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TAUCHNITZ EDITION

COLLECTION OF BRITISH AND AMERICAN AUTHORS

VOL. 4667

YOUTH CALLING

BY

BEATRICE HARRADEN

IN ONE VOLUME

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YOUTH CALLING. By BEATRICE HARRADEN

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By the same Author

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YOUTH CALLING

BY

BEATRICE HARRADEN

AUTHOR OF

"SHIPS THAT PASS IN THE NIGHT," "PATUFFA," ETC.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1924

My best thanks are due to my friend Miss Mary Carmichael, the composer of "A June Song," and Messrs. J. B. Cramer & Co., the publishers, for kindly giving me permission to quote the beginning of the song.

BEATRICE HARRADEN.

YOUTH CALLING

I

WHEN Dr. Allbrook tried to persuade old Mrs. Claverdon to rest in bed more frequently and spare her strength, she only laughed at him.

"Rest in bed?" she mocked. "Spare my strength? What for, pray? Now, don't be ridiculous, Allbrook. None of your absurd suggestions for me. You'll be expecting me to swallow some of your highly dangerous medicines next. No, thank you."

So although she had to own to herself that she felt pretty weak at times, for she was eighty years of age, she remained doggedly determined never to alter any of her habits. Day after day she rose at nine and went into the beautiful room which she called her studio, and where for many long years she had painted pictures to ease her solitude until it had ceased to be solitude. For it was peopled with copies

of the portraits of the great and subject pictures of her own imagination, many of them dealing with Queen Elizabeth and the events of her long reign, or with other personages in the realms of history or literature. The room was filled with the results of her tireless energy, and scores of her canvases were kept near at hand in other parts of the old Moat House. She lived with them all in turn. They displaced each other on the panelled walls from time to time, and she regarded them as a procession of friends whose comings and goings stimulated her interest. They were indeed the only friends on whose visits she could reckon. She had outlived her own generation and was alone in the world.

It was two or three mornings after Dr. Allbrook had tried to impress on her the desirability of taking things more easily that she put the last touches to a painting of San Bernardino refusing the offer of three bishoprics, laid aside palette and brushes and leaned back in her chair. She closed her eyes.

"That fool doctor was right," she murmured. "I am losing strength rather quickly now."

What passed through her mind on this March morning in the year 1890, as she sat alone, a handsome, dignified figure of the old-world type, whilst the sun, of unusual brightness for the early springtime, streamed fitfully through the casement windows jewelled with the armorial bearings of the Claverdon and Kingsmead families? Was she thinking of husband and relatives long since laid to rest? Of the eventful happenings of her early years? Of the splendid and gifted friends of the past amongst whom her lot had been so happily cast?

No, possibly not, for she said aloud:

"My writings, my secret writings, so dear to me —shall I burn them to-day? If I am really beginning to fail at last, would it not be better to burn them whilst I can know for myself that they are safely removed from strange hands and prying eyes?"

It was a long time before she stirred. Then she rose, and wended her steps slowly to a large oak chest at the farther end of the room. She was obviously feeble on her feet, but she used no stick for

support. She dragged a chair alongside the chest, and rested awhile to recover from the effort which had taxed her. But there was a light in her eyes and an eagerness on her face which lent her for the moment the beauty of a magic youthfulness.

"My writings," she murmured. "My thoughts, my ideas, my inspirations—the secret of years. My outpourings which eased my soul when love and happiness and belief in life failed me."

The oak chest was deep, and the packets of papers which Mrs. Claverdon wanted lay at the bottom. It was a difficult task for her to bend over and haul them up. She tried once or twice and nearly fell down.

"Ridiculous and inconvenient being old," she said impatiently. She glanced at the bell rope and thought of calling Jenkins to her aid, but decided he would be of little use since he was even frailer than herself. There was Mrs. Bristowe, the housekeeper, and there were others, of course. But Jenkins alone of her staff belonged to her own generation. No one save this faithful old family retainer had the

right to handle the things which she held sacred in her past. She could have borne to see him lift up those precious papers and put them within her reach. But no one else in this world. And he was too feeble. Well, she must manage alone.

She did manage somehow alone, for she had a determined and stubborn spirit, and before long the old refectory table against the window was strewn with manuscripts in the fine pointed Italian writing of former days; and an old woman of eighty, with an eagerness which was almost painful in its intensity, crooned over them, fondled them and scanned them with pride and triumph and remembered rapture.

They had been the avalanches of her heart, the flowers of her mind, the structures of her brain, the fruits of her imagination, her dreams, her visions, her secret fulfilments, her self-expression, her real vibrating life unrevealed and unguessed at. There they were, representative of all her varying moods: songs to the sunrise, songs to the sunset, invocations to the moon and the stars, and the fringe of the

surf by the sea shore; sonnets to friends, famous and obscure; romances of love and adventure; studies of character and temperament; essays on literary and historical subjects; translations from the Italian and German including the whole of *Faust,* and the opening chapters of the biography of an early African explorer, Peter Maurice, known to her since childhood. These last were tied up together with his diaries and letters. She did not unfasten the string. She rested her hand on the bundle awhile and whispered "Peter."

All unpublished. A secret, sacred hoard. No miser had ever guarded his hidden treasure more jealously than Mrs. Claverdon had sentinelled her writings.

And now she was going to burn them, so that the secret of them might die with her, so that after her death no stranger might ever handle them nor toss them scornfully aside. But could she burn them? Would she have the heart to? She glanced at the fire, glanced at the manuscripts, and glanced

again at the glowing logs which seemed almost to be demanding a sacrificial offering. Then she stared straight in front of her, and sat rigid as a statue whilst the conflict raged within her breast.

The clock struck half-past eleven. The door opened and old Jenkins shuffled in, carrying a silver salver with its immemorial morning lunch of a glass of sherry and two small biscuits.

"The lunch is served, my lady," he murmured, as he prepared to put the salver in its usual place on the refectory table. But on seeing the confusion of papers there he became bewildered and looked questioningly first at her and then at them. Here was a disturbing departure from habit which he could not understand and did not like.

She gave no sign of being aware of his presence. He repeated in his cracked old voice:

"The lunch is served, my lady."

There was still no sign from her, and Jenkins was troubled.

"I beg pardon, my lady, but will you not

take it?" he entreated. "You will miss it, and Dr. Allbrook has been telling me that we must keep up your strength."

His concern reached her, and the strain on her face relaxed.

"The doctor is a duffer, Jenkins," she said. "Always bothering me about keeping up my strength. I suppose my strength is my own to do what I like with, isn't it? Well, leave it there. Perhaps I'll take it as usual, and perhaps I won't. For the moment I'm very occupied trying to decide about something. No, don't go. I may want you to help me."

He waited whilst she passed through an agony of mind over those manuscripts which she was dooming to destruction. He could not know the nature of her trouble, but it was evident to him that she was suffering intensely, and the old fellow shook his head gravely in silent sympathy as he had so often done in the past when he had seen her harassed by the long-drawn-out tragedy of her early years.

At last she said in a far-off voice:

"I have decided. The manuscripts shall be burnt—and now."

She shrank back a moment as if she could not bring herself to carry out her ruthless plan, and then she suddenly pounced on one or two of the victims and thrust them into his hands.

"Throw them into the fire, Jenkins," she said peremptorily.

He stared at her uneasily instead of obeying her orders.

"Didn't you hear what I said? Throw them into the fire," she said.

"Throw them into the fire?" he repeated, without stirring an inch. "No, I beg your pardon, my lady, but I couldn't burn them. No, I couldn't burn anything belonging to my lady. They've always been in the oak chest. I remember when you put them there first. Couldn't they just bide there—till the end?"

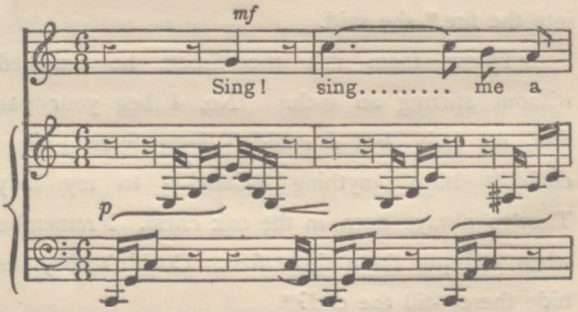
"But the end is nearly here, both for you

and me," she said. "We can't expect to go on living for ever. Come now, do as I tell you."

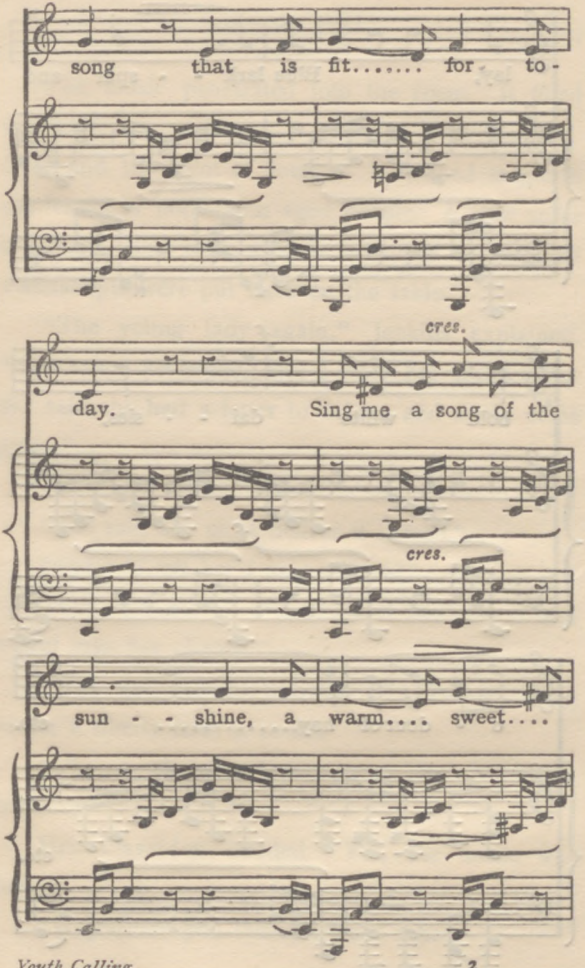
Again the old man persisted stubbornly:

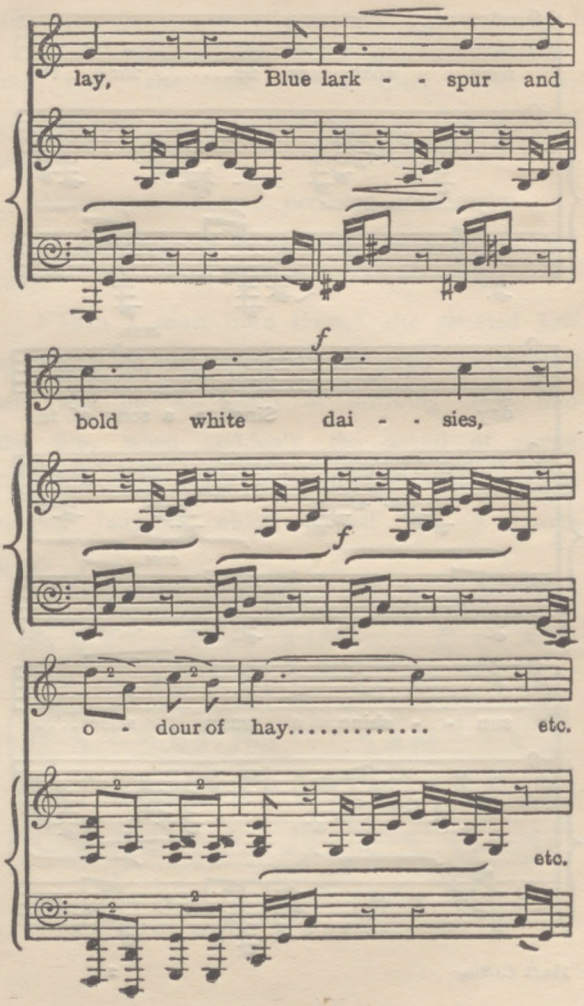
"I couldn't burn anything belonging to my lady."

"Then I must burn them," she retorted half angrily, and she snatched the papers from him and was on the point of throwing them into the fire, when suddenly the sound of young laughter was heard in the garden—young, ringing laughter which passed into a joyous song:



("A June Song," by Mary Carmichael.)




lay, Blue lark - - spur and
f
bold white dai - - sies,
f
o - dour of hay..... etc.
etc.

The music penetrated into the room. It filled the whole atmosphere. It mingled with the sunshine and the scent of flowers. It worked magic in the hearts of both those aged people. A slow smile of wonder stole over their faces. And the doomed manuscripts were put back on the table.

"The young lady again," Jenkins explained. "She came yesterday, and I sent her away. But she said she had a letter to deliver and would come again."

"Why did she not leave the letter?"

"She said she must deliver it herself."

"Did you tell her I saw no one?"

"Yes, my lady. She laughed and said she would take her chance."

"Was she rude and insistent? She is taking rather a liberty now, it seems."

"Oh, no, she was just happy—like the music, my lady."

Mrs. Claverdon nodded. Yes, the music was happy.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she asked.

"I forgot," he answered simply.

"Ah, that is what we do at our age, Jenkins. We forget. And probably it doesn't matter. Well, you can go now and bring her in. That singing——"

She broke off, a wistful little smile on her face.

"Sing, sing me a song that is fit for to-day," she murmured.

II

A FEW minutes later Jenkins ushered in a young woman of about twenty-three years of age. She was rather under middle stature, slight and alert, with soft fair hair, an intensely eager face, and dancing eyes. She gave a pleasing impression of earnestness and joyousness combined. Her manner was entirely unself-conscious and fearless, with no touch of aggressiveness in it. The old lady sitting stiffly in the armchair near her easel, and looking as solemn and unreachable as a judge, failed to intimidate her, and as she advanced she said:

"How very kind of you to receive me. I do think it kind."

And she added impulsively:

"And oh, what a lovely old place! Never have I seen such a lovely old place, hidden from the outside world and coming upon one suddenly like an unexpected joy."

Mrs. Claverdon remained silent and only glared

at her. And whilst she glared, the girl thought how beautiful she must have been in her youth and how fine and distinguished she now looked, and how thrilling it was to find herself in the presence of a *grande dame* of bygone days. She had heard and read of this type, but had never come face to face with it. She offered to it instant and generous homage of spirit. And perhaps the old lady knew. Anyway, one of the defences she had put up suddenly yielded, and her eyes lost their stony stare.

"Well," she said abruptly, "who are you? What is your name? What do you want here? Sit down on that chair and tell me."

The girl sat down.

"My name is Kingsmead—Gwen Kingsmead," she said.

"Kingsmead?" repeated Mrs. Claverdon with surprise. "That was my maiden name. What are you doing with it, I should like to know?"

"Well, it is mine also," the girl smiled. "It was my mother's maiden name. My mother was not

married, and I never knew what my father's name was, so Kingsmead is all I have to boast of. But I love it."

"You well may," the old lady said more gently. "You could not have a fairer name, nor a finer old English name, dating back centuries."

There was a pause, and then she said:

"I suppose you have come to tell me that you are a relative of mine and that you want money. That is what long-lost relatives generally turn up for —in book or in life."

"Then I think I must be the exception." Gwen laughed softly. "Money is the last thing I want from anyone. I earn my own livelihood and I go my own way, and am thankful that I don't have to ask favours of that kind from any living soul."

She spoke with some pride, and Mrs. Claverdon liked her none the less for that.

"Well, what is it you do want?" Mrs. Claverdon asked, tapping with her foot on the floor.

"It is just this," Gwen said, bending forward in her eager way. "I am a young writer trying to make

my way, and I am lucky enough to get some occasional work from a publisher. He is at present compiling a book on a very interesting subject—the historic homes of England. When I saw in the list prepared for this purpose a very brief reference to this old fifteenth-century fortified homestead, I begged to have it assigned to me for my contribution to the book. I longed to see it for its own sake, for I've never had such a chance before, but I can't pretend that I was not interested in your maiden name. That was natural enough, wasn't it? But as for claiming relationship, it never entered my head. Relations, you see, have played no part in my life. My mother, owing to circumstances, stood alone, and I stand alone. Have I made myself quite clear?"

Mrs. Claverdon nodded grave assent. She had to own to herself that the girl's words rang true.

"That's all," ended Gwen. "I have just come on the bare chance of being allowed to see over this wonderful old place. The publisher gave me this letter to present to you asking for the great privilege. Here it is. I could not explain to the dear, funny

old man. He seemed to think I was a dangerous tramp. But I am not easily disheartened, and so I spent the night at *The Stirrup*, and made up my mind to challenge the sentinel again."

Mrs. Claverdon half smiled as she held out her hand for the letter.

"Jenkins guards me from intruders," she said. "It is my habit to receive no visitors. You would not have been received to-day, but that we heard your voice singing in the garden—something about the sunshine and a song fit for to-day."

"I couldn't help singing," the girl said impulsively. "A liberty, I know well, and please forgive me, but I couldn't help it. Such a lovely morning, not like a March morning, but with a June feeling in the air. The beauty and freshness of the morning and the loveliness of the surroundings got into my head, and sing I had to, for very joy."

"It was pleasant enough to hear," Mrs. Claverdon said, with a gesture which seemed to dismiss any need for apology. "Sing that song again."

Gwen sang the song to the end.

When it was over Mrs. Claverdon glanced at the publisher's letter, and then put it aside. She stared at Gwen with an increasing interest.

"This person, whoever he is, calls you a promising young writer who can be trusted to write an article worthy of the subject," she said. "'Not merely a journalist,' he says, 'but a writer with true literary gifts and instincts which will eventually carry her far.' That's what he writes."

Gwen's face lit up.

"I have tremendous ambitions," she said. "I intend to go far—very far. I know it and feel it. I have always had huge ambitions ever since I can remember. I've written ever since I can remember. Descriptive articles and all work of that nature which I am so glad to get, are only for bread-and-butter, since one has to live—but the real thing—oh, you can't imagine the thrill of it. It's so glorious. All your own. Something flowing out of you."

"Ah, I know the thrill of it," the old lady whispered, but the girl in her own excitement did not heed her.

"Ever since I can remember," Gwen went on, "I have always carried paper and pencil about with me and scribbled down something. My mother used to say I took to it like a babe to the breast. She used to wonder where I got it from. Certainly not from her—poor, dear little mother."

"And what have you done with your mother?" Mrs. Claverdon asked abruptly.

"She died ten years ago," Gwen said softly. "She died in her sleep."

"That was a good way to die."

"Yes, but there were so many things I wanted to say to her and ask her."

"That would always happen," Mrs. Claverdon said. "The 'too late' pursues us all our lives."

She seemed lost in thought and had forgotten Gwen's presence. The girl waited until she should rouse herself. Meantime she was deeply interested in the room and longed to spring up and examine close at hand the old oak chimney-piece elaborately carved and reaching right up to the ceiling. She

longed to know about the coats of arms in the ancient stained glass in all the windows. The panelled walls, the pictures, the book-cases, the old chairs and a score of other objects claimed her attention, and her eyes rested wonderingly now on the easel, and now on the refectory table strewn with papers. But Gwen was chiefly concerned with the thought that she would be able to write at her best in such a delightful room. Ideas, visions, dreams, would surely come to her there. She could see herself sitting alone at night—a lamp on the table—a great fire—a log fire, with dancing lights. She could even feel herself twisted up with eagerness and aglow with the exquisite joy of conception. What a chance for a writer! And no writer would have the chance.

Mrs. Claverdon broke the silence, during which she had been gradually retreating to her fortress of seclusion. Her face had once more become severe.

"My home has never been intimately written about," she said. "This is not the first time that

permission has been sought for an article to be published about this house and its history and associations. I have always refused — perhaps selfishly. The truth is that I have lived a very retired life for many years and have cherished increasingly the privacy of my home. I still cherish it. In the natural order of things it will not be long now before I pass on my way. Those who come after me will be at liberty to make a peep-show of the place if they wish. But for myself, it would be against the grain to concede the favour which your publisher asks. Tell him to wait for my death. Very, very much I value my privacy, or my secrecy perhaps I might call it."

She turned involuntarily to her manuscripts. Almost she said, "These are some of my secrets—secrets of a lifetime."

Gwen rose.

"I quite understand," she said, "and I feel ashamed to have intruded on you, and I do thank you for the kind way in which you have received me. I will go back and tell the publisher that you

preferred not to give your consent to an article. But I could not deliver your message about waiting. I hope you will live on in this beautiful old house in quiet and happy privacy, for very many long years."

She swept the room with a quick, eager survey as if her very life depended on not losing any detail of its charm.

"What a room to remember!" she said impetuously, smiling with a sudden delight, which she could not restrain. "What a gracious and an abiding memory! And what a room to write in —it thrills me to think of what I could have written here."

Again the old lady glanced at her manuscripts. Almost she said:

"Things have been written here."

But not a word of her secret escaped her, and to look at her impassive countenance, no one would have guessed at the strife stirring in her breast. Was she intending to let that girl go or stay? Was she going to relent about the article, or stand by

her determination? Was she going to tell this young aspirant to fame that she should have her wish fulfilled to write in this very room? Or was that a foolish, ridiculous impulse which ought to be checked at her age or any age?

Of course it ought to be checked. What was the girl to her? Nothing. And of what importance to her was the coincidence of the name? No importance. That didn't count. But didn't it count that they shared a happiness than which, as every writer knows, life holds none higher—the rapture sensed in the use of the gifts of the imagination? And didn't it count that here was a comrade afire with the same ambitions and enthusiasms which had once been hers? And hadn't youth stormed the citadel of Old Age with a Song of June? Well, what was it to be?

These thoughts held her as Gwen stood waiting to take her leave, with no trace of disappointment over her rebuff, but with a quiet acceptance and reverent understanding. She had lost—that was all. The publisher would probably think that she

had managed badly. But what of that? And as for trying to cajole this venerable lady—never. Not for all the publishers in the world.

"Good-bye," she said, "and please let me thank you again for having received me in spite of the dear, funny old man."

"Good-bye," nodded Mrs. Claverdon, and stretched out her hand stiffly.

She watched Gwen go towards the door, and watched her open it. It was closing on her, had almost closed when the last barrier of resistance broke down in Mrs. Claverdon's heart. She suddenly felt that she could not bear to let that young thing go, could not bear to shut out Youth with its hope and radiance.

"Come back," she called imperiously. "Do you hear me—come back."

Back into the room sprang Gwen like a young gazelle.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes"—the old lady smiled, half grimly—

"hand me that glass of sherry. I must drink it up, or else that dear, funny old man, as you call Jenkins, will be in despair over me. And then you shall give me your arm, and I'll show you over the house myself."

"Show me over the house yourself!" Gwen exclaimed joyously. "Oh, you can't mean it!"

"I do mean it," Mrs. Claverdon said. "I give in. You shall write your article for that publisher man. Why shouldn't you, after all?"

As she sipped her sherry, she kept on murmuring:

"Very ridiculous of me, very ridiculous of me, but I give in. I like you."

III

QUEEN ELIZABETH had slept in the house. Mrs. Claverdon showed Gwen how the door of the studio had been widened half the way up to admit of her hoop, and she pointed out with half-humorous pride the pair of gauntlets left behind as a remembrance of her visit, and also the recesses in the walls, in olden times receptacles for family valuables, concealed by the oak wainscoting. In the covered passage which led to the chapel, Mrs. Claverdon paused some time before one of the family portraits, a picture of a young and beautiful woman with a wistful face, who had died in 1730, and whose ghost haunted the house. The legend was that she roamed through all the rooms and appeared to be always searching for something she could not find. But Mrs. Claverdon herself had neither seen nor sensed that troubled presence.

They visited the chapel and the priest's room and his hole of concealment, and had a look at the

secret stairs which communicated with a passage under the moat. They went to Queen Elizabeth's bedroom, also with a widened door for the hoop, and with *E. R.* marked on the great bedstead, on the ceiling and chairs, and even on the fire-back. They passed into several rooms which led into each other, and Mrs. Claverdon drew her attention to many points of interest and bade her look at the charming views framed by the windows; but of the many pictures which were her own work she said nothing. Not a word escaped her when Gwen, arrested by one of them, exclaimed: "What a delightful subject—the old monk busy illuminating. I do envy him." But the old lady smiled inwardly and was hugely pleased, because that picture chanced to be one of her special favourites.

She gathered rather than lost strength in the course of their long pilgrimage, and her face grew younger and her spirits gayer as she caught and shared the girl's eagerness and enthusiasm. Only once did her vitality appear to receive a check, and that was when they came upon a sealed door at the

extreme end of one of the passages. Gwen thought she was going to fall, and put her arm round her and begged her not to exert herself further. But she recovered herself and said:

"Thank you, my child, but when I do a thing at all, I like to do it thoroughly, and I am not too tired to show you a few more points of which you must take notice. The old stained glass in the windows on the staircase, for instance, the most ancient in the house, always the pride of the family —and my pride, even now."

So she spared no pains to give Gwen both pleasure and information, and by the time the adventure was over, she had furnished her with rich material for her article. They landed back eventually in the studio, where she settled down in her accustomed chair, distinctly triumphant over the effort she had made, and not at all prepared to own that she was tired or exhausted.

"No, no," she persisted, "not tired, but renewed. That is the word. And now, listen. A brilliant plan of action suggests itself to me, rather

absurd considering that you are a stranger to me, but let that pass. You have now seen the house, and I know that you have enjoyed every inch of it, and made me enjoy it again in a way I never thought possible. You have got what you needed for the bread-and-butter part of your life, but there remains the other part, just as necessary and far more precious to any one with aspirations. It must also be ministered to. You said something about the ideas which would come leaping to any writer who worked in this room. Very well, then, you can try if you like. You can go and fetch your things from *The Stirrup* and stay here to-night and write in this room. In this room, hopes and joys and ambitions have been born, lived their brief day, and died down. You shall resurrect them to-night with the magic of your youth and the unimpaired strength of your own hopes and ambitions."

The girl seemed entirely overwhelmed by this unexpected happiness, and at first she could scarcely believe her good fortune.

"Oh, you don't know what you are offering me," she said in a tense voice. "You simply don't know."

"Yes, I know," Mrs. Claverdon said proudly. "Make no mistake about that. I know."

And again she glanced at her manuscripts, and hugged the secret of them to her soul.

Later in the afternoon when she was alone, she caressed them with her eyes, touched them from time to time and nodded her head with approval as she read a few sentences here and there. But again she only rested her hand on the packet marked *Peter Maurice,* and murmured as before "Peter."

"I was mad to think I could burn any one of them," she said aloud, "and certainly not this —never this. No, instead of burning them, I must add to them. Ah, the rapture, the magic ecstasy of spirit when imagination works and inspiration flows. That child knows it. And I have known it. The memory of it, and her fire and enthu-

siasm rekindle the embers of my own poor gifts. Perhaps I could still create. Perhaps thought and imaginings would come as freely as in the past if I once began. Ah—that wandering spirit always searching for something which she cannot find. What was she searching for—love—gold—hope—fame?"

She took pen and paper, closed her eyes, and then with a hand trembling with eagerness she began thus:

"This is the spiritual history of Georgina Claverdon, who died in this house in the year 1730. For many years I have pondered over it, for her wistful face has always drawn me. How many times I have looked up at it, longing to solve the mystery of it, but no sign has ever come to guide me until to-day when I stood once more in the gallery beside the portrait, and scanned her sad countenance. And suddenly an idea flashed through my mind, an idea which——"

The pen ceased to write, the old brain ceased to work. She had fallen asleep.

IV

THAT afternoon Gwen, left to her own devices, wrote out elaborate notes about the Moat House, took a few photographs, much to Jenkins's uneasiness, and strolled into the garden, much to the gardener's concern. Bruce watched her as she danced up the grass steps leading to the terrace, where four sentinel yew trees guarded the house. Then she disappeared into the herb garden, which was enclosed by a wonderful old yew hedge, the glory of the place. She emerged, crossed the lawn and made for the green-houses. And by this time the frown on Bruce's face was as settled and solid as the half-timbered homestead itself.

Jenkins, from a window in the hall, watched her staring up at the coat of arms over the Gate House and writing something in a book. Then she passed very slowly over the stone bridge which had replaced the drawbridge of former days. He was not quite sure, but he thought he heard her singing.

Then she started to walk round the moat, and he shook his head in grave disapproval and continued shaking it long after he had lost sight of her. The old fellow did not like changes, and he resented the intrusion of this young person who had come and upset all the habits of the house. Dragging his mistress out of the studio. Eating lunch enough for ten. Having Queen Elizabeth's bedroom prepared for her—think of that now. Singing over the house as if it belonged to her. Laughing with his mistress as if she had known her all her life. Yes, and his mistress laughing too, and making such a fuss about the young person's comfort. Worrying Mrs. Bristowe over and over again to make sure there was a good fire in the Queen's room, and that there were plenty of blankets on the bed. No wonder Mrs. Bristowe was upset and had one of her attacks of the nerves and bronchitises. Why, it was years since they had had a visitor, and they did not want one now. And there was my lady tiring herself, when the doctor said she ought to be saving her strength. That was what he had said the other

day. "Jenkins," he had said, "see that your mistress saves her strength." A pretty way of saving her strength having this young person dancing all over the place, staring at the windows, staring at the staircase, at the ceilings, at everything, indoors and outdoors. Very disturbing it was.

The climax to his worry came that evening at nine o'clock, which was the hour when Mrs. Claverdon went to bed. At that hour the fire was raked low, and the lamps were put out. Imagine then his dismay when she said:

"No, Jenkins, we will not rake out the fire to-night. We will pile on the logs, and we will have some more oil for the lamps. The young lady is going to sit here to-night. Put the Abbot's chair ready for her."

"Going to sit here—in this room?" he asked.

"Going to sit here in this room," she answered.

"But, my lady," he mumbled, "no one has sat in this room after you have left it at nights for twenty years and more."

"Time, then, someone did," she snapped. "Do as I tell you, Jenkins, and don't go on mumbling like that. Bristowe was bad enough when I told her to get Queen Elizabeth's room prepared, but you are infinitely worse, and I won't allow it."

She added more gently:

"Don't be distressed, faithful old Jenkins. Miss Kingsmead is only going to sit here and write—as I used to write in the past. I wonder how many times you have knocked at the door and said: 'Is my lady not going to retire yet?'"

He smiled and piled on the logs, and placed the Abbot's chair in position.

So Gwen entered into possession. At first she was too excited and thrilled to settle to work. The Abbot's chair with the mitre carved at the back invited inspection. The pictures and books sent out their appeal. There were many books about Shelley on the shelves, and there was a copy of his works on her desk lying open at *"Alastor, or The Spirit of Solitude."* He must certainly be her

favourite poet. And there was his portrait. Was that her own work, Gwen wondered? And that picture of Shelley writing in the woods at Spezzia—was that hers? And all those papers on the table near her easel? Why did they rouse her curiosity and tempt her to look at them? Of course she must not. Were they old family papers, perhaps, so yellow and faded? No, she did not sense them as such. What were they? And why did she feel impelled to take them in her hands, one by one, and find out what they stood for and what was their message? For a message they had—that was certain. More than once they drew her, but she turned away from them resolutely and continued her pacings up and down the room.

What a room! Always she had longed to write in just such a room. Surely she had always known it and had pictured herself in it instead of in the poor, mean little lodgings which had ever been her portion. There had been times when she would have given her soul to have changed them for some beautiful setting such as this, to appeal to her

imagination and foster the gifts which she knew well were hers. A lovely home—lovely scenery spread before one—space, ease, splendour of tradition—would they not bring out the very best that was in one?

But there were other times—most times—when Gwen remembered the immortal works conceived and achieved in loneliness and poverty, when the space and the ease and the splendour of tradition and the glories of Nature and gracious surroundings were furnished by one's own spirit. Great names—a procession of them throughout the world's history—rose up to rebuke her—and she knew herself ashamed and humbled. Then her own garret became once more the true palace that it was, the glorious scene of her strivings and visionings and travellings towards the goal of her ambitions.

For above everything else she was ambitious, not for riches, worldly success, notoriety, modest recognition, but for true fame, for immortality through the ages, like that of Shakespeare or

Shelley or Beethoven or Michelangelo. Something large and pervading. Nothing, however gratifying, on a small scale. This was the hidden fire raging within her, little suspected by those who judged of her only from her natural joyousness of bearing. It was her own secret, hitherto shared with no one, and the only person who knew the intensity of her aspirations was the head of a great publishing firm with traditions reaching far into the past. He knew by instinct, from the style of the work she had sent in for his consideration. And although he had refused her stories several times, he had commented on them and encouraged her in princely fashion. And his last letter ran thus:

"Do not be disheartened that I again consider your story unworthy of our magazine. Go on sending to me until you have found your way. You will win through, I am sure. You will find that your ambitions and intentions to do only work of a high order were more than justified, and I shall be justified in believing in the eventual ripening of your undoubted powers."

Would not such a letter have given anyone wings with which to mount to heights?

She carried it about with her as if it were a love-letter. It was a love-letter, in very truth. It promised her all she most wished for in life if she worked and strove and cared and turned neither to the right nor the left, but went pressing on towards the mountain ranges in the far horizon.

She took it out now and read it for the thousandth time, and revelled in it as if it had only that moment come into her possession.

And meanwhile the lights in the great log fire were dancing in the room, and thoughts and fancies and ideas dimly imagined began to take form and substance in her mind, and inner voices called to her, now softly, now imperiously, and the silence of the night, and the space and beauty of her new palace, and the magic in the atmosphere worked on her senses until they vibrated in response.

Her pen touched the paper at last, and she began her story of the Fells with a prologue which had in it the thrill and pulsation of life. Fresh

from the mountain rushed the invigorating stream of thought, gathering strength and breadth on its way. Gladness and sadness and wisdom and folly and gropings and yearnings and longings were poured out in an avalanche of passionate imagination possible only to young genius in its early rapture.

It must have been nearly two o'clock when the door opened and Jenkins shuffled in. He had been guarding that room outside, had fallen asleep and been dreaming of the past. He was still half dreaming.

"Is my lady not going to retire yet?" he said in his cracked old voice.

V

GWEN slept soundly in Queen Elizabeth's bed, undisturbed by dreams of her royalty, her reign, or her hoop. Mrs. Bristowe had obeyed orders and seen to it that there were blankets in profusion and that the fire was nobly built. The girl had gone to rest, conscious that she had made a good start with her book and therefore happy in her spirit; and the kindness of her hostess had given her a sense of well-being and protection which she had not known since her mother died and left her alone to do battle with the world. No wonder that she slept.

When she awoke and remembered where she was, she sprang out of the huge four-poster and rushed to look at the view from the window. It was even lovelier, she thought, than all the beauties of the house. In the process of dressing she hopped about from one interesting bit of furniture to another, and studied the portrait of the great Queen, hanging on the wall, and of course the

widened doorway. What luck had been hers, she thought, and how she blessed the publisher man, as Mrs. Claverdon insisted on calling him, for having planned his book about the Historic Homes of England. She laughed as she recalled some of the old lady's half-grim, half-playful expressions and some of her witty comments on life and history. So bright and alert she had been that it was impossible to realise that she was as old as she claimed to be.

But for all her intermittent brightness, she gave the impression of great loneliness and of stern reserve, too, which would, at her pleasure, keep the world at arm's length. And something tugged at Gwen's heart when she thought of her alone in this secluded homestead, sole survivor, as she told her, of her own generation, and with no bonds to knit her to the present day. Great courage it must need to go on—and indeed that was another impression she gave, of a courage which crowned her old age with a dignity which could never be forgotten.

Gwen was summoned to her presence some

time later in the morning to take leave of her, and found her at her easel busily at work on a large oil-painting, the subject being from *Ivanhoe,* Rebecca saying to Rowena: *"Accept them, lady—to me they are valueless. I will never wear jewels more."*

"Oh, but you are wonderful," Gwen could not help exclaiming. "I do think you are a wonder to be working like this, instead of resting as so many would. It is a lesson for all one's life."

"No, not wonderful, only sensible," Mrs. Claverdon said, pretending not to be pleased. "If I had to live on, it was necessary to fill my days and thoughts. These are nearly all my own paintings in this room, and if you look round you'll notice that they are mostly portraits, or pictures with people in them. These people have been company to me. If you know anything about art, you will detect at once that I've had only very moderate ability. Moderate ability and fatal facility. That is what a great artist, long since passed away, said of my efforts. But he told me never to lose the habit, because of the immense pleasure it gave me

and would continue to give me even though I should never set the Thames on fire. And he was right. I've been very happy over my pictures. I am still."

She waved her brush as if she wished the subject dismissed.

"And what happened here last night?" she asked. "What about you and your work? Were you caught up on wings? Did inspiration come?"

"Yes, yes," Gwen said, her face shining. "The best bit of writing I've ever done in my life I did here—the beginning of a book which I've had vaguely floating about in my mind ever since I spent some months in the Fells amongst some shepherd folk. Last night it took shape and form, and I see my way."

The old lady nodded her head. She made no comment.

"A curious thing happened," the girl continued. "All those papers on the table attracted me most unaccountably. I longed more than I can say to do the dishonourable deed of looking at them. I

took it for granted at first that they were family documents, old and yellow with time. And then it was borne in on me that they were not family papers, but something far more thrilling—manuscripts. I did not know how to resist looking at them. Oh, you need not start. I did resist, of course. But this is the point: directly I sensed them to be manuscripts, there seemed to emanate from them some motive power which released my own pent-up thoughts for expression. And I do want to ask this impertinent question. What are they that they excited and spurred me on and shed an atmosphere around me in which I thrived and prospered?"

There was a long pause, and then Mrs. Claverdon said slowly as if with effort:

"They are the writings of a lifetime, my child—my writings."

"Your writings!" the girl exclaimed. "Then you, too, are an author. Why, then, we are comrades of the pen—you and I. How perfectly delightful!"

She held out her hand for an impulsive grasp of comradeship, and as the old lady took it, a flush of pleasure rose to her face. She was hugely delighted at being claimed as a fellow-author. No more gratifying title than this could have been found for her in this world or the next.

"Yesterday, I was on the point of burning those manuscripts when you came," she said. "I had got them all out of the oak chest, and had doomed them all to destruction when . . ."

"But why should they be burnt?" Gwen interrupted eagerly. "It would be like burning part of yourself. Oh, don't burn them—please don't. I burned one of mine once—and I felt awful afterwards."

"They have been my secret joy for years," Mrs. Claverdon said dreamily. "They must be burnt before I pass on my way."

"But you are not passing on your way yet," Gwen said. "How can you talk of passing on your way when you paint these pictures and are busy, as you told me, the whole day long? Why, for all

you know, you may want passionately to read them over one day, and what would you feel like if you had got rid of them? It would be enough to kill you. Don't burn them. Put them back safe from harm's way in that grand old oak chest where you keep them. If I saved their lives at a critical moment, I have the right to plead for them now. Let me put them back for you. May I? One day, you know, you could make a strong parcel of them, and seal it and write on it: *To be burnt unread.* At least you would know that they were there to be got at any time the spirit moved you. And think what a comfort that would be. That is what I should do if I were you, comrade."

"And who would burn them, pray?" Mrs. Claverdon asked, with a touch of bitterness in her voice. "My solicitor's clerk, for instance, carelessly, irreverently."

"I would burn them for you," Gwen said. "I would burn them for you with tenderness and reverence. I swear it."

There was another pause, which ended when a

smile began to steal slowly over the old lady's face.

"Very well, comrade," she said, "stranger though you are, I trust you and I accept your offer. Put them all back in the chest. When my hour comes, you shall be the one to burn them."

With lynx eyes she watched the girl bending over the chest and restoring the manuscripts one by one to their accustomed place. When the task was over, she gave a sigh of relief.

Did she have any impulse to speak of her writings to this fellow-author who had come so unexpectedly into her life? Or was she, by reason of her fixed habits of secrecy, prevented from any such departure from tradition?

And were her interest and curiosity stirred to know what the girl herself had been writing about the Fells and the lives of the shepherd folk? Or did her own passion for secrecy check her from even desiring to pierce the privacy of another person's thoughts?

Who could tell what went on in that old mind? Certain it is that she gave no confidences and asked

for none. But when the girl left, she was strangely moved and her last words were:

"If the book halts, comrade of the pen, as books do halt sometimes, and if the room calls—come."

VI

BACK in her boarding-house in Bloomsbury, Gwen worked up the notes she had made from her own observation and from the information given her by Mrs. Claverdon, and finished her article on the Moat House. Her thoughts were thus naturally centred on the old lady whose maiden name of Kingsmead was identical with her own. But as she had said, that was not a point which had much interest for her, and the question of relationship did not for a moment intrude itself on the girl's uncalculating mind. What did intrude itself was the old lady's temperament and her unusual setting. They made an increasing appeal to her literary instincts, and she realised that here was tempting material which might be fashioned into a story.

The scene rose before her of that aged personage—for she was a personage—sitting at her easel, day in, day out, painting pictures and portraits which were the companions of her solitude.

Think of it—all those long hours alone in that silent house, and for friends and companions only pictures, which did service for living people. There were so many of them that Gwen could only recall a few: the old monk illuminating manuscripts, San Bernardino refusing the offer of three bishoprics, Elizabeth in Woodstock Palace ornamenting a copy of St. Paul's Epistles and signing it with *E. C. Elizabeth captiva,* Elizabeth signing the death-warrant of Mary, Queen of Scots, Elizabeth receiving Shakespeare, Rebecca giving her jewels to the Lady Rowena, Tasso in the cloisters of San Onoforio, Shelley writing in the woods at Spezzia, a Vestal Virgin, Sir Walter Raleigh in the Tower—an amazing and heterogeneous company. Then the manuscripts, the work and recreation of a lifetime, safe in that deep oak chest, rescued from burning, silent but living witnesses of years of diligence and concentrated thought.

What was the mystery of her life? What was the tragedy which had driven her in on herself? That there was one, Gwen felt certain. It would be

easy enough to invent one. That was the only part which her imagination would have to supply. The setting was there, the loneliness was there, the pictures and the manuscripts, the aged butler, the old lady herself were there. All that was needed was to gather them together—and the thing was done. Just the very theme for Rosthwaite's magazine. The very atmosphere. With a theme of this nature, Gwen was certain that she could write a tale which Mr. Rosthwaite would be able to accept. And then, with this glorious opening, she would forge ahead. She could see, dancing before her eyes, the words of the letter which he would surely write to her. Those words were: *"At last you have sent me something which I can publish in the magazine."*

If she could only do it. Oughtn't she to do it? Oughtn't she to put her book of the Fells aside and make the attempt? If she once set to work, ideas would come; she knew that well. Here was a subject thrown at her head by fate. Think of it—to be accepted by one of the leading literary maga-

zines of the time—think of it! Think of what it would mean—the pride of it, the joy of it—and dear God in Heaven—the stimulus! The very thought was thrilling. Fail again this time? No, she knew she wouldn't. Her ambition would be realised at last, and Mr. Rosthwaite would be justified in his belief in her.

But every time Gwen tried to begin a story with Mrs. Claverdon for its theme, she was dissuaded by an inner conviction that it would be a sort of sacrilege to write a single word about her. She could see with her mind's eye the look of proud indignation on the old lady's face at the mere idea of anyone daring to violate the privacy of her life, and especially one to whom she had shown much kindness and concession.

She was desperately torn. She argued with herself continuously. One moment she said:

"Why shouldn't I? Writers have to drag everyone and everything into their net. They have to. They can't help themselves."

And the answer came back:

"The passion of your comrade was for privacy and secrecy. She told you that distinctly. It is your duty to leave her unassailed in her citadel."

"But how could it hurt her?" asked Gwen's other self. "In any case it would not be her life's story, of which I know nothing. Also she would never even hear of it."

"That has nothing to do with it," was the answer. "The whole point is whether you have any right or any heart to trespass on a sacred preserve."

"Well, supposing I wrote and asked her? What about that?"

"That, of course, would alter the whole situation. But if she said 'no,' would you abstain?"

"Of course I would."

"Well, write then, if you have the courage."

But she had not the courage. She was as reluctant to offer the bare suggestion as to write the story; and she made a desperate effort to turn away entirely from the temptation and to rivet her mind on her book.

But in vain. Not the shepherd folk, but the old lady haunted her; not the Fells and the great spaces of the moorland, but that fifteenth-century fortified homestead dominated her thoughts. She dreamed about the pictures which filed past her in a solemn procession; she dreamed of the dear, funny old man Jenkins and the ghost ancestress who kept glancing from side to side with anxious eyes vainly searching for something which eluded her. She dreamed of the manuscripts: now she was reading them: now she was putting them safely in the chest: now she was tying them into a strong parcel and writing on the outside in big letters underlined three times: *To be burnt unread:* and now she was fulfilling her promise and burning that parcel. The gate house, the yew hedge, the old stained glass, the easel, Queen Elizabeth's bedroom, the old lady's beautiful face and stately presence fought with each other for remembrance.

So great was the obsession that it began to tell on her, and she knew that she could not win freedom from the hold it had on her mind nor release

her imagination for her other writings until she had yielded to her impulses and written the story for *Rosthwaite's Magazine.*

"I can write it and destroy it," she said. "But write it I must."

And suddenly an inspiration came to her. Could she not weave into and about the story a study of old age? Old Age—what was it like? What did it feel like to be old? When and how did one begin to know and realise that old age was overtaking one? Or didn't one realise? Was its approach so gradual that one accommodated oneself unconsciously to the different phases which dovetailed into each other so perfectly that the whole process was merely a continuously gentle slipping on to the end? Or was there constant regret and resentment, as first one power failed and then another? Was there constant bereavement over the dying down of hopes and ambitions, constant fear of losing one's hold on life, constant fear of facing death?

Was there quiet resignation, was there definite

thankfulness that the lamp of life was burning low? Were there no pangs to suffer save the tragedy of being left over from one's generation, as in the case of her old lady? Did courage and pluck survive? Did any emotions survive? Or did old age have for its rightful protection a thick armour of insensitiveness against which the blows of fate might hammer in vain? Did the memory of old age become so faint and feeble in its working that the meaning of youth and the message of youth were like flowers faded out of all recognition?

What a puzzle. And only think of it—one day, she, Gwen, twenty-three years old, and full of life and verve and of the very joy of existence—she, Gwen, would be old and perhaps listless and insensitive. No response to the call of life, no thrill, no resilience. Instead, a dead level of complacent serenity. It seemed incredible that this could ever be her portion. But this was probably what everyone, now old, had thought in youth and strength and the full flush of activity. Mrs. Claverdon also.

And this would be interesting to know: Was

the gulf between youth and old age—such a gulf—as great as the gulf between old age and youth? Would she, Gwen, for instance, be as far removed, when she was old, from her present self as her present self now was far removed from old age?

So now many conflicting thoughts and conjectures about old age obsessed her, old age in the abstract, and old age as seen and wondered at in her comrade of the pen. They tempered each other, and out of the resultant mellowness Gwen's story was born one night. On that night her misgivings and her hesitancies were lulled to rest, and before she took up her pen, she was able to say to her other self who had striven with her:

"This will not be sacrilege. This will be no storming of a citadel. It will be an interpretation of old age—a tribute to old age."

Then she began, and gave the reins to her fancy.

VII

It was a beautiful piece of work which bore witness that Gwen was a born artist with rare gifts of imagination. The few facts were there, as she knew them, the outward facts which had aroused her interest, and on them she had based a tragedy of her own visioning. The Moat House was under another name, and Mrs. Claverdon and old Jenkins were also under different names; but those companions of solitude, the portraits and pictures, wore no disguise, and the oak chest with its treasure-trove of manuscripts donned no mantle of concealment. But for the rest, the fabric was of her own creation.

A lonely childhood, when inventing stories was the only joy during long days of neglect. A loveless marriage, when self-suppression found its solace and outlet in describing happier lives and brighter scenes. A son's disgrace, and a broken heart which

tried to mend itself in secret with the balm of literary pursuits—and not in vain. A second talent, not of finest calibre, perhaps, but serviceable and resourceful, and used assiduously, year in, year out, far into old age when most people were numbed or resting, to provide constant occupation and to fill a lonely home with friends whose presence could not be withdrawn by time or death.

And interwoven with the whole story the memory of an early love, lost in young days by untoward chance, and found again in middle years when life could only vouchsafe a communion of spirit across the gulf of separating circumstance. But that communion a secret sustaining influence not waning with the passage of time nor by the intervention of death.

And throughout, his earnest, never failing exhortation that she should not cease to paint and write and study and keep her mind fortified against ill fate.

His words had echoed from the distances of space and time:

"My beloved, hold fast to the pleasures of the mind. No one can take them from us except we ourselves. They remain, if we will let them, when all else fails. Go on to the end. Will you remember?"

She had remembered.

It was an amazing study of old age. With unerring vision Gwen had pierced the far-off land. She had sounded its depths, she had penetrated its secrets. She had imaged its beauty, and she had sensed its failings. She had stressed its courage and its endurance. She had voiced its fears.

But it was chiefly on its beauty that she dwelt, and on the pathos of it when Time cut it off from the mainland to which it belonged and left it stranded alone—waiting.

When Gwen had ended the story, she knew, from the ravage to her own spirit, that it was the best piece of work she had done.

VIII

It was only after Gwen had gone and when all was as before in the Moat House that Mrs. Claverdon began to make conjectures about the possible relationship between herself and this young writer to whom, much to her own surprise, she had yielded up some of her long-cherished privacy. She had been so delighted with her companionship, and so excited by the thrilling fact that she was a comrade of the pen, that other considerations went for nothing.

But now, alone again, she wondered and pondered. The name was an unusual one—Kingsmead. Her father's family, of ancient lineage, dating back even longer than the Claverdons. Her own maiden name of which she had ever been so proud. And the girl's name, too, Kingsmead—Gwendolin Kingsmead. Illegitimate, was she? Well, that rather increased the interest. And born in Australia, hadn't she said? She must look over the family papers

and see if she could find any reference to Australia. Not that it mattered. Just a point of curiosity only. The point was that out of the void had come this Spirit of Youth, breaking in upon the solitude of an old woman, asking nothing, expecting nothing, and singing a song of June.

The words and the music echoed back to her:

> Sing, sing me a song that is fit for to-day,
> Sing me a song of the sunshine, a warm, sweet lay,
> Blue larkspur and bold white daisies, odour of hay.

If she had come saying: "My name is your name and we must be related in some way or other, and I am young and struggling and need help," Mrs. Claverdon would have closed up her heart and her purse.

But on the contrary, she had said that money was the last thing she wanted and that she needed no favours of that kind from anyone. She was proud, that little thing. Proud and ambitious—and lovable.

And gay hearted. Ah, ah, the house was lonely without her, and yet not so lonely as it had been

before she came and saved those manuscripts from the burning bush. For she had left something behind her—the remembrance of her youth, the fervour of her ambitions, the fragrance of her comradeship—and a sacred promise.

Mrs. Claverdon could not settle to her painting that day. According to habit, she took up brush and palette and prepared for her work. Having finished the picture, "San Bernardino refusing the offer of three bishoprics," she had planned to go on with another which she had laid aside for some time, "Queen Elizabeth receiving Master William Shakespeare." It was already fixed on the easel, and Elizabeth's ruff seemed to be sending out an imperious demand to be finished. But at the moment, dreadful to relate, Mrs. Claverdon did not care whether her favourite monarch, whom she was never tired of portraying, had or had not a ruff. She felt no zest for her task. She sat passive and indifferent, thinking neither of the great Queen nor of the great Poet, but of Gwen—of the girl's voice and presence and laughter.

So instead of painting, she rummaged out all her manuscripts and spread them again on the refectory table. She was enormously pleased when she had performed this feat, and nodded to them, saying aloud:

"Not to be burnt, dear friends, not to be burnt during my lifetime, and at my death only by kind and reverent hands. That is a promise, dear friends —think what it means to you and me—a promise which will be kept."

Then she unlocked her bureau and examined carefully the few documents she possessed relating to the Kingsmead family; but in none of them did she find any reference to an Australian branch. But what she did find, was a letter from her brother Frederick written long before he had brought disgrace upon the family and had been disowned. And her thoughts leapt back to the past, and she remembered that he had left all his papers and everything he possessed to the one friend who had stood by him in his need, George Rodney. A lifetime ago —and yet how distinctly everything stood out. Well,

well, if she wanted to pursue the matter, she would have to find out whether George Rodney were still alive. Why not? She was still alive. He would be about five or six years older than herself. But if you could live to eighty, she grimly thought, you could live to any age.

But was it worth while to trouble? Even if it could be proved that there was a relationship, what would be gained? Nothing. She was allowing herself to be foolish.

Never had she cared about relationships, and why should she care now? And yet when you came to think, what a sweet thing it would be, even at the eleventh hour, to find someone belonging to your lineage, however remotely, and to know that one was not alone in the world. Yes, it might be worth taking trouble over. It might—and it might not. She wasn't sure.

But the idea born in her brain gained amazing strength as the days went on, and she formed a secret plan which gave her a great deal of satisfaction and over which she laughed softly from time

to time. Whatever it was, it had a beneficial effect on her health and spirits, and there was a twinkle in her eye when she said to Mrs. Bristowe: "Ah, you don't know what is in store for you, poor dear Bristowe. But keep a stout heart!"

What could she mean?

And to Jenkins she said mysteriously:

"Something in store for Bristowe which she won't like. Good for her, Jenkins."

"Yes, my lady," said Jenkins, vaguely glad that something, no matter what, was in store for Mrs. Bristowe which she wouldn't like!

It was on this morning that Dr. Allbrook called. Nearly three weeks had elapsed since he had been at the Moat House, shaken his head over the old lady's weakness and implored her to save her strength and to rest. There were times when he was convinced that it could not be long before she departed this life, and he expected to find to-day that she had taken several more steps in the direction he had definitely assigned her. But he saw at once that instead of advancing, she had retreated! She

looked much better, and there was a light in her eyes which spoke of recovered vitality.

"Well, you are simply amazing," he smiled. "Simply amazing. That shows what rest will do."

"Nonsense," she said. "I've not rested. On the contrary, I've exerted myself abnormally."

"Then the medicine has worked a miracle," he said.

"I haven't taken it," she chuckled. "I told you I would never begin the dangerous game of taking your medicines. Haven't I always refused?"

"Well, well," he said good-naturedly, "what has happened to you, I wonder?"

"Several things have happened, and amongst them, I have found a comrade," she said, "maybe even a relative. I am not sure about that. But about the comrade I am sure, Allbrook. I am no longer alone in this world. Someone walks with me."

And she repeated with a smile:

"Someone walks with me."

"Ah, that makes a great difference," he said,

touched by her words, which surprised him, for he had never before heard her refer to her loneliness. But he could not help hoping that the comrade, whoever the comrade was, would not prove to be a relative and march off with all the old lady's money. For he had expectations, had Dr. Allbrook, and perhaps with some reason, too. Had he not for years been attending her and her household? Had he not for years been prescribing medicines for her at which she scoffed and which she never took? Had he not for years been putting up with her gruffness and smiling amiably instead of telling her what he really thought of her sometimes, even though he had the greatest admiration and regard for her?

Had he not always come to her summons in fair weather or foul, often to be told by old Jenkins that my lady had changed her mind and did not wish to see him? What more, pray, could a doctor do or be? Of course, he had expectations. He would not have been human otherwise. And of course he wanted to know about this mysterious and dangerous comrade suddenly appearing on the horizon.

But he was far too wise to ask. He knew that if he waited, he would learn, but that if he showed the least sign of interest or curiosity, her lips would be sealed till the crack of doom.

So instead he changed the subject, spoke of *Lord Palmerston's Life* which he had been reading, and of an accident on the Great Western Railway, and of the discovery of what was believed by experts to be a genuine Rembrandt—*The Portrait of a Young Man*, run to earth in Shoreditch, of all places. He had brought the cutting with him and he read it out to her. He nearly always brought some little paragraphs which he knew would interest her; and nothing pleased her more than to be remembered in this way.

"I must find time to go and see it in the National Gallery when I run up to London next week," he said. "Then I shall be able to tell you all about it."

"Very kind, I'm sure," she smiled, "but I myself shall probably run up to London next week, so I can see it for myself."

"Good heavens!" he cried in real surprise. "You can't mean it. Why, you haven't been up to London for years."

"It is time, then, that I did go," she said grimly. "I want to make some inquiries. I want to see my lawyer."

"But it's impossible," he said. "Impossible at your age, and with your feeble and uncertain strength. I forbid it absolutely. Mr. Borrowdale can come to you as he has always done."

She laughed.

"Forbid it just as much as you like," she said. "That doesn't hurt anyone. But I am going all the same. And moreover, Allbrook, you are going to take me."

"Never," he said emphatically. "I could not be a party to such a mad adventure. It would kill you. And I would deserve to be considered responsible for your death."

"Has anything killed me all the years you've known me?" she asked. "Why, even your medicines haven't."

"But then you've never taken them, so you've led me to believe over and over again," he said.

"No, that's true," she laughed. "Well, if you won't escort me, it will have to be Jenkins. And a nice pair we shall make."

"Come, come, you are not serious." He smiled as he rose from the Abbot's chair. "Just one of your grim jokes, I am sure. But I'm glad to hear one again. It shows that you are in good form and that my medicine which you did not take, has done you a power of good."

"It was the comrade's youth," she said, half to herself. "Youth giving renewal to Old Age."

She added abruptly:

"You needn't go. If you like to sit down again, I don't mind telling you about her."

So he had gained his point by showing no curiosity, and he continued to show none whilst she told him briefly of Gwen's visit, her mission, and the coincidence of her name. She ended with:

"I must find out who she is. If she belongs to

my family, she has claims on me which I shall not disregard."

Perhaps it was the vision of a relative marching off with all the money that caused a shade of anxiety to pass over the doctor's face. Her quick old eyes must have noticed it, for she laughed softly as she said:

"No one expecting legacies need be alarmed. You'll have your trifle of five thousand pounds just the same. There now—I've never meant to tell you the amount—but it's out. Something in return for your long patience and forbearance with a stubborn old woman who has often vented her spleen on you because she had no one else to vent it on. Don't fear—don't fear. I'm not ungrateful, though I'm disagreeable enough at times. That I know perfectly well. Don't take the trouble to contradict it, as you would only be pretending. And why pretend? There is no need. Well now, what are you thinking? Are you thinking that you will take me up to London and look after me properly as a doctor should?"

"Never," he said stoutly. "Never. Not for tens of thousands of pounds. I might just as well seize a knife and stab you in the back as do that. Murder is not in my line—not even by prescriptions. You have not been beyond these grounds for years—I don't believe you've crossed the moat once—and you know well that at times you have scarcely got a respectable heart-beat in you; and for me to encourage you to take a railway journey, when you have barely strength to get from one room to another, would be madness and a crime."

"You would get your five thousand pounds quicker," she threw out.

"Blood money," he said hotly.

"Then you refuse?"

"Of course I refuse. If you want to give instructions to Borrowdale, let him come here as he has always done. Or why not let me make the inquiries for you? I would take the matter up most vigorously, I assure you."

"I intend to take it up most vigorously myself," she said. "As you are aware, when I have once

got an idea in my head, I never leave go of it. And I've made up my mind to go to London. It is a most curious thing, Allbrook, but I have an inordinate desire to go there and see once more the National Gallery, the British Museum, and Westminster Abbey. Why I've put it off so long I can't tell you, because I don't know myself. But it's not too late, and go I shall. So don't argue about it. You are only wasting your breath. Well, you need not decide now as to whether you will accompany me. Come back on Friday and give me your answer."

"You have my answer now, Mrs. Claverdon," he said gravely. "I will have nothing to do with this wild-goose chase. Nothing."

Anger shot from her eyes, for she hated being thwarted, but he shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly and left her.

Five thousand pounds—and almost immediately, for the adventure would be sure to kill her. It would be bound to kill her. No old person of

her age and habits and uncertain strength who had scarcely been out of the house for twenty years could suddenly take a journey up to London, even in the most favourable circumstances, and not die from it. Five thousand pounds—think of it. He had never expected such a sum, though she had always said that she would remember him in a trifling way—that was her own expression—*a trifling way*. Five thousand pounds. It would pay off his debts, pay off the mortgage on his house, and give him a clear running for the rest of his days. *And without delay*. That was the point. For he took it for granted, rightly or wrongly, that she would collapse. But if he did not fall in with her wishes, he certainly ran the risk of displeasing her, with fatal consequences to himself. Who could tell what she might not do in her anger? Perhaps even cut him out of her will. No, not that, but . . . there was no knowing.

He was very distraught, very torn, as he drove on his rounds that day. His mind was not with

any of his patients, and he made fearful mistakes, mixed up everyone's ailments and wrote out the most reckless prescriptions which he would never have dreamed of in his sober moments.

And it was obviously not a difficulty he could discuss with anyone. He could not say to his wife, "Shall I?" He could not say to his daughter Alice, "Shall I?" He could not consult Fred, his boy, slaving as a doctor's assistant in a poor part of Leeds—poor old Fred who needed money so badly to buy a decent practice. And when he got home that night he was so tired out with the tumult raging in his spirit, that he could do nothing except sit alone in his study, with pipe unlit and slippers untouched, staring into the fire and murmuring *Five thousand pounds,* staring at some fresh bills come in which he could not meet and murmuring, *Five thousand pounds.* Bills met. Mortgage paid off. Good, hard-working Fred with a practice of his own. Alice given the desire of her heart to go to Girton. Ease of

heart for his wife. Ease of heart for himself. *And at once.*

He got up and threw open the window. The heavens were jewelled with the stars in all their silver resplendency; and their serenity and their aloofness from all earthly concerns induced peace in his troubled spirit. Almost he heard them whispering: "Come out to us and find in our remoteness the blessed solace of impersonality, and in our myriads the awe-inspiring realisation of countless worlds beyond human ken."

He had ever loved them, from boyhood onwards, and he went out to them now as friends and counsellors. Past the old Norman Church he went, past the running stream and the watercress beds, past the stocks on the village green, past the last inn, and so onwards and upwards to the moor with its wide-spreading dome of stars.

IX

THE temptation had been worked through beneath the stars; and the next morning Dr. Allbrook sent a letter by hand to Mrs. Claverdon in which he said very briefly that he could take no share in her London adventure. He begged her to stay quietly at home and send for Mr. Borrowdale. Four or five days afterwards he called at the Moat House fully prepared to meet her wrath and reason with her again about the folly of her intentions and offer his services for investigating her comrade's antecedents. He stood dumbfounded in the hall when old Jenkins, who seemed greatly distressed, in fact, almost in tears, told him she had gone.

"Gone," he exclaimed. "I can't believe it."

And he hurried up the stairs and made for the studio as if to disprove Jenkins's words and find her as usual in her accustomed place at her

easel. Jenkins shuffled after him as fast as he could, and that was not very fast. The studio was empty. Palette and brushes were there, and the picture of Queen Elizabeth receiving Master William Shakespeare stood on the easel testifying to the sad fact that Elizabeth's ruff had made no progress. But the presence that had always dominated the atmosphere had gone. The atmosphere itself had gone, and the room struck cold as a room of death. He sank down in a chair, and signed to the old man, whose knees were shaking, to take the seat opposite him.

Jenkins shook his head.

"I have never sat down here," he said in his trembling voice.

"Then you must now," Dr. Allbrook said kindly. "Doctor's orders, Jenkins."

Very reluctantly the old fellow slipped on to the edge of the chair and sat in a huddled heap.

"She will never come back again," he moaned. "I told Mrs. Bristowe so. I told her a hundred times, but she said it was no use thwarting my

lady when she had once made up her mind. And I know that well enough, I do. Ever since master died, she has had her own way. If you'll excuse me, sir, she will never forgive you for saying you wouldn't go with her. She said she never would. And I know my lady never will."

Little by little Dr. Allbrook learnt the story. There had been a fit of great temper when his letter came, and my lady was more obstinately determined than ever to go to London. Preparations were hurried on, much to Mrs. Bristowe's dismay, and a telegram had been sent to Claridge's Hotel where my lady last went twenty years ago. She had decided not to take him, for she said that one old dodderer was more than enough for Mrs. Bristowe to look after and that he would be better at home guarding the house against all burglars. She had laughed a good deal about that, for she was very bright and good-humoured when her temper was over, and where she got her strength from, he didn't know. She was busy all the time with packets of papers from her bureau

and the oak chest. And he wasn't sure, but he thought she did something to her will, for he and Mrs. Bristowe had to witness her signature.

"Ah," thought Dr. Allbrook, "that's me!"

But his face did not move a muscle.

It was all the fault of the young lady, Jenkins said. Everything was going on as usual until she came. It was true that before she came my lady had seemed a little restless and was beginning to burn some papers, but she would soon have settled down again if she had been left alone. He knew her well. She would have settled down. But this stranger had upset everything, coming into the house and sleeping in Queen Elizabeth's room, and sitting up writing in this room until two in the morning, just as my lady used to do in the past. Ever since then my lady had been excited and queer. She had scarcely touched her brushes. All she did was to spread all her papers out on the table, read them, smile over them, put them back into the oak chest, and then have them out again. He did not know how she got

them out or put them back. He said he couldn't have. She seemed suddenly to have become young again—oh, he didn't mean young like the young lady, of course, but not like anyone old and feeble. And now she had gone, and would never come back. Mrs. Bristowe would come back alone. No, they would never see her again at the Moat House. He felt sure of that. And, oh dear, oh dear, why hadn't the doctor gone with her to take care of her and bring her safely home?

On and on he rambled, repeating the same words, the same phrases, and the doctor sat silent, listening to the poor old man and knowing that the best way to comfort him was to let him pour himself out. When he had ended, Jenkins got up from the chair, said, "I beg your pardon, sir," and shuffled towards the door. Dr. Allbrook detained him, putting his hand kindly on the old fellow's shoulder.

"Jenkins," he said, "when I refused to accompany your mistress, it never entered my head that she would go without me. I wanted to choke

off her plan. I thought it my duty. It was my duty as her medical adviser."

"Ah, but my lady has got such a will of her own," the old man said. "She always has had since the master died. I remember I was glad to see it in her, for she——"

He shook his head, broke off, and vanished like a ghost.

And the doctor was left alone in the studio thinking. Of course he thought of those five thousand pounds codiciled away, for all he knew: of the mortgage and his bills: of a practice for Fred which might never be bought now: of Girton which would never see Alice: of cares which pressed too heavily on his own advancing years and would probably never be lightened: of the stars beneath which he had fought out his battle and won—or lost. Which was it? What good had he done by opposing her wishes? None really. No, no, that wasn't true. At least his conscience was clear whatever happened, and if she succumbed, he would be able to say to the end of his days

that he had had no hand in hastening on her death. That was the viewpoint which he had to keep steadily before him—that and nothing else.

Then he heaved a sigh of relief and knew himself to be free from the bondage of unworthy thoughts. He had done his duty and had remained true to the best traditions of his honourable profession.

He was making for the door when it flashed across his mind that this might be the last time he would see this room. He glanced round the studio, taking in every detail as Gwen had done, so as to store his memory with abiding impressions; only, in his case, every object that met his eye was the familiar friend of years, and something tugged at his heart as he turned now to the pictures, now to the armorial bearings in the windows, now to the lovely old chimney-piece, now to the book-cases, now to the Abbot's chair where he had so often sat, now to her easel and her chair.

He saw her with his mind's eye in that chair —a stubborn, self-willed, and often sardonic old

woman, with a subtle, reconciling charm and a quiet courage of purpose which he had never come across in such a marked degree in any other old person. The courage of going on, alone, upheld by no one but herself. The courage of peopling her solitude with companions who would not fail her by absence or disaster or death. The courage of not yielding an inch to the demands of weakness. The courage of continued habit. What a lesson to remember and fit into one's own old age, if one lived to be old and alone and left over from one's generation.

He took her palette and for a moment held it in his hands, and then gently put it back on the stool.

X

GWEN'S heart beat violently as she paused outside the offices of the great publishing firm of Messrs. Rosthwaite in St. Paul's Churchyard. Almost she could have died from excitement a few minutes later when she followed the clerk upstairs, then through a passage and then up some more steps to the left which led to the inner sanctum of the Head.

"This is the best moment of my life," she thought. "Nothing could ever be as thrilling as this moment."

A voice answered the clerk's knock, and he announced:

"Miss Kingsmead."

A tall, dignified-looking man rose from his desk and received her with a considerate courtesy which even in the year 1890 was beginning to be out of date.

"I am glad you were able to come and see me," he said, pretending to rummage in a drawer for her

MS. which was really lying in readiness on the left-hand side of his desk. He had seen at once that she was nervous and overcome, and he took this means of giving her time to collect her senses. He knew it was a great event for her to be told that her MS. was accepted and to be summoned for a personal interview with the editor. It was a landmark in her life, and no wonder she was stirred to her depths. He himself would have been.

She glanced at the portraits on the walls. Her quick eyes made out Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, Byron, Shelley, George Eliot, and Keats. She had the feeling that she had come into a sacred world, and the ecstasy of being allowed to enter there held her spellbound. When she looked round at him, Mr. Hubert Rosthwaite thought it was as though she carried within her soul a lamp which lit up her whole being and cast its radiance around—the radiance of youth and young ambition and young enthusiasm, life-giving to herself and others. He suddenly felt years younger.

"Well," he smiled, "you've done it this time.

You have written a very remarkable story, which, as you know, I am going to print in the *Magazine.* I have been sure from the first that you had it in you, and that is why I have told you to go on. You have not disappointed me. You have astonished me, not only by the style of the writing, but by the subject and the way you have treated it, and by your vision and imagination. For what can you know of old age —a young thing like you on the threshold of life? And yet here is old age pictured with a sure touch, a rare intuition. And not only old age, but the successive stages which are passed in reaching it. The gradual slowing down of impulses, the dying down of the fever of life, with its hopes and ambitions and anxieties and fears all toned into passiveness—but with courage remaining as an active force. How have you been able to track the secret path? What set you going, I wonder? But this I say to you, if you can write this, you can write anything, provided you keep your vision clear and your gift intact, and don't allow yourself to be tempted to side issues, but go on your way as a pilgrim treading his destined path.

What impelled you to take old age as the theme for your story? Have you lived with old people, put them under a microscope, studied them? You must have—surely."

No, she told him, she had not. She had borrowed the actual setting of the story, but the character-drawing and the plot, such as there was, and the psychology were wholly the fruits of her own imagination. In a few words she told him the history of her visit to the Moat House, and how she had written in that delightful room and had felt inspired and been lifted up on wings. She told him how the old lady, sitting alone there, painting those pictures, as companions of her solitude, had haunted her night and day. She told him how she had struggled against a strong desire to write about her, but in vain. The desire grew until it became an obsession, and she had to write that story in order to get free of it.

And having written it, she had entered on another struggle. Should she destroy it or send it in for his consideration? Should she destroy it, even

though she knew that it was the best thing she had done? Were her scruples unnecessary? After all, she knew nothing of the real circumstances of the old lady's life. She had only taken a temperament and a setting which appealed to her imagination and had given the rein to her fancy.

That was all. And yet there was the other side. If she had not been to the Moat House, the story would never have been conceived or written. The door of the citadel had been opened to her and she had gone in and robbed. She had laid hands on the pictures and the manuscripts and the easel and the oak chest and the windows with their ancient stained glass and Jenkins and that privacy which the old lady had owned was her passion—yes, she had laid hands on them all and borne them off relentlessly for her own purposes. She ended with:

"With half my mind I should have been thankful if you had rejected the story. And with the other half I am thrilled with your praise and encouragement. You must know that."

He nodded. He knew.

"At times," she began again, "I think that the proudest thing that could happen to me would be to have this story in your magazine. Think of it—in *Rosthwaite's Magazine!* The beginning of everything for me. My christening. But at other times—most times—I dread to see it there. For I know I should be haunted by a reproachful look on that old lady's face. I should hear her saying: *'Comrade, you have betrayed me.'*"

"Do you know what you have done in this story?" he said. "You have paid a beautiful tribute to old age. No one could reproach you for that. You have sounded its harmonies with ringing clearness. You have touched in its discords with gentle hands. You have interwoven its melody with all its changing phases. It is a lovely little piece of work. It is a message from Youth to Age. It appeals to me strongly, perhaps because I myself am beginning to feel something of the weight of years and to experience some of the sensations which your intuition has led you to record so truthfully. Whether it is published or not, I shall never forget this story. I don't want you to

do anything against the grain. If you think you would rather not have it published, well then, take it home, and have another try with something else. As I have said before, if you could write this, you could write anything. But pause awhile before you decide to lay the story aside. Remember, for your guidance, that you have disguised all the names, of course, and built up your own structure. It is not as if she had told you her history and you had gone straight home and written it out whilst it was fresh in your memory. Did she tell you anything about herself?"

Gwen shook her head.

"Not a word," she said in a low voice. "Not a single word, except that those were her own manuscripts, the writings of a lifetime."

"After all," he continued, "writers have to have a starting-point. Some temperament, some situation appeals to their imagination, and with the frailest foundation to work on, they rear their own edifice, the creation of their own brain and spirit. It has always been so. I don't see how it can be otherwise. But

I should not dream of coercing you. Do as you wish. If you decide against having it published, your disappointment will be sore, I know, for you deliberately turn away from an immediate fulfilment of your ambition, after having gone on so bravely and persistently to win acceptance from me. You make a sacrifice, in fact. But there are other things besides the bitterness of a disappointment. And you are so young, and you have all your years before you, and all your powers to ripen with time."

Gwen saw her name in *Rosthwaite's Magazine*, in the list of contributors. She saw the pages with her story printed on them. She saw herself reading and re-reading them, and imagined herself anxiously scanning them to make sure that this particular sentence on which she had prided herself, and that special thought over which she had lingered so intently, were as telling in print as she believed they were in manuscript. She felt the pride and rapture of first success. Was anything ever like it? No,

nothing could ever be like it. Think of it—in *Rosthwaite's Magazine*—in the company of the great, in sacred precincts guarded by barriers seldom lowered to admit a new writer. But they had been lowered for her—and she was turning away. Could she turn away?

The vision of the printed pages faded, the thrill died down, the barriers of the enchanted land were raised once more. No entrance now—no, not now.

Gwen rose from her chair and seized her story.

"I don't know what you will think of me," she said, with a nervous half laugh, "but I'd rather burn it. I should be happier so. Indeed I should. I can write other stories. Your encouragement alone is enough to spur one on to anything. I'll burn this and forget it, and start afresh."

There was no trace of tragedy in her manner, but, instead, a quiet yet resilient self-confidence, not the outcome of conceit, but of consciousness of power on which to draw without reserve and with which to reach the goal she had ever in view. As she stood there, she gave the impression of being

detached from passing details of circumstance. And some of this strange immunity was seen now as she grasped her manuscript and was about to throw it into the fire as something done with and to be forgotten as soon as possible. He prevented her in time, even as the old lady had been prevented from the same act by the sound of the June Song.

"No, no," he said authoritatively. "Not that, that's not allowed. I'm not going to stand by and see a good little bit of literature consigned to the flames as if it were a piece of waste paper. Give it back to me at once. I'll hold it in safe keeping for you. You can trust me, can't you? We can ask the old lady. I can ask her. Soon enough for the flames when she says 'No.'"

Alone again, he read and studied it carefully. It had taken his fancy. It was a long time since he had been so impressed by any manuscript sent in for his consideration. Apart from the story itself, the well-turned phrase, the apt word, the condensed thought filled him with admiration. He was delighted

with its marked literary distinction, and was gratified that he had made no mistake in believing this young woman to be possessed of something very much like genius. And here was genius itself—genius with its mysterious birthright of vision and imagination. The mystery of it, the joy of it, the suffering of it—its uplifted wings poised for flight to regions towards which the secret pathway remained for ever secret save to the favoured few. Yes, here was genius.

He lingered over some of the thoughts. He found the words which seemed as if written to fit his special case. These were the words:

"The warnings of advancing age were coming, oh, so softly, softly, almost unheard, almost unsensed, as a thief in the night. One might turn a deaf ear to them, one might pretend they were not being sounded, one might even strike a sweeping chord to drown in full rich harmonies those faint heraldings of Time, the advancing conqueror—but do what one would, they could not be silenced."

XI

When he had laid it down finally, he made up his mind that for the girl's sake and for the sake of the magazine also, the story must be published. And why shouldn't he take an outing for a day or two and seek permission from that old lady? Why not?

He would be all the better for a little change; and if he could combine that change with an act of kindness and a bit of business for the magazine, well, why not? He was perfectly sure that the critics would praise the story and congratulate the editor on having discovered a new and an original writer. That was the business side. And the human side was that this gifted and eager young woman, who had not allowed herself to be discouraged by many disappointments, ought now, without delay, to reap the reward of her perseverance and make her appearance in his magazine. And the story had

interested him so much that he felt he would rather like to see the personage and the place which had inspired it. Yes, he would go. Something out of the ordinary. Something to break the eternal Brighton habit. Wasn't he getting too much into a rut? Well, here was the chance to get out. Yes, he would go.

By his wish, or rather on his insistence—for Gwen was by no means willing—she had written down the name and address of the old lady, and he took the piece of paper and studied it. And as he read aloud the name *Claverdon*, some vague memory was stirred in his mind. It sounded faintly familiar to him, as an echo from the far distance. *Mrs. Claverdon—The Moat House—Sutcliffe, Dorsetshire. Claverdon.* He shook his head. He ransacked the past in vain, yet felt more and more convinced that there was some circumstance in his early days connected with that particular name and place. Nothing of a personal nature—of that he was sure. Perhaps some business of the firm—if anything. Ah, it might be worth while asking Fraser. Fraser

knew everything about the life of the firm, which had been his only life for forty years. And he had a stored memory. So he summoned Fraser.

But Fraser could not help him. Yes, he said, the name recalled something, but what it was he could not remember. *Claverdon—Claverdon. The Moat House—The Moat House.* Fraser tapped his forehead, but with no result, and went away crestfallen at having lost his character of an encyclopædia warranted to supply information on any needed subject at a minute's notice.

Now it so happened that the binders had sent in five hundred copies of a new edition of a book of travels, *Through Central Asia*, with which the firm was having a great success; and in dealing with the distribution of the consignment, Fraser's thoughts became directed towards the subject of travels. And suddenly the hidden memory which had eluded his search was run to earth. Of course. The diaries and letters of the African explorer, Peter Maurice, bequeathed by him to a Mrs. Alwina Claverdon—he recalled her unusual Christian name

now. That was where she came in. And she had refused to yield them up or lend them, and had been proof against all persuasion not only on the part of Mr. Samuel Rosthwaite, father of the present head of the firm, but also on the part of the Royal Geographical Society. Oh, yes, he remembered the whole of the incident now. Forty years ago—a year or two before Mr. Hubert Rosthwaite took over the management. Claverdon. The Moat House. Those were the names right enough. He could look up the details in the chronicles of the firm, but he was sure that this was the connection.

He hastened back to tell Mr. Rosthwaite, triumph in his heart and on his face. The encyclopædia had not failed after all. It could still boast of an unblemished reputation!

"Well, I must say you are a wonder, Fraser," Mr. Rosthwaite said. "I remember now. I remember my father's exasperation that no proper and full record of Maurice's explorations could be published, because the diaries and letters were being selfishly withheld by a friend. And that *was* the name—

Claverdon. Good heavens, Fraser—think of it—forty years ago—and as far as I can make out, that same woman is still alive—very old—but she's alive. We must get hold of those papers, somehow. The book must be published. It would create a tremendous sensation, and bring honour to the firm and repair a loss to the world."

Fraser's face shone. Honour to the firm was what he lived for. The firm was his spouse and family. The books published by it in the past were his ancestors, and the ones published now were his lawful descendants. Stirring events in the outside world, the fall of monarchs, the dawn of democracy, strikes, revolutions, wars, earthquakes, scientific discoveries would have always left him entirely unmoved, whereas the ups and downs of the firm hoisted him to the heights of happiness or depressed him to the depths of despair. For all books in all languages Fraser cherished a profound respect. Even for the books which had the misfortune to be published by other houses he had a benevolent and an indulgent regard. But the books of his own firm

he loved with a love passing the love of women, and reverenced them as something set apart, out of the range of praise or blame.

And here was a fresh opportunity to add to the glory which was already the birthright of the firm. No wonder, then, that his face shone as he and Mr. Rosthwaite talked over this exciting matter. It was arranged that he should look up the chronicles of the years 1850—52 and unearth all the correspondence in connection with that project which was never carried out. So, business hours over, Fraser stayed on alone, lit his pipe and set to work. After a tireless search he found what he wanted.

"I wasn't far wrong. I wasn't far wrong," he positively purred.

The next morning he brought all the letters bearing on the subject to Mr. Rosthwaite's sanctum, and laid them before him with a quietness of manner which did not, however, conceal the exultancy of his spirit.

"I wasn't so far wrong, sir," he purred again.

The following were some of the letters he brought:

"THE MOAT HOUSE,
"SUTCLIFFE.

"DEAR SIR,

"No, I cannot lend Mr. Peter Maurice's diaries and papers for the purposes you mention—viz. the compilation of a biography. If anyone ever writes that biography, it will be myself. I may or may not write it: in all probability the latter.

"Yours faithfully,

"ALWINA CLAVERDON."

"THE MOAT HOUSE,
"SUTCLIFFE.

"DEAR SIR,

"I shall be gratified if you will discontinue writing to me about the diaries and papers of Mr. Peter Maurice. I have given you my answer and I have nothing whatsoever to add to it.

"Yours faithfully,

"ALWINA CLAVERDON."

"ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD, E.C.

"MADAM,

"In writing my final letter to you on the subject of Peter Maurice's diaries and papers, I would point out that by your refusal to use or lend them, you are withholding from the world a very valuable record to which it has a right. Your decision is much to be deplored. We know, fortunately, the results of his early explorations in Central Africa, but the details and descriptions of his amazing adventures and the difficulties which he overcame would be of immense value to the history of exploration.

"May I venture to hope that some day you will see your way to change your mind?

"Yours faithfully,

"SAMUEL ROSTHWAITE."

"THE MOAT HOUSE,
"SUTCLIFFE.

"DEAR SIR,

"I shall never change my mind. This correspondence must now cease.

"Yours faithfully,

"ALWINA CLAVERDON."

Mr. Rosthwaite put the papers faded with age, on his desk.

"What can have been the reason?" he said. "There must have been a reason beyond that of selfishness and stubbornness. What do you think it could have been, Fraser?"

Fraser shook his head. He knew books through and through, did Fraser—books, bindings, paper, type, print—but of human nature he knew not so much as a semi-colon.

"Well, she is still alive; that is one thing to the good," Rosthwaite said. "By a mere coincidence, which I'll tell you about some day, I've learnt that much. So what I shall do, is to go and see her and get those papers out of her by fair means or foul—eh, Fraser, what say you?"

He smiled as he spoke, and Fraser laughed softly and rubbed his hands.

"It would be worth while trying," he said, "by any means whatsoever, fair or foul. Fancy, sir, her having dared to oppose the will of the firm. I

remember how angry your honoured father was. Such obstinacy, such impertinence."

Yes, thought Rosthwaite, such obstinacy and even impertinence. It was a thundering shame that those diaries and letters had never been secured, and a disgrace that the firm had allowed all these years to pass without making any further effort to give a biography of Peter Maurice to the world. He blamed himself. Why hadn't he taken up the affair when he came into power? He had had everything in his own hands, and if he had been alert, he would have tried to bring about a *coup d'état*. Well, it was not too late now. In fact it was the very moment when Stanley's discovery of Ruwenzori and Albert Edward Nyanza and the south-western gulf of Victoria Nyanza and his book *In Darkest Africa* had directed public attention to the subject of exploration in Africa.

He would make the effort without delay and go on the double adventure of getting permission to have Miss Kingsmead's fine story published in the magazine and of rescuing Maurice's papers from the

oblivion to which this woman's stubbornness had consigned them. Rather a formidable undertaking to confront an enemy of such calibre. But it presented a chance for him to rouse himself and get rid of some of the slackness which had lately been overcoming him—he knew well. His keenness was getting blunted, and here was something to sharpen it back to activity. His enthusiasm was losing its former fire, and here was something to stir it into living flame—for the glory of the firm. And once again that passage in Gwen's story, which he believed covered his own case, stole over his remembrance. He found it and read it aloud:

"The warnings of advancing age . . . one might pretend they were not being sounded, one might even strike a sweeping chord to drown in full rich harmonies those faint heraldings of Time, the advancing conqueror . . ."

He would drown those warnings. He would strike that sweeping chord.

XII

GWEN meanwhile had passed on. When she left her story behind in Mr. Rosthwaite's care, she left her disappointment and all remembrance of sacrifice. What she took with her was renewed courage and hope and added joy in her own powers of singing. What was it to her that one of her outpourings—her best outpouring, so far—had been, in one sense, in vain? Nothing. She could pour herself out in other directions and was free to do so now that she was released from the obsession of that one subject.

Was not her book waiting for her, crying out for her? Couldn't she now sing with surer notes having won approval from her friend and counsellor? What did one little delay matter? What did any number of delays matter? All that mattered was that she had struck the right path and that she could press on with head erect, unfaltering footsteps, and a gay heart.

So in that strange way characteristic of many writers she detached her interest entirely from her last piece of work, now that it was done. If she had any passing thoughts to bestow on it, they took the form of vague hopes that Mr. Rosthwaite would let the matter rest as she had begged him. But supposing he did not, then it was to be hoped that Mrs. Claverdon would forgive her whether or not she consented to the publication of the story. Yes, she would forgive because she was generous-hearted and would understand. Because she was herself a writer, she would know the nature of the temptation which Gwen had not been able to resist.

So she thrust the episode aside with a gesture of dismissal worthy of the old lady herself, and cleared the deck for action.

She returned to her book with the impassioned ardour of a lover. She picked up a thread here, and another one there, and another one elsewhere, and wove them together in the way she had intended when she had left them loose. One dormant thought, once roused to

life, summoned another brother-thought waiting only for a rallying signal. New ideas leapt out to challenge each other and appeal to her as arbitrator. Visions rose before her and were dispelled by her wand or arrested by her will.

The outside world died down. She lived in a world of her own creating in which alone she moved and had her being. Without a name was that fair and far-spreading region which knew no boundaries. It was hers to wander in at her pleasure.

XIII

Now imagine Mr. Borrowdale's consternation when one morning in May his clerk brought him a card bearing the name of his old client, Mrs. Alwina Claverdon.

"A very old lady, sir," the clerk said, adding with a smile, "and a very determined one. I told her you were engaged for the moment, and she said that was nothing to her, and that she must see you at once. She is in the little room downstairs. I did not see how she could manage to get up here. So I made her as comfortable as I could in the arm-chair and handed her *The Times*. She pushed it aside impatiently and said: 'I've not come here to read *The Times*, but to see Mr. Borrowdale without delay, so don't fuss around but take my card in and be quick about it. My time is valuable.'"

John Borrowdale, who was a slow-moving man, positively ran downstairs, and as he entered the room,

wearing no doubt an astonished look on his face, Mrs. Claverdon nodded pleasantly enough, held out her hand and said:

"Now don't for goodness' sake begin anything about being astonished, Borrowdale. No one is more astonished than I am that I should be here. But here I am. So that is that. That's finished. How is your gout? Is that finished?"

"I wish it were," smiled Borrowdale. "About your health I need not ask. You look amazingly well. I could not have believed it possible that you would have the strength to come up to London."

"Well, I evidently have," she said. "My fool doctor, Allbrook, tries to make me believe that I am dying. I almost did begin to believe it and was on the point of burning some of my private papers preparatory to my departure from this planet, when something occurred to stop me. But that has nothing to do with you. What I've come to you about is this. I have been looking over my family papers to see if I could find any reference to relations in Australia bearing my maiden name—my

own family name—Kingsmead. Without success. But then I have very few documents. Being the youngest of my family—I was young once, Borrowdale, though you may not believe it—family papers were not in my keeping. But there is a certain thing I want to know. It is briefly this."

Then in a few words she told him about Gwen Kingsmead, and when she had ended, he remarked that he supposed this young woman had come to ask for money on the strength of a vague relationship.

"I thought so at first," she nodded. "All wicked people including lawyers would immediately jump to that conclusion. But I was wrong for once, and you are wrong for about the hundredth time since I've had dealings with you. No, money didn't come into it, and relationship didn't come into it. The name she regarded only as a coincidence, and probably it is only that. But the reason why my curiosity is aroused is that my own family has always been of a literary turn. I myself . . ."

She broke off, waved her hand, and then continued:

"And this young woman, bearing the name of Kingsmead, is a writer—literature is her profession."

"Very curious," said Borrowdale dryly. "Perhaps another coincidence."

"Two coincidences," said Mrs. Claverdon. "She was born in Australia and her mother was born in Australia. If, therefore, there chanced to have been any Australian branch of our family, the coincidences would be three. Do you follow? Lawyers are so slow, and you were ever of the slowest, Borrowdale. Do you follow?"

"I follow," Borrowdale answered, with a patient smile. "I even gather that you want the circumstances investigated. Well, that could be done, but it would take time."

"I am sure it would if you had anything to do with it alone, by yourself," she said. "And that is why I have come up to London, to hurry things on, because I desire greatly to know. And if there is too much delay, Allbrook may prove to

be right, and I may be nearer my end than I suspect."

Borrowdale waved his hand as if deprecating anything so unlikely, or so horrible to contemplate.

"Now listen," she said. "There is another reason for my coming up to London. I had a sudden inspiration when I was thinking over this matter. If a man called George Rodney is alive, he might know something about our family history, or even have some papers. He was my brother Frederick's close friend, and when Frederick died, he left him everything. You may not remember my brother's history. I hope you don't. But this much I can tell you: he died disgraced and disowned, poor dear boy—and the only one who stood by him was George Rodney. Well, now, you've got to find out if George Rodney is alive, and if he is, I must see him. That's the first thing. I give you five days, Borrowdale. A handsomer fee if you make it three. I have always hated waiting, as you know. Yes, I'm at Claridge's, as usual. I speak as if I came up every year—don't I? Why I haven't come

up is more than I can tell you, for I don't know myself, except that when one walks alone, nothing matters."

He handed her into the brougham where Mrs. Bristowe was waiting to receive her and cover her up with wraps, but she pushed them aside, rejected the rug and spurned the hot-water bottle.

"Don't bother me, Bristowe," she said, with good-natured impatience. "I am quite warm and well. Don't wear that absurd look of concern. The lawyers haven't eaten me up. Did you think they would?"

And to Mr. Borrowdale she said:

"George Rodney used to belong to the Athenæum. That may be a clue. And his age would be anything between eighty and ninety. Now, good-bye, Borrowdale, and mind you bestir yourself. Pretend you are young as I am pretending. And very well it answers."

He stood watching the disappearing carriage.

"Brave, gallant old woman," he said softly.

"How little she guesses that the secret of her life is known to me."

He set to work with alacrity, not only to earn a handsome fee, but to please her, for, like everyone else who came into contact with Mrs. Claverdon, he was always won by her personality even when she was at her rudest. He was sixty now, and he remembered how as a clerk in his father's office, forty years ago, he had been held by her subtle charm, half pleasant, half sardonic. He remembered well that she said to his father:

"So this is your son, Mr. Borrowdale. Well, let us hope he will add to the brains of the firm. I rather think he will from his appearance. And what a blessing! The firm needs those brains."

His father had laughed, and he had laughed also. And after she had gone his father said:

"Stephen, when you are in my shoes, look after her always if she wants you. She has had a wretched life and borne herself grandly. Some day I'll tell you."

And one day he told her history.

Forty years ago—and he was still looking after her—very badly and slowly according to her utterances on the subject. But although it amused her to depreciate his services, he knew well enough that in her own way she trusted him and leaned on him.

He found out that George Rodney was still alive, very old and feeble-minded, and in the charge of a middle-aged nurse who guarded him like a dragon from all approach. No one had been allowed to see him for a long time, and there seemed but little chance that Mrs. Claverdon would gain access to him. Still Borrowdale had got the facts. The old man was alive. He lived in Mecklenburgh Square where he had always lived, and the name of the dragon guarding the premises was Mrs. Garrick, a formidable personage who intimidated whole processions of servants, relatives, lawyers, doctors, and even a bishop.

"She won't intimidate me," said Mrs. Claverdon when Borrowdale called on her at Claridge's and

gave her this information. "And as for bishops, you know what I think of them—or perhaps you don't. We had two in the family, and neither of them had the pluck of a rabbit. Well, go on, Borrowdale, this sounds interesting."

"There is nothing more to tell," smiled Borrowdale, "except that the nurse is reported to look like a Madonna and has a heavenly smile."

"She would have," nodded Mrs. Claverdon. "Well, I must go and bask in that smile without delay. I must say you have been very clever and prompt. I shouldn't have thought it of you. Thank you, my good friend."

"You will, of course, leave it to me to arrange a meeting, and let me come with you?" he asked, smiling at her praise, which gratified him. "You must not see her alone, if indeed she consents to see you at all."

"I shall go alone and see her alone," she laughed. "A lawyer would only bungle things. I shall write to say I am coming, and if she behaves herself she will not have cause to regret it. I have

made up my mind to see her and her patient, and intend to bring it off somehow. Now, don't put on that absurd expression of worry. You're as bad as Allbrook or Bristowe or Jenkins. Poor old Jenkins. I've left him at home to deal with the burglars."

So alone she went to Mecklenburgh Square—alone, that is to say, except for poor, martyred Mrs. Bristowe, who remained in the brougham, as usual wondering whether the world were coming to an end, what with the noise and bustle of London, her anxiety about my lady's frightening activities, her own nerves all to pieces already, Claridge's, the lawyer, Westminster Abbey and the National Gallery and the British Museum, and now No. 4 Mecklenburgh Square. And after that, the railway journey home, and her mistress suddenly taken ill in consequence of all this fatigue, and dying and dead, and, as Jenkins would say, all through that young woman coming and sleeping the night under their roof and changing all the habits of the house.

The bell was answered at once, and Mrs. Claverdon was taken by a maid, who seemed awed by her stately appearance, into a large and rather desolate room on the ground floor with folding doors closed and half curtained. There she sat in state, gazed around her and was attracted by a portrait hanging over the fireplace. She got up with some effort, went to examine it, and gave an exclamation, half of pain, half of pleasure. It was a most charming portrait of a young man, date round about 1830.

"My brother Fred," she murmured. "How well I remember him like that. Such a charming face and figure and the heart of a poet. The senseless folly of his life—the waste of a fine spirit—and the stupidity and cruelty of all of us who abandoned him."

She was still looking at it and shaking her head gravely when the door opened and Mrs. Garrick came into the room. She had Mrs. Claverdon's letter in her hand, and she half pointed to it as she said frigidly but quite politely:

"I understand that you have something you wish to say to me."

Mrs. Claverdon turned round and her quick eyes took in a lady of decidedly angelic appearance, but with tighter lips than one generally associates with heavenly countenances. She knew her at once to be a dragon in disguise which must be negotiated with care and cunning. So she smiled in a most friendly fashion and said:

"It is just a little personal affair of my own, Mrs. Garrick, and has nothing to do with anyone else except myself. As I wrote in my letter to you, I represent no one but myself. But you could help me if you would, and in return, as I hinted, I am more than willing to compensate you for time and trouble. Naturally, too, otherwise I should not have ventured to thrust myself upon you either by post or in person."

Mrs. Garrick inclined her angelic head. She was on her guard and stiff with the starch of suspicion; but when it began to dawn on her that her preserves were not being intruded on, she relaxed

a little of her tension and could not help being impressed with this fine, old-world lady's courteous manner and charm of voice, yes, and with her sense of fair play. A service of some kind to be rendered and in return some suitable recompense. She listened attentively with folded hands whilst Mrs. Claverdon explained how she had been examining her family papers in order to try to trace a relationship with some young lady who chanced to bear her own maiden name, Kingsmead, and in whom she had become interested.

"You would have to be old yourself," she said, "and to have outlived your own generation and to be alone in the world, to realise what it would mean suddenly to find someone who in a sense belonged to you and whom you liked. That's a great point, of course. Whom you liked. For one might hate that person even if he or she bore your name a thousand times over. One generally would. But in this case, no, no. Not hatred, nor dislike, but attraction, deep interest, comradeship."

Well, she went on, her family documents were unfortunately few in number, and whilst she was deploring this fact, she suddenly remembered that her brother Frederick, who had been disowned by the family, had left all his belongings to the one friend who had stood by him—George Rodney. Now what she desired to know very greatly, almost ridiculously greatly, was whether among those belongings were some of the Kingsmead papers. They might be there. They might not be there. She wanted to see Mr. Rodney and make the inquiry direct of him.

But at this juncture Mrs. Garrick stiffened into an alabaster statue.

"That is impossible, quite impossible," she said in a stony voice. "My patient, as you know, is a very old man and very frail. I could not on any account allow him to be disturbed. I had not the least idea that the object of your visit was to see Mr. Rodney. You gave no suggestion of it in your letter. If you had, I should have written to you that if you came, you would only be making a

fruitless call. I am sorry to disappoint you, madam, but, of course, my patient's health is my first consideration."

She half rose as if to indicate that the interview was over, but Mrs. Claverdon, nothing daunted, said with good-natured abruptness:

"The interview is not over. It has only just begun. This is a business interview, and no business can be said to be ended before money matters have at least been touched on. Now listen. Was it likely that I should tell you in my letter that I wished to see Mr. Rodney, when I knew that you have always kept him carefully tucked away from everyone?"

"That's not true," Mrs. Garrick put in, her face flushing. "I——"

"It may be true, or may not," interrupted Mrs. Claverdon. "It's no concern of mine. I told you I only represented myself, and that is true if nothing else is. I've not come here to pry on your preserves and report. Be very clear about that. But you can also be clear about something else, which

is, that I mean to see him. You don't suppose, do you, that I am going to be thwarted after having come to London especially for the purpose? Why, I haven't left my home in Dorsetshire for years. Do you imagine therefore that I shall allow myself to have made a fruitless journey? Certainly not. I shall sit here solidly until I have seen him. And when I have seen him and asked him that question —in your presence, if you like, so that you may know I am not breaking faith with you, for I suppose you are pretty suspicious—I should be in your position—when I have seen him, I say, I shall leave on the mantelpiece ten twenty-pound notes. A large sum for gratifying a whim. But I can afford it. And you will deserve it and probably anything else you may get eventually, for it cannot be very thrilling having an aged person in tow, day in, day out. I should hate it myself, and I should hate being in tow. I have always hoped I should die before such a fate overtook me. Well, now, we have touched on business. Is the interview over? Or have we only just begun?"

Mrs. Garrick did not answer that question. Instead she looked towards the mantelpiece as if a beauteous vision of those ten twenty-pound notes had already risen before her expectant eyes; and when she glanced back again at her visitor, there was the hint of an angel's smile on her face, and a gentle relaxing of her rigidity. Her appearance at that moment would have taken in whole battalions of doctors, but it did not deceive the old lady of the Moat House, who chuckled *sotto voce.*

"What has become of the nurse's first consideration for the patient's health?" she thought. "Oh, money, money, what a magic and wicked power! But we are progressing comfortably, the Madonna and I."

"You see," Mrs. Garrick explained sweetly, "he is such a very old, feeble man, and his memory is much impaired—in fact, he has no memory. I really think there would be no advantage to you in seeing him. His mind wanders all the time."

"Of course, of course, it would," said Mrs. Claverdon soothingly. "Mine does, too. It wanders

back to the past. The past is all we've got left. If we hadn't that, we would not have anything."

There was a silence, during which Mrs. Garrick's eyes again stole to that enchanted region, the mantelpiece. Mrs. Claverdon observed her out of one sharp old eye. The other she kept closed. She ensconced herself more comfortably in the chair, as if she were intending to occupy it for the remainder of her life.

"There is one thing I can tell you," went on Mrs. Garrick in the same sweet accents. "Mr. Rodney constantly speaks of his friend, your brother. He stands before the portrait and addresses it as if it were a living person. It is very pathetic to hear and see him."

"It would be," murmured Mrs. Claverdon, almost inaudibly.

There was another silence and then Mrs. Garrick rose.

"I will go and fetch him, if you wish," she said. "He is not always in bed. I encourage him to get up when he feels like it. But you must not

be disappointed if his mind is a blank. At least I shall have done my best."

"You will have done your best," Mrs. Claverdon repeated, and this time it was she who looked significantly in the direction of the mantelpiece.

In the interval that followed she thought of many things. She was very old already, and if she lived much longer, she would have to end by being in some stranger's power. She shuddered. Yes, that was what would happen to her. Old Jenkins would die. Mrs. Bristowe's tiresome bronchitis and her nerves and her fat would get worse and worse and she would die off. There would be only Allbrook and Borrowdale left, and she could not expect a doctor and a lawyer to be always by her bedside watching with lynx eyes to see that the nurse in charge was kind and faithful, and merciful.

And then suddenly a light broke in on her darkness, for darkness encompassed her as she thought these thoughts.

"Ah," she cried, "my comrade will be there."

XIV

THE door opened and an exceedingly frail, silver-haired old man came in, leaning, but not heavily, on Mrs. Garrick's arm. There was a painfully vacant expression on his face, and it was easy enough to see that his mind as well as his body was feeble. But he looked thoroughly well cared for and not intimidated. Mrs. Garrick might be imprisoning him, so to speak, but evidently no torture was being applied.

Mrs. Claverdon, seeing his condition, knew that she would have no heart to trouble him with questions, nor make him pierce his memory for anything she might want to learn.

"Someone to see me," he said in a trembling voice. "That is very unusual. No one comes to see me now."

But he did not look in Mrs. Claverdon's direction. He immediately forgot that he had a visitor,

let go of his nurse's arm and shuffled off by himself to the portrait of his friend. He addressed it as if it were a living person.

"Ah, Fred, that's you, is it? Well, well, that's you; and so it is, to be sure. You know I swore I would never forsake you, and I won't. When you come out of prison, you'll find me waiting for you. The world is very wide, Fred, and we'll go off together somewhere, to some distant country where no one will know about the forgery. I will be as good as my word. You'll see when the time comes."

He ceased, and moved away from the portrait towards the window, where he gazed out at the square.

"The plane-trees are very pretty," he murmured, "very pretty, the London plane-trees, Nurse. I love them."

"Yes," she smiled, joining him at the window, "they are very pretty; so green and fresh."

"Yes," he said, "so green and fresh."

"You have a visitor, you know," she said. "A

lady who has come to see you. Do you remember I told you about her in the other room?"

"Ah, yes, I remember," he said, his face brightening up. "Someone to see me. That is very unusual. No one comes to see me now. But there is always Fred."

And he wandered back to the portrait. Mrs. Garrick made a movement as if to divert his steps towards Mrs. Claverdon, but the old lady put up a restraining hand.

"Let him be, let him be," she whispered.

"Well, well, Fred," he went on, "and so we are going to choose Australia, aren't we? It is a good choice for a second chance. History repeating itself, your family history repeating itself, as you are always saying. And am I not always saying that half your family are a wretched tribe and the good ones heartless? Except Alwina—I do except Alwina—she is worth something—but . . . Well, well, Fred . . ."

He moved away again and was shuffling towards the door when Mrs. Garrick detained him.

"You must not forget your visitor," she said kindly.

"My visitor," he repeated. "Ah, that's true—my visitor."

Then he turned round and saw Mrs. Claverdon for the first time.

"Who are you?" he asked querulously. "I don't know you. What do you want?"

"I want nothing," she answered gently.

"Ah, that is just as well," he said, "because you will get nothing. But who are you?"

She hesitated a moment and he became impatient.

"Who are you?" he urged. "Don't you hear me asking you?"

"I am Alwina," she said in a low voice, but clearly.

"Oh, no," he laughed softly. "That's impossible. Alwina is young and beautiful. I know Alwina. I admire Alwina. The only one of the crew who tries to show kindness to poor old Fred in his disgrace. Young and beautiful, and with such a bearing."

He stood silent, smiling as if he saw a radiant presence through the mist of years.

"Yes," he said, "the only one to show kindness in his trouble—kindness and mercifulness. She shall have his papers and his portrait some day. Yes, and the anthem he wrote in prison, *'Out of the deep have I called unto Thee.'* She deserves to have them. I must send them to her if I don't forget."

Then a blank look stole over his face. He put his hand to his brow, shook his head, and went tottering from the room. Mrs. Garrick hastened after him. When she came back, she found the old lady sitting with her hands over her face. For a moment or two she contemplated her in a respectful silence.

"I shall remind him," she said at length gently. "Believe me, I shall not allow him to forget."

At the sound of her voice Mrs. Claverdon removed her hands, looked at her out of dim eyes, and said, half dreamily:

"Has it ever struck you how differently things

shape themselves from all our elaborate plans—and to the same end?"

She rose with some effort; but braced herself up and walked erect to the mantelpiece, where she placed the ten twenty-pound notes.

"They are yours," she said. "You have earned them, and I am sure you will remind the dear, gentle, old man who was my brother's friend. But I should like to ask a favour of you. I told you I represented myself only—and this remains true. But it is also true that from what I learnt, I had not formed a right impression of you. And now I feel very strongly that it is a duty which I owe to you to send a message to those people whom you keep away, to assure them that he is in good hands. May I, or may I not?"

And then the unexpected happened. All the nurse's defences broke down and she sobbed her heart out. She said she didn't want the money and couldn't accept it, and as for keeping his people away, yes, she owned she had kept them away, at the beginning, simply because they had

distressed him so and tried to force his memory, never realising that half the time his poor old mind was wandering and what he needed was rest and peace.

But gradually her real concern for his welfare had degenerated into something less worthy—concern for herself and her own interests; and almost unconsciously she had made the barriers which she put up more and more impassable, so that no one might have the chance of exerting any influence over him except herself. The temptation had been so great—rich and well-placed people could never understand what a temptation it was to those who, like herself, had worked and slaved for years with no prospect before them except poverty for their declining strength and their old age.

But at first there had been no question of temptation—that she could swear to—no question—only a most honest desire to protect her patient from being harassed. They came and went and never knew the condition they left him in. That was what she had had to fight in the beginning.

And slowly the habit grew and grew until she had ended by barring the door against them not for his sake but on her own behalf.

And so on and so on. It was a passionate outpouring, a loosening of the tension of years, perhaps, and when the end came Mrs. Claverdon touched the nurse gently on the arm.

"A great temptation," she said in a low voice, "and who of us in like circumstances could be certain not to have succumbed? I could never have been certain."

She stood looking at the portrait and waiting until the nurse had recovered her composure, and then, with that reconciling charm of manner which was all her own, she said:

"Well, then, since you do not forbid me, I shall let it be known that he is in good and merciful hands. Be merciful to the end. The old, like the young, need very special mercifulness."

And now a half-mischievous smile flitted across her face, and she pointed with a discreet vagueness towards the little pile of bank-notes.

"Treaties must be honourably kept," she said, "or else the world will fall to pieces. Though perhaps it would not matter very much if it did—what do you think? The notes are yours, for services, very valuable services rendered. Accept them from that Alwina who, so you have heard, is young and beautiful."

To Borrowdale later she said:

"Yes, I have learnt something, and I shall learn more when I get the papers, as I know I shall do. The dragon, who, by the way, is not a dragon in the strict sense of the word, will send them, I am sure. A good thing you did not come with me, Borrowdale—as I told you, a lawyer would only have bungled matters."

XV

YES, history had repeated itself. Mrs. Claverdon, studying the old, yellow papers bequeathed by her brother Frederick to his friend George Rodney, and now safely in her possession, learnt that one Ebenezer Kingsmead had in 1780 committed formidable frauds and absconded to Australia.

There was a short and bitter comment on this fact in Fred's own handwriting:

"Inherited tendencies, dear, darling, respectable family of mine, living in the odour of virtue and sanctity and turning your damned backs on me, the black sheep, the family forger. Take care, you pillars of society, that you don't fall some day. You've got it in you, as I have—ha!"

But there was another side of Fred's nature shown on faded pieces of music manuscript; and amongst them she found an anthem: "Out of the deep have I called unto Thee." At the top was written: *Composed in gaol.*

For a long time she lingered over these relics of the past; and as memories were evoked and emotions of bygone days were brought into play, the thought came to her that old age at least brought one comfort, a diminished capacity for suffering.

"It is ridiculous to deny that," she said. "It is a fact—a merciful dispensation."

She put them aside, leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. But soon, very soon her sorrowful recollections were dispelled and a smile broke over her face, for the music of the June Song was echoing to her from a far distance, yet so clearly that almost she could have believed that the singer was in the room.

"Ah, comrade of the pen," she laughed softly, "you there? Well, it certainly looks as if there were some relationship between us—you belonging to the wild and wicked members of the family, and I to the pillars of society. Think of that!"

XVI

MEANTIME Gwen, keener than ever and deeply absorbed, forged ahead with her book of the Fells and rejoiced in her power to evoke scenes, portray temperaments and build up events. What a happy time! Could any time be happier? No, don't think it!

A lost thread. And then the delight when that lost thread is found. Don't talk to me of treasures lost and found, and of kingdoms lost and recaptured. They count as nothing compared with the threads of a story lost and found—and held. Ah, and those beloved characters coming from distant space and taking their rightful places in the foreground or the background of the scene. One by one they come perhaps, and so stealthily that at first you scarcely know they are there or what they have come for. But they know what they come for, and they tell you, and you say: *"Of course, of*

course." And you welcome them with heart and brain, and nothing on earth would make you dismiss them, even though some of them cause you grave anxiety and crease your brow with furrows. And behold, from being dim presences faintly outlined, they gradually take shape and form and grow into real living human beings with voices which call to you by day and whisper to you by night. Dear, beloved people—"pillars of society," perhaps, or perhaps members of the wicked branch of the human family, all dear to you alike, because they are your own, the children of your brain, the offspring of your imagination.

And the words you want—very elusive those words can be sometimes—you search for them untiringly; and when they are within sight, within reach, off they glide with a teasing laugh. But when you have captured them at last and fettered them, what a triumph, and worth all the long pursuit!

Sprites of fancy, too, luring you from your main path so that you lose yourself and wander aimlessly

in the thick forest. And you say: "Woe is me. I have missed my way." And they cry: "Ha, ha!" Then suddenly you see the right trail and make for it joyously; and then it is you who cry, "Ha, ha!"

Doubts, despairs, disbelief in self, devastating apathy. And then a sudden passing of the cloud from your soul and a sudden illumination.

Thus with Gwen. During this acute phase she thought of nothing except her book, and continued to feel no concern about the fate of her Moat House story. It had been a *tour de force* and had served its purpose in confirming Mr. Rosthwaite's belief in her powers, but it was a negligible effort as compared with her new adventure, an enterprise larger and more ambitious than anything she had yet attempted.

But as the days passed and some of her fire began to abate, the abiding remembrance of her old comrade, always at the back of her brain, was stirred afresh, and her parting words echoed back to her:

"If the book halts as books do halt sometimes, and the rooms call, come."

Well, so far, the book didn't halt. It sprang, it leapt, it bounded. But when the hour came that it halted, Gwen knew well that she would go to the Moat House, without any shadow of doubt as to the welcome she would receive. Mrs. Claverdon might be angry with her for having dared to steal her atmosphere and cage it in a story, but she would not turn her away. Of that she felt sure. And she heard herself saying:

"Comrade, if you only knew what a tempting subject it was, you would write about it yourself, privately and secretly, and put it with those other manuscripts of yours in the oak chest. Let my story stay there together with your writings—frightfully private and secret and safe from all prying eyes. No one need ever know of it except you and me and Mr. Rosthwaite. But believe me, I had to write it. It was an obsession over which I had no control. But now I've done it, the net is broken like the fowler's, and you have escaped."

And several times she said aloud:

"I do wonder what she is doing now. Is she reading Shelley? Is she writing? Is she tying up her manuscripts? Is she working at her picture of Queen Elizabeth receiving Master William Shakespeare, or of Rebecca giving her jewels to the Lady Rowena?"

But with the exception of Rosthwaite so bound up with her ambitions, and Mrs. Claverdon intertwined with the recent fruits of her imagination, no one existed for Gwen at that time. She had to earn her bare livelihood, of course, and for this purpose she worked at the commonplace, stereotyped things which fell to her share in the office of a daily newspaper. But this was not her real life; it was merely an external activity which formed no part of her emotional and spiritual being, even as the people in her boarding-house had no access to her inner consciousness. Except one, a professional pianist of rare gifts, who, with the unerring instinct of an artist, singled out Gwen from that heterogeneous community and made friends with her.

She would entice the girl away from her work, settle her in an armchair with soft silk cushions, and play to her, generally Chopin, Chopin "who dreamed dreams, and saw visions of sorrowful vales and bright waters to which it was meet that he should lead women and men."

And to the sound of his music, thoughts were born, perplexities were smoothed away.

XVII

JENKINS brought in the glass of sherry and the two biscuits as the clock struck eleven. For him, his step was quite brisk, and he was smiling.

"The lunch is served, my lady," he said.

"And I am alive to take it, Jenkins," Mrs. Claverdon said, looking round at him from her easel. "Think of that. After everyone has been prophesying my death, and in fact, attending my funeral in anticipation of the event, here I am still alive and busy at my painting as usual. Very remarkable, isn't it?"

"Very remarkable, my lady," repeated old Jenkins in his cracked voice. "We made a mistake."

"Quite a mistake," she laughed.

"I never thought to see you back again, my lady," he went on. "I've come in here day after

day and have said to myself that my lady would never be here again painting her pictures."

"A cheerful way of spending your time, and exceedingly lazy of you instead of attending to the burglars," she smiled.

"We've been very anxious here," he said. "Every day we expected bad news from Mrs. Bristowe. And Mrs. Bristowe says she was very anxious all the time in London, and it has told on her, my lady, for she has gone to bed with the nerves and the bronchitis."

"Ah, that is just what she would do, Jenkins. I could have prophesied that and made no mistake. Well, well, I dare say I was a bit of an anxiety to her, for I was enormously active. Better send for Dr. Allbrook. He will expect to attend someone after my excursion to London, and by a piece of good luck there's Bristowe handy and ready for him."

She added, with a twinkle in her eye:

"Only don't let him know beforehand who the patient is. Now don't forget that. Just a plain

message to ask him to call at once. Tell the gardener."

"As you wish, my lady," Jenkins said. "But he will be glad when he knows it isn't my lady. He came here after you had gone, and was very troubled, if you will excuse me for telling you, my lady."

"He has buried me so many times, Jenkins. He ought to be accustomed to it now. Well, bring him in straight to me when he comes. And if you can, open the lid of the oak chest. I want to get my papers out again."

"But not to burn them?" he said anxiously.

She smiled kindly at the old fellow's instant concern.

"No, not to burn them," she assured him. "The young lady won't allow that. She says they are not to be burnt."

"Ah," he said, but as he opened the chest he mumbled to himself something about the young lady coming interfering with things which did not concern her. His words did not reach Mrs. Claverdon,

but his thoughts certainly did, for she laughed a little and said:

"The young lady brought changes, and changes are good for us all, even at our age. She'll be coming again before long, and she will be writing in this room and you will be piling up the logs and making everything comfortable for her just as you used to do for me, Jenkins, in the past. Only, mercifully, she is not in trouble as I was—you remember?"

He nodded his head almost imperceptibly but with an infinite respectfulness, and went on his errand with a step still brisk for him; for hadn't my lady returned safely home and wasn't she busy again with her painting and her papers, and none the worse for that dangerous outing to London?

An hour or two afterwards Dr. Allbrook received the message that he was wanted at once at the Moat House, and as he had already heard that Mrs. Claverdon had returned, he naturally con-

cluded that she had been taken ill and that he was being summoned to her sick-bed from which he did not suppose she would ever rise. The wonder to him was that she had got back at all.

He had only that moment arrived home after a long and tiring round, but he did not even stop to snatch a hasty lunch, but dashed off at once on his bicycle, taking with him all the necessary and unnecessary remedies for a severe heart attack. As he flew along the lanes, his principal feeling was an intense relief to know that at least no action of his had contributed to this inevitable breakdown. Heaven knows the temptation had been great enough, but once overcome, a serenity of spirit spread itself beneficently over all his anxieties of the present and his fears for the future. The world changed for him, as if by some magic. It became a glorious place—the world. Yet it could not be said that virtue alone had worked this wonder. Does it ever, alone? No, at the back of Dr. Allbrook's brain lurked the remembrance of that five thousand pounds eventually to be his and by no unlawful means—

unless indeed she had altered her will, a tragedy which he did not seriously anticipate.

"Your mistress very bad, I fear, Jenkins?" he asked, when at length he stood in the hall of the Moat House.

Old Jenkins mumbled something even more indistinctly than usual and conducted him as usual to the studio, much to his surprise, for he had certainly expected that his patient would be in bed. But no, there she was at her easel, looking so well and bright that he exclaimed:

"Well, I thought I had been called to a sick-bed. I am glad that it is only an easel!"

"You have been called to a sick-bed, only it is not mine," she laughed. "Bristowe is down with nerves and bronchitis, the result of our expedition. Whereas I am better than I have been for a long time. You see now, Allbrook, how silly all your fears were. You might very well have escorted me. However, I am bound to say we managed just as well without you—probably better. I was angry with you at the moment. But I don't

mind telling you that I respected you all the more when I had recovered from my temper. I had a temper over it—a bad one. Sit down, and I will tell you about my adventure. Bristowe's bronchitis and nerves can wait, and anyway you won't do her any good when you do see her. All she needs is repose of mind, and perhaps some of your coloured water. I've been too dashing for her. I am afraid I was a great anxiety to the poor soul."

"You were a great anxiety to us all," he said. "I can't tell you how troubled I've been, and as for poor old Jenkins, he was in an awful state—almost beside himself. But I must say you don't look as if you've taken any harm."

He leaned back in the Abbot's chair and laughed and said:

"You are a wonder, and no mistake. And what a sell for me, rushing off post haste to see what I could do for you, with all the heart remedies in the pharmacopœia!"

"I meant it to be a sell for you," she chuckled. "Well, well, I've forgiven you, coward though you

were. It was a risk, I knew. But I had made up my mind to go, and I have done all I wanted to. I've seen that Rembrandt at the National Gallery, and I've sat in Westminster Abbey, and I've been to the British Museum, and enjoyed myself enormously everywhere. And I must say that Borrowdale helped me uncommonly well, for him, with my special business. But if I had taken your advice and let him come here, nothing would have happened. He would have listened and gone away and centuries would have passed before I got any news—if then. Very useful the news would have been to me then —wouldn't it?"

She was, of course, too reticent to tell him the details of the information she had received, nor did one word of her brother's history escape her lips. But he learnt that the young writer whom she called her comrade was certainly related to her through an Australian branch of the family, and that this fact seemed to give her great pleasure—much to her own astonishment, so she said, for she had never in the past yearned to become acquainted with any re-

latives or connections suddenly emerging from the prehistoric impenetrable.

It was obvious that she had fixed her heart on this young stranger, whose coming into her life so unexpectedly had made her feel that "she no longer walked alone." That was a tremendous asset in an old person's life, she insisted. It gave renewed meaning to life, renewed courage to await the end, or even not to want the end at all. Yes, positively, not to want the end in the very least. That was why she had been able to go to London, do her business, visit the National Gallery and Westminster Abbey and the British Museum, and return alive in spite of everyone's mournful prognostications. And it was not only that she no longer walked alone. The comrade had a career. Now at eighty, you yourself could not be said to have a career of your own, but you might be excited and uplifted by someone else's career. That was precisely what had happened to her. Henceforth when she was painting her subject pictures, she would not always be thinking of Queen Elizabeth or Shakespeare or Wolsey or San Bernardino

or Santa Theresa or Mary, Queen of Scots, or any of her companions of solitude. She would be thinking of the career of a living person—and that person her little comrade. Did he understand? Of course he did, she said, for had he not got the careers of his own children to think about? Ah, and that reminded her she wanted to speak to him about those careers one day soon. She had been turning over many things in her mind lately, and that was one of them.

If Dr. Allbrook's heart gave a leap, no one knew. He sat quiet and passive, wondering at her, watching her, amazed at her, asking himself whether this extraordinary renewal of interest in life and living people was merely the last flame, the last glow which would die down as suddenly as it had sprung into being, or whether, on the contrary, it was some latent force, arrested by chance, and by chance released for steady action. He could not tell which it was, but as he sat there and listened to her, her psychology plunged him into deep thought. His own prospects, his curiosity as to what she intended to

do about this young writer whom she could claim as a relative, were entirely blotted out from his mind as he pondered over his old patient's character.

He had attended her for many years, and she had always been a puzzle to him, physically and mentally. At times she seemed so frail that he was more than justified in thinking that her strength could not possibly last out any longer; and then, without any apparent cause, she would suddenly recover her vitality and take a fresh lease of physical life. But throughout, her mental powers had remained intact, and the wonder was that with so much alertness of mind she should have been content to remain in the solitude which circumstances had imposed on her. And the fresh wonder was that she should now suddenly, at the eleventh hour, break down her barriers of impersonality and interest herself actively in anything or anyone outside her own routine and rut of occupation.

It was beyond his comprehension. He could have understood it, of course, in the case of a person

of middle or advanced years, but that an aged woman of eighty should be able, at her will, to emerge from a long-continued state of passiveness and respond to a call outside her own prescribed range, struck him as an unfathomable mystery. He came back from his musings when he heard her say:

"I suppose you had better go and see the suffering patient, and attend to her ailments and give her some of the wonderful restoratives you intended for me. It doesn't really matter who has them so long as they are used. You see I don't want them. I never felt better in my life. London is an amazing tonic. I shall have to send Jenkins there to recuperate —poor old Jenkins."

"I do want to ask you one thing," he said, smiling. "Did you find many changes in London? It is so long since you have been there."

"The world has not been standing still, and a good thing too," was her complacent answer. "I liked the changes in a way. I liked the hansom cabs, Allbrook. Much preferred them to that dod-

dering old brougham which Borrowdale was always trying to stuff me into, until I told him to mind his own business. But Bristowe was very frightened in them, poor soul, and it took all my time to tell her not to be a fool."

She added with a chuckle:

"Ask her about the hansom cabs, and then feel the poor soul's pulse."

He laughed and went to the door, where he paused a moment.

"Then I take it that I am forgiven?" he asked, naïvely.

"Yes, coward," she answered, with a twinkle in her eye, "yes, conscientious coward, you may take it that you are forgiven."

And the truth was, as she had said, that she respected him for having refused to sanction her adventure to London. He had not occupied any of her thoughts during these days when her mind had been switched off from the people and things belonging to her usual life; but now that she was once

more in contact with him, she realised that he had behaved, not like a conscientious coward, but like a conscientious hero. So easy it would have been to give in to her wishes and risk the consequences—a grave risk, too, as he evidently believed. Yes, Allbrook had comported himself like an honourable gentleman; and since it was evident that she was not going to die yet, and that her legacy to him would, therefore, be in prolonged abeyance, why not do something for him now? Why not? Well, perhaps she would, and perhaps she wouldn't. Perhaps she would write to Borrowdale and tell him to sell out two or three thousand of Consols. And perhaps she wouldn't. She could see the look of horror on Borrowdale's face. She could hear him saying: *"What—sell out capital—anticipate a legacy—oh, pray not, pray not."*

But after all, why not? And how amusing to take a piece of paper and write: *To Dr. Allbrook, for professional services not rendered,* £2,500.

The idea tickled her immensely. She laughed. As Homer hath it, her dear heart laughed within

her. Perhaps she would do it, and perhaps she would not.

And then there was the comrade. Ah, that was different. She was young. She could wait. No one must do her the wrong of taking away her incentive. That codicil to her will which she had added before going to London would answer all purposes for the present. Just a small acknowledgment of the girl's promise to burn the manuscripts. That wouldn't injure her. No, she must not be injured. Her career must be safeguarded.

XVIII

SHE was not the same after her return home. Her habits had been broken into by her adventure into the world on which she had turned her back so many years ago. She still spent most of her time at her easel, but her heart was not given up to her work, and she was restless and wandered about the house, much to Jenkins's uneasiness, who was accustomed to see her always glued to her palette and brushes. She went from room to room and noted some of the objects of interest which she had forgotten to point out to Gwen. She went into Queen Elizabeth's bedroom several times to make sure that Bristowe kept a fire going so that the place might be thoroughly well aired against her comrade's next visit. She smiled as she remembered how the girl had enjoyed being in the royal bed. Well, it would not be long before she would sleep there again. But she must come of her own free will. The young

must not be forced. She knew she could come. She would come when the book halted.

She strolled into the garden which she had not visited for many a long day, had a look at the herbaceous border and the green-houses, and gave a good round scolding to Bruce for not having tended the old yew hedge with sufficient skill and care. But having delivered herself of her wrath and nearly devitalised him, she brought him to life again by praising the roses which his soul dearly loved.

"Very, very beautiful, Bruce," she smiled. "Thank you very much."

He looked after her and all he could say was: "Well, I never."

She examined her own paintings in the various rooms, and herself dragged Erasmus and Leonardo da Vinci back to the studio from which they had been banished for several months. She stood constantly before the picture of Georgina Claverdon and tried to read on her sad face the secret which eluded her. She tried to continue the story which she had

begun about her ghost which haunted the house. But her imagination did not work.

She made several attempts with other subjects; but this kind of effort seemed to tire her more than anything she attempted, and she always ended by shaking her head and pushing the pages away sorrowfully.

"It halts," she said. "No use trying now. It halts. I'm past it."

But although she could not write, she rummaged amongst her manuscripts, now all left permanently on the refectory table. But she could not bring herself to untie the bundle marked *Peter's diaries and letters.* According to her habit, her hand merely rested on it lovingly as she smiled and whispered *Peter;* and she wondered how she could ever have thought of burning that sacred treasure, whatever her drastic designs on her own writings.

She read aloud some of Shelley's poems during these days: *The Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, The Cloud, The Ode to the West Wind,* and *Lines written amongst the Euganean Hills,* and bits out

of *Prometheus Unbound*. And she tried to puzzle out her probable relationship to her comrade, but as she had so few data to go on, it was not likely that she could have got very near the solution of this problem. Yet it amused and pleased her to write down the following:

"Ebenezer Kingsmead absconded to Australia, 1780. Whom did he marry out there? Was the comrade's mother his granddaughter? Who was her lover? What was the history of the poor woman? And why had she come to England? Had she perhaps followed him in the hopes of being made what they call 'respectable'? Well, there is nothing to help one to the actual facts, but no harm in surmising."

She always ended by returning to her easel and working at "Queen Elizabeth receiving Master William Shakespeare." She had finished the Queen's ruff and was now bestowing attention on the poet's hands, but they by no means received the careful workmanship they needed; for in spite of her wish to be faithful and diligent, her thoughts ran away

with her. If she had recorded them, they would have stood something like this:

Frederick—the promise of his youth—the wildness of his early years—George Rodney—Alwina, young and beautiful—Australia—the comrade—Peter—his diaries—his letters—her husband—no, no, she mustn't think of him—never of him—Borrowdale's father—the comrade's career—her own writings, her own ambitions—Allbrook—for professional services not rendered, £2,500—the comrade—some sort of relative—no doubt about that—but Heaven knows what, I don't, what does it matter? I no longer walk alone. She is in my life—when I pass away, it is she who will burn my papers—the nurse who wasn't such a dragon and kept faith with me—Frederick's portrait—such a poet he looked—and all the makings of a true poet in him—he, the poet, and they who had been so hard to him, the pillars of society—such pillars—herself, for instance—what a pillar of society. *Out of the deep have I called unto Thee.*

Yes, that is how those thougths would have

stood, but touched in so lightly on the tablets of the mind that their impress caused no undue emotions to hurt, distress, over-excite, or pierce the armour of old age.

But one day she opened the old piano in the unused drawing-room, and spread in front of her the faded and faint music manuscript of Frederick's anthem, *Out of the deep have I called unto Thee.* She touched the yellow keys, but her fingers could not find the notes and her eyes could not see.

That was merciful.

XIX

AND then one day Gwen's book halted. No ideas leapt into her brain, and the springs of her imagination were dried up. Her people had vanished like pale ghosts to the mysterious regions from which they had been conjured, and no longing, no entreaty, no insistence enticed them back. Gone were they and left no trace by means of which they might be searched for by day or by night, in hours of conscious thought or in dreams. Sheep and shepherds, moon and mist, the wind-swept fells, the wild moors with the lights and shadows sweeping over them, the purple sea of heather, the storm clouds, the curlews and peewits and the upland village had ceased to be.

Great was Gwen's misery. She turned to music, to nature for inspiration, but in vain. From human companionship, from the friendship of books no help came. She wandered in the Abbey, always

a haven of happiness, and found no consolation, and none either in the National Gallery where time after time she had been uplifted by the messages of the great. Her real life, the life of imagination, was arrested, passive, silenced, unresponsive. And in her hour of mental and spiritual destitution she thought, as many an artist has thought in similar plight, that her powers had failed and that never again would she recapture the cherished vision.

It was at the moment when she touched the depths of her despair that the comrade's words came echoing to her, clear, insistent, and charged with added meaning in answer to her need. And she wrote to her:

"The book halts, dear comrade of the pen. The room calls. But not only the room. You call—and I long to come to you. May I?"

XX

Mr. Hubert Rosthwaite sat opposite to old Mrs. Claverdon and twiddled his watchchain a little nervously. He wished himself safely back in his office and wondered why in the name of Heaven he had ever ventured on this expedition to the Moat House.

For she was far more formidable than he had anticipated, much more of a personage than even Gwen had described her in the story, stronger, more alert, and more dominating. But it was not her dignified appearance nor her severe manner that quelled him so much as her remoteness. She gave the impression of being untold miles removed from him, though actually near him in bodily presence. It was as if he were attempting intercourse with someone who had retreated to the inner sanctuary of some isolated temple on an inaccessible mountain. Not very comfortable nor very sure of

himself was the head of the great publishing firm. Some of his authors and all of his staff might have been intrigued to see him in this condition. And perhaps the experience was good for him.

Not that she had been rude to him. On the contrary she had been extraordinarily polite. Her answer to his letter asking whether he might venture to call on her about a little matter in connection with the career of Miss Gwendolin Kingsmead, in whom he was interested, was curt, it is true, but not uncourteous and not discouraging. It ran:

"THE MOAT HOUSE,
"SUTCLIFFE.

"SIR,

"I am willing to talk with you about the career of Miss Gwendolin Kingsmead, who interests me also.

"Yours faithfully,

"ALWINA CLAVERDON."

Moreover she had been in readiness to receive him on the day and at the hour arranged between them, and the old butler had shuffled in with a tray containing a decanter of sherry and biscuits, and had filled two glasses, one small and one large, with what was certainly a very rich and rare wine. He had already sipped of it, and if he had been alone, Mr. Rosthwaite would have smacked his lips: for even as he knew a good piece of literature when he saw it, so also he knew a good wine on instant acquaintance.

And the room in which he found himself would ordinarily have put him at once at his ease; for he certainly fitted in naturally with the atmosphere—with the pictures and books and all those manuscripts spread out on the refectory table, and the portraits of Shelley and Keats and Charles Lamb and the stained glass and the panelled walls. He thought as Gwen had thought, that it would be a heavenly room to work in. If it had not been for the aloofness of the lady of the house, he would have been pleasantly reassured by the sur-

roundings in which he found himself. As it was, he scarcely knew how to make his first request of her concerning Gwen's story, and as for his second, relating to Peter Maurice's biography—well, he closed his eyes at the mere thought of the danger involved.

It was Mrs. Claverdon who began.

"Well," she said abruptly, "about this girl's career. What is it you wanted to say to me? I understand from your letter that you have been watching the development of her gifts and are interested in her work. She is lucky to have such a friend. But I don't see what I have to do with you in the matter. I don't see where I come in at all."

"You said in your letter that you were interested in her career," he ventured, "and that is why you have been so exceedingly kind as to allow me to intrude on you."

"So I am interested," she said, "but from my own angle, from my own angle, not yours or anyone else's."

"I believe our angles are the same," he smiled. "May I tell you?"

She nodded frigidly, but not unkindly, and he was not sure, but rather fancied that she advanced an inch or two from that distressing distance which made things so difficult for him. He was quite sure, however, when he saw her sip her sherry and sign to him to refill his own glass. He did so with an air of deprecating reluctance which he by no means felt, gained courage and began.

He told what is already known, and laid stress on Gwen's decision not to have the story published and on her attempt to burn it—an attempt which he himself had frustrated because it was more than he could stand to see a good and brilliant piece of literature consigned to the flames. He alone was to blame for saving the manuscript and for wishing to lay the matter before Mrs. Claverdon herself. He was taking this liberty because he felt it was a great pity that Miss Kingsmead should loose her chance of appearing in the magazine, and a great pity also that a story so eminently suited for the magazine should not see the light of day. But if Mrs. Claverdon objected in the very slightest de-

gree, that would settle everything and settle it finally. Might he read the story to her?

All this time she had given no sign of surprise or vexation, and he could form no idea from the expression on her face what thoughts might be passing through her mind. But that she was interested he was certain, and again he had the feeling that she had advanced another inch or two from her remoteness.

"Read it," she said abruptly. "How can I know till I have heard it?"

But to herself she said:

"What has my comrade been doing with my privacy? Has she failed me? Am I to shut the door on her, and walk alone again?"

Then he read the story, that little gem of imagination, which was fitted in so deftly and delicately to the surround of reality—how deftly and delicately he himself had not realised, could not have realised until this moment when he was in the very presence of her who had been the source

of the inspiration. If his voice faltered now and then, how could one wonder?

The end came, and his ordeal was over, for it had been an ordeal. He put the manuscript on the table, and waited for anything that might come—indignation, anger, absolute refusal—anything. And yet in his heart he believed that no one could fail to be moved by this tribute of Youth to Old Age. And he was right.

She was stirred to her depths, though her proud old spirit would never have owned that to him. He would never know that, and also he would never know how she was telling herself that the door need not be closed, should not be closed, and that she need not walk alone, for here was a rare understanding and a compassionate sympathy for her to take and hold on to as some sustaining staff which would not bend or break.

But what he did know was that she was no longer remote. By reason of her interest in the story, her delight in its beauty, her generous admiration as Gwen's gifts unfolded themselves and

testified to her genius, Mrs. Claverdon had taken a flying leap from inaccessibility and landed safely by his side. The expression on her face had changed from inscrutable passiveness to eager alertness.

"Of course the story must be published, and at once," she said peremptorily. "I don't see what all this fuss is about. The girl has merely used me and my home as tools of her imagination—that's all. Well, writers have got to have tools. Do you suppose I don't know that? Well, I happen to. I'm not a fool. Of course it must be published. But she——"

"You really mean that you give your consent?" he put in.

But she waved her hand as if to sweep away his interruption and went on:

"But she doesn't know everything. Where are my tempers, for instance? I insist on having my tempers. No one can afford to do without them at my age. Tempers and peevishness. She'd better consult Jenkins—good old Jenkins—he could tell her a thing or two. She has put Jenkins in whole-

meal. Well, that doesn't matter. He doesn't read *Rosthwaite's Magazine.* I understand he does not read anything except his Bible occasionally, and goes to sleep over it comfortably in his pantry as he ought to do. She has given me a son who broke my heart. Well, I never had one. But I dare say he would have broken my heart if I had had a son or a heart. So that can pass. She had given me a secret romance. Well, that can pass also, for haven't we all had our secret romances, all of us, including you, I have no doubt, secret romances by which we move and live and have our being?"

She left off suddenly and scrutinised him severely as if asking this question of him and expecting to be told the truth; and Mr. Rosthwaite smiled gravely and bowed his head in acquiescence. But he ventured not a word, and for a moment she remained silent. And then in quite an altered tone of voice she said:

"How does the child know about old age? But she does know. That is wonderful—wonderful.

And with so much mercifulness, too much compassion by far."

"And how does she know about the stages which lead to it?" he said, "and the warnings coming as she says, so softly, softly, almost unheard, almost unsensed, as a thief in the night—heraldings, she calls them."

"Are you hearing them?" she asked.

"Faintly at times, I've thought," he answered with a half smile.

"Very subtle, very disturbing at first," she murmured. "I remember them well. But afterwards, take it from me, they do not hurt. The child says that also. How can she know, she who only hears the call of youth? Ah, well, there is only one answer—vision—intuition—genius."

"Yes," he said, "that's it."

And then, by Mrs. Claverdon's wish, he read again some of the passages which had arrested her, and others which had taken hold of him. There was one about death and another about courage, another about the clinging to life, the habit of life,

and another about the quieting down of emotions, and another about the sudden leaping up of the flame, and another about things which had formerly counted so much gradually ceasing to matter at all.

Together they studied the little story, taking pleasure over it as if they were intimate friends knit together by a common bond of pride and interest in the writer. And he told her that he believed Gwen would go far, and that she had the chance of a brilliant career before her if she kept on in the same spirit and with the same steadfast purpose which he had noted in her from the beginning. Disappointments and rebuffs seemed only to act as a spur for further effort, and he had not a doubt but that at the present she was pegging away with fierce intent on another piece of work, having cast this story from her as a garment and with it her opportunity of an immediate appearance in the pages of *Rosthwaite's Magazine*—so she thought. But now——

"But now she has got it back again," Mrs. Claverdon nodded. "You give it to her, and I give

it to her. Do you suppose that I also do not know a good piece of literature when I see it, or hear it? Of course it must be published and at once. Now, don't you go putting it in a drawer and letting the months slip by. I make this condition part of the bargain. Do you grasp that, Mr. Rosthwaite?"

He laughed, and promised that it should not be stuffed in a drawer, but should go in at once, next month, in fact, and he said that this was the least he could do to show his appreciation of her generosity of spirit and true kindness.

"I like the child," the old lady said softly. "I have taken to her. I shall be proud of her. I am proud of her. I am glad to be able to help in giving her this splendid start off. If she had made me a monstrosity instead of a remarkably fascinating personage—for that is what she has made me here—I believe I should have said all the same, 'Go ahead, little comrade. Let us both get into *Rosthwaite's Magazine* and stop there. We couldn't be in a better place in this world.'"

Hubert Rosthwaite's face shone. He was terribly pleased.

"Moreover," she continued, "the girl, who was a stranger to me until recently, is probably my own relative. She bears my maiden name, and since I saw her, I've taken the trouble to find out a little about her. She belongs to the wicked branch of my family, fortunately for her—and that is how she gets her genius, I suppose. I belong to the respectable lot—the pillars of society—and that is why I have only had half gifts, I suppose. Writing is in my family. It oozes from us. You see all those manuscripts there—they are mine—yes, mine."

In her excitement she had risen, and was pointing to the table. She suddenly parted with her secrecy, her reticence of long years, worked up by the thought of Gwen's career and the atmosphere of the great publisher who embodied all the glorious traditions of his firm and of literature itself.

"Mine," she repeated in triumph, "my own—my writings of a lifetime—written for consolation

and amusement—never sent out to be buffeted and scorned by rejection. Never that."

"She your relative—writing in your family—and these your manuscripts," he exclaimed, springing up and bending eagerly over the table. "Well, I am interested—well, well, to think of it. All those your writings, your private writings, for no one's eyes but your own. May I touch them, may I handle them? I could scarcely help wanting to do that, since manuscripts are part of my everyday life."

"You may touch them," she said, with the grave condescension of an empress; and an empress she looked in very truth as she stood surveying her kingdom which no one should ever wrest from her. Young and beautiful she looked, like the Alwina whom George Rodney had seen again with the eyes of the Past.

He touched them so reverently, glanced at the titles of some of them, nodded his head as if in sympathy, glanced at the faded pages, put them down tenderly as if he were handling something too frail

and precious for careless contact. It was a lovely sight to see him paying his tribute in his own way to the unknown work of this aged writer.

Then he stretched out his hand at random and grasped the bundle of papers which she had not untied. It was Peter Maurice's letters and diaries—and outside was written: *Preface for Peter Maurice's Biography, his letters, diaries, etc. . . .*

XXI

"PREFACE for Peter Maurice's Biography, his letters and diaries," he read aloud, and the words had scarcely passed his lips when she had snatched the packet from his hands.

"No, no," she exclaimed angrily, "not that, not that."

But Rosthwaite's heart had given a leap of joy at his discovery, and a whole battalion of angry women would not have daunted him at that moment.

"Mrs. Claverdon," he said excitedly, "it is about this biography that I also wanted to speak to you. Please don't turn from me like that. Please listen to me, I beg you."

"I don't want to hear anything you have to say," she snapped. "There is nothing to say."

"Oh, but there is," he insisted. "Years ago you refused to have Maurice's biography published. Years

ago you refused to lend his diaries and papers for that purpose."

"And pray how do you know that?" she asked fiercely.

"Because it was my firm that asked in vain that you should lend his papers."

"Your firm?" she repeated. "It was your firm, was it? If I had remembered that, you wouldn't be here now."

"But I am here," he went on bravely, "and again I make the request which you would not grant to my father forty years ago."

"Forty years ago," she murmured to herself.

"Because of your refusal, there is no proper history of his life and explorations," Rosthwaite continued. "Only the other day there was a reissue of the meagre little monograph which has had to do service for the record of a famous man. Here it is. Look at it. Do you consider it is worthy of a pioneer such as Peter Maurice? Justice has never been done to him. He has been overshadowed by Livingstone."

He had taken it from his pocket and held it out to her, but she would not look at it and thrust it away roughly. Obstinacy was on every line of her face and figure. She tapped on the ground with her foot.

"So this is what you really came for," she said scornfully. "You came on a pretence."

"No, no," he said severely. "You shall not be allowed to say that. I had made up my mind definitely to come and see you about Miss Kingsmead's story. It was after she had gone and as I sat thinking over the story and the circumstances of her visit to you that your name touched a chord of memory very faintly. But my old clerk remembered better, and he searched our annals and found your correspondence with my father. Then I determined to ask this favour also of you, Mrs. Claverdon."

"Killing two birds with one stone," she put in.

"If you like to put it that way," he assented gravely.

"Well, I don't blame you," she conceded abruptly. "I would have done the same."

He smiled.

"For the glory of the firm I wanted to make a forlorn attempt," he went on, "and on behalf of the world to which you owe that biography. And there was something else which spurred me on—I will confess it to you—something in the girl's story itself. Do you remember that passage in which she speaks of the brave resistance, the courageous resistance so often put up doggedly, determinedly against the indifference, the lethargy born of advancing years? Well, I had not been resisting. I had been getting slack. So I braced myself up for the glory of the firm. There you have the whole tale. Cannot you see your way to consent?"

"No," she said stubbornly, "I cannot, I will not. What I said forty years ago, I say now—no."

"What can be your reason, I wonder?" he said half to himself.

"My reasons are my own," she said, turning on him sharply.

"Yes, of course, of course," he answered gently. "Pardon me. I was only thinking aloud."

He put the little monograph in his pocket, with a sigh of disappointment and defeat. He glanced mournfully at the forbidden packet which at that moment was his heart's desire, and shook his head.

Then he gathered himself together and held out his hand in his courtly fashion.

"Good-bye," he said, "I thank you for receiving me. At least half of my mission has not failed. You have been most kind and generous-hearted about our young author. The story shall go into next month's issue, and I am quite sure that it will make a hit. And you and I will together be proud of her, not only on this occasion but in the future also."

Her face softened at once and her manner lost its aggressiveness.

"Ah," she said, "the comrade. We are on safe ground there."

And at that moment Jenkins shuffled into the room and mumbled:

"Luncheon is served, my lady."

She turned to her visitor with a queer little smile, half wistful, half apologetic, half imperious.

"Come," she said. "Luncheon is served. Don't refuse to break bread with me because we have had a mortal combat. Give me your arm like the true gentleman you are—give it to an old woman who indulges in temper and rudeness at her own sweet will and who ought to say she is sorry but won't. That's right. Ah, and about that monograph. You may leave it if you like. I may look at it—and I may not."

"I have failed, Fraser," Mr. Rosthwaite said the next day. "She is a cultured old lady and a lover of literature, but just as stubborn as she was forty years ago. I have been able to do nothing for the glory of the firm."

He sighed, and Fraser sighed. Their disappointment was immeasurable.

XXII

THE young lady was coming. My lady had given orders that Queen Elizabeth's bedroom should again be prepared, and she herself went to make sure that all her wishes had been attended to by Mrs. Bristowe. Mrs. Bristowe carried out the instructions, but expressed her disapproval by a settled and silent air of Christian resignation which needed no words to proclaim its intensity. Jenkins shuffled about mumbling incoherently in his usual way when he was put out, and Bruce, the gardener, was up in arms, for hadn't he been told to cut an outrageous number of flowers for the house and to remember that it was Mrs. Claverdon who owned the garden and not himself? What were things coming to—and all because of the young lady?

Mrs. Claverdon, who was in fine form and in an excellent good humour, was greatly amused by her staff.

"The truth is, I shall have to give you all a month's notice," she said to old Jenkins. "Now, what would you think if I gave you a month's notice, Jenkins? You wouldn't like it, would you?"

"No, my lady, I shouldn't," he laughed softly. "But I can't fancy myself getting it, that I can't."

"I can't quite fancy you getting it," she laughed, "not at this time in the history of the world. But don't mumble so much, or if you must mumble, mumble something about the blessing and advantage of having a cheerful spirit, able and willing to put up with any kind of change. For things are never going to be the same here—not quite the same. I've been asleep for years, I think, and now I'm awake. Very strange, I admit, but there it is. And you must be awake, too. And after all, Jenkins, it was pleasant to hear that young voice singing in the garden, wasn't it? We both listened to it together, didn't we? You remember?"

"Yes, my lady," he said. "It sounded fresh and happy."

"Very well, then," she smiled, "and it will sound

fresh and happy again. We shall all feel young once more. Years will roll away from us. We shan't know ourselves. Bristowe will lose her bronchitis and her nerves and her Christian resignation; I shall go striding over the downs as I used to; and you, Jenkins, will be the brisk young butler of past days. What a miracle."

Already she scarcely knew herself, so joyous and excited did she feel over the prospect of welcoming her comrade of the pen. Nothing in recent years had pleased her so much as Gwen's words, *"Not only the room calls. You call. I long to come"*; and from the moment she received the letter, she bestirred herself in a manner that bewildered her household. She interested herself in the housekeeping, and drew up in her fine pointed Italian handwriting a list of dishes and dainties which nearly took the cook's breath away, and she made a raid on the green-houses to learn the condition of her choicest grapes. Again she changed the pictures in her studio, reinstating this time the old monk, illuminating manuscripts which Gwen had

specially liked, and also Tasso walking in the cloisters of San Onoforio. But in spite of her restlessness she did not neglect to give a certain amount of time and thought to her painting, and "Queen Elizabeth receiving Master William Shakespeare" made progress. For she told herself pretty severely that no one could and should take the place of the companions of her solitude.

"I should indeed be ungrateful if that were possible, dear friends," she said, addressing them not once, but several times.

But it cannot be said that Queen Bess and Shakespeare riveted her attention in the way they certainly would have done if other more immediate interests had not intruded themselves. The beauty and message of Gwen's story held her thoughts, and Mr. Rosthwaite refused to be banished from her mind. She had a vision of that courtly gentleman handling her own manuscripts with deferential care, and a vision of herself snatching away Peter's papers so roughly and rudely. She heard him say, "Please, please do not turn away from me like that." Well,

she couldn't help being fierce and angry. It had been more than she could stand. Tiresome man—why couldn't she forget him and his tiresome words about the wrong she had been doing to the world and to Peter?

But she was not angry now. Indeed she had actually written him one of her curt letters which she tore up. It ran:

"DEAR SIR,

"I do not mind owning that the little monograph you left is, as you say, unworthy of Peter Maurice's life and work.

"Yours faithfully,

"ALWINA CLAVERDON."

For she had read it, very carefully, and without any overwhelming emotions. That had surprised her very much.

She thought:

"How strange that I do not suffer in the way I always believed I should if I once began to dwell

on all that Peter did and stood for in my life. And here I am reading about him, calm and tearless, as of someone known to me æons ago, in a different world, across the gulf of Time. Who knows—perhaps I should feel equally calm and collected if I read his letters and diaries, over which in the past I have shed so many bitter tears. Is it possible that all these years I have been hugging to myself a secret pain which had long since ceased to be active? I shouldn't wonder. Pain and suffering of spirit, searing at the onset, but easing off gradually into a tradition, and like all traditions, shorn of reality in the end."

But farther than this she did not go. Yet it was very far to go, and amazing that she brought herself to untie the papers which she had snatched from Mr. Rosthwaite and even to turn over the pages of her Preface to the biography. She did not read them. That she could not do.

Was something working in her mind towards the end which Mr. Rosthwaite so earnestly desired for the righting of the wrong done to the world and to

Peter Maurice himself, and for the glory of the firm? He would indeed have been heartened could he have read her letter, and Fraser would have rubbed his hands in quiet glee and said: "I think, sir, the stubborn old lady is coming round, and that we shall get those papers by fair means or foul."

But she sent some laconic letters in another direction. There was no need for those to be torn up, and she was immensely amused with them. They were the following:

"DEAR BORROWDALE,

"Sell me out at once enough Consols to realise £2,500, and don't write and argue about it.

"Yours faithfully,

"ALWINA CLAVERDON."

"DEAR BORROWDALE,

"Can't you read the English language? I told you not to argue with me.

"Yours faithfully,

"ALWINA CLAVERDON."

"DEAR BORROWDALE,

"Very kind of you to trust that my newly found relative is not already 'sponging on me,' as you call it. You are quite on the wrong track, as you usually are.

"Yours faithfully,

"ALWINA CLAVERDON."

"DEAR BORROWDALE,

"So you have come to your senses, have you, and are doing what I enjoined? I take this opportunity of reminding you once for all that my capital is mine, not yours. I have found it necessary to remind the gardener that my flowers are mine, not his. You would appear to bear him a close resemblance.

"Yours faithfully,

"ALWINA CLAVERDON."

"DEAR BORROWDALE,

"Transfers enclosed duly signed and witnessed by Mrs. Bristowe. I must own that considering you

are a lawyer, you have shown some approach to alacrity.

"Yours faithfully,

"ALWINA CLAVERDON."

"DEAR ALLBROOK,

"As I have no intention of ever beginning to take any of your medicines, it is more than probable that I shall not be dying yet. Even if I made another journey to London, it is certain that I should not perish, but come back alive and much invigorated, thank you. So in these circumstances I am going to hand over to you now half of the legacy I intended for you. The other half must wait awhile, for even as it is, poor Borrowdale may have a stroke from the shock of being ordered to sell out capital. I rather respect you, Allbrook, for having opposed me against your own interests. I think you have been looking rather careworn lately and you are certainly not getting younger. The enclosed prescription will possibly be a strong tonic—at any rate it is harmless, which is more than can be said of

most prescriptions. Buy your son a practice, and send your daughter to Girton. Career can't wait.

"Yours faithfully,

"ALWINA CLAVERDON."

"P.S.—Bristowe is now suffering from an acute attack of Christian resignation. You'd better come and see the poor soul."

The enclosure was a cheque for £2,500 pinned to a sheet of paper on which she had written: *"Dr. Allbrook. To professional services not rendered at a crisis*—£2,500."

He came, his eyes shining with gratitude. But she told him not to be a duffer and thank the wrong person. It was the comrade he would have to thank —youth which made it worth while for old age to do and be.

XXIII

When Gwen arrived at the Moat House, old Jenkins opened the door wide, showed no inclination to treat her like a tramp, and didn't mumble. And, indeed, her happy young face, flushed with excitement, would have overcome the reluctance of the hardesthearted family butler in the universe. And hadn't she every reason to be happy? Did she not carry in her pocket Mrs. Claverdon's letter of welcome together with Rosthwaite's letter telling her the good news about the story? Hadn't she the firm belief that she would find her beloved characters waiting for her in the magic room? And wasn't she going to see once more her old comrade of the pen to whom her heart had gone out in gratitude and sympathy and understanding?

In another minute she was seated by the old lady's side, and heard her soft pleased little laugh which had so much charm in it, and saw her bright

eyes sparkling like those of someone young and glad.

"Why, comrade," she exclaimed, "you look years and years younger, and even more beautiful."

"I have to be," Mrs. Claverdon smiled. "You said so in the story. You also said I was entrancing, my child. I must certainly endeavour to live up to that adjective. But as I told your Rosthwaite, you've left out my tempers. You've deprived me of one of my most precious possessions. You'll have to put them in the proofs."

"Yes, we'll put them in the proofs," Gwen laughed happily. "And you really mean that the story is to be published? I didn't want it published when it came to the point. Indeed I didn't. But I had to write it. I had to write it. I couldn't help myself."

"I know," the old lady said, patting her hand. "Be comforted. I know. But I also know that you were willing to burn it, and if you remember, you would not let me burn any of my manuscripts. You saved their poor, mean, little lives. Well, I have

saved the life of your most beautiful and finished bit of work—your tribute to old age—your interpretation of old age. Mr. Rosthwaite says he knows a good piece of literature when he sees it. I suppose he does. That's what he is here for. But I also know a fine piece of literature when I see it, though I couldn't construct it any more easily than he himself could, I expect, if the truth were known. And let me tell you, comrade, if you had represented me as a prehistoric monstrosity instead of a beautiful and entrancing personage, I should still have said that the story was to be published. For careers can't wait. Opportunities must be grasped—and here is a great one. And as for my privacy, I'm inclined to think I am rather tired of my privacy, Why, I don't know—but I am. So your story goes into *Rosthwaite's Magazine* and Mr. Rosthwaite will be proud of it."

"I think you are just splendid, so fine and generous-hearted," Gwen said, in a low voice tense with emotion. "I don't know what to say to you."

"You need not say anything," Mrs. Claverdon smiled. "I am pleasing myself; and as for being generous-hearted, let us suppose for fun that I am, but I'm not sure. Forty years ago, or even thirty, I might have been jealous of that story and the place it is going to secure you in *Rosthwaite's Magazine,* and jealous of your gifts; but at the age of eighty the thing is not possible. At least I think not, for one can never be sure of what human nature *is* capable—even at eighty.

"Also," she added, "if you think I am behaving splendidly, as perhaps I am, please remember that I am uplifted by family pride, for you are my kinswoman. You bear my maiden name—you share in overflowing measure my family's passion for writing, and you come from Australia where one of us, a certain Ebenezer Kingsmead, several generations ago, absconded after committing appalling but thrilling frauds. That much I have found out since you were here. How near or how distantly related we are I don't know and it doesn't matter; and as frauds have been committed

in my branch of the family also, it would appear that we have much in common—tastes in fraud and tastes in literature. A most promising combination surely, and eminently suitable for walking together —what say you?"

"Eminently," Gwen laughed, her face lighting up with pleasure, and she took the frail old hand and touched it ever so lightly with her lips.

"There is one thing that pleased me above all else in your story," Mrs. Claverdon went on, "and that is your tribute to the courage of old age; though how you know about it, or know about any of the attributes of old age, passes my comprehension. You seem to have turned old age inside out, but with a tender hand—bless you, my child—almost too tender, as I told Rosthwaite. But courage is a characteristic of it, and so little recognised and appreciated by the young: the courage of going on, with waning powers and faded flowers of life and circumstance, with aimless days and nameless fears, and at the world's mercy, even as children are.

Yes, that is courage, though some people may call it apathy and inanition. But you have chosen to write it down as courage because you have vision."

She paused a moment and then said:

"You speak of the loneliness of old age, and you sound the note with a sure touch, an amazingly sure touch."

"Yes, but I do know about loneliness," Gwen said. "No need for guessing there. I've been lonely myself, belonging nowhere, belonging to no one since my mother died."

"It isn't the same," Mrs. Claverdon said. "The loneliness of youth has hope for a comrade—a dim presence, perhaps, at times, but ever there. The loneliness of old age has another kind of comrade —not always a dim presence either—despair. Yet you have written that down also very wonderfully."

She looked round the room and smiled tenderly at her pictures.

"Very beautifully you have brought in the com-

panions of my solitude," she said. "I thank you, for their sake, and for myself. I should have suffered very much if you had left them out. But there they are—safely in their own places and in the story Companions, never-failing companions of my solitude. And which one I love best I could not tell you—perhaps Shelley, my poet of poets."

"They haunted me," Gwen said. "I dreamed about them—Elizabeth—Shakespeare—Erasmus—Lady Jane Grey—Keats—Blake—Raleigh—San Bernardino, the old monk illuminating, Rowena—Rebecca. Such a mixed company."

The old lady chuckled.

"Ah, that is what friends ought to be," she said. "That's where the spice of them comes in. Different friends to minister to our different needs, all offering their own special attributes. Yes, you've brought them all in. I should have been angry if you hadn't. And the manuscripts, well, they are part of me, and you have honoured them with a tender reverence far beyond their worth—half gifts, my child,

as you would know if you read them, but precious and dear to me."

"I felt them to be something sacred," Gwen murmured.

"And treated them as such," Mrs. Claverdon said. "You've no cause to feel regret about them. I don't grudge them to you. I'm content they should be in the story, reverenced in their privacy and not buffeted—that's the point."

Gwen had covered her face with her hands.

"I wish I had burnt it," she half sobbed. "I wish it with all my heart. It seems such a shameful liberty to have taken. I can hardly bear it. We can stop its publication even now, comrade."

"What, and deprive me of appearing in *Rosthwaite's Magazine?*" Mrs. Claverdon exclaimed. "Rob me of my only chance of getting there? Never. That would be mean. And what of the message to the world about the courage of old age? Isn't that to be given? Of course it is. Now take your hands from your face, or else I shall feel unhappy. That's right. And listen to me. I have something more I

want to say, and then we will leave the story to take care of itself and embark on its own career, with an old woman's blessing and sanction, mark you, and a young woman's joyous anticipation of its successful voyage on the ocean of fame. That is how we shall leave the story, my child. Is that understood, once and for all? Ah, that is as it should be—smile and be as joyous and proud as you are making me. Very happy you have made me. Do I not look it? Isn't that why you find me younger and more beautiful? I wonder how many times I have fancied I heard your fresh young voice singing in the garden that song of June and restoring to me many sweet things lost."

She closed her eyes and smiled contentedly. When she opened them at length, she glanced at the table where her manuscripts were lying, glanced at Gwen as if asking herself a searching question about the girl, and then shook her head as if in doubt and hesitation, and stared straight in front of her, scanning the far horizon for some beacon to guide her spirit. She must have found it, for the strain on

her face relaxed, and she began, half inaudibly at first:

"You have given me a romance. You have imagined some secret cause for my strange habit of secrecy and privacy maintained for so many long years. You have guessed at some things, guessed rightly, how I don't know, and probably you don't know yourself. But, after all, most romances bear each other a close resemblance. And that helped you. And I myself may have helped you, since it is certain that our thoughts are borne by mysterious waves over time and space and reach their destined goal. And the rest you have wrought by your own imaginative insight as mysterious as those unseen waves of which at present we know so little. I think, I almost think, my child, that I want to tell you my real romance, so that you may learn how near to the truth you came, and yet how far from it you were. If I could tell it to anyone, it would be to you, since half the telling is already done. Give me those papers yonder—yes, that is the bundle I mean."

Gwen reached her the packet marked *Peter Maurice*. It rested in her hands for a little while.

"My real romance," she murmured.

She shook her head.

"Not to-night, not to-night," she said.

XXIV

THE clock struck midnight. Gwen leaned back in the Abbot's chair, with blank pages before her on the table. The people of her book had not come to her. The magic of the room failed to evoke them, and they were as far away as when a few days past her eagerness and her despair had vainly striven to conjure them from the distance to which they had retreated.

Did they tarry because her mind was not wholly directed towards them, because her thoughts were wandering back to her Moat House story and the things interwoven with it? Yes, that was the trouble — the whole trouble. They would only deign to come, like royal personages, when the road was cleared free and wide for their imperial progress.

The road was not free. The old comrade stood there, herself a regal personage, and re-

fused to be hustled away—and most rightly, too. Yes, she stood there, and bore in her hands a scroll, as yet unrolled, the history of her life. Would it be unrolled, and what would be its contents?

And Rosthwaite, another regal personage, stood there pointing to the Temple of Fame on the distant mountain range, and his words were borne to her: "On you must press—press on with your utmost strength—it is but a step you have gone, and the way is long." And ambition stood there, fierce and feverish one moment, calm and confident the next.

Gratitude was there, that most rare and lovely presence, with wings the colour of doves' breasts, and with softly radiant eyes which told their silent message of the spirit.

No, the road was not clear. How could it be clear?

Gwen wandered about the beautiful old room, looked out at the moonlight, listened to the owls,

feasted her eyes on the bowls of flowers wrested from the gardener, touched the books with that caress of hands known only to lovers of books, stood before the easel, smiled tenderly at the palette and brushes lying ready for the next day's work, stood before the pictures one by one, lingered long before Shelley's portrait, and drifted to the manuscripts which had tempted her before. But now there was no need to resist her impulses, for Mrs. Claverdon's last words that night had been:

"If the manuscripts tempt you again, my child, read any of them you please, yes, any you please, even those papers which you handed me this afternoon and which we put back—yes, very specially those. They belong to the romance of my life; and perhaps to-morrow I may feel I can tell it to you. Perhaps I may and perhaps I may not."

She read some of the poems, and amongst them *Tributary Tears, The Evergreen of Memory, Loneliness, To the Dawn, Solitude, Death, The Fringe of the Surf, The Secret of the Citadel, Long-*

ing, The Star of Hope, Sunrise. Poems of genius they were not, but they were more than half gifts, and if they had gone out into the world, they would not have been buffeted, since they were the outpourings of a cultured mind, and of an aroma faint and delicate. She read a story, *One nail drives out another,* and was arrested by its originality and its forceful style. If that had gone out into the world, it ran a good chance of not being buffeted. Then she read a remarkable essay on Queen Elizabeth, giving a fresh aspect of her mind and character new at that time but now familiar. There was another one on Wolsey, equally thoughtful and able, and there was one on Shelley called "An interpretation of his rare Spirit," and there was a long analysis of *Prometheus Unbound.* There were, in fact, several articles on Shelley's poems. Mrs. Claverdon seemed to have loved him dearly, and to have studied untiringly his life and work.

It was only at the last, and then with that reverential hesitancy which restrains us as we ap-

proach a shrine, that Gwen untied the packet of papers which the comrade had said were connected with the real romance of her life. This Peter Maurice, then, must have been the man she had loved. There were his diaries and letters, which she laid aside unread, and many sheets of notes such as anyone beginning to construct a biography would write out for guidance and reference. Gwen glanced at these and learnt that he was an African explorer contemporary with Livingstone. The quotation evidently intended for the title page was: *"Opener of his books by night and day, traveller by ship and foot and horse."* There was a preface which at once riveted Gwen's attention both as a document and as a piece of writing, so admirable was its form and so comprehensive its character, and so marked its restraint.

But in the end the restraint gave way, and there were these concluding lines from Shelley:

> But this low sphere,
> And all that it contains, contains not thee;
> Thou, whom seen nowhere, I feel everywhere.
> From Heaven and Earth and all that in them are
> Veiled art thou, like a—star.

There were five chapters of his biography. Gwen read them straight through and was carried along by their force and compelling interest to the unfinished sentence of the fifth chapter, where the narrative broke off suddenly. At the bottom of this page Mrs. Claverdon had written: *"January the twenty-fourth,* 1850. *I cannot go on. It is more than I can bear to work at this book."*

As Gwen read these words a thought sprang into her brain quick as a dart, and her face lit up with eagerness.

"Couldn't I go on, comrade?" she exclaimed.

She stood awhile thinking, surmising about her old friend's romance, and then she tied up the packet and went back to her own place where the chapter of her book lay untouched and the fresh sheets of paper uncovered. She shook her head sadly. Not to-night, she thought. No use trying to-night.

No, the road was not clear. How could it be clear.

So with disappointment in her heart she stole to her room in the deep silence of the night, and tired in mind and body, fell asleep almost immediately in Queen Bess's bed. But it was destined that compensation should come to her, for in her dreams her shepherd folk sought her and brought her their message for which she had been vainly waiting for many long days, and the mists cleared from the Fells, and the heather spread over the mighty spaces of the moor.

XXV

JENKINS heard her singing in the garden the next day, and said to himself that my lady was right and that it was pleasant to hear that young voice, which made one feel younger in a sense, not much younger, but a little, surely. And it was not unpleasant to have the young lady about the house, by no means unpleasant, for she seemed to bring life into the old place, and certainly laughter. He himself had laughed several times and about nothing. And hadn't Mrs. Bristowe laughed when the young lady stole a rose when Bruce was not looking, and pinned it on her dress and said: "There, Mrs. Bristowe, doesn't that make you look even smarter than you were?"

"And to him she had said: "I brought a little snuff for you. Might I offer it to you?" Well, well, to think of it. How did she know that he loved a little pinch of snuff now and again? Such good

snuff, too. He took a pinch and smiled. Well, well, there was nothing to mumble about when he came to think of it. And he hadn't mumbled, either. And hadn't my lady said: "Good old Jenkins, you haven't mumbled, and I shan't have to give you a month's notice!" And then she had laughed. It was good to hear her laugh, and good to see her happy, for my lady had had sore trouble, that she had. He remembered. And if it was the young lady that made her happy, then he would never mumble again. He took another pinch of Gwen's snuff and nodded his head and murmured, not mumbled: "Never again."

All that day, much to Gwen's disappointment, Mrs. Claverdon gave no sign that she was intending to tell her the real story of her life. She was much taken up with the proofs of the article on the Moat House which Gwen had brought with her, and after studying it carefully, expressed her entire approval of it.

"Very well, you have done it, my child," she said. "Nothing of a peep-show here. I'm glad I

gave in. If I hadn't given in, you would not be sitting here now, and I should have punished myself. That's what generally happens when we are disagreeable—we punish ourselves. Undoubtedly I was wise for once, and the descriptions are admirable. But you've made a mistake about the date of the stained glass. It ought to be fifteenth century, not sixteenth. I will correct that now. A wonderful event for me to be correcting proofs for the first time in my life. There's no knowing what I shall do next. Write again? No, no. I've tried since you came. Yes, fired by you, I've tried. But imagination does not work at eighty. And I shall never add to my half gifts now."

She glanced wistfully at her manuscripts and then as wistfully at Gwen, but she was too proud to ask the girl whether she had read any of them. But Gwen, who had been longing for an opportune moment, seized it when it came. No, she said, she would not allow her comrade to call them half gifts. Might she speak of them without taking too great a liberty? Though it was absurd for her to hesitate

at taking a liberty, considering what she had already done in that direction! But she did want to speak of them. Might she? Well, then, she thought that some of the poems were perfect little gems, and that they would never have been buffeted if they had been sent out into the world. And the ones she admired most were *The Fringe of the Surf,* and *The Ode to Death.* She had only read one of the stories, *One nail drives out another,* which she thought was a most telling bit of work, so forceful and condensed, and what a good title. The essays on historical subjects had interested her enormously, especially the one on Queen Elizabeth. It was extraordinarily clever and *modern,* though written so many years ago; for only now were historians beginning to look on history from that angle, and the comrade seemed to have anticipated them all. No, no, these writings must not be called half gifts. She would stand up for their reputation as she had already stood up for their lives.

And the old writer smiled and almost purred from quiet joy, and very bright were her eyes as

she stretched out her hand to grasp Gwen's, and asked:

"And am I in very truth worthy to be called a comrade of the pen, or are you only flattering and trying to please a foolish old woman who has doted on her literary offspring from the moment of their birth until now—and now perhaps more than ever?"

"In very truth," Gwen laughed gently, and looked her unflinchingly in the face. "But tell me, comrade, why have they been hidden away all these years? And that preface and those five chapters of Maurice's life which go with a lilt—splendid I call them—tell me why——"

But Mrs. Claverdon put up her hand to enjoin silence.

"I shall try to tell you, my child. I want to tell you. But I have not got as far. Perhaps I may tell you to-night, and perhaps I may not. I am battling with my long habits of reticence which prevail over my new impulses—so far. Don't press me. If the moment comes, it comes."

"Have I wounded you?" the girl cried. "I wouldn't for worlds."

"No, you have not wounded me," she smiled. "At eighty, one is not susceptible to wounds, I've come to the conclusion, but one certainly is to praise. Praise is very pleasant at eighty, far pleasanter than at eighteen, let me tell you. No, my child, you have not wounded me."

There were so many other things to talk about, and amongst them Gwen's book. The old lady asked, a little shyly, perhaps, whether she might hear some of it, and Gwen read her about the snowstorm on the Fells and the long search for the sheep, and the shepherd's wife torn with anxious waiting for the return of her husband, setting out to find him somehow, somewhere—and failing. And Mrs. Claverdon sat spellbound with interest and murmured at the end: "No half gifts there, no half gifts there."

Then there was their relationship to discuss and puzzle over. Gwen had to tell all she knew about

her mother—which was not much. They decided between them that she had probably followed her lover to England in the hope of being married to him and had been repudiated. But her story was so wrapt in mystery that it was impossible to do anything except guess wildly, and as Mrs. Claverdon said, probably quite wrongly.

She told Gwen of her visit to George Rodney and showed her Frederick's papers faithfully sent by the dragon who was not such a dragon after all. On Frederick's story she did not dwell, but she asked her to play the anthem *Out of the deep have I called unto Thee,* and Gwen looked at it, shook her head and pretended she could not decipher it, for she thought it was better so. And to divert her old friend from sad remembrances she whipped out the June Song which she had brought with her, played it and sang it. That made the comrade happy at once. It made old Jenkins, listening outside, happy also.

"Well, well," he said, "well, well, am I beginning to be the brisk young butler again?"

She gave a spirited account of her adventure to London, and of the alarm she had caused her household and her doctor.

"As far as I can make out," she said, with a twinkle in her eye, "they had a fresh funeral for me every day. Very attentive of them, I'm sure, but quite unnecessary. But they had made up their minds that I was never to return, never again to sit at my easel and paint my pictures. The wonder is not that I returned, but that their accumulated despair did not succeed in finishing me off. And that reminds me, my child: in your story written round a very old woman you make only the briefest allusion to death. I noticed that at once. Why did you not dwell on it, since it is waiting always near at hand to claim its own?"

"I could not have borne to think of it in connection with you," Gwen said, turning away.

Very beautiful looked the comrade in the moment of silence that followed.

"This much I can tell you of the attitude of old age to death," she said. "Life is a habit, and

old age clings to its habits even if it is not happy. But when it has been made happy, as you have made me by coming so unceremoniously into my life, death is not taken into account at all."

In the afternoon when Gwen had gone out for a tramp and she was alone, she had a long struggle with herself. With one part of her mind she had a great yearning to unfold her history to this girl with whom she found herself so much in sympathy. And with the other part she shrank from lifting the veil which had screened her past even from herself for many long years, and thought she ought to be ashamed of herself for even wishing to confide in anyone, at her age, too. But she did wish it, and wished it increasingly.

And she was worried increasingly about Peter's diaries and letters. Mr. Rosthwaite's reproach continued to haunt her. She knew well that she had done Peter himself a wrong in withholding them, but she was not going to give them up now because she ought to. No. Certainly not. Who wants to do a thing simply because he ought to? Obstinate she

had been for forty years and obstinate she would remain unless the urge came of itself. But how would it be to lay the matter before the child? She had told her to read those papers; but could she bring herself to speak of them? No, no, she couldn't. Yes, yes, she could. No, no, impossible.

And perhaps that night also might have passed without a single word of confidence escaping Mrs. Claverdon's lips, but that in the course of the evening her eyes rested on the trailing branches, treasure trove from the hedges which Gwen had brought back from her long ramble. She had not seen anything of the kind for many years in her room. There had been no one of her household young enough and eager enough to wander forth and return to deck the house with nature's own wild offerings.

Very beautiful they looked, she thought, and very dear the young thing who had brought them, sitting there by the fireside, reading, with the light from the fire playing about her hair and face as if in glee over her companionship. Not only trailing

branches from the hedges had she brought into the room—no, far more besides, intangible things, invisible things. And how wonderful that she was there, how very wonderful, and how mysterious the chances and happenings of life—or if one wanted to call them so, the ways of Providence. It mattered so little what one called them. All that mattered was that she was there, with her understanding and her insight and her gifts which made an old heart thrill with pride, and the radiance of her youth which shed itself over the dark and dim places of the soul.

The barrier broke down suddenly, and she began:

"My child, perhaps I may be able to tell you my own story, and perhaps I may not. I shall try. After all, it is very simple and nothing to make a fuss about. All the events of my life now seem so far away, that it is almost as if they had happened to someone else rather than to me. And that is true enough. For we are none of us the same as we were in bygone days, though we may pretend we are. And so it comes about that our past would

seem to be the story of someone with whom we were once acquainted rather than our own personal record. So I think I can tell it.

"Well, then, you were wrong in your story about my childhood. It was not lonely or unhappy. It was joyous and full of incident, and from my earliest remembrance bright intellects gathered round us and lovely and clever people were in our lives, who spoilt us and made a great fuss over us. And we children all wrote, like the Brontës, you know, and we had our family magazine, and we acted the little plays we wrote. I remember well my pride when we acted my first play, which was called *Dodette, or the Executioner's Daughter.* I was Dodette, and my elder brother Frederick was the executioner, and very telling he was in that rôle.

"We read our wonderful effusions to each other and admired ourselves tremendously, and quarrelled and disagreed and made it up handsomely, for we were a devoted group, six in number. Yes, it was a happy childhood, unusual perhaps, but none the worse for that. And the great, the passionate love

of writing, which we had in common, knit us together in exactly the same way as I now feel knitted to you, my little comrade of the pen, you who have a real career before you which stands for all I hold most dear, and which fires me, even in my old age."

She paused a moment, and then, with a gesture of her hand, waved her childhood away.

"It was when I was about sixteen," she went on, "that my brother Frederick brought on the family that disgrace of which I've already spoken to you. (You pretended, my child, that you could not decipher that anthem of his. Do you suppose I did not know that you were trying to shield me from sad remembrances?) He was the eldest and cleverest and the most brilliant of us all—too versatile for his own welfare. My mother could not recover from the sadness and the shock, for he was her dearest and best beloved, and she died a year or so after the trial. My father's heart was turned to stone and his pride of family wounded to the quick. He never allowed Frederick's name to be mentioned, and when the poor fellow came out of

prison after serving his term of penal servitude for forgery, it was not his father who stood by him. It was his friend, George Rodney. With Rodney he went to Australia, where, as we learnt from those papers I showed you, Ebenezer Kingsmead had fled in 1750. He had a small remittance sent him on condition that he changed his name, and he disappeared for ever out of our lives and died about four years after he had been released. I am always glad to remember that I defied my father's orders and got some messages through to him by George Rodney's kindness, during his imprisonment. And at first I used to write to him in Australia and send a paper. But he never answered, never showed a sign. He had cut us all off—and I don't wonder. But it was not that the others had loved him less than I did, only it so chanced that I had more defiance and adventure in my nature than they; and some can turn over a page so much more easily than others. And they had married and gone their ways. I was the youngest and the last to marry."

She paused again, this time longer. Then she went on:

"You guessed rightly about my marriage. It was unhappy. It was disastrous almost from the beginning. Stephen Claverdon's own sister had warned me of his irritable temper, but I had all the confidence of youth and good spirits, and said that I could deal with anyone's irritable temper, and certainly Stephen's. He had a charm which was disarming, and his love of learning made him a hero in my eyes: for as I have told you, the people amongst whom we moved were fine and cultured. But almost at once the trouble began. He was irritable to the highest degree, and gave way to passionate outbursts of temper over the pettiest trifles.

"My writing annoyed him from the beginning, and I soon found out that not only could I not show him what I had written, according to the old and dear traditional habits of my family, but that I could not even let him find me writing, for fear of an outburst of jealousy and scorn. And once he

came across one of my manuscripts left carelessly about, and read it aloud and mocked at it. Yes, mocked at it. After that, I wrote only in secret, but write I had to. You might just as well have asked a bird not to sing. But I wrote at night, in this room where you have been working, and I found consolation unspeakable, alone with my thoughts, and true happiness in my flights of imagination. And I locked up everything I wrote, so that no one might again pour scorn on my efforts, so that no tale of mine, no poem, no essay should ever be *buffeted.* And thus began my habits of secrecy, so foreign to my nature. Ah, it is a long story, and I could not linger on it. I have never been able to dwell on it, and I could not now."

Then in brief and curiously impersonal fashion she told Gwen that his irritability and unaccountable rages were finally diagnosed as being due to slow softening of the brain. Very slowly the illness made its inroad. Very terrible were the nine years she passed through before the end came. He died

on the eve of the day when she had at last reluctantly consented to his removal to a private asylum. She had fought that point with the doctors for the last four years of his life. Old Jenkins had fought it with her. But for Jenkins she could never have gone on. It was owing to Jenkins's unfailing loyalty that he had passed away in his own home in the surroundings he knew and could recognise from time to time. The sealed room had been his room. She had never entered it again.

XXVI

She waved her marriage away in the same abrupt manner as she had dismissed her childhood. The set and grim expression on her face softened into a tender smile as she continued in happier tones:

"You have given me a romance, a secret romance in your story, and again you guessed rightly. But whether I had one or not, it would never have done to let me be without one in the story—would it? But you will see, I had it in real life also. Only you have imagined the man who pervaded my life to be some learned and highly intellectual spirit, whereas Peter Maurice—yes, it was Peter Maurice—was a breezy sailorman and a rover by nature. We had always known Peter, and he had loved my sisters and myself in turns. We used to laugh and say that we never knew which of us would be his sweetheart the next day, and it

didn't seem to matter either to him or us. Now it was Helen's turn, now Margaret's, and I am bound to say very often mine. It would never have occurred to any one of us to regard Peter as a serious suitor. Yet the day came when he was one, when he proposed to me and said he had always loved me and only me. And I, like the fool I was, would not have him. He went off to China soon afterwards, and when he came back two years later, he found me married to Stephen Claverdon. He saw at once that something was wrong and that I was unhappy, and he swore a good deal—he was a great one at swearing, was Peter—and he said: *'Alwina, you have made a nice fool of yourself, haven't you?'* And I answered, *'You needn't tell me that, Peter. I know it.'* And then he said: *'Well, friends for life, Alwina. This ship will stand by.'*"

She said that those words had echoed back to her through the years. And Peter had kept faith and stood by unfailingly. When he could, he had sent letters—such kind and cheery letters they had

always been—telling her about the things he had seen and always ending with: "That will be good stuff for one of your yarns, for what you scribblers call local colour, I believe." And he was always enjoining her to keep on with those yarns, for they were good for her, and would "let the steam off." Yes, he had written, and always when he arrived back in England it was to the Moat House he came first. He was about the only one who dared or cared to break in upon her loneliness, for as the months went on, people had ceased to visit them, naturally enough too, she said, since there were always storm clouds hovering around, gathering strength for an impending tempest. And each time Peter came he was always graver as he witnessed the unhappiness of her married life. And at last he implored her to throw up everything and go with him. He knew well enough by then that she loved him as he loved her, though never a word of love had crossed their lips. But that word was not needed. He knew. She knew.

She paused a long time here, and it seemed as

if she had come to the end of her endurance. Gwen would fain have entreated her not to put herself to further strain. But she did not dare speak or stir. And Mrs. Claverdon continued:

"I was sorely tempted to leave husband and home and go forth with Peter. I was sorely tempted. There seemed nothing to keep me. I promised to meet Peter in three days' time at his lawyer's office —and give him my answer. And I should have given in, I know well, and he would have had the answer which he wanted to receive and which I hungered to give, but that Fate intervened. That very night there came a terrible crisis, and I learnt from the specialist whom we called in the next day that my husband's brain was affected. There was no question then of leaving my post. I went to the lawyer's office as arranged and found Peter waiting for me. When I told him my news he stood at first as one stunned, and then he bowed his head—I see him now—and said in a strained voice—I hear it now—so unlike his own: 'My God—my God—but the ship will stand by.'

"The years went slowly, painfully by. Centuries they seemed. Peter had given up the sea and was one of the early explorers in Central Africa. But letters reached me which showed how strong and steadfast and pitiful was his love. That love sustained me during my long ordeal and for ever afterwards. I had no right to it, I thought, and no wish to spoil his life. For his own sake I wished he could forget me, and he knew that I never strove to anchor him, as he called it. He said he had anchored himself. And when my ordeal was over and I was free to go with him to the ends of the earth, it was too late. A week after my husband was laid to rest, news came that Peter had died of fever at Lake Ngami. He left all his diaries and records to me, so that I might know that his thoughts had, as ever, been directed towards me and that the ship was, as ever, standing by.

"So near he had seemed to me always, and yet so far. Always I thought of those words of Shelley:

"This low sphere,
And all that it contains, contains not thee;
Thou, whom seen nowhere, I feel everywhere.
From Heaven and Earth and all that in them are,
Veiled art thou, like a—star."

XXVII

AGAIN she fell into silence, but Gwen could see her lips moving as if repeating soundlessly the last words: *Veiled art thou, like a—star.*

She ended with:

"That is the outline of my romance—the bare outline. You see, I've had much sorrow which threw me in on myself at an early date in my life; and as time has gone by, taking from me friends and relatives one by one, I know not what would have become of me if I had not retained my love of books and my habits of writing and painting. Courage you call that in your story. Yes, perhaps it does take courage not to die. Now, give me his papers. We will look at them together, you and I. I could bear to look at them now, with you by my side."

Gwen rose and went to the table. She was

deeply moved, too moved for words at first, and when she spoke, her voice was almost inaudible.

"The honour you have shown me to-night I could never forget," she said. "You must know how much I value your condescension."

Mrs. Claverdon smiled tenderly at the word and at the little figure standing before her with a grave respect.

"Not condescension, my child," she murmured. "Not condescension, but communion. And these papers, so dear to me—you read some of them last night?"

Gwen recovered herself, and her mind leapt to the biography which had so impressed her with the vigour of its opening and the possibilities of its development.

"I read the Preface and the five chapters of the Life," she said eagerly. "The diaries and letters, of course, I did not touch. But, comrade, the chapters go with a rush. They whirl one along. And the style is so splendid. And what a man—what a subject—and all those letters and those diaries ready

for use—think of the material there—oh, a thousand pities you could not have gone on—you would have written a glorious book—from the very beginning you make him live—he captures one—he is felt, seen, and heard and one longs to know more of him—the book ought to have been written—it ought still to be written—it——"

"Rosthwaite has been priming you, I plainly see," the old lady interrupted, half angrily, even though she was feeling uplifted with the girl's enthusiasm and praise.

"I don't understand what you mean," Gwen smiled. "What has Mr. Rosthwaite got to do with it?"

Mrs. Claverdon told her, and when Gwen had heard the whole story, she said with that same fearlessness which had attracted the old lady at the onset:

"But why should you refuse him now? When your grief was fresh, forty years ago, of course you could not have gone on. I can't describe to you how that unfinished sentence pulled at my heart.

But now—why not now? Isn't Mr. Rosthwaite right? Isn't it true that because of what you yourself call your obstinacy, Peter Maurice has not had justice done to his pioneer work, though he was earlier on the scenes than Livingstone? Don't you owe it to his memory and to the world to give up these papers and let them be published in some form or other? Don't you know in your heart of hearts that Mr. Rosthwaite is right?"

"Yes, I do," she said defiantly. "But that is no reason why I should capitulate now. I knew years ago what I ought to do. But I could not share Peter Maurice with anyone once he was my own. In life he had not been mine, but in death he was utterly mine, and mine I meant to keep him—and mean to now."

"No, no, you don't," the girl urged earnestly. "Already by honouring me so tremendously in telling me of him and letting me read what you have written about him in the past, you've begun to share him with me."

"Nothing would induce me to give up those

papers," she said doggedly, "and I'm too old to write the book myself. It is too late."

"But there is no need to give up the papers," Gwen persisted. "Do you know, comrade, what I said when I came to that unfinished sentence and read your words, *I cannot go on. It is more than I can bear?* I said: 'Why should I not go on for her, or why should we not go on together?'"

"You and I together," the old lady exclaimed, a smile breaking over her face. "You and I working together—oh, my child, think of it, how wonderful that would be! Perhaps in that way I could do it and perhaps I couldn't—but——"

"But let us try," Gwen said, aglow with the pleasure she was bestowing and taking. "Let us begin now, this very moment, for the sake of saying that we have started—a few lines only to say we've begun. Why not?"

"Well, well, why not?" Mrs. Claverdon repeated softly. "Untie the packet, my child."

* * * * *

It was late into the night when old Jenkins shuffled into the room, found them poring over the papers, heads close together, and said in his cracked voice:

"Are my ladies not going to retire?"

THE END

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