

Flower o' the Clove

By Henry Harland

I

IN the first-floor sitting-room of a lodging-house in Great College Street, Westminster, a young man—he was tall and thin, with a good deal of rather longish light-coloured hair, somewhat tumbled about; and he wore a pince-nez, and was in slippers and the oldest of tattered coats—a man of thirty-something was seated at a writing-table, diligently scribbling at what an accustomed eye might have recognised as “copy,” and negligently allowing the smoke from a cigarette to curl round and stain the thumb and forefinger of his idle hand, when the lodging-house maid-servant opened his door, and announced excitedly, “A lady to see you, sir.”

With the air of one taken altogether by surprise, and at a cruel disadvantage, the writer dropped his pen, and jumped up. He was in slippers and a disgraceful coat, not to dwell upon the condition of his hair. “You ought to have kept her downstairs until——” he began, frowning upon the maid; and at that point his visitor entered the room.

She was a handsome, dashing-looking young woman, in a toilette that breathed the very last and crispest savour of Parisian elegance :
a hat

a hat that was a tangle of geraniums, an embroidered jacket, white gloves, a skirt that frou-froued breezily as she moved; and she carried an amazing silver-hilted sunshade, a thing like a folded gonfalon, a thing of red silk gleaming through draperies of black lace.

Poising lightly near the threshold, with a bright little smile of interrogation, this bewildering vision said, "Have I the honour of addressing Mr. William Stretton?"

The young man bowed a vague plea of guilty to that name; but his gaze, through the lenses of his pince-nez, was all perplexity and question.

"I'm very fortunate in finding you at home. I've called to see you about a matter of business," she informed him.

"Oh?" he wondered. Then he added, with a pathetic shake of the head, "I'm the last man in the world whom any one could wisely choose to see about a matter of business; but such as I am, I'm all at your disposal."

"So much the better," she rejoined cheerily. "I infinitely prefer to transact business with people who are unbusinesslike. One has some chance of over-reaching them."

"You'll have every chance of over-reaching me," sighed he.

"What a jolly quarter of the town you live in," she commented. "It's so picturesque and Gothic and dilapidated, with such an atmosphere of academic calm. It reminds me of Oxford."

"Yes," assented he, "it *is* a bit like Oxford. Was your business connected——?"

"Oh, it *is* like Oxford?" she interrupted. "Then never tell me again that there's nothing in intuitions. I've never been in Oxford, but directly I passed the gateway of Dean's Yard, I felt reminded of it."

"There's

"There's undoubtedly a lot in intuitions," he agreed; "and for the future I shall carefully abstain from telling you there isn't."

"Those things are gardens, over the way, behind the wall, aren't they?" she asked, looking out of the window.

"Yes, those things are gardens, the gardens of the Abbey. The canons and people have their houses there."

"Very comfortable and nice," said she. "Plenty of grass. And the trees aren't bad, either, for town trees. It must be rather fun to be a canon. As I live," she cried, turning back into the room, "you've got a Pleyel. This is the first Pleyel I've seen in England. Let me congratulate you on your taste in pianos." And with her gloved hands she struck a chord and made a run or two. "You'll need the tuner soon, though. It's just the shadow of a shadow out. I was brought up on Pleyels. Do you know, I've half a mind to make you a confidence?"

"Oh, do make it, I pray you," he encouraged her.

"Well, then, I believe, if you were to offer me a chair, I believe I could bring myself to sit down."

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed; and she sank rustling into the chair that he pushed forward.

"Well, now for my business," said she. "Would you just put this thing somewhere?" She offered him her sunshade, which he took and handled somewhat gingerly. "Oh, you needn't be afraid. It's quite tame," she laughed, "though I admit it looks a bit ferocious. What a sweet room you've got—so manny, and smoky, and booky. Are they all real books?"

"More or less real," he answered; "as real as any books ever are that a fellow gets for review."

"Oh, you got them for review? How terribly exciting. I've never seen a book before that's actually passed through a reviewer's

reviewer's hands. They don't look much the worse for it. Whatever else you said about them, I trust you didn't deny that they make nice domestic ornaments. But this isn't business. You wouldn't call this business?"

"No, I should call this pleasure," he assured her, laughing.

"*Would you?*" she questioned, raising her eyebrows. "Ah, but then you're English."

"Aren't you?" asked he.

"Do I look English?"

"I'm not sure. You certainly don't dress English."

"Heaven forbid! I'm a miserable sinner, but at least I'm incapable of that. However, if you were really kind, you'd affect just a little curiosity to know the errand to which you owe my presence."

"I'm devoured by curiosity."

"You are? Then why don't you show it?"

"Perhaps because I have a sense of humour—amongst other reasons."

"Well, since you're devoured by curiosity, you must know," she began; but broke off suddenly—"Apropos, I wonder whether *you* could be induced to tell *me* something."

"I daresay I could, if it's anything within my sphere of knowledge."

"Then tell me, please, why you keep your Japanese fan in your fireplace."

"Why shouldn't I? Doesn't it strike you as a good place for it?"

"Admirable. But my interest was psychological. I was wondering by what mental process you came to hit upon it."

"Well, then, to be frank, it wasn't I who hit upon it; it isn't my Japanese fan. It's a conceit of my landlady's. This

is

is an age of paradox, you know. Would you prefer silver paper?"

"Must one have one or the other?"

"You're making it painfully clear," he cautioned her, "that you've never lived in lodgings."

"If you go on at this rate," she retorted, laughing, "I shall never get my task accomplished. Here are twenty times that I've commenced it, and twenty times you've put me off. Shall we now, at last, proceed seriously to business?"

"Not on my account, I beg. I'm not in the slightest hurry."

"You said you were devoured by curiosity."

"Did I say that?"

"Certainly you did."

"It must have been aphasia. I meant contentment."

"Devoured by contentment?"

"Why not, as well as by curiosity?"

"The phrase is novel."

"It's the occupation of my life to seek for novel phrases. I'm what somebody or other has called a literary man."

"And you enjoy what somebody or other has called beating about the bush?"

"Hugely—with such a fellow-beater."

"You drive me to extremities. I see there's nothing for it but to plunge in *medias res*. You must know, then, that I have been asked to call upon you by a friend—by my friend Miss Johannah Rothe—I beg your pardon; I never *can* remember that she's changed her name—my friend Miss Johannah Silver—but Silver *née* Rothe—of Silver Towers, in the County of Sussex."

"Ah?" said he. "Ah, yes. Then never tell me again that there's nothing in intuitions. I've never met Miss Silver, but directly

directly you crossed the threshold of this room, I began to feel vaguely reminded of her."

"Oh, there's a lot in intuitions," she agreed. "But don't think to disconcert me. My friend Miss Silver——"

"Your *friend*?"

"Considering the sacrifice I'm making on her behalf to-day, it's strange you should throw doubt upon my friendship for her."

"You make your sacrifices with a cheerful countenance. I should never have guessed that you weren't entirely happy. But forgive my interruption. You were about to say that your friend Miss Silver——"

"My occasional friend. Sometimes, I confess, we quarrel like everything, and remain at daggers drawn for months. She's such a flighty creature, dear Johannah, she not infrequently gets me into a perfect peck of trouble. But since she's fallen heir to all this money, you'd be surprised to behold the devotion her friends have shown her. I couldn't very well refuse to follow their example. One's human, you see; and one can't dress like this for nothing, can one?"

"Upon my word, I'm not in a position to answer you. I've never tried," laughed he.

"In the absence of evidence to the contrary, I think we may safely assume one can't," said she. "However, here you are, beating about the bush again. I come to you as Johannah's emissary. She desires me to ask you several questions."

"Yes?" said he, a trifle uncomfortably.

"She would be glad to know," his visitor declared, looking straight into his eyes, and smiling a little gravely, "why you have been so excessively nasty to her!"

"Have I been nasty to her?" he asked, with an innocence that was palpably counterfeit.

"Don't

"Don't you think you have?"

"I don't see how."

"Don't you think you've responded somewhat ungraciously to her overtures of friendship? Do you think it was nice to answer her letters with those curt little formal notes of yours? Look. Johannah sat down to write to you. And she began her letter *Dear Mr. Stretton*. And then she simply couldn't. So she tore up the sheet and began another *My dear Cousin Will*. And what did she receive in reply? A note beginning *Dear Miss Silver*. Do you think that was kind? Don't you think it was the least bit mortifying? And why have you refused in such a stiff-necked way to go down and see her at Silver Towers?"

"Oh," he protested, "in all fairness, in all logic, your questions ought to be put the other way round."

"Bother logic! But put them any way you like."

"What right had Miss Silver to expect me to multiply the complications of my life by rushing into an ecstatic friendship with her? And why, being very well as I am in town just now, why should I disarrange myself by a journey into the country?"

"Why, indeed? I'm sure I can give no reason. Why should one ever do any one else a kindness? Your cousin has conceived a great desire to meet you."

"Oh, a great desire! She'll live it down. A man named Burrell has been stuffing her up."

"Stuffing her up? The expression is new to me."

"Greening her, filling her head with all sorts of nonsensical delusions, painting my portrait for her in all the colours of the rainbow. Oh, I know my Burrell. He's tried to stuff *me* up, too, about her."

"Oh? Has he? What has he said?"

∴ "The

"The usual rubbishy things one does say, when one wants to stuff a fellow up."

"For instance?"

"Oh, that she's tremendously good-looking, with hair and eyes and things, and very charming."

"What a dear good person the man named Burrell must be."

"He's not a bad chap, but you must remember that he's her solicitor."

"And so you weren't to be stuffed?"

"If she was charming and good-looking, it was a reason the more for avoiding her."

"Oh?"

"There's nothing on earth so tiresome as charming women. They're all exactly alike."

"Thank you," his guest exclaimed, bowing.

"Oh, nobody could pretend that *you're* exactly alike," he said. "I own at once that you're delightfully different. But Burrell has no knack for character drawing."

"You're extremely flattering. But aren't you taking a slightly one-sided point of view? Let us grant, for the sake of the argument, that it *is* Johannah's bad luck to be charming and good-looking. Nevertheless, she still has claims on you."

"Has she?"

"She's your cousin."

"Oh, by the left hand," said he.

She stared for an instant, biting her lip. Then she laughed.

"And only my second or third cousin at that," he went on serenely.

She looked at him with eyes that were half whimsical, half pleading. "Would you mind being quite serious for a moment?" she asked. "Because Johannah's situation, absurd as it seems,
really

really is terribly serious for Johannah, I should like to submit it to your better judgment. We'll drop the question of cousinship, if you wish—though it's the simple fact that you're her only blood-relation in this country, where she feels herself the forlornest sort of alien. She's passed her entire life in Italy and France, you know, and this is the first visit she's made to England since her childhood. But we'll drop the question of cousinship. At any rate, Johannah is a human being. Well, consider her plight a little. She finds herself in the most painful, the most humiliating circumstances that can be imagined; and you're the only person living who can make them easier for her. Involuntarily—in spite of herself—she's come into possession of a fortune that naturally, morally, belongs to you. She can't help it. It's been left to her by will—by the will of a man who never saw her, never had any kind of relations with her, but chose her for his heir just because her mother, who died when Johannah was a baby, had chanced to be his cousin. And there the poor girl is. Can't you see how like a thief she must feel at the best? Can't you see how much worse you make it for her, when she holds out her hand, and you refuse to take it? Is that magnanimous of you? Isn't it cruel? You couldn't treat her with greater unkindness if she'd actually designed, and schemed, and intrigued, to do you out of your inheritance, instead of coming into it in the passive way she has. After all, she's a human being, she's a woman. Think of her pride."

"Think of mine," said he.

"I can't see that your pride is involved."

"To put it plainly, I'm the late Sir William Silver's illegitimate son."

"Well? What of that?"

"Do you fancy I should enjoy being taken up and patronised by his legitimate heir?"

"Oh!"

"Oh!" she cried, starting to her feet. "You can't think I would be capable of anything so base as that."

And her saw that her eyes had suddenly filled with tears.

"I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon a thousand times," he said. "You would be utterly incapable of anything that was not generous and noble. But you must remember that I had never seen you. How could I know?"

"Well, now that you *have* seen me," she responded, her eyes all smiles again, "now that I've put *my* pride in my pocket, and bearded you in your den, I don't mind confiding to you that it's nearly lunch-time, and also that I'm ravenously hungry. Could you ring your bell, and order up something in the nature of meat and drink? And while you are about it, you might tell your landlady or some one to pack your bag. We take," she mentioned, examining a tiny watch, that seemed nothing more than a frivolous incrustation of little diamonds and rubies, "we take the three-sixteen for Silver Towers."

II

Seated opposite her in the railway-carriage, as their train bore them through the pleasant dales and woods of Surrey, Will Stretton fell to studying his cousin's appearance. "Burrell was right," he told himself; "she really is tremendously good-looking," and that, in spite of a perfectly reckless irregularity of feature. Her nose was too small, but it was a delicate, pert, pretty nose, notwithstanding. Her mouth was too large, but it was a beautiful mouth, all the same, softly curved and red as scarlet, with sensitive, humorous little quirks in its corners. Her eyes he could admire without reservation, brown and pellucid, with the wittiest, teasingest, mockingest lights dancing in them, yet at the same time a deeper

deeper light that was pensive, tender, womanly. Her hair, too, he decided, was quite lovely, abundant, undulating, black, blue-black even, but fine, but silky, escaping in a flutter of small curls above her brow. "It's like black foam," he said. And he would have been ready to go to war for her complexion, though it was so un-English a complexion that one might have mistaken her for a native of the France or Italy she had inhabited: warm, dusky, white, with an elusive shadow of rose glowing through it. Yes, she was tremendously good-looking, he concluded. She looked fresh and strong and real. She looked alert, alive, full of the spring and the joy of life. She looked as if she could feel quick and deep, as if her blood flowed swiftly, and was red. He liked her face, and he liked her figure—it was supple and vigorous. He liked the way she dressed—there was something daring and spirited in the unabashed, whole-souled luxury of it. "Who ever saw such a hat—or such a sunshade?" he reflected.

"There'll be no coach-and-four to meet us at the station," she warned him, as they neared their journey's end, "because I have no horses. But we'll probably find Madame Dornaye there, *piaffer*-ing in person. Can you resign yourself to the prospect of driving up to your ancestral mansion in a hired fly?"

"I could even, at a pinch, resign myself to walking," he declared. "But who is Madame Dornaye?"

"Madame Dornaye is my burnt-offering to that terrible sort of fetich called the County. She's what might be technically termed my chaperon."

"Oh, to be sure. I had forgotten. Of course, you'd have a chaperon."

"By no means of course. Until the other day I'd never thought of such a thing. But it's all along o' the man named

Burrell. He insisted that I mustn't live alone—that I was too young. He has such violent hallucinations about people's ages. He said the County would be horrified. I must have an old woman, a sound, reliable old woman, to live with me. I begged and implored *him* to come and try it, but he protested with tears in his eyes that he wasn't an old woman. So I sent for Madame Dornaye, who is, every inch of her. She's the widow of a man who used to be a professor at the Sorbonne, or something. I've known her for at least a hundred years. She's connected in some roundabout way with the family of my father's step-mother. She's like a little dry brown leaf; and she plays Chopin *comme pas un*; and she lends me a false air of respectability, I suppose. She calls me *Jeanne ma fille*, if you can believe it, as if my name weren't common Johannah. If you chance to please her, she'll very likely call you *Jean mon fils*. But see how things turn out. The man named Burrell also insisted that I must put on mourning, as a symbol of my grief for the late Sir William. That I positively refused to think of. So the County's horrified, all the same—which proves the futility of concessions."

"Oh?" questioned Will. "What does the County do?"

"It comes and calls on me, and walks round me, and stares, with a funny little deprecating smile, as if I were some outlandish and not very proper animal, cast up by the sea. To begin with, there's the vicar, with all his wives and daughters. *Their* emotions are complicated by the fact that I'm a Papist. Then there's old Lord Belgard; and there's Mrs. Breckenbridge, with her marriageable sons; and there's the Bishop of Salchester, with his Bishopess, Dean, and Chapter. The dear good people make up parties in the afternoon, to come and have a look at me; and they sip my tea with an air of guilt, as if it smacked of profligacy; and they suppress demure little knowing glances among themselves. And then

then at last they go away, shaking their heads, and talking me over in awe-struck voices."

"I can see them, I can hear them," Will laughed.

"Haven't you in English a somewhat homely proverbial expression about the fat and the fire?" asked Johannah.

"About the fat getting into the fire? Yes," said Will.

"Well, then, to employ that somewhat homely proverbial expression," she went on, "the fat got into the fire at the Bishop's palace. Mrs. Rawley was kind enough to write and ask us to dinner, and she added that she had heard I sang, and wouldn't I bring some music? But nobody had ever told me that it's bad form in England to sing *well*. So, after dinner, when Mrs. Rawley said, 'Now, Miss Silver, do sing us something,' I made the incredible blunder of singing as well as I could. I sang the *Erlkönig*, and Madame Dornaye played the accompaniment, and we both did our very bestest, in our barefaced, Continental way. We were a little surprised, and vastly enlightened, to perceive that we'd shocked everybody. And by-and-by the Bishop's daughters consented to sing in their turn, and then we saw the correct British style of doing it. If you don't want to be considered rowdyish and noisy in a British drawing-room, you must sing under your breath, faintly, faintingly, as if you were afraid somebody might hear you."

"My poor dear young lady," her cousin commiserated her, "fancy your only just discovering that. It's one of the foundation-stones of our social constitution. If you sing with any art or with any feeling, you expose yourself to being mistaken for a paid professional."

"Another thing that's horrified the County," pursued Johannah, "is the circumstance that I keep no horses. I don't like horses—except in pictures. In pictures, I admit at once, they make a

very

very pleasant decorative motive. But in life—they're too strong and too unintelligent; and they're perpetually bolting. By-the-bye, please choose a good feeble jaded one, when you engage our fly. I'm devoted to donkeys, though. They're every bit as decorative as the horse, and they're really wise—they only balk. I had a perfect love of a little donkey in Italy; his name was Angelo. If I decide to stay in England, I shall have a spanking team of four donkeys, with scarlet trappings and silver bells. But the County says, 'Oh, you *must* have horses,' and casts its eyes appealingly to heaven when I say I *won't*."

"The County lacks a sense of situations. It's really a deliciously fresh one—a big country house, and not a horse in the stables."

"Apropos of the house, that brings me to another point," said she. "The County feels very strongly that I ought to put the house in repair—that dear old wonderful, rambling, crumbling house. They take it as the final crushing evidence of my depravity, that I prefer to leave it in its present condition of picturesque decay. I'm sure you agree with me, that it would be high treason to allow a carpenter or mason to lay a hand on it. By-the-bye, I hope you have no conscientious scruples against speaking French; for Madame Dornaye only knows two words of English, and those she mispronounces. There she is—yes, that little black and grey thing, in the frock. She's come to meet me, because we had a bet. You owe me five shillings," she called out to Madame Dornaye, as Will helped her from the carriage. "You see, I've brought him."

Madame Dornaye, who had a pair of humorous old French eyes, responded, blinking them, "Oh, before I pay you, I shall have to be convinced that it is really he."

"I am afraid it's really he," laughed Will; "but rather than let

so immaterial a detail cost you five shillings, I'm prepared to maintain with my dying breath that there's no such person."

"Don't mind him," interposed Johannah. "He's trying to flatter you up, because he wants you to call him *Jean mon fils*, as if his name weren't common William." Then, to him, "Go," she said, with an imperious gesture, "go and find a vehicle with a good tired horse."

And when the vehicle with the good tired horse had brought them to their destination, and they stood before the hall-door of Silver Towers, Johannah looked up at the escutcheon carved in the pale-grey stone above it, and said pensively, "On a field azure, a heart gules, crowned with an imperial crown or; and the motto, 'Qu'il régne!' If, when you got my first letter, Cousin Will, if you'd remembered the arms of our family, and the motto—if you had 'let it reign'—I should have been spared the trouble and expense of a journey to town to-day."

"But I should have missed a precious experience," said he. "You forget what I couldn't help being supremely conscious of—that I bear those arms with a difference. I hope, though, that you won't begrudge the journey to town. I think there are certain aspects of your character that I might never have discovered if I'd met you in any other way."

That evening Johannah wrote a letter :

"DEAR MR. BURRELL :

"*Ce que femme veut, Dieu le veut.* The first part of my rash little prophecy has already come true. Will Stretton is staying in this house, a contented guest. At the present moment he's hovering about the piano, where Madame Dornaye is playing Chopin; and
he's

he's just remarked that he never hears Chopin without thinking of those lines of Browning's :

‘ I discern
Infinite passion, and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn.’

I quite agree with you, he *is* a charming creature. So now I repeat the second part of my rash little prophecy: Before the summer's over he will have accepted at least a good half of his paternal fortune. *Ce que femme veut, le diable ne saurait pas l'empêcher.* He will he shall, even if I have to marry him to make him.

“ Yours ever

“ JOHANNAH SILVER.”

III

Will left his room somewhat early the next morning, and went down into the garden. The sun was shining briskly, the dew still sparkled on the grass, the air was heady with a hundred keen earth-odours. A mile away, beyond the wide green levels of Sumpter Meads, the sea glowed blue as the blue of larkspur, under the blue June sky. And everywhere, everywhere, innumerable birds piped and twittered, filling the world with a sense of gay activity, of whole-hearted, high-hearted life.

“ What ! up already ? ” a voice called softly, from behind him.

He turned, and met Johannah.

“ Why not, since you are ? ” he responded.

She laughed, and gave him her hand, a warm, elastic hand, firm of grasp. In a garden-hat and a white frock, her eyes beaming, her cheeks faintly flushed, she seemed to him a sort of beautiful incarnation of the spirit of the summer morning, its freshness, and sweetness, and richness.

“ Oh,

“Oh, we furriners,” she explained ; “we’re all shocking early risers. In Italy we love the day when it is young, and deem it middle-aged by eight o’clock. But in England I had heard it was the fashion to lie late.”

“I woke, and couldn’t go to sleep again, so I tossed the fashion to the winds. Perhaps it was a sort of dim presentiment that I should surprise Aurora walking in the garden, that banished slumber.”

“Flowery speeches are best met by flowery deeds,” said she. “Come with me to the roserie, and I will give you a red, red rose.”

And in the roserie, as she stood close to him, pinning the red, red rose in his coat, her smooth cheek and fragrant hair so near, so near, he felt his heart all at once begin to throb, and he had to control a sudden absurd longing to put his arms round her and kiss her. “Good heavens,” he said to himself, “I must be on my guard.”

“There,” she cried, bestowing upon her task a gentle pat, by way of finish, “that makes us quits.” And she raised her eyes to his, and held them for an instant with a smile that did anything but soothe the trouble in his heart, such a sly little teasing, cryptic smile. Could it possibly be, he wondered wildly, that she had divined his monstrous impulse, and was coquetting with it ?

“Now let’s be serious,” she said, leading the way back to the lawn. “It’s like a hanging-garden, high up here, with the meads and the sea below, isn’t it ? And apropos of the sea, I would beg you to observe its colour. Is it blue ? I would also ask you kindly to cast an eye on that line of cliffs, there to the eastward, as it goes winding in and out away to the vanishing-point. Are the cliffs white ?”

“Oh, yes, the cliffs are white,” asserted Will.

“How

"How can you tell such dreadful fibs?" she reproached him. "The cliffs are prismatic. White, indeed! when they gleam with every transparent tint from rose to violet, as if the light that falls on them had passed through rubies and amethysts, and all sorts of precious stones. That is an optical effect due doubtless to reflection or refraction or something—no?"

"I should say it was almost certainly due to something," he acquiesced.

"And now," she continued, "will you obligingly turn your attention to the birds? Tweet-weet-willow-will-weet. I don't know what it means, but they repeat it so often and so earnestly, I'm sure it must be true."

"It's relatively true," said he. "It means that it's a fine morning, and their digestion's good, and their affairs are prospering—nothing more than that. They're material-minded little beasts, you know."

"All truth is relative," said she, "and one's relatively a material-minded little beast oneself. Is the greensward beyond there (relatively) spangled with buttercups and daisies? Is the park leafy, and shadowy, and mysterious, and (relatively) delightful? Is the may in bloom? *Voyons donc!* you'll never be denying that the may's in bloom. And is the air like an elixir? I vow, it goes to one's head like some ethereal elixir? And yet you have the effrontery to tell me that you're pining for the flesh-pots of Great College Street, Westminster, S.W."

"Oh, did I tell you that? Ah, well, it must have been with intent to deceive, for nothing could be farther from the truth."

"The relative truth? Then you're not homesick?"

"Not consciously."

"Neither am I," said she.

"Why should you be?" said he.

"This

"This is positively the first day since my arrival in England that I haven't been, more or less," she answered.

"Oh?" he questioned sympathetically.

"You can't think how *dépaysée* I've felt. After having lived all one's life in Prague, suddenly to find oneself translated to the mistress-ship of an English country house."

"In Prague? I thought you had lived in Rome and Paris, chiefly."

"Prague is a figure of rhetoric. I mean the capital of Bohemia. Wasn't my father a sculptor? And wasn't I born in a studio? And haven't my playmates and companions always been of Florizel the loyal subjects? So whether you call it Rome or Paris or Florence or Naples, it was Prague, none the less."

"At that rate, I live in Prague myself, and we're compatriots," said Will.

"That's no doubt why I don't feel homesick any more. Where two of the faithful are gathered together they can form a miniature Prague of their own. If I decide to stay in England, I shall send for a lot of my Prague friends to come and visit me, and you can send for an equal number of yours; and then we'll turn this bright particular corner of the British Empire into a province of Bohemia, and the County may be horrified with reason. But meanwhile, let's be Pragueians in practice as well as theory. Let's go to the strawberry beds, and steal some strawberries."

She walked a little in front of him. Her garden-hat had come off, and she was swinging it at her side, by its ribbons. Will noticed the strong, lithe sway and rhythm of her body, as she moved. "What a *woman* she is," he thought; "how one feels her sex." And with that, he all at once became aware of a singular depression. "Surely," a malevolent little voice within him argued,

argued, "woman that she is, and having passed all her life with the subjects of Florizel, surely, surely, she must have had . . . experiences. She must have loved—she must have been loved." And (as if it was any of his business!) a kind of vague jealousy of her past, a kind of suspiciousness and irrelevant resentment, began to burn dully, a small spot of pain, somewhere in his breast.

She, apparently, was in the highest spirits. There was something expressive of joyousness in the mere way she tripped over the grass, swinging her garden-hat like a basket; and presently she fell to singing, merrily, in a light voice, that prettiest of old French songs, *Les Trois Princesses*, dancing forward to its measure :

" Derrièr' chez mon père,
 (Vole, vole, mon cœur, vole !)
 Derrièr' chez mon père,
 Ya un pommier doux,
 Tout doux, et iou,
 Ya un pommier doux."

"Don't you like that song?" she asked. "The tune of it is like the smell of faded rose-leaves, isn't it?"

And suddenly she began to sing a different one, possibly an improvisation :

" And so they set forth for the strawberry beds,
 The strawberry beds, the strawberry beds,
 And so they set forth for the strawberry beds,
 On Christmas day in the morning."

And when they had reached the strawberry beds, she knelt, and plucked a great red berry, and then leapt up again, and held it to her cousin's lips, saying, "Bite—but spare my fingers." And so, laughing,

laughing, she fed it to him, while he, laughing too, consumed it. But when her pink finger-tips all but touched his lips, his heart had a convulsion, and it was only by main-force that he restrained his kisses. And he said to himself, "I must go back to town to-morrow. This will never do. It would be the devil to pay if I should let myself fall in love with her."

"Oh, yes, I've felt terribly *dépaysée*," she told him again, herself nibbling a berry. "I've felt like the traditional cat in the strange garret. And then, besides, there was my change of name. I can't reconcile myself to being called Miss Silver. I can't realise the character. It's like an affectation, like making-believe. Directly I relax my vigilance, I forget, and sink back into Johannah Rothe. I'm always Johannah Rothe when I'm alone. Directly I'm alone, I push a big *ouf*, and send Miss Silver to Cracklimboo. Then somebody comes, and, with a weary sigh, I don my sheep's clothing again. Of course, there's nothing in a name, and yet there's everything. There's a furious amount of mental discomfort when the name doesn't fit."

"It's a discomfort that will pass," he said consolingly. "The change of name is a mere formality—a condition attached to coming into a property. In England, you know, it's a rather frequent condition."

"I'm aware of that. But to me it seems symbolic—symbolic of my whole situation, which is false, abnormal. Silver? Silver? It's a name meant for a fair person, with light hair and a white skin. And here I am, as black as any Gipsy. And then! It's a condition attached to coming into a property. Well, I come into a property to which I have no more moral right than I have to the coat on your back; and I'm obliged to do it under an *alias*, like a thief in the night."

"Oh, my dear young lady," he cried out, "you've the very
best

best of rights, moral as well as legal. You come into a property that is left to you by will, and you're the last representative of the family in whose hands it has been for I forget how many hundreds of years."

"That," said she, "is a question I shall not refuse to discuss with you upon some more fitting occasion. For the present I am tempted to perpetrate a simply villainous pun, but I forbear. Suffice it to say that I consider the property that I've come into as nothing more nor less than a present made me by my cousin, William Stretton. No—don't interrupt! I happen to know my facts. I happen to know that if Will Stretton hadn't, for reasons in the highest degree honourable to himself, quarrelled and broken with his father, and refused to receive a penny from him, I happen to know, I say, that Sir William Silver would have left Will Stretton everything he possessed in the world. So, you see, I'm indebted to my Quixotic cousin for something in the neighbourhood, I'm told, of eight thousand a year. Rather a handsome little present, isn't it? Furthermore, let me add in passing, I absolutely forbid my cousin to call me his dear young lady, as if he were seven hundred years my senior and only a casual acquaintance. A really nice cousin would take the liberty of calling me by my Christian name."

"I'll take the liberty of calling you by some exceedingly *un-Christian* name, if you don't leave off talking that impossible rot about my making you a present."

"I wasn't talking impossible rot about your making me a present. I was merely telling you how *dépaysée* I'd felt. The rest was parenthetical. So now, then, keep your promise, call me Johannah."

"Johannah," he called submissively.

"Will," said she. "And when you feel, Will, that on the whole,

whole, Will, you've had strawberries enough, Will, quite to destroy your appetite, perhaps it would be as well if we should go in to breakfast, Willie."

IV

They were seated on the turf, under a great tree, in the park, amid a multitude of bright-coloured cushions, Johannah, Will, and Madame Dornaye. It was three weeks later—whence it may be inferred that he had abandoned his resolution to "go back to town to-morrow." He was smoking a cigarette; Madame Dornaye was knitting; Johannah, hatless, in an indescribable confection of cream-coloured muslin, her head pillowed in a scarlet cushion against the body of the tree, was gazing off towards the sea with dreamy eyes.

"Will," she called languidly, by-and-by.

"Yes?" he responded.

"Do you happen by any chance to belong to that sect of philosophers who regard gold as a precious metal?"

"From the little I've seen of it, I am inclined to regard it as precious—yes," he answered.

"Well, then, I wouldn't be so lavish of it, if I were you," said she.

"If you don't take care," said he, "you'll force me to admit that I haven't an idea of what you're driving at."

"I'm driving at your silence. You're as silent as a statue. Please talk a little."

"What shall I talk about?"

"Anything. Nothing. Tell us a story."

"I don't know any stories."

"Then the least you can do is to invent one."

"What

"What sort of story would you like?"

"There's only one sort of story a woman ever sincerely likes—especially on a hot summer's afternoon, in the country."

"Oh, I couldn't possibly invent a love-story."

"Then tell us a true one. You needn't be afraid of shocking Madame Dornaye. She's a realist herself."

"Jeanne ma fille!" murmured Madame Dornaye, reprovingly.

"The only true love-story I could tell has a somewhat singular defect," said he. "There's no heroine."

"That's like the story of what's-his-name—Narcissus."

"With the vastest difference. The hero of my story wasn't in love with his own image. He was in love with a beautiful princess."

"Then how can you have the face to say that there's no heroine?"

"There isn't any heroine. At the same time, there's nothing else. The story's all about her. You see, she never existed."

"You said it was a *true* love-story."

"So it is—literally true."

"I asked for a story, and you give me a riddle."

"Oh, no, it's a story all the same. Its title is *Much Ado about Nobody*."

"Oh? It runs in my head that I've met with something or other with a similar title before."

"Precisely. Something or other by one of the Elizabethans. That's how it came to occur to me. I take my goods where I find them. However, do you want to hear the story?"

"Oh, if you're determined to tell it, I daresay I can steel myself to listen."

"On second thoughts, I'm determined not to tell it."

"Bother! Don't be disagreeable. Tell it at once."

"Well,

“Well, then, there isn’t any story. It’s simply an absurd little freak of child psychology. It’s the story of a boy who fell in love with a girl—a girl that never was, on sea or land. It happened in Regent Street, of all romantic places, ‘one day still fierce, ’mid many a day struck calm.’ I had gone with my mother to her milliner’s. I think I was ten or eleven. And while my mother was transacting her business with the milliner, I devoted my attention to the various hats and bonnets that were displayed about the shop. And presently I hit on one that gave me a sensation. It was a straw hat, with brown ribbons, and cherries, great glossy red and purple cherries. I looked at it—and suddenly I got a vision, a vision of a girl. Oh, the loveliest, loveliest girl! She was about eighteen (a self-respecting boy of eleven, you know, always chooses a girl of about eighteen to fall in love with), and she had the brightest brown eyes, and the rosiest cheeks, and the curlingest hair, and a smile and a laugh that made one’s heart thrill and thrill with unutterable blisses. And there hung her hat, as if she had just come in, and taken it off, and passed into another room. There hung her hat, suggestive of her as only people’s hats know how to be suggestive; and there sat I, my eyes devouring it, my soul transported. The very air of the shop seemed all at once to have become fragrant—with the fragrance that had been shaken from her garments as she passed. I went home, hopelessly, frantically in love. I loved that non-existent young woman, with a passion past expressing, for at least half a year. I was always thinking of her, she was always with me, everywhere. How I used to talk to her, and tell her all my childish fancies, desires, questionings; how I used to sit at her feet and listen! She never laughed at me. Sometimes she would let me kiss her—I declare, my heart still jumps at the memory of it. Sometimes I would hold her hand or play with her hair. And all

all the *real* girls I met seemed so tame and commonplace by contrast with her. And then, little by little, I suppose, her image faded away.—Rather an odd experience, wasn't it?"

"Very, very odd; very strange, and very pretty. It seems as if it ought to have some allegorical significance, though I can't perceive one. It would be interesting to know what sort of real girl, if any, ended by becoming the owner of that hat. You weren't shocked, were you?" Johannah inquired of Madame Dornaye.

"Not by the story. But the heat is too much for me," said that lady, gathering up her knitting. "I am going to the house to make a siesta."

Will rose, as she did, and stood looking vaguely after her, as she moved away. Johannah nestled her head deeper in her cushion, and half closed her eyes. And for a while neither she nor her cousin spoke. A faint, faint breeze whispered in the tree-tops; now a twig snapped; now a bird dropped a solitary liquid note. For the rest, all was still summer heat and woodland perfume. Here and there the greensward round them, dark in the shadow of dense foliage, was diapered with vivid yellow by sunbeams that filtered through.

"Oh, dear me," Johannah sighed at last.

"What is it?" Will demanded.

"Here you are, silent as eternity again. Come and sit down—here—near to me."

She indicated a position with a lazy movement of her hand. He obediently sank upon the grass.

"You're always silent nowadays, when we're alone," she complained.

"Am I? I hadn't noticed that."

"Then you're extremely unobservant. Directly we're alone,
you

you appear to lose the power of speech. You mope and moon, and gaze off at things beyond the horizon, and never open your mouth. One might suppose you had something on your mind. Have you? What is it? Confide it to me, and you can't think how relieved you'll feel."

"I haven't anything on my mind," said he.

"Oh? Ah, then you're silent with me because I bore you? You find me an uninspiring talk-mate! Thank you."

"You know perfectly well that that's preposterous nonsense."

"Well, then, what is it? Why do you never talk to me when we're alone?"

"But I do talk to you. I talk too much. Perhaps *I'm* afraid of boring *you*."

"You know perfectly well that that's a preposterous subterfuge. You've got something on your mind. You're keeping something back." She paused for a second; then, softly, wistfully, "Tell me what it is, Will, *please*." And she looked eagerly, pleadingly, into his eyes.

He looked away from her. "Upon my word, there's nothing to tell," he said, but his tone was a little forced.

She broke into a merry peal of laughter, looking at him now with eyes that were derisive.

"What are you laughing at?" he asked.

"At you, Will," said she. "What else could you imagine?"

"I'm flattered to think you find me so amusing."

"Oh, you're supremely amusing. 'Refrain thou shalt; thou shalt refrain!' Is that your motto, Will? If I were a man I'd choose another. 'Be bold, be bold, and everywhere be bold!' That should be my motto if I were a man."

"But as you're a woman——"

"It's my motto, all the same," she interrupted. "Do you mean

mean to say you've not discovered that yet? Oh, Will, if I were you, and you were I, how differently we should be employing this heaven-sent summer's afternoon."

"What should we be doing?"

"That's a secret. Pray the fairies to-night to transpose our souls, and you'll know by to-morrow morning—if the fairies grant your prayer. But in the meanwhile you must try to entertain me. Tell me another story."

"I can't think of any more stories till I've had my tea."

"You shan't have any tea unless you earn it. Now that Madame Dornaye's no longer present, you can tell me of some of your grown-up love affairs, some of your flesh-and-blood ones."

"I've never had a grown-up love affair."

"Oh, come! you can't expect me to believe that."

"It's the truth, all the same."

"Well, then, it's high time you *should* have one. How old did you say you were?"

"I'm thirty-three."

"And you've never had a love affair! *Fi donc!* I'm barely twenty-eight, and I've had a hundred."

"Have you?" he asked, a little ruefully.

"No, I haven't. But everybody's had at least one. So tell me yours."

"Upon my word, I've not had even one."

"It seems incredible. How have you contrived it?"

"The circumstances of my birth contrived it for me. It would be impossible for me to have a love affair with a woman I could love."

"Impossible? For goodness' sake, why?"

"What woman would accept the addresses of a man without a name?"

"Haven't

"Haven't you a name? Methought I'd heard your name was William Stretten."

"You know what I mean."

"Then permit me to remark that what you mean is quite superlatively silly. If you loved a woman, wouldn't you tell her so?"

"Not if I could help it."

"But suppose the woman loved you?"

"Oh, it wouldn't come to that."

"But suppose it *had* come to that? Suppose she'd set her heart upon you? Would it be fair to her not to tell her?"

"What would be the good of my telling her, since I couldn't possibly ask her to marry me?"

"The fact might interest her, apart from the question of its consequences. But suppose *she* told *you*? Suppose *she* asked *you* to marry *her*?"

"She wouldn't."

"All hypotheses are admissible. Suppose she should?"

"I couldn't marry her."

"You'd find it rather an awkward job refusing, wouldn't you? And what reasons could you give?"

"Ten thousand reasons. I'm a bastard. That begins and ends it. It would dishonour her, and it would dishonour me; and, worst of all, it would dishonour my mother."

"It would certainly *not* dishonour you, nor the woman you married. That's the sheerest, antiquated, exploded rubbish. And how on earth could it dishonour your mother?"

"For me to take as my wife a woman who could not respect her? My mother's memory is for me the sacreddest of sacred things. You know something of her history. You know that she was in every sense but a legal sense my father's wife. You

know

know why they couldn't be married legally. You know, too, how he treated her—and how she died. Do you suppose I could marry a woman who would always think of my mother as of one who had done something shameful?"

"Oh, but no woman with a spark of nobility in her soul would or could do that," Johannah cried.

"Every woman brought up in the usual way, with the usual prejudices, the usual traditions, thinks evil of the woman who has had an illegitimate child."

"Not every woman. I, for instance. Do you imagine that I could think evil of your mother, Will?"

"Oh, you're entirely different from other women. You're——" But he stopped at that.

"Then—just for the sake of a case in point—if *I* were the woman you chanced to be in love with, and if I simultaneously chanced to be in love with you, you *could* see your way to marrying *me*?"

"What's the use of discussing that?"

"For its metaphysical interest. Answer me."

"There are other reasons why I couldn't marry *you*."

"I'm not good-looking enough?"

"Don't be silly."

"Not young enough?"

"Oh, I say! Let's talk of something reasonable."

"Not old enough, perhaps?"

He was silent.

"Not wise enough? Not foolish enough?" she persisted.

"You're foolish enough, in all conscience," said he.

"Well, then, why? What are the reasons why you couldn't marry *me*?"

"What *is* the good of talking about this!"

"I want

"I want to know. A man has the hardihood to inform me to my face that he'd spurn my hand, even if I offered it to him. I insist upon knowing why."

"You know why. And you know that 'spurn' is very far from the right word."

"I don't know why. I insist upon your telling me."

"You know that you're Sir William Silver's heiress, I suppose."

"Oh, come! that's not *my* fault. How could *that* matter?"

"Look here, I'm not going to make an ass of myself by explaining the obvious."

"I daresay I'm very stupid, but it isn't obvious to me."

"Well, then, let's drop the subject," he suggested.

"I'll not drop the subject till you've elucidated it. If you were in love with me, Will, and I were in love with you, how on earth could it matter, my being Sir William Silver's heiress?"

"Wouldn't I seem a bit mercenary if I asked you to marry me?"

"Oh, Will!" she cried. "Don't tell me you're such a prig as that. What! if you loved me, if I loved you, you'd give me up, you'd break my heart, just for fear lest idiotic people, whose opinions don't matter any more than the opinions of so many deep-sea fish, might think you mercenary! When you and I both knew in our own two souls that you really weren't mercenary in the least! You'd pay me a poor compliment, Will. Isn't it conceivable that a man might love me for myself?"

"You state the case too simply. You make no allowances for the shades and complexities of a man's feelings."

"Bother shades and complexities. Love burns them up. Your shades and complexities are nothing but priggishness and vanity. But there! I'm actually getting angry over a purely supposititious

supposititious question. For, of course, we don't really love each other the least bit, do we, Will?"

He appeared to be giving his whole attention to the rolling of a cigarette; he did not answer. But his fingers trembled, and presently he tore his paper, spilling half the tobacco in his lap.

Johannah watched him from eyes full of languid, half mocking, half pensive laughter.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," she sighed again, by-and-by.

He looked at her; and he had to catch his breath. Lying there on the turf, the skirts of her frock flowing round her in a sort of little billowy white pool, her head deep in the scarlet cushion, her black hair straying wantonly where it would about her face and brow, her eyes lambent with that lazy, pensive laughter, one of her hands, pink and white, warm and soft, fallen open on the grass between her and her cousin, her whole person seeming to breathe a subtle scent of womanhood, and the luxury and mystery of womanhood—oh, the sight of her, the sense of her, there in the wide green stillness of the summer day, set his heart burning and beating poignantly.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," she sighed, "I wish the man I *am* in love with were only here."

"Oh! You *are* in love with some one?" he questioned, with a little start.

"Rather!" said she. "In love! I should think so. Oh, I love him, love him, love him. Ah, if he were here! *He* wouldn't waste this golden afternoon, as you're doing. He'd take my hand—he'd hold it, and press it, and kiss it; and he'd pour his soul out in tumultuous celebration of my charms, in fiery avowals of his passion. If he were here! Ah, me!"

"Where is he?" Will asked, in a dry voice.

"Ah, where indeed? I wish I knew."

"I've

"I've never heard you speak of him before."

"There's none so deaf as he that *will* not hear. I've spoken of him to you at least a thousand times. He forms the staple of my conversation."

"I must be very deaf indeed. I swear this is absolutely news to me."

"Oh, Will, you *are* such a goose—or such a hypocrite," said she. "But it's tea-time. Help me up."

She held out her hand, and he took it and helped her up. But she tottered a little before she got her balance (or made, at least, a feint of doing so), and grasped his hand tight as if to save herself, and all but fell into his arms.

He drew back a step.

She looked straight into his eyes. "You're a goose, and a hypocrite, and a prig, and—a *dear*," she said.

V

Their tea was served in the garden, and whilst they were dallying over it, a footman brought Johannah a visiting-card.

She glanced at the card; and Will, watching her, noticed that a look of annoyance—it might even have been a look of distress—came into her face.

Then she threw the card on the tea-table, and rose. "I shan't be gone long," she said, and set out for the house.

The card lay plainly legible under the eyes of Will and Madame Dornaye. "Mr. George Aymer, 36 Boulevard Rochechouart" was the legend inscribed upon it.

"*Tiens*," said Madame Dornaye; "Jeanne told me she had ceased to see him."

Will suppressed a desire to ask, "Who is he?"

But Madame Dornaye answered him all the same.

"You have heard of him? He is a known personage in Paris, although English. He is a painter, a painter of great talent; very young, but already decorated. And of a surprising beauty—the face of an angel. With that, a thorough-paced rascal. Oh, yes, whatever is vilest, whatever is basest. Even in Montmartre, even in the corruptest world of Paris, among the lowest journalists and painters, he is notorious for his corruption. Johannah used to see a great deal of him. She would not believe the evil stories that were told about him. And with his rare talent and his beautiful face, he has the most plausible manners, the most winning address. We were afraid that she might end by marrying him. But at last she found him out for herself, and gave him up. She told me she had altogether ceased to see him. I wonder what ill wind blows him here."

Johannah entered the drawing-room.

A man in grey tweeds, the red ribbon of the Legion of Honour gleaming in his buttonhole, was standing near a window: a man, indeed, as Madame Dornaye had described him, with a face of surprising beauty—a fine, clear, open-air complexion, a clean-cut, even profile, a sensitive, soft mouth, big, frank, innocent blue eyes, and waving hair of the palest Saxon yellow. He could scarcely have been thirty; and the exceeding beauty of his face, its beauty and its sweetness, made one overlook his figure, which was a trifle below the medium height, and thick-set, with remarkably square, broad shoulders, and long arms.

Johannah greeted him with some succinctness. "What do you want?" she asked, remaining close to the door.

"I want

"I want to have a talk with you," he answered, moving towards her. He drawled slightly; his voice was low and soft, conciliatory, caressing almost. And his big blue eyes shone with a faint, sweet, appealing smile.

"Would you mind staying where you are?" said she. "You can make yourself audible from across the room."

"What are you afraid of?" he asked, his smile brightening with innocent wonder.

"Afraid? You do yourself too much honour. One does not like to find oneself in close proximity with objects that disgust one."

He laughed; but instead of moving further towards her, he dropped into a chair. "You were always brutally outspoken," he murmured.

"Yes; and with advancing years I've become even more so," said Johannah, who continued to stand.

"You're quite sure, though, that you're not afraid of me?" he questioned.

"Oh, for that, as sure as sure can be. If you've based any sort of calculations upon the theory that I would be afraid of you, you'll have to throw them over."

He flushed a little, as if with anger; but in a moment he answered calmly, "I always base my calculations upon certainties. You've come into a perfect pot of money since I last had the pleasure of meeting you."

"Yes, into something like eight thousand a year, if the figures interest you."

"I never had any head for figures. But eight thousand sounds stupendous. And a lovely place, into the bargain. The park, or so much of it as one sees from the avenue, could not be better. And I permitted myself to admire the façade of the house and the view of the sea."

"They're

"They're not bad," Johannah assented.

"It's heart-rending, the way things are shared in this world. Here are you, rich beyond the dreams of avarice, you who have done nothing all your life but take your pleasure; and I, who've toiled like a galley-slave, I remain as poor as any church-mouse. It's monstrous."

Johannah did not answer.

"And now," he went on, "I suppose you've settled down and become respectable? No more Bohemia? No more cakes and ale? Only champagne and truffles? A County Family! Fancy your being a County Family, all by yourself, as it were! You must feel rather like the reformed rake of tradition—don't you!"

"I mentioned that I am not afraid of you," she reminded him, "but that doesn't in the least imply that I find you amusing. The plain truth is, I find you deadly tiresome. If you have anything special to say to me, may I ask you to say it quickly?"

Again he flushed a little; then, again, in a moment, answered smoothly, "I'll say it in a sentence. I've come all the way to England, for the purpose of offering you my hand in marriage." And he raised his bright blue eyes to her face with a look that really was seraphic.

"I decline the offer. If you've nothing further to keep you here, I'll ring to have you shown out."

Still again he flushed, yet once more controlled himself. "You decline the offer! *Allons donc!* When I'm prepared to do the right thing, and make an honest woman of you."

"I decline the offer," Johannah repeated.

"That's foolish of you," said he.

"If you could dream how remotely your opinion interests me, you wouldn't trouble to express it," said she.

His anger this time got the better of him. He scowled, and
looked

looked at her from the corners of his eyes. "You had better not trifle with me," he said in a suppressed voice.

"Oh," said she, "you must suffer me to be the mistress of my own actions in my own house. Now—if you are quite ready to go?" she suggested, putting her hand upon the bell-cord.

"I'm not ready to go yet. I want to talk with you. To cut a long business short, you're rich. I'm pitifully poor. You know how poor I am. You know how I have to live, the hardships, the privations I'm obliged to put up with."

"Have you come here to beg?" Johannah asked.

"No, I've come to appeal to your better nature. You refuse to marry me. That's absurd of you, but—*tant pis!* Whether you marry me or not, you haven't the heart to leave me to rot in poverty, while you luxuriate in plenty. Considering our old-time relations, the thing's impossible on the face of it."

"Ah, I understand. You *have* come here to beg," she said.

"No—to demand," said he. "One begs when one has no power to enforce. When one has the power to enforce, one demands."

"What is the use of these glittering aphorisms?" she asked wearily.

"If you are ready to behave well to me, I'll behave handsomely to you. But if you refuse to recognise my claims upon you, I'm in a position to take reprisals," he said very quietly.

Johannah did not answer.

"I'm miserably, tragically poor; you're rich. At this moment I've not got ten pounds in the world; and I owe hundreds. I've not sold a picture since March. You have eight thousand a year. You can't expect me to sit down under it in silence. As the French attorneys phrase it, *cet état de choses ne peut pas durer.*"

Still Johannah answered nothing.

"You

"You must come to my relief," said he. "You must make it possible for me to go on. If you have any right feeling, you'll do it spontaneously. If not—you know I can compel you."

"Oh, then, for goodness' sake, compel me, and so make an end of this entirely tedious visit."

"I'd immensely rather not compel you. If you will lend me a helping hand from time to time, I'll promise never to take a step to harm you. I shall be moderate. You've got eight thousand a year. You'd never miss a hundred now and then. You might simply occasionally buy a picture. That would be the best way. You might buy my pictures."

"I should be glad to know definitely," remarked Johannah, "whether I have to deal with a blackmailer or a bagman."

"Damn you," he broke out, with sudden savagery, flushing very red indeed.

Johannah was silent.

After a pause, he said, "I'm staying at the inn in the village—at the Silver Arms."

Johannah did not speak.

"I've already scraped acquaintance with the parson," he went on. Then, as she still was silent, "I wonder what would become of your social position in this County if I should have a good long talk about you with the parson."

"To a man of your intelligence, the solution of that problem can present no serious difficulty."

"You admit that your social position would be smashed up?"

"All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put it together again."

"I'm glad to find at least that you acknowledge my power."

"You have it in your power to tell people that I was once inconceivably simple enough to believe that you were an honourable

able man, that I once had the inconceivable bad taste to be fond of you. What woman's character could survive *that* revelation?"

"And I could add—couldn't I?—that you once had the inconceivable weakness to become my mistress?"

"Oh, you could add no end of details."

"Well, then?" he questioned.

"Well, then?" questioned she.

"It comes to this, that if you don't want your social position, your reputation, to be utterly smashed up, you must make terms with me."

"It's a little unfortunate, from that point of view, that I shouldn't happen to care a rush about my social position—as you call it."

"I think I'll have a good long talk with the parson."

"Do by all means."

"You'd better be careful. I may take you at your word."

"I wish you would. Take me at my word—and go."

"You mean to say you seriously don't care?"

"Not a rush, not a button."

"Oh, come! You'll never try to brazen the thing out."

"I wish you'd go and have your long talk with the parson."

"I don't understand you."

"I do understand you—perfectly."

"It would be so easy for you to give me a little help."

"It would be so easy for you to 'smash up' my reputation with the parson."

"You never used to be close-fisted. It's incomprehensible that you should refuse me a little help. Look. I'm willing to be more than fair. Give me a hundred pounds, a bare little hundred pounds, and I'll send you a lovely picture."

"Thank you, I don't want a picture."

"You

"You won't give me a hundred pounds—a beggarly hundred pounds?"

"I won't give you a farthing."

"Well, then, by God, you damned, infernal jade," he cried, springing to his feet, his face crimson, "by God, I'll make you. I swear I'll ruin you. Look out!"

"Are you really going at last?" she asked quietly.

"No, I'm not going till it suits my pleasure. You've got a sort of bastard cousin staying here with you, I'm told."

"I would advise you to moderate your tone or your language. If my sort of bastard cousin should by any chance happen to hear you referring to him in those terms, he might not be pleased."

"I want to see him."

"I would advise you not to see him."

"I want to see him."

"If you really wish to see him, I'll send for him. But it's only right to warn you that he's not at all a patient sort of man. If I send for him, he will quite certainly make things extremely disagreeable for you."

"I am not afraid of him. You know well enough that I'm not a coward."

"My cousin is more than a head taller than you are. He would be perfectly able and perfectly sure to kick you. If there's any other possible way of getting rid of you, I'd rather not trouble him."

"I think I had better have a talk with your cousin, as well as with the parson."

"I think you had better confine your attentions to the parson. My cousin wouldn't listen to a word."

"I am going to make a concession," said Aymer. "I'm going to give you a night in which to think this thing over. If you
care

care to send me a note, with a cheque in it, so that I shall receive it at the inn by to-morrow at ten o'clock, I'll take the next earliest train back to town, and I'll send you a picture in return. If no note comes by ten o'clock, I'll call on the parson, and tell him all I know about you ; and I'll write a letter to your cousin. Now, good day."

Johannah rang, and Aymer was shown out.

VI

"I shan't be gone long," Johannah had said, when she left Madame Dornaye and Will at tea in the garden ; but time passed and she did not come back. Will, mounting through various stages and degrees of nervousness, restlessness, anxiety, at last said, "What on earth can be keeping her?" and Madame Dornaye replied, "That is precisely what I am asking myself." They waited a little longer, and then, "Shall we go back to the house?" he suggested. But when they reached the house, they found the drawing-room empty, and—no trace of Johannah.

"She may be in her room. I'll go and see," said Madame Dornaye.

More time passed, and still no Johannah. Nor did Madame Dornaye return to explain her absence.

Will walked about in a state of acute misery. What could it be? What could have happened? What could this painter, this George Aymer, this thorough-paced rascal with the beautiful face, this man of whom Johannah, in days gone by, "had seen a great deal," so that her friends had feared "she might end by marrying him"—what could he have called upon her for? What could have passed between them? Why had she disappeared?

Where

Where was she now? Where was he? Where was Madame Dornaye, who had gone to look for her? Could—could it possibly be—that he—this man notorious for his corruption even in the corruptest world of Paris—could it be that he was the man Johannah meant when she had talked of the man she was in love with? And Will, fatuous imbecile, had vainly allowed himself to imagine. . . . Oh, why did she not come back? What *could* be keeping her away from him all this time? . . . “I have had a hundred, I have had a hundred.” The phrase echoed and echoed in his memory. She had said, “I have had a hundred love affairs.” Oh, to be sure, in the next breath, she had contradicted herself, she had said, “No, I haven’t.” But she had added, “Everybody has had at least one.” So she had had at least one. With this man, George Aymer? Madame Dornaye said she had broken with him, ceased to see him. But—it was certain she had seen him to-day. But—lovers’ quarrels are made up; lovers break with each other, and then come together again, are reunited. . . . Perhaps . . . Perhaps . . . Oh, where was she? Why did she remain away in this mysterious fashion? What could she be doing? What could she be doing?

The dressing-bell rang, and he went to dress for dinner.

“Anyhow, I shall see her now, I shall see her at dinner,” he kept telling himself, as he dressed.

But when he came downstairs the drawing-room was still empty. He walked backwards and forwards.

“We shall have to dine without our hostess,” Madame Dornaye said, entering presently. “Jeanne has a bad headache, and will stay in her room.”

VII

Will left the house early the next morning, and went out into the garden. The sun was shining, the dew sparkled on the grass, the air was keen and sweet with the odours of the earth. A mile away the sea glowed blue as larkspur; and overhead innumerable birds gaily piped and twittered. But oh, the difference, the difference! His eyes could see no colour, his ears could hear no music. His brain felt as if it had been stretched and strained, like a thing of india-rubber; a lump ached in his throat; his heart was abject and sick with the suspense of waiting, with the futile questionings, the fears, suspicions, the dreading hopes, that had beset and tortured it throughout the night.

"Will!" Johannah's voice called behind him.

He turned.

"Thank God!" the words came without conscious volition on his part. "I thought I was never going to see you again."

"I have been waiting for you," said she.

She wore her garden-hat and her white frock; but her face was pale, and her eyes looked dark and anxious.

He had taken her hand, and was clinging to it, pressing it, hard, so hard that it must have hurt her, in the violence of his emotion.

"Oh, wait, Will, wait," she said, trying to draw her hand away; and her eyes filled with sudden tears.

He let go her hand, and looked into her tearful eyes, helpless, speechless, longing to speak, unable, in the confusion of his thoughts and feelings, to find a word.

"I must tell you something, Will. Come with me somewhere—where we can be alone. I must tell you something."

She moved off, away from the house, he keeping beside her.

They passed out of the garden, into the deep shade of the park.

"Do you remember," she began, all at once, "do you remember what I said yesterday, about my motto? That my motto was 'Be bold, be bold, and everywhere be bold'?"

"Yes," he said.

"I am going to be very bold indeed now, Will. I am going to tell you something—something that will make you hate me perhaps—that will make you despise me perhaps."

"You could not possibly tell me anything that could make me hate you or despise you. But you must not tell me anything at all, unless it is something you are perfectly sure you will be happier for having told me."

"It is something I wish to tell you, something I must tell you," said she. Then, after a little pause, "Oh, how shall I begin it?" But before he could have spoken, "Do you think that a woman—do you think that a girl, when she is very young, when she is very immature and impressionable, and very impulsive, and ignorant, and when she is alone in the world, without a father or mother—do you think that if she makes some terrible mistake, if she is terribly deceived, if somebody whom she believes to be good and noble and unhappy and misunderstood, somebody whom she—whom she loves—do you think that if she makes some terrible mistake—if she—if she—oh, my God!—if——" She held her breath for a second, then suddenly, "Can't you understand what I *mean*?" she broke down in a sort of wail, and hid her face in her hands, and sobbed.

Will stood beside her, holding his arms out towards her. "Johannah! Johannah!" was all he could say.

She dropped her hands, and looked at him with great painful eyes. "Tell me—do you think that a woman can never be forgiven?"

given? Do you think that she is soiled, degraded, changed utterly? Do you think that when she—that when she did what she did—it was a sin, a crime, not only a terrible mistake, and that her whole nature is changed by it? Most people think so. They think that a mark has been left upon her, branded upon her; that she can never, never be the same again. Do you think so, Will? Oh, it is not true; I know it is not true. A woman can leave that mistake, that terror, that horror—she can leave it behind her as completely as she can leave any other dreadful thing. She can blot it out of her life, like a nightmare. She *isn't* changed—she remains the same woman. She isn't utterly changed, and soiled, and defiled. In her own conscience, no matter what other people think, she knows, she knows she isn't. When she wakes up to find that the man she had believed in, the man she had loved, when she wakes up to find that he isn't in any way what she had thought him, that he is base and evil and ignoble, and when all her love for him dies in horror and misery—oh, do you think that she must never, never, as long as she lives, hold up her head again, never be happy again, never love any one again? Look at me, Will. I am myself. I am what God made me. Do you think that I am utterly vile because—because——” But her voice failed again, and her eyes again filled with tears.

“Oh, Johannah, don't ask me what I think of you. I could not tell you what I think of you. You are as God made you. God never made—never made any one else so splendid.”

And in a moment his arms were round her, and she was weeping her heart out on his shoulder.