But the conversation made me realise acutely what the Clives have to face. I don't think I'm very sensitive as to what people are thinking about me. Half of the time it never occurs to me to worry about it, or I suppose that they're not thinking about me at all, which is probably true. But if I were Clive Baratrie even I should find life pretty hard, I believe. And I imagine he's a super-sensitive man."

"What makes you think that?"

"The hardness which I have noticed in him ever since his marriage and settling down again in London."

"A good many ex-soldiers have something of that, I think," said Mrs. Herries, spreading her hands to the fire, which made them look semi-transparent, and oddly unlike hands belonging to her body and face. "I always think of it as the up-against-it manner which they haven't been able to lose with the coming of peace."

"Yes, poor chaps, I know all about that. But Baratrie's manner isn't theirs. There's a subtle difference. His hardness is absolutely individual. It's a silent defiance flung at the mob, and is grounded on an eternal suspicion. If he had not married I think it might have been less marked."

"I know what you mean. He's fighting for his splendid girl as well as for himself."

"And it's a thundering good fight too. Baratrie's got grit. You know, Bun"—Bun was Bob Herries's not inappropriate name for his delightfully round wife—"he's so full of grit that I believe if I asked him to talk to us in Church on a Wednesday afternoon he'd do it. He'd go any lengths in the effort to assert his moral courage. He's sweat blood to prove himself to his wife. See what you bring us to! You make us afraid to be afraid, taskmistresses as you are, most of you!"

"D'you regret it, Bob?"

"What? That moral tyranny of our women over us?"

"You don't need it, and so you haven't to put up with it. No. I mean the fight you say Clive Baratrie's making?"

"Well, I'm a bit afraid of it somehow."

He spoke with great seriousness. He was smoking his pipe with the relish of a hard-worked man who was quietly revelling in a dear solace for his body. He lay back in the big shabby chair with his legs stretched out, and his feet, in thick black boots, crossed. The physical man was obviously at ease. But the unphysical man was perturbed. His wife saw that plainly.

"I don't see quite what it's going to end in. There's something not very natural about it—to me. Will Baratrie's effort be permanently successful? Will he be able to keep it up? That's the question. Heathcote now! There are a good many Heathcotes about. Baratrie meets many of them probably. He sees the eager curiosity in their eyes. And it just flays him—flays him, Bun."

"Surely Mr. Heathcote doesn't think——"

She stopped. She did not care to say it.

"Oh, I don't say he thinks—that. No! But he debates possibilities. He wonders about things. He surmises. His curiosity is alive. The doubter of bona fides! One never knows what a man may be up to, has been up to. There are minds like that. Apparently they can't help themselves. We all have to reckon with them. He didn't do it of course—but did he? Even Heathcote's sense of humour is almost purely cynical, and I imagine he has no power of love at all. And yet he's a charming fellow, and often amiable too. But his mind's cruel. And d'you know, Bun, lots of charming and amiable people have cruel minds. That's the fact, and Clive Baratrie, and others who've been unlucky, are up against it."

"Can we do anything to help?"

"I wonder."

He sat smoking steadily for two or three minutes. And his eyes held an anxious expression which was very characteristic of them. Nearly always his eyes seemed asking questions: "What's to be done? How shall I set about helping so and so? What would be the quickest and surest way of getting the sunlight into that room?"

"There's Mrs. Baratrie mère too!" he said at last, in a pondering voice. "The business of the trial has changed her."

"I can't make her out. I think she's an extraordinary woman," said his wife. "She keeps you at arms' length, and yet you feel that the arms were made for embraces. Has she a cruel mind, d'you think?"

"Cruel to herself, perhaps. Yes. I believe she is tortured by her own brains. But I don't know exactly how."

"Perhaps if we knew them all much better we could do something without seeming to. But as it is we've no right——"

"Bun," he interrupted emphatically, "in this after-the-war world I hold that every one of us has the right to do all he can to help others whether they demand help or not. I don't believe in waiting to be asked. Delicate, sensitive people think they haven't the right to ask us for help. And if we on our side think we haven't the right to help without being asked, there's deadlock for humanity. When Baratrie was arrested, and the whole trouble began, I pushed myself into his Mother's life. I forced the door. And it was all right. When the room's on fire, force the door. When there's murder being done in the room, force the door. When there's a life in agony, a soul in distress, force the door. But take care what you do when you're inside the room."

"You're right, Bob. But you've got more tact than I have."

"Rubbish, dear!"

"And I'm haunted by the fear of being a busybody."

Bob Herries smiled at her, and his smile gave the history of his married happiness.

"You—a busybody!" was all he said.

"Yes; the clergyman's prying wife who assumes that she has the right to poke her nose everywhere!"

"Your dear old nose isn't the shape that can poke. But—what can we do for them?"

"I'll tell you something that came to me in Church just now."

Her soft voice—she had a voice that matched her hands—was lower than usual as she said that. It even sounded slightly surreptitious.

"About Mrs. Clive?"

"Yes, about Mrs. Clive. I think—in fact I feel almost sure——"

She paused, looking at him. He received the message and moved his head, on which the dark hair at the back stood out in a feather.

"That! And will it make matters better?"

"Don't you think it must?"

He thought for a minute, while she sat still with her hands spread again to the fire, looking at him with the clear grey eyes which made an almost startling contrast to her red, blunt-featured face.

"In that household I can't tell. It's odd, but my values seem to get mixed up when I get to the door of the Baratrie room. It's dark, and I don't know what's going on inside. Would Baratrie welcome a child? I'm not sure. I'm not at all sure of that."

"She would."

"Yes. She's true woman. Poor Gordon! There's another one would like to do something for."

"You see, dear, it isn't always so easy to force the door!"

Bob Herries gazed straight at his wife and then said:

"I believe every woman, even the dearest, considers her

husband sarcastically at moments. And the worst of it is that I'm sure every woman's got jolly good reason for doing so. Don't try to look modest, Bun."

"I'm not trying."

"Yes, you are."

He knocked out his pipe against the oak border of the fire-place, then got up out of his chair.

"I married them and I feel responsible for them. He loves her tremendously and we know what she is. What she did proved her feeling for him long ago. Now here we have two people, man and woman, loving each other tremendously and united. What more can be given to them? What more of real value? But there's something wrong, something very wrong. Love isn't enough, in spite of old William Morris."

He glanced at his bookshelves, glanced at the shelf where the poets stood in line.

"Is it his super-sensitiveness, Bun? Or is it something else, something more deep and serious even than that?"

"Don't you think it may be Mrs. Sabine?" she said.

"Remorse about her?"

"It might be."

"Yes. Whatever her faults she was genuinely and desperately in love with him."

"Poor woman!"

"Baratril has a dangerous something in him, a gift of fascination that seems to have little to do either with brains or character. His appearance shows it. What is it?"

"Those things can't be explained, Bob."

"No. They aren't of the mind. They are in the most distant part of man, in the heart of the mystery. I sometimes wish I had never known Mrs. Sabine."

"Why, Bob?"

"Because I disliked her so much. And I hate disliking anybody. She always seemed to me malign, though she, too,

had fascination! When I think of the Baratries I sometimes have an odd feeling which I cannot away with."

"What is it?"

"I sometimes feel that they haven't done with Mrs. Sabine yet."

Mrs. Herries took her hands from the fire abruptly. She was evidently startled. But she said nothing, only looked a bright, definite question at her husband.

"There was something in Mrs. Sabine which was quite out of the ordinary," he continued, replying to her eyes as he often did. "One might call it a terrible persistence. It seemed to me almost more than will. It suggested to me once or twice a machine which, having been started, perhaps by an accidental touch, couldn't be stopped. There was something frightful about it. I remember thinking: 'Heaven help the being who gets caught by accident in that machinery, that inexorably revolving pitiless maze which nothing can stop.'"

"Death has stopped it now."

"Yes."

He stared into the fire, then put his left hand up to his "feather," and stroked it two or three times.

"All the same," he added, after a long pause, "I sometimes think I still hear faintly the whirr of that terrible machinery. Clive Baratrie was caught in it once. We know that. I wish very much that he never had been."

At this moment the study door was opened, and an elderly parlourmaid showed herself in a black dress and a very simple white cap, innocent of streamers and bows.

"Yes, Kate?" said Mr. Herries, turning.

"You are wanted on the telephone, Sir."

"D'you know who it is?"

"Captain Rumbigon, Sir."

Bob Herries exchanged a smile with his wife. Kate's absolute inability to get a name even approximately right, and

her calm decisiveness in error, was a standing joke between them.

"Captain Rumbigon, Bun! I'll just go and see what *he* wants."

He went away, followed by Kate, whose nice round back looked remarkably cosy and capable, leaving Mrs. Herries to a task which always amused her, the trying to identify Kate's ringer-up.

"Rumbigon? Who can that be? Rumford? Ramsbotham? No, that's much too like it—couldn't be that! Robinson? I shouldn't wonder if—but that's quite a good deal like too!"

She sat still reflecting till her husband came back.

"Robinson, dear?" she asked.

"No. It's Captain Raphael, our gassed friend. He seems terribly down on his luck. Jermyn Street, you know, on an evening like this! Wants me badly to look in and cheer him up if I can. I haven't much time. Only about an hour before I must be with the boys. But I said I'd go. Just come to the window, Bun, and let's have a look at it outside."

Mrs. Herries put her hands on the two arms of her chair and was up quite alertly. There was nothing phlegmatic in her plumpness. She stood just five feet one and a half in her low-heeled shoes, and always—something moral in that perhaps—looked rather taller than she was. Bob Herries went over to one of the two big windows of the room, pulled away the worn blue curtains, drew up the blind, and thrust up the window, letting in something of the drowned City in whose very core they were. His wife came to join him, and he put his left arm round her shoulder, and they stood there silently for a moment, feeling, breathing in, listening to the London that lay all about them, spread through the darkness, submerged in November.

The rectory house stood at a corner. Their window opened on a wide thoroughfare in which were heavy-looking, substantial houses, not unlike some of the elderly houses of Bath,

but beyond the window the thoroughfare ended in a vast square which was one of the busiest spaces of London. Now from this square came to them the sound of creeping traffic, of muffled shouts and exclamations. Under the deadly pall Life was trying to keep on its way, to go about its business or its pleasures. The fog, dense and inexorable, seemed tyrannically endeavouring to force Life to be still, to give up the struggle and cease from activity, but Life fought on. Like Mrs. Sabine, it could not stop.

"You can never get to Jermyn Street, surely," said Mrs. Herries.

She was looking out of the window and could only see the iron railings that protected the area of the rectory, the faint glimmer of a street lamp, a blur that must be the pavement. The roadway was hidden. The houses opposite had disappeared.

"I'll manage it somehow. I know every step of the way. Bun, what a mercy it is for us that neither of us lives alone. I think to live quite alone in any big city would be awful to me. I wonder how the innumerable men and women who do live like that—there must be multitudes of them all around us at this moment—keep up their spirits at all on a night, say, like this."

He paused; then added:

"Listen to those cries! London makes one want to help much more than the country, doesn't it?"

"Ever so much more. I'm glad we live in London."

He pressed her shoulder. Just then the fog seemed to move, to gather itself together and to flow upon them over and between the iron railings like a wave.

"I must be off. Raphael's a mass of nerves since the war. And on an evening like this he'll be down in the nethermost depths, poor fellow."

He shut down the window, drew the blind and the curtains.

"We are lucky people, Bun!"

"Indeed we are."

"What are you going to do?"

"I ought to write a lot of letters. But I believe I'm going to sit by the fire and think about the Baratries."

"You won't hit on a scheme, I'm afraid."

"No; I don't think I shall. It's such a peculiar case. I've never met one like it."

"It leaves one at a loss. Well, now for Captain Rumbigon."

"Wrap up well!"

Bob Herries went out, and Mrs. Herries once more turned her kind red face and spread her pretty little hands to the fire.

IV

ON the November day when Bob Herries and his wife had seen her at the Wednesday service in St. Giles's, Vivian had two things in her mind, which seemed to fill it up, even almost to distend it. Mrs. Herries had been right in her suspicion. Vivian knew that she was going to have a child. She knew, but Clive did not know yet. She had not forgotten their conversation about that possibility, his view which she had combated and had overcome. She wondered how he would take the great news. It was of course an entirely natural happening this coming of the child. There was no reason why it should surprise him. Yet she wondered and was a little anxious. That was partly why she had done such an unusual thing, had gone to a week-day service. But she had had another reason for wishing to be in the quiet atmosphere of the great church, which seemed to her to hold something of Bob Herries's atmosphere of courage. A suspicion which she had had for some time had just developed into something like a conviction.

She felt sure that there was something seriously wrong with Jim Gordon.

Although she had never spoken of it to anyone, for some

time she had noticed faint and subtle signs of deterioration in Jim. Despite his great self-control and reserve, she had always felt that there was something reckless and erratic in him. Men's characters show themselves in games. Now and then in lawn-tennis Vivian had felt the reckless side of Jim's character. Very seldom it had been apparent. But there had been moments when it had seemed as if a large door had been suddenly unlocked and something violent had burst out into the open. Had it not been so at the end of the match played by Vivian and Jim against Mrs. Littlethwaite and Kemmis on the day of Clive's release? Vivian had always suspected that in life, as well as in lawn-tennis, Jim sometimes "went wild." Archie had never spoken of this. Vivian thought probably he knew nothing about it. Jim was ten years older than her brother, was considered by Archie to be his mentor as well as his friend. Probably any lapse from firm self-control on Jim's part would be carefully concealed from Archie. But Vivian was intuitive. She knew that there was another Jim beside the almost stern and powerful athlete whom the world of sportsmen knew and admired. What did this other Jim do in secret when he got the upper hand? She had wondered, had thought much, and anxiously, about that. Now she believed that she knew. An ugly conviction had forced its way up to the surface of her mind.

Surely Jim drank. That was what was the matter.

During the war Vivian had worked, as had many girls, among the fighting men. Although she had been very young, only a schoolgirl when the war began, she had insisted on helping in various ways. She had been in hospitals, had served at night in railway-station canteens. And experience of men had soaked into her without her being self-consciously aware of it. Her eyes were not ignorant eyes. She could read the signs in men's faces. When subtle alteration came in a face she knew well she did not miss it. And, like most people

who were not wrapped up in cotton-wool during the war, she knew the part drink had played in the struggle, and through that knowledge also knew the part drink might play in any life that was in disorder, that lacked a moral basis, that was secretly the prey of disappointment or deep unhappiness. She could not understand the attraction of drink in a personal way, but she knew in an impersonal way of its lure for nerve-racked, reckless and miserable men. And she had begun to be afraid for Jim.

There was something in his face, a slight coarsening of the features, a faintly blurred look, there was something now and then in his eyes, an expression that seemed mingled of self-disgust and defiance, that gave her this ugly conviction. She had tried to struggle against it, but she had not been successful. No one who knew Jim had ever hinted to her that he drank. She had never heard from anyone a word hinting at dissipation on Jim's part. On the contrary, she believed that he was generally considered to be the perfect model of a self-respecting athlete, the type of man who lives for fitness and attains it. Nevertheless, thinking of certain faces of soldiers she had seen by night, faces of men living safely in London and drinking deep of its pleasures in short intervals between one battle and another, remembering men's eyes seen for a moment in the flare of station lamps in deep hours of the darkness, Vivian felt that she knew about Jim what perhaps others did not know. She cared for Jim; she felt responsible towards Jim, because he loved her.

Perhaps that was why she knew.

When she left the Church of St. Giles after speaking to Mrs. Herries she walked towards the little house in Chester Street where she and Clive lived wondering about him and Jim Gordon, the two men who loved her. Her duty to Clive was obvious. She had consecrated her life to him. But she felt that she had also a duty to Jim.

How was she going to fulfil it? She debated that ques-

tion but could arrive at no conclusion. She knew that for the time at least she had injured Jim's life. That was not her fault surely. She had never pretended to care for him more than she did care. Archie, her Father, and perhaps others who knew her, thought that if she had never met Clive she would certainly have married Jim. Perhaps Jim thought that too. She did not know what she might have done if she had never known Clive. It was useless to think about that. But she still had probably more influence over Jim than anyone else had. She wished she could use that influence now. She wished she dared to use it. For she felt positive that he was in danger, and that the danger had come about because of her. Something told her that he was beginning secretly to try to drown a misery which she had unintentionally caused.

What could she do?

She had noticed the hardness, as of a thin steel veil, which had overspread Clive since his trial. She was sorry it had come, but she was not surprised. Clive had no hardness for her. He worshipped her, and often showed his worship both in small and big ways. But she felt that though he trusted her he was secretly jealous of her.

That was a very strange thing—his jealousy.

Often she remembered how in the woods at Tyford on the day of decision looking down upon Clive she had felt that she saw jealousy in him like a definite entity set apart from its fellows. Since she had been married to Clive she had grown increasingly aware of this jealousy. It was not petty. It seldom showed itself in actions. It never spoke, gave itself in words. But it affected her mysteriously like a steady and ceaseless glow, like the glow that comes from a still and red-hot fire. Feeling it, wondering about it, Vivian supposed it was part of that love of which Clive had spoken to her on the day of the verdict. He had spoken of the danger which threatens when anything is carried beyond a certain

point, the point which should not be passed. He had warned her that his love had passed beyond that danger-point. And now she felt definitely that he had spoken the truth, that there was something akin to danger in his engrossing love for her. The smouldering jealousy, never expressed, never hinted at, had something disquieting in it. It suggested a life apart, strictly controlled, but holding within it possibilities of intense action.

Probably Clive was hag-ridden. He might have besieging fears; fear that some day she might repent having taken up the burden of his name, might regret sharing part of the load laid upon him; fear lest some day a voice within her might say: "I wish I had Clive without the burden of his name and his past. His past is wearing me down." And then, if it ever came to that, his hag-ridden mind might fear lest she might look into the world and wish she had linked herself to someone else, to an ordinary man of whom the world knew nothing, who roused no keen curiosity, a man from whom curiosity's great blazing eye was turned away.

Yet in spite of the still and persistent glow, Clive sedulously avoided interfering with her life. Far from showing the jealousy of a husband who was passionately and exclusively devoted to his wife, he seemed to Vivian inclined to push her into freedom.

Knowing of Jim Gordon's devotion to her, he might naturally enough have tried to keep Gordon at arm's length. He had not done that. On the contrary, he had showed friendship to Gordon, had assumed as a matter of course that Vivian would continue her close association with Gordon in lawn-tennis match play, and she had obeyed what had seemed to be Clive's wish, had kept up her lawn-tennis as before, and had kept Jim as her partner in all mixed doubles match play.

With the ending of the lawn-tennis season it was natural that Vivian saw less of Jim Gordon. But she still met him fairly often. He was Archie's great pal. He knew Vivian's people intimately and was a friend of most of her friends.

And Clive seemed to wish him to come to their house on a footing of intimacy.

"I hate the man who when he marries a woman tries to push her friends out of her life," he had once said to Vivian. "I hope Gordon will often come to us."

Vivian had known he was speaking with sincerity. Nevertheless, she felt certain that the glow in Clive was turned upon Jim, the glow of that strange, hidden, never blatantly manifested, yet all-embracing jealousy. And she often remembered Clive's words about Gordon "waiting for the empty place."

Jim was not waiting now. He had nothing more to hope for. But she was not happy about Jim.

She turned into Chester Street.

When she reached their house it was getting late. She had come very slowly because of the fog. Clive had returned from business. She found him sitting in the drawing-room by the fire waiting for her. All the lights were out except one, a reading lamp which shone over a book he was reading and over the hands that held it, those hands which she had once thought of as victims. He got up when he saw her, and she told him at once where she had been.

He looked surprised.

"Church on a weekday! You don't often do that, do you?"

"No; but I felt like doing it to-day."

"Any special reason?"

As he spoke he put an arm round her, and drew her down beside him on the sofa which was in front of the fire.

"Mr. Heathcote—Wilfred Heathcote—gave an address. But I didn't go for that. In fact, I didn't know anything about it till I got to the church."

She felt Clive's arm slightly relax in its embrace, as if a faint and sudden coldness had come to him.

"What—the actor?" he said.

"Yes."

"What was his subject?"

"Psychology on the Stage and psychology in the Church."

"I know Heathcote imagines he's great on psychology. I think it's rather a pity to let that type of man loose in a church."

"D'you know him?" said Vivian, rather surprised at his tone.

"No; but I've seen him at the Garrick once or twice when a member has asked me there."

"Have you taken a dislike to him?"

"I don't take to that type of man. He's clever, and I admire his work on the stage, but I don't want to know him. And I think he's out of his place speaking to people in a church. But Herries, of course, knows his job. And I'm only an outsider and really have no right to express an opinion. Psychology!"

He got up abruptly and stood by the fire.

"That usually means trying to pry into other people's minds whether they happen to wish it or not. I mean the study of psychology. A man like Heathcote is really a sort of social detective."

He paused, as if suddenly aware of his own heat, and looked at Vivian with a trace of self-consciousness in his eyes.

"I've nothing against Heathcote," he then said, rather slowly, as if choosing his words. "But you know how it is. One type of man I take to, another I don't take to. They may be equally good fellows. But there's something in the one that suits me, and something in the other which goes against my grain. You cotton on to a man, or you just don't cotton on to him."

"What type of man do you like best?" she asked him, with a sort of earnest curiosity.

"I could hardly say."

"Well, among the men we know. Which are those you like best?"

"I like Bob Herries. I don't know him intimately. He's a terribly busy man, and our lives are so different that we don't meet very often. But he's a man I like."

"Do you like Jim Gordon?"

She had not meant to say that; it suddenly came from her lips, prompted by something strong in her mind.

"Gordon!" said Clive, as if startled.

"Yes. Just consider Jim impartially—and tell me."

He stood there as if obeying her, and considering Gordon.

"I think Gordon has very fine qualities," he said at last. "But he's so reserved that it isn't easy to know him. I like him, but I never know quite what to say to him. However, that's natural enough, I suppose."

She did not ask him why it was natural.

"It's not in human nature for Gordon genuinely to like me," he added. "And I don't believe one can ever know a man thoroughly unless he likes you."

"You think in liking we give knowledge of ourselves?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then—in loving?"

"Ah, Vi, we learn almost everything in loving!"

"But not everything."

"No."

"I want to ask you something," she said, after a pause. "You know how it was with Jim before you and I were married. If circumstances were ever to arise in which Jim needed help, was in a difficulty, let us say, and I could do something for him, would you mind my doing it?"

"No," he said.

But she noticed a perceptible pause before he answered, and guessed that during the pause he had overcome something.

"Why should I? You know I should hate to break any friendship of yours. And I suppose if friendship means anything, it means help in time of trouble."

"That's just what I think. Friendship that passes by on the other side is no use at all."

"Let's hope nothing will go wrong with Gordon. I suppose he'll always be rather hard up though. Lawn-tennis is scarcely a paying game, and it takes a lot of a man's time to get to Gordon's top-hole position."

"Yes, that's the worst of any game. If one wants to come to the top one must work almost as if it were a profession. Jim will have money from his Father some day, but he hasn't got much now. Perhaps being such an athlete has been a snare to him. But I don't know. Some people seem to have been born to triumph in the body and some in the mind. I suppose Jim is among the former."

"And I belong to neither class."

Again the glow of that hidden fire seemed to be intensified for a moment. Perhaps Clive feared she had felt it, for he added quickly, with a change of tone:

"Gordon's a great athlete, and, in England, that's a great thing to be. And you, Vi—do you ever realise that you are a famous person?"

"Famous—no! That's an absurd word to use about me. But of course the English do show you that they appreciate your skill in any game. They're generous."

"Dearest," he said, with sudden tenderness, "I love you to be appreciated. Perhaps you think I don't care. But I do. I want you to be the greatest woman champion ever known in the history of lawn-tennis."

"Clive, come here!"

"Yes?"

He sat down again beside her.

"What is it?"

"I shall have to stop playing tennis presently for quite a long time."

He did not ask her why. When she had spoken he took both her hands in his, and held them close, and looked into

her eyes without a word. She never forgot that look. It seemed to have in it intense love and something else that was intense—apprehension. But the light in the room—fire-light and light from the shaded lamp mingled—was not very strong; and almost directly he had taken her hands he leaned back and his face was in shadow. Perhaps she was mistaken about the apprehension. She knew she was not mistaken about the love.

“So—we are to give life!” he said, at last.

There was something very strange in the tone of his voice when he said that, a note of awe. Then he bent over her, kissed her, and put his arms round her. And she heard him sigh deeply; she felt the sigh go through his body. His arms tightened. There was violence in them. They felt like arms that wanted to lift her up and carry her away. But suddenly they fell away from her and he got up. She was wondering why, when the drawing-room door opened and their parlour-maid appeared. Clive had evidently heard her outside, though Vivian had heard nothing.

“You’re wanted on the telephone, Sir,” she said.

The telephone was in the hall, and Clive went down to answer it. A moment later Vivian heard him calling her, and went to the head of the stairs.

“Yes?”

“It’s from Mrs. Herries. She’s been offered a box at some theatre to-night and asks us to go. Her husband can’t come till very late. Shall we go?”

“But the fog?”

“She says it’s lifting.”

“Shall I look out?”

“Do, dearest.”

Vivian ran downstairs, opened the front door quickly and saw at once that the fog was less dense. She could see the street and the houses opposite.

“It seems to be lifting,” she said, shutting the door.

"Shall we go?"

She hesitated, then said:

"Suppose we do, as it's Mrs. Herries."

He spoke into the telephone. It was arranged that Vivian and he should pick Mrs. Herries up at the rectory and take her with them to the theatre.

"Did she say what play it was for?" Vivian asked.

"No."

"I hope it isn't anything idiotic—a musical comedy, or one of those rushing-about farces. Somehow to-night——" She did not finish her sentence.

He put his arm round her and they went up the stairs.

"Would you rather stay at home?"

"In a way—yes. But I refused to go to tea with Mrs. Herries only to-day, and I like her very much. And I'm sure she wants—let us go! Clive!"

"Yes? What is it?"

"Do you feel to-night that you have something to forgive me for?"

"No," he said, earnestly. "No."

But at that moment he felt that Vivian had taken the management of their two lives into her hands. It was she who had as it were decreed the child. And he remembered the scene in the twilight after his release. She had held to her words; she had strength of purpose. And she was using that strength, as she thought, for him, on his behalf, urged perhaps by some obscure pushing force that she scarcely understood, and that she thought moral.

Was not Fate really using her?

"Have you ever had the feeling of being a puppet, Vi?" he said, when they were in the drawing-room again.

"No, never. How can you ask me that to-night?"

"I sometimes seem to feel the tug at our strings."

"I never do."

She paused; then she added:

"I think we make our own destinies, or at any rate the greater part of them. Of course, certain conditions are imposed upon us. That is obvious. But think how much of all that happens to us comes directly from ourselves!"

"Free will! Well, I suppose I proved that just now at the telephone. We shall soon have to dress. What about dinner?"

V

MRS. HERRIES often acted on impulse without thinking things thoroughly out. She had done so when she telephoned to the Baratries. But as soon as they had accepted her invitation she remembered something, and said to herself, "Perhaps I've made a mistake!"

The box was for Wilfred Heathcote's theatre, and she now recalled her husband's remarks about the actor's cruel mind and Clive Baratrie's sensitiveness to curiosity. Heathcote had given her the box. He would almost certainly ask her and her friends to pay a visit to his dressing-room between the acts of the play. And Bob had spoken of Clive Baratrie being flayed by the eyes of men like Heathcote. Why hadn't she remembered that? Why had she hurried to the telephone without thinking the whole thing well over? She regretted her impulsiveness as she put on her rather badly made evening gown.

Bob had not come back. She knew he would not be in till late, probably till nearly ten o'clock. He had several engagements. She would leave a message for him, and he could come into the box for the last hour of the play, or not, as he pleased. What would he think of her proceedings? His sense of tact was more developed than hers. Well, that couldn't be helped now. The thing was done. But she felt rather chastened as she stood in the drawing-room of the rectory waiting for the Baratries to come and pick her up,

and when they came, and she had to tell Clive to which theatre they were going, she felt almost guilty though she did not show it. He told the taxi man the name of the theatre and got into the cab after her.

The fog was still lifting, slowly, mysteriously. It hung over the City but was now only dense above the housetops. It was possible for traffic to go at a reasonable pace. Heathcote's theatre was in Shaftesbury Avenue. They reached it in less than seven minutes and had little time for conversation. But Mrs. Herries had time during the drive to feel a certain constraint in both her companions. As she did not know of Vivian's talk with Clive about Heathcote that afternoon, she did not understand it. But instinctively she connected it with Heathcote and began to feel actively uncomfortable. By the time their cab drew up before the theatre she was quite positive that she had made a mistake. She could only hope that Heathcote would not see who was with her in the box, and would not ask them to visit his dressing-room. No doubt he knew Clive Baratrie by sight. She would make Clive sit in the right-hand corner of the box. There he would perhaps be hidden from the stage.

She carried out this little plan, but it was all in vain. After the first act a thin, smart young man, who looked as sharp as a needle, and yet vaguely artistic too, appeared at the box door with a message from Mr. Heathcote. "The Chief" begged Mrs. Herries to come to his room with her two friends during the interval between the third and fourth acts.

"Thank you very much," said Mrs. Herries, rather vaguely and doubtfully. "But—shan't we be in the way?"

"Not at all," said the smart young man, looking at Clive with intense interest in his rather beady eyes. "The Chief doesn't have to change for the last act. He has a quarter of an hour's leisure. He particularly wants to have the pleasure of seeing you and your friends."

He stressed the last three words and again looked hard at Clive.

"Very well. Thank you very much."

"Can I send you in some coffee, cigarettes, chocolates?"

After a glance at her friends Mrs. Herries refused, and the young man arranged his thick brown hair and withdrew, saying:

"I will come to escort you after the third act."

When he had gone Mrs. Herries could not help saying to Clive:

"Won't it bore you very much to go behind the scenes?"

As she spoke she saw Vivian glance at her husband with a sort of eager inquiry mingled with tenderness. Without looking at her, Clive answered:

"Of course not. Heathcote must be a very interesting fellow, and well worth meeting."

And he began to talk about the piece and Heathcote's performance, and praised both strongly with apparent sincerity.

"How he plays up!" Mrs. Herries thought.

She had not missed the smart young man's beady glance, and she began to realise in a very personal way what Clive Baratrie had to fight against in London. She understood why his face had something in its expression that suggested the hardness and fixity of a mask, why his manner at moments held something of a faint, barely sketched, defiance. The greedy curiosity of strangers must be difficult to bear. She knew how indelicate people not well bred often are, without any intention of cruelty, or any thought of inflicting pain. And she longed to do something to ease the divined burden which the man by her side had to bear, and surely, with him, the ardent and tender girl. But what could she do? What would she ever be able to do? And her husband's words came to her mind: "I sometimes feel that they haven't done with Mrs. Sabine yet." When she had heard him say

them they had sounded to her almost sinister, even on Bob's lips. Now when she thought of them they seemed quite definitely sinister.

Half-way through the third act of the play the box door was softly opened and Bob Herries slipped in, looking pale and tired, but, as he frequently looked, eager and very much alive. (Mrs. Herries had been heard to say: "The more overworked and tired out Bob is, the more alive he looks!") The "feather" still showed at the back of his head, but he had changed into evening dress with a high black waistcoat and all-round white collar.

He shook hands and sat down at the back of the box without speaking. His wife, when the Baratries seemed to be intent on the stage, sent him a glance eloquent of her sense of sin and asking for pardon. In reply he shook his head at her with a smile, and she saw his lips forming a sentence which she guessed to be, "Very naughty of you!" Bob was never angry with her, but now she was almost seriously vexed with herself, and while the act went on its way she wondered whether she could not manage to visit Heathcote's dressing-room without taking the Baratries in her train. Now Bob was here, that might be possible. She might say that four were too many.

When the curtain fell she had quite decided to go without the Baratries, but before the applause had stopped there was a tap at the door, and the young man appeared.

"Will you please *all* come this way? Mr. Heathcote is expecting you."

"What? Are you going behind?" said Bob Herries, lifting his fluffy dark eyebrows.

"We can't all go," said Mrs. Herries. "Suppose——"

"But indeed the Chief expects you all," broke in the young man. "He has a sitting-room next his dressing-room. He often receives six or eight people."

Mrs. Herries looked at her husband. Vivian and Clive

had got up and were standing with their backs to the auditorium, as if ready to follow Heathcote's determined young emissary. And at this moment Clive said, in a rather hard voice:

"Vivian and I would very much like to make Mr. Heathcote's acquaintance, if we are really not too many to go behind."

"Then let's all come along!" said Bob Herries, in the rather boyish manner which he had never got rid of, a manner which accorded very perfectly with the "feather" at the back of his head.

"This way," said the young man. "Down these stairs and then through the iron door."

He pushed open the latter slowly, and immediately they were among the stage-hands, who were busy with the scenery. Three or four of the company were standing in the wings, among them Heathcote's "leading lady," a well-known actress of great talent but very mischievous temperament, whose lustrous brown eyes were now full of curiosity. It was evident at once that this was an "occasion." As the visitors came on to the stage all eyes were turned towards Clive. Even the stage-hands had evidently been informed that the notorious "Baratrie" of the great murder trial was distinguishing the theatre with his presence that night. For they stood blatantly at gaze, and whispered to each other behind their dusty palms. As for the "leading lady," she simply made a prey of Clive with her eyes.

Clive did not show that he noticed all this attention. He walked across the stage with Bob Herries behind the two women without looking to right or left. Only his exceptional, seemingly total, lack of interest in his surroundings showed his discomfort. Bob Herries understood very well the cause of his friend's apparent detachment. The spirit was trying to get away from the thing it hated.

The young man knocked gently on a door, opened it and looked in.

"This way, please. If you will sit down, I'll go to the Chief's dressing-room and tell him you are here."

And he showed them rather ceremoniously into a good-sized room, panelled with dark wood, well furnished, and containing a quantity of large photographs signed. At the end of this room hung an oil-painting of Heathcote in the part of Romeo, tall, lean, rouged and melancholy. Opposite to this picture, at the other end of the room, there was a door into a second room, and while they were looking at Romeo and the photographs a deep, strong voice called out from behind it:

"Please sit down. I am just coming."

"That's the Chief!" whispered the young man, lifting a pale, too delicate hand.

And he opened the door from beyond which the voice had come and vanished.

About three minutes later Heathcote came in.

He was playing in a modern piece, and wore country clothes, with a silk shirt and collar and brown brogues. He had a soft hat in his hand, and laid it down on a cabinet among some china as he shut the dressing-room door. His piercing dark eyes at once fixed themselves upon Clive, but only for an instant. Then he turned to Mrs. Herries and Bob, and she introduced him to the Barataries.

Heathcote was an unusual man. Although he was a distinguished actor, he had many interests besides those connected with the stage. He was a painter, a great reader, an admirable public speaker, and a clever talker. He was also an inveterate Club-man and passionately fond of good company. He looked like an ascetic, but ate and drank voraciously, and was said to choose the women for his theatre quite as much on account of their good looks as of their histrionic talents. One thing he never did. He never took

any exercise. He detested games and sports, and abominated cards. His life might be called thoroughly unwholesome, for he sat up desperately late at night and scarcely ever breathed pure air. Yet he was never known to be ill. He contented himself with looking ill. His body was unnaturally lean. His complexion was of an almost unearthly pallor. He was totally free from self-consciousness, and no one had ever seen his amazing self-confidence shaken by any person or event. Although English, he looked foreign.

After the introductions he asked his guests to sit down, and his dresser, a fat little man, totally bald, and with a pug's eyes, brought in a tray with whisky and soda, cigars and cigarettes, which he offered to every one. There was some desultory conversation about the play, and Heathcote remarked sardonically that he hated it, but that it was exactly what the public wanted at that moment. Pouring out a stiff whisky and soda for himself, he added, to Bob Herries, that since the war had ended it had become almost as difficult to fill a theatre as to fill a church.

"The public hates to be made to think almost as much as it hates to be made to pray. It wants violent shocks, crude sensationalism, the sort of tomfoolery that causes schoolboy laughter. Pure comedy hasn't a chance. Tragedy, of course, merely empties the house. Melodrama and farce, if possible with an undercurrent of what the public believes to be impropriety, are the only things that draw, apart from musical pieces which exploit the inanities of the chocolate-box girl with the greedy hands and eyes."

Bob Herries remarked that Barrie plays were still a goldmine. And a discussion followed in which the kindly optimism of the clergyman was opposed to the satirical pessimism of the actor. Mrs. Herries took part in it, and Vivian was appealed to once or twice, but Clive sat silent, listening and smoking a cigarette. Heathcote did not attempt to bring him into the argument, but often looked at him with piercing

"made-up" eyes, which seemed to glitter with intellectual inquisitiveness. Heathcote's naturally white face was painted white; his thin, flexible lips were painted red; his long-fingered, narrow hands, given to slow, significant gesture, were streaked with something which looked like a thick powder. And all this "make-up," combined with his rough country suit and brown brogues, and set in the midst of what was entirely natural—for neither Mrs. Herries nor Vivian put anything on their faces—gave him a strangely improper look, emphasised his peculiar expression, seemed to underline his intense personality.

The discussion presently broadened out into a consideration of after-the-war conditions, and Heathcote said that the conflict not long over had entirely altered the characters of thousands of young men. He paused, and looked round the room.

"I see you've something very definite in your mind," said Bob Herries.

"Yes. It's this. These thousands of young men have become accustomed to a hideous effort prolonged for years, the effort to suppress, to get rid of, life. That's been their aim, their job, year in, year out. And it's altered them fundamentally. The soldiers are hiding a secret moral change which is tremendous. They have lost the civilised man's natural respect for life."

As he said the last words he happened—if indeed it were chance—to look again at Clive Baratrie. And immediately he seemed to recollect something, for he added quickly, with a smile which completely changed his face for a moment:

"Perhaps I oughtn't to have said that in a soldier's presence."

"Why not?" said Clive. "Such a general accusation couldn't possibly be taken personally."

As he spoke he looked hard into the actor's heavily made-up eyes.

"Oh, I didn't intend it as an accusation. I was merely stating a fact which is making, and which is going to make, a great difference to our world."

There was a moment of silence, during which probably every one in the room was thinking the same thought. When making his statement, had Heathcote made an unintentional "gaffe," or had he spoken with unpardonable malice? The silence was broken by a tap on the door which led into the passage.

"Come in!" said Heathcote, sonorously.

The door was partially opened and a cooing, melodious voice remarked:

"It's only little me!"

"Oh—come in, Mrs. Dews!" said Heathcote, getting up.

His "leading lady" showed her beautiful, conscious-looking head.

"Really? Am I to? Ought I? I know I'm in the way. I feel so frightened. Hadn't I better go?"

"Bring it all in," said Heathcote, looking satirical.

Mrs. Dews obeyed, and brought in a face full of tragic beauty and impudent expression, a wonderful cloud of auburn hair, and a figure that in almost every supple movement seemed to be offering itself to somebody.

"This is sheer curiosity," she said, still in the cooing voice.

Clive stiffened. She was looking at him.

"I want to know, *really* to know, a—clergyman!"

She made a sweeping, very graceful, but oddly improper movement which brought her face to face with Bob Herries.

"You are one, aren't you? One of the stage carpenters—you know, Willy, the one we call Slow Gin Jack——"

"I know!"

"Slow Gin Jack swore to me that you were."

"Well, Slow Gin Jack's quite right," said Bob, smiling.

"I am a clergyman."

"I'm so thankful. Please introduce me, Willy."

"Is it necessary now? Well, here goes!"

And Heathcote introduced every one to Mrs. Dews, who seemed quite overwhelmed.

"You all look so clever and wonderful," she said. "Mrs. Baratrie, aren't you a champion at Bowls?"

"I'm afraid not," said Vivian, smiling.

"But Slow Gin Jack assured me you were. He says they write about you in a paper he reads called 'Odds and Ends.' Isn't it true?"

"I didn't know it."

"But surely you do play something? Spilikens, perhaps?"

"My wife is a lawn-tennis player," said Clive, abruptly. Mrs. Dews looked at him earnestly.

"Ah, that's it! 'Love all.' Such a sweet way of scoring. But it's awful when they get to 'love forty,' because you can't do that, can you? Willy, may I sit down?"

"Yes."

"And *you* may sit down too," she said to Clive.

And she managed him exquisitely into the corner of a red sofa, and sat down close to him, and leaned almost over him, and, lowering her voice to a smooth and rather sensual murmur, began to talk to him as if they were alone in a cave.

Her interest in clergymen, despite her blatant assertion of it, was evidently as fleeting as it had been momentarily intense. Slow Gin Jack had, perhaps, given her from his ample store of knowledge some titbit which drew her to Clive. And she didn't let Clive go, or raise her delicious voice, till there came a knock at the door, and a voice cried:

"Mrs. Dews! Curtain's up!"

Even then she went on talking and leaning towards Clive till her bosom nearly touched his chest.

"Please don't keep the stage waiting again, Mrs. Dews!" Heathcote said sharply.

"I'm sure it likes to wait for *me*," she answered. "Anticipation always increases the sharp ecstasy of fulfilment."

Nevertheless, she got up, with Clive, and held his hand softly.

"That's a bargain! And a better one than I ever made at the sales. Hill House, Campden Hill, the house with a gilded peacock let into the iron gate."

She swept round to the others.

"I'm so glad to have met you all, though you've made me feel very shy."

She went near to Vivian and made her eyes narrow.

"I shall read 'Odds and Ends' from to-night, so that I may follow your career as a champion. And some day, when it's a great match at Hurlingham—or somewhere—I shall come to *see* you play Bowls."

She turned her Southern-looking head towards Bob Herries.

"And now I know, actually *know* a clergyman!" she murmured. "For you *really* are—aren't you?"

"I really am a clergyman, Mrs. Dews. There's no getting away from it."

"And you are *really* his wife!" (to Mrs. Herries). "How wonderful it all is!"

"Look here, Monkey, you're holding up the stage, I tell you! Off with you at once!" said Heathcote, almost fiercely.

"Listen to him! He's always like that—a slave-driver! He gives us all *Hell!*"

And on the charming word she was gone.

"We must go, too, in the wake of that wonderful personage," said Mrs. Herries. "How delightful her surprise was at finding that I was *really* your wife, Bob, not merely playing the part for the evening, as might have been expected! I don't want to miss the beginning of the last act."

"My dear friend! You don't mean to say the play interests you?" said Heathcote.

"Yes, I do."

"Well now—wait one minute. Two clever men are coming to supper with me at *Ciro's* at half-past eleven, and I want you all"—his keen eyes went to *Clive*—"to join us, if you will."

"We can't, *Heathcote*, though it's jolly kind of you," broke in *Bob Herries* in his gently firm voice. "Mr. and Mrs. *Baratrie* are supping with us in *St. Giles's Place* to-night. I want to talk over something with *Baratrie*."

"Oh?"

The actor's face looked suddenly darker.

"Be careful, Mr. *Baratrie*," he added, "or he'll force you to preach, as he did me. I was at it only to-day."

"My wife told me so."

"Oh—you heard me?"

He looked at *Vivian*.

"Yes. And I was very much interested."

"I hope my pulpit manner——"

"Mr. *Heathcote!*" called a voice in the passage outside the door.

Heathcote picked up the hat which had been lying on the china cabinet, suddenly pulled himself up, straightened his back and looked professional.

"I must be off. I wish you could have come. Two clever fellows—not actors; *Sir Douglas Haynes*, the K.C., and *Barnaby*, the writer. You know *Chisholm Barnaby*, *Herries*?"

"Yes, a vast vat full of wit and learning."

"You've got it! A human vat, and always worth tapping."

He said good-bye. To *Clive* he added:

"I hope you'll come to lunch with me one day at the *Garrick*. Suggest your own day."

"Thank you," said *Clive*, with intense reserve but a mouth that smiled.

"Mr. *Heathcote!*" cried the voice behind the door sharply.

The actor opened the door and slipped out of it with a

movement that reminded Bob Herries of the movement of a greyhound.

When the play was over, Bob Herries said:

"Baratrie, I hope you and your wife didn't mind my accepting my own supper invitation for you before Heathcote. I don't quite see how you are both going to get out of it now."

"We'll come with pleasure. Won't we, Vi?"

"Of course," she said, sending a grateful look to Bob Herries.

"Is there anything to eat, Bob?" asked his wife casually, getting into her shabby black cloak.

"Yes; I told Kate—on the chance. I knew we should have no time for talk at the theatre."

They found a taxi and drove slowly through the fog to St. Giles's Place. As they got out in front of the rectory, Clive said:

"Shall we be able to get a cab to go home?"

"Yes. There's a cab-rank just round the corner."

"What's the fog going to do? If it stays as it is we shall be all right, but if it gets worse . . .?"

He looked at Vivian as he spoke.

"Let's chance it," she said.

"Right you are!"

The cab was paid off and they went into the house.

Vivian went upstairs for a moment with Mrs. Herries, and Clive and the clergyman were left alone together.

"By the way, Herries," said Clive, and there was, his host thought, a touch of something like suspicion in his voice, "you told Heathcote you had something to talk over with me!"

"I said I wanted to talk over something with you."

"Shall we have the chance to-night?"

"We might have a quiet smoke after supper, if you don't mind getting late home for once. I thought you wouldn't want to see more of Heathcote, so I did my best for you."

Clive looked straight at him. The first glance was hard, almost defiant, a glance that seemed trying to thrust the clergyman away; but it softened, though it did not waver, and Clive said:

"I believe you are always doing your best for others. But why should you think that?"

"Wasn't it true?"

"Yes. But how could you know?"

"One feels things. I feel a lot about you. Remember I was with you through your trouble."

"I shall never forget that," Clive said.

He spoke with feeling, yet there was a sort of stiffness in his voice.

"That's a door which will have to be forced!" Herries said to himself.

Then the two women came back, and they went in to the homely supper which Kate and the cook had "managed."

During the meal conversation was lively. Although Bob Herries had had a very hard day, and was tired, his humanity carried him through. His power of "coming up to the scratch" in all circumstances was extraordinary, and when his mind was deeply interested he generally succeeded in forgetting all about his body. Also, he had a genuine love of pleasant company, and enjoyed, almost like a boy, his hard-earned relaxation. His piety had a brother in merriment. He believed in religion making a man happy, and the anxious look in his eyes came from sympathy with the abundant sorrow he saw about him and eagerness to help, not from any brooding melancholy of his own.

Although the supper provided was ordinary enough, he opened a bottle of champagne—one of his sidesmen, a Colonel in the Scots Guards, had recently sent him a dozen, wine you could "rely on"—and had no hesitation in taking a glass himself. The champagne was eminently good; the fire—Kate prided herself on her fires—blazed in the ample

grate; the thick, shabby curtains shut out night and the fog. There was no smartness. The brightness and gilding of Ciro's seemed very far away, as if in another world, a world less real, less firmly anchored in the permanent, than that to which round Mrs. Herries, Bob with his "feather," and their rectory belonged. But the talk was as genuine as the undoctored wine, as spontaneous as the bubbles that winked in the glasses.

An hour ran away with the swiftness of happy things, and to Clive it was an exceptional hour. For in it he knew the natural brightness of a home in which the two reigning spirits were in perfect accord. He was often to remember that home later on in his life as one of those fine realities in which pessimists profess to disbelieve.

The sound of the clock of St. Giles's church booming a heavy note, which sounded large and muffled, struck presently on Clive's attention, although he had not noticed the same clock's announcement of midnight a quarter of an hour earlier.

"I say, it's getting very late!" he said, with a look at Vivian.

Mrs. Herries glanced quickly at her husband and got up.

"Have a quarter of an hour's smoke by the fire, you two," she said. "And then we'll let you go home. You'll find us in the study when you want us."

And she put her fat right arm gently in Vivian's and went out of the room with her, looking unusually short and round by the side of the girl's lithe slimness, which had not yet disappeared.

When they had gone and the door was shut, Bob fetched a box of first-rate cigars which a parishioner—not the Colonel in the Scots Guards—had given him, and offered it to Clive.

"I'll stick to my pipe," he said. "And let's sit by the fire. D'you mind if I turn off some of this light?"

"Not a bit!"

Herries switched off the light above the dining-room table, and bent over the pipe which he had taken up from the mantelpiece. He was now looking very grave. Perhaps, in spite of the supper and champagne, he was beginning to feel the strain of the long day's work. Clive lit a cigar and sat down in one of the worn armchairs which stood on either side of the fireplace. From it he looked up at the small figure standing near him with the white face and the naturally untidy hair. And he wondered about Herries. When the tobacco glowed in the pipe-bowl he spoke.

"What is it you want to talk over with me?"

In reply the clergyman asked him a question.

"Can I do anything for you, Baratrie?"

"How do you mean? In what way?"

Bob Herries sat down in the other armchair, stretched out his legs, crossed his feet, and sighed.

"I'll tell you the truth," he said, after a moment. "We don't see each other very often. We don't know each other very well. You aren't easy to know, Baratrie. But we rather cotton to each other. And then I've seen you pass through great tribulation. Whether you like it or not—probably you don't like it—I must always in a way be intimate with you."

Clive moved and threw one arm over an arm of his chair.

"Well—there it is—I must! And you've got to forgive me for it."

"My dear Herries—forgive you!"

"Yes, yes! It isn't only sins that have to be forgiven. And besides, I know I'm a bit of a thruster. I thrust myself into that big trouble of yours, and your Mother's. I didn't know her at all well. Clergymen aren't much in her line. I scarcely knew you. And yet I pushed in and stayed there."

"Why did you do it?"

"I suppose because I've got an itch to be doing some-

thing for people, and things were particularly bad for you and her."

"They certainly were pretty bad."

After a silence Clive added:

"Have you seen my Mother lately?"

"Last week."

Clive looked at him, but said nothing.

"I want to tell you something," Herries continued slowly, between puffs at his pipe. "I want to tell you how tremendously I admire you for the fight you're putting up."

"What fight?" said Clive, in a voice that had become suddenly hard.

"You hate me for mentioning it, but you know what I mean. I got to know your grit in the trial, and before it came on. I admired it then. But I believe in some ways this is an even more difficult business to work through. It's less concrete—vaguer. You don't know when things are coming. There's no certainty. It must be pretty awful."

Bob Herries spoke now as if he were pondering, almost as if he were talking to himself, were working out something for himself.

"I don't know how I should face such a thing, how I should work my way through it," he added, looking up.

"Through it!" Clive said, harshly. "There's no question of working through such a thing. It's impossible. Can't you see that? How can I ever be not Clive Baratrie the man who was accused of murdering a woman? My only chance, as I saw from the first, was to change my name and go away to a new life."

"You'd thought of doing that?"

"I wanted to do it, but Vivian wouldn't let me."

This burst of frankness, coming suddenly from a man usually reserved, even locked up, surprised Herries. But he did not show any surprise.

"Vivian has big ideals," Clive continued. "She's not

ordinary. It may be ridiculous in these days to speak of heroism—I don't mean what the newspapers chuck about as heroism, I mean the big thing, that isn't merely physical but that's moral and spiritual too,—it may seem ridiculous, but my wife's got something of the heroic in her. And she wanted to be heroic for me too. She tried to deceive me once before we were married. And I suppose she succeeded. I think she did. I must have been a blind fool. But since I've lived with her I know. She would have gone with me anywhere, have given up anything for me, though she pretended she didn't wish to, shrank from it. The dearest woman can be cunning at times, Herries. What she's done, she's done for me. The fact is she's undertaken to make more of a man of me than I can ever be. That's the trouble! We've got our limits and, if things are to go right for us, we must live within them. Well, I'm living beyond mine all the time. That may seem an absurdity, an impossibility, an assertion that must be a lie. I swear to you it's true."

"But we often make a mistake as to what our limits are. Mayn't you be making a mistake about yours?"

"How d'you mean?"

"We are often less circumscribed, much less, than we suppose. We often think we have only Clapham within us, when really we've got Heaven and Hell."

"Hell—yes!" said Clive.

And for an instant Herries saw in his face a naked look. It was gone almost immediately, but the clergyman knew that he would never forget it. It had been like a cry for help, the cry of a soul. Although he had divined something of his guest's mental distress it startled him. Suddenly he realised how little he had suspected of the truth of this man's tragedy. And he felt oddly impotent and almost embarrassed.

"What are you going to do?"

That question, dull enough it sounded, came from his

lips although he had no consciousness of having formed it in his mind.

"Do? What can I do but go on—just go on?"

"But you say you're living beyond your limits. Then some day the tension, the strain on you, will be unbearable, won't it?"

"Probably it will."

Clive was silent for an instant. Then, as if struck by a thought, he said:

"Mind you—she's never to know. I'm trusting you, Herries. I never intended to speak of this to anyone. There's a child coming too."

"Won't that make things better?"

"D'you think so? Will it be a great advantage to my child to have me for its Father?"

"You're morbid about it, Baratrie!" said Herries, with sudden impulse. "There's no shame attaching to a man from an accusation, however horrible, that's been proved false. We are talking as if there was. That's all bunkum. You've every right to hold up your head like any other man."

"Don't I hold it up?"

"You know what I mean. After all a defiance of the body's very little. The true defiance is in the mind and soul. And you——"

"My nakedness has been uncovered to the whole world, Herries. Wherever I go under my own name, every one can see through the clothes. Every stranger can stare on my blemishes. Every vulgar brute hugs his knowledge of that—that intrigue of mine. You were at my trial."

"Yes—I understand. But why mind what people know or think? Can't you brace up and say to yourself: 'After all they can't hurt me. Their stupid or unclean thoughts don't affect me.' I often think there's only one real emancipation. Only the man who is absolutely independent of

public opinion, who looks to no one but himself for praise or blame, is a free man."

"Very likely. But find me that man, Herries."

"You're altogether too sensitive," said the clergyman, and there was just then a slight intentional hardness in his voice. "That really is a weakness, if you will forgive me for saying so, and I believe you might overcome it."

"How?"

"How is any mental effort made? The question of the will's a great mystery, but surely you'll allow that we can and do make will-efforts."

"Oh yes. I know all about that."

"My dear fellow—forgive me!"

Bob Herries got up and stood by the fire.

"It's awfully difficult for anyone to realise another man's trouble," he said. "I don't suppose I do, though God knows I've tried to. I'm trying to now. I want to help. I do want to help."

"I know you do."

"She—your wife—doesn't her belief in you help you? I should have thought it must. She's a splendid creature, I think."

"Indeed she is!" Clive said, and there was a profound note in his voice. "But had I any right to marry her? She has to carry my cursed name everywhere. Is it fair on such a woman?"

"She chose to. She wishes to. Yes, it's quite fair. A woman who loves a man glories in bearing something for him."

"She's made a sacrifice in marrying me. I've brought into her life the necessity for endurance."

"And a jolly good thing too!" exclaimed the clergyman, in his startlingly boyish manner. "You've given her a chance to show her grit. For heaven's sake don't mope about that."

Clive reddened, and the mask-like look returned to his face.

"Conquer it, Baratrie! Conquer it! Rise up and get the better of the cursed thing! I know it's very easy for a man like me who hasn't your burden on his back to talk. But I saw you through the trial. I know what you're capable of, and I feel you aren't anything like finished yet. You can draw out masses more of fight than you've ever drawn out yet. You think not, I know. You think you've made your effort and you're pretty nearly spent. Isn't that it?"

"Possibly!"

"Are you angry with me for my infernally plain speaking?"

After a slight pause Clive said:

"No."

"That's good. I'm afraid I'm a tactless man at times. But I mean well."

He said this with such intense and naïve earnestness, that Clive could not help smiling.

"I shall always think you a trump, Herries," he said, getting up and putting a foot on the fender.

"One can make awful mistakes in dealing with people. I do, I know. I dare say I've blundered with you. But I do feel that you're a man of great strength, in spite of your sensitiveness. And I do feel you'll come through somehow."

"Well, I don't see a way out."

"There is a way out of everything."

"I don't see how you prove the truth of that."

"There is, as long as a change of feeling—what mystics have named a change of heart—can take place in a human being. And you'll surely not deny that such a change is possible in every human being so long as there's life and sanity."

"So—the way out must come through a change of heart!" said Clive, with a sort of slow irony.

"The greatest, the most marvellous of all changes!"

"Is it?"

"Such a change makes a man new."

"Ah!"

"Do you really doubt that?"

"I don't think one can ever get quite away from the old self."

"Baratrie, you've gone through a lot, but there are things, mighty things, that you haven't experienced yet. There are glories you may be destined to know."

Suddenly Bob Herries's eyes blazed. Just for a moment he was transformed. Then the fire died down, and the quiet, pale little man was standing by his hearth and stroking his "feather" with his left hand, and looking wistful and nearly boyish.

"I suppose we ought to join our wives," he said.

"Yes, I think we ought. It's getting well on towards one o'clock."

"And I've got to be up early to-morrow."

"Wonder how the fog is?"

"Let's look!"

Herries went to the window, pulled away the curtains, touched the string of the blind which shot up.

"Now for the window!"

Slowly he pushed the big window upwards.

"I can't see a thing!"

"Shall I turn off the light for a minute?"

"Yes, do. Then we shall know."

Clive switched off the light.

"The fog's absolutely dense, I'm afraid," said Herries.

"Worse than ever. I don't see how you're to get home."

He coughed.

"It chokes you almost."

He pulled down the window.

"We'd better go to the hall door, hadn't we?" said Clive.

"We really must get home somehow if it's possible."

But when they confronted the night from the rectory doorstep they both knew at once that departure was impossible. The fog was in complete possession of the sleeping City. They could see nothing. And the mystery of the fog folded itself about them, seemed to feel at their throats as if trying to strangle them.

Herries shut the door.

"We've got to put you up for the night. We can manage it."

And so it came about that Clive and Vivian slept at the rectory, and breakfasted in the rectory dining-room the next morning in evening dress.

VI

THE New Year had come in cold and blustering, and many fortunate people who could live where they chose were preparing to leave England for a time. The Riviera expresses were crammed; cabins were booked up for many days ahead on the steamers which ply between Marseille and the North African coast; hotels in Southern Italy and in Sicily were filling. The newspapers which record the doings of the rich and the idle were full of reports of gaieties abroad in sunshiny places; of lunch parties in the open air at Algiers, of golf at Cannes under bright blue skies, of white dresses and parasols on the terrace at Monte Carlo, of lawn-tennis at Nice, at Menton, at Hyères.

Many trunks were being packed in London, ready for a flight to the sun. Among them were Jim Gordon's. Jim was due at Cannes in three days to take part in a big lawn-tennis tournament on the Carlton Courts. Afterwards he was down to play in tournaments at the principal places on the Riviera right through the season there up to the last week in April. In that week he had arranged to play at Marseille before returning to England for the summer lawn-

tennis season. He would be away for nearly four months playing, always playing.

Archie Denys looked in to have a last talk with Jim before the latter's departure, and brought with him a note from Vivian. Archie was to have a month on the Riviera a little later on, and was to play in some of the chief tournaments, but the Bank claimed him till the beginning of March. There was of course no question of Vivian's going. She had "dropped out" of lawn-tennis. Nobody could foretell when she would be seen on Court again.

"Hulloh, Jim!" said Archie, coming into Jim's sitting-room in Cork Street, where his friend possessed a minute "service flat." "McQuin says you're nearly packed. Wish I was going with you. But I'm so damned useful at the Bank now that they can't part with me at present. Must have one fellow there with a real business head on his shoulders, don't you know! Vi gave me this for you."

Jim stretched out his strong, wiry hand and took the note.

"Have a cigar?"

"Don't mind if I do!"

"Have a drink?"

"No, thanks. Too early for me," said Archie, looking slightly surprised.

It was after four o'clock. Darkness was already falling; the red curtains were drawn over Jim's windows; the electric light was on; a bright fire was burning.

Jim opened the note and read it, standing up straight by the fire, while Archie, sunk in an armchair, pulled at his cigar and looked away from his friend. He heard the rustle of paper as Jim turned a page, and stared at the rounded toes of his well-polished black brogues. He wanted to look at Jim, but that wouldn't do at the moment. What a lot of things wouldn't do! Archie was feeling angry with life. He was only a boy and he did want to have things his own

way. More than that, he wanted Jim to have things Jim's way. And how impossible that was! Curse it!

"Vivian asks me to look in at six this evening to see the last of her," said Jim, laying down the note in a casual way on the mantelpiece among some pipes.

"See the last of her?"

"Say good-bye before I start. I'll just telephone and tell her I'm coming."

And he went over to the telephone and communicated with Chester Street. Then he came back to the fire.

"She says Baratrie's away."

"Clive—yes; he had to go to Birmingham this morning about some business. I don't know what. He'll be away for nearly a week."

Archie put back his cigar between his lips, took it away again, held it in his hand, stared at it with puckered brows, and then said, in a voice that sounded terribly uncontrolled:

"I wish to God he'd never come back!"

"What's that?" said Jim, sternly.

"Oh, it's no use, Jim! After all we're pals. You've taught me all I know about tennis and most of what I know about life. If I can't say what I want to you, where the devil am I to go for it? It's all very well to say, 'Keep your mouth shut, can't you?' But things kept in for ever—well, they begin to fester. You know I always try to live up to you, but now you're going away I feel like letting things out. After all—I say—what is the good of being pals if one can never speak one's mind?"

"Baratrie's your sister's husband, old chap, don't forget that."

Archie flushed. He had a habit of flushing violently at times when his feelings were stirred. It was a habit which he loathed. But he couldn't get over it.

"D'you think I'd let anyone but you know what I—I did try my best, Jim. I went away with him after the trial."

He spoke with a sort of humble wistfulness, looking sideways at his friend, not searching for praise but only seeking for understanding. "And ever since I've done the best I could. I've never—very well, if you won't let me speak!"

"What's the good of speaking?"

"We aren't all made like you."

"If you think I'm different from the general run of men you're very much mistaken!" Jim said, with a strong touch of bitterness.

"You are different! You are jolly different!"

"Rot!"

"Allow me to know!" said Archie, obstinately. "I should never have let you train me if you weren't."

"Conceited cub!"

Jim turned to the mantelpiece for a pipe.

"So you were so damned important that you needed something special! Well, it's time you learned that we are both ordinary, about as ordinary as they make 'em!"

"Then I only wish he was ordinary too!"

"Who?"

"You know, of course—Clive."

"At it again!"

Jim pulled at his pipe and looked severe, considering things. At last he seemed to make up his mind, for he said:

"Well, if you must—go ahead!"

Archie did not speak for a moment. He sat there wrinkling his forehead as if he were perplexed, were trying to decide what course to take now that Jim had permitted him to take a course. At last he said:

"Vi's being married to Clive is worse even than I thought it would be, Jim."

"Why? Doesn't he do all he can to make her happy?"

The question sounded stern, and Jim's face was stern as he put it.

"Have you any reason to think that——?"

"Oh Lord no, of course not!" Archie interrupted.

"Well then!"

"Jim, you go about. You must know what they say. Of course they don't speak before *us*. But I can feel it in the air. Don't you know what I mean?"

Jim did know. He knew how the lips of the world played with Clive's name. He heard what was said in the Clubs, in Society, wherever men congregated and women talked. In the West End, in the City, everywhere since the trial and the subsequent marriage, Baratrie's character, motives, possible vices, probable passions, had been freely and cruelly discussed. It was as if among men who were clothed he went about stripped naked. His connection with the dead woman, Mrs. Sabine, was a bone for the teeth of the world to sharpen themselves on. He was pronounced innocent of the crime of murder, and people, with the inevitable exceptions, those who "think for themselves," believed him to be innocent. But all privacy was for ever gone from him. And Jim Gordon, who was very reserved, and in some ways very conventional, though markedly characteristic, felt through his love for Vivian the horror of that lost privacy. To be stripped naked and blown upon by all the winds! What a martyrdom! "Poor devil!" men said in the Clubs, when talking of Baratrie. "He got off all right, but I wouldn't be in his shoes." And Jim Gordon had raged, thinking of Vivian. He raged now. Vivian had sunk her name in that horribly notorious name. Wherever she went she was stared at as "Baratrie's wife." It was horrible to Jim, but he did not mean to say so to Archie.

"Can't be helped!" he said.

"And now she's gone out of lawn-tennis!" said Archie, with acute exasperation. "Life is filthy!"

"As to tennis—that might have happened in any case," said Jim.

"You mean whomever she'd married."

"Yes, of course. If that's all you have to say, old chap, it isn't very much, and I don't know why you had to make such a damned shindy about it."

"I was a fool to come to you for sympathy," said Archie, almost savagely.

Then he suddenly realised who needed sympathy most, and added, hot with secret shame:

"Sorry, Jim!"

"That's all right!"

"Fact is, I'm a weakling, haven't got your powers of sticking things out."

"You're a youngster yet."

"And I'd counted on such a different life for Vi. She was to be British Champion, and then World Champion. She was to beat the Lenglen, and—Jim, you're the only one I can speak to——"

"Well?"

"D'you think Vi's really happy with Clive? Can she be?"

"Why not? D'you dislike him?"

"No, I couldn't say that. He's always awfully nice to me, to all of us. But he isn't our sort, is he?"

"Our sort?"

"You know what I mean. It isn't only what they've said about him, what he's been through. Without that he isn't our sort."

"You mean that he's a bit more interesting, more out of the common than we are. That's about the size of it."

Archie looked at his friend's tall, muscular, splendidly athletic figure, and then at his handsome, striking face. But at that moment he was not thinking of Jim's physique, but of something else of Jim's, something moral. Jim had a double strength, Archie thought. There was really something heroic about him.

"I like to hear you talking of yourself as not out of the common," Archie said. "When everybody knows——"

"What everybody knows, or ought to know, is that a fellow who's only fit to play games is a very ordinary product of English life."

"And all you did in the war?"

"Oh—please! Spare us that!" said Jim, with intense repugnance.

"Well, what does Clive do?"

"Earns his living at any rate," said Jim, moodily.

And then he did something that surprised Archie; went across to a cupboard, took out a bottle, and poured out for himself a remarkably stiff whisky. As he added some soda-water he said, as if in explanation of this unusual proceeding:

"I've got a bit of a cold. I shall knock off all this sort of thing directly I start in on the Riviera."

He took a long drink and added:

"Baratrie earns his living, and I don't."

"Well; but surely you're not going to run down games."

"Not I! But what's the good of eternally hitting a ball? Sometimes I feel like chucking it all up, but if I did what else is there for me to do?"

"But you're one of our champions!" said Archie, horrified. "You're a Davis Cup man!"

"Great! Isn't it?" said Jim. "A lawn-tennis hero! My God!"

"I never thought I should hear you talk like that about tennis," said Archie, sincerely amazed. "When Vi used to play you never jeered at it. When you trained me you always took the line that——"

"And so I would again," Jim interrupted him. "Whatever you do, do it to win. I only say that games and athletics aren't worth all the everlasting fuss that's made about them. I say it and I think it."

Archie glanced at the whisky bottle and then at his friend. Jim must certainly be infernally seedy. He didn't look quite himself somehow, a bit heavier, a bit redder than

usual. And fellows always said a lot of things they didn't really mean when they weren't up to the mark.

"I say—are you out of condition?" he blurted out.

Jim sent him a look that was, he thought, oddly suspicious. He couldn't remember ever having seen his friend look at him quite like that before.

"Why should I be out of condition?" Jim said, almost defiantly.

"You said just now you had a cold."

"What's a cold?"

He shot a glance at the mirror over the chimney-piece.

"Don't I look just as usual?"

"No; I don't think you do," Archie said, bluntly.

Jim looked again at the glass with sharp scrutiny.

"I can't see any difference," he said, slowly. "But if there is, the sun down there will soon put me right. I shall be glad to be off. I'm sick to death of England."

This remark, which struck Archie as purely outrageous, called forth no comment. Archie didn't know how to deal with such an amazing blasphemy on the lips of his friend.

"I shall have to go in a minute," he said.

"And I shall soon be off to Chester Street."

"Vi will be glad of a talk with you. She's—she thinks a lot of you, Jim. If she was ever in a hole——"

"A hole?"

"In a difficulty, I'm sure she'd turn to you rather than to anyone else."

"You're wrong there. She wouldn't. She'd turn to her husband, and quite right too."

"You don't take me! I mean if she was ever in a difficulty with Clive."

"We needn't look forward to anything of that kind," said Jim, coldly.

Archie was trying him severely, but he did not want to show it.

"Tell me honestly now, Jim," Archie went on. "I promise you I won't bother you again. Isn't there something about Clive which keeps one off from him?"

"I can't see it. He's always friendly with me."

"I know, but—then you really don't feel anything?"

"Neither of us would if it weren't for what's happened."

"You honestly think it's only all that beastliness about Mrs. Sabine?"

"Don't you?"

"I hardly know. It's awfully difficult to say. Of course he'll always—I mean his name will always be mixed up with Mrs. Sabine's as long as he lives. I do hate that!"

"With time practically everything gets forgotten."

"Not a thing like that."

"Anyhow we can't help it."

"No," said Archie, miserably. "And you think Vi's happy, quite happy, with him?"

It was a cruel question; but somehow he had to ask it.

"I've never had any reason to think the contrary," said Jim, inflexibly.

"She's my sister. But—I don't know why—I can't judge. Vi and I—we aren't quite what we used to be together."

"It isn't often we can judge about other people. I think it's best to leave 'em alone and not try to interfere with 'em."

"But if one cares a lot about them, isn't it natural——"

"Yes. But sometimes you've got to give your nature one straight from the shoulder, a regular Mary Anne."

Archie stared at his friend and then at the empty glass.

"What's up now?" said Jim.

"Nothing."

But in that moment Archie made up his mind about something.

There was a definite change in Jim. He had not noticed

it till now, but now he was sure of it. Jim was beginning to alter in some subtle, as yet mysterious way.

"What's done is done," said Jim, looking at Archie now with hard, inexpressive eyes. "Your sister has married Baratrie. She knew exactly what she was doing. You hate it, but she wished it. She must have counted the cost."

"How d'you know that? Vi is only young still."

A shadow came into Jim's face.

"Look here," he said, "have you any reason to think Vivian is finding life with him more difficult than she thought it was going to be?"

"I couldn't say. She'd never tell me. But I'm sure it must be awful for her. Being stared at and whispered about wherever she goes."

Jim frowned and looked at the empty tumbler. He stretched out his hand to the whisky bottle, like a man who was eager to have another drink. But when the bottle was in his hand he looked at Archie, then went over to the cupboard and locked the bottle away. And Archie found himself thinking:

"He wouldn't have done that if I hadn't been here."

"Well, I'll be off," Archie said.

He was feeling uncomfortable and, in consequence, spoke in his most offhand manner.

"What time d'you start to-morrow?" he added, getting up.

"Morning express from Charing Cross."

"I hope you beat all the French cracks. You'll win the Cannes tournament at the Carlton. I'm dead sure of that."

"May do."

"I say it's a great game, Jim. I don't like to hear you run it down. You'll feel different about it when you go on Court at Cannes, with Cochet, or Aeschliman, or Morpurgo up against you."

"Let's hope so."

"To be a champion's a big thing whatever you may say."

"There are bigger things. But one can't have all one wants. Any message for Vivian?"

Archie hesitated, then he said:

"No, I don't think so. But try to find out whether she's really all right. You know what I mean. See you first week in March."

"Righto."

And then Archie was out in a thawing street passing the Blue Posts.

When Archie had gone Jim went to the mirror above his fireplace and stared at himself in it for a long time, trying, as he would have expressed it, to "take stock" of himself. He had not missed Archie's new observation of him. It had given him a very unpleasant jar, had made him feel unusually small, lessened in the eyes of the boy who had been his pupil, who had given him the hero-worship which leaves no man quite unmoved.

How much had Archie guessed? Or had he guessed anything? Jim was conscious of an unpleasant sensation as of secret guilt which made him feel apprehensive. He had been a fool, a damned fool. But now he was off to the sun. He had months of strenuous exertion before him. He must keep in the pink of condition, simply had to. Out there he would make a fresh start. Just lately in London he hadn't been playing lawn-tennis at all. The weather had been awful, the light so poor that it was scarcely worth while even to play under cover. And so he had let himself go. There had been two or three bad breaks down, when he had been away where nobody knew him for three or four days on end.

London nightmares! He hated to think of them, though there had been a sort of hideous pleasure in them, the pleasure the lowest part of a man feels when wallowing in degradation. That pleasure hadn't lasted long, but it had been de-

finite. It was a frightful lure, the lure to a man usually controlled, a slave to self-restraint, to let himself go.

London nightmares far away from the West End! If Archie knew, or even suspected, what his friend and mentor was capable of when the beast was let out! And if Vivian——

And then Jim looked more sternly, more scrutinisingly into the mirror. But such a girl wouldn't guess. She might notice a slight alteration, see that a fellow wasn't quite up to his usual mark, but she would never guess the reason. It was self-knowledge that made him unnecessarily fearful.

He came away from the mirror, went into his bedroom, had a word with McQuin, the soldier servant of the flats at Number 2E Cork Street, put on his overcoat and set off to the Bath Club *en route* for Chester Street. He met some fellows whom he knew at the Club, and sat for a little while in the balcony above the big swimming bath talking desultorily and looking down into the clear green water. And he was aware of a creeping reluctance to go to Chester Street. If he hadn't promised! It would have been wiser to go away without seeing Vivian again. In four months, with all the physical exertion he was going to put forth, he would come back a new man, or the man he had been once with an even stronger will, a will that had won a victory. But—he must go. And he got up out of his deep armchair, and said good-bye to his pals, and heard them wish him luck with cheery voices. He was clapped on the shoulder. In a cloud of tobacco smoke and an uproar of hearty laughter about nothing particular—the laughter of sheer good fellowship—he was sent on his way. He felt, could not help feeling, his popularity with these fellows. He never touted for it. Indeed he was inclined sometimes to go out of his way to avoid it. Some people disliked him. Nevertheless he was somebody among the young Englishmen who loved sport and athletics. They appreciated and even respected his powers and they let him know it. They wanted him to win

out there in the sun, genuinely wanted victory for him. They would follow his doings on Court in the papers, would lay bets on him.

He mustn't let them down.

"Cheerio! Keep the flag flying. Show 'em England's got a few players left, in spite of Tilden and Patterson."

But if she had been coming out too! If Vivian were to be there, were to be his partner in the mixed doubles! If he were going to have four months in the sun and the great game with Vivian!

She ought to have married him. And he felt it just then fiercely. But the game which had drawn them together had got in the way of that. It had kept him from working, from making money. He had given himself to it, and there was no money in it. That was partly why he, and others like him, delighted in it. One played simply for the game. Nothing sordid about it.

But it had devoured his time and kept him poor. And so he had waited, and Baratrie had come along with his peculiar fascination, which Jim frankly couldn't understand. He could see of course that the fellow wasn't bad-looking, but he could only wonder why Baratrie suited Vivian better than all other men including himself. It seemed to him that in marriage Vivian and he could have been such wonderful pals. But evidently she had thought otherwise. Perhaps she didn't want her husband to be her pal. There must be a great deal in Vivian which he, Jim, did not understand, had no idea of. But no man could love her better than he did, or admire her more. He was certain of that.

As he hailed a taxi-cab and got in to drive to Chester Street he thought of Archie's uneasiness about Vivian, and wondered whether it was caused by mere fancy, or whether the boy really had noticed something. The thought that Vivian was divinely happy with Baratrie had been loathsome to Jim. Yet the thought that she was, perhaps, unhappy,

and could not be released from unhappiness, made him painfully uneasy. She had chosen a difficult life deliberately. Could it be that she was beginning to realise that her moral strength was not equal to the burden she was obliged to bear?

But probably Archie was wrong. He did not really like Baratrie. That fact might well warp his young judgment, breed in him unfounded fears.

On the other hand, knowing Vivian as he did, Jim was certain that if she found out that she had made a great mistake in marrying Baratrie she would never acknowledge it. She was sensitively proud, but above all she was intensely chivalrous. Baratrie had suffered tremendously, must be suffering tremendously still. His wife was no doubt his refuge, the one splendid thing he still had in life. Jim was sure that she would never allow either Baratrie, or the world, to know she repented of the courageous step she had taken in marrying a marked man, a man branded by a great scandal, if indeed repentance came to her. Vi had the tournament temperament. She would never show emotion on Court if the match was going against her. Archie had told Jim that if she ever got into a difficulty she would turn to him who had played the great game with her so often and with so much success. Archie was wrong there. He didn't know his sister. Jim knew her better. He could see Vivian coming to help him, but never coming to him for help.

What deep reserves marriage raised up between old friends! Jim felt them painfully at that moment.

His cab drew up before the small house in Chester Street, and as he paid the chauffeur and turned to ring the bell by the dark green door, Jim thought:

"If *we* were living here together!"

Vivian was waiting for him in the little drawing-room, and as he came in each threw a swift, questioning glance at the other. Hers said:

"What kind of Jim exactly is this?"

His asked:

"Is Archie right? Is she unhappy?"

And the two questions, not uttered, seemed to divide them, to spread about them an atmosphere which was not wholly sincere.

Her glance gave her something quite definite; his left him still in the dark.

Certainly Vivian was slightly changed in appearance now that marriage was bringing into her girlish life what so many women marry for. Her figure was not yet sufficiently altered to be noticeable. Jim would not have known by looking at her that she was going to have a child. She still looked fine drawn, athletic, girlish even. But—how Jim could not have said—experience of some deep kind, very full of meaning, was indicated in, though perhaps not absolutely stamped on, her face. She did not look unmistakably a woman who had suffered, but she did look unmistakably a woman, girl but woman too, who had felt with great intensity. She was obviously full of health and strength, even of elastic vigour. But the Amazon in her was shadowed by something more romantic, something that suggested to Jim possibilities it were wiser for him not to think of. As he greeted her he felt a terrible stab of physical jealousy, and for a moment he hated Clive with a virile hatred that was wholly primitive.

"Archie's been to see me," he said, as he let her hand go. "He was with me when I telephoned. But of course he brought your note, so you knew he was coming."

He spoke with his usual self-possession, and looked self-possessed. But he felt awkward, and knew that he had spoken awkwardly. Why tell her something that she already knew since she had given her brother the note?

"So your husband's away!" he added.

"Yes. He's gone to Birmingham. I told him I should ask you to look in before you went abroad, to say good-bye."

"Asking permission?" Jim thought.

"He told me to wish you luck for him. He meant specially luck on Court, I think."

"Thank him for me, please, will you?"

He had sat down now and glanced round the room, comparing it mentally with his sitting-room. He had been in it before of course, but this evening it seemed to him more cosy than usual, prettier, more intimate, a regular nest for intimacy, just what a man wanted when the softer moments came, when the lure of energy, skill and pugnacity abated, gave way to another lure.

"Haven't you done something to the room?" he asked.

"No. Oh—except that screen near the piano with dancing figures on it. That's an addition. Clive found it in an old shop buried in the East End, and gave it to me for a birthday present."

"Does Baratrie go to the East End?" said Jim.

She noticed a change in his tone, a slight change, too, in his expression, but she did not understand them.

"He has been there with Bob Herries, Mr. Herries the rector of St. Giles's, who married us. You know him, don't you?"

"I've met him now and then at the Bath Club. He's a good chap. I shouldn't think the East End is much in Baratrie's line, is it?"

Again Vivian wondered.

"Do you ever go there?" she asked, moved by an instinct which she did not understand.

"Oh, that's quite off my beat!" he said.

And she felt evasion in the reply. But why should Jim want to evade such an ordinary question?

She turned the conversation to their game. Although for a time she was obliged to give up playing, her love for it had not diminished. Her last tournament had been at King's Club on the covered courts, where she had been in the final

of the mixed doubles with Jim, and Clive had looked on from the gallery. Since then, early in October, she had not played once. Now she asked Jim to tell her his programme. He had an excellent memory, and was able to run it off for her with scarcely a hesitation.

"I end up at Marseille," he said finally.

"Four months of tournament play!"

She looked at him rather intently with her grave, kind eyes.

"Hard work, Jim. You'll need to be at the top of your form to do yourself and us justice!"

"Us?"

"Us of the English tennis world. You represent us and England, you know, on Court. You'll be our chief male star out there, the only English Davis Cup player on the Riviera this Spring. We shall expect great things from you. I suppose you'll meet most of the best French players?"

"Yes, I believe I shall. Several of our crowd will be out there too; Jenny Littlethwaite, of course, Mrs. Charlesworth, Elizabeth Saxby, Bob Murray, and naturally old Madding. Two or three of the Indians are coming. The Dartrees will have their villa full up. You remember it?"

"Yes—that heavenly garden."

"It's got a jolly view of the sea too."

"Are you staying with them?"

"I shall be for part of my time. I wish you were coming out again, Vivian."

"I had a wonderful time out there."

"You'll play again, thank the Lord."

"Not for a long while."

"I'll look for it, however long the time is. I do better with you in doubles than with anyone else. You keep me up to the notch, inspire me somehow. And for the sake of 'us'—I quote your own word against you—you've got to play. You're really our one female hope in lawn-tennis. Some day

you've got to beat the Lenglen and put Old England back where she ought to be at the top. After all, we invented lawn-tennis. You owe it to *us* to come back, and don't you forget it."

"Perhaps—some day!" she said, rather doubtfully.

"You'll break Archie's heart if you give up match play."

"Archie!"

For a moment she looked very gentle, wistful even.

"He's such a boy still. There are things he scarcely understands. I shall want to come back."

"Sure?"

"Yes. But how can I tell? Life has other things in it besides tennis—even for *us*."

Jim was silent for a moment. Then, without looking at her, he said:

"Sometimes I curse the game."

Vivian was startled by the depth of angry feeling in his voice, but she did not show it. She only leaned forward a little, and said quietly:

"Why?"

He looked at her now, and his grey eyes were hard under his level brows. They were eyes that could gleam but that seemed to have little depth, in that respect different from the deep eyes of Clive. His smoothly shaven, powerful face had a dark expression on it, heavily dark and sombre.

"I curse the game because it eats up nearly all a man's time, if he gets to the top and means to stay there."

"Not always," she said.

And she mentioned four well-known English players who were in business, or who had professions. Jim nodded his head.

"Yes, they're strong players, but I can beat them all except Carrick; and probably the only reason of my beating them is that I give more time to it than they do. As to Carrick, he's a miracle, the sort of player who's born once in a blue moon."

"But there are crack French players who are in business."

Again she was going to give him some names. But he interrupted her.

"The fact is I suppose I've been too keen, cared too much for the game, and now it's having its revenge on me for my trouble. I don't know how to walk in the middle way. That's my difficulty, and always has been. I was always mad on games and sports. When I was a boy it was cricket, football. Then at Oxford it was swimming, rowing, running, racquets. And then somehow lawn-tennis got hold of me. And here I am, a Davis Cup player and practically a pauper. What's the good of it, after all? Month after month of playing a game!"

"It keeps you fit," she said, but soberly, not with any enthusiasm.

"Four months' tournaments abroad, and then back to England and play right through the summer!"

He jerked up his strong head.

"'Pon my word, sometimes I think it's contemptible. And yet I haven't the heart to give it up. I've got into the habit of it, and what else could I do now? Physical things get an awful grip of you. I suppose some day I shall be like old Madding, a wrinkled, grey-haired, dried-up lawn-tennis machine, without a thought beyond the next match, or a genuine desire beyond the desperate longing not to be finally banished from the centre court at Wimbledon. A nice look out for the future!"

"Then why not make a change? Why not play less, keep yourself for the big matches and let the rest go?"

"Well—and—and——?"

"And do something. Go into business, take up some profession!"

"What am I fit for? I ought to have stayed on in the army. But when the war was over one seemed to have had

enough of soldiering. And I didn't feel about the game then quite as I do now."

He gave her a long look.

"*You* came into the game, Vi. And if you had stayed in it things would have been different."

She did not answer his look.

"Perhaps it's a good thing for me that circumstances have forced me out of it for a time," she said. "You may be right. Too much love of a game may make one waste one's life. It's so difficult to know, to find out, just the right way. But some of us certainly seem to be specially adapted for what I suppose I must call bodily, rather than mental, things, though of course mind is needed in them. For instance, you were made to be a great athlete, Jim. I'm certain of that. And I can't help thinking it's a fine thing to be. It implies pluck and control, patience and severe self-discipline."

Her eyes were upon him now.

"A man can't be, go on being, a great athlete if he's a dissipated man. There's virtue in a body kept in perfect training, I think. And if you intend to keep your place at the top there can be no letting go. It's a Spartan sort of business and I like it for that."

She was still gazing at him, steadily and sweetly. There was an immense kindness, friendliness in her brown eyes, but there was a firmness, an intention in them which Jim did not miss. Vivian was very strong, he thought, not coldly, warmly strong. What did she mean now? What was she driving at? Could she have any special reason for speaking like this? Her words went home to him. They applied acutely to him just now. But surely she could not know that. Or did she know? And sudden cold went through him.

Those London nightmares! He would rather that anyone on earth knew about them than that Vivian should know. And his eyes against his will searched hers guiltily.

"Yes, there's good in athleticism," he said, uncomfortably. "I'm the last to deny that. And I don't need much money. I can get along. There's no reason why I should wish to pile up money."

"Are you very dissatisfied, Jim?" she asked him.

She knew it was a dangerous question, but she had to ask it. She wanted to help him, and did not know how to set about it. There was that unavowed, yet fully understood, love of his in the way.

"Dissatisfied?" he said. "How? What with?"

"With life in general?"

He hesitated, and seemed unwilling to answer. Finally he said:

"I wouldn't say that. There's always some good in life if one keeps healthy and strong. And you—what do you say?"

He was thinking of Archie's doubts as he said that.

"I think life is profoundly interesting," she answered, slowly. "But I think one needs a tremendous amount of courage to get through it finely, to live it as it should be lived."

"Well, you've got all the courage that's necessary."

"Oh no."

"I say you have. What's more, I say you've proved it."

"But very probably I have only lived less than half of my life."

"I should hope so."

"Then there's the long future. And one doesn't know what the tests of the future will be."

"Anyhow, up to now I haven't seen the flaw."

"You see my actions, but not my poor little anxious thoughts."

She said it, but as she said it she managed to convey a whimsical sound into her voice, as if she were half laughing at herself, did not perhaps quite mean that her thoughts

really were anxious. And he was not sure whether underneath she was very serious, or whether she was playing with the subject and with him. His mind was not made up about her. She had made up her mind about him. He had set his feet on a downward path. But probably he had not yet gone very far. And she now knew, as a woman knows certain things about herself in connection with a man, that she still had great influence over him. In giving herself to Clive she had not destroyed that influence. It might easily have been so, but it had not been so. Jim still looked to her as to no other woman. That was tragic, perhaps, but it filled her with a sense of obligation which was not without hope. Some men cannot be restrained. There is a Devil within them that nothing can rule. Jim was not one of these in spite of the sometimes fierce decision of his character. She certainly had the power to help him if the great day of difficulty ever came to him.

That evening she felt a deep sense of sympathy for him. She longed to tell him of it, to say out all that was in her heart. But she was held back by the knowledge that if she did that she would almost certainly increase his affection for her. She dared not risk that. So she began to talk in a more lively, more ordinary way, about the Riviera, the Dar-trees, about people whom they knew and things they had done together.

At last he got up to go.

"Well, it's for four months this time, Vivian."

"Yes, till May."

Her hand was in his, and she gave his hand a squeeze as she said:

"Play to win, live to win, all the time out there! We expect it of you."

"We! But do *you* expect it of me?"

"Yes. The Spartan life is the way to victory."

She took away her hand.

"Then you still care so much for the game? It matters so much—you think?"

"I care for something else too, something that matters a great deal to me."

"How can it?" he said.

She felt the dangerous ground. Sympathy was perhaps carrying her too far. Sex made so many things difficult, or absolutely perilous.

"Good-bye, Jim!" she said. "We shall all put our money on you."

When he had gone she remembered, and was troubled by, the last look in his eyes. And she was oddly troubled, too, by something else.

Why had Jim seemed startled when she had spoken of Clive's going to the East End? And why, when she had asked him whether he ever went there, had he deliberately evaded giving a direct answer to her question? Such a trifling matter, and yet it had certainly caused him discomfort.

Clive—Jim—the East End!

She looked towards the screen with the dancing figures by the piano and knit her brows, wondering.

VII

SINCE the visit to the theatre on the night of the great fog Mrs. Herries had become intimate with Vivian, probably the most intimate woman friend Vivian had, and as the time drew on, and Winter was merging into a cold and wintry Spring, laden with sleety showers, and whipped by vicious east winds, she often went to Chester Street to spend a few minutes with her. She was now very fond of the girl. Indeed her fondness was growing into a deep affection which she often longed to extend to Clive.

But this she could not do. There was something in Clive which disturbed, which almost distressed her. She was not

quite sure what it was. She admired him for the fight he was making, which she had long ago fully realised. She felt full of pity, even of intense compassion for him. His love and care for his wife touched her. Nevertheless there was something about him that made her feel uneasy against her desire, even against her will.

Sometimes she tried to believe that this troubling element was an effect of Clive's peculiar and remarkable appearance. But that was a mere pretence and, being very sincere with herself, she soon knew it for what it was. At other times she wondered whether Clive would have affected her so strangely before his great misfortune had come upon him. She had not known him till after his trial. Perhaps she was unpleasantly influenced by the scandal attaching to his name.

The thought that it might be so almost angered her. She did not want to be a partner in the horrible unfairness of life, which she and Bob spent so much of their time in trying to redress. Was she then one of the horrid crowd who could never forget an accusation even when it had been disproved? Her ever-growing admiration and affection for Vivian made her wish to be peculiarly merciful in regard to Vivian's husband. And yet she could not be quite sure that she did not partake some of the wholly uncharitable feeling which in others she could only condemn, in herself must despise.

She said nothing about all this to her husband. Instead of speaking about it she tried hard to get the better of the discomfort which she always felt when she was with Clive, and even sometimes when she only thought about him, imagined him with her, standing before her.

But she did not succeed in this endeavour.

One day in March she went to Knightsbridge to call on Clive's Mother. Bob had suggested her doing this—though he had added that very likely Mrs. Baratrie would refuse to see her. When she reached the door Kingston said that he did not know whether his mistress was "at home," but that

he would go and find out. He came back in a moment and asked Mrs. Herries to come upstairs to the drawing-room.

She found Mrs. Baratrie alone standing up. An armchair was pushed forward close to a log fire, and on a book-rest fastened to it there was a large volume which Mrs. Baratrie had evidently been reading when the visitor was announced. After greeting her Mrs. Herries looked at the book and was surprised to see that it was a Bible.

Mrs. Baratrie's cruelly observant eyes did not miss her visitor's glance at the Holy Book, but she made no allusion to it. She bent, shut up the Bible, pushed the book-rest aside, sat down with her guest and began to talk in a thin, rather sharp-edged voice. And Mrs. Herries thought that there was a sound of ill-health in her voice; but perhaps she imagined that because she had immediately been shocked by her appearance.

Mrs. Baratrie talked well. She had an animated and animating mind, and expressed her thoughts clearly and pungently. Tragic she might be; sluggish she could never be. She was far cleverer than Mrs. Herries, who thought her a very interesting woman.

She found her interesting now, but she did not feel at ease with her. As a rule Mrs. Herries was the least shy of women. She had none of the average Englishwoman's self-consciousness. When with others she seldom thought about herself. But to-day Mrs. Baratrie made her self-conscious.

Mrs. Baratrie looked very ill and had aged greatly since Mrs. Herries had last seen her. But she spoke of her health as excellent and with a sort of defiance dwelt on her joy in living a "hermit's life."

"I've given up seeing people," she said. "I have all my time to myself now. And the days aren't long enough for me."

"But why did you let *me* in?" asked Mrs. Herries, trying to smile under the piercing eyes fixed upon her.

"We have always got on and I have a great admiration for your husband. You both live for others, I know. And that's splendid. I'm thoroughly selfish—not like you. I live definitely for myself. And—don't be disgusted—I find it delightful. There's such a sense of calm and safety in being absolutely your own mistress and the sole owner of your hours. I never feel dull."

"I can't imagine you as dull. But isn't it rather lonely?"

"Not a bit. I read enormously. I am never tired of reading."

Mrs. Herries looked again towards the Bible.

"Yes, I even have time for the Bible," said Mrs. Baratrie. "And how many people who live in London can say that, I wonder? I've been really studying the Bible lately. When you arrived I was reading the Book of Job. There's a story with a happy ending for you! But, d'you know, despite the magnificence of the telling, it doesn't convince me."

"Surely it's her sarcastic bent of mind which makes me self-conscious!" thought Mrs. Herries at this moment.

"A man who could be made happy as Job apparently was must be a poor sort of man, I think," continued Mrs. Baratrie, always in the sharp-edged voice. "To lose property and have it restored is all very well. But to lose people—wives, children and so on—and have your loss made up to you by being presented with other people!"

She raised her eyebrows and the ghost of an ugly smile wavered over her lips.

"Job must have had a very peculiar temperament if *that* satisfied him! Don't you think that the loss of someone loved is an irreparable misfortune to anyone with a heart?"

Mrs. Herries thought of Bob.

"Indeed I do," she said.

"But perhaps we are too sentimental," continued Mrs. Baratrie, bending, crouching almost over the fire, and humping her thin shoulders. "I noticed during the war, that's supposed

by some simple souls to have made us all better than we used to be, that all the young widows made haste to marry again. Some even married twice during the hostilities and seemed quite satisfied about it. But somehow to me one person—even if he's only a husband—doesn't seem quite as good as another. I'm out of the mode, I suppose. The best thing of all is not to depend upon anybody for one's happiness, to be sufficient to oneself. And—it may seem very selfish and conceited—that's what I am now."

"And that's a great lie!" said something within Mrs. Herries. "Are you really quite contented with the whole world shut out?" she asked, not daring to state her thought.

"I should be miserable if it weren't."

"Well—but you always have your son and that dear wife of his."

Mrs. Baratrie bent still more forward to change the position of a log in the fire.

"Oh, I don't count the family," she said, in a low, and decidedly curt, voice.

"Well now and that's just what I should count, and count twice over," said Mrs. Herries, with perfectly natural bluntness.

Mrs. Baratrie looked round, still bending. The firelight glittered in her eyes, and played over her withered and flattened cheeks. She opened her lips to say something, then suddenly shut them, straightened up and turned towards the door. At the same moment it opened and Clive Baratrie came in.

He looked surprised, almost startled, at finding Mrs. Herries there. A nervous quiver went all through him, she thought. He reddened slightly, then evidently made an effort and looked suddenly almost sternly calm. But she had the impression that this was a man absolutely persecuted by his nerves, who could be startled by the least unexpected occurrence, however slight. The strange thing was that directly

he had recovered from his evident surprise Mrs. Herries felt that her presence in the room brought him a sensation of relief. And it struck her that this Mother and son were not happy together. Yet Bob had spoken of Mrs. Baratrie more than once as a deeply loving Mother in whom the maternal instinct was even abnormally developed. And Bob had had the opportunity of studying her in tragic days, which must surely have revealed the very depths of her heart.

Clive was on his way home from business and had "dropped in," he explained, to see how his Mother was getting on. A very natural thing to do, but somehow Mrs. Herries felt that the doing of it had involved some kind of self-sacrifice. Her son's arrival had certainly not made Mrs. Baratrie happier. She looked tragically detached and observant as she sat over the fire, seemed to bristle with a watchful acuteness which was unnatural in its intensity. Mrs. Herries would have gone up to go if she had not felt positive that her being there was a relief to Clive, and perhaps also to his Mother.

About Mrs. Baratrie she did not feel sure. There was something so strange in Mrs. Baratrie's voice, in her manner, even in the way in which she sat on her chair, looking like a bit of wreckage on fire, that Mrs. Herries could not tell exactly how she was affected by anything so commonplace as a very ordinary and well-meaning woman's presence in her drawing-room. What was the matter with these two people. Mrs. Herries began to connect the discomfort which she had more than once felt in Clive's company with another discomfort. But that came from his Mother. Perhaps it was caused then by some trick of manner, or by some peculiarity of temperament which had descended from the Mother to the son. In that case it had nothing to do with the tragic happening of Mrs. Sabine.

Mrs. Sabine!

Mrs. Herries felt guilty as she remembered Bob's words, sinister even on his lips: "I sometimes feel that they haven't

done with Mrs. Sabine yet." By "they" his wife had supposed that he meant Clive and Vivian. Now mentally she added a third personality to the group of two, and she did this quite instinctively, as women often do things without argument or any minute thinking out.

But Mrs. Sabine had departed across the great gulf. How could she ever return to do harm?

Clive sat down by the fireplace opposite to his Mother. Mrs. Herries was between them. He spoke of topics of the day, stirred up a little argument about some social subject between the two women. He seemed to be trying to warm up their minds, rather cold by the fire which gave heat to their bodies. But Mrs. Herries felt a strange detachment in him. She was sure that he was entirely uninterested in all that was interesting to most London men. His Mother was a recluse and openly proclaimed her indifference to the rest of the world, not "counting" the family. Clive Baratrie boldly faced and subtly fought the world. Yet they were alike in peculiarity. From each of them something, some great thing, had blotted out the fascination of life, that many-sided fascination which appeals to all ordinary humanity.

Again Mrs. Sabine rose up in Mrs. Herries's mind, almost as the Witch of Endor rose up out of the earth before Saul.

Making an effort—for she felt unusually strange, not at all herself, in this room which seemed full of moral misery—Mrs. Herries asked after Vivian, whom she had not seen for a few days. As she did so she saw Mrs. Baratrie shoot a sharp, sideways glance at her, a glance which suggested to her the mental question, "How much does she know?"

"Vivian's getting on all right," Clive said, heavily.

"She's always in the wholesome centre," said Mrs. Baratrie, in an oddly brisk voice. "No false steps into side-paths for her. And so the natural has absolutely no terrors for her."

"I've become very fond of Vivian," said Mrs. Herries.

Looking straight into the fire, Mrs. Baratrie said:

"I'm very glad Vivian has you for a friend."

She was silent for an instant; then very unexpectedly she added:

"I love Vivian, but I don't suit her."

Clive moved like a man startled.

"My dear Mother! I don't know why you should think that," he said, in a hurried, uneven way.

"I think it because I know it," said Mrs. Baratrie. "But the fact is that I no longer suit anyone. There comes a period in some lives, Mrs. Herries, when the wilderness has to be traversed. And the traveller in the wilderness acquires quite a special brand of mind, which doesn't accord with the mind of anyone who doesn't know what journeying in the wilderness means. When the Bedouin comes to town he seems a barbarian to every citizen. The desert has stamped him. He's unfit for anything else. Well, the stamp is on me, and that's why I live as I do. Compared with our dear and beautiful and beloved Vivian I'm a savage. Not physically, in another way. She never tells me so, but I'm sure—yes, Clive, I really am—that she often wonders how such a savage will manage, will behave, as a grandmother. Can you imagine me with a baby in my arms, Mrs. Herries?"

The question sounded bitterly sarcastic.

"I should think any Mother must be quite at home with a baby," said Mrs. Herries, in the soft, harmonious voice which was one of her attractions.

Mrs. Baratrie shook her thin shoulders, apparently in a violent shiver.

"I've got a cold coming," she said, as if to excuse or explain it.

Clive opened his lips to make some rejoinder, but before he could speak she went on:

"You're quite wrong, Mrs. Herries, quite wrong. One forgets completely all about babies. It's so long ago that I've totally forgotten what I suppose I must have known as

a young Mother. Life is said to be short. But to me it seems terrifically long, when I look back—which, by the way, I very seldom do. There are periods which I have passed through—they might have been in other lives sunk deep long ago in the bog of Time, the engulfing bog. I shall have to learn how to be a grandmother, I shall indeed."

"Mother, if you've got a cold coming you must take great care of yourself," said Clive.

"Well, I do. It's warm in here, and I never go out now."

"That's just it! You ought to. You——"

"In the summer, when the bright weather is here, and I'm a practised and perfect grandmother, perhaps I'll go out again—with the perambulator."

And then Mrs. Herries got up to go away. As she was saying good-bye to Mrs. Baratrie, Clive stood by, looking flushed and tormented. But when she turned to him and held out her hand, he said:

"I'll come with you. It's getting late. It's time for me to be off. Good-bye, Mother dear."

"Good-bye, old boy," said Mrs. Baratrie.

She had got up out of her chair and was standing with her back to the fire. Now she pushed up her left cheek. It was as if she had a tic. There was something pathetic about it. Clive bent down and she kissed him. The cheek was still twitching and now her lips were trembling.

"Good-bye, good-bye!" she said, looking at Mrs. Herries with defiantly cheerful eyes. "And now, having finished with Job, I am going to have a long cosy evening with Henri Barbusse. One can get plenty of variety, more than enough really, into one's life through books. *They* don't always say the same thing over and over again if one chooses carefully among them. And I choose with prayer and fasting. Good-bye, good-bye!"

She stood there smiling as they went out.

"Are you driving?" asked Clive, with some hesitation,

when they were in the hall and he was finding his hat and stick.

"Yes, if going in an omnibus is driving."

"Technically I suppose it is. I'll walk with you to the place where they stop. It's only a few yards unfortunately."

"Do you go down Sloane Street?" she asked him.

"Yes. But if you had been walking—I——"

He hesitated, and glanced at her inquiringly, then he added abruptly:

"One can always pick up a bus at Hyde Park Corner."

"Yes, or further on," said Mrs. Herries, cheerfully.

"That's true," he said.

And again he looked at her.

They came out into the hum of Knightsbridge, which was not dominated by the sharp and windy coldness of the March evening. The lamps were already lit, for it was one of the dark London days. People went by in droves. Across the way, beyond the Island, the great shops glared defiantly into the slowly increasing darkness.

"There are always such crowds here," said Clive, as they stepped into the thoroughfare. "If you really don't mind walking a little way, what do you say to turning into the Park by the French Embassy?"

She felt sure he had something he wanted to talk about to her, and wondered very much what it was as she answered:

"Why not, as I've got an escort?"

"Thank you," he said. "Odd the difference between my Mother's life and where she lives, isn't it?"

"Yes; a wall, and what it can do!"

Clive said nothing more till they had turned to the left and were out of the crowd. Mrs. Herries felt that he was thinking deeply and painfully, was abstracted in thought. She felt, too, that something was urging him to break through the reserve he had always shown with her, and to be more

intimate with her than he had been heretofore. His first remark after their silence surprised her.

"How do you think my Mother looks?" he said.

Mrs. Herries had thought that perhaps he was going to speak about Vivian.

"Your Mother? I don't think she looks well," she said, truthfully.

"Do you find her altered since you first met her?"

"Yes. She has altered."

"It's a case of nerves."

"Yes?"

"Yes. She's all on edge. She has always been what is called a nervous woman, highly strung, ultra-sensitive. I wish I could persuade her to come out of her shell. I hate seeing her always shut up alone. I wanted her to change her way of life, to travel. But she won't. I can't persuade her."

"Perhaps there is no one she would care to travel with."

"Do you know how old she is?"

She saw his head turned towards her, his large eyes fixed upon her.

"No."

"How old do you think she looks?"

Mrs. Herries considered for a moment.

"Sixty-four? Sixty-five perhaps?" she said, doubtfully.

"She's only sixty."

"I always find it difficult to tell ages."

"It seems to me," he said, in a lower voice and with a sigh, "that Mother's withering—withering away."

He stopped on the path and she stopped beside him.

"Isn't she?" he said.

"I don't know. I hope not. But she looks far too thin," said Mrs. Herries, feeling painfully uncomfortable.

"Why should she hate the idea of Vivian having a child?" he continued, staring down at her.

"But does she?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. Didn't you notice—to-day?"

"She certainly seemed doubtful of her powers as a grandmother," said Mrs. Herries, trying to speak lightly, and to look serene under his sombre eyes.

"She doesn't want Vivian to have a child," he said, with heavy emphasis.

"Some women don't like to be grandmothers. I suppose it makes them feel old."

"Oh, my Mother isn't that sort of woman. She hasn't an ounce of nonsense in her, never has had. She's not an ordinary woman."

They were now walking slowly on again.

"I'm quite sure she isn't," said Mrs. Herries. "She gives me the impression that she's abnormally acute."

"Acute!" he said, in a voice that sounded startled. "What do you mean exactly by that?"

"Well, there's something piercing about her. At moments she looks almost like a seer."

"A seer?"

"Clairvoyante."

"D'you believe in that sort of thing? I don't."

"There were seers in the Bible."

"Oh—the Bible!"

"D'you reject it?" she said, quietly.

"No, of course not. But I can't believe half of it, and I expect very few people can."

"Your Mother was reading it to-day when I came in."

"I know. She's taken to studying it lately. I don't know why."

His voice still sounded uneasy.

"She writes out sentences—that specially strike her, I suppose. The other day when I went to see her—she was

up in her bedroom at the moment—I found some words written several times on a slip of paper.”

“What were they?”

“*The souls of the Just are in the hands of God.*”

Mrs. Herries felt the tears start to her eyes, as she often did when she heard, or came across, some grand, penetrating and final sentence from the greatest of all books.

“They’re splendid words, tremendous words,” she said.

“Yes; but why should she copy them down?”

“I wonder.”

“I wish something could be done for my Mother,” he said, and Mrs. Herries now began to understand why he had wished to talk to her intimately. “Before it is too late. I mean something to take her out of herself. I can’t do anything. I am no good to her. Vivian—well, she has enough as it is, too much. I can’t put anything more on her shoulders, especially now. She ought to be kept out of all trouble. It—they say unborn children can be affected by——” He broke off abruptly. “I’m worried about my Mother, Mrs. Herries,” he continued, after an instant’s pause. “And I don’t know what to do. There are so many things on me that sometimes—but that’s no matter. Only you and your husband are such bricks, always trying to help others, that, finding you in the house to-day, I thought I would venture to speak to you about her. If only I could get her interested in something outside of the house! She sits there all day long alone. It must affect her mind, the narrowness of her life now. She never even comes to us. Vivian goes to her, of course. But she doesn’t seem to want even us. I don’t think we are very welcome when we do go. She won’t see a doctor.”

“She assured me that she was in excellent health.”

“She always says that. But look at her!”

“What would you like Bob, or me, or both of us, to try to do?”

“Well—I was thinking. You see she’s taken to reading

the Bible lately. How would it be if one tried to interest her in work for others, in social work of some kind, or even perhaps religious work? Anything to take her mind off herself."

"But is she always thinking about herself? Is she self-centred?"

"Don't you think so? What else——"

"I was only wondering."

"I'm sure if she could only be induced to take up some work of a social, or religious kind—anyhow, work for others—it would be a perfect blessing to her. I can't stand the thought of her sitting there eternally by herself."

There was exasperation in his voice.

"I want to be brutal and drive her out," he added. "But I'm impotent."

"But why?"

"Oh, I'm her son. Probably she has a sort of idea that I'm still a child."

"No, I don't believe she has."

She spoke with conviction. He did not ask her what this conviction was founded on.

"Anyhow, I know that I could have no influence upon her," he said.

"But—I think she loves you very much," said Mrs. Herries.

She had suddenly felt that it was so, suddenly felt it, almost like a revelation, out there in the dimness of the Park, in the windy cold air, as she had not felt it in the warm Knightsbridge drawing-room. And there came into her mind the remembrance of her own remark, "A wall, and what it can do!" There was a wall built up by invisible hands between this mother and son, dividing them. But who had built it? She did not know that, but she thought of those hands as cruel, inexorable, vindictive.

Clive made no comment on her impulse remark, only turned his face away from her for a moment.

They were very near Hyde Park Corner now, and could see the large open space where the road sweeps round towards the north side of the Park by the statue of Achilles. Mrs. Herries saw Clive staring at the lights and the roadway. A motor slipped by them going swiftly towards the Marble Arch. Its small red light diminished and disappeared. The March wind blew viciously through the trees. An elderly woman in a tattered black dress passed them slowly and, as she passed, peered at them with red-rimmed eyes. And just then Mrs. Herries was conscious of desolation. She realised her own happiness, but in it she realised painfully how widespread unhappiness was. This man at her side was desperately in need of help, and he was asking for help, but not for himself, for his Mother, the strange woman whom she had just seen crouching over the fire. He said he was impotent to do anything for her. That was because of the wall. Mrs. Herries wished she could break that wall down. To do that would be more efficacious than an attempt to persuade Mrs. Baratrie to take up social or religious work. She was seized by an impulse to be very frank. She was frank and impulsive by nature. Sometimes she was cautious, and restrained herself. More often she followed the promptings of her nature. She did so now.

"Let us turn back for a few minutes," she said. "Or if you prefer it, let us walk on a little on the Park Lane side of the road. Shall we?"

"Yes, if it isn't keeping you out too late."

"Not a bit."

They crossed over, passed through a gap in the railing, and walked slowly northwards.

"Look here, Mr. Baratrie," she then said, with her bluntest manner, "since you've spoken to me you mustn't mind my being frank with you. If you had asked me to try to help Vivian in some way I would certainly have tried to do it. And probably I could have done it, because Vivian is fond

of me, and I feel I understand her rather well. But with your Mother it's different. I know her very slightly. She has never admitted me into her intimacy. I don't pretend to understand her. And I'm not like Bob—a thruster. Bob and I are quite different in our temperaments and ways. He can do things I could never undertake, and carry them through. But though I feel in the dark with your Mother, I'm quite sure of one thing about her. I'm sure because I have an instinct which tells it me. She would never take up social or religious work such as you suggest, and if she did she wouldn't be any good at it."

"Why not?" he asked.

And there was a sharpness in his voice.

"Because she's too peculiar. Are you angry with me?"

"Angry, Mrs. Herries! No—of course not!"

"To be successful in such work one needs to be naturally sympathetic, full of sympathy for others. One has as it were to empty one's soul of self and then fill it up with love of humanity. At least, that's my idea of the matter. I feel that your Mother, as she is now, couldn't possibly do that. She seems to me—she gives me the feeling—how shall I put it?"

She paused for a moment.

"I feel that she's tremendously isolated. That's how I feel her. And I feel, too, as if she had a great grudge against humanity. I don't know why. The last thing she would do, I think, would be to work for others. She can love. She loves you intensely. I know that somehow. But I don't believe she has any altruism in her. I don't believe she pities *humanity*."

"Perhaps you are right," said Clive, in a low voice.

"I hope you don't mind my——"

"No, no."

"I might of course get Bob to try. But I know it wouldn't be any use. She couldn't help others in her present con-

dition. She wants help herself. Remember what she said about the wilderness. And it was true. I felt that when she was speaking."

"You're right, you're right," he said. "I was a fool to think—I was catching at a straw. I'm, so unhappy about her."

Mrs. Herries stopped, as he had stopped on the path a few minutes before.

"I feel there's only one person who can help her," she said.

"Who's that?" he said, looking down into her eyes.

"You."

"I!" he exclaimed, with sudden, intense bitterness.

"Yes. Of course I don't know whether she can get help from another source. That won't always come in a moment. You know what I mean. One reads the Bible, but it doesn't always come. Still, the souls of the Just *are* in the hands of God, and not only after death. And surely she—but I don't want to use any religious clichés with you. Bob and I don't believe in them much anyhow. Putting that help aside, she could only be helped by you."

"I can't help her," Clive said, with hard emphasis. "It's beyond—it's out of my power. I can only make things worse for her."

"Don't say that, or—saying doesn't really matter—don't think that."

"But I know it, I know it, Mrs. Herries."

"How can you? You said just now that you had no influence with your Mother. I'm sure that isn't so. I feel that it all rests with you, in your hands."

"What?" he asked, in a hard, and almost loud voice. "What rests with me?"

"Your Mother's happiness, even perhaps her health, because her health probably depends upon her mental condition. You are troubled about your Mother. So am I, since I have seen her to-day. Can't you do the necessary thing

—whatever it is, I don't know—that will put her right with herself and the world?”

“There isn't anything I can do. If there were, I should do it. I should have done it long ago.”

There was a despairing sound in his voice. He stopped, then added conventionally as if he had suddenly realised that he was being too unreserved:

“But it's most awfully kind of you to have spoken out, to bother about the matter at all.”

And then somehow—she scarcely knew how—Mrs. Herries found herself walking back towards Hyde Park Corner. When Clive spoke again it was in a less constrained voice and with a much more sincere and simple manner.

“I can't tell you,” he said, “how I value all your kindness to my wife. Your friendship is a godsend to her, especially in this anxious time.”

“But I don't think Vivian is anxious. She seems wonderfully calm.”

“That's her will—for the child. But anyhow, I can't help being anxious. There's always a danger, especially with a first child. And I—I couldn't get along without Vivian.”

And then they walked on in silence.

Something in this man still made Mrs. Herries feel uneasy when she was with him. But she understood very well why Vivian loved him. For she realised that he had a very exceptional power of loving. And where he gave it would be given to him. He would always be able to call forth a return of emotion. Yet he had that strange troubling element, the capacity surely to cause deep unhappiness.

When they reached Hyde Park Corner, and Mrs. Herries saw her omnibus coming up, she held out her hand and pressed Clive's hand warmly. The note in his voice when he had spoken about his wife had touched her deeply, and she wished to show something of what she was feeling. To her surprise, Clive said:

"If you don't mind I'll come with you as far as the rectory."

"Do!" she said, wondering, but concealing her wonder.

"Shan't we go outside? There's such a crowd in there. Or do you hate the climb?"

"No, not a bit."

She started up the stairs and he followed. They found two vacant seats at the back. When they had settled down Clive said:

"Is your husband likely to be in at this time?"

"I don't know. I scarcely ever know when Bob will be in, or out. Sometimes he's on the run till very late. Would you like to see him?"

"Yes. I shouldn't keep him long."

His voice sounded constrained. She felt that probably ever since they had met that day he had been secretly debating whether he would, or would not, try to see Bob that evening. At last abruptly he had come to a decision. But the decision had cost him a good deal. He was fighting down some reserve.

"If he isn't in, come in and wait for him. He will love to see you," she said, cordially.

"Thank you."

They said nothing more to each other till the omnibus stopped at a corner not three minutes' walk from St. Giles's Place.

VIII

WHEN they got to the rectory Mrs. Herries asked Kate at once if the rector was at home.

"Yes, Ma'am. He's in his study."

"Capital!" said Mrs. Herries, turning to Clive.

"But he's got someone with him, Ma'am."

"Oh. Who is it?"

"The young man Aviner, Ma'am."

"The young man Aviner?" repeated Mrs. Herries, in a musing voice.

"Yes, Ma'am," said Kate, with a quiet air of definiteness and gentle decision.

"Very well. I dare say he won't stay long. Will you just go to the study and say——"

But Clive interrupted her.

"Don't disturb your husband. I don't want to bother him. It's getting late and I ought to be off. Vivian will be wondering. I can easily come another day."

"No, no. Now you are here, wait a few minutes. Bob would hate it if you went away. He likes seeing you. Kate, just go in and say that Mr. Clive Baratrie is here and would like to see my husband when he is free."

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Mr. Clive Baratrie."

"Yes, Ma'am."

As Kate went away Mrs. Herries said, as she led the way to the drawing-room:

"Kate is a trump, but she has one little failing."

"Has she? What is it?"

"She can't get a name right. I'm sure my husband knows no young man of the name of Aviner. What she'll call you is beyond imagining. But she may possibly get Clive. And if she does achieve that Bob will know. Do sit down. Smoke if you like. Bob smokes everywhere."

But Clive did not sit down. He was evidently restless and went to stand by the fire. Then he came away and said:

"If I stay——"

"You really must now."

"Then may I just telephone to Vivian to tell her I shall be late?"

"Of course. The telephone's in the hall."

He went out immediately. When he came back he looked a little calmer, but still nervous and uneasy.

"If your husband is long in coming," he said, "I really think I ought to——"

But at this moment there was the sound of an opening door, and they heard Bob's voice saying:

"Rather! Of course I will. Well then that's settled. And now have another fag."

Mrs. Herries smiled.

"Bob will call cigarettes fags," she said, in a low voice. "He's worked a lot among soldiers and sailors, and of course they——"

"Right, Sir! I'm sure we shall all be most grateful. It isn't every one that'll——"

The cockney voice was lost in the distance as the two speakers went towards the front door. A moment later Bob came eagerly into the drawing-room.

"By Jove, it *is* you!" he said, as he saw Clive. "I guessed." He came up and shook hands.

"How did Kate put it, dear?" said his wife.

"Mr. Clynes Barramore. But I jumped to it."

"And who was with you?"

"Dick Haffenden, to be sure, about the Stepney Football Club."

"Kate wasn't far wrong. She said the young man Aviner and Haffenden really is young."

"Just twenty."

He glanced at Clive.

"Let's go into the study and have a talk."

"Thanks awfully. I won't keep you long."

"The longer the better. We don't see each other too often."

"Good-bye, Mrs. Herries," said Clive, holding out his hand.

"It was good of you to bother about my Mother."

Before she had time to answer he turned quickly and went out of the room, with an unnecessary decisiveness, which made her think of a man rushing to something unpleasant which he had made up his mind with difficulty to face. Bob

sent her a grave, almost anxiously inquiring look, and followed him.

As soon as they were in the study, and the door had been shut by Bob, Clive said:

"Herries, I won't keep you long. I mustn't, because I ought to get home to Vivian, and it's late already. But I'm in a difficulty, a great difficulty. People in trouble are always coming to you, I know. You must be pretty sick of it. But you're the sort of man one can seek out in trouble. And—I've thought it over till my mind's almost at a standstill—I don't know what course to take."

"Sit down."

"No; really I can't."

"Well, anyhow I will."

And he sat down in his armchair with the air of a man at leisure and, as usual, reached for his pipe.

"First of all I must tell you how things stand with me," said Clive.

He came up to the fire and stood there, and, as he went on speaking, touched first one thing, then another, on the chimney-piece.

"My Mother's horribly ill. At least I believe she is, though she says she's quite well. Anyhow, she's what I should call a nervous wreck. My wife is wonderful. But she is soon going to have a child, and ought certainly to be kept free from all outside worry. That is obvious. Both of them have been through Hell. You know all about that."

He stopped.

"Yes, I know," said Bob Herries, quietly.

"Hell—on account of me," said Clive. "Naturally I want—I should wish to protect them both, women whom I—naturally I want to keep anything further of a horrible nature out of their lives if I can."

"Of course," said Bob, with deep earnestness.

"I had hoped——"

His lips twisted, and for a moment his whole face was contorted. Then he seemed to get a hold on himself and went on.

"That doesn't matter. As a fact, I've always had an underneath feeling that there were other blows to fall upon me. And now, with the situation such as I have described it to you, I have had this."

He put his hand into the breast pocket of his jacket and brought out a letter enclosed in an envelope.

"It came a week ago," he said. "And all that time I've done nothing. I've just gone on—trying to make up my mind. I haven't said a word of it to anyone till now."

"An anonymous letter?"

"Oh no! If it were anonymous! No—it's from Gordon, Jim Gordon. You know him."

"Yes, not very well. I meet him now and then at the Bath Club. But he's a good fellow."

Bob was beginning to look puzzled.

"Of course he is; an excellent fellow. He comes to our house when he's in England. He's abroad now, playing tennis on the Riviera. Archie's with him. He's an old friend of my wife's."

"I know. Well?"

Clive drew the letter out of the envelope and gave it to Bob.

"Read that, if you don't mind."

Bob sat back in his armchair and read:

"HÔTEL GRAY ET D'ALBION,

"CANNES

"(A.M.)

"*March 17th.*

"DEAR BARATRIE,—

"You'll be surprised to get a letter from me, but I felt bound to write to you. My subject's an infernally disagreeable one, and I've sat for a good bit considering what's

best to do. In the end I've come to the conclusion that I ought to write this, and I hope you'll think the same when you've got through with it, and will acquit me of everything except a sincere wish to do the best by you in a damned awkward situation. The Dartrees—Lord and Lady Dartree—have a villa not so far from here and entertain a lot. The tennis crowd all turn up there. House full is the word. Mrs. Lorrimer—Anne Lorrimer, whom your wife knows pretty well, she gets up tennis matches for charities, that sort of thing—has been there lately, and several others, including Sir Aubrey Sabine”—

When Bob Herries in his reading got to this name he made an involuntary movement, and his eyes went from the letter to Clive.

“You see! You see!” said Clive, tapping his fingers hard and repeatedly on the mantelpiece, like a man whose hand was completely out of control.

“But I haven't finished.”

“Then why look at me like that?”

“It was only——” But Bob stopped there. He didn't care to tell Clive of his remark to his wife: “I sometimes think that they haven't done with Mrs. Sabine yet.” And it was the memory of that remark, the sight of the fatal name in Gordon's letter, and the guess his mind had instantly made at what was coming, which had caused the look Clive was asking about, with eyes as well as with lips.

“Yes?” said Clive.

“Let me finish, please.”

As he looked down again at the letter and went on reading he still heard the drumming fingers on the wooden mantel-piece.

—“including Sir Aubrey Sabine. He's a young fellow just out of the Life Guards, the head of the Sabine family. But

no doubt you know all about him. The Mrs. Sabine who ran the hospital was his Aunt. Well, he can't keep his mouth still. You know the sort. Must be talking. One day up at the villa—that's why I'm writing this, very much against the grain—when there were a lot of us there, including Mrs. Lorrimer who, between you and me, is a female counterpart of Sabine, though quite a good sort as far as meaning all right goes, Sabine began talking about you, and that beastly case which you won so splendidly. And—I must be frank—he said abominable things."

The drumming had not ceased on the mantelpiece.

"I tried to pull him up in time, but it was no go. The gist of what he said was this, that though you'd got off,—'saved your skin,' he said,—he and the whole of his family knew you'd got rid of his Aunt, and knew perfectly well your reason for what you did. I can't go into details, but your wife's name was mentioned. I was very angry and tried to stop his mouth the best I could, but it only made him more determined and emphatic. And he went on to say that there were outsiders who thoroughly agreed with him, even criminologists who had made a study of such things. He mentioned one who, he swore, was of his opinion. It was Wilfred Heathcote, the actor, whom he quoted. I needn't give the quotation, however. In the end I simply couldn't stick it, and told him I supposed he knew that you could have him up for libel and get heavy damages out of him for what he'd been saying before all these witnesses. He said of course he knew, but you wouldn't dare. In the room were Madding, Mrs. Littlethwaite, Mrs. Charlesworth, Dartree—Lady Dartree wasn't there,—two or three French people, Gerald Bowyer, the referee—he referees most of our big matches in England—Mrs. Lorrimer, as I said, etc. I quarrelled with Sabine, of course in a decent way

as there were women, and when I left I told him I should take any action I thought fit, although it had all taken place in a friend's house. By that he knew of course that I meant referring the matter to you. Since then Anne Lorrimer has been repeating the whole thing everywhere and calling you 'the murderer man.' But she's only a fool. Sabine on the other hand was venomous.

"Well, that's all, and enough too. I simply hate the whole thing and writing like this. I thought a lot before I wrote. But it seemed to me in the end the right thing to do, and what I should have wished to have done by me—given reversed positions. You may like to leave it alone. If you don't, keep Anne Lorrimer out, won't you. By that I mean don't pursue her for her silly words. No one takes her seriously. And she's a woman. Sabine's different. He ought to be ashamed of himself, and so I told him.

"Kind remembrances to your wife, if you mention this to her. But I dare say you won't. And perhaps much better not.

"Yours sincerely

"JIM GORDON."

As Bob Herries looked up from this letter and laid it down on his knee Clive's fingers at last stopped drumming, and he took his hand from the mantelpiece. For a minute or two there was a complete silence in the room. Outside there was the spreading sound of the vast traffic of London, dim and immense.

"I'm sorry for this," Bob Herries said at last. "I'm horribly sorry."

"It isn't particularly agreeable, is it?" said Clive, in a would-be casual voice.

"Agreeable! It's—it's damnable, simply that—yes. If people would only not——"

He broke off.

"Ah! if they only wouldn't!" said Clive, with intense

bitterness. "But there's malice—malice—malice spread through human hearts, as there's that dull, ugly roar spread through London."

Bob Herries made no reply to this exclamation, which seemed wrung out of the very soul of the man standing by the fire. His eyes had again gone to the letter on his knee. His pale boyish forehead showed deep lines. At last he said:

"You say you've done nothing?"

"Nothing at all."

"Haven't you written a word to Gordon even?"

"No, not a word. No doubt I ought to have. He must be wondering. But—well, this has been a bad blow to me, Herries. I can hardly tell you how bad. I've been—all this time I've been trying to work my way through to—through to something tolerable, to some bearable way of life. I mean—it's difficult to explain, but I've been trying to harden myself to the general situation, to accustom myself to it all. It's been one continual fight really, though perhaps it mayn't have seemed so. I've always said to myself that things will get better, must get better every day. Time, you know, the lapse of time! And now comes this. It's been a terrific facer. It's seemed in a way almost to stun my mind. And I've done absolutely nothing."

"And no one——"

"I haven't spoken, hinted anything to a soul."

"No."

"It was quite a chance my coming here to-night. I happened to find your wife calling on my Mother when I looked in. Directly I saw her there by the fire I thought of speaking to you. I had the letter on me. I knew I must do something, and it struck me I'd ask you for your advice."

Bob Herries looked very grave, stern almost.

"Anyhow, you'll have to write to Gordon," he said.

And he stretched up his arm to Clive with the letter in his hand. As he did so he felt something of the horror of

it like a sort of emanation oozing out of the paper. The poison of words! The poison of words!

"I will. I'll write to him to-night. By God, Herries, I wish the letter, if it had to come, had come from anyone else."

"Why?"

"I do. That's all."

His face was set and hard now, terribly hard, mask-like. And suddenly Herries had the thought:

"What might not that man do in certain circumstances?"

"Surely there's no malice in that letter," he said.

"No, there isn't. It's written in absolute good faith. I felt that from the first, and I don't go back on it. Gordon thought I ought to know. And he was right. Well, I know. I've known for a week. The only question is what I'm going to do, or whether I'm going to do anything at all."

"Sit down, Baratrie, there's a good fellow."

"Right! Right! Why not?"

He dropped into a chair, and immediately leaned forward in it, with his hands clasped and hanging between his knees.

"Of course I know what I should do if I were an isolated man."

"Isolated?"

"Without two women linked as it were—I suppose they are—to my cursed life and fate. When a fellow says of you in public that you daren't do a thing in connection with him, well, there's only one thing to be done, and that's the thing he says you don't dare to do. That's obvious enough. But I'm thinking of them—those two. I ought to go for that fellow." He seemed about to speak his name, but didn't. "If I don't he'll boast that he was right, that I'm afraid of him—that is if he gets to know Gordon's told me. And of course he will get to know. But if I do go for him the whole of that awful business will be raked up again and spread out, like stinking linen, before the whole world. Of

course if there were a law case, if he let it go into Court, I should win—naturally. It isn't that I'm thinking about. It's the revival of—it's the damned resurrection. Pulling a corpse out of the grave wouldn't be so bad with all the worms at work on it. Vivian going to have a child! And look at my Mother! Ask your wife what impression she got to-day of my Mother! Am I to torture these two again? Have I the right to do it? They'll surely curse me if I do."

"Oh—no!"

Clive did not seem to hear the strong, convinced exclamation, to notice Bob Herries's gesture, the expression in his eyes as he made it.

"Herries, I'll tell you the truth. What's happened—the accusation against me, my arrest, the trial—nearly killed my Mother, may kill her yet. She's changed, Herries; she's a withered thing! The sap's all gone out of her."

"She's full of fire, Baratrie."

"Fire! Well then it's burning her up. She's shrivelling like burning paper. I can see her go out."

Bob Herries looked into the fire. For some time he said nothing and did not move. And Clive was silent too. He knew, he could see, that Herries was thinking so strongly that, for the moment, he was probably unconscious of everything but his thought. At last Herries moved and looked up.

"If it were not for your Mother," he said, "I shouldn't hesitate for one moment what advice to give you, as you ask me."

"No? Ah, I understand! But Vivian, too!"

"No, it's your Mother I'm concerned with, not your wife. It's she who troubles me."

He spoke with solemnity and again paused. Then, with a movement of the shoulders as if shaking something off from him, he said:

"You'll be surprised by what I'm going to say. It's this. Will you let me call my wife in and put the matter to her?"

Clive looked aghast.

"Ask—tell your wife!" he said, in a suddenly thick voice.

"That's what I want to do. I'll tell you why. She has been with your Mother this afternoon, has got an impression of her condition of course."

"Yes."

"She's a woman and can feel another woman better than we can. Let me put it to her, ask her what she would wish her son to do in such circumstances if she had one. She'll know."

Clive got up.

"I don't think I——"

He stopped.

"Can't you bear it? My wife's very loving, very full of love and understanding, and tremendously sincere."

"She is, I know."

"May I fetch her?"

Clive was silent.

"Or, look here, may I go to her with the letter and ask her? You needn't see her at all. I'll tell you exactly what she says, the very words. And I won't attempt to influence her. But I couldn't in such a case."

Clive lifted his head.

"No, if it's done let it be done here. I'm not such a coward as that."

"You're not a coward at all, couldn't be."

"You don't know."

"Well, what is it to be?"

"Better fetch her, if she'll come."

Bob got up and went out of the room. He was away for two or three minutes, then came back with his wife, who looked very calm and very simple as she entered the room. Clive flushed to the forehead when he saw her.

Bob shut the door.

"I've just explained to Bun that you've had a beastly letter, and don't quite know what to do about it, and that I'm rather at a loss too," said Bob.

"Yes," said Clive.

He held out the letter to Mrs. Herries.

"It—it's awfully good of you to bother about my tiresome affairs," he said.

He drew himself up sharply, suddenly looked like a soldier, and added:

"I should know what to do if it weren't for my Mother. We are leaving Vivian out of this. Aren't we?" he asked of Bob.

"Yes. I think we all understand her."

Mrs. Herries took the letter.

"I'll give you an honest opinion, Clive. That's all I can do."

She had never called Clive by his Christian name before. Her doing it now touched him to the quick. He knew she had done it with intention, to indicate that, in this moment, her wish was to draw as close as possible to him.

"Thank you," he murmured.

"I'll just sit down by the lamp and read it."

She sat down, drew the reading lamp a little forward and lifted the letter. Then she read it slowly and carefully while the two men stood, and instinctively watched her red, blunt-featured face and the delicate hands that held up the paper. When she had finished she said to Clive:

"If you were *my* son, I shouldn't let this go. I mean I should want you to bring Sir Aubrey Sabine to book for his abominable words."

As she spoke her kindly face changed till even Bob, who knew her so well, was surprised. An expression of anger transformed it.

"There are righteous punishments," she said. "I don't believe in wickedness going scot-free. I mean being allowed

to go scot-free even by us when we have the power to do something. It's abominable—this!"

She put the letter down.

"And my Mother?" said Clive.

She turned towards him, as if startled.

"Oh—yes?"

"You've seen her to-day, been with her. And we talked about her. Do you think *she* would wish me to take this matter up?"

"That's what we wanted to know, Bun," interposed Bob Herries. "We thought that you ought to be able to judge about another woman better than we can."

He was surprised to see a look that suggested to him agitation come into his wife's face.

"I see! That was it. Of course!"

It seemed as if only then she thoroughly realised the problem put to her.

"I want to be quite honest," she added, with an anxious note in her soft voice. "This is so important."

"Please be quite honest with me," Clive said.

"Yes."

"Suppose I go for this man, the whole thing will be raked up again. All the papers will fall upon it like wolves. The whole world will be talking. There will be another tremendous scandal and my miserable name the centre of it. Could my Mother stand that? Mightn't it just simply kill her? You've seen the condition she's in."

"I wish I knew. I wish I could know," said Mrs. Herries. "But your Mother is an enigma to me."

"Then never mind! You can't advise us, Bun."

She heard the sound of disappointment in her husband's voice. Evidently he had thoroughly relied on her being definite, and now she was failing him in her dreadful honesty. For a moment she felt separated from her husband, and had a sensation of unaccustomed pain as if a virtue divided

them. And it was this sensation that decided her to take a straight course.

"Do you think we ought to consider persons, individuals, in such a case as this?" she asked the two men. "It just strikes me that weakness may creep in if we do."

She sat looking at them.

"Go on, Bun!" said her husband, earnestly.

And now there was a look of hope in his wistful, inquiring eyes.

"I feel it like this—now."

She spoke to Clive.

"You are thinking about your Mother, asking me about her."

"Yes."

"Honestly I cannot understand her. I understand, of course, how she must have suffered. I believe I could have understood her *then*. You know what I mean?"

"Yes."

"But now I can't. I should have looked for recovery. But it doesn't seem to have taken place."

"It hasn't," Clive muttered, looking down.

"Then I can't judge for her. If I were you—this will sound cruel, I know; but I can't help that—I should ignore her."

"Ignore my Mother?"

"Yes, in this. I should do the simple, manly, obvious thing and trust her to appreciate it."

"Ah!" said Bob.

And he looked suddenly relieved, almost happy.

"Vivian would agree with me, I know. I have no fears about her. She would always suffer much more under what might even *seem* cowardice than under straightforward manliness. Clive"—she touched the letter with her delicate hand, and now her red face was calm and firm, no longer angry or puzzled—"I should take this up."

"Yes?"

"You can't let this man be justified in saying before others that you *daren't* do anything."

And when she said that it seemed so plain and obvious that Bob found himself wondering why he had ever needed to consult his wife about such a matter.

"Of course she's right," he said. "Individuals really oughtn't to affect, influence this at all. But pity often leads one astray, I expect."

And then, as he said the word "pity," he looked at Clive. The face of the man was tragic, set like a mask but tragic. Only the lower jaw was quivering. And as Bob Herries looked he knew that the moral satisfaction brought about in him by his wife's resolute clearing of the issue was not echoed by anything in Baratrie. Poor chap! And the pity which Bob had just spoken of as a dangerous thing rushed back and took possession of his heart. Nevertheless he said firmly:

"I can't help thinking that your Mother, if you consulted her, would agree with my wife."

"She might. But, of course, if I didn't take the matter up, she would remain in absolute ignorance. She would never know anything about it."

Then there was an awkward silence. Neither Bob nor his wife knew what more to say without seeming too intimate, without showing what might seem like indelicacy. Finally Clive said, straightening up and managing a sort of hard smile:

"You are right, Mrs. Herries. I think I always knew the thing ought to be gone through. But it's difficult to make up one's mind to hurt sensitive women who've been through Hell. It seems to me they might almost get to hate me for all the trouble I bring upon them."

"No, no—never!" said Mrs. Herries.

"Well, thank you. I'm glad we asked you. May I have the letter?"

She stretched up and gave it to him. He folded it and put it carefully away in his breast pocket, then buttoned his jacket.

"And now I must be going. It must be very late. You've been awfully kind, both of you. Don't you get very sick of having so many troubles and difficulties shovelled on to you? I'm sure I should."

Mrs. Herries had got up and now they were all moving towards the door.

"Whe don't," Bob said. "By the way, it just strikes me that perhaps there may be some means of avoiding the worst sort of publicity in this beastly business. You'll consult your solicitor, of course, if you decide to go on with the matter. There are many cases that are settled out of Court, aren't there?"

"Yes, I believe there are."

"As it's totally impossible, of course, for Sir Aubrey Sabine to justify his words——"

"Good heavens!" said Clive, with a sudden intense sharpness. "It wasn't *that* I was afraid of!"

They were now in the hall and he stood still.

"I was thinking of my Mother and Vivian."

"I know."

"Of course we know that, Clive!" said Mrs. Herries, looking distressed.

"Yes. If there's a libel case I shall win it, of course."

He laughed and threw up his head.

"I shall get big damages too, if the case comes on."

He turned to Bob.

"Something for one of your many charities."

"What I mean is that if Sir Aubrey Sabine isn't an absolute fool, he will never let the matter get into Court," said Bob.

"I imagine that would rest with me," Clive said, in a grim voice.

"Here's your coat."

"Thanks."

He put it on.

"Good night, Mrs. Herries."

"Good night, Clive."

"Thank you ever so much. Good night, Herries. My Mother said once that you were the only man she knew who fulfilled the law of Christ. 'Bear ye one another's burdens,' you know."

And then he was gone and the door was shut.

When they were alone Bob said to his wife:

"Will he take your advice, Bun? He didn't actually say he would."

"No; I noticed that."

She sighed.

"Bob dear, what I can't understand is why there has been no recovery in poor Mrs. Baratrie."

"Too horribly sensitive, perhaps. There are people who, once they have been struck, are always expecting another blow."

"But then——"

He stopped her.

"I feel you were right," he said. "In such a matter as this individuals must not be considered. A man can't sit down under certain accusations if he's to keep anything, even a shred, of his manhood."

"No, that's true."

They were in the study again now, and she added:

"But it's awful for Clive to have the whole thing raked up again, and I understand his feeling about his Mother and Vivian. Isn't it horrible, too, about Wilfred Heathcote's name being in it?"

"Yes. The whole thing is absolutely disgusting."

After a minute Mrs. Herries said:

"Bob, do you think he'll go through with it?"

"Clive?"

He was silent, looking into the fire. Then he said:
"Yes, I believe he will. I'm practically certain he will."

IX

THAT evening after dinner Clive wrote an answer to Jim Gordon's letter, thanking him for sending it, and saying that he was considering how best to deal with the matter of Sir Aubrey Sabine's "wild and ridiculous accusation." The letter was short and non-committal. It contained no mention of Mrs. Lorrimer's or Wilfred Heathcote's names. Temper was carefully excluded from it. Any intimate touch was avoided. There was nothing about Vivian. It was a cold, temperate, reserved and very English letter, giving practically no indication of Clive's feeling about Gordon's unpleasant revelation, no definite information as to what line of conduct he intended to take.

The fact was that when he wrote the letter Clive had not come to a decision. He knew what ought to be done. He did not know whether he was going to do it. He wrote the letter to Gordon with difficulty. He hated intensely having to write it. Gordon's letter to him and his reply seemed to him to create a kind of surreptitious and abominable intimacy between him and Gordon against which his whole nature instinctively revolted. That Gordon of all men should be dragged by fate into the Sabine affair made Clive feel sick with a sort of deadly sickness of the mind. He wanted Gordon away, right away, out of his life, out of his knowledge. And here he was intruding, and quite rightly, into the most intimate places. Clive secretly raged at this poignant little stroke of fate, like a flick with a poisoned whip. As he sealed up the envelope and took up his pen to write the address he uttered a curse under his breath.

Just as he was writing the words "Hôtel Gray et d'Albion" he heard his study door open. He turned round sharply and

saw Vivian coming in. And immediately he laid his hand over the still wet ink on the envelope.

"Oh—I'm disturbing you!" she said.

He knew by her face that the expression on his must have startled and disquieted her. Or perhaps it was his sudden action, the hiding of the name and address on the envelope.

"I didn't know who it was," he said. "That was all."

But he did not remove his hand.

"Shall I go?" she asked. "I was only going to sit by the fire so as to be with you."

He looked at her altered figure, and the dawning change in her face, and he was shaken secretly by a passion of love and jealousy mingled. (For already he knew a strange jealousy of the child.) What was coming? What was on the way inexorably with footsteps no ear could catch the sound of, so delicate, so surreptitious were they? Was it something which might separate him ever so little from that which he clung to with such desperate fixity of purpose, with such a straining of all his being? Life anyhow, their common life, was changing before his eyes. Its duality was fading away. The third, decreed by her, was already present to his horribly alert and morbid consciousness.

"Don't go, dear," he said.

The words came after a silence which he was totally unaware of.

"How could I ever want you to go?" he added.

And he lifted his hand stained with ink, got up from the table, went to her and shut the door.

"Come to the fire. I'll settle you."

He put his arm gently round her figure, gripping between his fingers some folds of the loose tea gown she was wearing.

"Sit here. I'll put a cushion for you. Lean your head back."

She obeyed him in silence.

"Is that right?"

"Yes."

She was lying back in the low chair looking up at him with those eyes which were changing. In them already, and quite definitely, he saw the mother looking at him as well as the wife.

"Have you much more writing to do?" she said, in a low, quiet voice.

"No. I've just finished."

He put his hands into the pockets of the easy smoking-coat he was wearing, clenched them when they were hidden, and then said:

"I've been writing to Gordon."

"To Jim!" she said.

And a look of deep surprise came into her face.

"Yes. Perhaps you noticed that when you came in I put my hand over the letter."

"Yes. I didn't understand. I thought you were startled."

"That's it. I was. I hadn't intended to tell you."

"Then why do you?"

"Because—when I looked at you, when I look at you now—because I can't bear to be separated from you by an unnecessary secret. No, I can't bear it. I want to get nearer and nearer to you, Vi."

He spoke almost with desperation.

"Don't let anything get in the way, come between us—anything! I couldn't bear it!"

"Nothing could. Nothing shall," she said, earnestly.

"Oh, you say that! But how can we know? How can we tell? Life can be so malicious. It's got hands, talons. It can tear apart the most closely interwoven existences."

"Not yours and mine—never."

"Anyhow I won't help it in any damned work of that kind."

He took his right hand out of his pocket and showed her the ink-stain on it.

"I did that hiding Gordon's name and address from you."

"Yes?"

"Don't you ask why I'm writing to him?"

"Tell me if you want to. Don't tell me if you would rather not. What does it matter—a letter—between us?"

She was smiling at him now in the firelight, and he felt that she *would* be serene. But that was for the child rather than for him. At least he believed so then.

"Gordon wrote to me. I have been answering his letter."

There was no surprise visible in her face now. She had herself evidently in complete control, and still looked quietly serene.

"Jim isn't much of a letter-writer, I should think," was all she said.

"Aren't you surprised at his writing to me?"

"Yes."

He knelt down beside her chair.

"Vi, I long—you will never know how much—to make you happy. But it seems as if I am to be made to do things to bring misery and torture upon you."

"No. How can you be made to do such things? You have a will. Your will is to make me happy. I love you. Then how can your will be turned against me?"

"You shall judge. Only—don't hate me! Don't ever get to hate me."

She smiled again and touched the hand that was laid on her chair.

"You don't torment me, dear. It's yourself you torment. I don't know why."

"Wait till you have read Gordon's letter."

She looked straight at him with a very pure look.

"Is it about me?"

"No, I couldn't say that. But your name is just mentioned in it."

He drew her face down to his and gave her a long kiss on the lips.

"Vi—Vi—we ought to have gone away," he whispered. "Indeed we ought. Then we should have been safe from the world. We should have been out of it and happy. My instinct was right. I feel that more and more."

He released her, got up, fetched Gordon's letter from the writing-table and brought it to her.

"I hate to give this to you. I hate your reading it," he said.

"Then why should I read it?"

"Because we must share. If we don't we are separated."

"Let us share everything then," she said.

He did not answer and looked down. She took the letter.

"Give me a little more light, Clive," she said.

He hesitated. Even in that moment he had an inclination not to let her read the letter, not to do anything about it, to let the thing go, to shut his eyes and pretend that the horrible menace was not there, to "trust to luck." Aubrey Sabine might not repeat his accusation, might not find out that Jim Gordon had told.

"Clive dear! The little reading lamp there! Do you mind?"

He looked at her, went and turned on the lamp.

"While you read it I'll get a fresh envelope and rewrite that address."

And he went to the writing-table and sat down with his back to her. He knew she was reading. The thing was done now. She was, she must be, realising that once more Mrs. Sabine was going to rise up and be linked with her in the public mind. Once more those two names, Mrs. Sabine's and hers, would be on the lips of the world. It was profanation. She must feel it to be so. Her purity must be outraged by this imminent resurrection. The envelope was all smudged. Gordon's name was a blur. He tore the en-

velope and threw it away, took another, put his letter to Gordon in it, took his pen and slowly wrote the address: James Gordon Esq. D.S.O., Hôtel Gray et d'Albion, Cannes, (A.M.), France. Then carefully he blotted the envelope, took a breath and turned round.

Vivian was sitting in the low armchair with the lamp behind her, holding the letter. The ray of the lamp fell on the paper, lit up the ugly combination of words which had come out of the dark to Clive like a sword and pierced him to the quick.

"Have you finished?" he asked.

"Yes."

He did not get up, but sat turned in his chair looking at her.

"I feel almost guilty, dearest," she said, after a little silence.

"Guilty? You! What do you mean?"

"I held you here, didn't I?"

"Yes, I suppose you did."

"But I had to hold you, I had to. And now this has come. You might almost hate me now."

He got up and came to her.

"You were right, Vi. You urged the strong course."

"Just now, only just now, you said we ought to have gone away. You said that your instinct was right."

"I was writhing under this new torment for you."

"What does Jim mean by that passage about Sir Aubrey Sabine's knowing the reason—why?"

"How can I tell?"

"What do you think it means?"

"God knows."

She did not press him any more, and after he had waited for her to say something, he said:

"In writing to Gordon to thank him I didn't say what I was going to do about this."

"What are you going to do?"

The look in her eyes suddenly decided him.

"I shall see my lawyer. I mean to take proceedings against Sir Aubrey Sabine for libel."

She did not make any comment on this. But she took hold of his hand and put it against her cheek and held it there for an instant.

"Does your Mother know?" she said then.

"No, not yet."

"Then no one knows."

"This afternoon I told Bob Herries and his wife, and gave them Gordon's letter to read."

"But why? You had not told me."

"I wasn't sure I was going to tell you. I wasn't sure whether I ought to involve you and my Mother in any further—whether I could plunge you into that filth again. I felt as if you might get to hate me for—I thought I would ask Herries and——"

He broke off.

"My Clive, you don't know women yet," she said. "If they love at all, really love, trouble turns their spark into a blaze."

Tears came into his eyes. He had great difficulty in holding his body still, in keeping it from trembling.

"A blaze!" she repeated, putting her arm round his neck. "But oh, it's terrible the yearning to protect when one can't! It's travail! The intimacy of that pain perhaps no man can quite understand. All the body and soul seem in it working together to feel more pain."

"Vi! Vi!"

When presently they spoke again she begged him to go and tell his Mother.

"Now? To-night?" he said.

"Yes, to-night. She ought to know. Don't wait. Don't hesitate. I know you ought to go."

There was a strong pressure in her voice.

"I will go," he said. "What time is it?"

He drew out his watch.

"Close upon ten. She will be surprised at my coming so late."

"I don't like to know such a thing long before she does."

"Poor Mother!" he said.

"She'll glory in every bit of strength you show."

"Will she? Do you understand her?"

"No. But I understand certain things in her."

"Will you stay in here?"

"Yes."

"Shall I get you a book?"

"No."

Her face was serene and strong again, marvellously serene, he thought. He had taken the letter. He put it in his pocket, took the letter he had written to Gordon, and stamped it. Just before he left her she said:

"I think Jim's act was the act of a friend."

"Yes, I'm sure he meant well."

Then he went out. She thought his voice had been very cold in those last few words.

"The spark!" she whispered to herself, looking into the fire. "The spark—and the blaze! Do they ever understand? Can they?"

X

MRS. BARATRIE was sitting over the fire that night with, as usual, a book to keep her company. But she had already finished with Henri Barbusse, who had succeeded Job. When she had had her meagre meal, eaten from a tray, and her glass of white wine, she had gone to the shelves in her drawing-room and, after a good deal of consideration, had taken down a copy in French of Dostoyewsky's *Le Crime et*

le Châtiment. Twice already during her life she had tried to read this book and twice she had given it up. The nervous tension in it, the febrile power, had been too much for her. Something in the tone and manner of the book had frightened her, and she had laid it away reluctantly with the thought: "It is wonderful but it is not for me. It excites me too much. I had better not read it." And each time she had stopped at the same episode: the nightmare about the little horse. Now, however, she was determined to go on, to read the whole book. She was a different woman now. She could stand anything. For she, too, like so many of Dostoyewsky's characters, and like Dostoyewsky himself, had gone down into the depths, had known personally the fierceness and the terror of life. Experience had come to her and had taken away the veil. And she had looked on her own nakedness and known it.

As she read she became absorbed. She even, a rare occurrence with her now, forgot herself, her circumstances, London. She was living away in Russia. The greatest boon a book can bestow this book was bestowing on her. It was giving her at the same time a new world and forgetfulness.

Suddenly a sort of dreadful awareness crept through her whole body like icy water. She was sitting in a big chair with her back completely turned to the door. She knew that she would not be disturbed. She knew that none of the servants would come to her. After nine o'clock it was an understood thing that she was to be left alone, that she wanted nothing, that she did not wish, or choose, to see anyone. Yet now, pushing resolutely through the spell of the book, came this cold awareness. Someone was certainly in the room with her standing behind her, someone with a very strong personality which now seemed to be handling her.

"Who's that?" she cried out, without turning round. "Who's here?"

"Mother!"

It was Clive's voice; but, perhaps because she had been entangled in the coils of the book and was not yet really free of them, Mrs. Baratrie had the hallucination that she had been wrong, that Clive was not in the room with her, that no one was in the room with her, but that she was receiving a message from her son at a distance, that by a tremendous effort he had from a distance projected his personality, released somehow from his body, into her room, that he had even succeeded in making his voice heard by her because of the intensity of his desire that she should hear it.

"Clive!" she said, still remaining where she was. "Do you want me?"

Although she did not know it, there was a strange sound in her voice. It was as if the mask was dropped from her voice for a moment.

"Mother! Mother!" the voice behind her repeated.

And then she felt a hand touch her, and instantly the hallucination was gone, and she knew Clive was really there. But why was he there? The great need which she had imagined in her dupery must be a fact.

She turned round and saw Clive standing.

"Did I startle you, Mother?"

"Yes. I was deep in a book, lost in it."

"I didn't mean to startle you. I came in in the ordinary way, shut the door audibly. You seemed absolutely immersed in your reading."

"I was. But I felt someone was there at last."

"I'm awfully sorry if I startled you."

"I thought you were communicating from a distance."

He looked astonished.

"The link between Mother and son is strong, must be, I suppose. I thought you were using it."

"Oh!" he said.

"It seemed to flash over me that you were in great need of me. Are you? Why have you come at this time of night?"

"I'll tell you. Let me sit down."

"Yes, do."

She moved her chair to the left side of the fireplace. Her eyes were fixed on him, fiery eyes holding a question.

"Vivian isn't ill?"

"No. I left her sitting serenely in my study before the fire. She is wonderful."

"And I'm not."

"I don't know that."

"Have you come here to test me?"

"Yes, Mother."

Mrs. Baratrie pulled herself up in her chair. As she did so she dropped her book. Clive bent quickly and picked it up.

"*Le Crime et le Châtiment!*" he said, looking at the title.

"Yes. Have you ever read it?"

"No. But I think I will. It is very remarkable, isn't it?"

"Wonderful, but terrible."

"The title suggests that."

He put it down on a table with a steady, quietly moving hand.

"And now——" He put his hand into his breast pocket.

"For the test, eh?" she said.

There was a sort of acid amusement in the sound of her voice.

"Yes. Read that, Mother, will you?"

He gave her Gordon's letter, and sat back while she read it, and looked about the room, the familiar room in which he had had the strange struggle with Vivian. Presently he knew that she had finished reading and that her eyes were fixed upon him, and he looked at her, met their penetrating gaze.

"I felt that you needed me tremendously," she said. "Was it to ask my advice about this?"

Her face was fiercely grave, he thought. There even seemed to him to be something condemnatory in it.

"Oh no!" he said.

"Then why did you come here to-night?"

"I thought you ought to know about that letter immediately I had shown it to Vivian."

"Did she see it to-night for the first time?"

"Yes."

"But it's more than a week old," she rejoined, quickly.

"Yes."

He did not offer her any explanation about that, but added:

"I thought I ought to tell you what I intend to do about it."

"Ah," she said. "That's what I want to know."

For a long time Clive had noticed the strangeness in his Mother's appearance and manner. To-night it struck him more forcibly than ever before. Was it possible that at moments she felt hostile to him? Was she feeling hostile now?

"I should like to know what you wish me to do," he said. "I know what I am going to do, and I've told Vivian to-night what it is. I'll be quite frank, Mother. Whatever you wish, or don't wish, can't alter my mind. I've decided on my course. But I should like to know all the same what your desire would be in the matter."

"But I shan't tell you that."

"Why not?"

"You've made up your mind. Then my opinion could be of no manner of use to you. I should only give it to you if it could be."

"You're not angry? I didn't mean to be rude or brusque."

"Of course not. Well? What's the decision?"

As she said this the tic appeared in her left cheek, which twitched violently. She did not seem to notice it, did not put up her hand to it, but sat looking at Clive with an intensity, he thought an anguish of intensity, which seemed to bely

the cool, almost brisk, tone of her voice. And the expression in her eyes made him suddenly afraid. Mrs. Herries had said his Mother sometimes looked like a seer; perhaps she already knew by divination what he had decided to do, and felt that this fresh blow would kill her.

"Mother," he said. "Will you promise to forgive me whatever I do about this?"

"I don't know that I can make such a promise. No, really I don't think I can. There are things—one's nature is too strong for one sometimes, and forgiveness is after all a matter of feeling. Of course, I can *say* I forgive you, if that's enough."

He felt chilled to the heart, not only by her words, but by her extraordinary manner, detached, conventional almost, at any rate not intimate, and very far from tender.

"I don't want to hurt you, to do anything which might make you hate me."

"Hate's a strong word between mother and son. Now what are you going to do?"

"If it's possible—and I've no doubt it is, though I haven't taken an opinion yet—I shall bring an action for libel against Sir Aubrey Sabine."

The tic in her cheek stopped. It seemed to him that the expression on her face was on the verge of changing completely, but as if she prevented that by a sudden, tremendous effort of the will, which caused her features to contract. Her eyes stared steadily at him.

"Really?" she said. "You will?"

"Yes, I must."

"But haven't we been through enough?"

"Oh, Mother dear!" he said, in desperation.

Somehow he had not expected this, had not expected any protest from her, however heavy the blow might be.

"Yes, but really—haven't we?"

He got up.

"I know! I know! You can't tell me anything I haven't felt about it!"

"For us? For Vivian and me?"

"Yes! yes! Yes!"

Her sudden mercilessness struck him with horror. It seemed as if her intention was to be cruel.

"And we are to be put through it all again?"

"Yes!" he said, with sudden brutality.

Something savage was rising up in him. Since he had made up his mind, after the terrible indecision, he had tried to harden his heart. And now he actually felt savagely hard and that he would trample down all opposition from whatever source it came.

"Very well!" she said, with a sort of cold inflexibility.

"Mother darling, I know it's hard on you. I——"

"Look at me!" she interrupted.

He stood and looked at her.

"Do you think I can stand much more?"

"Mother! I can't help it! You must try to stand this."

"But isn't it best to let sleeping dogs lie?"

"I say," he said, bending down to her, "that I will not bear this accusation in silence. It's no use. I understand. You want me to let the thing go. You shrink from—it's natural! You only want a little peace. But I'm not considering you now or anyone but myself. I won't bear this accusation in silence. I won't allow a man to say I'm a murderer and that I shan't dare to have him up for saying so. It's no use—really, Mother—your trying to persuade me. I came to tell you——"

"Why did you ask me what I wished you to do?"

"Never mind!"

"Do you want to kill me?"

"Oh, Mother!"

He made a downward gesture, but she got suddenly on to her feet.

"Do you?" she said.

"Mother, I shall do it whatever happens."

The sound of his voice was final. So was the look on his face. It was quite obvious that he had gone beyond the region in which a man can still be influenced or persuaded. The ultimate will was in action.

"Aren't you afraid for Vivian in her present condition, even if you aren't afraid for me?"

Her persistence seemed to him abominable now. She was destroying an ideal, for until now he had always thought her a brave woman.

"Look here!" he exclaimed, with violence. "Do you mean to say that you really wish me to put up with such an accusation in silence, to do nothing, *not* to dare?"

"Well—and if I do? What then?"

"What then? But—but—then I refuse! I'm sorry, but I refuse. Individuals are really of no account when it comes to this sort of thing."

He was practically quoting Mrs. Herries, but Mrs. Baratrie did not know it.

"I wished to be thoughtful for others," he went on. "For you and Vivian. I even tried to force myself. I kept that letter for a week."

"Ah, that was why!"

"Yes. But I can't help it. Mother, you oughtn't to wish me to keep quiet under such an accusation. It would be shameful."

His eyes seemed accusing her now.

"I never thought you would ask me to do a shameful thing."

"I don't."

A new tone in her voice startled him. But something drove him on. He had begun to attack his Mother. It was incredible, but he was attacking her and he did not know how to stop. He felt launched and out of control, irresistibly impelled to go on.

"You ought to back me up. You ought to help me, to stand by me, not to do all you can to weaken my will."

"But it seems I can't!" she interrupted, still with the strange new note in her voice, a note with an odd thrill in it. "I can't weaken it."

"No, you can't. But that doesn't matter to me. What does matter, what hurts, is that you should wish to."

"So you're disappointed in your Mother?"

"Yes," he said, and he deliberately tried to speak cruelly. "Yes, I am."

"Well, I'm not disappointed in my son."

This time her voice checked him, pulled him up short. Her words startled him, of course, but he was really influenced by her voice.

"What d'you mean? But what's all this? I don't understand you, Mother. This is a deadly serious thing. What's the matter?"

"I wanted to see if I could influence you. Women, even mothers, sometimes like to have a try with men, even with sons."

"But—but—have you been acting?"

"Call it that if you like. My boy"—she held out a hand that trembled—"you've made me very happy to-night."

And he saw now that she looked happy, still thin, withered, ravaged physically, but shining almost with happiness.

"We women often love men best when they don't think of us but of something else that is much more than we are," she said, holding his hand. "We aren't always such egoists as we are supposed to be. I'm not! Bring that horrible man to book! Teach him—teach them all a lesson they won't forget! Your chance has been offered to you, and by Jim Gordon strangely enough."

"Why—strangely enough?"

"Isn't it strange?"

"Perhaps it is—yes."

"He wanted to be in your place."

"I know."

"You couldn't let *him* despise you."

"I'm not going to give anyone the chance to do that. But—Mother—how you deceived me!"

He let her hand go. He felt confused by this sudden change, this abrupt revelation.

"Why did you do it?"

"You came here to test me. May not I test you?"

He looked at her with a flickering of suspicion.

"Are you to be exempt?" she said.

"Why do you look so happy?"

"Do I?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps it's because Jim Gordon has given you this chance."

"But—but—the verdict!"

"You were attacked then. This time you will be the attacker. The difference is vast. Instead of receiving you give the blow."

"And afterwards?"

"It will all be much better after this, much better."

She seemed to him like one who had dropped a burden which had been weighing her almost to the ground.

They talked till midnight. When he said good-night he told her:

"Mother, you are wonderful too."

"As well as Vivian? But we are just two women and want to be proud of our man. That's not wonderful, but quite ordinary."

She kissed him and let him go.

Although it was so late, he walked home, wondering about the burden his Mother had surely shaken off that night, a burden that had been weighing her down. She was far more intricate than Vivian, far less easy to understand. In sorrow

she sometimes seemed cruel. But there was a passion of tenderness in her, generally hidden away. She lived her life, and surely an intense life, apart. He felt her tremendous loneliness, not of the body but of the spirit. The loneliness of the body was nothing compared with the other loneliness.

How she had tricked him that night! He had been absolutely blind to the truth of her. Vivian could never deceive him like that. She would never try to. But she could not. That power hadn't been given to her. She was clear water.

Presently he put his latchkey into his door. As he did so some words of his Mother's were repeated by his mind:

"We are just two women and want to be proud of our man!"

Women! Makers, destroyers of men!

But something was above them.

In Clive's terrific game—it seemed terrific to him, even under the cold stars of a March night in London—Something Else was taking a hand.

XI

ON the following afternoon about half-past four Clive turned out of the Strand down a narrow passage on his way to Paper Buildings, Temple, where he had an appointment with his solicitor, Robert Martin, of Messrs. Martin and Fanshaw. During the long preliminaries before his trial, and the trial itself, he had come to have a strong regard for Martin. He admired his energy and his capacity as a lawyer, but he also liked him genuinely as a man. Nevertheless he dreaded seeing Martin again. He could not help connecting him with the horrors of the trial, and now, as he entered the passage and made his way from the uproar of the Strand towards the strange, almost startling, peace of the Temple, his heart sank and his feet instinctively trod more slowly over the

greasy pavement. For a moment his mind went to Africa, to the *endroit du bonheur*, and he saw the wild oleanders growing among the rocks by the stream that came down from the tawny precipices. Then he saw a white villa hiding among palms on a bluff by a calm blue sea. And he cursed his mind for its terrible power of seeing in thought.

If they, he and Vivian, had gone! If they had only gone away!

He came into the big open space in front of Paper Buildings, and saw the dark lawns of the Temple. Number 2! Here it was! He stood still for a moment pulling himself together. This was the beginning of another tremendous ordeal. At least he supposed so. He looked towards the Thames, and longed to be on it, floating down between the wharves and the tall chimneys of London on the way to the sea. Then he went into the big building on the right, mounted the staircase, pushed open a door, and was immediately met by a smart, middle-aged man in uniform with a line of medals on his left breast.

"Good day. I've got an appointment with Mr. Martin for half-past four. Mr. Baratrie."

"Yes, Sir. Mr. Martin is expecting you."

The man sent him a keen, soldierly look and showed him into a large room with a big centre table, green walls, a few good engravings.

"I'll tell Mr. Martin, Sir."

He went out quickly, with a stiff back. Clive sat down by the table and waited. And he still saw African scenes, could almost feel on his face the wind from the vast open spaces, the tang of the uncivilised life. Men didn't know what they missed by living congregated in cities, or surely at all costs they would break away into physical freedom. He saw Arabs on horseback, hooded, galloping through yellow emptiness.

Then the door opened and Mr. Martin came in.

Martin was a man of fifty-seven, of middle height and robust build, with the big shoulders and deep chest of an athlete, topped by the pale, narrow face of a student and thinker. Clive knew him to be an original, unlike any other man he had met, yet totally free from all eccentricity of manner. Martin was simply, definitely, and at all times himself. In his youth he had been a cricketer, a boxer, and an extraordinarily fine swimmer, never beaten in any short race. But long ago he had given up these pleasures of the body, and he never alluded to them. He had won lots of cups. But they were locked away in cupboards and never seen by anyone. He now seldom took any hard exercise. He did not even play golf. Yet he was invariably liked by golfers. In lawn-tennis he took a sort of scientific interest and played, rather well, perhaps half a dozen times in the year. His hobbies were carpentering, bee-keeping, and music. He performed, admirably for an amateur, on the 'cello, and never missed practising for an hour before starting from his house at Chenies of the Temple in the morning. His knowledge of musical instruments and of Chamber music was remarkable. He was married and had three charming daughters, a first violin, a second violin and a viola. His wife was a first-rate pianist. Between them they could give a performance of Schumann's Piano Quintet which was well worth hearing. He liked being read to in the evening, but detested poetry and love stories. As a lawyer he was tremendously successful. Every one who knew him, even slightly, trusted him. And he was absolutely trustworthy. He had a power of speaking his mind without being offensive, which is given to very few men.

Clive got up as Martin came in and the two men shook hands.

"Did you hear Casals play last night?" asked Martin.

"No."

"I wish you had. I don't believe there has ever been

such a 'cellist before. Piatti was fine, but nothing like Casals."

"I must take my wife to hear him."

They sat down at the table, Martin at the top, Clive at the left-hand side.

"I've got something to consult you about, a matter that is very important to me," said Clive.

Martin put on a pair of spectacles, not rimmed with tortoiseshell or horn, but small, modest, unobtrusive spectacles which did their duty and made no show.

"Let me hear it."

"First I'll ask you to read that."

And Clive handed to him Jim Gordon's letter. Martin took it and first looked at the writer's name.

"Gordon, the tennis player, the Davis Cup man?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"He's got the finest back-hand stroke in England!" Martin observed, and then turned to the first sheet.

He read the letter slowly and laid it down.

"It used to amaze me, the foolishness of quite decently educated and brought-up people," he then said. "But that was before I was thirty."

"You think that letter foolish? I mean what it tells me of?"

"Don't you?"

"I think what it tells me of is diabolically malicious."

Martin seldom, or never, used picturesquely strong language in an interview with a client. He remarked now, soberly:

"It's malicious, of course, but very foolish too. Do you want to have my opinion on the best course to take in regard to Sir Aubrey Sabine's statement?"

"I wanted to consult you. I mean to bring a libel action against him."

"You can't do that."

"Can't?" Clive exclaimed, in a voice suddenly full of quick life. Martin had looked down again at the letter which lay on the table before him. Clive's exclamation caused him to look up sharply, and just for an instant the rather effaced grey-blue eyes behind the small spectacles were penetrating, seemed to dart out a shining inquiry.

"Why not?" Clive said, still in the quick, lively voice.

"Because in the circumstances we have here an action for libel wouldn't lie. But——"

"Please explain!" Clive interrupted. "I've had enough of the law, God knows. But I know nothing about this sort of thing."

His voice had changed, and now he sat back in his chair and put his left hand up to his thick brown hair and began to smooth it quickly.

"To start with, this is a case of slander and not libel."

"Oh!"

"Slander is in respect of words spoken, whereas libel is in respect of written words. And there is this further to be noted, that in slander an action will not lie, with certain exceptions, unless special damage is proved, and the damage must be of a pecuniary nature. Injury to feelings—that sort of thing—is not sufficient."

"Oh! Well, this infernal accusation won't affect me in any pecuniary way as far as I can see."

"In libel," Martin continued, in a quiet, low voice, "an action will lie without proof of special damage."

"But since this isn't libel?"

"You've no reason to suppose that Sir Aubrey has ever written this accusation to anyone?"

"No. I know nothing of the matter except what's in that letter."

"There's no libel then so far as we know."

"And no slander either according to your definition."

Again Martin's grey-blue eyes took on a suddenly sharp expression.

"Wait a minute. I spoke just now of certain exceptions."

"What to? In what case?"

"In cases of slander. And this of course"—he laid a powerful forefinger on the letter—"is slander. In this case it has been publicly stated that you are a murderer. This"—he struck the letter gently, without emphasis—"is one of the exceptions and would be sufficient without proof of damage to support an action for slander."

"I see. I see. Very well then, according to you, I could go on, I could attack this man!"

Clive took his left hand from his hair, and leaned forward abruptly with both his arms on the table.

"But there's a legal point which might arise," continued Martin.

"Oh—a legal point is there?"

Clive drew away his arms sharply.

"Yes. In 'Pollock on Torts' I recall the following passage: 'Words sued on as imputing crime must amount to a charge of some offence, which if proved against the party to whom it is imputed would expose him to imprisonment or other corporal penalty.'"

"Can a man be tried twice for the same murder?" Clive asked, sitting absolutely still and staring hard at the pale, narrow face which contrasted so notably with the big shoulders and deep chest of the lawyer.

"No. Not when a verdict has been given."

"Well, I seem to remember that I have been tried and acquitted"

"Exactly."

"Then there's nothing to be done, it seems. That's surely very extraordinary. Has a man in my situation no protection whatever against such abominable statements as this fellow Sabine has made?"

"Well, the words I have just quoted may bear the interpretation that unless the person charged—that is you in the

case we are considering—is exposed to imprisonment or corporal penalty, no action will lie, and that as he has been found ‘not guilty’ he is not so exposed.”

“It seems to me they obviously do bear that interpretation—unfortunately,” said Clive.

“But wait a minute. I seem to remember that ‘Underhill on Torts’ says——”

He paused and looked down, keeping silence.

“No, I can’t recall the precise words. Excuse me for just a minute.”

And he got up and went out of the room, taking off his spectacles and holding them in his left hand.

Directly he was outside Clive got up passionately.

“Damn the law and its cursed ins and outs!” he muttered. “Damn its contradictions! Damn, I say! Damn!”

He lifted both his hands clenched, like a man who longed to do some violent act, to dash something down, to destroy something utterly. His face was convulsed for a moment. It was turned towards the door by which the solicitor had gone out. But suddenly he swung round, walked to one of the two tall windows of the room, and stood there rigid.

The blind had not yet been drawn down. He stared out. He could not see the great river close by, but he seemed to feel it, to be drawn by its flowing waters. Oh, to be on them and away! Surely there was peace for him, somewhere beyond the margses of England, but never here, never, never! Things would never go right for him here. He had given up any hope he had had. England and the heart of it, London, would always be a place of purgatory for him. And he felt that he could not bear it much longer, not even for Vivian. Something would surely happen. Some crash would come. She did not know, could not know, what he was living in without hope of an outlet. It was impossible for anyone, even a loving woman, to know.

"There'll have to be an end to it, there'll have to be!" he muttered, scarcely moving his teeth.

The door clicked. He turned round, and saw Robert Martin coming in with a small slip of paper in his hand.

"I've got it," he said, in his quiet, very English voice, self-possessed, unassertive.

"Ah! Underhill—wasn't it?"

Clive came back to the table.

"Yes—Underhill."

"Let's hear it. Let's hear it."

"These are the words from 'Underhill on Torts.'" (He read from the slip of paper.) "'It is immaterial that the charge was made at a time when it could not cause any criminal proceedings to be instituted.' That's Underhill on Slander."

"Well, but—Good Heavens, Martin, to me as a miserable layman Underhill seems to be in direct contradiction with the other fellow. What was his name?"

"Pollock."

"Well? What do you say? Isn't Underhill in direct contradiction with Pollock?"

"There is some doubt about the matter, some doubt."

He stopped. Clive looked at him but said nothing more. There was a moment of silence. Then Martin looked across at Clive—they were both again sitting at the table—and said:

"Are you anxious to take this into a court of law, or do you prefer to let it go, now that I have explained as well as I can the position?"

"Of course, I wish to punish this man Sabine, and to stop once for all the mouths of these calumniators, Heathcote and the rest of them."

"Oh, then you wish, if possible, to bring the whole thing into Court?"

There was a peculiar directness (so it seemed to Clive) even in the sound of Robert Martin's voice at this moment.

"Do you doubt it?" said Clive, with sudden uneasy heat.

"Yes," replied Martin. "I think you would probably be glad to let the whole matter drop."

"You're wrong, you're absolutely wrong. Naturally I don't look forward—could any man?—to a revival of this horrible business, but I want to punish Sabine, to punish him to the uttermost. Only I don't want to make a fool of myself, to revive the scandal for nothing. Therefore I only wish to go on if I have every chance of success in my action. According to you, I don't seem to have even a fighting chance, and——"

"Not according to *me!*" Martin interrupted. "I've quoted Pollock and Underhill to you, but I haven't given you *my* opinion."

"Please give it! I want it. That's what I'm here for."

"Although, as I said, there is some doubt, on the whole I am strongly of opinion that in this case action would lie and that you would certainly have the sympathy of the Court."

"Oh!"

Clive looked at an engraving on the wall just opposite to him, a woman in a high-waisted gown walking in a garden with two oddly dressed children and a greyhound. He even wondered about her for an instant. But part of his mind was hard at work all the time on the matter in hand.

"In that case I can go ahead?" he presently said.

(He did not know how long he had been silent.)

"If you wish to. I have given you my opinion for what it's worth."

"Every one knows an opinion of yours in law is worth a great deal."

"If you give me time, I can look further into the matter, and see if there are any cases similar to yours which have been decided."

"You might do that."

"I will."

Clive sat still looking down. The lawyer, watching him through the small spectacles, realised that he was debating something, had some further question in his mind, was probably considering whether to ask it or not.

"Look here!" at last Clive said, lifting his head, and tapping on the table with his left hand clenched into a fist. "Suppose this man Sabine got rattled, got a fright when he found I wasn't going to sit down under his abominable accusation?"

"Yes?"

"He might apologise, mightn't he? He might say he hadn't meant it, had been talking at random. He might send me a written apology."

"Certainly he might."

"Could I proceed against him if he did that?"

"Yes."

"I could?"

"No apology, written or otherwise, need prevent you from taking proceedings. The apology would only be used in Court, by the Counsel for the defence, in mitigation of penalty."

"Ah!"

Clive sat for a moment, then got up, put both his hands in his jacket pockets and said:

"In your opinion, then, this fellow has delivered himself into my hands?"

"In my opinion he has. As I told you, there's the point of law, but I don't think any judge would be likely to raise it. I imagine that you would win your case hands down."

"Thank you."

"Why not go to someone else, take another opinion?"

"Oh no. Yours is quite good enough for me."

A small clock on the chimney-piece chimed five.

"I'm going to have a cup of tea," said Martin. "Let me give you one."

"Thanks very much. One thing more—"

"Yes. What is it?"

"In taking proceedings for Slander, could I take civil proceedings for damages, or could I take criminal proceedings?"

"You could only take civil proceedings."

"Thanks. Well, I shall be very glad of some tea now."

Martin got up and touched a bell. The Commissionaire came.

"Tea for two, please, Sergeant."

"Yes, Sir. I'll send it in at once."

"A cigar, Baratrie?" said Martin, as the man went out.

"No, thanks. You never smoke, I know."

"It's bad for my eyes. But let me give you one."

"No, really! How are the bees getting on?"

"Famously."

And he began to talk about his bees with earnest interest, and a curious simplicity. This simplicity went oddly in his character with great astuteness and an outlook on men and women which, as his remarks about them often indicated, was strongly tinged with cynicism. A boy brought in two cups of tea and some biscuits on a silver tray, and while they had it Martin continued talking about bees. His talk on any subject was always interesting, for he had not a grain of folly in him, or a grain of pretentiousness, and he never spoke at large on subjects of which he had no knowledge. A confession of ignorance was to him the easiest matter in the world. "I know nothing whatever about that," came as readily to his lips as a piece of curious information. Apparently he had at no time any desire to be considered as more than, or other than, he was. Perhaps that was partly why most men liked him.

When the tea had been drunk Clive got up to go.

"You must be a happy man, Martin," he said, abruptly.

"I suppose I am fairly happy. But why does it strike you?"

"Listening to your talk about bees. And then the music;

Casals, your 'cello practice, your children, a piano quintet in your family. When I listen to you, look at you, I see such a——” He broke off.

“You and your wife must come down and let us play to you. But we are only amateurs, of course.”

“Jolly good ones. My wife's expecting her first child some time in May.”

Martin looked rather doubtful for a moment. Then he said:

“She is very strong and very sane. She ought to get through very well.”

“Do you congratulate me, Martin?”

“If you wish for a child, I do certainly.”

Clive reached for his hat.

“I think you're very clever, Martin. But you're more than that. You're appallingly sincere. Do you realise how much more sincere you are than most people?”

Martin merely smiled at this, and Clive thought there was a touch of irony in the smile.

“I'll see if I can find any case on all fours with this of yours,” he said. “And I'll let you know one way or the other, probably some time to-morrow.”

“Thank you. And then—well, then we shall have to go to work.”

“I'm extremely sorry that this has happened. I quite realise how painful and disgusting it is for you.”

“It's just damnable. That's all! Utterly damnable!”

“I'm afraid so.”

“Do you ever *feel* your cases, Martin?”

“I do, certainly.”

“But you keep an even mind through it all.”

“Like the Specialist who sometimes has to pronounce sentence on a patient. One learns the power of dismissal, utter dismissal.”

“And the bees help you no doubt?”

"They do. But in this case you will win again."

"Again?"

"Didn't you win before?"

"Oh—well, in a way, I suppose I did. Well, good-bye, Martin."

XII

At breakfast-time on the next day but one Clive received a note from Robert Martin:

"2 PAPER BUILDINGS,
"TEMPLE, E.C.,

"DEAR BARATRIE,—

"I have looked into the matter we spoke of the other day, as I said I would. There are apparently no cases on the subject. I feel pretty sure you need not anticipate anybody raising the legal point I drew your attention to. If you go on I should say you would win, and no one could say that it is bad law even if there were an appeal against the verdict. I shall hold myself at your disposal and can see you again whenever you like.

"To turn to pleasanter matters. Casals is playing at Queen's Hall next Saturday afternoon. If you and your wife ever feel inclined to come down to Chenies on a Sunday my wife will be delighted, and the family will gladly do their best in Schumann's Quintet, if you happen to care for that sort of music. Some don't.

"Yours sincerely,

"ROBERT MARTIN."

Clive was alone in the dining-room. Vivian was breakfasting in her bedroom. The child was expected some time in May and, rather against her desire, she rested a good deal now. Clive read Martin's letter, read it again and then crushed it up in his right hand.

Casals playing at Queen's Hall—the family will gladly do their best in Schumann's Quintet if you happen to like that kind of music!

Could anyone understand another, have the slightest real understanding of another, of another man as a whole? For a moment Clive felt that he stood poised in the world in absolute, irrevocable loneliness. Martin's letter had made him feel this. And yet Martin was undoubtedly a man with a subtle intellect, quick to grasp many things. Clive had not forgotten a certain look in the pale grey-blue eyes. Perhaps the truth was that the happy man cannot comprehend unhappiness, as the robustly healthy man usually seems quite incapable of comprehending ill health. And Martin was happy, he must be happy. He could carry the playing of Casals tenderly in his memory. He could rejoice over "the family" in Schumann's Quintet. And he could deliver a blow over the heart without apparently being aware that he was delivering it.

If only those who were happy knew what they possessed! But they didn't. Only the unhappy knew that.

"To turn to pleasanter matters——"

Clive tore the letter up and threw the fragments into a waste-paper basket. Well, now he knew! There was nothing more to wait for. He had Martin's full opinion. And two women, one just overhead, the other not far off in Knightsbridge, were wanting to be "proud of their man." As he left the dining-room and went slowly upstairs he remembered several of his Mother's sayings, uttered in that curious night interview he had had with her.

"You were attacked—this time you will be the attacker." "Instead of receiving you will give the blow." "Your chance has been offered to you, and by Jim Gordon strangely enough."

"My chance!" thought Clive, dwelling mentally on the last of those three sentences. "My chance! I must look on this as my chance. I must go for it as my chance."

And he tried to make a violent effort, to force himself into a mood that would carry him out of the blank horror he was feeling. This thing had to be gone through now. There was no escape. Better then go through it gallantly, try for some of the exaltation of the hardy fighting man keen to get at his opponent. But the arena! How awful to be again in the arena surrounded by the many-headed mob! His heart sickened at the prospect. And he saw his name, like a thing blazing, some horrible fiery sign, lifted up in the heavens to be seen of all men. Clive Baratrie. So those two words were to be branded on the minds of the public.

He reached a small landing where the staircase turned, and abruptly stood still. It seemed to him that he had caught the sound of a footstep behind him, a light, but inexorable footstep, like a woman's. He looked back down the stairs. He saw nothing but the moss-green carpet on which some pale sunshine fell. He heard nothing but distant voices below. The servants were talking downstairs. But the impression that he had heard a light footfall remained with him; he knew that he had not, but he felt that he had. That contradiction was within him. And the fact that it was within him, and that he could not get rid of it, made him think with dread of his nervous system. Was he beginning to go to pieces under the stress of his life? Had this last unexpected blow done him irreparable damage? Just then he felt frightened of himself. The worst of it was that he knew whose was the footfall he had as it were heard and not heard.

Although he did not know it, he was unusually pale when he opened the door of Vivian's bedroom and went in.

She was sitting up in bed enveloped in a mauve wrapper reading a letter, from which she looked up quickly as she heard him at the door. Her bright hair, which she still wore short and parted in the middle, was uncovered. He could see the child in her eyes. As his eyes met them he

felt that she had had some news by the post which had depressed her, or made her anxious. She looked less delicately calm than usual.

He shut the door and went up to the bed.

"Any bad news?" he asked.

"You don't look well, Clive," she replied. "What is it?"

"I'm perfectly well. But you don't look quite yourself. Is anything the matter?"

"I've had a letter from Cannes, from Archie."

"Well?"

She looked doubtful. He sat down by the bed.

"Does he write about Sabine's monstrous statement? I suppose it's all over Cannes by now."

"There isn't a word about it in his letter."

"Oh! He's all right, I hope?"

"Yes."

"The tennis going well?"

"Yes. He's been playing at Menton and Hyères, and done better than he expected."

"I'm glad."

"But Jim hasn't been doing well."

"I heard at the club the other day that he wasn't playing up to his form this spring."

"Did you?"

"But I suppose every player must have his ups and downs. A run of bad luck, I suppose."

"I don't think I believe very much in bad luck in games, once you've reached a certain level of play."

She laid the letter away on a little table beside the bed. He realised that she had nothing more to say to him about it.

"Weren't you going to tell me something?" she asked, as he was silent.

"Well, yes. I've seen Robert Martin, and this morning I heard from him. I can bring an action for slander against Aubrey Sabine on the letter Gordon sent me with every

chance—with practically the certainty, I imagine—of winning it hands down.”

“He deserves it,” she said, but without any intensity either of hatred or enthusiasm. “But if only he hadn’t said that horrible thing!”

“Unfortunately he has said it, and Gordon’s told me of it, and the thing’s got to be thrashed out. I don’t know how long it will take, but of course the papers will be full of it, and the whole world will talk of it, and my name will flame sky-high once more, my name that’s yours now.”

She put out her hand and squeezed his.

“I am ready,” she said.

He leaned towards her, and stretched out his arms gently over the bed and her in it. Suddenly a great longing had come to him, a longing that overwhelmed him, that must be expressed.

“When it’s all over,” he said. “It must be over some day—when it’s all over—promise me something.”

“Dearest, what is it?”

“Once in the wood at Tyford, when I spoke to you about Africa—you remember?”

“Yes.”

“I tried to persuade you to something, but I didn’t succeed. And at the end you said why shouldn’t we go to that place—*l’endroit du bonheur*—for our honeymoon.”

“I remember—every word.”

“I was almost savage with you. I said I couldn’t stand being first dropped into Paradise and then pulled out by the heels.”

“I know you did.”

“Life’s been training me, I suppose. And there’s more training, pretty severe training, ahead. One learns, and sees oneself as a fool. I should be willing now to take a few days in Paradise—only a few days. I wanted a lifetime. Now—now—I’d leap at a few days. Will you let me take back

my refusal, Vi? Will you let me eat my words? Will you come with me to the *endroit du bonheur* when this thing that lies ahead of me is over?"

"You mean the trial, your prosecution of Sir Aubrey Sabine?"

"Yes. I shall have to stand a lot—all this thing coming up again. I'm facing a hideous resurrection, Vi. When the damned thing is over, directly it's over, will you come away with me just for a few weeks—I won't ask more than that—to the place I told you of? Will you come out in camp with me above the plain of the gazelles? Will you visit the villa by the sea with me?"

She put an arm round his neck. Her face had flushed, and the flush went down to her neck from which the mauve wrapper fell back.

"Darling, I would—I would! Of course I would! But how can I? Have you forgotten?"

And instantly at the word "forgotten," he remembered. Actually in that moment he had forgotten. It seemed incredible, but it was true. He had forgotten the child. His pain, his dread, and his longing for a few weeks of peace far away in the wilds where he was unknown, with her, had blotted out his knowledge of the child. For a moment the child had not been.

The sudden rush of consciousness that came with her words had a physical effect on him. The blood seemed to gather together and to pour towards his eyes. He felt as if his eyes were suffused with blood. Something, the blood too, perhaps, sang in his head, dully, menacingly. And her arm about his neck seemed to be throttling him.

He shook himself free from her arm and got up.

"Oh, Vi," he said, as soon as he could find a voice, "what a madman you must think me! How could I forget? There's so much in my mind, such a mass of material. Sometimes it's like a tremendous weight, and I feel that if

anything big is added to the heap something will founder. And now this Sabine business has been added and I—but how could I forget, even for a moment?”

“Clive, I would give a great deal to go away with you, far away, for a little while. Do you believe it?”

He looked down at her and said:

“Yes.”

After a moment he added:

“I always believe everything you tell me.”

“Sit down just for a moment.”

He sat down again by the bed.

“Don’t hate the child for preventing me,” she whispered.
“Don’t ever hate the child.”

“Hate my own child!”

“You didn’t want to have a child. Don’t you remember?”

“I—I thought perhaps it was hardly fair to tie my name round a young neck. If it’s a boy, his name shan’t be Clive.”

“But you *will* love him?”

“Could a man help loving his own son?”

“I don’t know. This is my doing. I know that. But if you didn’t love him, it would hurt me almost to death.”

“I shall love him. But—later on—will he love me?”

He bent abruptly, kissed her and got up.

“I must go, dearest. It’s time I started for business. Good-bye till this evening.”

He didn’t look round as he went out. And she felt that he did not wish her to see his face just then.

XIII

VIVIAN had wished to be calm, to be tranquil in spirit that spring. Her instinct had told her to put forth her full strength of character for the sake of the child and for Clive’s sake. She believed it was possible to control thought, and through thought-control to govern feeling. But it seemed to

her now as if Destiny were ranged definitely against her. She had not allowed herself to show all the emotion which this new blow at Clive, totally unforeseen and unexpected, had roused in her. The intensity of her sympathy she had shown. She had spoken of the spark and the blaze. But she had not even hinted at the disgust, the shrinking, the horror almost which had stirred in her directly she had read Jim's letter and had realised what it had made inevitable.

The life of the child within her had brought to the birth in her a passionate longing for privacy. This longing, which seemed to her sacred, was going to be outraged. Again, and now as a wife and mother, she would have to endure the abominable and stripping publicity which she had already endured as an unmarried girl. A great revival of it was at hand. Once more Clive's name, now hers, would be shouted through the streets by newsboys, would be blazoned on the placards at street corners, would spring to the eyes in column after column of the newspapers. Once more another name, a woman's name, would be linked with it.

Mrs. Sabine!

Would they, she and Clive, ever get away from the tyranny of that following name? Would the child even ever outrun it? It was beginning to seem to Vivian like an inexorable pursuer that could not be shaken off, attentive and inevitable as the shadow that pursues the human being to whom it belongs and from whom it can never be detached.

She had always secretly hated the thought of Mrs. Sabine, the woman whose lover Clive had been before he had ever seen her, the woman through whom a great tragedy had come into his life. Now she was beginning almost to fear Mrs. Sabine.

Hitherto Vivian had genuinely believed that she was unimaginative, and when she had lived chiefly out of doors, had taken daily hard exercise, had kept herself in training, had been full of ambition to conquer in a game, her imagina-

tion—so she thought now—had lain within her quiescent. Her completely changed life had made her know that she had not thoroughly known herself. She had imagination, and the strong influence of Clive upon her had gradually made it alert. It was like a thing which had slept, but which now lifted its head, looked about it with sensitive eyes, listened with sensitive ears. And it was a thing which could be tormented and which could torment itself.

Vivian had never seen Mrs. Sabine. In the past she had often been very thankful for that. But now, since this new development in Clive's life, she began to feel full of a pricking curiosity about this dead woman, whose influence seemed potent still in the world from which she had departed. Vivian found herself wondering about Mrs. Sabine, about her appearance, her voice, her habits and tricks, and then presently about the sum-total of her, the sum-total which had been the real woman whole, the woman who had dominated Clive. What had she been, this woman whose name still clung to Clive's like a thing too persistent ever to be shaken off, however loathed, feared, shrunk from?

It was difficult to Vivian not to think that the dead woman must have been evil. Yet she must have had strong influence, magnetic force, fascination. She had been much older than Clive. Vivian and the whole London world knew that. When she had died she had been fifty-one. Her death had revealed the carefully hidden secret of her real age. But she had seemed many years younger than she was, and had apparently still been beautiful when she had passed the half-century. She had willed to remain beautiful. She had willed many things. In the trial she had been presented to the public as an embodiment of will.

And thinking of this will-power of a dead woman, Vivian was led on to think about Clive's will, how much will he had and what was its exact nature. For there were many kinds of will, she thought, all partaking of one principle. If Clive's

will were brought up against a fierce opposing will, what would inevitably happen? And then she remembered how Clive had allowed her will to override his in a matter that affected vitally his whole life.

Mrs. Sabine's will—his wife's will! The one had surely been definitely destructive in Clive's existence. What about the other?

It was just then, when that comparison came up in Vivian's mind, that for the first time she began to be afraid of her own will and of what it had done. Suddenly she saw it as an arrogant thing, a sister to the will of the dead woman who had preceded her in Clive's intimate life. She had made Clive stay and face life in London, and she had been able to do that because of his intense love for her. But he had struggled against her will. She had seemed to conquer on the night of the verdict. But he had struggled again. In Scotland he had certainly returned to his original conclusion that life in London was impossible for him. And in Tyford he had striven to renew the fight. But she had beaten him. (She used hard words to herself.) She had taken him back to London. Now sometimes she saw him as a victim, led back by her from the safety he had longed to keep, the safety in which "Claude Ormeley" had dwelt for a time, into the moral misery and danger of London. He had been doubly a victim; first a victim to the love of the dead Mrs. Sabine, and then a victim to her love.

And Vivian began to blame herself, to remember many things to her own detriment.

Has anyone a right to think and act for another who has reached maturity? She had arrogated to herself that tremendous right, and now she was confronted with this terrible resurrection of the scandal she had forced Clive to try and "live down." If she had yielded her will to Clive's, the woman's to the man's, if they had gone away and lived as he wished, this resurrection would never have taken place.

It was she who had made it possible. Claude Ormeley and Claude Ormeley's wife in a distant land would never have been troubled by the tongue of slander. They would have shed the past.

But they would have been cowards.

And then Vivian realised that another and greater assertion of her will over Clive's was even now being worked out to its fulfilment. The child had been willed by her. Clive might hate the child because of that fact. She could conceive of such a hatred as possible, given the circumstances. How terrible it would be if Clive hated the child, or even if he felt the slightest aversion from it. It would, it must, be a living symbol of her will-assertion directly it was born.

And now she had had to refuse Clive's pathetic request for a few weeks with her in peace and safety, over the sea, among the dark men who knew not their lives, in the *endroit du bonheur*, and in the white villa among the palm trees, when his new period of torment was over. It had hurt her terribly to have to refuse that request made under the spell of a strange forgetfulness, and she was haunted by the memory of the look in Clive's eyes when he had made it, by the memory of the hunger in his eyes. The child, willed by her, prevented the possibility of Clive's having the few weeks in Paradise so longed for, so needed, by him. How was she going to make up to him for all that she had taken from him? She had a longing to subordinate her will to his in some great matter. Perhaps some day that chance would be given to her. Meanwhile she must wait.

As well as this great new trouble of Clive's which affected her so closely and intimately, Vivian had another trouble. Clive had been right in thinking that she had been depressed by some news which she had received through the post. Archie's letter from Cannes had told her that "old Jim" was no longer at all his "own man." His staying power and brilliance on Court had deteriorated almost beyond belief.

He was being beaten by fellows who formerly had not been near his own class. In his letter Archie had "let loose" to his sister. It was evident to Vivian that alarm for his great pal had forced him into an unreserve which he would certainly never have shown to anyone but her. So the tie between them was still strong, still meant something to Archie though life had tried to build up a wall between them.

Archie did not put forward any theory to account for Jim's failure on the Riviera. There was no hint that Jim was ill, or that he had been foolish in any way. But the general trend of the boy's news was that Jim was going to pieces. "Oh, Vi," Archie wrote, "if only you were out here! If only you were still in lawn-tennis! It would be all right then. Without you old Jim seems to me like a rudderless ship. I can't do anything, and everybody's wondering about it." There was nothing in the letter to show that Archie had heard anything of the scandal at Cannes about Clive.

Before her brother's letter came Vivian had known that Jim's luck on the Riviera had been out. He had begun well and had won the singles in his first tournament just after he had been with her and she had told him to play to win. But what had happened since? She could only guess. Her guess was sad, even horrible. But she could do nothing in England.

And now—and that troubled her too—Jim had entered into the life of her husband. Jim's action in writing that letter to Clive had surely created a sort of subtle intimacy between them. Vivian knew that Clive must hate that sensitively, though he had never said so.

The blow which had fallen on Clive had been dealt by Jim's hand. And yet—and that seemed ironic—the dealing of the blow had been meant as a friendly act. It would have been wrong of Jim to keep silence about Sir Aubrey Sabine's abominable words. But there was something horrible about the knowledge of them having been conveyed to Clive by Jim.

Although Vivian tried with all her power to dismiss sad thoughts and evil forebodings from her mind at this time, not to give way to apprehension or depression, not to show to Clive that she was living through a period of stress, she found the effort one of the most difficult she had ever yet made.

There was one thing that comforted her, though it also surprised her. Mrs. Baratrie, instead of being crushed by the new development in her son's tormented life, seemed to greet it with a cheer. Vivian had always found her mother-in-law a very unusual, even at times a very strange, woman, highly individual and totally unlike every one else, but she had certainly never looked for the resurrection which now took place, and which apparently was caused by the imminent prospect of Clive's public attack on Sir Aubrey Sabine.

Mrs. Baratrie abandoned her life of a hermit. She began to go out again. She came frequently to the house in Chester Street to visit Vivian, and made Vivian and Clive go to her. She even began once more to see some of her friends and acquaintances, to invite a few people to her house from time to time. She still looked much aged, physically ravaged, but the expression of her face was notably, even extraordinarily, changed. At times there was almost a happy gleam in her eyes. Often she looked calm, steadily serene. The haggard watchfulness, the fiercely alert self-consciousness and consciousness of those about her, which Mrs. Herries and others had noticed and been made uncomfortable, even distressed, by, had vanished from her. She seemed nearly normal again. In her manner there was sometimes a brightness which was startling shown by one who had for so long been evidently bowed under the weight of an affliction mysterious and apparently irrevocable. The lifting of a cloud was apparent to everyone who knew her at all well.

Either this new attack on her son, and his determination to meet it publicly, had acted as a tonic on her peculiar

temperament and nature, or she must have braced herself up magnificently to play a part now that a fresh misfortune was threatening. Was the latter, the bracing up, a possibility? Could a woman of her age, who had really seemed to be withering away under the influence of some torture of the mind, make such a gallant effort merely to hearten her son? Vivian asked herself the question. Bob Herries and his wife discussed the matter in their rectory. Two or three others who knew Mrs. Baratrie well wondered about it. They all came to the conclusion that Mrs. Baratrie was not pretending. She was not a woman given at any time to elaborate pretence. So all those thought who knew her best. She might conceal by silence. Is not almost any woman capable of that? She might declare she was well and happy when she was obviously, or seemed so to those about her, ill and miserable. Such matters were but the defiances of a brave nature whose pride could not consent to a revelation of any truth which might seem to be touting for sympathy. But a prolonged elaboration of acting was surely quite out of her character. Vivian felt positive of that. So did Bob Herries and his wife. So did the few intimate friends who were genuinely interested in her.

Evidently then she did greet this fresh ordeal of Clive with a cheer. It was giving her new life, quickening her spirits, sending a long unknown and genuine animation coursing through her.

"Can you understand Mum?" Vivian could not help asking Clive once after a visit from Mrs. Baratrie.

He looked at her with a sudden close scrutiny.

"What makes you ask me that just now?" he said.

"It's only that she seems to welcome all this that is coming."

"D'you think that's heartless?"

"No, she could never be heartless. She has a big heart, though not for every one."

"You think it's strange then?"

"Isn't it? One should meet everything gallantly, of course. That's one of the first and biggest lessons life has to teach, I think. But meeting a thing gallantly doesn't mean being glad of the encounter."

"And Mother does seem glad? Well, thank God for it. It's a help to me, Vi."

And on that he had left the room abruptly, like a man afraid of betraying some emotion.

Although very tender to her of late, she had not failed to notice that beneath his tenderness there was a great and, she believed, growing reserve. She thought she understood it. She did not dare to try to combat it. But she longed to see it vanish, to have him with her in frankness. It was very sad that they could not live quite frankly together at such a time, when both were waiting for the coming of their first child. But evidently it was fated that this child was not to be born in joy. Its birth, its first glimpses of life, would be overshadowed by the anxiety and misery caused to its parents by the ugly scandal which already the world was just beginning to whisper about. For there were social eavesdroppers on the Riviera, who made money by retailing gossip to hungry newspapers. Here and there veiled allusions to the scene in Lady Dartree's villa were cropping up. The clubs were already on the alert, and London drawing-rooms were beginning to lend an ear. It would not be long now before Clive's name and reputation would be once more tossing on the giant waves of publicity.

And Vivian could not divest herself of this new longing for privacy and remoteness which seemed to have been born in her with the child, to be quickening in her with it. She longed to go away with Clive and be absolutely hidden until after the child was born. The horrible claw of publicity seemed to her to be stretching out even to the child as if anxious to brand it directly it saw the light. And she felt as if it were her duty to protect it from such a branding

which would set it apart from all other children. She even had moments of weakness in which she was tempted to doubt whether Clive had not been right, whether he had not seen more clearly than she on that evening in Knightsbridge when he had said: "I don't think a man like me ought ever to have children. I don't think it would be fair." In those moments she almost agonised over the child. But then, recovering partially, she fought with herself. Silently she denounced her own weakness, saw herself as the thing she had always been inclined to despise, a morbid woman. Was motherhood destroying the strength of her nature instead of bringing, as it ought to bring, fresh powers, the faculty of endurance for two instead of for one? One thing was certain, that her condition made her almost tremblingly sensitive. From what she was now she looked back on what she had been, and she saw herself as a hard-bitten Amazon, with a ruthlessly trained body which had surely had an effect upon the mind, turning it to a certain ruthlessness. How she had changed since the mere lawn-tennis player had become the vehicle for the handing on of life!

And then suddenly she saw Clive standing up in fierce light like a symbolic figure, she saw him as a terrific change-bringer.

That was in the deep night when he was sleeping.

Clive had submitted his will to two women, to Mrs. Sabine and to her. Yet he had power. She always felt force in him, like some big concealed thing that perhaps had not yet reached maturity. He had changed her, she believed, far more than she had changed him.

The figure that seemed to stand up for a moment before her in fire faded. The room was dark. In the darkness she heard Clive's regular breathing. She listened intently. All her thoughts were on him just then.

She heard him turn and mutter in his sleep.

XIV

THE effect produced on Vivian's people by the tidings of fresh legal proceedings, in which their daughter's name would almost certainly be mentioned, though of course she would have nothing personally to do with the case, was quite different from that produced on Mrs. Baratrie. Vivian had never seen her Mother so painfully distressed as she was when she first heard the news. Usually calm, and full of quiet self-control, she was shocked and startled into a display of feeling which she did not attempt to hide. After a moment of silence, during which she sat looking aghast and as if stunned, she got up from her sofa and lifted up her hands in a gesture so unlike her that, afterwards, Vivian could scarcely believe that she had ever made it. It was like another, quite different woman's gesture, wild and ugly, coming from a body undisciplined, out of control.

"More mud!" she said.

And the voice that spoke seemed quite unlike hers.

"More mud! Are we to be covered with it?"

"But, Mother darling——"

But before Vivian could say anything more Mrs. Denys burst into tears. And she did not try to hide her tears, though she took out a handkerchief, and with a hand that shook a little she wiped them away as they fell.

"Mother dearest—please—please! I told you too suddenly."

"How could you tell me any other way? I'm sorry. I'm very sorry, but I can't help it. Just when the child is coming, my first little grandchild,—mud, more mud, thrown upon us all."

Vivian said nothing more, did not attempt to comfort her Mother. She could not, for she was horrified by this outburst which told her with awful swiftness what her Mother must

have endured through her connection with Clive. In a flash everything which had been tenderly hidden was revealed, and for a moment Vivian was conscious of a startled feeling of guilt. How terribly this love of hers had hurt her Mother! Archie she had read, but she had never really read her Mother, whose deep religious resignation, which attributed everything to the will of God, had made for a deceptive calm, a deceptive serenity, even a deceptive cheerfulness.

And now suddenly—the naked truth!

While Mrs. Denys was still wiping her eyes, and Vivian was looking at her, unable to speak, able only to stand there and feel the weight of this abrupt revelation, the drawing-room door opened, and Mr. Denys came in after his day's work at the Bank and a brief visit to the Athenæum on his way home.

"Hulloh, Vi!" he said, cheerfully.

Then he saw his wife and immediately shut the door.

"Mary!" he said, and his naturally humorous face became very grave. "What is it?"

He looked from his wife to Vivian.

"Anything wrong about Archie?"

"No, Harry, no!"

Mrs. Denys made a great effort, rolled her handkerchief up in a ball and managed to control her voice for an instant.

"I'm very sorry for this. It isn't often I——" She could not go on.

Her husband bent his tall, thin figure, which was crowned by a rather small head covered with thick silvery hair, and put a hand gently on her shoulder.

"You, the most controlled of women! Vivian, what is it?"

"Dad, it's about Clive."

"Clive!"

! Her Father's voice sounded to her sharp as he said the name.

"Is Clive ill?"

"No."

She stopped, summoned all her resolution and said in a quiet, unemotional voice:

"Sir Aubrey Sabine, a nephew of—of Mrs. Sabine's——"

"Yes, yes?"

"He's at Cannes, where Jim is——"

"Archie too! Well?"

"He has said in public at Lady Dartree's an abominable thing about Clive."

"What did he say?"

"He said that he and his family believed that Clive had murdered Mrs. Sabine—I think the expression was *knew*—and that other people, among them Mr. Wilfred Heathcote, the actor, agreed with them. Jim was there and took the matter up. But Sir Aubrey only reiterated what he had said, stuck to it. Jim said Clive could prosecute him for his assertion. Sir Aubrey said Clive wouldn't dare to do that. Jim wrote the whole thing to Clive. Clive has consulted Mr. Martin, the solicitor, and taken his opinion. And he is going to prosecute Sir Aubrey Sabine for slander. I've been telling Mother. I'm sorry, Daddy. But it isn't my fault, and it isn't Clive's fault."

How dull the words sounded in her ears as she said them.

"Then you mean—then there's going to be another public scandal and Clive's name in it?" said Mr. Denys, catching hold of his left wrist with his right hand.

"Yes, Daddy. How can Clive help it?"

"No, no. Mary, we must be just, dear. A man has to take up a thing of that kind."

Mr. Denys tried to speak firmly, quietly, but Vivian could see in his face that he was stricken by the news. And she thought of the Athenæum, of all the distinguished men there whom her Father knew, of the great Bank which he ruled,

with its many employés looking up to him, and she remembered her Mother's cry—"Mud, more mud thrown upon us all!" And her heart sickened. But she did not show it. She was married to Clive, she would be the Mother of his child, and they were not guilty, he and she. It was all just fate, the great coil of destiny closing upon them.

Mrs. Denys had now recovered some outward calm.

"I don't blame poor Clive," she said. "He is only unfortunate."

A thought seemed to strike her. She turned to Vivian, and said, in a different voice:

"Oh, I had forgotten Mrs. Baratrie. She knows, of course, poor woman."

"Yes."

"Won't it kill her?"

"It seems to have given her new life," said Vivian.

When Vivian was leaving them, after an uneasy and painful talk, which they all tried to make affectionate, intimate and natural, Mrs. Denys kissed her tenderly and said, with tears in her eyes:

"Forgive me, dear. But you will, I know. It was very wrong to break out like that. I am ashamed of myself. But I was so startled—almost as if someone had struck me from behind. I ought to have thought of you and Clive and I thought of myself. That's how I am. Sometimes all one's efforts and prayers seem no good. But they are. I know that. I feel quite different now. Give my love and my sympathy to Clive."

"Yes, Mother darling."

"And please never let him know about to-day. He's very sensitive. It would upset him terribly, and it would be wicked to add to his troubles."

Her lips trembled as she kissed her daughter anxiously.

Mr. Denys had gone into his library, and Vivian and her Mother were alone in the hall.

"Of course, you realise, Mother," Vivian said, "that Clive will win the case against Sir Aubrey Sabine."

"Yes. It isn't that. But I—I seemed to want the way clear for the baby. You know what I mean, Vivian dear."

"Oh yes, Mother! I know. But this is how I look at it. This horror *must* be knocked on the head once for all. Clive can't allow such awful things to be said, and those who say them to go unpunished. Just think if people began to say that Clive really didn't dare to defend himself!"

"I know, dear, I know. And it's all God's will for us. I thought I had learnt to feel that. I mean that everything that comes is meant to come, and is best for us in the end. But evidently I was wrong."

She paused and put her hand up to her grey-brown hair.

"Is my hair right?" she asked.

"Yes. Why?"

"I feel as if it was all in disorder. That is because of my horrid outbreak."

"Please don't think any more about that, Mother dear."

"Ah, but *you* will. That's what troubles me."

Vivian was too sincere to attempt any denial.

"Well——" she said.

But Mrs. Denys still kept her for a moment.

"Vivian, it's just struck me! Mightn't that man apologise when he realises that he is going to be proceeded against?"

"Yes. But Clive will not accept an apology. Whatever happens, he will go on and get a verdict. That is the only way to stamp out a slander like this."

"Then all we can do is to bear the publicity."

Again tears started to her eyes, and her face suddenly began to redden.

"Good-bye, dear," she said hastily, again kissing Vivian. "The cab's there, isn't it?"

"Yes, Mother."

Mrs. Denys turned to go upstairs, then stopped and looked back.

"The little baby won't know. That's something," she said.

Her voice just then was husky. She went rather quickly towards the staircase, and began to go up.

"I seemed to want the way clear for the baby."

Those words of her Mother had gone into the depths of Vivian, as if to meet and be with a feeling, intense, jealous, protective, which was hidden there and which they had expressed. Poor Mother! Poor Mothers! Did any man know, or even conjecture, the nature of their protective love for a child that came from them? Mrs. Denys was feeling what Vivian was feeling, and evidently with almost fierce intensity. Vivian had never before seen her Mother so entirely out of control. A door had been flung open for a moment, and the vision revealed had been astonishing.

Vivian could not forget that wild gesture, the gesture of a stranger, could never forget that cry of "More mud!" If Clive had seen and heard! But, thank God, he had not.

And there was Archie still to be encountered.

With his Father's permission Archie had decided to lengthen his stay in the South of France. He had begged to be allowed to remain till Jim Gordon came back in May, after the Marseille tournament. The reason given to Mr. Denys for this wish to prolong a holiday was that Archie found himself in unexpectedly good form, and was keen to play up to the very end of the South of France season. But to Vivian, in a letter that came soon after her memorable visit to Pont Street, the real reason was revealed. Archie wanted to stay specially because of Jim. Jim was awfully down on his luck just now, but though he was having little, or no, success, he was determined to stick it out, not to lower his flag till the end of the season. And Archie wanted to stick it out with him. They would play in the men's doubles to-

gether in Marseille and then come straight home. That would be some time in May.

Not long before the birth of the child!

Archie would be in London when the child was born. A strange imagination came to Vivian. Suppose that she died in giving birth to the child and it was left alone with Clive. She saw Clive and the child without her. And then, thinking of death, she thought how useless it was to allow trouble of the spirit to grow. So near the end might be. And then surely all the trouble would be laid to rest. Yet it seemed to her almost incredible that she could rest anywhere if she had left Clive and the child together without her. And she wondered about the so-called dead.

At that time there was a marked revival of spiritualism in England, and in many other parts of the world. Vivian had never had anything to do with the cult, but now she sometimes asked herself whether there could be any truth in the confident assertions of its leaders, and the question rose in her mind: "Could I be absolutely detached from Clive and my baby even by death?"

She told Clive presently that her people knew about the coming prosecution for slander, and he did not ask her how they had taken the news. He only said:

"It must have been very painful for you, Vi. But we've got to go through with it."

Then after a moment he added:

"Has Archie written to you about it?"

"No," she said, "not a word."

"Have you written to him?"

"Yes, but I didn't mention it."

"Of course, as he's on the Riviera, he must have heard about Sabine's statement. Gordon would have told him, even if no one else did."

"Yes, he must know."

"When does he come back?"

"In May, immediately after the Marseille tournament."

"How Archie must be hating me!" said Clive. "How all your people must be hating me!"

"That isn't true. Mother begged me to give you her love and sympathy."

"Sympathy! What a damnable word that is for a man to have perpetually in his ears! Your dear Mother's good, one of the most truly and naturally good women that ever lived. But she's human all the same. We can't escape our humanity. She believes that God tells her to love me, and she's trying to obey with all her might. I'm certain of that. But she and all your people must curse the day you met me. And never more whole-heartedly than now. They've kept up a good fight to like me. Archie showed an absolutely Spartan spirit, and I don't forget it. But this last thing will be too much for them all. There's a limit to human forbearance. And their very love of you, Vi, must make them hate me in their hearts."

"They know all this isn't your fault."

"Isn't it my fault?"

She was startled by the sound of his voice just then, and by the look in his eyes.

"I say it is!"

"What do you mean, Clive?"

"Just this, that if I hadn't been sensual and weak, terribly weak, all this would never have happened. There's horrible weakness in me, and the war brought it to a head."

"The war?"

"Yes. The war gave most of us a chance to show we had physical courage, but it uncovered our nakedness in a hundred other ways. And it showed me my weakness. It uncovered *me*."

Vivian remembered how she had mused on Clive's will, and had set the will of two women against it, and she looked down and was silent.

"But I'm going to be strong and carry this one thing more through," Clive added, after pausing, perhaps for her to speak. "And then, when it's through—well"—he threw up his arms—"I *will* have some peace and quiet, some spirit-rest—shall we call it that?—whoever, or whatever, tries to get in the way. I can work my way through this. I feel that. But then there'll have to be a change of some kind for the better. It will come. It will surely come. I intend that it shall. I mean it to with all I am. Sometimes lately I've felt that we, you and I, are drawing near to some tremendous change. Do you ever feel that?"

"Naturally I must feel——" She stopped.

What she had been going to say seemed somehow too small to be said to him in this moment.

"No, it isn't the child," he said, now almost mysteriously. "It's beyond the child, right away from the child."

"Then do you think——"

"I don't think," he interrupted. "It's purely a question of feeling. It has nothing to do with reasoning, or deliberate mental processes. It's occult—perhaps."

"Can you see into the future?"

"No, but perhaps sometimes I can feel into it."

"What do you feel now?"

He looked into her eyes and, as he did so, she felt strangely troubled. It seemed to her that he was searching her to know whether he should answer her question sincerely, or whether he should evade it. She tried to return his gaze quite naturally, but somehow that was difficult. At last he said:

"What I feel may be all an illusion. Who knows?"

"Won't you tell me?"

"What I feel doesn't seem likely. I might say it seems impossible. But how can we ever tell what turn life will take? The unexpected, the last things we look for—aren't they often close to us, right upon us?"

"Yes. I suppose they are. There's something rather frightful in that thought."

"There may be. But when one's been kept in Hell for a very long while, a sharp change may be for the better. It can hardly be for the worse."

"Then—do you feel we, you and I, are on the edge of some great change for the better?"

"Cross-examiner!" he said.

"You make me want to know."

"Vi"—he took her hand in his, and held it fast, and pressed it rhythmically—"we love each other more than most coupled women and men love each other. Coupling often leads to hatred; it hasn't done so with us. Surely, surely we shall be allowed to have our love in peace and security some day, if only for a little while?"

He spoke with tremendous earnestness, yet she felt underneath his words doubt. He was not daring to make a statement. Rather he was asking a passionate question of Fate, was stretching forth imploring hands into the dark.

"You think we deserve that so much that we are sure to have it?" she said.

His eyes fell before hers.

"I don't say that. But a big change of some kind is on the way. I am certain of that. Things can't go on as they are now. They will get worse. There's a horrible time just ahead. But everything passes. That will pass, and then——"

He let go her hand. She saw that he had done with that subject.

When he left her she wondered about something. How strangely his mind ignored the child! Once he had absolutely forgotten about the child, when he had asked her to go away with him as soon as the trial for slander should be over. Since then, more than once, she had felt that in his thoughts, his calculations, his reaching forward mentally into the future, he was ignoring the child. He never talked,

he seldom seemed even to think, like a man soon to be a father. There was absolutely nothing paternal to be noted in him. Why was that? She wondered whether he deliberately chose to exclude the child from his mind-life just now, or whether some, perhaps subconscious, conviction had possession of him, a conviction which she would not allow herself to dwell on, or even to formulate in unspoken words.

One thing she knew now. When this new trial was over Clive meant to assert his will as a Master. She could not doubt that. And she saw him, felt him, as a man driven by circumstances into violent self-assertion, a man driven as it were against his last defences and forced to make a stand. And she knew that there was something in Clive which could govern her, something which he had never yet brought into action. In that outburst of his he had not, perhaps, meant to warn her. But he had warned her almost brutally. She would never forget those words: "I will have . . . some spirit-rest . . . whoever, or whatever, tries to get in the way." He had spoken mysteriously of a great change that was coming for them both. He had said that he felt it coming.

Perhaps that was really only his way of saying that he intended arbitrarily to change their lives soon by a violent exercise of his will.

She thought of an African solitude. Then she thought of "Claude Ormeley." She had resisted "Claude Ormeley," but perhaps he had a will that was greater than hers. Perhaps, though he had ceased since those days in Scotland which she had not shared, he would come into being again, would hold her at his side, in his life, as the woman he had chosen and who belonged to him, perhaps he would take her far away from everything she had ever known into a country she had refused to know, but of which she had dreamed much oftener than he suspected.

She had longed for a great opportunity to subordinate

her will to his. Was he already devising that opportunity without being aware of her longing? Or had her longing secretly prompted him although he knew it not? And she wondered whether she could ever bring herself to be false to her own convictions, whether she could ever consent to take up a new life as the wife of "Claude Ormeley." It was strange how that name was beginning to take hold of her as the name of a living man. Clive—Claude Ormeley. What was there really in a name? Yet when she thought of Clive as Clive Baratrie, and then, immediately afterwards, as Claude Ormeley, she seemed to be thinking of two men, alike yet definitely not the same. She was the wife of the one. Could she ever be at ease as the wife of the other?

She wondered if really she were selfish, had always been selfish without realising it. She had not sacrificed herself to Clive. A strong principle rooted in her character had prevented that. Perhaps she would have been finer if she had overcome that stubborn thing, if she had not judged for Clive. The very fact of judging seemed to imply a secret sense of superiority. She began to wonder whether she had ever yet known herself.

And often she dreamed of Africa.

One thing was strange. She could see Clive in Africa. She could see herself there with him.

But she never saw a child with them, never heard a child's voice in the sunshine among the palm trees.

XV

ONE morning early in May, when Clive had gone to the City—for he still kept rigorously to his duties, although it was now sheer torment to him to go among the crowds of energetic and gossiping business men—Vivian took up a paper. She was afraid of the newspapers now. She hated them. She would have liked to keep them out of the house,

to ignore their existence, to pretend to herself that there were no such carriers of misery and pain. Nevertheless, every day a paper was there at breakfast-time, and every day she glanced into it.

That morning she turned first to the sporting news and came upon an article headed Lawn Tennis. Underneath in small lettering between brackets were the words: "From our special correspondent." And above the article on the right of the column were the further words: "Marseille. Saturday night." She held the paper up in the bright May sunshine and read:

"The final Tournament in the South of France season has been played out, and the leading players will soon be turning their faces northwards. Many of them will be seen on the hard courts of Brussels in the near future. Then will follow shortly the long list of important engagements in England. The tournament here in the rather small but well-arranged tennis club has brought some good play, though nothing specially notable. A young English player, who has shown very marked improvement of late, A. E. Denys, brother of the famous 'Miss Vivian Denys,' now of course Mrs. Clive Baratrie, and alas! for the time being out of the hunt, has been here, coming from the Riviera, and was in excellent form. He is extraordinarily quick about the Court, has a pair of sound legs, indomitable pluck, and is not afraid of chasing the most difficult balls. His activity is remarkable, and he is beginning to add to it sound judgment and commendable steadiness, though he will never be one of the rather wearisome base-liners. Young Archie Denys gets to the net whenever he can. He has not his sister's quite exceptional brilliance, but if she had seen him here in the semi-final of the men's singles she would have had no reason to blush for him. He was just beaten by the French crack, Duberrier, who ultimately won the Final against another

Frenchman, Henri Pascale. The chief English star in the tournament was of course 'Jim' Gordon. But the bad luck which has dogged him almost persistently ever since he came out to the South of France in January did not let up in the city of bouillabaisse. For he was put out early in the third round of the men's singles by a player usually considered quite inferior to him, the Roumanian who plays under the pseudonym of 'Sinaia.' Gordon is evidently either out of health or gone stale, probably the latter. We should advise him to take a rest, and not to play except in practice matches till Wimbledon. He was partnered by young Denys in the men's doubles, and did better in them, getting into the semi-finals. But even there his showing was not quite what we expect from a Davis Cup man. On the other hand, Archie Denys was on the top of his form."

There was more in the article. Vivian saw the names of Mrs. Littlethwaite, Mrs. Charlesworth, and others whom she knew lower down on the page, but she had read enough. Archie had played up for Jim, but Jim had not been able to play up for himself. She could read between the lines the story of his rapid decrescendo.

Jim was going to pieces because of her.

Well, they would be in London, Jim and Archie, within a few hours. They were coming over from Paris that evening. And Archie, she knew, would come almost directly to her. She longed to see him, yet she dreaded the interview. What would he have to tell her about Jim? And then there was the coming trial. They would have to speak about that. But she must not allow herself to go to sad thoughts or anxious imaginings. The birth of the child was now very near. At the end of the month she expected to be a mother.

To distract her thoughts she turned again to the paper, and read a good deal of its news, political, social, artistic. And she received an impression of turmoil, of a world in

travail, turning and turning upon itself as if in an agonising effort to feel less pain. She shut her eyes. Yes, the uneasy monster was writhing and could not be still and at peace. She opened them and found herself looking at the middle page of the paper.

Her eyes fell upon these words: "A sensational case."

Did the monster want peace? Did it aspire after any tranquillity of body or soul? Or were the journalists right, the journalists whose everlasting aim was to feed the monster with sensation, to stuff it with sensation, to find each day sensation for it, and if that were impossible to manufacture sensation lest its maw should go empty?

And she thought of the African life Clive had sketched for her in the wood at Tyford. Those lovers had chosen well the place of their love. They had probably belonged to the small but elect company of men and women who can see that so-called civilisation has cloven hoofs and loves best to feed on garbage. And they had gone away. But they had come back. Why do people always come back to the thing they have the habit of, however distracted, trivial, vulgar, abominable even, it be?

"If Clive and I had gone away as he wished, should we have wanted to come back?" Vivian asked herself.

And then, though her love for Clive was so great, she felt the many hands laid upon her in England. She cared for her people, for her friends, for the companions of her youth, for her comrades of the courts. She cared for the game she excelled in. It was almost like a living thing to her, a thing to be served and honoured with the best work possible of body and mind. Some people sneered at a game. They did not know what it meant, what it was to its devotees, and especially to its well-tried champions. Those few words in the paper had brought back to Vivian many memories of happy triumphs in the past on green courts of dear England

in typical English scenes. She cared immensely for England. Love for England was in her blood, vivid, continuing.

How loves fought in one! And she saw everything in conflict, even the affections by which a woman lives. Apparently conflict was the law of Being. And yet among the many longings of the human creature there was surely a strange, perhaps deeply hidden, but persistent, longing for peace.

"A sensational case."

Again Vivian looked down at the paper. And this time she read on.

"We understand that a case which is certain to cause an enormous sensation throughout the English-speaking world is likely to come on in the High Court some time this year, though not immediately. It is an action for slander, to be brought against a well-known Baronet by an Englishman who has already been much in the public eye on account of legal proceedings, and whose name is known from one end of the country to the other. Various prominent people are likely to be mixed up in this case, among them one of our most famous actors, and several men and women whose names are household words in the world of athletics. Lawn-tennis players will be specially interested in this trial, as one of our chief lawn-tennis 'stars,' a young lady who has been applauded at Wimbledon, at King's, at Eastbourne, and on the courts of Cannes and Nice, is closely connected with the Plaintiff. We shall give more precise details a little later on."

Vivian put the paper away. For a moment she felt very sick. Nausea, and an unusual sensation of feebleness, of dying away, which seemed both moral and physical, took hold on her. This was the first time she had seen any definite public allusion to the case. She had known this was coming. But now that it had come, she felt unprepared to face it. She wanted more time.

She had a strange and terrible feeling, too, that this was an outrage on the child.

Leaving the paper, she lay back and shut her eyes.

Archie and Jim Gordon arrived in London that day by the boat train which got in just before six. They parted at Victoria Station, and Archie drove with his luggage to Pont Street. Before dinner-time he telephoned to Chester Street and asked to speak to Vivian. After a moment he heard her voice giving him a greeting.

"Any chance of seeing you alone this evening after dinner, Vi?" he asked, after telling her he was all right and inquiring about her.

There was an instant of silence, which suggested to him hesitation. Then he heard her:

"I believe Clive will be in, but of course we can have a talk alone. Do come."

Archie hesitated at his end. He heard Vivian again.

"What time will you come? I am longing to see you."

"Sure we can have a quiet talk?" he asked.

"Yes. Of course we can."

"I'll be there by nine."

"I read about you to-day. Congratulations, boy!"

"Oh, Vi——"

"Yes?"

"Nothing. At nine!"

Archie left the telephone. His young face looked emotional. There was no one in the hall to see that, so it didn't matter. He went upstairs to his Mother.

"I'm going to see Vi to-night after dinner, Mother. She says we can have a talk alone."

"I'm glad of that."

Mrs. Denys looked gently at her son, then laid a hand on his.

"Be very nice to Clive, won't you, dear?"

"I always try to be nice to Clive."

"I know you do. But just now let us do our very best. I'm sure he is intensely sensitive, though he may not choose to show it. And probably he is specially sensitive with regard to us. That's natural, I think. Besides, apart from that, if we were to show any strong feeling just now, I think it would hurt dear Vivian terribly. You know what I mean, of course."

"Yes."

"I'm sorry to say I was very much in fault the other afternoon."

"You, Mother!"

Archie looked astonished.

"How?"

"Never mind, dear. But I have been sorry ever since, and ashamed of myself."

"I'll do my best for Vi's sake."

"I know you will."

It was just after nine when Archie arrived in Chester Street. He was shown up to the drawing-room and was there for a minute alone. Then the door opened. He feared to see Clive. But Vivian came in. When he saw her he felt an odd sensation of acute shyness. She was very much altered. Of course, he had known that she would be, though he had seen her not more than ten weeks before. But since then she seemed to him quite transformed. He could scarcely believe that this deliberate, slow-moving girl, with the strange new look in her eyes, was the Vivian he had so often seen running light-footed on the courts, leaping to kill a ball at the net.

She came to him, and they kissed each other rather awkwardly. Then she said:

"Clive has gone out."

"I hope not because of me," said Archie, quickly.

"He has gone to see his Mother. He sometimes goes to her for an hour in the evening. Come and sit down. Oh, Archie boy, I'm glad to see you again!"

They sat down by the fire. Archie still felt very self-conscious and shy. He did not like to look at his sister, yet it was unnatural to look away from her. He had so much to say that he felt tongue-tied. All he could find at the moment was:

"I hope you feel all right, Vi?"

"Yes."

She began to talk about lawn-tennis, and told him what she had read about him and how pleased she was that he had come on so much in his game. He acknowledged that he had done better than he had expected.

"Jim must have been pleased?" she said.

"Yes, of course. But——"

He glanced at her and glanced away. He still felt strange with this altered girl, who looked maternal instead of athletic.

"But what?" she asked, with pressure.

"I'd rather it had been Jim who had done well, much rather."

"I'm sure you would. But you are Jim's pupil, and I know he takes a keen interest in you."

"I don't think he does now."

"Why not?"

"I don't think he takes real interest in anything."

"I know he's had an unsuccessful season, but surely it can't be as bad as that."

"It couldn't be worse, Vi, at least it couldn't be much worse."

"But what——"

She hesitated. It seemed to her that she would be less than sincere if she asked the question that had been on her lips.

Archie looked at her and shrugged his shoulders. His face was miserable. She guessed that he was longing to open out to her, but that his chivalrous feeling for Jim prevented him from being frank even with her.

"I must see Jim," she said.

"Yes. I want you to. And yet I don't know whether it will do any good now. The only thing that might do good would be if you were back in lawn-tennis."

"That's impossible. It will be a long time before——"

"Oh, I know, Vi. I was only saying——"

"Besides—Archie, we must look things in the face—I think that would probably be dangerous now."

Archie flushed, looked down and fidgeted with his hands.

"Everything seems jolly difficult these days," he murmured.

He looked up again, and his large yellowish-brown eyes held, she thought, a sort of defiance.

"Well, if Jim's to go, he must go, I suppose!" he said, bitterly.

"Archie dear, don't you understand my difficulty?"

"I think anything would be better than your dropping old Jim."

"I could never drop a friend. But I mustn't make things worse by even the slightest insincerity. Jim's not an ordinary sort of man."

Suddenly she was acutely aware of the two forces imprisoned in the two men who loved her, and for a moment she felt a creeping of fear.

"Nor is Clive!" she added.

And then, having again mentioned Clive, she gained in resolution and "had it out" with her brother. She spoke of Jim's letter and of its result, and of the necessity Clive and she were under of going through what she described as the last and final torment of a scandalous publicity. Archie

listened, the flush still on his face. He did not interrupt her, except once when he said:

"Of course, I knew all about it at Cannes. The whole Riviera was full of it."

As Vivian went on speaking she was gradually overwhelmed by a distressing feeling as of subtle egoism. She saw herself as a woman yielding to a love which to her had brought hidden satisfactions of various kinds; wonderful bodily satisfactions not to be spoken of; acute sensations of completion in which her life-force, and something else ineffable mingled with it, had seemed to touch the topmost peaks of joy, and almost to cease in fulness of joy; other satisfactions, too, not bodily, which she knew of but could never have put into words, such as women know in the perpetual nearness to them of a being they love. All this she had had from her love; secretly, in the wonderful intimacy with Clive from which the whole world was excluded. The unhappiness her marriage had brought her had been outweighed by these secret joys of which she could never speak, the raptures behind the veil in which the world stood far away and ordinary life was forgotten. But what had her love, and its consequence, marriage with Clive, brought to those others whom she loved deeply too, but in such a different way, to her Father, her Mother and Archie? Nothing really but distress, apprehension, acute uneasiness, and even, perhaps, a sense of shame, in the glaring publicity which the scandal attached to Clive's name had cast upon them because they were connected with her. Hadn't they something to forgive her for, much even? And she saw quite clearly, perhaps really for the first time, the selfishness of a deep love, the selfishness of her love for Clive. And for a moment she felt that she had ruthlessly sacrificed her family for her own benefit, that they were her victims.

"The whole Riviera was full of it."

Those words represented accurately enough the sum of Archie's unhappiness, due wholly to her. And she remembered her Mother's strange outbreak, and the stricken look on her Father's face. And now there was Jim!

She felt that she needed to ask for pardon. And yet she knew that she had had to do what she had done. The compulsion of something great had been upon her, would surely be upon her as long as she lived.

"Archie," she said, "it seems that my love for Clive brings unhappiness on you all. I wonder why that has to be. I don't know. Have you ever felt angry with me about all this, ever felt as if you could almost hate me for the trouble I've brought into your lives by what I've done?"

"Hate you? I like that! What next, Vi?"

"No, Archie! Tell me the real truth."

"It's simple enough, old girl. I wanted you for Jim. You know that well enough."

"I do hate bringing unhappiness to you all," she said.

Her eyes filled with tears.

"It's horrible," she added, "that even our loves do harm to each other. Everything that we are seems to have the power to do harm, even against our will."

For a moment she felt hopeless.

"Don't worry, Vi. You oughtn't to worry just now."

"You are all so good to me," she said.

"Well, what about you to us, if it comes to that?"

"I only bring trouble upon you all. I know it. Poor Mother! I know how she feels. She let it out to me by accident."

"It will be all right. But if you want to do something for me, give a helping hand to old Jim"

"What exactly is the matter with Jim? Do you know?"

Archie's eyes looked away from hers quickly.

"I couldn't say exactly. But when—I mean when you're

quite all right, and things are as usual, you might just show Jim you still take an interest in him, and expect a lot from him—and all that. Clive wouldn't mind, would he?"

"Clive told me he wished me to be Jim's friend."

"Oh. Well, real friendship means a lot, I think."

"You know how to be a friend."

"Well, hang it, I owe everything to Jim, and I should be an awful sweep to forget it. Of course, I know you can't do anything just now."

The ice between them seemed broken, and they were able to talk together more freely, more easily now, although there were always the reserves between them which Vivian's marriage had made inevitable. Archie told her all about his play on the Riviera, took her again into the old happy life of lawn-tennis. Their talk flowed. They were true brother and sister once more. They forgot that the minutes were flying.

The drawing-room door opened and Clive stood there looking in on them. Some words—what was he saying?—died on Archie's lips. He got up.

"Hulloh, Clive!"

"Hulloh, Archie! Welcome back!"

Clive came in and shut the door.

"I had to go and see my Mother."

They shook hands.

"You've done well. I know. I've been following the game in the papers."

"Really? I didn't know you bothered to do that."

"Marseille seems to have been the best of all."

"Oh, it was pretty good. But a lot of the best players didn't show up there. I say, I'm afraid it's awfully late. I'd forgotten the time." (He looked quickly at his watch.) "Nearly eleven. I hope I haven't tired you out, Vi. Once I begin gassing there's no end to it! I must be off. Are you all right, Clive?"

"Splendid!"

"That's good. Well, Vi, good night. Sleep well. I hope I haven't tired you."

All the self-consciousness and shyness had returned upon him. He felt almost unable to look either at his altered sister or at Clive.

Clive went down with him to let him out. When they were alone together in the little hall, and Archie had taken his hat and stick, Clive said, in a firm voice:

"I'm tremendously sorry for all this beastly business about that fellow, Aubrey Sabine."

"Oh—yes."

"Of course, I've had to take action."

"Of course."

"The case won't last long when it does come on. And I expect to get heavy damages."

"I'm sure you will."

"One thing is—it will clear the air. And that will be all to the good."

"Rather!"

"I only wanted to say how sorry I am for all this bother—the dust this sort of thing kicks up. You might tell your people that."

"I will. But it's his fault, not yours. And he's got to pay for it."

"I am glad you take it like that. Good night, Archie."

"Good night, Clive."

XVI

VIVIAN'S child, a son, was born in the night during the last week of May, just before dawn, in that hour when human strength of body and mind often seems at its lowest ebb. The coming of the child was difficult, and was attended by

complications which for a time put the Mother's life in grave danger. Clive had to endure a period of agonising doubt, during which he looked into the abyss, stared at a terror of gross darkness, and felt about for a courage which evaded him, like a thing felt for in water, and moving always out of reach as the water moves stirred by the searcher.

He managed somehow, mechanically it seemed to him, to look and appear calm, even cold, during that agony. The two doctors who were in the house—a second had been sent for when it was obvious that Vivian was in danger—were surprised by the apparent completeness of his self-control. Mrs. Denys, who was also there, was less surprised. Being a woman, she was able to read Clive more easily than they were. Instinctively she knew that this English reserve covered a blaze of fear. She would have liked to draw near to her son-in-law when they were together on that terrible night. Her deep religious feeling made her long to pass on to him some of the consolation that she drew from her unfaltering belief in a God watching over the individual. But she, too, was held in a certain bondage by her English temperament. Or else—was it, perhaps, rather that?—something in Clive inhibited her from showing any strong emotional frankness. She wanted to say many things to Clive, to open her heart to him, to speak of the guiding influence which she felt always near her, and which she was sure was not neglecting him. But the words which were in her heart did not blossom on her lips. Although she was by nature a wonderfully simple woman (though not deprived of the simple woman's natural feminine astuteness), she could not show all her simplicity to Clive. Under his fiercely conscious eyes she was troubled in her soul, and could not tell how he would take what she wished to give him.

And so she did not give it to him.

Nevertheless, even in the reserve he perhaps imposed

upon her, she knew a feeling of motherhood for him unknown to her still now. At moments she saw him as a child chilled by fear of a thing not understood, felt the pathos of him as she had never quite felt it before, even began to comprehend Vivian's love for him as hitherto she had not comprehended it.

Very often in the past she had secretly wondered why Vivian loved Clive so much, as Archie, as Jim, had wondered each in his different way. That night—why she did not exactly know—she ceased to wonder. In spite of his apparent coldness she must have realised Clive for the first time. And she knew somehow that if Vivian died it would break Clive's heart. He would not die because of that death. A strong man in natural health does not die so easily. But the main-spring of his life would break if Vivian went from him. Mrs. Denys knew that and mysteriously comprehended for the first time why Vivian loved him, had been drawn to love him instead of Jim Gordon, her tried comrade in so many arduous encounters, her companion in tastes. There was something in Clive which Jim lacked, some peculiar intensity, and it was a thing to draw a woman. That night Mrs. Denys, who had never had anything of that kind in her own life, and had indeed never felt the imperative need of it, knew that a woman can miss something and for half a lifetime not know that she has missed it. What exact name to give it she did not know.

Was it, perhaps, what some people called Passion? It was probably a quality with danger attaching to it. But danger possibly held attraction for some women, perhaps for many women? And Mrs. Denys, unwontedly, thought of her own married life, remembered early days, the romance of her youth. Had that romance after all been very romantic? Yet she had never loved, had never wanted to love, any man but Harry. It was all very strange, this new stirring within

her under the troubling eyes of her son-in-law. She felt almost guilty as if she had been near to a sin, to some infidelity of the mind. But Clive did not know. No one could ever know. And perhaps this strangeness in her was bred by the night, the gnawing shared anxiety, the unusual companionship enclosed in outward reserve yet, for all that reserve, quiveringly intimate.

And she wondered whether Clive was feeling new things about her as she was about him.

Neither of them had had any sleep. All the little house seemed brimful of sleeplessness. And it was difficult for them to believe that vast London was full of sleep.

About an hour before the child was born Clive did something which Mrs. Denys wondered about then and afterwards. She and he were together in a small upstairs sitting-room which belonged specially to Vivian, and which was full of possessions which she valued, favourite books of hers, photographs, cups she had won in lawn-tennis matches, pictures she had chosen, little bits of china, silver ornaments, knick-knacks given to her by old friends. The doctors and the nurse were with Vivian. Mother and husband kept away under orders. Even in the torture of their anxiety they had both succeeded in being reasonable. The one door of the room, which gave on to a landing from which the staircase descended to the first floor, was shut. The carpet outside was thick and deadened the sound of footsteps.

Mrs. Denys was sitting in an armchair near the window, which was slightly open to the warm May night behind curtains. She was trying to occupy herself with a piece of embroidery, but often her eyes could not see clearly what she was doing, and not seldom her hands faltered and ceased to move. She and Clive had long since given up attempting to talk to one another. Now and then they exchanged a brief remark. Generally they were silent. And in that mutual

silence they were listening with the strained attention of those who listen for the possible coming of death.

Clive was sitting near the door. There was an electric lamp just above him and he had a book in his hand. It was Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter," which he had come upon in Vivian's little white bookcase, and taken down at random. (Afterwards when he thought of that night, he always saw dense darkness and against it blazing a great letter in scarlet.) The light shone on his thick hair, his weary, anxious forehead and the book. Now and then he turned a page with an uneasy hand. And each time he did that Mrs. Denys glanced across the room at him, then looked again, or tried to look, at her embroidery. She knew that Clive was listening all the time as she was. But the carpet on the stairs and landing was so thick that they would not know if anyone was coming until the door opened. It was really no use listening. Yet they had to listen in the silence of the night.

Presently there was a faint rustle, and the curtains near Mrs. Denys moved. A little wind had touched them from outside. The rustle caused her to glance towards them for an instant. When she looked again across the room she saw Clive standing up by the door. He was half turned from her. She saw his white cheek (deadly white it looked), his ear, the close sweep of his thick, short hair. And she saw his right hand hanging down, and opening and shutting, opening and shutting.

It was at once evident to her that he had either actually heard, or felt, some sound outside, though she had heard nothing. She listened with strong intention. But no sound came to her in the house.

Suddenly Clive turned his head and looked at her, and his eyes seemed to hold an intense, even a terrible inquiry. It was as if—she thought afterwards—his eyes cried out to

her, "Do you hear what I hear?" She was going to speak, to say, "What is it?" when he held up a warning hand. And his forehead wrinkled in a frown that seemed menacing. But she understood that it was not menacing, but was only caused by his intense desire to hear—not to be interrupted. An instant passed. During it Mrs. Denys thought that the blood died away from Clive's face, the whiteness of which began to look like the whiteness of chalk. Then he clenched his right hand, pulled up his body stiffly, laid his left hand on the handle of the door, opened it sharply, and immediately stepped out on to the landing and shut the door behind him.

Left alone, Mrs. Denys felt suddenly cold. She knew in that moment the coldness of a fear not comprehended. For a moment she thought of following Clive. The reasonable supposition was that he had heard something in the house, a call perhaps from nurse or doctor, a summons to Vivian's room. If so, it was natural that Vivian's mother should share any knowledge conveyed to him. And Mrs. Denys slowly got up from her chair with the intention of following him. She even crossed the room. But when she reached the shut door she could not bring herself to open it. She was afraid to open it. In such a peculiar way it had been shut against her by Clive that simply she did not dare to lay a hand on it. And after waiting a moment, slowly she went back to her chair, sat down again, and with shaking hands picked up her embroidery.

Almost directly the door was reopened and Clive came in.

"Who was it? Who came up the stairs? Who was outside?" Mrs. Denys whispered.

Clive shut the door.

"What are you saying, Mother?" he asked.

(Sometimes, not often, he called Mrs. Denys "Mother.")

"Who was outside?"

She spoke a little louder.

"No one."

"But what did you hear?"

"Nothing," he said.

But she felt that when he said that he was telling her a lie. Since she had spoken she realised that Clive had gone out of the room like a man bracing himself up, summoning all his resolution, to meet an adversary.

"But what did you think it was?" she persisted.

"Well——"

Clive stopped, looked at her, then went on slowly, like one weighing his words:

"I imagined I heard someone on the stairs, and then on the landing. It seemed to stop outside the door—I fancied."

"It?" said Mrs. Denys.

"The foot."

She was silent, wondering.

"It was imagination," he then said firmly.

And again she felt that he was telling her a lie.

"And Vivian?" she said.

"We must wait. We can only wait."

"Is she—have you heard anything?"

"No. I didn't go to her room. The house was silent. There was nobody about."

"Are you sure?" she felt compelled to ask.

"Yes."

He looked at his watch and sat down.

She never knew why he had gone out of the room in that strange, horrible way and had shut the door behind him as if against her. She never spoke of the matter again to him. She never mentioned it to anyone.

When at last one of the doctors came to say that Vivian had given birth to a son, Clive stood up and said simply:

"Thank you."

The doctor looked towards Mrs. Denys, and she got up,

with sudden tears rolling over her face, and went towards him. He turned and she followed him out of the room, passing Clive with a look of thankfulness and blessing. But when she was outside, and had gone a step or two down the stairs, she felt that she must speak to Clive, touch him. And she turned and went back. When she reached the doorway she saw Clive kneeling with his back to her at the window. He had pulled away the curtains and was leaning out with his arms on the window-sill. And his body was shaking. She stood for one instant looking at him, then turned away and went to her daughter's room. And as she went she said to herself:

"No—no—I mustn't! I mustn't!"

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The boy whose coming had caused such fear and pain was exceptionally small, frail and delicate from his birth. Vivian rapidly recovered her health. Although she had been apparently close to the gates of death, her strong constitution asserted itself victoriously when her baby was with her. And the doctors had soon no further alarm on her account. But the child did not seem to derive from its mother. He was puny and distressful, had the shattered look of a very old man, and something abnormally remote in his small pale eyes. The nurse, an experienced woman, instead of making the time-honoured assertion that he was a remarkably fine child, shook her head and said to Mrs. Baratrie *mère* out of Vivian's hearing, that she didn't believe the baby was "long for this world." Even Vivian herself secretly from the first felt doubtful about her baby. She loved it, but she loved it in fear. Sometimes when it was sleeping beside her, and she looked at it in the night, she was overtaken by a prophetic feeling of impermanence. She did not, like many mothers, gaze at the tiny and helpless thing she had given

birth to, and, peering into the future, see the marvellous growth that Time has the power to bring to what lasts, see limbs growing and strengthening, eyes filling with the mysterious light of intelligence, features moulding themselves into forms that are definite. She did not look forward and see the steady ardour of the boy marvellously dawning out of the restless incapacity of the infant, the youth emerging from the boy, the pride of manhood bidding youth farewell with scarcely a regret. She could not feel that in the morsel of life which stirred against her there was vitality capable of outliving her own. Whenever she looked at her baby, fed him, felt his tiny body, which often squirmed and writhed as if endeavouring blindly to escape from some terror, she was haunted by the thought, "There was one who did not want you." And it seemed to her that somehow the baby had mysteriously been dowered with the knowledge of that day long ago in Knightsbridge, when as the darkness began to fall a voice had said: "I don't think a man like me ought ever to have children. I don't think it would be fair." She had decreed the child. And the child was here. But—how long?

She never discussed her fears about the child with Clive.

What he felt for their son she did not know. But she knew the agony he had endured on her account before the birth. He told her that in a few sentences, and in the telling used a word which startled her. He spoke of "punishment," said "I thought that punishment was coming upon me that night." When she asked him, "Did you think you deserved punishment?" he answered, "Yes."

"Why?" she said.

"Because I married you, and by marrying you involved you in my trouble," he answered. "You were meant for an open, healthy, happy, care-free English life. If you had married, say——"

He paused.

"Whom?" she said. "Tell me, Clive."

"If you had married, say, Gordon, you would have had it. Now you'll never have it."

"If you had refused to marry me after your trial, do you think I should have been happy?" she said.

"Not then. Not at first. But you might have been some day."

"You know me, and you don't know me," she said.

And when she said that she believed profoundly in the truth of her words. Clive, she believed, held in his love a strange ignorance of her. But perhaps that had to be. Perhaps it was not individual but sexual. She was not sure about that.

They spoke of the name to be given to the child. She had not forgotten that Clive had said that his name was not to be handed on to his son, if the baby were a boy, and she asked what they should call him. Clive seemed to have no special wish, but suggested Archibald, after her brother, or Henry, after her father. She hesitated, then rejected both names.

"Haven't you any favourite name?" she asked.

Clive said that he hadn't. His manner was so curiously indifferent that for a moment Vivian felt anger, the sudden quick anger of a Mother, which has something animal in it.

"Do you think it doesn't matter what my baby is called?" she said, flushing.

"I don't know that a name matters very much," he said. "Especially as nearly all parents give their children pet names."

"We all call you Clive," she said, still with a touch of anger.

"I suppose I'm not the sort of fellow who is given a pet name."

"Let us call baby Clive," she said.

And she looked at him with a sudden defiance in her eyes.

She knew at that moment that he knew she was combating an expressed wish of his which she had not forgotten. She wished him to know that she had not forgotten it. Just then she was putting her will against his, and almost with heat, like one in a fight.

"I don't wish that," he said.

"Why not?"

"I hate my name."

"I don't."

"Are you sure you will never get to hate it?"

"Oh, Clive," she said, with a sudden rush of bitterness and tenderness combined. "How can you be so doubtful about me? It's horribly cruel of you. Can nothing I do ever give you complete confidence in my love? Why are you so distrustful? If I were like you I should never have a happy moment. But I'm not. I trust you absolutely. And you ought to trust me. It isn't fair."

She felt strangely inclined to cry, and the feeling made her ashamed, for she despised what is sometimes called womanly weakness. But since her illness and the birth of the baby she had not felt as usual. Her self-control seemed to be lessened, her moods to be more changeable. And sometimes an almost terrifying feeling of fatal hopelessness swept over her suddenly. It came to her now.

"You must trust me," she said. "You shall or——"

He took both her hands and held them tightly.

"I do. I do absolutely. If I didn't I shouldn't be able to get along at all."

"Then please never speak like that again."

"I won't. Don't be afraid. I won't. And as you wish it, let us call baby Clive. What does it matter? He will make his own life. He won't be a replica of me. You are in him, thank God."

Once again his will had retreated before what he thought

was hers. And it was not even really hers. But something, some mysterious inhibition, prevented her from saying so just then, and, once the moment was passed, it seemed too late to explain that she had only spoken moved by a passing impulse of anger because he had seemed indifferent about a matter affecting the child.

Every one seemed to think it quite natural that the boy should be given his Father's name, but to Clive's Mother the decision brought apparently a peculiar joy, amounting almost to exultation. She assumed that Clive had wished it as well as Vivian, and Vivian did not undeceive her. She could not tell the truth of what had passed between her and Clive, so she said nothing. But she wondered about Mrs. Baratrie. There had been strangeness in the misery of her mother-in-law, and now there was strangeness in the joy. In each there seemed to be present defiance. But while in the misery the defiance had shut every one out, in the joy it seemed to open arms, to bid Clive, Vivian, the Denys family, and even Mrs. Baratrie's few intimate friends, share closely with her, be solid with her in sheer pride of happiness. And by this peculiarity of joy Vivian seemed to measure for the first time what Mrs. Baratrie's misery had been, to plumb its depths.

It was arranged that the christening of the baby should take place at St. Giles's Church, but before the date fixed for the little ceremony the child was taken suddenly ill with convulsions. The doctor came and looked grave. He said little to Vivian, but when Clive was alone with him and asked for his opinion he said:

"Many young children have this sort of thing and get through it, but I'll be frank with you, Mr. Baratrie. Your child seems to have very little stamina, to be born with scarcely any resisting power. It isn't at all a strong child. From the first it has been puny and delicate. I don't know why. You"—he looked hard at Clive—"you are all right.

Anyone can see that, though of course you have a lot to worry you, if you'll forgive me for saying so. As to your wife—the whole world knows what she is, one of our most famous athletes. But the baby doesn't seem to have inherited from either of you."

"Do you think he will die?" asked Clive.

"I wouldn't say that. But"—he paused, and looked at his feet for a moment—"I know you meant to have him christened in St. Giles's by Mr. Herries."

"Yes."

"Well, I shouldn't delay the christening."

"You mean—better to have it soon—here?"

"Yes. That's what I should advise. Of course the child may very likely recover. But no harm will be done."

"I'll speak about it to my wife."

"I should. But don't alarm her. Tell her it's merely a precautionary measure such as I should advise in any similar case. Lots of children are baptised like that in a hurry and live to a green old age."

He twisted his elderly face into what was probably meant to be an encouraging smile.

"You might say that to your wife—a green old age. Or shall I tell her myself?"

"Oh no. I'll do it."

When the doctor was gone Clive went to find Vivian. She was not in her little sitting-room. He guessed she was with the baby, and was about to go to her room when he saw her coming down the stairs.

"I wanted to speak to you," he said, gently.

"Yes, I know."

"How could you know?"

"The doctor has been saying something to you that he didn't say to me. Hasn't he?"

He looked into her eyes.

"Yes," he said.

"What was it?"

"I'll tell you in here."

They went into the sitting-room and he shut the door.

"Aren't you going to sit down, dear?" he asked, as she remained standing close to the door.

"What did he say about Baby?" she answered, as if she had not heard his last words.

"Well, he said that many children who had troubles like this lived to a green old age."

"A green old age!" she said.

And there was a sound of resentment in her voice.

"Are you laughing at me?" she added.

"Vi! I am telling you his very words."

"Well, I don't like them," she said, and her eyes were hostile, he thought. "What else did he say?"

"He spoke about the christening. He knew it was going to be in St. Giles's. But he advises us to have it quietly here, as baby isn't quite the thing."

Vivian said nothing for a minute. He saw her swallow and then open her lips, but no words came. A great change seemed to him to come in her eyes, like knowledge stirring deep down in them, and then forcing its way up mysteriously to the surface. And the knowledge looked out at him with a tremendous solemnity that seemed to hold something of menace. He had never seen Vivian look like that before; he had never imagined that she could look like that. In that moment, though a girl stood before him, he seemed confronted by immeasurable age.

"Very well," she said, speaking at last.

"There is nothing to be alarmed about. That's what Dr. Creyke said. It's merely a precautionary measure."

"Why do you speak like that to me, Clive? What's the good of such words between us?"

"But Creyke told me——"

"All doctors think that they have to be liars in their profession. But you and I are not doctors. Thank you for telling me. I shall ask Mr. Herries to come here and christen baby to-morrow."

She went out of the room, leaving Clive ashamed. Yet he loved her frankness. Without it she would not have been Vivian. Nevertheless with it went a power of penetration that at moments reminded him of a highly tempered spear.

That evening Vivian told him that she had arranged about the christening. Bob Herries had promised to come early in the afternoon of the following day. He could not come in the morning. Otherwise he would have fixed an earlier hour. She had already told Mrs. Baratrie and her Mother what had been arranged. Mrs. Baratrie was going to be the baby's godmother. The godfathers were to be Archie and Robert Martin, Clive's solicitor. Vivian had chosen her brother as godfather, Clive's choice had fallen on Martin. This had surprised Vivian till Clive had said: "Martin is a very quiet man, but he's really rather a wonderful fellow. I owe him a great deal. If he accepts, our child will have someone to look to, someone absolutely reliable and straight. Martin will take being a godfather seriously. It will mean something to him. To most men it would mean very little or nothing." And Vivian had understood, and Martin had accepted, without manifesting any surprise.

Now Clive communicated with Martin and received through the telephone his promise to come to Chester Street on the following day for the christening.

That night, after all the arrangements had been made, the baby seemed suddenly better. Before going to bed Clive went into Vivian's bedroom to look at him. Vivian was already in bed, but not asleep. A night-light was burning by the bed and the tiny cot at its side, giving out a faint

yellow radiance. And this faint yellow radiance suddenly took Clive back to his nursery days, to the earliest recollections of his childhood.

He bent down to Vivian.

"He's sleeping," she whispered.

"Do you think——"

"Nurse says he is better."

Her eyes looked very soft and luminous in the dim light. She stretched up her arm, and Clive felt her warm hand on the back of his neck.

"You do want him to live, don't you?"

He heard the yearning of all the mother-world in her whispering voice, and his eyes were suddenly dim. How he loved Vivian at that moment! All the life that was in him seemed to surge up in a great wave of tenderness. All he was, all he could ever be, moved and aspired in that wave.

"Yes," he whispered. "Yes."

She smiled, and he knew that she believed him.

END OF VOL I



yellow radiance. And the first yellow radiance suddenly
rose. One part of the energy data, called "yellow radiance"
crossed the threshold of the air and the other part
remained below the surface. The first part of the yellow
radiance was called "yellow radiance" and the second part
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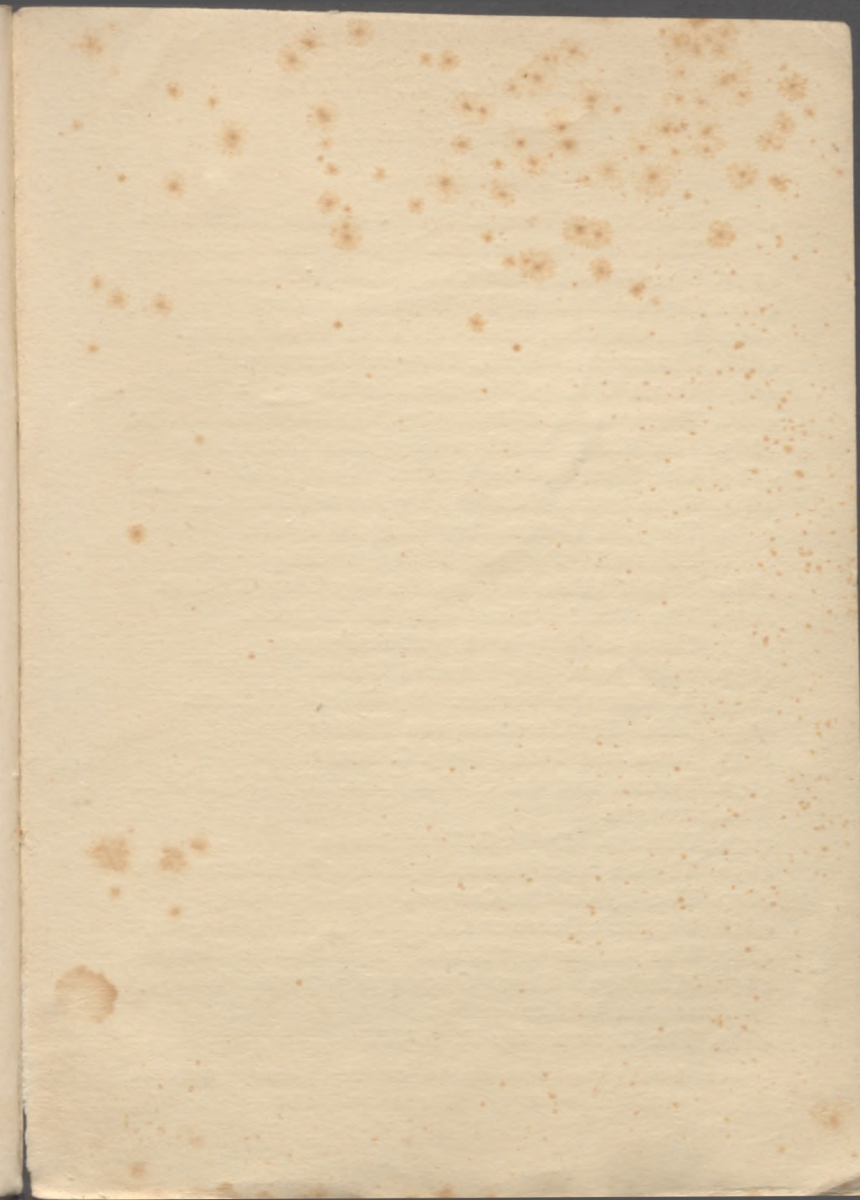
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