My Flirtations

Ella Hepworth Dixon

Table of Contents

My Flirtations

Ella Hepworth Dixon

CHAPTER I

THE first one—the very first one? Well, I think it was a sallow, under−sized Italian with handsome ox−eyes, who used to give us violin lessons; or else it was a cousin, a boy with sandy hair, who stammered, and who was reading for the army; but, no, I rather think it was the anxious young doctor, who came when I had the measles—anyhow, he, the primeval one, is lost in the mists of antiquity...

A great many people come to our house, and they have always done so as long as I can recollect. Father is a Royal Academician, and paints shocking bad portraits, but the British public is quite unaware of the fact. The British public likes to be painted by a Royal Academician, so it pays large prices and is hung on the line in the big room at Burlington House. They all come; red−faced, red−coated M.F.H.'s, the bejewelled wives of Manchester millionaires, young beauties, heads of colleges, the celebrities of the day—they all sit, with the same fixed eyes and the same tight smile, on the dais in our gorgeous studio.

The studio is an imposing room. Father likes me to sit in the alcove with the golden mosaics, on a peach−coloured divan, with turquoise−blue cushions; and on Show Sunday Christina is seen in a little white gown in the oaken gallery, playing dreamy voluntaries on the organ.... It looks idyllic, and nobody knows that there has usually been a family row shortly before the people begin crowding in. Christina is tart of tongue, and is not to be put down by a mere parent. But I was speaking of the studio. There is a perfection of detail about the vast apartment which is impressive; indeed, so fascinating a workshop has father fashioned for himself, that I have seen a dozen people inspecting the brocades and spindle−legged tables, and forgetting to look at the pictures on the easels. The over−worked critics, too, about the beginning of April, are apt to gush inordinately over a Nankin bowl full of daffodils, while they turn their backs on a portrait that has taken the best part of a year to paint. We live in a nest of artists. Next door they paint Oriental subjects, and hire a dusky Arab—more or less genuine—who wears a turban, and opens the front door at tea−parties. A dozen yards farther up the street they supply the thoroughly English idyl—young ladies in white muslin sitting on September lawns; young gentlemen in riding−breeches, who are either accepted or rejected. Just opposite they do sea−pictures—the old woman shading her eyes with her hand; the young woman in despair, with the careless infant at her knee. And all the houses are of red brick, with gables and white−wood balconies, and queer little windows in unexpected places. Our front doors are painted a pale sea−green, with brass knockers and bell−handles. On Show Sunday the British public wanders in and out, sublimely ignorant of whether it is in the house of Smith, R.A., or Robinson, A.R.A. And yet ours is the only studio with an Organ.

During the season we give Sunday dinner−parties, followed by an open evening, and we also entertain the 'sitters' at lunch. Some of the sitters have been known to want to hear me play the violin. I play execrably, but they are too polite to say so. All this rather bores Christina, whose latest hobby—Socialism—takes up most of her time.

Christina can be, on occasion, almost brutally cynical; but then she is clever, and when I want to get out of a scrape I go to her. Mother would not be of the faintest use under such circumstances. She would get pink and flurried, and tell me 'that she married my father at seventeen, and settled down after that,' and would further inform me that she had 'no patience with such philandering.' Poor mother, I really pity her limited experience. .. It must be like eternally dining off roast mutton to marry at seventeen, and settle down dully and respectably for the rest of your natural life!

I was christened Margaret, but most people call me Peggy. It is a curious fact that all my friends call me by different names. Some call me Miss Wynman, others Margaret; while 'Miss Peggy' and 'Peggy' do duty more often. One young man—but he was an American—always addressed me as 'Peggy Wynman'—a form of appellation, by−the−bye, which usually prefaced a lecture. Gilbert Mandell called me Marguerite.

Gilbert Mandell is one of the 'dear departed.' Not that he is dead. Oh no! I call them the 'dear departed' when it is all over, and they have betaken themselves to India, or Japan, or the East End to work among the People.

It is not flattering to one's vanity, but it must be frankly owned that, as a rule, my admirers 'depart' with phenomenal celerity. Their devotion generally lasts from six weeks to three months. Why this thing should be I cannot tell. Some people say it is because I don't let them talk about themselves.

I really think Christina objected less to Gilbert Mandell than to any of those who have come after him. If he savoured slightly of the prig, she maintained, he was neither a knave nor a fool. Christina doesn't care for young men.

My principal objection to him was that he was associated in my imagination with drains. Of course one cannot help the particular way in which one's parent has made a fortune, but, considering his son's taste for smart society and intellectual pursuits, it was thoughtless of Mandell *père* to poke his 'Deodorising Powder' in one's eye at every turn. Poor young man, how he must have suffered! 'Mandell's superior pink carbolic disinfectant powder' screamed at you, so to speak, at every street corner. The legend of its multifarious virtues was writ large on every omnibus. It flared, in connection with a plump lady in full ball costume, from every hoarding.

Of course there were lots of people, even when he was at Cambridge, who knew nothing of the Deodoriser. But it always hung, like a modern sword of Damocles, over poor Gilbert's head. It made him diffident where he should have been at ease; it made him malicious when it would have been to his social advantage to appear kindly. But even at Cambridge he had given unmistakable signs of being a Superior Person. He could repeat, to a nicety, the shibboleth of Superior People. He knew when to let fall a damaging phrase about the poetical fame of Mr. Lewis Morris, and when to insinuate a paradox about the great and only Stendhal. In art, he generally spoke of Velasquez and Degas; in music, only the tetralogies at Bayreuth were worth discussion.

Mr. Mandell was a pessimist. That was what attracted me first, for at seventeen a girl is always impressed by any cynical man of the world who will notice her. And Gilbert Mandell noticed me a good deal. He said I was 'suggestive'—whatever that meant—and that my mind was 'receptive.' And then he began to lend me books by Mr. Walter Pater, which I remember perplexed me very much. He also sent me George Meredith's novels; and there was even a volume of Schopenhauer, I remember, which I used to pretend I had read.

In appearance he was a middle−sized man of thirty−four, with rather pink cheeks, and a slightly bald forehead. His hands were fleshy and white, and had exquisitely pared and polished nails. A manicure usually attended to his hands. He always had the newest scandal; and sometimes, when he was going to say something specially malicious, he hesitated a little in his speech, not from any false shame, but because he was so delighted with what he was going to say. For the rest, he was always beautifully dressed, and generally affected fashions which were coming in. He had two secret ambitions: to dine with a duchess, and to write an article in the *Contemporary Review* .

Looking back at it now, it strikes me that Gilbert Mandell had quaint notions about amusing a young girl. He used to take us for long afternoons at the South Kensington Museum, where we gazed at Persian tiles, and Japanese ivories, and illuminated missals until my eyes ached, and Christina roundly declared she wouldn't stay another minute. Then Gilbert would look at us from under his drooping eyelids with a surprised little stare. He was never tired of art. And how Christina was bored! She came from a stern sense of duty, and because, as she frankly said, the 'thing wouldn't do.' Poor Christina, she was destined to see many such as Mr. Gilbert Mandell come and go. Other days it would be the National Gallery—he never went inside modern exhibitions of pictures in London—where I learnt a good deal about Velasquez and Holbein and Franz Hals. It is from that period that my suspicion dates that father does not know how to paint pictures.

He came to our house a good deal. Father laughed at his clothes and his manners, but said he was a 'sharp fellow'; while mother was amused with his little stories about smart society, into which, by great assiduity, he had managed to effect a sort of entrance. In Mayfair they knew nothing of the Deodoriser. Mandell senior lived in a mansion in Surrey, where he cultivated orchids and pineapples, and the world knew nothing of him. The son, on the other hand, had charming rooms in St. James's, where he gave frequent tea−parties, which were sparsely attended by a handful of modish women, interlarded with thin, youngish−old men, who spent their lives criticising the critics, and whose claim to immortality lay in a memoir of Lamb or Coleridge. Somehow or other, these parties were not hilarious. The elements did not mix, and Mr. Mandell was a somewhat flurried, nervous host. The day that an ambassadress came to tea his distraction was almost painful. Gilbert Mandell was an example of that extremely modern mixture, a man of fashion and a critic; indeed, his respect for smart women was only equalled by his adoration for the log−rollers of the *Saturday Review*.

I have never made out to this day why he noticed me. Christina says he must have had a depraved taste for school−girls, or else he thought by taking the raw material of a woman, so to speak, he might fashion a companion to his taste. He tried hard to cultivate my mind. He was always writing to me. That was another odd

thing about Gilbert Mandell. An ordinary young man looks upon pens and paper with deep−rooted suspicion and distrust. I have had more than one flirtation carried on solely by telegram. But Mr. Mandell was always writing me long epistles, very carefully worded, and in a semi−literary style.

I remember I was very proud of those letters. They flattered me in a young girl's most vulnerable point; they implied that my opinion was worth having. I don't know whether it was that, or his pronounced pessimism, which attracted me most. He was also fond of implying—as he pointed out, with a white hand, some masterpiece of the Florentine school, or sat murmuring paradoxes over the tea−table—that there were places and things which we should see, in the future, together.

'There is a little town in Italy—Orvieto,' he said, one afternoon, when Christina and I had been listening to a disquisition on the Renaissance, 'where I must take you one day, Marguerite. You must see the façade of the cathedral. Orvieto is an education in art.'

It long remained vague. But one day—it was a very wet day, I remember, and we were coming back in a hansom from the National Gallery—he alluded in a roundabout sort of way to an organ he was pleased to call his heart. Then it struck me all at once that it was impossible. It was not the Deodoriser that I minded. I think it was the pinkness of his nails and a certain complaisant way which he had of regarding me which irritated me when it came to a question of a life−long interview.

I suppose I must have said 'No,' and possibly with some fervour. Smiling vaguely, he took my hand. He evidently did not believe me.

'I won't hurry you, dear child,' he said, as he left me on my own doorstep. 'You will think it over—you will be able to make up your mind by−and−by.'

But I never made up my mind that I wanted to marry Mr. Mandell.

Not long after he came to say that he was going abroad. At first he wrote pretty often, and, as usual, his letters were semi−literary, though to be sure the 'burning question' was discussed from various points of view. But, to my relief, the letters got more and more literary as time went on, and finally they stopped altogether.

CHAPTER II

PERHAPS it was by way of contrast to the Superior Person that I appreciated Tony Lambert so much—for a time. He was the most naïve individual I have ever known; indeed, his naïveté quite disarmed me. And, in a breezy, boyish way he was diverting. To be sure, he did not expect me to read Schopenhauer, of whose existence I imagine he was but dimly aware, nor did he ask me to spend afternoons at the National Gallery. Kempton Park and the Gaiety Theatre were more to his taste, and while this sportive affair lasted the house had a rollicking, youthful atmosphere which was the result of something more subtle than Tony's ringing laugh, and Tony's skirmishing fox terriers, who invariably accompanied their master in his many visits.

We neither of us took each other seriously, and that added a certain charm to the thing. Everybody at home liked Tony, except, I think, Christina, who said she couldn't understand his slang, and that he made a draught in the drawing−room, he was so boisterous and restless. The family saw a good deal of him in those days, for he was being painted in parade dress, and he used to stay to lunch so as to be able to pose again in the afternoon.

I remember the first time he came in with father, pink with mortification at being seen in his uniform in the daytime out of barracks. Whence comes, I wonder, the love of mufti so deeply implanted in the breast of the British officer? Tony, fortunately, learnt to forget his early sense of discomfiture, and spent many merry half−hours in our little study when he had done sitting, singing soldiers' songs with a fearful and wonderful accompaniment of his own invention, while the dogs chased each other, barking joyously, over the sofas and chairs. How he used to light up the dim little twilight room with his scarlet bravery and his irrepressible spirits!

Mr. Anthony Lamnbert was the eldest son of Norfolk People. One day or other he would come into possession of a fine old house, some excellent shooting, and three thousand a year—an income by no means large enough to keep up the Towers. Therefore it was an understood thing, especially by Lady Marion, his mamma, that Tony, when he married, was to marry money. In the meantime Tony was to be painted, first to adorn the next exhibition at Burlington House, and afterwards the collection of family portraits at the Towers. So that in this way the boy, in spite of Lady Marion's precautions, came directly under the influence of a most undesirable young person, to wit, myself.

Tony was a lieutenant in a line regiment, and I fear his high spirits made him have occasional differences of opinion with his colonel. In appearance he was distinctly good to look at. He had a clean, pink skin, twinkling blue eyes, and hair so flaxen that it was almost silver. His shoulders were broad and square, he had a delightful laugh, and he was just three−and−twenty. And, without being in the least conceited, Tony was thoroughly pleased with himself, his regiment, and his belongings. He had, in a supreme degree, the magnetism which comes of perfect health, good spirits, and complete self−satisfaction.

What an infectious thing is happiness, and what a golden age is three−and−twenty! With what vigour did Tony play lawn−tennis, how excited he got over races and cricket matches, how hot he became when he danced, what portentous suppers he could eat! ... The very sound of his voice in the hall—a voice with raised inflections, for the ends of Tony's sentences always finished joyously—roused one up on the foggiest and dreariest of days.

To go for a walk in the park or along Piccadilly with Tony Lambert was a whole education in itself in the ways of young men: his joy was so manifest when a pretty face, a showy figure, or even a well−cut gown appeared in sight. He had the omnivorous glance which takes in every detail, and which is the prerogative of men who spend most of their leisure in sport. Seldom will you find a writer, a lawyer, or a scientist with the faculty of observation as highly cultivated as in the most brainless individual used to the rod and the gun.

Tony, by−the−bye, was one of the young men with whom I corresponded by electric telegraph. As a matter of fact, I do not possess a scrap of his handwriting. Whether he was doubtful of his prowess in grammar and spelling, or whether it was a bit of worldly wisdom beyond his years, will remain for ever a mystery, but Christina got quite tired of those agitated pulls of the bell which announced the telegraph boy, while at this period orange−coloured envelopes were served up to me at every hour of the day.

There was nothing he didn't offer us, from invitations to military balls, to bags of American candy. To me especially he offered a great many photographs of himself, in various degrees of military splendour, which gave my room, for the time being, quite a spirited and martial air. Of course this didn't last long, for my photograph frames and space to put them are limited, whereas my friends are many, and in the course of years one frame

contains many 'counterfeit presentments.' Christina says that, if I have a heart, it must be like my photograph frames....

From what I could gather, Mr. Lambert was never in love with fewer than three ladies at a time. He was like one of the modern monster shopkeepers, a sort of universal admirer of the fairer sex. And yet one never blamed him for it, perhaps because he was so perfectly candid in his enthusiasms. As far as I could make out, the fair with whom I shared his affections at this time were his Major's wife—a person with fluffy hair, an exaggerated figure, and a well−worn smile—and an individual whose acquaintance, it appeared, he had not yet succeeded in making, but who occupied a distinguished position in the second row of the Gaiety chorus. It was always amusing to get Tony on to the subject of his loves. The 'little friends' that he 'played with' seemed to have been of all ages and sizes, and his amorous difficulties appeared to have been numerous. Once already had his family offered a substantial sum to a young lady in the Camberwell Road as a substitute for Tony's hand; but that, as he acknowledged with a pink and rueful countenance, had been in 'his gay and giddy youth.' Having now arrived at the discreet age of three−and−twenty, he was resolved to mend his ways. And to begin well, he proceeded, in his airy and irresponsible way, to imagine that he cared about me.

I wonder what Lady Marion would have said of the three months that followed?

Tony took his 'long leave' on January 1st, and it was at this time, being a good deal in London, that he sat for his portrait. For the next two months Christina and I were never sure when he would not burst into our den with his joyous laugh and a couple of excited dogs wagging delighted tails, with some project of rushing us off somewhere or other in search of amusement. What would Lady Marion have said to all this, I wonder; and of those many accidental meetings in Bond Street, when we used to drop in at the minor exhibitions, and come out sublimely unconscious of whether we had been looking at Van Beers or Gustave Doré? Or of the pompous dances in Queen's Gate to which mother allowed me to take the boy, and where he met, I believe for the first time in his life, the youth and loveliness of South Kensington? Tony had met 'county' girls and 'garrison' girls and Gaiety girls, but I don't think he had ever before danced with a London middle−class damsel. Lady Marion, I verily believe, would have preferred the young person in the Camberwell Road.

But our last dance was not to be in Queen's Gate. The regiment was ordered to the Curragh, and Tony was in despair. Nothing would do but we must come to the regiment's farewell ball at Mulchester, and it was there, in the long, low rooms of the Officers' Mess, against a background of flags and military trophies, that I saw Tony's blonde head for the last time.... The pretty scene comes back to me now—the glare of scarlet coats among the flesh−tones of the women; the delicate−tinted tulle dresses against a bank of pink azaleas and palms; the blue uniforms of the Gunners and the green of the Rifles striking a sombre note in the gay chord of colour; the intimate sadness of those valse refrains which the band of the regiment played; and over all that acute atmosphere of mixed pain and pleasure which is associated—when one is eighteen—with the words 'for the last time.'

It was my first soldiers' ball. How well I remember the whole atmosphere of that night: the Colonel, smiling, urbane, and slightly indifferent; the Colonel's wife, a lady with protruding teeth and neatly−parted hair, who was said to be wealthy; the eager young faces of the junior subalterns as they surrounded some showy beauty; the heavy−jawed Captain to whom I was introduced on my entry, and who deserted me at once for a buxom lady with dubious hair and many diamonds.... Oh, those military ladies! How dashing, how much too dashing, they were; what drawn−in waists, what liberal smiles, what suspiciously white shoulders! How pert and off−hand they seemed in public, and how confiding they looked in obscure corners down back passages, where Tony's straw−coloured hair and scarlet coat were to be seen often during that night. Heaven has not been pleased to inflict on me a suspicious disposition, or I fear I should have passed but an indifferently amusing evening. For Mr. Anthony Lambert, with the gay insouciance of youth, had thoughtlessly invited some half−dozen of his 'loves,' and his Major's wife, it appeared, was inordinately jealous.

Some fifteen years ago this lady had been described in a local newspaper as a 'magnificent blonde,' and she had been living up to the epithet ever since. She had all the airs of a beauty, and she seemed to regard Mr. Lambert as her especial property. At ten o'clock I heard her reproaching him for only wanting three dances; at one o'clock she deliberately fetched him out of a balcony where he was saying good−bye to a pretty little girl with red hair.... I don't wonder that Tony looked harassed; the smile of his Major's wife was terrifying. Poor boy! I, at least, had never worried or reproached him, and I think he was proportionately grateful at the last. It was a black night and pouring rain, I remember, when we finally drove away, but I could see that Tony's blue eyes looked

unspeakable things as we whispered a final hurried good−bye at the carriage door.

One morning, a few months later, we read in the paper that a marriage had been arranged, and would take place immediately, between Mr. Anthony Lambert of the Blankshire Regiment, eldest son of Mr. and Lady Marion Lambert of the Towers, Sleepington, Norfolk, and Katherine, eldest daughter of Patrick O'Flaherty, Esq., of Dublin. He had been taken seriously by a garrison beauty a dozen years older than himself. Although they have already three children, I hear that Lady Marion refuses to see her enterprising Irish daughter− in−law, and now the regiment is in India. Poor Tony! He was born, it would appear, to be the sport of the less amiable members of our sex. His Major's wife is, of course, with the regiment, and people say that Mrs. Anthony Lambert is primitively jealous. A ridiculous song that he used to strum always occurs to me when I think of him, for the refrain

Woman, lovely woman! epitomises the tragi−comedy of his blameless little life.

CHAPTER III

IT is with an uneasy conscience that I recall the brief episode of Mr. Hanbury Price. There used to be a derisive ring in Christina's voice when she alluded to Mr. Price as my 'new young man.' She knew well enough that he could not, by the wildest stretch of imagination, be called young. Neither, to be sure, was he in the sere and yellow leaf. No, he was worse than old; he was middle−aged. Middle−aged in ideas rather than in person, for he affected a jauntiness of attire, which he was able to carry off to a certain extent, being rather big, with a high colour, and having hair still untouched with grey. He also liked to be thought what in early Victorian novels would have been called 'an agreeable rattle'; but then half of Mr. Price's conversation consisted of projects and invitations which somehow never came off. It was wonderful what a reputation for festive hospitality Mr. Price had—among people who didn't know him well.

One of his least agreeable idiosyncrasies was his curious distrust of everybody. He was always in dread of being, as he would have expressed it, 'done.' So suspicious, indeed, was he, that he even suspected himself. His *coups* on the Stock Exchange, the bouquet he had offered over−night, the very wine he drank, suggested the after−thought that he had made a fool of himself—that it was possible he might not yet get the desired return for his money. His small red−lidded eyes, of a watery blue, continually betrayed this recurring idea, while his loosely−hung jaw and mouth gave signs of a loquacious temperament, which his frequent and abrupt laugh did not succeed in making genial.

Though he did not mention it in polite society, Mr. Hanbury Price hailed from Tulse Hill. In that eminently respectable suburb he had first seen the light, and in the same stucco mansion there still resided his mother and a bevy of plain unmarried sisters, to whom he used to journey down to partake of early dinner on Sundays. 'Never mention Tulse Hill to smart people,' he confided to me one day with one of his sudden and unmirthful laughs; 'if I do, they want to know if it's in Yorkshire.'

He was curiously anxious to be voted popular—at least among the right sort of people—and was fond of alluding, in an airy way, to the parties he had given or intended to give; but as he had an inherent dislike to laying out half−a−crown on anything which was not strictly necessary, Mr. Price must have undergone untold tortures—if, indeed, these festivities ever really came off—in his efforts to be classed among the bachelors who entertain. Of course, it was only in time that I became aware of all these amiable little peculiarities, for at first sight Mir. Price gave one the impression of being a good−natured, talkative, and gregarious member of society, with an inclination for giving little dinners and theatre parties.

We met him first on a Saturday−to−Monday on the river, at the house of a vulgar little woman whose portrait father was painting. Mrs. Bodley−Gallard was loud in his praises; she had, it transpired, only known Mr. Hanbury Price a fortnight. Our hostess was one of those over−officious people who say things that make one's blood run cold. 'Now, my dear Miss Wynman,' she whispered to me on Sunday night after dinner, 'please be nice to the poor young man.' Mrs. Bodley−Gallard belonged to the class of person who calls everybody a 'young man' who still is unmarried, even though he be on the wrong side of fifty. 'I assure you he is devoted—quite devoted. Now promise me you'll think about it!' A speech which had the effect of making me extremely rude to Mr. Price when he joined me after dinner, and it was only when he had seen us into our cab at Paddington station next morning that I mentioned, after he had made repeated enquiries on the subject, that we were generally at home at five o'clock.

He was not long in coming, and when he appeared he was profuse in his invitations. Would we do a theatre? would we dine with him? He was thinking of taking a house on the river for August; he hoped that mother would bring us down to stay with him.

The least we could do was to accept his offer for the play. We were to dine somewhere first, and the party was arranged for the following Tuesday. But when Tuesday arrived, there was a post−card from Mr. Price to say that the proposed festivity was postponed, and, as I afterwards found out, because he had been vainly soliciting free admissions for the Thalia Theatre from a young man whom he knew, who played the footman in the first piece. Then, when the night at last arrived, we found we were to partake of a three−and−sixpenny *table d'hôte* dinner, with a maddening accompaniment of glees; and this from a man who talked continually of the Amphitryon and the Bachelors' Club. That damped my spirits to begin with. Of course, when one is under twenty, one does not care much for the niceties of cooking and the brand of the champagne; but it is lowering to one's dignity, in the

eyes of one's family, to be asked to dine at *table d'hôte* with travelling Yankees and gaping provincials. But it was nothing to what followed.

We were a party of five—mother and I, and a couple of men beside our host. When we were at last landed inside the doors of the Thalia, we found that Mr. Hanbury Price had secured seats for his party in the fourth row of the dress circle. The two other men exchanged amused and surprised glances; mother and I declared we much preferred the dress circle to a box or stalls; and Mr. Price, who began to dimly discern that for once his economy was ill−timed, spent half his evening in the lobby, having, as I shrewdly suspect, a prolonged altercation with the attendant on the subject of a charge of sixpence for each programme.

It grieves me to think what we must have cost Mr. Hanbury Price in hansoms, for our house, as he more than once explained, is inconveniently situated for omnibuses. Whether he really imagined himself to be in love I have never been able to decide, but he was obviously haunted by dreadful forebodings as to the expense of a young lady with my tastes and proclivities. He used to lecture me about taking care of my gowns, and suggested that I was recklessly extravagant in the matter of feather boas and shoes.... One day he tried to persuade me to attend the cookery classes at South Kensington; and another evening, when he was unusually sentimental, he asked me if I didn't like the neighbourhood of Notting Hill? All this contributed to Christina's joy, for Mr. Price's struggles between economy and the tender passion were really diverting to behold.

I think, perhaps, when I look back at the whole affair dispassionately, that it was the box of chocolates that ended Mr. Hanbury Price's dream. One afternoon, when he had been particularly confidential, he asked me, at parting, if I cared for sweets. The next day there arrived from the Civil Service Stores a small cardboard box of second−rate chocolate creams, addressed to me—to me, who had had qualms of conscience that he might have telegraphed to Paris for some elaborate offering from the Boulevard des Italiens. Telegraphed, indeed! Hanbury Price was not the man to waste his money in telegrams, when a letter, or, better still, a halfpenny postcard, would answer the same purpose. I have quite a collection of postcards in his handwriting, for he wrote often on every sort of matter, and he chiefly used the cheapest means of communication. There is the mass of postcards, for instance, which relates to the famous dinner at the Crystal Palace, which finally ended the affair.

We tried hard to get out of it, Christina and I, but it was of no avail, and in the end we had to go. Mrs. Bodley−Gallard was to be the chaperon, and there were to be one or two other men. I like to go over the events of that day, for they are unique in my history.

Five o'clock was the hour of meeting at Victoria Station. It was high midsummer, and bitterly cold and damp. Arrived at the station, we found that Mr. Price had already taken second−class tickets for the whole party, but that he was not above recouping himself from our purses for this outlay. 'Just as jolly second−class,' declared our host, 'if you're a party, don't you know;' though he laughed awkwardly when he found that a couple of damp, plush−clad babies, with their respective mammas, were also to journey down with us to Sydenham. Of course we arrived too early, and wandered about on the interminable and dubious boards of the Palace among pieces of greasy paper—the remnants of recent feasts—until seven o'clock.

But dinner came at last—with a lengthy harangue as to which table Mr. Price had selected, an interview with the manager, and some sour Sauterne−cup. Only one young man had turned up (the other two had probably dined with Mr. Price before), and he chaffed our host into ordering a beverage more suitable to the damp night; but even that failed to revive the flagging spirits of the party. Mournful pauses fell, and Hanbury Price's eye travelled anxiously after the champagne bottle as it went its way round the table. Even Mrs. Bodley−Gallard could not pretend that she was enjoying herself. And then, with the phenomenally hard peaches and dried figs, came the final blow. There were to be fireworks, but our host had evidently no intention of offering us covered seats from which to view them. 'One of you young ladies will come with me in the grounds,' urged the ever−economical Hanbury, casting a sentimental and meaning glance in my direction. 'I'm afraid I've caught cold already,' I said with decision. And then Christina, with true nobility, came to my rescue, in answer to my appealing nudge: 'I will, if you like,' she said, quickly; 'Peggy can't wander about in the dark and the cold tonight. She's nearly got bronchitis as it is; the child must stay indoors.'

The only young man at once secured seats for the chaperon and myself, and Mr. Hanbury Price spent what he may have intended to be the eventful night of his life wandering about the grounds, under a dripping umbrella, with my sister. Christina's account of the evening is extremely diverting. I shall always be grateful to her for that night. Whatever differences may arise between us in after years, I shall never forget from what an awkward

interview Christina saved me.

And he, for his part, had a chastened air in the railway−carriage coming home.

We left town very soon after, and when I meet Mr. Hanbury Price on rare occasions in the Park, or at some crowded party, I get ready my sweetest and most deceitful smile. But Mr. Hanbury Price invariably looks the other way.

CHAPTER IV

THE gleam of velvety grass through a grey cloister, a bare oaken staircase, leading to a low room lined with books; a cushioned window seat, a summer night, and the distant sound of someone playing the violin: hese are the things that come back to me whenever anyone pronounces the name of Frank Harding.

It was at Oxford, at Commemoration, that I saw him first. He was lying on his back on the grass in one of those small, meagre gardens in the Parks which make the joy of Oxford dons and their wives, and their troops of babies. As a matter of fact, he was being photographed—we were all being photographed—as is the pleasing custom during Commemoration week. We had gone to pay a call on the Talford Browns—Talford Brown is the most eminent authority on the Phoenician language in Oxford—and we had been at once taken into the garden, where tea and the photographer's camera awaited us. There we found the usual Oxford group: the lady with smooth hair and clinging gown, one or two vague, bearded Fellows or tutors, the girl in a pince−nez and badly−made boots, a couple of small boys, two babies, three dogs, and—Frank. Flat on his back, as I said before; his six foot one of length arrayed in virgin flannels and a Trinity College blazer.

Frank Harding was one of those exceptional beings, an undergraduate on easy—nay, even familiar—terms with dons. The wives of these gentlemen were very tolerant of Frank—indeed, if it were given to a don's wife to be capable of a flirtation, I am pretty sure they would have flirted with him. As it was, he strolled in and out of those villas in Norham Gardens very much as he liked, played with the babies, teased the dogs, and helped the ladies of the house in their perennial little difficulties with the Greek syntax. In spite of his eccentricities and those daring caricatures of the dons of his which regularly appeared in Shrimpton's window, the authorities all liked Frank, and everybody was ready to bet—if one can picture such a transaction taking place in a college common−room—that Frank would take a First.

We stayed to dinner at the Talford Browns, and we were much struck with the somewhat affected simplicity of the Oxford interior. There was a long table, sparsely decorated with attenuated glass flower−holders, in each of which were placed three Iceland poppies. Mrs. Talford Brown, who had the reputation of being a wit, and was understood to say scathing things about the undergraduates, herself carved the cold mutton which formed the principal dish at dinner. Professor Talford Brown drank toast−and−water. We had a salad, with a trifle too much vinegar, and we talked a good deal of the higher education of women, and of the recent finals for honours which had just come off. Christina sat next to the Professor, and I could see that our host and hostess were as much taken with her as it is possible for Oxford people to be with a mere Londoner; and this was an inexpressible relief to me, for every minute I felt that I was falling lower in their regard. An irresistible impulse seized me to say frivolous things, to giggle in an imbecile manner, and to ask Mrs. Talford Brown if she had ever been to the Empire? Do what I may in the after years, I know that I shall ever be regarded with contempt in those Oxford circles in which 'plain living and high thinking' obtain. But Frank Harding, who sat next to me, by no means shared this opinion. To begin with, we recollected that we were, so to speak, old friends. We remembered that it had taken two nurses and a governess to make peace between us some fifteen years ago, when we had met at a children's party and found no favour in each other's eyes. The Hardings, indeed, were connections of my mother's, so that we had seen Frank now and then up to the trying age of eight; but after that they had gone to live in the country, and we had lost sight of them for years. But on the strength of my having pulled his hair some dozen years ago, Frank, in his unconventional and airy way, insisted on calling us 'Christina' and 'Peggy.'

After dinner, Mrs. Talford Brown went up to put the twins to bed—nothing was ever allowed to interfere with this domestic rite— and then we all sat in the ugly little square garden, and watched a great yellow moon travel slowly up the sky. And Frank Harding talked. He was as far removed from the ordinary football−playing young man as it is possible to be. To begin with, his father was a poet—one of our finest latter−day lyrists—and it was from him that he inherited all his sympathy, his feminine intuitions, and his charmingly impracticable theories. At present, of course, he was only a clever, somewhat lanky boy; but his beautiful grey eyes made him almost handsome, and his perfectly easy manners were curiously attractive. He had the wildest ideas, and was the sort of man who might found a new religion, commit a murder, devote a lifetime to the East End, or take away his neighbour's wife and write a book to prove that his action was justified. Some years have passed since then, but I shall never be astonished to hear anything of Frank Harding, except that he had gone into the City and was paying

taxes in Bayswater.

We saw a great deal of Frank in the days that followed. To enjoy Commemoration, one must be twenty and never have stayed in Oxford before. It was astonishing how much we managed to get into that week, and how much of Frank's society we had.... There were lazy mornings, punting on the Cherwell, and picnics to Godstow and Sanford Lasher, the ball at Christ Church, and the garden−parties in the colleges, for which we put on our best frocks, and stared at the celebrities, and then hurried home to a cosy tea in our rooms, where a dozen undergraduates fought decorously for the honour of handing the tea−cups. And then the endless strawberries, the valses that were quarrelled for, the unstinted devotion of the boys....

I am old−fashioned enough to like a young man to be in love. Even if his passion burns for someone else, one likes to see it, and it is still more interesting when the young man expends his ardour on oneself. So Frank fell in love with me, and I liked it.... I remember it all as if it were yesterday.

There is the sad−coloured June day—a harmony in soft greys and greens—when we went to pick fritillaries in Mesopotamia. It was the day after Commemoration was over, and the narrow, willow−fringed river was de−serted. Afar off we could see the grey spires and towers of the University against the wide, white sky, while across the fat, buttercup−gilded meadows came the mellow, distant sound of Oxford bells. As Frank pushed the punt lazily up stream, we seemed wrapped in a mysterious green silence. We left the punt where the old chain ferry crosses the Cherwell, and plunged into the long new grass. I carried a basket for the fritillaries, and Frank had brought an empty soda−water bottle; a proceeding which puzzled me immensely, until I found that all among the abundant grass studded with June flowers there leapt and danced hundreds of tiny, nimble, gay−hearted frogs, only lately emerged from the juvenile or tadpole state. 'They are **so** like undergraduates!' I cried, kneeling in the long grass and stretching depredatory fingers here and there, while Frank pretended to be offended, and declared I shouldn't put any of my frogs into his soda−water bottle.... But in the end we compromised, and Frank was set to gather the queer, spotted, purplish−brown fritillaries, whilst I crammed the leaping little reptiles into our bottle.... And so the June afternoon slipped by, until the clang of evening bells warned us it was time to turn homewards....

The next morning, when the train which conveyed us back to town steamed out of the station, the two things I carried away with me as a remembrance of my first Commemoration were a lapful of La France roses and the sight of a pair of wistful grey eyes.

Frank had got permission to stay in Oxford during a part of the vacation and work, but his work took a form which would scarcely have met with the entire approval of his tutor, seeing that he was reading for a First in classics. One night, a few days after, as Christina and I were dressing for an evening party, I was handed a letter in a strange handwriting. It contained a poem, and the poem was about myself! After Tony's telegrams and Hanbury Price's post−cards it seemed idyllic to have a charming, clever young man writing poems about—me! I waved the missive triumphantly under Christina's nose, and made myself, as she remarked, odious for the rest of the evening.

'He says I am like the morning star shining above the mists of a murky city, and that the birds sing sweeter at my foot−fall, and skim like Hope across life's—'

'Life's fiddlestick!' said Christina. 'Pass those hot tongs. How you can encourage boys to write you such rubbish I can't conceive. And we're an hour late as it is. Get on your cloak, Peggy, and for Heaven's sake throw that drivel into the fire.'

But I naturally did nothing of the kind, and when Frank appeared at our house a week later, somewhat sad of mien and looking rather thin, I did my best to cheer him up, though we neither of us said a word about the poem. He stayed until it was time to catch the last train to Oxford, and after that he was always appearing at unexpected moments. He used to write me odd little abrupt notes, asking if I cared to see him? What could I say? It is awkward to tell people that you don't wish to see them. Besides—besides, I did want to....

It was only when it came to the stern realities of life that I took Christina's point of view, and saw what an impossible thing it was.... I remember so well the day it was finally decided—a cold, drizzling November afternoon. He had rushed up from the country, where he was living now that he had left Oxford, and had been shown into the long amber−and−white drawing−room, where they had forgotten to light a fire, so that the cold winter twilight wrapped us round as we sat. Frank had taken a First, and there was some idea of his getting a Fellowship. But he did not wish to stop in Oxford, or, indeed, in England. The imperial destinies of the English race was one of his hobbies, and he asked me to give up London and go to North−Western Canada, where he

wanted to start a new community. Visions of Margaret Fuller and the 'Blithedale Romance,' of Laurence Oliphant and his self−sacrificing bride, were evoked to tempt me. But I knew—I still had sense enough to know−that it was not for me....

The dreary November day had closed in before Frank rose to go. And long after he had gone I sat on in the cold dark room. One by one the lamps twinkled out all up the street, and a dreary piano−organ came and played some threadbare airs from a comic opera.... Christina was very nice to me when she found me sitting alone in the cold and the dark, for I think she knew I had been crying....

Frank Harding has always refused to see me since that day. He writes sometimes; the last time I heard from him he was in South Africa, and I gathered from his letter that he considered the amalgamation, by marriage, of the Boer race the duty of all English settlers in the Transvaal....

There are times—times when I am a little tired of the egotism and puerile frivolity of London young men, tired of their little quarrels and their little admirations for fashionable divinities—when I would give worlds to see Frank stretched in my deck−chair, his grey eyes gazing into futurity, and propounding even the most amazing of his curious social schemes.

And he—does he ever think of those old Oxford days, days full of cool green shadows and quick with emotion, over yonder in his home under a torrid sky? Probably not—probably not. 'There are no fields of amaranth on this side of the grave' some poet has wisely written; 'There is no name, with whatever emphasis of passionate love repeated, of which the echo is not faint at last.'

CHAPTER V

HE was curiously pretty, incredibly malicious, and indisputably 'smart,' with a nice house in Sloane Street, where he entertained a great deal, and a little following of young gentlemen who copied his neckties and buttonholes, and whom one sometimes saw giggling together in corners, and calling each other by pet names. When one of them wanted to give Val Redmond a birthday present—in that set the young men constantly make each other little presents—he chose a silver vinaigrette, which Val took out with him to dinner all that season. And yet the boy was very far from being a fool. If he had lived in less degenerate days, and had been obliged to work for his living, he might have made a name for himself. But as it was, he only gave amusing parties; while one was haunted by misgivings if one had to leave his drawing−room early—with one's reputation behind.

When he gave dinners and Sunday lunches at his house in Sloane Street, his aunt, Lady Marchmont, presided. To have had only men's parties would not have suited Val. He liked the society of women, and particularly of old women; but then his elderly female friends were invariably clever, and some had had, in addition, an almost historical past. '**Dear** Julia Calverly,' he would say of the Dowager Countess—he had the most astounding way of talking of his elderly dames—'I **love** that woman. It is as good as reading a scandalous "Mémoire pour servir" to talk to her.'

'Julia is very *fin de siècle*,' admitted a pasty−looking youth of nineteen.

'Oh, my dear! ... End of the last century, you mean,' smirked Val.

One of the most amusing things about Mr. Valentine Redmond was his imperturbable coolness. Though hardly two−and−twenty, he had none of the tremors, the diffidences of youth. I have seen him talk to an archbishop or a foreign potentate with the same ease with which he would tackle an undergraduate or take a young lady down to supper. Not that you would ever have caught Val Redmond wasting his acidulous sweetness on a young girl. Women under thirty seldom went to his house.

One of his least pleasing characteristics was a tendency to flout and pout. He was constantly having little quarrels with his intimate friends. His intimate friendships lasted, on an average, exactly six weeks. In other houses where they talk scandal it is usually about acquaintances, but in Val's drawing−room you generally heard his bosom friends deprived of their reputations. This is a trait which makes society feel uneasy, and to it one may perhaps attribute the brief duration of Val's friendships. Ours, for instance, though it was never perfervid, lasted but a brief two months.

The Duchess of Birmingham brought him to our house. She was going to have her portrait painted, and Val was brought along to help to decide on her costume. He knew a great deal about clothes; his taste was charming, his house as pretty as a house need be. Her Grace was a stout little person from Philadelphia, who was at vast pains to acquire an English manner. Her chief desire, as far as I could make out, was to be painted in a coronet. But Mr. Redmond, with his head on one side and his eyes half shut, tabooed the idea of a diadem. He was rather in favour of sables, of dark velvets, of heavy brocades. Father, I remember, was furious when he had gone. 'Does the young puppy think he knows more about it than I do? Confound his impudence—why, I have been painting portraits for twenty years.'

And yet, after all, it was Valentine's costume which was chosen, and the Duchess brought him again more than once to see the picture as it progressed. Father always liked to have me in the studio when he was painting, so that every time he appeared we made a little more of each other's acquaintance. I think I was rather rude to him than otherwise, but he was the sort of person who disliked gush—in women. Gushing was too much the prerogative of his 'boys,' who usually, by−the−bye, were heard addressing each other as 'my dear.'

Sitting on the oaken staircase of the studio, talking to Val while the Duchess's portrait went on below, I learnt a number of surprising things about London society. He told me of all the houses where a young man might permit himself to be seen, where it would be to his advantage to do so, and where it would be fatal, absolutely fatal, for him to appear. 'I had the imprudence to lunch with the Patterson−Tayleurs, those new people in Prince's Gate; and though, of course, a lunch doesn't count the same as a dinner, I assure you it was weeks before I heard the last of it. A young man can't be too careful where he goes,' Val confided to me one day with a rueful air. He had found me filling the bowls and vases with roses, and had insisted on being allowed to help. It was one of his talents, that

of arranging flowers. He was sitting on the hall table, swinging his feet, and holding his head on one side as he twitched an amethyst−coloured orchid in front of the light. 'There is the question of dancing, too. Ah, not **that**,' screamed Mr. Redmond in his rather shrill voice, as he plucked a huge poppy out of my hand; 'you can't **possibly** put that in blue and white; Nankin is only for roses! What was I saying? Oh yes, about balls. Isn't it absurd of people to expect one to dance everywhere? ... Some of us were at Mrs. Vandeleur's ball the other night—you know the woman I mean, with a quantity of drab daughters?—and she actually had the effrontery to seize me by the elbow and ask me why I wasn't dancing the polka? As if anyone ever did anything but sup at the Vandeleurs! and as if she didn't know perfectly well that one only dances at the houses where one dines! I resisted for a long time, and then she had the shocking taste to remind me that she had seen me leading the cotillon at the Duchess's with Lady Susan, when she knows that Lady Susan is one of the most amusing persons in London. She is the *fin−de−siècle* old maid.'

I shall never forget our first dinner at his house in Sloane Street. It was the oddest party. There was something strange and unusual not only about the guests, but the very dishes and the flowers. The dining−room, painted and decorated like that of a Roman villa, contained nothing but the table and one or two giant palms in pots of old faïence. The tablecloth was nearly covered with a mass of pink rose−leaves, with here and there a spray of roses thrown carelessly on to this pink carpet. A huge lamp of Oriental workmanship, hung by gold chains, lighted up the mass; of rose colour, and there were none of the usual fripperies of a lady's table. But perhaps what struck one most on glancing round the room was the fact that all the men were boys, though they appeared prematurely old, and that all the ladies were elderly, though they, to be sure, looked unnaturally young.

'The glories of the past,' simpered the pale, clean−shaven youth who had taken me in, surveying the ladies with unabashed effrontery. 'It reminds one of the ruins of the Acropolis, don't you know.'

My neighbour got very confidential as the dinner progressed. He gazed at me critically with tired eyes, under lids which drooped a little at the corners.

'Do you know our host well? No? A pity he's so shockingly malicious. Gives charming dinners—as far as the people go—but I don't think much of his cook, do you? Oh no, I've only known him a fortnight; he insisted on being introduced to me at the Vandeleurs' ball, and I thought, as he is a great friend of one of my dearest friends—Tommy Singleton, you know—that he would be sure to be nice.... And I really do think he's charming. He would take no denial; I've dined here already three times.... We go everywhere together. Do you see that weird old person opposite? She says such quite too deliciously amusing things; she is a great friend of the Prince of Wales's. Tommy Singleton seems in great form to−night. He is so very charming! I must introduce you to him, though I'm afraid, my dear Miss Wynman, that you won't get on very well. Tommy is so dreadfully frightened of *débutantes*. Don't you think dear Lady Rougemont's new *toupée* is quite delicious? I do. But then I **adore** the meretricious and the artificial. That is Miss Van Hoyt, the American heiress; she always wears that miniature of an old gentleman with a hook nose and powdered hair. She says it's her grandfather; but Tommy Singleton declares—and he had it from the Duchess—that Miss Van Hoyt's grandfather kept a small cheesemonger's shop in Ninth Avenue. How quite too weird Lady Susan looks; but then she always has her gowns made from remnants bought at the summer sales. She must have said something dreadfully improper to Val, he is laughing so; look, he has got quite pink! I wonder what it is? I shall ask her directly; she loves to have the whole table listen to her stories—though really her stories are *d'un raide*! Lady Susan, you know, is not afraid of *le mot qui choque*.'

And, of a truth, the ladies at Mr. Redmond's dinner−table denied themselves nothing in the way of speech. Nor, when the cigarettes were handed round, did they show the usual feminine reluctance to light up; though this may have been a protest on their part against the effeminacy of the age, for it was a remarkable fact at Mr. Valentine Redmond's parties that, though the elderly ladies invariably smoked, none of the young gentlemen indulged in nicotine.

When the men rejoined us in the drawing−room, I found myself, to my surprise, the centre of a small group of attentive youths. One sat on a footstool at my feet, another hung over the back of the sofa, while a third reclined among the cushions at my elbow. And they all asked if they might come and call. Afterwards I heard that Mr. Redmond had passed the word that I was 'charming,' a dictum which they always accepted without questioning. Val and his friends invariably worshipped in a little crowd.

After that night Mr. Valentine Redmond was pleased to indulge in one of his wild enthusiasms. He brought all his boys to see me, one by one, and insisted that they should admire me as much as he did; which was as tiresome

for them, poor things, as for me. My photograph, framed in gold and turquoises, was, for exactly five weeks, a conspicuous object on his drawing−room table; after which, for a fortnight, it stood on a cupboard in a dark corner, and finally, I hear, disappeared altogether—to the limbo where the rest of his departed 'enthusiasms' languish. But I am anticipating the catastrophe. For six weeks, at least, Val and I saw a good deal of each other. At one of our big parties Mr. Redmond and some of his young friends made quite a little sensation when they appeared. They were all clean−shaven, and all had tired eyes, exaggerated buttonholes, and shoes of phenomenal luminosity.

'Gracious heavens!' whispered Christina, when she saw them all file in—they always went about in cabfuls—'What are they? Where did you find them? And what's to be done with them now they're here?' But Valentine Redmond and his friends never wanted amusing. They all had a passion for being introduced to other young men of their own age, and, failing that, they gathered together in corners and smirked over their own little jokes.

The chief amusement of these boys, I soon found out, was to go to music−halls. They spoke of Miss Bessie Bellwood with bated breath; and would hear of no other comedians than Mr. Arthur Roberts and Mr. Albert Chevalier. They had a positive infatuation for acrobats, for those stout, bespangled gentlemen who tie themselves into knots and balance themselves on each other's heads, with a fixed smile, to the accompaniment of a spirited waltz tune. It was Val Redmond's delight to get two or three smart women to dinner, with a corresponding number of boys, and then to take the party on to the Empire or to the Pavilion.

'Why do you like tumblers and topical songs so much?' I asked Val one day, when I had refused, for the fourth time, a pleading invitation to make one of a party to the Tivoli. He shrugged his shoulders and looked rather annoyed.

'Culture is such a bore,' he said; '*on a besoin de s'encanailler quelquefois*.'

This London idyl lasted, I think, nearly two months, and then, as London idyls will, it came to a painless death. Its end was hastened by gossips, and it was killed with a *mot*.

'Val Redmond's ambition was to start a *salon* in Sloane Street, but he has only succeeded, so far, in running a restaurant,' Christina had said on one of her unamiable days.

Someone, of course, told Val.

The rupture left no sense of loss. Though good−looking, clever, and amusing, Val Redmond's personality somehow 'left one cold.' It was an essentially thin nature. Had I ever had occasion to appeal to his help, his sympathy, I fancy I should have had a charming, gushing little note to say that he was going out of town. One had an uneasy feeling that his devotion was only meant for dinner−parties; his little compliments were, like his bonbons, the accompaniments of the box he offered you at the play.

Once a year or so we still go and dine with Val. The swinging lamp, the spreading palms, the wealth of hot−house flowers are always there, but it is the rarest thing to find the same face. Our host renews his friends as often as the bouquets in his buttonhole.

CHAPTER VI

THE provincial young man has never possessed any attractions for me, and it is certain that, if I had not gone up North to stay with Daisy Drysdale, I should never have known so well such a striking specimen of the type as Dr. Styles. He was not a bad fellow, but he was naïvely pleased with himself and his belongings. Your provincial, indeed, is rarely modest; in the limited circle of country−town society a suitable young man is pursued with too much pertinacity and ardour to have any doubts in his own mind as to his personal desirability and manifold charms.

Dr. Styles was a stoutish person of thirty−two, with nondescript features and a slow, portentous manner, along with a large and increasing practice in the suburb of Northaw, where his medical skill was in constant request among the spinsters and widows of that some− what damp and chilly neighbourhood. So highly esteemed were his services in the sick−room that these ladies would send for him at all hours of the day or night, until the good doctor, in self−defence, took to sending his red−haired assistant to some of his more flagrantly imaginary invalids.

Daisy Drysdale's husband was a manufacturer in Mudchester, and, like other manufacturers, he lived as far away from the factory chimneys of that thriving city as possible. So his brand−new red−brick mansion lay on the other side of the suburb of Northaw, and the society of Northaw supplied nearly all Mrs. Drysdale's intellectual recreation. Poor Daisy! how she missed London! And what, as she plaintively asked, was the use of her giving little dinners, seeing the component elements of which her parties were to be henceforward composed? Still, she was not to be baffled, and Mrs. Drysdale constantly entertained. She kept open house, too, and was delighted to see people drop in of an evening. The very night I arrived, by some chance, Dr. Styles came in about nine o'clock.

They were playing whist at one end of the long drawing−room, and I was set down to entertain the doctor at the other.

I shall not easily forget that night. Accustomed to the manifestly insincere gushings of London young men, I was amused at the naïve manner in which this country Æsculapius comported himself. For a long time we talked of the last exhibition at Burlington House, for he remembered father's pictures, and was much impressed, apparently, by the fact that he was talking to an Academician's daughter. The provinces are still impressed by the Royal Academy.

They played more than one rubber of whist that night, but Dr. Styles remained until the end. Before he left he had offered to lend me a horse, proposed that he should drive me to a ruin ten miles off, and expressed a wish that I should know his three sisters.

The drive to the ruin had assumed the proportions of a picnic before three days were over. Life, as someone has justly observed, would be tolerable if it were not for its pleasures, and possibly our English summers would be less dreary to look back upon were it not for the inevitable picnic.

The day declared itself grey and chilly, with watery−looking clouds hanging despondingly overhead; but as it was not actually raining, we of course felt obliged to start. The doctor drove Mrs. Drysdale and me, and, as he had to stop and see several patients on his way out of Northaw, we were three−quarters of an hour late when we arrived on the festive scene. We found our friends reclining on rugs and cushions in a damp field, where there was an unmistakable odour of manure; we found, also, that they were already more than half through the meal; for, as they justly observed, the cold had made them uncommonly hungry, though the quantity of well−picked bones and empty bottles sufficiently proclaimed the fact. But the mention of empty bottles suggests an air of hilarity which did not belong to this particular feast. A number of total abstainers were of the party, and these had brought their own supply of perry, lemonade, and mineral waters, and now sat apart round one table−cloth, surveying, with somewhat un−sheeplike glances, the goats who were imbibing shandy−gaff and claret. This attitude on the part of non− alcoholic Northaw not being conducive to sociability, the party, as a whole, cannot be said to have been, as the French say, of 'a mad gaiety.' The doctor did his best, but he had not the light social touch. If he offered you the salad, it was with a portentous air; or did he spread you a cushion, he never dropped his professional manner.

Several untoward accidents marred what was left of the day. A young lady had hysterics at the back of the ruin, and the doctor, who was fetched just when he was showing me the view from the topmost turret, muttered something distinctly ungallant about his prospective patient as he hurried off. A drizzle began just as the tea was laid, and the rain fell in dismal earnest as we drove home to Northaw.

The next time I saw our friend Dr. Styles my head was tied up in a flannel shawl, and my throat was so swollen that I could hardly speak. The doctor had been called in professionally. The Northaw picnic had been too much for a Londoner uninured to the climate, and I was down with a malignant sore throat.

The doctor came evely day, and once he came twice, to work a patent inhaler, and paint my throat with some mysterious compound. He constantly changed the treatment; it was as if he never could do enough. He even used to bring me flowers—and who ever heard of a doctor taking his patient flowers? Daisy was convulsed with amusement. She said that, when she was ill, she sometimes used to have to send for Dr. Styles two or three times before he appeared, he was so busy.

At the end of a week I was better, and in ten days I was quite well. I really felt very grateful, for I knew that the doctor had saved me by his constant care from a dangerous illness. I wonder if he took my gratitude for—something else? Anyway, as I told Christina when she scolded me for the whole affair, it was not my fault.

The thing came quickly to a crisis. We were all invited to spend an evening at the doctor's house. In the North they have a mysterious meal called 'high tea,' which is apparently a source of no little comfort and even of self−righteousness. It enables the habitual partakers thereof to allude witheringly to the late dinner indulged in by inhabitants of the South, and so, if you are invited out in Northaw, be sure you will be regaled on tea and cold chicken (fearful mixture!), on hot cakes, jam, marmalade, and currant buns. To this evening meal, then, we were bidden by Dr. Styles.

He lived alone with his sisters, who were curiously like him. They were all stoutish, with nondescript features, and had solemn and somewhat stolid manners. To see all four of them together inclined one to indecent mirth. It was impossible to be more worthy, more dull, and more self−satisfied.

They sat in a circle in the long drawing−room on rather uncomfortable chairs. All three of the Misses Styles took great interest in church matters, or at least in the curate, who was unmarried, and whom they consulted very often on the subject of soup tickets and flannel petticoats. The curate, and a boy of about nineteen years of age, with a shrill voice, were the other men of the party. Miss Styles (the eldest of the three Misses Styles) was a capital housekeeper; everything went like clockwork in the doctor's roomy house. The early dinner was served to a minute. Two o'clock was the hour. If the doctor were out, the meal proceeded with unfailing punctuality, a slice of mutton being kept hot in the oven for the master of the house. On the long, bare lavender−coloured walls of the drawing−room hung several water−colours by Miss Louisa; indeed, the Misses Styles were considered to have a pretty taste for art. They painted everything within reach with sprawling red roses or startling white daisies, the doctor being of opinion that his sisters' artistic talent was of the first order. Miss Ada, too, was musical, and sang songs by Pinsuti and Milton Wellings. The doctor liked Miss Ada's vocal efforts. Miss Emily was literary; at least, she assiduously read Miss Edna Lyall and Mr. Rider Haggard, and of these authors we discoursed solemnly until 'tea' was announced.

The table groaned with good things: with buttered toast, with salad, with vague dishes covered with custard, with ham, with quivering blanc−mange. The curate, it transpired, had a phenomenal appetite, though he coughed and expostulated when helped to a third serve of pressed beef. Both he and the shrill−voiced boy had been among the abstaining sheep at our picnic; this evening meal, therefore, washed down by tea and coffee, had obviously no terrors for them. The conversation was not of the kind that dazzles. There were frequent pauses, during which Miss Ada made several bald statements about a forthcoming village concert, and the doctor, wishing to show his knowledge of the town, solemnly inquired if I had seen Mr. Irving in *Henry VIII*.?

The air was full of ominous portents. The doctor's manner, when he invited me for the second time to partake of cold chicken, or pressed upon me, with Northern hospitality, the currant cake, was full of a certain protecting pride, while a humbly conquering expression was in his eyes when they rested upon me. It was with 'intention'—as the French say—that he showed me the photograph album, full of aunts and cousins, after tea. The good doctor looked quite sentimental when, later on, Miss Ada warbled a romance with a waltz accompaniment, entitled 'The Love that will Never Fade.' I began to feel restless. More than once did I cross the room, engage either of the Misses Styles in feverish con− versation—I always ended by finding the doctor at my elbow. At last I resigned myself to my fate, and sat down to talk to him. I imagined that the sanitary state of the suburb of Northaw would be a safe subject, and one unlikely to lead to a declaration of a tender nature, but inll this, it appeared, I was mistaken. We got on to the subject of fevers, and, to convince me on a certain point, the doctor suggested a reference to one of the medical books in his surgery. Once inside the little room, which lay just across

the passage, Dr. Styles shut the door and advanced towards me with that particular expression which is so intolerable in a man one doesn't care for.

I put on my most indifferent manner, and inspected with much interest the rows of medical books in their glass case.

'So kind of you,' I said hurriedly, to fill up the dreadful pause, 'to take so much trouble Most doctors only laugh at you if one wants to know any real fact—about your dreadful trade,' I added with flippancy, seeing that the man was not listening to a word I was saying, but was gazing at me as an amiable snake might be said to regard a sparrow.

'Trouble!' he said at last. 'How can anything be a trouble that is done for you? I wish you would let me tell you how much I—how much I—'

A sharp rap at the door interrupted this speech. A servant came in.

'Please, sir, Mr. Brown is very bad, and Mrs. Brown says, will you come at once, and bring some of the drops, and she hopes you won't be long.'

'A three−mile drive!' said Dr. Styles with a sigh, 'and I shall not see you again to−night.' He took my hand and held it fast. 'I will bring the book to−morrow morning. Shall I have a chance of seeing you alone? Try to be alone when I come,' and, wrenching my hand violently, the doctor disappeared.

'Daisy,' I said hurriedly in the carriage going home, 'I'm sorry to say, dear, I shall have to go home by the 10.15 to−morrow. I—I had a telegram just before we came out.'

'You had a fiddlestick! What nonsense, Peggy! Why, you came to stay a month, and you've hardly been twelve days.'

'Twelve days? Good heavens! Why, how has he—?'

'Oh, it's that, is it? And so, you don't like him? Well, I think you're silly. You might do much worse. How much better to settle down with someone like that than with one of your flipperty London young men. He's sensible, clever, a good fellow, well off, and very fond of you—'

'The 10.15, **please**, Daisy.'

And, sure enough, by the 10.15 I went. As the Yorkshire fields flew behind me on my rapid journey back to London, the whole thing seemed like some nightmare from which I had just awoke. Great heavens! From what had I not escaped? A lifetime of high tea, suburban gossip, and provincial self−sufficiency, of rose−bedecked door−panels, the novels of Mr. Rider Haggard, and 'The Love that will Never Fade.'

I am very fond of Mrs. Drysdale, but it will be a long time before I again trust myself to the seductions of that suburb of Mudchester.

CHAPTER VII

IT was not very tragic. The first time I saw him and the last time I saw him I laughed; and the interval was not unamusing.

Quite suddenly he had become the fashion. Some great lady in London—I forget who—had heard Claud Carson recite one of his own love songs at a concert got up for a charity, and she had invited him to her house, where he had met other women of fashion, and between themselves, in their little set, they had determined to make him the mode. It was at one of the Duchess of Birmingham's nicest parties—one of her small musical evenings—that we first saw him.

I had been away from town a month or two, and was out of touch with London things, so that when someone said excitedly to me in the supper−room, 'Oh, conime upstairs; Claud Carson is going to recite!' and I saw all the women trailing out of the room at once, I turned to the nearest young man to ask what it all meant.

'Oh, some cad with long hair, who rolls his eyes about, and recites erotic poems; meet him at every blessed place you go to,' was the answer, as my informant helped himself to plovers' eggs and reached for a fresh bottle of champagne. Upstairs, however, in the music−room, there was a flutter of excitement. A Royal Duchess was present: an event, coupled with the fact that this new artist was going to perform, favouring that kind of electric buzz in the air which is so precious to the ears of an anxious hostess. Round the grand piano was a line of pretty women, all with their eyes turned towards the seated figure at the music−stool. There was perfect silence as Mr. Claud Carson rippled a few chords over the keys.

I peeped over the shoulders of two or three people in front of me, and saw a white face framed in long blonde hair, which fell in one straight lock across the forehead. The eyes, which were fixed on the cornice of the ceiling, were dark grey in colour, and full of what young ladies call 'soul.' The nose was thin and straight, the lips full and beautifully curved, the jaw rather square and pathetically thin. It was a face out of a Burne−Jones picture.

Then the long white hands moved rhythmically over the piano, and Claud Carson, sweeping an ineffably weary glance along the line of pretty faces bent towards him, finally fixed his gaze on the Royal Duchess, and began to recite, speaking his words in a rather monotonous tone, to an accompaniment of ripples and chords.

'Ah, he's going to do that charming thing from his "Roses of Passion," the book which he is just going to publish,' somebody whispered excitedly. 'I like him best when he recites his own poems.'

First Mr. Claud Carson told us how he had met a young person in the twilight's mellow time, and how the daisies had kissed her feet, but how she, swerving beneath his glances, had flitted through the net−work fine, of buds which blow, in hawthorn's glow; but eventually it appeared the lady had not proved so coy, for in the second verse Mr. Carson very justly remarked:

But if you linger in that place
Beneath the hawthorns' interlace,
And I may gaze upon your face,
Shall love forgo sweet passion's flow?
The stars alone look down on high,
The winds alone repeat your sigh,
No eyes our lonely tryst descry:

They little know, they little know.Fans waved in time to the quaint rhythm, necks were craned forward, eyes drooped and glistened, there were pensive smiles on curved lips. It was not very good, but there was something magnetic about the strange performance. Claud Carson effectually 'filled the stage.' While he was reciting it was impossible to look in any other direction.

And if the second twilight break,
Faint bird−notes sweet the morning make,
And wond'rihg world now reawake
And life reflow, with love and woe;
The new day finds us parted, sweet,
And new worlds open at our feet,

Once strange—as strangers shall we meet?

We little know, we little know. He finished in a whisper which just filtered through his clenched teeth.

An elderly gentleman coughed severely, and a couple of young ones, with faces as unemotional as their glistening shirt−fronts, exchanged a swift expressive glance. The Royal Duchess beamed approval, and signified that the reciter should be presented to her. The whole performance was a delightful interlude in the decorous solemnity of her exalted existence. I was the only woman in the room who laughed.

'I suppose it's an acquired taste, like caviare or absinthe,' I said to a smart woman near me; 'but one has got to get accustomed to it. Why does he play the piano all the time if he's going to recite?'

The smart lady surveyed me with a withering glance.

'It's the most charming thing in London,' she said; 'Claud Carson is a delightful person.'

All heads were turned in the direction of the young poet as he stood talking to the Royal Duchess, his beautiful eyes fixed on her face, while occasionally, with a pretty, fatigued movement, he raised a white, graceful hand and pushed back the lock of blonde hair from his forehead. Before the short conversation was over, she had invited him to come and see her.

'It's stupid, hardly decent, and almost incomprehensible,' said Christina, as we drove home; 'so I shouldn't wonder if he became the rage this season.'

And sure enough he did. One found him everywhere one went, and I had grown quite accustomed to the thrilling tones of his languorous voice, the enigmatic look in his deep−set eyes, when one night he asked to be introduced to me.

'Everywhere,' said Mr. Carson, as he dropped into a chair at my side, 'everywhere I see your face.... But until to−night I did not know who you were,' he added softly.

His tone, his manner annoyed me.

'Perhaps you didn't ask!' I suggested, though an instant later I was sorry that I should have allowed myself to be flippant with a strange young man of whom I did not altogether approve.

And then he did something which showed that he was clever. He gazed at me in perfect silence for several minutes, until the memory of my flippant words had quite died away.

'Come,' he said at last in his thrilling tones, 'let me give you some strawberries.'

I took his arm and went. We had a charming time that night. Claud Carson was less absurd than he looked. Under his little affectations there was a boyish, frank personality which was really attractive; and when he could forget the fact that all the women in the room were staring at him, and remember that he was not expected to keep up the character of a modern Minnesänger while he helped you to quails and plovers' eggs, he was a nice, simple boy. Afterwards, by−the−bye, I heard that he was at least eight−and−twenty; but he was one of those fair, clean−shaven individuals who never look as if they had emerged from their teens.

'I want to come and see you,' said Claud Carson that night, holding my hand as we stood under the portico waiting for the carriage; 'when may I come?'

'We are at home on Sundays at five.'

'Not then, not in a crowd of people,' he pleaded. 'I want to see you—alone.'

'Oh, in that case,' I answered, laughing, 'don't come on a Sunday. Come—say on Wednesday. And then you will see Christina.'

But Christina, when he finally appeared, found him impossible. She said that his hands were too white, and that the shape of his collar was revolting. She did not like his poems; generally, she did not understand what they meant, and when she did, she said she wished she hadn't.

Claud Carson began to come a good deal. He was always dropping in at tea−time, and he never failed to look reproachful if he found me pouring out tea for Mr. Mandell, Val Redmond, or Tony Lambert. He would sit in a low chair, leaning back, and regarding me with half−closed eyes—a habit which Christina declared was insufferable. Indeed, she generally remembered she had letters to write when Mr. Carson called.

'I have come to offer you what I prize most in the world,' he said one day when we were alone.

'But I never take things—anything but flowers, I mean—from people,' I objected, hastily.

'Ah, but you will—you must—accept this. I dedicate to you my "Roses of Passion," the firstborn of my brain. Dear child, they are yours.' He handed me a bit of paper, on which was written:—

'To M. W.These, my first trembling chords on the instrumenit of Life, I dedicate to you. Perfect soul, framed in your strange, subtly−sweet beauty, I worship you from without, with never a thought of earthly guerdon. Fools only wish to pluck the star from the heavens, the lily from its stem. I leave my star in the blye vault, my lily in its garden.

'London, February, 189—

'Oh,' I said, 'how nice! Only, you mustn't put "To M. W."; you had better put three stars. I shall know who you mean.'

We sat and talked for a long time in the twilight. It was the end of February, and the late afternoon was tinged with the pale, wondering light of an early English spring. The trees outside were swelling with purple buds, and through the black branches there was the gleam of a tender, rosy sunset. It was the time of confidences, and the kind of day one says all sorts of things one doesn't mean, in a soft, regretful voice, just because they sound well and seem to fit into the emotional hour.

Claud Carson knelt on the window−seat, his blonde head turned to pale gold against the window−pane.

'You have helped me more than any woman I have ever known,' he said at last, with a sigh.

'Have I?' I asked, touched, flattered, and pleased. I was at an age when a girl likes to be called a 'woman.' 'I'm sure I don't know how! What have I ever done for you?'

He gazed at me for a few seconds, and then turned abruptly away.

'You have made my life happier,' he said. In another instant he had pressed my hand, and was gone.

Christina's dry tones called me back to mundane things.

'And so you have had that impossible young man here for hours,' said my sister, bursting into the room with all the matter−of−fact and common−sense which an afternoon out of doors brings with it. 'May I ask if you intend to make a fool of him, too?'

'To make a fool of him! No, I don't think I shall ever be able to do that.'

And my words, to be sure, came true.

A little while after, we were driving one afternoon towards Hammersmith, when suddenly the coachman pulled up. A huge dray had got across the road, and for a few moments we were obliged to wait while a small crowd urged the horses this way and that. We had stopped in a street of small stucco houses, whose weedy front gardens were suggestive of anything but rural delights. And then, as we waited, a thin, undersized child of seven ran out of one of the open hall−doors—a door which revealed a vision of a perambulator, a shabby oilcloth, and a framed oleograph—and hung staring over the green−painted rails.

"Ow dare you? Come in directly, Ermyntrude,' said a querulous voice; and for an instant I caught a glimpse of a rather good−looking young woman in a cheap tailor−made gown. 'I shall tell your father. You are a most disobedient child!' A moment later a young man strode down the gravelled path, seized the undersized child in his arms, kissed her, and carried her indoors. Just as he disappeared in the doorway our eyes met. The young man was Claud Carson.

'So he is married—your modern Minnesänger,' said Christina drily, holding her chin up and looking straight in front of her as we drove on.

'Apparently,' I said, shrugging my shoulders and gazing at the coachman's back. I was not to be outdone in imperturbability by Christina.

'He has married the landlady's daughter—poets generally do. But it was considerate of him,' she continued, with a twinkle in the corner of her eye, "to leave his star in the blue vault, his lily in its garden," seeing that he has already got one lily and a promising bud or two in Khartoum Gardens, Hammersmith.'

And then we both fell back on the cushions and gave way to uncontrollable giggles. I laughed till the tears ran down my cheeks.

'When **will** you learn sense?' sighed Christina.

CHAPTER VIII

'**YOU are** so good and dear,' repeated Julian Clancy for the second time, in his well−bred, drawling voice, detaining my hand for an instaut in the obscurity of his tapestry−hung hall. Mother, who always remembers she has an appointment in Hampstead or West Kensington just when one is beginning to enjoy oneself, was already at the bottom of the garden path. Mr. Julian Clancy slowly raised the hand he held to his lips. He was perfectly aware that this last−century salute was considered irresistible by his women friends.

He was a charming host. All the guests at Mr. Clancy's parties seemed on easy terms The men called each other by their Christian names; the ladies had quaint little nicknames for their friends. An atmosphere of intimate chat hung about the rooms. The women spoke in cooing tones, and had interminable confidences to make, while the men laughed softly as they leant forward to listen with an amused air in the veiled lamplight. It was distinctly a house where one enjoyed oneself. Julian Clancy would ask a dozen people—most of them well known—and you would find them, when you arrived, chatting with soft, intimate voices in obscure corners, or loitering, as they whispered the latest malicious story, in the draped doorways. Not that Julian Clancy himself ever listened to malicious stories. Though he wrote novels of modern society, lived all the year round in London, and was now over forty years of age, it was astonishing how guileless, how optimistic, he remained. His vague face and worn smile suggested only the most indefinite emotions, and yet the warmth of his language was extraordinary. Everyone he knew was 'a dear' or 'a dear person,' while the more favoured ones were 'so perfectly good and sweet.' Mr. Clancy would not listen to a word against anyone. How **could** people be so horrid as to say that his dear Lady Rougemont's beautiful red hair was dyed, or that his charming Charlie Deuceace was not the most exemplary of husbands? People were **so** unkind! Well off and well connected, he mixed in the best, as well as the rapidest, sets in London, but what he really worshipped was the 'celebrity.' It is an error to suppose that all the Leo Hunters are of the feminine sex. Julian Clancy always had the last celebrity—and, failing that, the last notoriety—at his parties in St. John's Wood.

He adored St. John's Wood. Celebrated artists, actors, dramatists were all to be found within a stone's throw of his door; he could run in and out of famous studios, and catch distinguished actors for his little suppers on their way home from the theatres. He tolerated a countess (if she happened to be amusing), but a new dancing girl set him raving. He used to ask great ladies to meet the most extraordinary people, and somehow or other they always came. His Sunday dinners—of eight—were most amusing. One never knew if one would sit next to a Guardsman, a burlesque actor, or the representative of a foreign Power. He knew everybody, and everybody wanted to know him. The Honourable Julian Clancy, second son of Lord Basingstoke, had a position in society which is not often the lot of younger sons. But then, to be sure, his brother had no children, and was already separated from his wife. In all human probability Julian would one day succeed to the earldom. And yet he, for his part, was chiefly preoccupied with literary fame. Every other year or so he published, at his own expense, a rather second−rate novel, which, however, had one merit. It was usually in one volume, with fat print and wide margins, so that when he presented it to his friends, with charming little enthusiastic phrases written on the first page, they were able to get a good idea what it was about without being at the pains to read it. About the time his book appeared, he usually gave one of his pleasantest parties, where one saw him with one arm round the neck of some young man who wrote reviews for the penny papers.

In former days, when he was younger and less gushing, Mr. Julian Clancy had been in the diplomatic service, and had wandered in many lands. He never wandered now. As a matter of fact, he never left London. Every year, when other people were making their autumn plans, he would point to his garden, with its pear−trees and hollyhocks, its plashing fountain and cooing doves, and ask you plain tively why he should leave it? September, January, or June he would stroll down St. James's Street to his club at five o'clock. Every year, as soon as August came, a paragraph went the round of the gossipy papers chronicling the fact that Mr. Julian Clancy never left town. People thought it so original and charming; he had quite a little notoriety on that account alone. But London, to be sure, was a passion with him. The pavement of Piccadilly was to him what the boulevard is to the Parisian. He was miserable five miles from Bond Street, and I have known him to rave about the exquisite effects one saw in a London fog. Julian Clancy made a cult of the metropolis.

His house—in springtime buried in a white cloud of pear−blossom, in summer shady with spreading

chestnut−trees and limes—was one of the prettiest things in town. A low, two−storied cottage, with queer−shaped rooms built out at odd angles, it was draped, arranged, and furnished with an artist's hand. His music−room, with its polished floor and Oriental walls, contained nothing but a grand piano, a huge spreading palm, and a low, downy divan running round the sides; but through a Cairene archway you stept into a drawing−room crowded with nick−nacks, hung with old brocade, and as dainty as the boudoir of some eighteenth−century beauty. In the dining−room the prim, thin Chippendale furniture was ranged against a pale−coloured wall, while the round table, with its fine damask and Georgian silver, and the soft lamplight illumining a great bowl of flowers, was somehow suggestive of brilliant talk and dainty fare. But Mr. Clancy was always modest about his possessions. 'It's so sweet of you to like my things,' he would say deprecatingly to some fashionable lady who was going round his rooms sniffing up ideas. 'I **never** care for anything I have. It's so **good** of you to like my poor little cottage.'

He came very often to our Sunday evening parties, when, about twelve o'clock, one saw his fatigued, expressionless features and his superb shirt−front appear in the studio doorway. He was one of the men, by−the−bye, who look their best at night, the sharp black and white of man's evening dress giving him a distinction, an elegance, which he somewhat lacked. At first I did not know why he came so often. Father—to whom he regularly offered up some of his choicest phrases—never liked him, and took no particular pains to conceal the fact. To mother all young men—especially in the evening—are alike. She looks upon them as necessary evils at our parties, but makes few distinctions between them. Christina was away that season, so there remained only myself. As the years had passed on I had had experience enough to know that a man who is heir−presumptive to an English earldom is not likely to preoccupy himself with a middle−class damsel of modest dowry. What brought him, then, so often to our house? Time, as usual, revealed the secret, and in this wise.

July, with its damp garden parties, was upon us. Mr. Julian Clancy's annual outdoor fête was one of the events of the late summer. He arranged the thing charmingly, and people intrigued for cards to what was sure to be an amusing party. This year it was rumoured he was to have the whole of the Frivolity chorus girls, attired as milkmaids, to dance skirt dances on his velvety lawn. So everybody wanted to go.

For some time beforehand Mr. Clancy was indefatigable in his calls at our house. He talked, as much as he ever talked about anything of his own—for he was only enthusiastic about other people and their parties, which were always 'perfectly charming' or 'too lovely'—of his forthcoming entertainment.

'I **do** so hope you'll come,' he said. 'I want you **all** to come. It would be so sweet and good of you all to come to my little party.'

'Oh, we don't go about in droves,' I said, laughing. 'Won't one or two of the family be enough?'

'Of course I only insist upon you,' said Julian, with a shade of his old diplomatic manner; 'but I should be so proud if—your father would come.'

A light flashed over me. This, then, was a possible explanation of Mr. Julian Clancy's devotion. He was hunting a celebrity—he wanted my father! How dense I had been, to be sure. Father was not only a famous and successful Royal Academician, but he was one of the most amusing people in town.

The day of the garden party I was all diplomacy and white muslin. Early in the afternoon I captured my distinguished parent and insisted on his accompanying me to St. John's Wood. I was not going to appear without him, as a second−rate substitute for a celebrity.

The sleepy suburban road was alive with carriages and cabs as we drove up, and at every turn you nodded to some well−known face. The clean−shaven profile and heliotrope necktie of Duncan Clive, the actor, were seen in a victoria side by side with Lady Susan's extraordinary hat (her ladyship had long ago given up chaperons as superfluous); Val Redmond, Tommy Singleton, and the pale−faced boy foamed out of a hansom, all blue buttonholes and light gloves; the Duchess of Birmingham was driving up in the ducal chariot, and had brought Miss Van Hoyt; there was no end to the people one knew. Inside the house it was dark and hot, and in the Oriental music−room you could hardly stand, for a famous prima donna was lamenting, in a piercing soprano voice, and an indifferent Italian accent, the absence of her beloved, while a small, red−haired cavalry major told a funny story in a high, penetrating voice, until several people said 'Hush!' and turned round and frowned. In the dining−room one saw a vista of backs pushing and struggling over a buffet, and there was an acrid odour of coffee and strawberries as you passed the open door to reach the garden.

Outside, the scene was pretty enough. In the green garden the pink, and mauve, and white dresses of the women made clear patches on the verdure, and smiling, fatigued faces greeted each other from under fantastic

hats. A Viennese band played beneath a huge cedar; the Frivolity girls, with their crinkled white frocks and painted cheeks—looking pinker than ever under their starched sun−bonnets—stood huddled together in the distance, and nudged each other as they recognised several smart young men, who, with imperturbable faces, were handing water−ices to the season's *débutantes*.

Presently the band struck up a catchy air, and the girls, forming into a line against a background of ivy, flipped their loose skirts and executed a series of swaying movements with fixed, mechanical smiles. The youngest—a thing of seven, with thin, pointed knees—had the most surprisingly wooden smile of all; she was like a miniature, but exaggerated, copy of the showy girls who towered above her. There was a great deal of applause when they had done, and only the smart young men appeared to be but vaguely interested in the performance.

Our host, as usual, was charming, but one felt that something distracting was in the air. One saw it in Mr. Julian Clancy's preoccupied face as he gushed a little over us both, making a civil effort when we entered. Something important was going on inside the house, from the glances which our host kept turning towards the open drawing−room windows. What could it be?

We were not long left in doubt. 'Oh, have you heard?' cried Val Redmond, detaining us with a delighted giggle. 'Nankowsky, the Russian who says he has been to the North Pole, is in there in the drawing−room. He is such a delightful person. They say he is a leper, but I don't believe that, though I dare say you can catch it from the Esquimaux. If I were you I should only look at him through the window, in case it **is** true, you know. He certainly is a very odd colour.'

This, then, was the reason of Mr. Clancy's tepid enthusiasm over father's appearance. Nankowsky, the famous Nankowsky, was a very great celebrity—the newest of the season—and he was now holding an informal levée in the drawing−room, where people were being introduced to him in shoals. Mr. Julian Clancy, it was obvious, had forgotten his ardour for my father in the triumph of securing a lion with a more penetrating roar.

'Dear,' I said twenty minutes later, when we had wandered round the garden, shaking hands right and left, 'I'm afraid this sort of thing bores you. Let's go home and have tea together in the studio—just you and I.'

We looked for our host, but he was not visible. As we crossed the hall, however, we saw his back for an instant through the open drawing−room door. He was quite absorbed, and did not hear us going out. Mr. Julian Clancy was bending over the new celebrity, and we could hear him saying, in his slow, well−bred tones:

'It was so **good** and **lovely** of you to come!'

CHAPTER IX

IT was at the Royal Academy, at the private view, that I first saw Mr. Albert Morris. Outside, the bright spring sunshine bathed Piccadilly with its unaccustomed warmth, gilding the tiny crinkled leaves in the Green Park, making blue shadows under the crowded omnibuses, and illuminating the clinking harness of the horses which passed, in a continual procession, into the courtyard of Burlington House.

Inside, up the wide staircase, with its crimson carpets and its banks of flowers and plants, all London was elbowing its way to the crowded galleries. People who had intrigued successfully for a ticket wore a triumphant, satisfied smile; the critics were preparing their most stolid, yet important air; women journalists felt for their pencils and note−books, eagerly demanding the names of over−dressed ladies; and the painters—the Royal Academicians and the few famous 'outsiders' who are invited to the private view, collected in little knots round some much−discussed canvas, or, plucking each other by the sleeve, hurried through the rooms in search of some striking picture by an unknown brush.

But Mr. Morris hurried neither here nor there, for he was a person of importance. He stood in the middle of the big room, casting cursory glances at the pictures on the walls, and shaking hands with a small procession of people who passed incessantly in front of him; with fashionable ladies, who stopped to give him several fingers, and then passed on with a well−turned phrase and a non−committing smile; with journalists, judges, actors, and cabinet ministers. We came upon him suddenly, father and I, and when I had been introduced, he seemed all at once to have a great deal to say....

Mr. Albert Morris was about fifty years old, and had a humorous eye. He was rather fat and rather red, and I think his hair and moustache were very carefully dyed. He was absurdly rich. One of the big weekly papers belonged to him, and he owned a good many 9*9* shares in the opera. Mr. Morris also bought pictures, and was invited nearly every year to the Royal Academy banquet. Everything he touched turned to gold; he had the true instinct of his race for money. Albert Morris made fabulous sums out of the most unlikely things, and they say that he was once seen driving through the City in a four−wheel cab piled to the ceiling with Argentine bonds. He never went farther away from town than Brighton, in order to be always within an hour of the Stock Exchange. But with all his money and his influence he was the simplest of men, and had only two strongly developed tastes—a liking for a good story and a pretty woman. His house in Piccadilly was, it is true, a little over−gorgeous; but then he had left the furnishing and decorating to a well−known firm, who had somewhat overdone the Louis XVI. period. Nobody, however, including the owner, seemed to think there were too many carved gilt legs and florid brocades, and in the celebrated white dining−room, with its panels by Chaplin, Mr. Albert Morris used to give little suppers to Royalty.

He was a self−made man, and he believed in money. He had bought everything: his position, his influence, his friends, his newspaper, his house, his pictures, his books and curios, the love of women, and the devotion of his servants. There was only one thing he dreaded, and that was a thing from which his millions could not save him. He was horribly afraid of death. Possible accidents or illnesses were a constant anxiety to Mr. Morris: he was childishly frightened of infectious diseases, he never went to bed without a ladder outside his window in case of fire, and he never sat behind—or on—a strange horse. If his little finger ached, or he caught a cold in the head, he consulted the greatest physicians in London, and he always carried a tiny golden flask containing brandy, for someone had once told him he had a weak heart. Poor Mr. Morris, quaking in the midst of his millions! They found him one morning—but I am anticipating.

Though of thoroughly Jewish origin, it was astonishing how British and patriotic was my new friend Mr. Morris. His newspaper was Conservative and highly orthodox, and in time of war−scares there was an uncompromising Jingoism in its leaders. They were inspired by the proprietor. The Church, the State, the House of Lords (who knows if the estimable little man may not have cherished hopes of a peerage himself?) were the things that Mr. Morris believed in. In religion he did not tolerate Broad Church, nor in politics any dallying with democrats. But these things, after all, were but a pastime; the opera, especially during the last year or two, was the serious preoccupation of his life.

'Charmin' little girl of yours, Wynman,' I overheard him whisper to father as we were moving on; 'might bring her one night to the opera, now. Always the same box, you know. Pit tier, No. 100. Say Thursday;' and without

waiting for an answer, for he was evidently accustomed to having his wishes acceded to, Mr. Morris slipped away, and was presently in deep confabulation with the Leader of the Opposition.

On the following Thursday we found ourselves in Mr. Morris's opera−box.

It was a brilliant night. All the beauties, with all their tiaras on, were ranged in dazzling groups round the house. Two famous sisters (one married to a marquis, and the other on the way to espouse a German princeling) were dressed exactly alike, and exhibited precisely the same pensive smile and the same drooping bouquet. They were, however, to−night entirely alone, filling the large box with their pink sleeves and their radiant beauty. Just above them, Lady Susan received a procession of smart young men all the evening. One after the other, the smart young men were convulsed with laughter; you could see their stolid faces getting pink and crinkled as they bent forward to catch what the lady said. In the next box a well−got−up mother and a pretty, badly−dressed girl shared the same cavalier between them; it was impossible to tell which he admired the least. An elderly lady, in pale blue satin and black pearls, exhibited a young and sheepish−looking husband. Mr. Valentine Redmond was supposed to be occupying a stall, but his little smirk and his huge white buttonhole appeared in every box on the grand tier that night. A number of 'cultured' people in the stalls had open books of the score on their knees, and never raised their heads to the stage all the evening. They were playing *Tristan und Isolde*.

Mr. Albert Morris swept with his glasses the crimson horse−shoe, on which the white shoulders and clear dresses of the women made spots and dots of light, and settled himself in his chair with a small grunt of approval. He felt, in a way, responsible for that brilliant house; he was one of the people who had revived the moribund opera, and had made it once more the most fashionable lounge in London. True, he distrusted Wagner and all his works, but he knew there was 'money in him'—for a season. He was more proud of his sway behind the scenes than of any other influence he possessed. He prided himself on discovering budding Pattis and Melbas, on unearthing unknown tenors and discovering baritones of genius. The *potins* of the greenroom, the little quarrels behind the scenes, were, I verily believe, the joy of his existence. He had always a good story to tell about the stars of the company. To spring a new prima donna on the town was the height of his ambition.

One liked Mr. Albert Morris at once. He was immensely comic, and had a slow, fat, drawling voice which made his stories irresistible. He was also delightfully candid. Like all the men of his race, he was easily touched by music, and when the famous soprano, in white satin, with her hair down her back, gave forth an operatic lament, I noticed a large tear coursing its way down Mr. Albert Morris's rubicund cheek and immaculate shirtfront.

'Ah, these things make me feel, Miss Wynman,' he whispered; 'but then, you see, I'm a wicked old sinner. It's only you charming young ladies who are so hard.'

It was impossible not to laugh, especially when Mr. Morris put on a gold pince−nez and, holding the book of words a long way off, tried to find out what the story was.

'What's it all about, now? Don't understand German. Oh, here we are. Act I. "**They tremble and convulsively put their hands to their hearts, then again press them to their foreheads. Their eyes meet anew, sink in confusion, and once more fasten on each other with looks of increasing,passion.**" Hum! ... ISOLDE (sinking on his breast), Faithlessly fondest! TRISTAN (pressing her to hint with fire), Deathlessly dearest!"

Ah! very unfortunate now, as she's going to marry the other Johnnie. Never have any luck, these poor little heroines. Beautiful high that! ... She's in great form to−night.' But later on Mr. Morris was again bewildered by the language of the libretto, which he insisted on reading aloud:

"'O highest, wholest,
Fairest, fiercest,
Brimmingest bliss!
Priceless! peerless!
Fixed and fearless!
Blind and breathless".... Now, I call that exaggerated, don't you know. Did you ever talk to Mrs. Wynman like that now, Wynman? Nobody ever says that sort of thing to me.'

But in spite of Mr. Morris's objections to the Wagnerian methods, our evening at the opera ended amiably all round. Before we separated that night he had given father a commission for a big canvas.

'Samson and Delilah' was to be the subject of the picture, for Mr. Morris had a taste for the good old themes. And yet when the picture was half finished he began to see that it was rather out of date for a modern house.

'Should like you to put Miss Peggy in, now!' said Mr. Morris one day, as we all three sat criticising the huge canvas. 'Nort suitable for Delilah, eh?' It was one of his peculiarities that he pronounced 'not' and 'got' like 'nort' and 'gort.' 'Want a more robust model? Nort at all. Just the sort of little girl like Miss Peggy.' But father was inexorable. I had sat to him as a Bacchante, as a village maiden, and as a nun, but for Delilah he would have none of me. Mr. Morris was obviously disappointed.

He used to be always dropping in to see how 'Samson and Delilah' was getting on, and he not infrequently stayed to lunch. 'Charmin'—hashed mutton—just what I like. Anythin' does for me. Gort a passion for baked potatoes, dear,' declared Mr. Morris, who feasted like Lucullus at home. It was another of his peculiarities, by−the−bye, that he usually addressed the whole female sex as 'dear.' Mr. Morris chaffed everybody, from the editor of his paper to the cabman who drove him to the City. He even chaffed Christina.

On one celebrated occasion, when Christina had turned vegetarian, she sat eating nothing but watercress, lettuce, and endive all through lunch.

'My heavens!' said Mr. Morris at last, adjusting his eyeglass, and regarding Christina placidly munching a third plate of raw green stuff, 'is this a beautiful woman or **a rumminatin' animal**?'

From that day forward Christina ate fish, meat, and fowl like the rest of the family.

'Samson and Delilah' was finished at last, and to celebrate the hanging of the picture there was to be a little supper in the white dining−room in Piccadilly, at which a Royal personage was expected to be present.

But Mr. Morris was not to eat his supper with Royalty in Piccadilly that night. On the morning of the party—a foggy November day—Mr. Morris's valet drove up to our door in a hansom. His white, twitching face told us the worst. Albert Morris was dead.

And so, after all, his millions had not been able to save him from what he dreaded—a sudden and a comparatively early death. The servant's scared face was painful to see; he had been genuinely attached to Mr. Morris, and he had entered his room that morning with tea and letters to find the electric light still burning, and the figure of his master propped up in bed with a book in the hand that had been cold for many hours. It was a French book, the valet said; 'Fort comme la Mort' he thought the name was. Albert Morris had drawn his last breath while reading his favourite author.

And that was the end.... One had a choky feeling in the throat when one thought of it.... Of course, in stories and plays it is only the death of the young, the handsome, and the virtuous which is meant to rouse our deepest pity. Yet in real life it is often the figure of an Albert Morris—stout, genial, worldly, rolling in wealth, and terrified at death—which most readily claims our tears. Of the earth earthy, we can only picture them in their clubs or at our dinner−tables. In the grand drama of death it seems impossible that they should ever take a part—they, the heroes of half a dozen farces, the authors of half a hundred *mots*.

CHAPTER X

'**I**'**M** surprised, now, that you English ladies don't come oftener on our side. I should surmise that young ladies have a better time in America than anywhere else on this earth. The deference paid to Woman in the United States is one of the most remarkable of our national characteristics. I tell you, you find it in every relation of life. There's this Divorce "act" now; a man—in America—will allow his wife to get a divorce from him if they find that they can't agree; he would not think of letting his wife take the blame. I should say, now, that that sort of thing was unheard of in this country. Your men, now, I should judge, would not be apt to take the blame on themselves. I have been much struck, though, with the splendid physical appearance of your young men. Why, in Rotten Row I have seen more remarkable−looking men in one morning's walk, than I should be apt to see in a week on Fifth Avenue or Broadway. Your tailors, now, they are one of the most remarkable of your institutions, if one may say so. You English ladies, too, are just perfectly lovely. Your high−bred repose is perfectly fascinating; and you are, I should judge, more affectionate than American women? I should say, now, that you had more heart? The trouble is that our society girls don't begin to have any. Why, there was an English nobleman, Sir John Lacklands, in New York last winter. That man was over seventy−two years of age. Well, he is about to be married to one of the youngest buds of this season, the daughter of one of our most prominent railroad kings Why, the night before I sailed from New York I went to see a girl in Madison Avenue, and there was a handsome young fellow of three−and−twenty there who had been calling every evening at that house for some weeks. When he left, I thought I should congratulate her on her engagement. "Why," said she, "what queer, old−fashioned ideas you do have. Well, I don't know but what I'm thinking of marrying, but I guess it's his grand− father, the millionaire, who's to be the happy man.'"

Christina and I gasped, as Mr. Elisha Van Schuyler at last paused, though apparently more to point his story than to take breath.

In appearance he was tall, but not so broad−shouldered as an Englishman of his height would have been, he had a dapper little pointed beard and moustache, and keen, intelligent eyes. His coat was made by a tailor in Savile Row.

We had never seen an American gentleman. Transatlantic women we had met by the score; admired their gowns, laughed at their stories, and secretly envied their unfailing vivacity; but none of the New Yorkers and Philadelphians that we had known in London had ever appeared to have, or seem to have wasted a thought on, any male belongings. Therefore, when Mr. Elisha Van Schuyler presented himself with a letter of introduction from her Grace of Birmingham (who had known him in her early days in America), it was with a feeling of keen curiosity that we undertook to show him the studio and its contents.

Our studio is one of the 'show' ones of London, and if Mr. Van Schuyler's face fell a little when confronted with papa's portraits, he was lavish in his admiration of the beautiful room. 'We don't begin to have anything like this in New York,' he said, giving a comprehensive look round. 'Our artists either can't afford to furnish a studio (nobody buys American pictures on our side), or else they sort of overdo the thing. Too much tapestry, too many suits of mail, too many mandolins, and too many ivory crucifixes. There was a man who studied in Paris, and thought he'd go home and do the "society act" as well as paint portraits of the "four hundred." Well, that man was as much fun as a goat. He just got as thin as a rail and as bald as a coot trying to work the "society racket." I tell you, he had a rocky time. He took a huge studio in one of the most fashionable parts of New York, furnished it perfectly elegantly, and began by painting one of our society belles—for nothing. Then he used to lend his studio to Polish pianists and Spanish dancing−girls, just to get the "four hundred" inside his house; and they used to crowd right in, and drink his tea and his punch, and go right away and get their portraits painted by a third−rate Frenchman who had fixed up an atelier next door. Why, I tell you, that Frenchman —' and here Mr. Van Schuyler was fairly launched on another stream of talk, which lasted, without intermission, until he rose, rather abruptly, to go. First he made us a low bow, a bow so deep that I have only seen it equalled by that of a Russian *attaché*, and then he reconsidered the question and shook hands with us, one after the other, very high up in the air. He was evidently under the impression that this was the latest mode of salutation.

When the heavy tapestry curtains had finally swung back behind him, Christina called my attention to the fact that, both together, we had only been allowed to put in three sentences, so entirely had our Transatlantic guest

monopolised the conversation. 'I thought they always said that American women did all the talking,' said Christina drily; 'but this young man seems to have a fancy for monologues. I timed one of his stories, that about General Horace Porter and—what's the other man's name?—Chauncey Depew, and it lasted exactly seventeen minutes by the clock.

'Never mind that,' I retorted, 'this American is going to be amusing.'

And in truth he turned out to be charming. After a while, when he took to coming pretty often, even Christina did not mind the length of Mr. Van Schuyler's anecdotes. He had, as I took occasion to point out to Christina more than once, that desirable thing in man or woman, a 'twinkling eye,' and he had also a pretty taste in flowers and bonbonnières, and a perfect mania for giving theatre parties, with dainty little suppers afterwards. And later on, when we knew him better, he had an inexhaustible fund of excellent, if slightly irreverent, stories.

He had his little peculiarities, to be sure. He was never tired of asking questions about the Royal Family and the House of Lords, and once—one night when we were all dining with him at the Savoy—he made us write out a list of English duchesses, to see how many there were.

'But I don't know any,' I objected, 'except the Duchess of Birmingham, and she's an American.'

'Mercy! We don't count her,' said Mr. Elisha Van Schuyler.

He was fond of asking tiresome questions, too, about the birthplaces of famous people in London; and he never looked at me, I am convinced, without seeing me against a fancy background of the Tower, Windsor Castle, and Stratford−on−Avon. I sometimes feel that he expected me to live up to a famous past.

But Mr. Van Schuyler's stay in London was not without its distractions. He wanted to know everybody, and everybody seemed pleased to know him; he wished all his friends to 'have a good time'—at his expense. He was generosity itself. One could not express the vaguest wish without its being immediately carried out. His generosity even took the form of inviting his rivals to dinner, and, what astonished me even more, sending one in with them. There was nothing mean or narrow−minded about our new American friend. And yet, though expansive and voluble, we seemed to know him no more intimately at the end of three months than at the end of his first call. Was there, under all his gregariousness, a deep−seated reserve? Christina thought that, on the whole, she preferred people who talked less and who said more. He had, to be sure, an enormous admiration for Englishwomen—especially the sort of young woman who rides to hounds, sculls a boat, and bags her own grouse. He constantly assured us that, if we would 'cross the herring−pond' and spend a winter in New York or Washington, we should at once attain the rank of 'raging belles,' though we as constantly disclaimed all intention of competing with the home−grown article on the other side of the Atlantic. But every day, as July verged on August, and everyone was thinking of the moors, and Homburg, and Aix, Mr. Van Schuyler grew more and more civil. He looked unutterable things. Hardly a day passed without a gorgeous bunch of roses being sent. I began to wonder what life was like in New York; if it was all roses, and devotion, and boxes at the play? My family began to regard me with unwonted tenderness and consideration, and it was obvious that they half expected Mr. Elisha Van Schuyler might carry me off by the next ocean greyhound. Qualms of conscience−an unwonted experi− ence with me—began to assail me, and more than once I asked myself whether I liked this young man chiefly for himself or for his dollars, when that little dinner put an unexpected end to my doubts.

It was at Hurlingham that the last act of the comedy was played. The polo ground was thick with wide−sleeved, slim−looking women, and with broad−shouldered military men, whose necks were bronzed by Indian suns. Here one caught the profile of some country−bred girl, with neat, fair plaits tucked away under a straw hat, and there a radiant vision of dainty laces and a delicate rose−pink visage half hidden under a vast parasol. Carefully made−up old men walked mincingly along. ogling the prettiest faces as they passed, and mentally comparing the beauties of 1892 with those more fascinating young creatures of thirty years ago. It was a mild, grey−skied afternoon of mid−July, and the sound of the Coldstream Guards' band came softly over the lime−scented air. On the lawn in front of the club−house the white−jacketed waiters ran quickly to and fro with trays of tea and strawberries, and the checkered light of the huge Chinese umbrellas over the tables threw curious little shadows on the faces of the tea−drinkers. All around, pretty women were nodding and smiling at their bachelor friends. Over yonder, the new beauty was obviously being made love to by somebody else's husband; while inside the cool, carpetless clubhouse could be seen the profiles of an elderly, painted personage in a muslin gown with pink ribbons, and of a bored, handsome young man who was endeavouring to make peace with the irate lady. At the next table, two smart City men were lighting their cigarettes after tea.

Mr. Van Schuyler was more than usually confidential that afternoon. He told me how he was 'just perfectly fascinated' with London and with London girls; how he should like to live here (with a sigh), and how, if he couldn't do that, he meant to come 'just all the time.' He had had, thanks to us, a perfectly beautiful time. He should never forget it.

Somebody had given a dinner, after the polo, and now we were sitting on the terrace drinking our coffee, listening to the metallic music of the Hungarian band, and watching the stars appear one by one above the fat, bronze−coloured elms. Mr. Elisha Van Schuyler drew his chair a little closer to mine.

'I wonder now, if you would like Tuxedo? Like most American things, it's on a larger scale than anything you have on this side—'

'Larger or not,' I said hastily, 'I shall never see it. You know I am always sea−sick. I shall never cross the Atlantic.'

'Well, now, I call that rough on us! I had just made up my mind that when we were married—'

'Married, Mr. Van Schuyler?'

'Why, yes. I guess' (now and again, when he forgot he was in London, Mr. Van Schuyler would let drop an occasional 'guess') 'Mamie and I must fix it up soon, if we are ever going to. Mamie's a society girl in Buffalo, and although I'm willing she should have a good time as long as ever she wants to, still, I think three years is long enough for a fellow to be kept waiting. Don't you agree with me, Miss Peggy?'

For a minute I was too astonished to speak. 'Y—es,' I hastened to say. 'Three years **is** rather a long time. But then you've managed, haven't you, to have ... a fairly good time—yourself?'

'Well, I should smile! I imagine Mamie would allow that I had better keep my hand in all the time. And when we settle down in New York (I've been sending cablegrams about a house on Fifth Avenue all this week) I hope you'll come over and make us quite a long visit. Why, you would be just a raging, tearing belle.'

I smiled, and said I should have to make Mrs. Van Schuyler's acquaintance over here; and so we talked it over, and I proffered my congratulations, while Mr. Van Schuyler took my hand and held it very hard as he informed me that he meant to settle down in double harness and be a model husband.

Next year he brought his wife to see us. At first sight she revealed herself as a restless, talkative, flirtatious little person, who had, like her husband, a passion for having 'a good time.' She had brought a cousin—a young man—'along,' as she explained, so her husband shouldn't have to go around shopping with her. He always got mad when she went shopping. She expected it was poky, anyhow, going around all the time with your own wife.... If he didn't like the young man, she didn't care, any way. He was just perfectly sweet.... Mr. Van Schuyler (she always alluded to her husband as Mr. Van Schuyler) was just perfectly devoted to Miss Peggy; he had never allowed anything to interfere with his affection for Miss Peggy. And English young ladies were perfectly lovely, any way. Mrs. Van Schuyler did not believe in trying to make one's husband domestic. If he didn't care for domesticity, neither did she. She just despised it, and meant to live in a hotel.

While Mrs. Van Schuyler was there her husband was strangely silent. But it turned out, on investigation, that he did not appear to find the bond of wedlock galling. She allowed him plenty of rope, and he was always to be found straying about at the very end of the tether. So far, I have not heard of either of the Van Schuylers having applied for a divorce.

CHAPTER XI

AFTER breakfast there was nothing pleasanter one could do than to sit out in the gravelled garden of the hotel under the palm−trees, and, unfurling a green−lined umbrella, to bask like a cat in the warmth. And it was here, generally with an offering of flowers, that M. René Levasseur used to join us, with his English sailor hat, his gauzy Parisian tie, and a shepherd's plaid shawl gracefully disposed round his shoulders. Skirmishing and giggling heralded his approach. He was on intimate terms with everybody in the hotel; he had confidences for the landlady, bon−bons for the children, and, if I am not mistaken, a special greeting for the 'boots.'

In appearance he was hardly a typical Frenchman. Blond, thin, and pale, he had only the beginnings of a beard, while his slightly stooping shoulders betrayed the habit of bend− ing at an easel. For M. Rene was a painter, one of the new school of *vibristes*. He did the most extraordinary little landscapes, all in pink, and mauve, and arsenic−green stripes, which looked well enough about ten yards off, but which were bewildering enough, to our British eyes, when inspected at close quarters. Other French painters, however, were enthusiastic over his work. 'Tiens—très fort, ce garçon!' they would say, gazing at a mountain put in with mauve and rose−coloured lines; 'beaucoup de v'lan; très−amusant. Il est dans le mouvement, celui−là; il tient de Monet.' Accustomed to the treacly sunset landscape, as depicted annually on the walls of Burlington House, we were not a little amazed at M. Rend's 'vibrations'—notes of dazzling sunlight and white open air. Like most of his painter−compatriots, he was very amusing. For the French artist, unlike his English brother, has a number of theories, which he can usually express in a more or less attractive way. To be sure, he is generally a pessimist; but to mention this is only to say that the French artist is eminently modern. And if M. René was a pessimist, he was an infinitely diverting one. He was one of the very few young men of our acquaintance who amused Christina.

First we were civil to him because we thought he was rather clever and impecunious; but we learnt, later on, that he was rich, and that the cheap sailor hat and faded shawl were part of his pose.

'Frenchmen, whatever you may say against them, are never snobbish,' I announced one day to Christina. 'When do you ever hear them talk about their money?'

'No, just as in England it is bad taste to talk of one's religion. Money is their religion, you know.'

It was our first winter in the South. The spell of the Riviera was over us. The lazy days crept by, filled with the scent of violets, the warmth of the sunshine, the magnificent panorama of the littoral. Our nights were devoted to cotillons, but I never could remember afterwards what we did during those sunny days.

Our painter, who had claimed our acquaintance from having seen father's pictures in the 'great, the unique, the epoch−making Exposition of 1889,' was always turning up. Even before the mid−day breakfast, he would run down to the harbour to see the English yachts come in or out, or stroll with us to the flower market, and come back with his arms full of mimosa, anemones, and violets. Or he would take us both off for a day's painting in the mountains; at least, he and Christina used to paint, and I used to lie on my back and look on, and eat the sweetmeats which he thoughtfully provided.

One day M. René painted me. He did me in a scarlet gown, with a scarlet parasol, in full sunlight, against the blue Mediterranean, and I remember he painted my face in scarlet and purple zigzags. Even my worst enemy has never accused me of vanity, but I must say I was annoyed.

'Do not be afraid, Mademoiselle. I shall send it to New York. You will never see it again. Those good Americans only speak of our school. Every millionaire of New York desires a Claude Monet, or, failing him, one of his disciples,' said M. René soothingly; and, to be sure, on reflection, it did not mratter much if my face appeared like a gaily−coloured zebra on the other side of the Atlantic.

But it was at night, when we went to dance at one of the villas or one of the hotels, that M. René was in his element. Even your most pessimistic Frenchman will valse—if you give him the chance. He danced madly, breathlessly, abominably; but, as a leader of cotillons, our painter was quite unapproachable. His tact, his *finesse*, his gaiety were admirable. How easily we amused ourselves during those winter nights! The drives back, after the ball, along the bay, packed into the small hotel omnibus, with our hands full of toys and ribbons and flowers—the spoils of the evening—while a large white moon lit up the coast, and the pink and yellow villas were hushed for the night among the orange−trees and palms. How pleased M. René looked when I brought home a lapful of tinsel ribbons and tea−roses! He had begun to assume little airs of semi−proprietorship which were amusing; I think he

already suspected me of cherishing a hopeless passion for him.

'Tenez, je vous aime bien, Mlle Marguerite,' said M. René one day; 'vous savez bien que je suis fou de vous. Mais ... je ne voudrai pas vous épouser ... mais non, mais non!

"Much obliged to you, but I'm sure I don't want you to do so!' I replied, with some acerbity. I always answered him in English. The French tongue is not my strong point, but when I speak my native language to a foreigner I invariably shout. 'Without being indiscreet, M. Levasseur, may I ask why?'

We were climbing, through some orange−groves, up a hill, and the glistening green leaves overhead were powdered with bloom and heavy with fruit. He tore a spray of orange−blossom down, and stuck it gingerly through my plaits. 'Très jolie, la mariée,' he said, laughing; 'mais très difficile à amuser—O, mais bien difficile.'

There was a fatuity about this little scene which made me thoughtful—for a week. Not that I alone was suspected of inclining my eyes in our painter's direction. No one, however unlikely, was safe in this regard, no one, from the stout, elderly landlady to the youngest school−girl in the hotel. We were one and all supposed to take a tender interest in his proceedings. But I never realised this quite until the night of the *tableaux vivants*, from which moment I fancy M. René was convinced of my hopeless attachment.

He was invaluable in our *tableaux vivants*. We did it all between us, he and I, and it involved the sending of dozens of notes on M. Rene's part; weird little missives, written half in French, half in English, which were sufficiently bewildering at first:—'Merci, dear friend, de votre amabilité. C'est donc convenu? Vous me prêtez une queue, et je serai une bête tout à fait convenable. On répète aujourd'hui à quatre heures. Il y aura du thé. En seriez−vous de la petite fête?—Wery faithfully yours, RENÉ LEVASSEUR.'

'Wery' was nice enough as an example of 'English as she is spoke,' but M. René's devotion was expressed in other extraordinary English phrases which he had just missed catching from English ladies in pensions and hotels. Nothing would remove the impression that 'my dearling' was a proper and ordinary way of addressing a woman.

Like most Frenchmen he had no self−consciousness (the absence of this defect was made up for, I suppose, by exaggerated personal vanity); he had, therefore, no more objection to making himself a false stomach with two or three sofa−cushions than he had to putting on a cardboard nose or running about on all−fours. As the 'Beast,' indeed, he was delightful, wearing my new sable boa as a tail, and wooing 'Beauty,' in the person of our schoolgirl, with quite irrepressible ardour. In our 'Pierrot' scenes, too, he was charming, taking my infidelities (as Pierrette) with the prettiest grace in the world. The whole thing was quaint, artistic, delightful. M. René was the hero of the ball that followed. We were to leave the next day.

The morning broke grey and stormy, and great waves tipped with white were lashing the pebbles on the beach as I sat in the hotel garden, tired after our late night. Christina had insisted on remaining upstairs to superintend the packing.

Presently something dark fell in my lap. It was a bouquet of votive violets, while M. René's quizzical face at an open window above announced to me my assailant.

'Comment, toute seule?' In a moment a leg appeared over the balcony, something bounded out, and M. René was bowing low in front of me.

'Pauvre Mees Marguerite!' he murmured.

'Why "poor" Miss Marguerite?' I asked in a high voice, so as to make sure that he understood.

'Vous vous en allez—comme ça, en Angleterre? C'est si triste—là−bas.'

'Oh no, it isn't. We are going back to the London season, you know. We manage to amuse ourselves over there, although you can't imagine it, immersed as we are in the outer darkness.'

And then M. René told me of his hopes of a visit to London some day, when the stormy waters of the Channel should have subsided enough for him to adventure on the wild and desperate journey. He told me of the experiences of a friend of his in London, of a fortnight spent at a French hotel near Leicester Square; of the hideosities of the English Sunday, of the flat−soled boots of *ces dames*, of the equally unexciting conversational efforts of *ces messieurs*; all the prejudices and preconceptions which the Parisian packs up in his portmanteau on leaving Paris and retains intact on his return to his beloved capital.

'Ah, but London is charming all the same,' I objected.

The wind had dropped, and the sun was already turning the sea−pines to a delicate greenish−silver. The day—our final day—was to be fine after all.

But it was time to go. We were not, however, to leave in the ordinary and conventional way, in a hotel

omnibus and an express train, but a large party of people were to drive us in brakes and carriages to the Italian frontier, and we were all to dine together at Ventimiglia before we took the train for Genoa. M. René sat close behind me in the brake, and whispered reassuringly into my ear as we dashed along the mountain road with the Mediterranean spread out below us and the rocky heights to the left. At the vine−covered trattoria, where we stopped to drink Chianti and to rest the horses, it was M. René who was so anxious we should all dance a farewell valse in the dusty and deserted *salon*, while someone strummed a tune on the jingling, worn piano, which only woke up once a week, when the peasants danced on Sundays. At Ventimiglia, where we all walked out to see the view, our painter grew sentimental, and at dinner, at the hotel, I think he managed to shed a tear.

But everything comes to an end. Dinner was over, and now we were already in the railway carriage, with our friends crowding round the open door. And what a charming leave−taking it was! Everybody brought a farewell gift; a bunch of roses, a basket of peaches, a Spanish fan, a china frog—every kind of trifle that one can give—and take—without being compromised. The engine was snorting, mother was snugly ensconced, and Christina was getting out her favourite books; the guards had three times announced the imminent departure of the train, and still M. René, climbing once more into the carriage, knelt, in mock tragedy, at our feet. A horrible suspicion came over us that he meant to come, too. But a final whistle sounded. M. René rose to his feet, and, crushing my fingers, bent over me as he whispered tenderly, soothingly, reassuringly the words:—

'L'avenir est aux audacieux.... Je viendrai!'

Needless to say, my Parisian admirer has not yet braved the terrors of the Channel passage for my sake. Now and again he sends a 'Figaro' or a 'Gaulois' containing a fervid article about his pictures, for M. René, it would seem, is on the way to fame; and once or twice he has written to say that he intends to come and make serious studies of *ces étonnants brouillards de Londres*. But he never comes, nor does he, I shrewdly suspect, intend to. Paris has swallowed him up.

CHAPTER XII

DUNCAN CLIVE'S Hamlet had taken the town. Christina roundly declared it was a revolting exhibition; but I don't know good acting from bad, so this last reading of the great part was good enough for me. True, it was a smug, sentimental, South Kensingtonian Hamlet, but I, in common with the rest of the public, became enthusiastic over Mr. Duncan Clive. We are only human, and my ardour was possibly not unconnected with the fact that the manager of the Proscenium Theatre was the fashion. Fashions in art are eminently contagious.

He had the look of a Roman emperor. His large round head, his square, clean−shaven jaw, and his broad shoulders made him an effective stage figure, though in private life he often enough looked depressed and bilious, and affected a humble and slightly apologetic manner. If you can picture Nero or Caligula, in a sublime frock−coat, sitting down meekly over the teacups and talking of 'elevating the drama' and 'improving the public taste,' you have a vision of Mr. Duncan Clive as he used to appear in our drawing−room. He was an actor−manager, so he had to talk about improving the public taste—and yet keep one eye on the box office. He spent fabulous sums on the production of his pieces, and all the town would flock to see his real Empire furniture and his genuine Aubusson carpets.

'Whether he is a great actor or not,' I argued one day with Christina, 'at any rate you must admit that he has done a great deal for the stage.'

'My dear, you mean for the stage−carpenter,' replied my sister, in an aggravatingly conclusive tone of voice.

Ours was the sort of house to which everybody goes. From ambassadors to interviewers, there was hardly anybody we didn't know, and Christina and I were told to be civil to all and sundry, but there was no need to admonish me to be civil to the new Hamlet.

I was in the studio, squeezing out colours on to father's palette, one day when Mr. Duncan Clive was announced. There he stood in the flesh, my favourite stage−lover, looking very blue about the jaw and very dazzling about the necktie, and he waited a second or two, holding back the heavy portière, just as he always did when he wished to make an effective entrance on the stage. Then he stepped forward rapidly, with a brilliant smile, shaking hands with father and making me a low and deferential bow.

Father was to paint him as Hamlet for the next Academy, and he had chosen to be done, not with Yorick's skull or in the famous soliloquy, but in the scene with Guildenstern, where he snaps the pipe in two. 'Do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe?' was the line to be depicted; and to be sure, Duncan Clive made an imposing figure enough in his sombre doublet, standing with his chin a little forward, and his eyes turned suspiciously towards the spectator. It was characteristic of the man to have chosen that particular episode, that especial pose, for he was above all things undecided and distrustful. He wanted to be 'in the movement,' but he wished to be well with the British public. He would like to have mounted *Hedda Gabler*, had there been a part big enough for him to play; he was capable of producing Maeterlinck, but for his doubts about filling the stalls. To see him humbly asking the opinion of the critics at one of his 'first night' suppers on the stage of the Proscenium Theatre was a curious and instructive spectacle.

He asked everybody's advice—that was one of his chief attractions in the eyes of women—and he even asked mine.

Mr. Duncan Clive had beautiful, suggestive hands, which he used a good deal when he talked, and a wandering, shifty eye, which travelled all round the room even when he bent towards you in one of his many confidences. He had interminable confidences to make. He liked to talk about his early life; only, as his imagination was vivid, and his memory defective, his early life was apt to be coloured by the mood of the moment. On dreary, dark November days, when the trees outside seemed to ooze grime and soot, he would tell you, in thrilling tones, that he began life barefoot, selling newspapers in the streets or calling cabs at the theatre doors; and how, one gruesome night, when he was shivering in the slush, he had made a vow that he would produce Shakspearian plays at a London theatre before he was thirty years of age. Other days, when the sun shone and the wind rioted out of doors, he would recall a rose−shaded drawing−room window giving on a blue sea, and a gentle−voiced mother who read Browning to him as he sat on soft cushions at her feet... No, certainly the accounts of Mr. Duncan Clive's early training did not, as his stage−carpenter would have expressed it, 'join'; but I am firmly convinced that, while he was talking to you, while his deep−set, hungry grey eyes sought inspiration

now in yours, and now in the fairyland inside the fire, he believed for the moment what he was saying. Most women liked to listen to Duncan Clive's confidences, especially as Mrs. Duncan Clive did not usually accompany him when he paid afternoon calls. He had married the 'walking lady' of a travelling company some years ago, but this fact by no means interfered with his success with the sex. Who cares whether Orlando, Charles Surface, or young Mirabel has a wife in Bayswater or a troop of brats in Bedford Park? Not even the most romantic schoolgirl cares. Young Mirabel carries the glamour of the footlights with him wherever he goes.

But this glamour, to be sure, rather interferes with the due enjoyment of one's idol, who is apt to be surrounded by admiring devotees. Does Orlando—in white gardenia and patent−leather boots—but offer you his arm to go down to supper, and you are pursued by a crowd of admiring ladies who hope to snatch him from you. You are permitted to have neither your cavalier nor your supper. You gaze wistfully at the salads and aspics, while an elderly lady buttonholes Orlando, reminding him archly that they met, six years ago, in a railway carriage in Switzerland, and proceeds on the strength of this acquaintanceship to introduce to him her three nieces from Huddersfield, who are so devoted to dear Mr. Clive's acting. Lady Susan takes him by the arm into a distant corner, from whence he is presently dug out by the Duchess of Birmingham, who is 'just dying to present him' to Miss Van Hoyt. The successful actor−manager is always engulfed in a sea of petticoats.

But all this I could have borne if it had not been for Lalage Leigh. She was the last straw. I could have forgiven him his wife—she didn't seem to count—and I could have forgiven him Miss Montmorency, the leading lady, for I suspected him of being jealous of her success with the dress−circle; but for Miss Lalage Leigh, who played the pert chambermaids in comedy, and who undertook the 'singing fairies' in Shakspearian productions, for her I had no toleration.

We had just had a card for a supper party on the stage of the Proscenium Theatre, and the matter was being discussed.

'In my young days,' said mother doubtfully, 'girls wouldn't have been taken to supper parties behind the scenes.'

'They're tremendously good fun,' said Lady Susan, who was paying one of her seven−minutes' visits; 'and quite good form, you know, and all that sort of thing. Lady Rougemont never misses one of Duncan's parties, and, what's more, she brings her daughter. So do Mrs. Stanley Goring, and most of that lot. You won't meet any actresses there, my dear lady, I can tell you.'

'We might as well go to a crush in Mayfair, then,' said Christina.

'Oh, it's not as bad as all that,' replied Lady Susan. 'What I meant to say was, that Miss Leigh is the only actress who ever appears at Duncan's suppers, and she is perfectly good form, you know. Her father was a dean.'

'They always are,' said Christina; but Lady Susan pretended not to hear.

At half−past eleven on the night in question we drove up to the Proscenium just as the audience was streaming out. It was the hundredth night of a piece in three acts, called *Hypocrisy*, which had drawn the town for some three months. Going down the soft−carpeted staircase, lighted by pink−shaded lamps, and lined with mirrors and laurel wreaths culled by Duncan Clive on his last American tour, we passed the entrance to the stalls, the open door revealing a now empty house with rows of pale pink−and−white chairs, and then, mounting a step or two, turned sharply to the right, where a narrow door gave on to the 'wings.' The stage was 'set' with the last act of *Hypocrisy*, a scene which depicted the precincts of the 'Camellia Club,' in which a masked ball is supposed to take place. Duncan Clive had not had time to change his dress, and he now stood at the door, with brown grease−paint on his cheek and blue pencil lines round his eyes, smiling and welcoming his guests.

One or two modish women, notorious for their Bohemian tastes, had brought their young daughters, who, surprised, delighted, and a little bit frightened at the novel scene in which they found themselves, whispered together in corners, all a−flutter with excitement and curiosity. The critics, imperturbable as usual, preserved a mask−like expression of countenance while they listened to the confidences of one or two leading actors on the vexed subject of their parts; and a phalanx of men about town, a trifle bald about the temples, a little weary about the eyes, gradually gathered on the stage. All these exquisitely−dressed individuals addressed the actor−manager as 'Duncan,' pressed the hand, while they whispered a compliment into the ear, of Miss Lalage Leigh, and then distributed themselves among the society dames who graced the scene with their presence. Meanwhile, the heat was stifling, and the footlights below, with the electric lights in the 'flies,' cast an unbecoming radiance on many a dyed head and wrinkled visage. In the distance a middle−aged and faded woman, covered in diamonds, had

engaged Mr. Clive in close confabulation.

'That's Mrs. Stanley Goring. Good family, rich, nice husband, but goes in for the stage, don't you know,' whispered Lady Susan; 'she's never happy unless she's got Duncan to lunch or supper.'

A buffet had been hastily erected by a dozen men in theatrical livery, and here Cabinet Ministers, fashionable doctors, blond Jews, white−headed generals, eminent tragedians, and the 'press' scrambled for champagne bottles, sandwiches, and cigars. A stout, red−faced man, who looked like a navvy in evening dress, was surrounded by a little court, all anxious to hear what he said. 'That is Brown, the Stock Exchange speculator,' continued Lady Susan; 'he makes "corners" in things, and people want to know which way the wind's going'to blow. I'm just going to make love to him myself; I want a straight tip about Lake Shores. There's Percy Whitemore, the young man from the Thalia. Never mention the stage if you talk to him, my dear. Always discuss horses; he likes to be taken for a cavalry man.'

Meanwhile Mrs. Duncan Clive, in a drab silk gown, hovered vaguely, with an apologetic smile, in the background, and a gallant old general, who was devoted to the stage, surprised her very much by detaining her in conversation. Miss Montmorency, who, it was supposed, had not only a 'past' but a 'present,' had swept out, smothered in a fur pelisse and point lace, directly the play was over. As Lady Susan had predicted, Miss Lalage Leigh was the only actress there.

For the daughter of an eminent ecclesiastic, I must say that Miss Leigh displayed a considerable knowledge of the ways of an effete and over−civilised world. She was a very pretty woman—even with that flaunting dab of rouge on each cheek and those deep−blue smudges round her eyes; even with that fixed, conventional smile and that languorous professional glance. Already a little circle of men surrounded her, so that it was almost impossible to approach, but it was to Mr. Brown, the Stock Exchange magnate, that she seemed to have most to say. One heard her enquiring feverishly about 'Brighton A's,' and expressing doubts about the future of Grand Trunks. She wished to be well, too, with Mrs. Stanley Goring, and detained that lady's hand in her own while she shot several killing glances over her shoulder at the critic of 'The Daily Telephone.' Mr. Duncan Clive had pressed my hand and murmured something pretty when I arrived, but he had not yet found time to come and speak to me.

'I do think this sort of thing is over−rated, don't you?' I whispered to Christina. They were bringing on a fresh supply of champagne now, and the men were beginning to smoke and tell stories; the smart women were slipping out with their young daughters through the flapping canvas doors. Father thought it was time to go, and so did I.

Picking up our skirts, we stepped cautiously along the dusty world behind the scenes, threading our way through virgin forests, dungeon walls, and flowering June meadows to the stage door. It was pitch dark, but we could see outside stood a neat brougham and a man's back.

The back, as we emerged into the street, turned out to be that of Mr. Duncan Clive. With the grease−paint still on his lips, my idol was imprinting a farewell salute on the bismuth−whitened arm of Miss Lalage Leigh, who laughed as she slammed the carriage−door.

It was an evidently not unrehearsed stage idyl.

CHAPTER XIII

'**CHRISTINA**,' I said thoughtfully one day when we were alone, 'you are a young woman of sense and observation. Did it not occur to you, when Mr. John Ford dined here last night, that he had the *cachet*, the unmistakable appearance of a **husband**?'

'What do you mean, Peggy? What ridiculous notions you always have. Why, everybody knows that John Ford is not, and has never been, married.'

'Oh, that's nothing,' I retorted; 'I tell you he was born to be henpecked, and to have a carriage with fat horses, and never drive in it, and to pay long, expensive milliners' bills. The man looks like a husband. Some men don't, and never will; let them marry three times, and they never look as he looks.'

'Well, he hasn't shown any indecent haste about taking a wife,' said Christina. 'He must be every day of fifty.'

'No,' I said, meditatively, 'he is forty−six— *mettons* forty−six. He likes French cooking and Italian operas (dear old fossils like the *Trovatore* and the *Traviata*), he is slightly rotund, he will give his wife a great many diamonds, and he will probably want to live in Prince's Gate. Now, if I were to marry a stockbroker, I would never wear diamonds. It is so like the City to wear diamonds. As a mere matter of taste, I should have nothing but sapphires and pearls.... And I should draw the line at Prince's Gate.'

'As you have only seen the man twice in your whole existence, I don't think you need disturb yourself about the locality you will inhabit with him—just yet.'

'Christina, don't interrupt my day−dream. As a matter of fact, I should insist on Mayfair. Not Charles Street, it's too gloomy; nor South Audley Street, it's too noisy; but, say, Park Street, or one of those cosy little cross streets—a red house with a white door and copper fixings.'

'Brass would be more appropriate for you, my dear girl,' said Christina, sententiously; and then the thing slipped from my memory, as the butler brought up a bunch of orchids from Mr. Van Schuyler and a letter containing an invitation to dinner with Mr. Julian Clancy.

John Ford, the well−known stockbroker, had made his first appearance in our house about a fortnight before. He had been brought to the studio by a pretty, showy Jewess, who was a great admirer of father's, and who liked to run in and out at all hours and bring whom she liked. He was tall, broad−shouldered, and clean−shaven, and had bright blue eyes set in a square face—a face which was red all over. He was not quite ugly, but his manners were odd. He was very silent. If he did speak, it was principally of 'huntin" and 'shootin"; but when he left the house he was the possessor of father's new Academy picture, for which he had offered—in an offhand way, in a distant corner—the sum of fifteen hundred pounds.

The next time we saw him it was at dinner, at one of our big dinners. It was one of those nights when I am simple and natural, and my frock happened to be one of those white, soft, fluffy things, which cost a small fortune and look so inexpensive.

At first the conversation did not flourish, but Mr. John Ford looked furtively and approvingly out of the corner of his eye as he ate his soup. 'Nice little frock,' he said at last. 'Like to see little girls in white. Ought always to dress in white.' And this was the first and last occasion on which Mr. John Ford has ever paid me a compliment. Talking, as I have said, was somewhat hard work, but before the dinner was over he had told me most of his tastes and predilections. In a world where we change our idols every six months, it was refreshing to find anyone with simple, old−fashioned tastes—a liking for pictures with sunset skies and waxen−faced maidens, for love stories which end happily, and for oleaginous Italian melodies. These were the things in fashion in Mr. John Ford's heyday of youth, and they suggested a capacity for fidelity which was encouraging. And such is the adaptability of woman and the egoism of man that before we left the dinner−table Mr. Ford was convinced that I cared for these things also. But it was not of Academy pictures and three−volume novels that I wished to talk with Mr. John Ford. 'Contangos,' 'debentures,' 'bears,' and 'bulls' have always been words of strange fascination for me, probably because I am totally ignorant of everything that goes on in the City. It came over me like madness that I wanted to have a little gamble, and Mr. John Ford offered to give me a 'straight tip,' as he called it, about Patagonians. And I, who never possessed more than 1*l.* 10*s.* altogether during my whole life, felt quite dissipated and worldly and reckless as we discussed the 'little flutter' which I was to undertake. There is hardly anything so infectious as the disease of gambling.

For the rest of the evening Mr. John Ford did not come near me, but Christina admitted afterwards that he was watching me all the time. And when he left I was told that my financial affairs were to be seen to at once. How excited, how dissipated I felt!

During the next few days I received several business−looking blue envelopes, in Mr. John Ford's handwriting, in which I was informed that Patagonians were 'dull,' and afterwards that there was a 'boom' in the same financial commodity, and then again that a fall was expected soon, to be followed by a rise—all of which was Greek to me, but which sounded very reckless.

But one day, a week later, I had a shock which will always be a date in my history. Christina and I were sitting alone over the tea−cups. A blue business−looking envelope was once more served up on a silver tray. I began to feel like a Rothschild or a Baring.

'What's this?' I muttered, as I began to seize the purport of the few neatly−written lines which meandered over a large page. 'He's bought me five shares in Patagonians at 10*l.* each. I've got to pay 50*l.* during the next fortnight! Great heavens!' I gasped. 'Why, I haven't got a penny in the world! I was only joking—'

'An odd sort of joke, my dear child,' said Christina drily. 'Couldn't you have remembered that rather important fact before?'

'Oh, I can't pay it! What's to be done? Father must be told, and—and—I shall never dare to look him in the face again!'

'Who—father?'

'N—no. Mr. Ford. And I like him so much, with his little blue eyes, and his face which is red all over.'

'Wire to him to come. Explain it nicely, said Christina, with what I thought then was a devilish calm, as she produced some telegraph−forms, pushed the ink and pen towards me, and rang the bell for the man.

In less than an hour John Ford was ushered into the room. Regardless of appearances, I had had a thoroughly feminine 'cry,' and was now huddled up on the sofa, with reddened eyelids and roughened hair—a dismal−looking hostess to receive afternoon callers. He came in, shut the door, and sat down, gazing at me in astonished silence.

'What's the matter, Miss Wynman?' he said at last. 'Been sending some poor devil about his business, and regretted it already, eh?'

'No, no, I never send anybody about their business—I—I—hate business any way. And, oh! why did you buy all those shares?'

'All those shares? Why, I only got you 50*l.* worth! I've just bought 6,000*l.* worth myself.'

'But I haven't got it, and I can't get it! I've counted my money carefully, and I find I possess exactly 1 l. 5*s.* 7½*d.*.'

John Ford laughed. 'Well, I think I can manage to get rid of 'em for you. In fact, I know a chap who wants five more.'

To anyone not blinded by financial terrors the little subterfuge must have been palpable. As it was, I never saw it till long afterwards.

'Do you really know of someone who wants them? I think you are an angel!' I said fervently.

John Ford blushed redder than ever, and just for a minute there was an embarrassing silence. We did not mention Patagonians again, and yet he stayed quite a long time that afternoon. At parting we looked straight at each other, and I knew from that minute forward we should be firm allies. There has never been a moment's doubt, from that day, that we should get on.

Six months have gone by since that day, and lots of things have happened. Everyone in the house is very nice to me just now. Father calls me every minute into the studio to ask my advice. Mother—dear mother!—looks at me solicitously, and follows me about the house with a biscuit and a glass of port wine. Christina slips out of the room when the doorbell rings. Nobody contradicts me. It reminds me of once, long ago, when I was ill.

And to be sure I am tired, very tired. Such quantities of gushing notes arrive by every post, which all require an enthusiastic answer, and large brown−paper parcels, with many wrappings, which have to be undone. I might be qualifying for the treadmill, I have tramped so often up the bare staircases of empty houses, where elderly ladies, smelling of gin−and−water, implore me to convince myself how excellent are the dustbins, and what convenient linen−cupboards there are next to the garrets. I bring home racking headaches from emporiums in the Tottenham Court Road, whence I emerge having ordered Louis XVI. clocks for all the servants' bedrooms, and the particular shade of blue which I detest for the dining−room chairs. Other days, it is true, I slink out of the shop with the

excuse that the drawing−room carpet which I have been choosing for the last two hours is for a friend, and that nothing can be decided without consulting her; but this transparent fabrication is invariably received with looks of withering scorn by the shopman in attendance. I am getting accustomed to this, if not to the ineffable Young Person in black silk who presides at Mme Virginie's, and who always leaves me, after one of our lengthened and heating interviews, with the pleasing impression that I am undersized, hopelessly plain, and dressed in shocking taste. Her piercing black eyes look me through; they discover the weak points in the cut of my nethermost petticoat, and I dare swear, if the truth be told, that she is perfectly aware that I have a small hole in the heel of my stocking.

But the process of gentle, low−voiced bullying which goes on at the milliner's only leaves one more obstinate, and I think I prefer my sworn enemy the ineffable Young Person to that other imperious Hebe at the hat−shop, who looks aggravatingly pretty in every shape, however eccentric, and who is of opinion that 'Madam cannot do better' than take a straw saucer trimmed with stuffed birds and strawberries, seeing that Mrs. Langtry has definitely made it the mode. There are those nervous interviews, too, with grinning, sporting−looking attorneys in Lincoln's Inn Fields, when perfectly incomprehensible documents without stops are read out to me, and I finally put my signature on a parchment, which makes one feel for all the world as if one were signing a death−warrant. There are the relations, too, unknown aunts and cousins from the provinces and the suburbs, who suddenly appear, asking one disagreeable questions about one's age, and who generally sigh, and 'hope it will all be for the best.' Then there is the advice, the reams of good advice, which they and my other friends shower upon me.

I am assured—what I can well believe—that it is the first year which is so trying. Some would have me change the savouries at dinner constantly, others insist that I must begin with morning prayers, while another division conjure me not to allow smoking in the dining−room. I am implored not to object to clubs, am warned about pretty parlour−maids, am told not to be too credulous, and am supplicated not to show signs of jealousy, as being quite out of date. A few pray me to be tolerant of old friends, race−meetings, and cigarettes; while many more urge me to keep an observant eye on sisters−inlaw, cheque−books, and bills. There is all this, and, as a final blow, there is the mackerel−kettle!

I think, on the whole, the mackerel−kettle has given me more weary days and sleepless nights than any other article I have had to procure. In every book on Furnishing we find the mackerel−kettle placed foremost in the list of indispensable things; in no illustrated catalogue of ironmongery is a tempting little wood−cut of a mackerel−kettle omitted; and yet in the flesh, or rather in the metal, the mackerel−kettle for ever eludes us. Fabulous sums are expended in hansom cabs, scouring the Tottenham Court Road in pursuit of this phantom article of hardware, and I begin to think that my chances of happiness may be seriously compromised...

But time flies by. The day is very near, now. One foggy winter afternoon I toil upstairs to Christina's room, dragging after me, with the help of the maid, a long, brown, wooden box.

'What do you think has come?' I demand breathlessly, bursting into the room where Christina is trying to read an article on the 'Under−payment of Feminine Labour' in one of the reviews. 'Put it down, Sarah. Unbuckle the strap, quick!'

Womanlike, my sister throws down the 'Twentieth Century,' and we bend curiously over the box as the maid lifts gingerly out a garment of shimmering white and silver from under a layer of tulle.

Symbols of the Eternal Feminine, those lengths of glittering satin flaunt themselves over the sofa and along the floor, lighting up the dim little room with their sumptuous whiteness, while, like a June cloud, the foam of tulle floats for an instant in the winter dusk.

It is my wedding gown.