

VOL. 10 NO. 2

JUNE  
1903

PRICE 25 CTS

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ESS ESS PUBLISHING COMPANY

NEW YORK

452 Fifth Ave.

LONDON

PARIS

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# THE HUSBANDS' COMEDY

By James Branch Cabell

*Times are changed with him who marries; there are no more by-path meadows, where you may innocently linger, but the road lies long and straight and dusty to the grave. . . . Once you are married, there is nothing left for you, not even suicide, but to be good.*—ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

## OLD LOVES AND OLD FACES

IT was she, beyond question. Rudolph Musgrave had anticipated this first sight of her in many varying fashions; beside the gallant chances he had vaguely dreamed of, the actual recognition seemed to have come about a little crudely. He had merely glanced up, in the most casual manner, and had discovered her—as he might have discovered any ordinary woman—in company with Alicia Wade, in the second box from the stage of the Lyric Theatre. Destiny had managed the affair rather shabbily.

They had arrived late. Yes, they must have come in while the lights were lowered for the first act. There were some men with them—probably, some of Alicia's men. At least, they were both of the callow and chinless sort that usually fluttered about her in public places—of the sort that makes life endurable for many women who have entered, under protest, into their forties.

One had a good view of all four of them from the orchestra. One could see that she was little altered. One could see that time had merely added poise and self-possession and a certain opulence to the beauty that had caused one's voice to play fantastic tricks in conference with Anne Willoughby—ancient, unforgotten conferences, wherein one had pointed out the

many respects in which she differed from all other women, and the perfect feasibility of marrying on nothing a year.

"Oh, man, man!" said Mr. Musgrave, in his soul, "what's the good of raking up all that! I tell you, that was all over years ago! It's over, it's dead, it's buried! I tell you, don't think of that; think of something sensible! Think of how much six times seven is! Think of—oh, think of anything but that! That isn't Anne Willoughby yonder, you ass; that's Mrs. John Charteris—she's the wife of the fellow that writes those decayed books. She's been abroad with her husband for years.. She's an old friend of yours—nothing more. You're going to see her again in three days at the Stanhopes' house-party; your wife's going to be there; her husband's going to be there. You're going to tell her how happy your wife makes you, and what a fine boy you've got. You're going to tell her how much you admire her husband's books. No, you aren't going to talk about anything else. Meanwhile, you aren't the fellow in 'Aux Italiens,' you know, even if you have run across a girl you used to admire, in a theatre; you aren't bothered by the faint, sweet smell of any foolish jasmine-flower, you understand, or by any equally foolish hankerings after your lost youth. You're simply a commonplace, every-day sort of a mar-

ried man, and you're feeling a bit pulled down to-night, because your liver or something is out of sorts. And you didn't come here to behave like an ass, but to see a play. Now, you're going to see that play. You're going to pay particular attention to it."

Thereupon, the curtain rose upon the second act, and he settled back in his seat.

The comedy was ridiculously over-rated. The acting was preposterous. And the ingénue, who had just stolen out to meet a painfully mature *jeune premier* in a rather pretty forest-setting—how gross and raddle-faced and utterly unlike—! Mr. Musgrave cleared his throat, and turned his eyes firmly toward the stage. Still, it was really out of all reason to call that woman beautiful, or her acting natural. In real life, for instance, a girl would have—

Mr. Musgrave decided that, after all, so poor a play was not worthy of his attention. In the grateful gloom of the theatre, he turned his eyes very frankly toward a certain box, and considered divers matters that had taken place quite long enough ago to have been forgotten.

It was a foolish sort of reverie, and scarcely worth the setting down. It was a reverie of the kind that every one, and especially every one's wife, admits to be mawkish and unprofitable; and yet, somehow, the next still Summer night, or long, sleepy Sunday afternoon, or, perhaps, some cheap, jigging, heart-breaking tune, will set a medley of old loves and old faces whirling in the brain. One grows very sad over it, of course, and it becomes very apparent that one has always been ill-treated by the world; but the sadness is not unpleasant, and one is quite willing to forgive.

Yes—it was a long, long time ago. It must have been a great number of centuries. Fairhaven—quaint, old-world Fairhaven—was decked in its Spring fripperies of burgeoning, and the sky was a great, pale turquoise, and the buttercups left a golden dust

high up on one's trousers. One had not become entirely accustomed to long trousers then, and one was rather proud of them. One was lying on one's back in the woods, where the birds were astir and eager to begin their house-building, and twittered hysterically over the pregnant possibilities of straws and broken twigs; overhead, the swollen buds of the trees stood out against the sky, and the branches were like grotesque designs on a Japanese plate; there was a little clump of arbutus that just brushed one's cheek. One was thinking—really thinking—for the first time in one's life; and, curiously enough, one was thinking about a girl, although girls were manifestly of no earthly importance.

But Anne Willoughby was different. Even at the age when girls were feckless creatures, whose aim was inaccurate, and whose reasons for bursting into tears innumerable, one had perceived the difference. One wondered about it from time to time. Gradually, there awoke in one an uneasy, self-conscious interest as to all matters that concerned her, a mental pricking up of the ears when her name was mentioned. One lay awake o' nights, wondering why her hair curled so curiously about her temples, and held such queer glowing tints in its depths when the sunlight fell upon it; one was uncomfortable and embarrassed in her presence, but with her absence came the overwhelming desire of seeing her again.

After a little, it was quite understood that one was in love with Anne Willoughby. It was a matter of very minor importance that her father was the wealthiest man in Fairhaven, and that one's parents were poor. One would go away into foreign lands after a while, and come back with a great deal of money—lacs of rupees and pieces of eight, probably. It was very simple. Anne promised to write every day. But Anne's father had taken an entirely unreasonable view of the matter, and had carried Anne off to a terrible aunt, who returned one's letters

unopened. That was the end of Anne.

Followed a black period when nothing happened, and nothing mattered; followed the intervention of the measles, and a runaway horse, to make one the natural heir to a certain shadowy uncle, reputed to be fabulously wealthy. One came to New York; one's uncle was fairly kind. After a while, one married Patricia, because one's uncle wished it, and because one was fond of her, and because Anne was already married. One was happy—oh, undoubtedly, one was happy. One's uncle had died, leaving all that could be expected of him in the matter of a will; Patricia—well, Patricia was Patricia. One had no great reason to complain; undoubtedly, one was happy.

Upon reflection, Mr. Musgrave was quite sure that he was happy; it was only his liver or something that was out of order.

He found it, as many others have done, but cheerless sexton's work, this digging up of old memories. One by one, they come to light—the brave hopes and dreams and aspirations of youth; the ruddy life has gone out of them; they have shriveled into an alien, pathetic dignity. They might have been one's great-grandfather's or Hannibal's or Adam's; the boy whose life was swayed by them is quite as dead as these. Amaryllis is dead, too. Perhaps, you drop in of an afternoon to talk over old times; she is very sympathetic. She thinks it is quite time you were married. Then, after a little, the lamps of welcome are lighted in her eyes, her breath quickens, her cheeks mount goodly crimson flags in honor of her lord, her hero, her conqueror. It is Mr. Grundy, who is very happy to meet you, and hopes you will stay to dinner. He patronizes you a bit; his wife, you see, has told him all about that boy who is as dead as Hannibal. You don't mind in the least; you dine with Mr. and Mrs. Grundy, and pass a very pleasant evening.

But, perhaps, Grundy strikes you as being a hulking, sluggish brute; perhaps, you flush a little at seeing him.

In that case, if you are a wise man, you will not stay to dinner. You will avoid that house for the future, as you would a pestilence. For that flush is a signal that wise, kindly old Nature has flung across the path; it is the red light that signifies danger.

"She has improved wonderfully," thought Mr. Musgrave, "and I have no doubt—none in the world—that Charteris ill-treats her. I wonder——"

It was really a very stupid play, and a man might wonder many things during its progress without fear of his attention being distracted.

## II

### AN ARCADIAN PASTORAL

MRS. MUSGRAVE sat in the great maple-grove that lies behind Kingsland, and pondered over a very short letter from her husband; Mr. Charteris lay at her feet, glancing rapidly over a very long one, which was from his wife.

The morning mail was just in, and Mrs. Musgrave had despatched Charteris for her letters, on the plea that the woods were too beautiful to leave, and that Kingsland, in the unsettled state that marks the end of the week in a house-party, was intolerable. She, undoubtedly, was partial to the grove, having spent the last ten mornings there. Mr. Charteris had overrated her modest literary abilities so far as to ask her advice in certain details of his new book, which was to appear in the Autumn, and they had found a vernal solitude, besides being extremely picturesque, to be conducive to the forming of really matured opinions. Moreover, she was assured that none of the members of the house-party would misunderstand her motives; people were so much less censorious in the country; there was something in the pastoral purity of Nature, seen face to face, that brought out one's noblest instincts, and put an end to all horrid gossip and scandal-mongering. Didn't Mrs. Ashmeade think so? And what was her

real opinion of that rumor about the Van Ordens, and was the woman as bad as people said she was? Thus had Mrs. Musgrave spoken in the privacy of her chamber, at that hour when ladies do up their hair for the night, and discourse of mysteries. It is at this time that they are said to babble out their hearts to one another; and so, beyond doubt, this must have been the real state of the case.

As Mrs. Musgrave admitted, she had given up esoteric Buddhism, and taken to literature only during the past year. She now conversed of it with a certain fitful persistence like that of an ill-regulated machine. Her comments were considered delightfully frank and original, as she had an unusually good memory. Of two books, she was apt to prefer the one with the wider margins, and she was sufficiently familiar with a vast number of poets to quote them inaccurately. However, she was young, and very, very beautiful.

Mr. Charteris—but we have all seen Mr. Charteris's portrait in the literary magazines, and most of us have read his books. Therefore, most of us know that he is clever and slight and dark, and that his hair is growing a little thin, and that he is not ill-favored. It may be of interest to his many admirers to add that his reason for wearing a mustache in this period of clean-shaven faces is that, without it, his mouth is not pleasant to look upon.

"Heigho!" said Mrs. Musgrave, at length, with a little laugh; "it is very strange that both of our encumbrances should arrive on the same day!"

"It is unfortunate," Mr. Charteris admitted, lazily; "but the blessed state of matrimony is liable to these mishaps. Let us be thankful that my wife's whim to visit her aunt has given us, at least, two perfect, golden weeks. Husbands are like bad pennies; and wives resemble the cat whose adventures have been commemorated by one of our really popular poets. They always come back."

There was a pause; Mrs. Musgrave communed with herself, and seemed, as she sat in the chequered sunlight,

far more beautiful than a married woman has any right to be.

"I wish—" she began, slowly. "Oh, I do wish——"

"So do I," Charteris assented, and laughed his utter comprehension. "But, after all," he cried, and snapped his fingers gaily, "we have still twenty-four hours, Patricia! Let us forget the crudities of life, and say foolish things to each other. I am pastorally inclined this morning, Patricia; I wish to lie at your feet and pipe amorous ditties upon an oaten reed. Have you such an article about you, Patricia?" He drew a key-ring from his pocket, and pondered over it. "Or would you prefer that I whistle into the opening of this door-key, to the effect that we must gather our rosebuds while we may, for Time is still a-flying, fa-la, and that a drear old age, not to mention our spouses, will soon descend upon us, fa-la? A door-key is not Arcadian, Patricia, but it makes a very creditable noise."

"Don't be foolish, *mon ami!*" she protested, with an indulgent smile. "I am very unhappy."

"Unhappy that I have chanced to fall in love with you, Patricia? It is an accident that might befall any man."

She shrugged her shoulders, ruefully. "I have done very wrong to let you talk to me as you have done of late. I—oh, Jack, I am afraid!"

Mr. Charteris meditated. Somewhere in a neighboring thicket a bird trilled out his song—a contented, half-hushed little song that called his mate to witness how infinitely blest above all other birds was he. Mr. Charteris heard him to the end, and languidly made as though to applaud; then, he raised his eyebrows.

"Of your husband, Patricia?" he queried.

"I—Rudolph doesn't care for me sufficiently to—to notice anything."

Mr. Charteris smiled. "Of my wife, Patricia?"

"No; I have not the least doubt you will explain matters satisfactorily to your wife. I have always heard that practice makes perfect."

Mr. Charteris laughed—a low and very musical laugh. “Of me, then, Patricia?”

“I—I think it is rather of myself I am afraid. Oh, I hate you when you smile like that! You have evil eyes, Jack! Stop it! Stop it, I say!” The ridiculously small hand she had raised in a threatening fashion fell back into her lap, and she shrugged her shoulders once more. “My nerves are somewhat upset by the approaching prospect of connubial felicity, I suppose. Really, though, *mon ami*, your conceit is appalling.”

Charteris gave vent to a chuckle, and raised the door-key to his lips. “When you are quite through with your histrionic efforts,” he suggested, apologetically, “I will proceed with my amorous pipings. Really, Patricia, one might fancy you the heroine of a society drama, working up the sympathies of the audience before taking to evil ways. Surely, you are not about to leave your dear, good, patient husband, Patricia? Heroines only do that on dark and stormy nights, and in an opera toilette; wearing her best gown seems always to affect a heroine in that way.” Mr. Charteris, at this point, dropped the key-ring, and drew nearer to her; his voice sank to a pleading cadence. “We are in Arcadia, Patricia; virtue and vice are contraband in this charming country, and must be left at the frontier. Let us be adorably foolish and happy, my lady, and forget for a little the evil days that approach. Can’t you fancy this Arcadia, Patricia?—it requires very little imagination. Listen very carefully, and you will hear the bright-eyed fauns rustling among the fallen leaves; they are watching us, Patricia, from behind every tree-bole. They think you a dryad—the queen of all the dryads, with the most glorious eyes and hair and the most tempting lips in all the forest. After a little, goat-footed Pan will grow jealous, and ravish you away from me, as he stole Syrinx from her lover. You are very beautiful, Patricia; you are quite incredibly beautiful. I adore you, Pa-

tricia. Would you mind very much if I held your hand? It is a foolish thing to do, but it is Arcadian.”

She had heard him with downcast eyes; her cheeks flushed a pink color that was highly agreeable to contemplate. “Do—do you really care for me, Jack?” she asked, softly; then cried, very quickly, “No, no, don’t answer—of course, you worship me madly, unboundedly, distractedly. They all do, but you do it more convincingly. You’ve had lots of practice, no doubt. And, Jack, really, really, I always stopped the others when they talked in this way. I tried to stop you, too. You—you know I did?” She raised her lashes, a trifle uncertainly, and withdrew her hand from his—a trifle slowly. “It is wrong—all horribly wrong. I wonder at myself. I—I shall not be alone with you again. I shall tell my husband all,” she concluded, manifestly not meaning a word of what she said.

“By all means,” assented Mr. Charteris, readily. “Let’s tell my wife, too. It will make things so very interesting.”

“Rudolph would be terribly unhappy,” she reflected.

“He would probably never smile again,” said Mr. Charteris. “And my wife—oh, it would upset her, frightfully! It is our bounden duty to save them from such misery.”

“I—I don’t know what to do!” she wailed, helplessly.

“The obvious course,” said he, after reflection, “is to shake off the bonds of matrimony, without further delay. Let’s elope, Patricia.”

Mrs. Musgrave, who was genuinely unhappy, took refuge in flippancy, and laughed somewhat shrilly. “I make it a rule,” said she, “never to elope on Fridays. Besides, now I think of it, there’s Rudolph—ah, Rudolph doesn’t care for me, I know, but he can be horribly disagreeable at times. I assure you, *mon ami*, he is a veritable Othello, and infinitely prefers the bolster to the divorce-court. He’d have us followed and torn apart by wild policemen.”

Mr. Charteris meditated for a moment. "I don't remember Rudolph very clearly. Isn't he a rather corpulent person—something like a retired and eminently respectable brewer?"

"Ah, don't make fun of Rudolph!" she cried, quickly. "Rudolph is no fool; and he's a good man, Jack—a good, clean, healthy, strong man! You aren't; you're weak and frivolous, and you sneer too much and—and that's why I like you, I suppose. Oh, I wish I were good; I've tried to be. Jack, you know I've tried to be good! I've never let you kiss me, and I never let you hold my hand—until to-day—and—and—" Mrs. Musgrave paused, and laughed, shortly. "We were talking of Rudolph," she said, with a touch of weariness. "Rudolph has all the good qualities that a woman most admires—theoretically."

"I thank you," said Mr. Charteris, "for the high opinion you entertain of my moral character." He bestowed a reproachful sigh upon her, and continued: "At any rate, Rudolph Musgrave has been an unusually lucky man—the luckiest that I know of."

Mrs. Musgrave had risen as if to go. She turned her big green eyes upon him for a moment. "You—you think so?" she queried, hesitatingly. Afterward, she spread out her hands in a helpless gesture, and laughed for no apparent reason, and sat down again. "Why?" said Mrs. Musgrave.

It took Charteris fully an hour to point out all the reasons. Mrs. Musgrave told him very frankly that she considered him to be talking nonsense, but she seemed quite willing to listen.

### III

#### A CONTENTED WOMAN

SUNSET was approaching on the following afternoon when Rudolph Musgrave came out upon the piazza at Kingsland. He had arrived on the afternoon train, about an hour previously; and, having dressed at once for dinner, found himself ready for

that meal somewhat in advance of the rest of the house-party. Indeed, only one of them was visible at that moment—a woman, who was reading on a rustic bench some distance from the house, and whose back was turned to him. The poise of her head, however, was not unfamiliar; also, it is not every one who has hair that is like a nimbus of burnished copper.

Mr. Musgrave threw back his shoulders, and drew a deep breath. Subsequently, with a fine air of unconcern, he inspected the view from the piazza, which was, indeed, quite worthy of his attention. Interesting things have happened at Kingsland—many things that have been preserved in the local mythology, not always to the credit of the old Stanhopes, and a few that have even slipped into a modest niche in history. It was, perhaps, on these that Mr. Musgrave pondered so intently.

Once the farthingaled and red-heeled gentry came in sluggish barges to Kingsland, and the broad river on which it faces was thick with bellying sails; since the days of railroads, one approaches it through the maple-grove in the rear, and enters ignominiously by the back-door. The house stands on a considerable elevation. The main portion, with its hipped roof and mullioned windows, is very old, but the two wings that stretch to the east and west are comparatively modern, and date back only a little over a century. Time has mellowed them into harmony with the major part of the house, and the kindly Virginia creeper has done its utmost to conceal the fact that they are constructed of plebeian bricks that were made in this country; but Kingsland was Kingsland long before they were built, and a mere affair of yesterday, such as the Revolution, antedates them. They were not standing when Tarleton paid his famous visit to Kingsland. In the great hall, you may still see the stairs up which he rode on horseback, and the slashes which his sabre hacked upon the hand-rail.

In the front of the mansion lies a

close-shaven lawn, dotted with sundry oaks and maples; from this, the formal gardens descend in six broad terraces. The seventh terrace was, until lately, uncultivated, the trees having been cleared away to afford pasturage. It is now closely planted with beeches, none of very great size, and extends to a tangled thicket of pine and cedar and sassafras and blackberry-bushes, which again masks a sudden drop of some ten feet to the river. The beach here is very narrow; at high tide, it is rarely more than fifteen feet in breadth, and is in many places completely submerged. Past this, the river lapses into the horizon line without a break, save on a very clear day when Bigelow's Island may be seen as a dim smudge upon the west.

All these things, Rudolph Musgrave regarded with curiously deep interest for one who had seen them so many times before. Then, with a shrug of the shoulders, he sauntered forward across the lawn. He had planned several appropriate speeches, but, when it came to the point of giving them utterance, he merely held out his hand in a rather awkward fashion, and said:

"Anne!"

She looked up quickly from her reading. She did this with two red-brown eyes that had no apparent limits to their depth. Her hand was very soft; it seemed quite lost in the broad palm of a man's hand.

"Dear Rudolph," she said, as simply as though they had parted yesterday, "it's awfully good to see you again."

Mr. Musgrave cleared his throat, and sat down beside her. A moment later, Mr. Musgrave cleared his throat once more.

Then, Mrs. Charteris laughed. It was a pleasant laugh—a clear, rippling carol of clean mirth that sparkled in her eyes, and dimpled in her wholesome cheeks. "Do you find it very, very awkward?"

"Awkward!" he cried. Their glances met in a flash of comprehension that seemed to purge the air.

Musgrave was not in the least self-conscious now. He laughed, and lifted an admonitory forefinger. "Anne, Anne!" said he, "I can't do it, my dear—I really can't live up to the requirements of being a Buried Past. In a proper story-book or play, I'd have come back from New Zealand or the Transvaal, all covered with glory and epaulets, and have found you in the last throes of consumption; but you've fattened, Anne, which a Buried Past never does, and which shows a sad lack of consideration for my feelings. And I—ah, my dear, I must confess that my hair is growing thin, and that my life hasn't been entirely empty without you, and that I ate and enjoyed two mutton-chops at luncheon, though I knew I should see you to-day. I'm afraid we're neither of us up to heroics, Anne. Let's be sensible and comfy, my dear."

"You brute!" she cried—not looking very angry, but still not without a touch of vexation; "don't you know that every woman cherishes the picture of her former lovers sitting alone in the twilight, and growing lackadaisical over old memories and faded letters? And you—you approach me, after I don't dare to think how many years, as calmly as if I were an old schoolmate of your mother's, and attempt to talk to me about mutton-chops! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Rudolph Musgrave. You might, at least, have started a little at seeing me, and have clasped your hand to your heart, and have said, 'You, you!' or something of the sort. I had every right—*every* right—to expect it."

Mrs. Charteris pouted, and then trifled for a moment with the pages of her book. It was "Ashtaroth's Lackey," and the author was Mr. John Charteris. She had been speaking with a very definite purpose; even the book may have been not entirely accidental. She was genuinely fond of Rudolph Musgrave; she intended to see as much of him as should be possible during their stay at Kings-



land; and she also intended on this first afternoon to have done with a necessarily awkward meeting, and to establish their future relations for all time. For a woman who made no pretensions to cleverness, she had, so far, acted wisely; but her conscience accused her of the blackest deceit. She added, impulsively, and with a slight hiatus: "Frankly, Rudolph, I am very happy."

"Ah, it was a great while ago we went mad for each other," Musgrave said, and smiled. "I fancy that the boy and girl we knew of are as dead now as Nebuchadnezzar. 'Marian's married, and I sit here alive and merry at'—well, not precisely at forty year, but with every prospect of reaching that period of life in due time."

"If you continue in that heartless strain, I shall go into the house," Mrs. Charteris protested. Her indignation was exaggerated, but it was not altogether feigned; women cannot quite pardon a rejected suitor who marries and is content. They wish him all imaginable happiness and prosperity, of course; they are genuinely interested in his welfare; but it seems a little unfeeling in him. Mrs. Charteris, therefore, added, with emphasis: "I am really disgracefully happy."

"Glad to hear it," said Musgrave, placidly. "So am I."

"Oh, Rudolph, Rudolph, you are hopeless!" she sighed. "And you used to make such a nice lover!" Mrs. Charteris looked out over the river, a little wistfully, and was silent for a moment. "I was frightfully in love with you, Rudolph," she said, half in wonder. "After—after that horrible time when my parents forced us to behave rationally, I wept—oh, I must have wept deluges! I firmly intended to pine away to an early grave, but—but Jack came, you see."

"H'm!" said Mr. Musgrave; "yes, I see."

"I want you to like Jack," she went on, and her face lighted up, and her voice grew tender. "He tells me he has never known you well, and, of course, we've been abroad a long time. Men

don't like him, as a rule, but I want you to. He has the artistic temperament, and naturally that makes him sensitive, and—and a little irritable and brusque at times. It takes so little to upset him, you see, for he feels so acutely what—what he calls the discords of life. I think most men are jealous of his talents; so they call him selfish and finicky. He isn't really, you know. Only, he can't help feeling a little superior to the majority of men, and his artistic temperament leads him to magnify the lesser mishaps of life—such as the steak being overdone, or missing a train. Oh, really a little thing like that worries him as much as the loss of a fortune, or a death in the family, would any one else! Jack says there are no such things as trifles in a harmonious and well-proportioned life, and I suppose that's true to men of genius. Of course, I'm rather a Philistine, and I grate on him at times—that is, I used to, but he says I've improved, wonderfully. Oh, we're ridiculously happy, Jack and I!"

Musgrave cast about vainly for an appropriate speech. Then, he compromised with his conscience, and said: "Your husband is a very clever man."

"Isn't he?" She flushed for pleasure at hearing him praised. Oh, she loved him! There was no questioning that; it was written in her face, was vibrant in her voice as she spoke of him. "Now, really, Rudolph, aren't his books wonderful? I don't appreciate them, of course, for I'm not clever, but I know you do. Oh, you'll like Jack, for you're both clever men. I don't see why men think him selfish! I know better. You have to live with Jack really to appreciate him. Every day, I discover some new side of his character that makes him dearer to me. He's so clever—and so noble! Why, I remember—before Jack made his first hit with 'Ashtaroth's Lackey,' he lived with his sister. They hadn't any money, and, of course, Jack couldn't be expected to take a clerkship or anything like that; business details make his head ache, poor boy! So, his sister taught school, and he lived with her.

They were very happy—his sister simply adores him, and I'm positively jealous of her sometimes—but, unfortunately, the bank in which she kept her money failed one day. I remember it was just before he asked me to marry him, and told me, in his dear, laughing manner, that he hadn't a penny in the world, and that we should have to live on bread and cheese and kisses. Of course, I had a plenty for us both—my father was dead then, you know—so we weren't really in danger of being reduced to that. Well, I wanted to make his sister an allowance. But Jack pointed out, with considerable reason, that one person could live very comfortably on an income that had formerly supported two. He said it wasn't right I should be burdened with the support of his family. Jack was so sensitive, you see, lest people might think he was making a mercenary marriage, and that his sister was profiting by it. So, he was quite firm about the allowance. Now, I call that one of the noblest things I ever heard of, for he is devotedly attached to his sister, and, naturally, it is a great grief to him to see her compelled to work for a living. His last book was dedicated to her, and the dedication is one of the most tender and pathetic things I ever read."

Musgrave was hardly conscious of what she was saying. She was not particularly intelligent, this handsome, cheery woman, but her voice, and the richness and sweetness of it, and the vitality of her laugh, contented his soul. He loved her; it came to him quite simply that he loved her, and had always loved her. He had no desire to tell her of this, no idea that it would affect in any way the tenor of his life. He merely accepted the fact that he loved her, and that her dear presence seemed, somehow, to strengthen and cheer and comfort and content beyond the reach of thought.

Yet, Musgrave recognized her lack of cleverness, and liked and admired her none the less. A sudden vision of Patricia rose before him—a vision of a dainty, shallow, Dresden-china face with a surprising quantity of pale-gold

hair about it. Patricia was beautiful; Patricia was clever, in a way. But Rudolph Musgrave doubted very much if her mocking eyes ever softened into that brooding, sacred tenderness he had seen in Anne's eyes; he doubted very much if a hurried, happy little thrill ran through Patricia's voice when she spoke of her husband.

"You've unquestionably married an unusual man," Musgrave said. "I must cultivate him. I—by Jove, you know, I fancy my wife finds him almost as attractive as you do!"

"Ah, Rudolph, I can't fancy any woman whom—whom you loved caring for any one else. Don't I remember, sir, how irresistible you can be when you choose?" Anne laughed, and raised her hands to heaven. "Really, though, women pursue him to a perfectly indecent extent! I have to watch over him carefully; not that I distrust him, of course, for—dear Jack!—he's so much in love with me, and cares so little for other women, that Joseph would seem in comparison only a depraved old roué. But the women—why, Rudolph, there was an Italian countess at Rome—the impudent minx!—who actually made me believe—However, Jack explained all that, after I had made both a spectacle and a nuisance of myself, and he had behaved so nobly in the entire affair that for days afterward I was positively limp with repentance. Then, in Paris—but he explained that, too. Some women are shameless, Rudolph!" Mrs. Charteris concluded, and sighed her pity for them.

"Utterly so!" Musgrave assented, gravely.

He was feeling a bit queer and uncomfortable. The place had grown suddenly horrible to him. The sun was very low, and the long shadows of the trees were black on the dim lawn. People were assembling for dinner, and passing to and fro under the branches; the gaily-colored gowns of the women glimmered softly through a faint blue haze like that in a Watteau painting. Inside the house, some one was playing an unpleasant sort of air

on the piano—an air that was quite needlessly creepy and haunting and insistent. It all seemed like a grim bit out of a play. The tenderness and pride that shone in Anne's eyes as she boasted of her happiness troubled him. He had a perfectly unreasonable desire to carry her away, by force, if necessary, and to protect her from clever people, and to buy things for her.

"So, I'm an old, old married woman now, and—and I think I suit Jack better than a more clever woman might. I'm glad your wife has taken such a fancy to him. I want you to follow her example. Jack says she's one of the most attractive women he ever met; he asked me to-day why I didn't do my hair like hers. She—she must make you very happy, Rudolph?"

"My wife," Mr. Musgrave said, "is, in my partial opinion, a very clever and very beautiful woman."

"Yes; cleverness and beauty are sufficient to make any man happy, I suppose," Anne hazarded, tentatively. "Jack says, though— Are cleverness and beauty the main things in a wife, Rudolph?"

"Undoubtedly," he protested.

"Now, that," she said, judicially, "shows the difference in men. Jack says a man loves a woman, not for her beauty or any other quality she possesses, but just because she's the woman he loves and can't help loving."

"Ah! I dare say that is the usual reason. Dear God, yes!" said Mr. Musgrave, an uncertain quiver in his voice—"because she's the woman he loves and can't help loving!"

Anne clapped her hands together, gleefully. "Ah, so I've penetrated your indifference at last, sir!" Impulsively, she laid her hand upon his arm, and spoke with great earnestness. "Dear Rudolph, I'm so glad you've found the woman you can really love. Jack—Jack says there's only one possible woman in the whole world for each man, and that he very rarely finds her."

"Yes," said Musgrave. He had risen, and was looking down rather curiously

into her eyes. "Yes, there's only one possible woman. And—and, yes, I think I've found her, Anne."

#### IV

##### A PAGE FROM PLATO

THE next morning, Mrs. Musgrave and Mr. Charteris met—quite by accident—on the seventh terrace of the gardens. Mrs. Musgrave had mentioned casually at the breakfast-table that she intended to spend the forenoon there in making notes for a paper on "The Symbolism of Dante," which she was to read before the Philomathean Club in October; but Mr. Charteris, it appeared, had not overheard her. He was seated on the piazza, working out a somewhat difficult point in his new book, when it had occurred to him that this particular terrace would be an inspiring and appropriate place in which to think the matter over, undisturbed. It was impossible he should have known that any one was there, as the seventh terrace happens to be the only one that, being planted with beech-trees, is completely screened from observation. From the house, you cannot see anything that happens there.

It was a curious accident, though. It really seemed, now that Mrs. Musgrave had put an ending to their meetings in the maple-grove, that Fate conspired to bring them together.

However, as Mr. Charteris pointed out, there could be no possible objection to this conspiracy, since they had decided that their friendship was to be of a purely platonic nature. It was a severe trial to him, he confessed, to be forced to put aside certain dreams he had had of the future—mad dreams, perhaps, but such as had seemed very dear and very plausible to his impractical artistic temperament; still, it heartened him to hope that their friendship—since it was to be no more—might prove a survival, or, rather, a veritable renaissance of the beautiful old Greek spirit in such matters. And,

though the blind chance that mismanaged the world had chained them to uncongenial, though certainly well-meaning, persons, this was no logical reason why they should be deprived of the pleasures of intellectual intercourse. Their souls were too closely akin. For Mr. Charteris admitted that his soul was Grecian to the core, and out of place and puzzled and very lonely in a sordid, bustling world; and he assured Patricia—she did not object if he called her Patricia?—that her own soul possessed all the beauty and purity and calm of an Aphrodite sculptured by Phidias. It was such a soul as Horace might have loved, as Theocritus might have hymned in glad Greek song.

Patricia flushed, and dissented somewhat.

"Frankly, *mon ami*," she said, "you are far too attractive for your company to be quite safe. You are such an adept in the nameless little attentions that women love—so profuse with the lesser sugar-plums of speech and action, that after two weeks one's husband is really necessary as an antidote. Sugar-plums are good, but, like all good things, unwholesome. I shall prescribe Rudolph's company for myself, to ward off an attack of moral indigestion. I am very glad he has come—really glad," she added, conscientiously. "Poor Rudolph! he so rarely has a holiday from those—those—What are those things, *mon ami*, that are always going up and down in Wall street?"

"Elevators?" Mr. Charteris suggested.

"Stupid! I mean those N. P.'s and N. Y. C.'s and those other letters that are always having flurries and panics and things. They keep him incredibly busy."

She sighed, tolerantly. Patricia really believed that she was neglected, if not positively ill-treated by her husband; and she had no earthly objection to Mr. Charteris thinking likewise. Her face expressed patient resignation now, as they walked under the close-matted foliage of the beech-trees, which made a pleasant, sun-flecked

gloom about them. Patricia removed her hat—it really was rather close—and paused where a slanting sunbeam fell upon her pale hair, and glorified her wistful countenance. She sighed once more, and added a finishing touch to the portrait of a *femme incomprise*. "Pray, don't think, *mon ami*," she said, very earnestly, "that I am blaming Rudolph! I—I suppose no woman need ever hope to have part in her husband's inner life."

"Not in her own husband's, of course," said Charteris, cryptically.

Patricia rallied with a pale smile. "Don't let's be clever. Cleverness is always a mistake; before luncheon, it is a misdemeanor. It makes me feel as if I had attended a Welsh-rabbit supper the night before. Your wife must be very patient."

"My wife," cried Charteris, in turn resolved to screen an unappreciative mate, "is a dear, kind-hearted little Philistine! At times, I grant you——"  
"Oh, of course!" Patricia said, impatiently. Then, she added, with slight irrelevance: "They were boy and girl together, you know, in some poky little place where buttercups and sewing-circles were the chief features. I wonder——"

"In fact," said Mr. Charteris, "I have frequently observed that the influence of the buttercup is fully as disturbing to the heart as that of the sewing-circle is to the reputation. I should think it highly probable."

"No; Rudolph isn't that sort. Rudolph—oh, Rudolph is perfection! How could any woman possibly care for him?" Patricia snapped her fingers—she had caught the gesture from Charteris—and spoke somewhat crossly: "I suppose your wife is an angel?"

"Why?" His eyebrows lifted, and he smiled.

"Wasn't it an angel," she asked, considering his shoes very carefully, "who barred the first man and woman out of paradise?"

"If—if I thought you meant that—!" he cried; then, he shrugged his shoulders. "My wife's virtues merit a better husband than Fate has accorded

her. Anne is the best woman I have ever known."

Patricia was naturally irritated. After all, one does not meet a man accidentally in a plantation of young beech-trees in order to hear him discourse of his wife's good qualities; besides, he was speaking in a very disagreeably solemn manner, rather as if he fancied himself in church. Therefore, Patricia cast down her eyes again, and said: "Men of genius are so rarely understood by their wives."

"We will waive the question of genius." Mr. Charteris laughed very heartily, but he had flushed for pleasure. "I suppose," he continued, pacing up and down with a certain cat-like fervor, "that matrimony is always more or less of a compromise—like two convicts chained together trying to catch each other's gait. After a while, they succeed to a certain extent; the chain is still heavy, of course, but it doesn't gall them as it used to do. I fear the artistic temperament is not suited to marriage; its capacity for suffering is too great." Mr. Charteris caught his breath in a shuddering, effective little fashion, and paused before Patricia. After a moment, he grasped her by both wrists. "We are chained fast enough, my lady," he cried, bitterly, "and our sentence is for life! There are green fields yonder, but our place is here in the prison-yard. There is laughter yonder in the fields, and the scent of the flowers floats in to us at times when we are very weary, and the whispering trees sway their branches over the prison-wall, and their fruit is good to look on, and hangs within easy reach—ah, we might reach it very easily! But it is forbidden fruit, my lady; it isn't included in our wholesome prison-fare. Don't think of it! We have been happy, you and I, for a little. We might—Don't think of it! Don't dare to think of it! Go back and help your husband drag his chain; it galls him as sorely as it does you. It galls us all. It is the heaviest chain was ever forged; but we don't dare shake it off!"

"I—oh, Jack, Jack, don't talk to me

like that! We must be brave. We must be sensible." Patricia, regardless of her skirts, sat down upon the ground, and produced a pocket-handkerchief. "I—oh, how dare you make me so unhappy?" she demanded, indignantly.

"Ah, Patricia," he murmured, as he knelt beside her, "how can you hope to have a man ever talk to you in a sane fashion? You shouldn't have such eyes, Patricia! They are green and fathomless like the ocean, and, when a man looks into them too long, his sanity grows weak, and sinks and drowns in their cool depths, and the man must babble out his foolish heart to you. Oh, you shouldn't have such eyes, Patricia! They are dangerous, and, oh, they are much too bright to wear in the morning! They are bad form, Patricia!"

"We must be sensible," she sobbed. "Your wife is here; my husband is here. We—we aren't children or madmen, Jack, dear. We—we really must be sensible, I suppose. Oh, Jack," she cried, suddenly, "it isn't honorable!"

"Dear God, no! Poor little Anne!" Mr. Charteris's eyes grew tender for a moment; for his wife, in a fashion, was very dear to him. Then, he laughed, discordantly. "How can a man remember honor, Patricia, when the choice lies between honor and you? You shouldn't have such hair, Patricia! It is a mesh of sunlight—of pale, Winter sunlight—and its tendrils have curled around what little honor I ever boasted of, and they hold it fast, Patricia. It is dishonorable to love you, but I cannot think of that when I am with you and hear you speak. The very sound of your voice quickens my pulses. Oh, Patricia, you shouldn't have such a voice!"

But the great gong, booming out for luncheon, interrupted him at this point, and Mr. Charteris was never permitted to finish his complaint against Patricia's voice. It was absolutely imperative they should be in time for luncheon; for, as Patricia pointed out, the majority of people are very censorious, and lose no opportunity for saying

nasty things. They are even capable of sneering at a purely platonic friendship that is attempting to preserve the beautiful old Greek spirit.

## V

## PROVIDENCE AND MRS. ASHMEADE

MRS. ASHMEADE now comes into the story. She is only an episode. Still, her intervention led to some very peculiar results—results, curiously enough, in which she was not in the least concerned. She simply comes into the story for a moment, and then goes out of it; but her part is an important one. She is like the watchman who announces the coming of Agamemnon; Clytemnestra sharpens her knife at the news, and the fatal bath is prepared for the *anax andron*. The tragedy moves on; the house of Atreus falls, and the wrath of implacable gods bellows across the heavens; meanwhile, the watchman has gone home to take tea with his family, and we hear no more of him. There are any number of morals in this.

Mrs. Ashmeade comes into the story just nine days after Rudolph Musgrave's arrival at Kingsland. Since then, affairs had progressed in a not unnatural sequence. Mr. Charteris, as we have seen, attributed it to Fate; and, assuredly, there must be a special providence of some kind that presides over country houses—a rather freakish, whimsical providence, that rejoices hugely in confounding one's sense of time and direction. Through its agency, people very unaccountably lose their way in the simplest walks, and turn up late and embarrassed for luncheon; at the end of the evening, it brings couples blinking out of the dark, with no idea it was more than half-past nine; and it delights in sending one into the garden—after roses, of course—and there causing one to meet the most unlikely people—really, quite the last person one would have thought of meeting. It is responsible for a great number of marriages, and, it may be,

for a large percentage of the divorce-cases; for, if you desire very heartily to see much of another member of a house-party, this lax-minded, easy-going providence, somehow, brings it about, in a speciously natural manner, and without any apparent thought of the consequences. And the Stanhopes' house-party was no exception.

Mrs. Ashmeade, for reasons of her own, objected to this. The others were largely engrossed by their own affairs; they did not concern themselves much about the doings of their fellow-guests. And, if Rudolph Musgrave manifestly sought the company of Anne Charteris, her husband did not appear to be dissatisfied or angry or even lonely; and, moreover, the fact remained that Mrs. Stanhope was at this time deeply interested in Bob Townsend, the young Englishman; and Billy Woods was undeniably very attentive to Margaret Hugonin; and Teddy Anstruther certainly spent a great part of his time on the beach with Alicia Wade. Every one's house has, at least, a pane or two of glass in it, you see; and, if indiscriminate stone-throwing were ever to become the fashion, there is really no telling what damage might ensue. And, had Mrs. Ashmeade been a younger woman—had her weight been, say, some twenty pounds less—she would probably have remained silent, and never have come into the story at all.

As it was, she approached Rudolph Musgrave with a perfectly fixed purpose this morning as he smoked on the piazza of Kingsland. Mr. Charteris and Mrs. Musgrave were just disappearing into the gardens, where they were going to polish off his paper on "The Symbolism of Dante."

"Rudolph," said Mrs. Ashmeade, impatiently, "are you blind?"

"You mean—?" he asked, and broke off, for he had really no idea what she meant.

Mrs. Ashmeade waved her hand, comprehensively, after the retreating couple. "I mean—that."

If ever amazement and utter incredulity shone in a man's eyes, they shone now in Rudolph Musgrave's.

After a little, the pupils widened in a sort of terror.

"Nonsense!" he cried. "Why—why, it's nonsense, I tell you—utter, preposterous, Bedlamite nonsense!" He caught his breath in sheer wonder at the thought of this grim jest. "It—oh, no, Fate hasn't such a fine sense of humor as that! The thing's incredible!" Musgrave laughed, shortly, and then flushed. "I mean——"

"I don't think you need tell me what you mean," said Mrs. Ashmeade. She sat down in a large rocking-chair, and fanned herself slowly, for the day was warm. "Of course, it's very officious and presumptuous and disagreeable of me to meddle; I don't mind your thinking that, in the least. But—oh, Rudolph, don't make the mistake of thinking that Fate ever misses a jest at the expense of humanity. It never does. I tell you—it never does." She paused, and her kindly eyes were full of memories, and very wise. "I'm only a looker-on at the tragic farce that's being played here," she continued, after a little, "but lookers-on, you know, see most of the game. They aren't playing fairly with you, Rudolph; they aren't playing fairly, my dear, and you ought to know."

He walked up and down the piazza once or twice, with his hands behind him; then, he stopped before Mrs. Ashmeade, and smiled down at her. "No, I don't think you officious or meddling or anything of the sort. I think you're one of the best and kindest-hearted women in the world. But—but, bless your motherly soul, Polly, the thing's preposterous—utterly preposterous, I assure you! Of course, Patricia's young, and likes attention, and—and it pleases her to have men admire her. That's natural, Polly—perfectly natural. Why, you wouldn't expect her to sit around under the trees, and read poetry with her own husband, would you? We've been married far too long for that, Patricia and I. She—she thinks me rather prosy and stupid at times, poor girl, because—well, because, in point of fact, I am. But, at the bottom of her

heart— Oh, it's preposterous! We're the best friends in the world, I tell you! It's simply that Charteris amuses her."

"You don't know Jack Charteris. I do," said Mrs. Ashmeade, placidly. "Charteris is simply a man of genius who happens to be an unmitigated cad. He isn't merely selfish; he is selfishness incarnate. I sometimes believe it's the only trait the man possesses. He reaches out his hand, and takes whatever he wants, just as a baby would, quite simply, and quite as a matter of course. He wants your wife now, and he is reaching out his hand to take her. He isn't conscious of doing anything especially wrong; he's always so plausible in whatever he does that he ends by deceiving himself, I suppose. For he's always plausible. It's utterly useless to argue any matter with him; he invariably ends by making you feel as if you'd been caught stealing a hat. The only argument that would ever get the better of him is knocking him down, just as spanking is the only argument that ever gets the better of a baby. Yes, he's very like a baby—thoroughly selfish and thoroughly dependent on other people; only, he's a clever baby who exaggerates his own helplessness in order to appeal to women. He—he has a taste for women. And women like him; he impresses them as an irresponsible child astray in an artful and designing world. They want to protect him. Even I do, at times. It's really maternal, you know; we'd infinitely prefer him to be soft and little, so that we could pick him up, and cuddle him. But as it is—he's dangerous." Her voice died away, and Mrs. Ashmeade fanned herself in the way that most large women do—slowly and impersonally, and quite as if she was fanning some one else through motives of charity.

"I don't question," Musgrave said, at length, "that Mr. Charteris is the highly estimable character you describe. But—oh, it's all nonsense, Polly!" he cried, with a little petulance and with a shade—a mere shade—of conviction lacking in his voice.

The fan continued its majestic,

gradual sweep from the shade into the sunlight, and back again into the shadow.

"Rudolph, I know very well what you meant by saying Fate hadn't such a fine sense of humor."

"Dear lady, doubtless you know a great number of things."

For a moment, the fan paused; then went on as before.

"I know that Charteris, in his own fashion, is in love with Patricia; I know that Anne and Patricia, both in their own different fashions, are in love with Charteris; I know that you, in a very brave, silent fashion, are in love with Anne."

"This," Mr. Musgrave cried, "is clearly the effect of the sun! Why, I—I—! Oh, nonsense, Polly—come here and sit in the shade! Hadn't you better loosen your collar or something?"

"Ah, I know, my dear—I know," she said, with unshaken conviction. Her lips smiled, but her eyes—Mrs. Ashmeade has eyes that are remarkably bright and clear for a woman of forty-two—were rather sad than otherwise. "Rudolph, it's a sorry tangle. No outsider can straighten it. You must do it. Patricia and Charteris are too weak; Anne—well, Anne doesn't pretend to be clever, you know."

"No, thank God!" Musgrave blurted out, fervently. There is, of course, no telling what he may have meant.

"But you are both, Rudolph—you are the only strong one among them. It rests with you, my dear. I can't help you. I wish I could," and her voice rang true as she spoke. "Think over what I have said, and—and do what you consider best. It will be the manly, brave, right thing, I know."

"I'll think! Oh, yes, I'll think!" said Musgrave, striding up and down, divided between a strong disposition to swear at the universe at large, and a strong disposition to laugh at it. Somehow, it did not occur to him now to doubt what she had told him. It scarcely seemed worth while to ques-

tion it. Nothing seemed quite worth while. It was useless to struggle against a Fate that planned such preposterous and elaborate jokes; one might depend on Fate to work out some ludicrous, horrible solution. Nevertheless, he paused after a while, and laughed, with a tolerable affectation of mirth. "I say—I— What in heaven's name, Polly, prompted you to bring me this choice specimen of a mare's nest?"

"Because I'm fond of you, I suppose. Isn't one always privileged to be disagreeable to one's friends? We've been friends a long while, you know." Mrs. Ashmeade was looking out over the river now, but she seemed to see a great way, a very great way beyond its glaring waters, and to be rather uncertain as to whether what she beheld there was of a humorous or a pathetic nature. "Do you remember that evening—the first Summer that I knew you—at Fortress Monroe, when we sat upon the pier so frightfully late, and the moon rose up out of the bay, and made a great, solid-looking, silver path that led straight over the rim of the world, and you talked to me about—about——?"

"Oh, yes, yes—I remember perfectly! One of the most beautiful evenings I ever saw. I remember it quite distinctly. I talked—I—what did I talk about, Polly?"

"Ah, men forget! A woman never forgets when she is really—really friends with a man. I know now you were telling me about Anne; you've been in love with her all your life, Rudolph. But I thought—I actually thought you were trying to make love to me, and I was disappointed in you and—yes, rather pleased. Women are all vain and perfectly inconsistent." Mrs. Ashmeade rose from her chair. Her fan shut with a snap. "You were a dear boy, Rudolph, when I first knew you—a little rustic and unformed at first, but I formed you. I formed you, my dear; I taught you to come into a room properly, and to be courteous in the way that women



like, and—yes, I taught you how to make love. And what I liked was that you never made love to me. Of all the boys I've formed, you were the only sensible one—the only one who never presumed. It was dear of you, Rudolph. It—it would have been ridiculous; I'm seven years older than you." She smiled a little over the bare idea of such a thing. "Wouldn't it have been ridiculous, Rudolph?" she demanded, suddenly.

"Not in the least," Musgrave protested, in courteous wise. "You—why, Polly, you were a wonderfully handsome woman. Any boy——"

"Yes—I was. I'm not now, am I, Rudolph?" Mrs. Ashmeade threw back her head, and laughed, naturally. "Ah, dear boy, it's unfair, isn't it, for an old woman to seize upon you in this fashion, and insist on your making love to her? I'll let you off. You don't have to do it." She caught up her skirts in her left hand, preparatory to going, and her right hand rested lightly on his arm. She spoke in a rather peculiar voice. "Yes," she said, "the boy was a very, very dear boy, and I want the man to be equally brave and—sensible."

Musgrave stared after her. "I wonder—I wonder— Oh, no, that couldn't be," he said, wearily.

Afterward, he strolled across the lawn, meditating upon a great number of things. There were a host of fleecy little clouds in the sky. He looked up at them, rather interrogatively. Then, he smiled and shook his head.

"I don't know," said he; "I'm coming to the conclusion that the world is run on an extremely humorous basis."

## VI

### AS PLAYED BEFORE PATRICIA

MUSGRAVE had a brief interview with his wife after luncheon. He began with a quiet remonstrance, and ended with an unheard defense of his own position. Patricia's speech,

on such occasions, was of an unfettered and heady nature.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," she said, when she had finally paused for breath, and had wiped away her tears, and powdered her nose, viciously, "to bully a weak, defenseless woman in this way. I dare say everybody in the house has heard us—brawling and squabbling just like a hod-carrier and his wife. What's that? You haven't said a word for fifteen minutes? I don't care. I have, and I'm perfectly sure they've heard me, and I'm sure I don't care in the least, and it's all your fault, anyway. You have a mean nature, Rudolph—a mean, cruel, suspicious nature. Charteris is nothing to me; I would have been quite willing to give him up if you had spoken to me in a decent manner about it. You only said—? I don't care what you said; besides, if you did speak to me in a decent manner, it simply shows that your thoughts were so horrid and vulgar that even you didn't dare put them into words. Very well, then, I won't be seen with him so much in future. I realize you're quite capable of beating me if I don't give way to your absurd prejudices. Yes, you are, Rudolph; you're just the sort of man to take pleasure in beating a woman. After the exhibition of temper you've given this afternoon, I believe you're capable of anything. Hand me that parasol! Don't talk to me; I don't wish to hear anything you've got to say. You're simply driving me to my grave with your continual nagging and abuse and fault-finding. I'm sure I wish I were dead as much as you do. Is my hat on straight? How do you expect me to see into that mirror if you stand directly in front of it? There! not content with robbing me of every pleasure in life, I verily believe you were going to let me go down-stairs with my hat on crooked! Don't look at me like that. I'm not going to meet Mr. Charteris. I—I'm going driving with Bob Townsend; he asked me at luncheon. I suppose you'll object to him next; you object to all my friends. Very well! Now you've made me

utterly miserable for the entire afternoon, and I'm sure I hope you're satisfied with yourself."

There was a rustle of skirts, and the door slammed.

Musgrave went to his own room, where he spent a little interval in meditation. Then, he rang for one of the servants, questioned him, and was informed that Mr. Charteris had gone down to the beach just after luncheon. A moment later, Mr. Musgrave was walking through the gardens in that direction.

As he came to the thicket that screens the beach, he called Charteris's name loudly, in order to ascertain his whereabouts. That gentleman's voice answered him—not at once, but after a brief silence. It chanced that, at that moment, Musgrave had come to a thin place in the thicket, and could see Mr. Charteris very plainly; he was concealing some white object in the hollow of a log that lay by the river. A little later, Musgrave came out upon the beach, and found Mr. Charteris seated upon the same log, an open book upon his knees, and looking back wonderingly over his shoulder.

"Oh," said Mr. Charteris, "so it was you, Musgrave? I couldn't imagine who it was that called."

Now, there are five little red-and-white bath-houses upon the beach at Kingsland; the nearest of them was perhaps thirty feet from Mr. Charteris. It might have been imagination, but Musgrave certainly thought he heard its door closing. Moreover, as he walked around the end of the log, he glanced downward, in the most casual manner, and perceived a certain protrusion that bore an undeniable resemblance to the handle of a parasol. Musgrave whistled, though, at the bottom of his heart, he was not greatly surprised; then, he sat down upon the log, and was silent for a moment.

"Beautiful evening," said Mr. Charteris.

Musgrave lighted a cigarette.

"Mr. Charteris, I've something rather difficult to say to you—yes, it's deuced

difficult, and the sooner it's over the better. I—hang it all, man, I want you to stop making love to my wife."

Mr. Charteris's eyebrows rose. "Really, Mr. Musgrave—" he began, coolly.

"Now, you're about to make a scene, you know," said Musgrave, raising his hand in protest, "and we aren't here for that. We aren't going to tear any passions to tatters; we aren't going to rant; we're simply going to have a quiet, sensible talk. We aren't characters in a romance; you aren't Lancelot, you know, and I'm not up to the part of Arthur by a great deal. I'm not angry. I'm not jealous. I don't put the matter on any high moral grounds. I simply say it won't do—no, hang it, it won't do!"

There was a pause. Charteris was thinking—thinking with desperate celerity. Each man suspected the other of consciously playing to a hidden audience, and, at any hazard, Charteris was determined to seize the dominant rôle. Musgrave had chosen his ground well; Charteris knew he would have need of all the audacity he could muster to prevent his part being rendered laughable. And Mr. Charteris, in common with many men, esteemed it no laughing matter to be laughed at.

"At least," he said, at length, "you are commendably frank. I appreciate that, Musgrave; I appreciate the fact that you have come to me, not as the husband of that fiction in which kitchen-maids delight, breathing fire and speaking balderdash, but as one sensible man to another. Let us be frank, then; let us play with the cards upon the table. You have charged me with loving your wife; I answer you frankly—I do. She does me the honor to return this affection. What, then, Mr. Musgrave?" Surely, Patricia would admire that!

Musgrave blew out a puff of gray smoke. "I don't especially mind," he said, slowly. "According to tradition, of course, I ought to spring at your throat with a muttered curse. But, as a matter of fact, I'm not in the

least angry. I—yes, at the bottom of my heart," he added, upon consideration, "I'm rather sorry for you."

Unintentionally, he had drawn first blood. Mr. Charteris sprang to his feet, and walked hastily up and down the beach. "Ah, you hide your feelings well, Musgrave!" he cried; his laughter was a trifle unconvincing and a bit angry. "But it is unavailing with me. I know! I know the sick, impotent hatred of me that is seething in your heart; and I feel for you the pity you pretend to entertain toward me. Yes, I pity you. But what would you have? Frankly, while doubtless a most estimable man, you are no fit mate for Patricia. She has the sensitive, artistic temperament, poor girl, and only we who are cursed with it can tell you what its possession implies. And you—frankness is the order of the day, you know—you impress me as being a trifle *bourgeois*; it isn't your fault, of course, but the fact remains that you are. Patricia's most cherished aspirations and ideals, if they could ever be explained to you, would seem in your eyes a very choice collection of absurdities. You are no fit mate for her. Any community of interest between you is impossible—radically impossible. Your marriage was a mistake—a hideous mistake, just as mine was. You are starving her soul, Musgrave, just as Anne has starved mine. And now, at last, when we have seen our one chance of happiness, we cannot—cannot and will not—defer to any outworn tradition or the fear of Mrs. Grundy's narrow-minded prattle!"

Charteris swept aside the crude dogmas of the world with an indignant gesture of somewhat conscious nobility, and turned toward his companion in an attitude of defiance. It was exquisite comedy. The men now understood each other perfectly; they were fighting for the woman in the bath-house, and each knew that every speech and action of the other was planned to appeal to her. Charteris paced the beach warily. Musgrave was smiling a little.

He smoked on very placidly for a few moments.

It was approaching sunset. The sun, a glowing ball of copper, hung low in the west over a rampart of dim, purple clouds, whose heights were smeared with red. A slight, almost imperceptible mist rose from the river, and, where the horizon should have been, a dubious cloudland prevailed. Far to the west were many orange-colored quiverings; nearer, the river dimpled with little, mica-tipped waves; and, at their feet, the water grew transparent, and plashed over the sleek, brown sand, and sucked back, leaving a curved line of bubbles that, one by one, winked and burst. There was a drowsy peacefulness in the air; behind them, among the beeches, were many stealthy wood-sounds, and, at long intervals, a sleepy, peevish twittering went about the nested trees. In Mr. Musgrave's face, the primal peace was mirrored.

"May I ask," said he, at length, "what you propose doing?"

It is more than probable that Mr. Charteris had had no definite plan in mind. It is very rarely necessary to form one in such cases; one drifts—drifts on the tide of circumstance that sets in with a strong, strong pull toward the realm of a certain personage, who is described as being not so black as he is painted. And the voyage, it is said, is very pleasant; the fare is collected at the other end of the trip, and is rumored to be excessive.

However this may have been, Charteris had passed the point of hesitation. Patricia was listening, and Patricia had no patience with half-measures. Mr. Charteris answered promptly. "I propose," said he, "to ask Patricia to share the remainder of my life."

"A euphemism, as I take it, for an elopement. I hardly thought you intended going so far."

"Sir!" cried Charteris, drawing himself to his full height—he was not to blame for the fact that it was but five feet, six—"I am an honorable man! I cannot eat your salt, and steal your honor. I loot openly, or not at all."

This was precisely what Musgrave had planned he should say. However, he shrugged his shoulders, carefully. "I suppose you've counted the cost—estimated the necessary breakage?"

"True love," the novelist declared, in a hushed, sweet voice, "is above such considerations."

"I think," said Musgrave, slowly, "that any love worthy of the name will always estimate the costs—to the woman. It's of Patricia I'm thinking."

"She loves me," Charteris murmured. He glanced up, and laughed lightly, for he believed now that he was winning. "Upon my soul, you know, I can't help thinking the situation a bit farcical—you and I talking over matters in this fashion. But I honestly believe the one chance of happiness for any of us hinges on Patricia and me chucking the whole affair, and bolting."

"It won't do—no, hang it, Charteris, it won't do!" Musgrave glanced toward the bath-house, and lifted his voice a little. "I'm not considering you, in the least—under the circumstances, you couldn't expect me to do that. It's of Patricia I'm thinking. I haven't made her happy. Our marriage was a mistake, I grant you—a hideous mistake. It's a nasty tangle altogether, but one mustn't cry over spilt milk. And it rests with us, the two men who—who love her, to decide what is best for Patricia. It's she, and only she, we must consider."

"Ah, you are right!" said Charteris, and his eyes grew tender. "She must have what she most desires; all must be sacrificed to that." He turned and spoke as simply as a child. "Of course, you know, I shall be giving up a great deal for her, but—I am willing."

Musgrave looked at him for a moment. "H'm, doubtless," he assented. "Why, then, we won't consider the others. We won't consider your wife, who—who worships you. We won't consider the boy. I—I, for my part, think it's a mother's duty to leave an unsullied name to her child, but, probably, my ideas are *bourgeois*. We won't consider Patricia's parents,

who, perhaps, will find it rather unpleasant. In short, we must consider no one save Patricia."

"Of course, one can't make an omelet without breaking eggs." Mr. Charteris looked rather sulky; he was beginning to realize that his opponent held some very strong cards, if he chose to play them properly.

"No; the question is whether it is absolutely necessary to make the omelet. I say no."

"And I," quoth Charteris, smiling gently, "say yes."

"For Patricia," Musgrave went on, as in meditation, but speaking very clearly, "it means giving up—everything. It means giving up her friends and the life to which she is accustomed; it means being ashamed to face those who were formerly her friends. We—the world, our world, I mean—are lax enough as to the divorce question, heaven knows, but we can't pardon immorality coupled with poverty. And you'll be poor, you know. Your books are very clever, Mr. Charteris, but—as I happen to know—the proceeds from them won't support two people in luxury; and Patricia has nothing. That's a sordid detail, of course, but it's worth considering. Patricia would never be happy in a three-pair back."

Mr. Charteris swallowed, before speaking. "Patricia has—nothing?"

"Bless your soul, of course not! Her father failed, you know, the year before we were married."

"I—I am a mere child in money-matters," Charteris reminded him. The novelist's voice was a little queer. "But—I understood—that failures were sometimes—profitable? And surely—some settlements——?"

"His failure wasn't." Musgrave had an irritating smile at times. Just now, he was offensively genial. "I don't mind telling you I had to lend him money in that affair to help him pay a decent percentage on the dollar. I—well, he's never been able to pay it back; he never prospered, somehow. And Patricia came to me without a penny. I never made any settlements on her, because I hadn't anything to

settle. What money I have comes from my uncle, you know, and I hold it only in trust for our boy, who's named after him. Patricia and I can't touch anything but the interest."

Mr. Charteris looked at him with eyes that were sad and hurt and wistful. "I am perfectly aware of your reason for telling me this," he said, candidly. "I know I have always been thought a mercenary man since my marriage. At that time, I fancied myself too much in love with Anne to permit any sordid considerations of fortune to stand in the way of our union. I—poor Anne! She little knows what sacrifices I have made for her! She, too, would be terribly unhappy if— Eh?"

"God help her—yes!" groaned Musgrave. He had forgotten, for the moment, the comedy they were playing.

Charteris had not.

"And Patricia—it would be unfair to condemn her to a life of comparative poverty. My—my books sell better than you think, Mr. Musgrave, but still an author cannot hope to attain affluence in these grasping days. We men of artistic tastes are apt to be somewhat hasty in our judgments. Since—since we have talked matters over, I—I really begin to think she might be happier with you." And Mr. Charteris's head sank resignedly upon his breast.

"I think so," Musgrave assented, calmly. "But, then, my opinion is, naturally, rather prejudiced and *bourgeois*."

"I perceive that you love her very tenderly." Mr. Charteris sighed, and passed his hand over his forehead in a graceful fashion. "I, also, love her far too dearly to imperil her happiness. It is true, I had hoped—ah, well, after all, we cannot utterly defy society! Its prejudices, though possibly unfounded, must be respected. I—I bid farewell to the dearest aspiration of my heart. You have my word of honor that henceforth I—I shall not—" Mr. Charteris held out his hand to seal the compact.

"Word of honor?" queried Mr. Musgrave, looking him in the face so intently that he, evidently, failed to perceive the proffered hand. "Why, then,

that's settled, and I'm glad of it. I told you, you know, it wouldn't do. See you at dinner, I suppose?"

And Rudolph Musgrave glanced at the bath-house, turned on his heel, and presently plunged into the beech plantation, whistling cheerfully. The effect of the melody was somewhat impaired by the apparent necessity of breaking off, at very frequent intervals, in order to smile.

The comedy had been well played on both sides; he did not object to Mr. Charteris's retiring with all the honors of war. Patricia, he thought, could not fail to have much the same opinion of the novelist as that which now interrupted her husband's whistling.

## VII

### WHAT THE RIVER WITNESSED

HE had not gone far, however, before he paused, thrust both hands into his trousers pockets, and stared down at the ground for a matter of five minutes. Patricia had a decided faculty for not seeing things she did not wish to see.

Musgrave shook his head. "After all," said he, "I can't trust them. Patricia is too erratic. The man will try to break off with her now, of course; but he's weak—weak as water. It isn't a nice thing to do, but—well, one must fight fire with fire."

Thereupon, he retraced his steps. When he had come to the thin spot in the thicket, Rudolph Musgrave left the path, and entered into the shrubbery. There, he sat down very composedly in the shadow of a small cedar. The sight of his wife upon the beach in converse with Mr. Charteris did not seem to surprise him.

She was speaking very quickly. She held a bedraggled parasol in one hand. Her husband noted, with a faint thrill of wonder, that, at times, and in a rather unwholesome, elfish way, Patricia was extraordinarily beautiful. Her green eyes glowed; they flashed sunlight purged of heat,

sunlight seen through a curving wave; her cheeks flushed, arbutus-like. The soft, white stuff that gowned her had the look of foam; against the gray sky she seemed a freakish spirit in the very act of vanishing. For sky and water were all one lambent gray by now. In the west was a faint, thin smear of orange; but, for the rest, the world was all gray. She and Charteris stood in the heart of a great pearl.

"Ah, believe me," she was saying, "Rudolph isn't a fool. He's cleverer than you think, Jack—oh, far cleverer! It was a comedy for my benefit, I tell you. He'll—he'll allow a great deal for the artistic temperament, no doubt, but he doesn't suppose you fetch along a white-lace parasol when you go to watch a sunset—especially a parasol he gave me last month."

"Indeed," protested Mr. Charteris, "he saw nothing. I was too quick for him."

She shrugged her shoulders. "I saw him looking at it. Accordingly, I paid no attention to what he said. But you—ah, Jack, you were so firm and manly! I suppose we shall have to elope at once now, though?"

Charteris evaded a direct answer. "I am not quite sure, Patricia, that your husband is not—to a certain extent—in the right. Believe me, he did not know you were about. He approached me in a perfectly sensible manner, and exhibited very commendable self-restraint; he has played a difficult part well. I could not have done it better, myself. And—and it is not for us who have been endowed with—with certain gifts denied to him, to reproach him for lacking the finer perceptions and sensibilities of life. Yet, I must admit that, for the time, I was a little hurt by his evident belief that I would allow my most sacred feelings to be influenced by mercenary considerations."

"He is a hopeless Philistine." She was not interested in the subject.

"He can't help that, you know," Charteris reminded her, gently; then, he asked, after a little: "I suppose it is all true?"

"What is true?"

"About your having no money of your own?" He laughed, lightly, though one could still see how deeply he had been pained by Musgrave's suspicions. "I ask, because, as your husband has discovered, I am utterly sordid, my lady, and care only for your wealth."

"Ah, how can you expect a man like that to understand—you? Why, Jack, how ridiculous in you to be hurt by what the brute thinks! You're as solemn as an owl, my dear. Yes, it's true enough. My father was unfortunate—and that horrid will—Ah, Jack, Jack, how grotesque, how characteristic it was, his thinking such things would influence you—you, of all men, who scarcely know what money is!"

"It was even more grotesque that I should have been pained by his thinking it," Charteris said, sadly. "The world always misunderstands, as we learn by experience. Yet—ah, my lady, you know that I would glory in the thought that I had given up all for you. You know, I think, that I would willingly work my fingers to the bone just that I might possess you always. I had dreamed of love in a cottage—an idyll of blissful poverty, where Love contents himself with crusts and kisses, and mocks at the proverbial wolf on the door-step. But I perceive now that I have been guilty of selfishness—the vice that of all others I most abhor. Your delicate, tender beauty, my lady, is unfitted to face the unlovely realities and petty deprivations and squalid makeshifts of such an existence. I would glory in them—ah, luxury and riches mean little to me, my dear, and I can conceive of no greater happiness than to starve with you. But true love knows how to sacrifice itself. Your husband was right; it would not be fair to you, Patricia."

"You—you are going to leave me?"

"Yes; I am strong enough to relinquish you, the one joy of my lonely life, because I love you better than

my life, Patricia—better than my immortal soul!”

“Ah, my dear!” she cried. Musgrave’s heart was sick within him as he heard the same notes in her voice that echoed in Anne’s voice when she spoke of her husband. This was a new Patricia; her shrill speech was low and gentle now, and her eyes held a light Rudolph Musgrave had never seen there. “Ah, my dear, you are the noblest man I have ever known; I wish we women could be brave and strong like men. But, oh, Jack, Jack, don’t be quixotic! I can’t give you up, my dear—that would never be for my good. Think how unhappy I’ve been all these years; think how—how Rudolph is starving my soul! I want to be free, Jack; I want to live my own life. You’ve shown me a glimpse of what life might be; don’t let me sink back into the old, humdrum existence from a foolish sense of honor! I tell you, I should go mad! I want you, Jack—just you! I don’t fear poverty. You could write some more wonderful books. I could work, too, Jack, dear. I—I could teach music or—or something. Lots of women support themselves, you know. Ah, Jack, we would be so happy! Don’t be honorable and brave and disagreeable, Jack, dear!”

Charteris was silent for a moment. His nostrils widened a little, and a curious look came into his face. He discovered something in the sand that interested him. “After all,” he said, slowly, “is it necessary—to go away—to be happy?”

“I—I don’t understand.” Her hand lifted from his arm; then, a quick remorse smote her, and it fluttered back, confidently.

Charteris rose to his feet. “It is, doubtless, a very spectacular and very stirring performance to cast your cap over the windmill in the face of the world; but, after all, is it not a bit foolish, Patricia? Lots of people manage these things—more quietly.”

“Oh, Jack!” Patricia’s face went red, then white, and stiffened in a sort of sick terror. She was a frightened

Columbine in stone. “I thought you cared for me—really, not—that way.” Mrs. Musgrave rose and spoke with perfect composure. “I think I’ll go back to the house, Mr. Charteris. It’s a bit chilly here. You needn’t bother to come.”

Then, Mr. Charteris laughed—a little, choking, sobbing laugh. He raised his hands impotently toward heaven. “And to think,” he cried, “to think that a man may love a woman with his whole heart—with all that is best and noblest in him—and she understand him so little!”

“I do not think I have misunderstood you,” Patricia said, in a crisp voice. “Your proposition was very—very explicit.”

“And you really believed that I could sully the great love I bear you by stooping to—that! You really believed that I would sacrifice to you my home-life, my honor, my prospects—all that a man can give—without testing the quality of your love! You did not know that I spoke to try you—you actually did not know! Ah, yours is a light nature, Patricia! I do not reproach you, for you are only as your narrow Philistine life has made you. But I had hoped better things of you, Patricia. You have pained me beyond words.” And he sank down on the log, and buried his face in his hands.

She came to him—it was pitiful to see how she came to him, laughing and sobbing all in one breath—and knelt humbly by his side, and turned her grieved, shamed, penitent face to his. “Forgive me!” she wailed; “oh, forgive me!”

“You have pained me beyond words, Patricia,” he repeated. He was not angry—only sorrowful and very, very hurt.

“Ah, Jack! dear, dear Jack, forgive me!”

Mr. Charteris sighed. “I forgive you, Patricia,” he said; “you did not know.”

She was happy now. “Dear boy,” she murmured, “don’t you see it’s just these constant proofs of the greatness

and nobility of your love—? Really, though, Jack, wasn't it too horrid of me to misunderstand you so? Are you quite sure you've forgiven me entirely—without any nasty little reservations?"

Mr. Charteris was quite, quite sure. His face was still sad, but it was benevolent.

"Don't you see," she went on, "that it's just these things that make me care for you so much, and feel quite sure we'll be happy? Ah, Jack, we'll be so unutterably happy that I'm almost afraid to think of it!" Patricia wiped away the last tear, and laughed, and added, in a matter-of-fact fashion: "There's a train at six-five in the morning; we can leave by that, before any one is up."

Charteris started. "Your husband loves you," he said, at length. His tone was a little uncertain—she was very beautiful.

"Bah, I tell you, that was a comedy for my benefit," she protested, laughing. She was unutterably happy now, because she, and not he, had been in the wrong. "Poor Rudolph!—he has such a smug horror of the divorce-court that he'll even go so far as to make love to his own wife in order to keep out of it. Really, Jack, both of our better-halves are horridly commonplace and eminently suited to each other. They will be much better off without us."

"He has my word of honor," said Mr. Charteris.

Really, though, she was very beautiful. She was April embodied in sweet flesh; her soul was just a little wisp of April cloud, and her life an April shower, half sun that only seemed to warm, and half rain that only played at raining; but she was very beautiful. Surely, it would be a brave and—yes, an agreeable exploit—to give up everything for such a woman; it would be like Antony at Actium. It would be an interesting episode in one's Life and Letters; such things were pardonable, even characteristic, in the artistic temperament. It seemed to Charteris just then that

they would surely get on, somehow. And—and she was very beautiful.

"He has my word of honor," Mr. Charteris repeated. It sounded like a question.

"Ah, does that matter?" she cried. "Does anything matter, except just that we love each other? I tell you, I've given the best part of my life to that man, but I mean to make the most of what there is left. He has had my youth, my love—there was a time, you know, when I actually fancied I cared for him—and he has only made me unhappy. I hate him, I loathe him, I detest him, I despise him! I never intend to speak to him again—oh, yes, I shall have to at dinner this evening, but that doesn't count. And I tell you, I mean to be happy in the only way that's possible. Every one has a right to do that. A woman has an especial right to take her share of happiness in any way she can, because her hour of it is so short. A woman can be really happy through love alone, Jack, dear, and it's only when we're young and good to look at that men care for us; after that, there's nothing left but to take either to religion or duplicate whist. Yes—yes, they all grow tired after a while. Oh, Jack, I'm only a vain and frivolous woman, but I love you very much, my dear, and I solemnly swear to commit suicide the moment my first wrinkle arrives. You shall never grow tired of me, my dear. Jack, kneel down at once, and swear that you're perfectly sore with loving me, as that ridiculous person says in Dickens, and whose name I never could remember. Oh, I forgot—Dickens caricatures nature, doesn't he, and isn't read by really cultured people? You will have to educate me up to your level, Jack, and I warn you in advance I am hopelessly stupid. Yes, I am quite aware that I'm talking nonsense, and am on the verge of hysterics, thank you, but I rather like it. It's because I'm going to have you all to myself for the future; the thought makes me quite drunk. Will you kindly ring for the patrol-wagon, Jack? Jack, are you



quite sure you love me? Are you perfectly certain you never have loved any one else half so much? No, don't answer me, for I intend to do all the talking for both of us for the future! I shall tyrannize over you frightfully, and you will like it. All I ask in return is that you will be a good boy—no, I mean a naughty boy—and do solemnly swear, promise and affirm that you will meet me at the side-door at half-past five in the morning, with a portmanteau and the intention of never going back to your wife. You swear it? Thank you so much! And, now, I think I should like to cry for a few minutes, and, after that, we will go back to the house, before dinner is over and my eyes are perfectly crimson."

In fact, Mr. Charteris had consented. Patricia was irresistible as she pleaded and mocked and scolded and coaxed and laughed and cried, all in one bewildering breath. Her plan was very simple; it was to slip out of Kingsland at dawn, and walk to the near-by station. There they would take the train, and snap their fingers at convention. It sounded impossible, but she demonstrated its perfect practicability. And Mr. Charteris consented.

Rudolph Musgrave sat in the shadow of the cedar with mighty emotions whirling in his soul. He had never thought seriously of this contingency. He had never dared to hope for this.

### VIII

#### A VOICE IN THE DARK

WHEN they had left the beach, Musgrave parted the underbrush, and leaped down upon the sand. He felt a bit queer. He must have air—air and an open place wherein to fight this out.

Night had risen about him in bland emptiness. There were no stars overhead, but a patient, wearied, ancient moon pushed through the clouds. The trees and the river conferred with one another, doubtfully.

He paced up and down the beach.

"They're going—they're actually going to-morrow! Think for a little of what that means, Rudolph Musgrave! I tell you, man, you've but to wait—only to wait!—and, without the lifting of your finger, there comes to you liberty and the chance of winning Anne. You can marry Anne. Think of that for a little, Rudolph Musgrave!"

He paused, and bestowed a crooked smile upon the moon.

"This shifting of partners undoubtedly savors of French farce. Man, man, it brings you all you've ever dreamed of, all you've ever hoped for, all you've ever imagined life could possibly mean! It brings you Anne. Isn't that worth the price you pay? Dear God in heaven, may a man not be deaf, dumb, blind, for a few hours when it brings him his heart's desire? Is it so great a crime when—when, after all, it may be the best possible solution of this hideous tangle?"

Up and down, up and down. Anne's face floated in the darkness. Her voice whispered through the lispings of the beeches, through the murmur of the water.

"It is so ridiculously simple. No one could blame me. No one could know—no one could possibly know. 'Mr. Musgrave had perceived with great grief the infatuation of the misguided couple. Oh, my dear, I assure you, he had remonstrated with his wife in the most feeling manner. He had even spoken, very temperately and very reasonably, I am told, to Charteris. No one could possibly blame him, my dear. Society only commiserates his present painful position, and congratulates him on being freed from such a—creature.' Thus Mrs. Grundy speaks over the tea-cups, and my position is impregnable. Yes, it is very simple."

Musgrave laughed a little in the darkness. His heart was racing, racing in him, and his thoughts were blown foam.

"Anne cares for me—not as she cares for her husband, but it is an ideal Charteris she loves—a Charteris

who exists only in her imagination. Let the man be once stripped of his disguise—as he will be to-morrow—let him once appear in his true colors, the lying, weak, unmitigated cad that he is, and will her love endure? Impossible! For Patricia is not the first; there was that Italian countess and the others that he explained so satisfactorily. I think these explanations will be gone over more carefully to-morrow. He has never loved Anne. He has been untrue to her from the first. He married her for her money. These things she will know to-morrow. Could any love for him survive that knowledge? Impossible! And she will still care for me. Yes, it is very simple.”

Up and down, up and down; then, a quick halt.

“Stop a bit, Rudolph Musgrave! It is her ideal of Charteris she loves; granted. Isn't it an ideal of you she cares for? Is it the real man—the man here by this river? Would she care, think you, for the man prepared to wink at his own dishonor, the man plotting to put a stain upon his son's name, the man—the real man, in short? You know the answer, Rudolph Musgrave. That, too, is very simple.”

Musgrave laughed, suddenly. He raised his hat, and bowed fantastically in the darkness.

“Signor Lucifer, I present my compliments. You have discoursed with me very plausibly. I honor your cunning, signor, but if you are indeed a gentleman, as I have always heard, you will now withdraw and permit me to regard the matter from a standpoint other than my own. For the others are weak, signor; as you have doubtless discovered, good women and bad men are the weakest of their sex. I am the strongest among them; the matter must rest with me.”

Up and down, up and down—the hands held behind him now, the heart still racing.

“First, as to Charteris—well, I don't think I need consider Charteris.”

Another laugh. Then, up and down

as before, the heart slackening a little.

“Second, as to Patricia. Patricia, I have heard from her own lips, hates me, loathes me, detests me. She has never been happy with me—never from the first. She never will be, that is certain. Will she be happy; with Charteris? I doubt it, yet there is a chance. She cares for him; and, incredible as it may seem, the man actually cares enough for her to brave poverty; he cares as much as he is capable of caring. One can do no more; and I shall see to it that they do not starve. Ah, they shall have money, if that is all that is necessary to complete their happiness! Yes; setting aside certain old-world notions of honor, I think I might, with a clear conscience, let Patricia go. The man is clever, and she may never find him out. She would have her chance of happiness; otherwise, she has none.”

The heart drops a beat; makes up for it, and then slackens slowly, slowly.

“Remains Anne. Ah, Rudolph Musgrave, face the facts without blinking! Is it not possible that, after the man has been exposed, stripped of his fine speeches and pretenses, shown up as the cheap mountebank he is—that, after all this, she may continue to love him? Such things have been, Rudolph Musgrave. Women have loved men far more vile than he is, and have died for love of them. You are convicted, it may be, by your own lips. ‘The man is clever, and she may never find him out!’ It rests with you—with you of all men!—to award her happiness or misery. Face the facts without blinking, Rudolph Musgrave! You must take lessons of this same cheap mountebank. ‘True love knows how to sacrifice itself’—the speech was true, though it came from a lying mouth. You must consider Anne's happiness, Rudolph Musgrave. Beside this, your happiness is a little thing, and the whims of a light man and a light woman are as nothing. It is she, and she alone, who is to be considered. If she may be rendered happy through your unhappiness, then you must be

unhappy; if she may be rendered happy through your dishonor, then you must be dishonored. If she desires this mountebank, then—she must have this mountebank."

The heart is normal now. He is very tired—physically tired, it seems to him—and the moon, looking down upon him, passionless, but inexorable, appears to await his decision. It is very, very hard to make.

"Lies, lies, lies! Why is it that the most honest of us dare not be truthful with ourselves? You know that Anne doesn't care for you, and never will care for you—that way. She loves the mountebank. And, as there is a God in heaven, she shall have her mountebank, and never know him for what he is! It's only fair—only fair and just. Anne's the only decent one among us; she's the only one who hasn't been nibbling at forbidden fruit. You've had your hour of happiness; now, you're going to pay for it. And Patricia? Ah, you've been lying, Rudolph Musgrave, lying hopelessly, pitifully! She can never be happy with Charteris, and you know it. When all is said and done, Patricia is your wife; Patricia is a light-minded little shrew, but Patricia is your wife. And you haven't made her happy, you know, though it doesn't take much to make Patricia happy. She wants only the petty things of life—the bodily comforts and a little flattery, and, it may be, a pretense of love. You could have given her these things very easily, Rudolph Musgrave; you still can give them to her. There's only one way to protect both Anne and Patricia—you must fight the liar with his own weapons. You've tried eavesdropping to-day; to-morrow, you must try lying. You must take lessons of the mountebank, Rudolph Musgrave! He has lied to his wife, and he has made her happy; you must do as he has done. That's the only way to protect both women—the woman you love, and the mother of your child. You can do it—you must do it. Afterward—well, Patricia will be content in her own fashion, and she will lead you rather

a devil of a life; and Anne will be happy with her mountebank, and she will be taught to despise you very cordially. The thing is settled."

And, having come to a decision, Rudolph Musgrave sat for a long while upon the deserted beach. The tumult had died out of his soul, and he was very, very tired.

## IX

### DESTINY LAUGHS

MUSGRAVE was, not unnaturally, late for dinner. At that meal and afterward, he observed with very faint interest that Charteris and Patricia avoided each other in a rather marked manner. Both seemed a trifle more serious than they were wont to be.

After dinner, Bob Townsend brought forth a mandolin, and the house-party sang songs, sentimental and otherwise, upon the piazza. Anne had disappeared somewhere. Musgrave subsequently discovered her in one of the drawing-rooms, puzzling over a number of papers which her maid had evidently just brought to her.

Mrs. Charteris looked up with a puckered brow, and then smiled. "Rudolph," said she, "haven't you an account at the Occidental Bank?"

"Hardly an account, dear lady—merely a deposit large enough to entitle me to receive monthly notices that I've overdrawn it."

"Why, then, of course, you've a cheque-book. Horrible things, aren't they?—such a nuisance remembering to fill out those little stubs. Of course, I forgot to bring mine with me—I always do; and equally, of course, a vexatious debt turns up and finds me without an Occidental Bank cheque to my name."

Musgrave smiled a little. "That," said he, "is easily remedied. I'll get you one; though even if— Ah, well, what's the good of trying to teach you adorable women anything about business! You shall have your indispensable blank form in three minutes."

He returned in rather less than that time, with the cheque. Anne was alone now. She was gowned in some dull, soft, yellow stuff, and sat by a small, marble-topped table, trifling with a fountain-pen.

"You mustn't sneer at my business methods, Rudolph," she said, pouting a little as she filled out the cheque. "It isn't polite, sir, in the first place, and, in the second, I am very, very methodical. Of course, I'm always losing my cheque-book, and drawing cheques, and forgetting to enter them, and I usually put down the same deposit two or three times—all women do that; but, otherwise, I am really very careful. I manage all the accounts; I couldn't expect Jack to do that, you know." Mrs. Charteris signed her name with a flourish, and nodded at him very wisely. "Dear boy, he's horribly unpractical! Do you know, this bill has been due—oh, for months—and he forgot it entirely until this evening. Fortunately, he can settle it to-morrow; those disagreeable publishers of his have telegraphed for him to come to New York at once, you know. Otherwise—dear, dear, marrying a genius is absolutely ruinous to one's credit, isn't it, Rudolph? The tradespeople will refuse to trust us soon."

Involuntarily, Musgrave had seen the cheque. It was for a considerable amount, and it was made out to John Charteris. "Beyond doubt," said Musgrave, in his soul, "the man is colossal! He's actually drawing on his wife for the necessary expenses for running away with another woman! He's actually doing that!"

Musgrave sat down abruptly before the great, open fireplace, and stared very hard at the pine-boughs that were heaped up in it.

"A penny," said she, at length.

He glanced up with a little smile. "Dear lady, it would be robbery! For a penny, you may read of the subject of my thoughts in any of the yellow journals, only far more vividly set forth, and obtain a variety of more or less savory additions, to boot. I was thinking of the Lethbury case, and

wondering how we could have been so greatly deceived by the man."

"Ah, poor Mrs. Lethbury!" she sighed, quickly. "I am very sorry for her, Rudolph; she was a good woman, and was always interested in charitable work."

"Do you know," said Musgrave, with some deliberation, "it is she I cannot understand. To discover that he has been systematically deceiving her for some ten years; that, after making away with as much of her fortune as he was able to lay his hands on, he has betrayed business trust after business trust in order to—to maintain another establishment; that he has never cared for her, and has made her his dupe time after time, in order to obtain money for his gambling debts and other even less reputable obligations—she must realize all these things now, you know, and one would have thought no woman's love could possibly survive such a test. Yet, she's standing by him through thick and thin. Yes, I confess, she puzzles me. I can't understand her mental attitude." Musgrave was looking at Anne very intently as he ended.

"Of course," Anne said, simply, "she realizes it was all the fault of that—that other woman; and, besides, the—the entanglement has been going on only a little over eight years—not ten, Rudolph."

She was entirely in earnest; Musgrave could see that very plainly.

"I admit I had not looked on it in that light," said he, at length, and was silent for a moment. Then: "Upon my soul, Anne," he cried, "I believe you think the woman's only doing the natural thing, only doing the thing one had a right to expect of her, in sticking to that blackguard after she has found him out!"

Mrs. Charteris raised her eyebrows; she was really surprised. "Naturally, she must stand by her husband when he's in trouble; why, if his own wife didn't, who would, Rudolph? It is just now that he needs her most. She would be very, very wicked to desert him now."

Anne paused, and thought for a moment. "Depend upon it, she knows a better side of his nature than we can see; she knows him, possibly, to have been misled, or to have acted thoughtlessly; otherwise, she would not stand by him so firmly." Having reached this satisfactory conclusion, Anne began to laugh—at Musgrave's lack of penetration, probably. "So, you see, Rudolph, in either case, her conduct is perfectly natural."

"And this," he cried, "this is how women reason!"

"Am I very stupid? Jack says I'm a bit illogical at times. But, Rudolph, you mustn't expect a woman to judge the man she loves; if you call on her to do that, she doesn't reason about it; she—she just goes on loving him, and thinking how horrid you are. Women love men as they do children; they punish them sometimes, but only in deference to public opinion. A woman will always find an excuse for the man she loves. If he deserts her, she is miserable until she succeeds in demonstrating to herself that it was entirely her own fault; after that, she is properly repentant, but far less unhappy; and she goes on loving him just the same."

Musgrave pondered over this. "Women are different," he said, appealingly.

"I don't know. I think that, if all women could be thrown with good men, they would all be good. All women want to be good; but there comes a time to each one of them when she wants to make a certain man happy, and wants that more than anything else in the world; and then, of course, if he wants—very much—for her to be bad, she will be bad. A bad woman is always to be explained by a bad man." Anne nodded, very wisely; then, she began to laugh, this time to herself. "I am talking quite like a book," she said. "Really, I had no idea I was so clever. But I've thought of this before, Rudolph, and been sorry—oh, very sorry—for those poor women who—who haven't found the right sort of man to care for."

"Yes." Musgrave's face was a little white now. He was breathing improperly, too. "You've been luckier than most, Anne," he said, at length.

"Lucky!" she cried, and that queer little thrill of happiness woke again in her voice. "Ah, you don't know how lucky I have been, Rudolph! I've never cared for any one except—well, yes, you, a great while ago—and Jack. And you're both good men. Ah, Rudolph, it was very dear and sweet and foolish, the way we loved each other, but you don't mind—very, very much—do you, if I think Jack's the best man in the world, and by far the best man in the world for me? He's so good to me; he's so good and kind and considerate to me, and, even after all these years of matrimony, he's always the lover. A woman appreciates that, Rudolph; she wants her husband to be always, always her lover, just as Jack is, and never to give in to her when she coaxes—because she only coaxes when she knows she's in the wrong—and never, never, to let her see him shaving himself. If a husband observes these simple rules, Rudolph, his wife will be a happy woman; and Jack does. In consequence, every day I live I grow fonder of him, and appreciate him more and more; he grows upon me just as a taste for strong drink might. Without him—without him—" Anne's voice died away; then, she faced Musgrave, indignantly. "Oh, Rudolph!" she cried, "how horrid of you, how mean of you, to come here and suggest the possibility of Jack's dying, or running away from me, or doing anything dreadful like that!"

Musgrave was smiling, but his face was very, very white now. "I?" said he, equably. "If you will reconsider, dear lady—"

"No," she conceded, after consideration, "it wasn't your fault. I simply ran on as I always do when I get started on the subject of Jack, and imagined all sorts of horrible and impossible things. I'm very morbid and very foolish, Rudolph; but, then, I'm in love, you know. Isn't it funny,

after all these years?" Anne asked with a smile, and then cried, in sudden penitence: "Don't—don't be angry, Rudolph!"

"My dear," he said, "I assure you, the emotion you raise in me is very far from resembling that of anger." Musgrave rose and laughed. "I say, you know, we'll create a scandal if we sit here any longer. Let's see what the others are doing."

That night, after the other guests had retired, Mr. Musgrave smoked a cigarette on the piazza. The moon was bright and chill overhead. After a while, Musgrave raised his face toward it, and laughed.

"Isn't it— isn't it funny?" he demanded, in a little, shaking whisper.

He was very human, you see. He was ready to sacrifice his own wishes, but he reserved the privilege of railing at Fate. He had known this was his last evening with Anne; he had spent it in probing his wound through and through, in making quite sure that the wound was there, in making quite sure that the wound was hopeless. Perhaps, he still retained some lingering hope; in a season of discomfort, most of us look vaguely for a miracle of some sort. And, at times, it comes, but, more often, not; life is not always a pantomime, with a fairy god-mother waiting to break through the darkness in a burst of glory, and reunite the severed lovers, and transform their enemies into pantaloons. In this case, it seemed quite certain that the fairy would not come.

Having demonstrated this to himself, Musgrave retired to bed. And there, being very human, he slept soundly.

## X

### A NEW DAY

THE day was growing strong in the maple-grove behind Kingsland. As yet, the climbing sun fired the topmost branches only, and flooded them with a tempered radiance through which

birds plunged and shrilled vague rumors to one another. Beneath, a green twilight still lingered—a twilight that held a gem-like glow, chill and lucent and steady as that of an emerald. Vagrant little puffs of wind bustled among the leaves, with a thin pretense of purpose, and then lapsed, and merged in the large, ambiguous whispering that went stealthily about the grove.

Rudolph Musgrave sat on a stone beside the road that winds through the woods toward the railway station, and smoked, nervously. He was disheartened of the business of living, and, absurdly enough, as it seemed to him, he was hungry.

"It's got to be done," he murmured, over and over again. "It's got to be done quietly and without the remotest chance of Anne's ever hearing of it, and without the remotest chance of it's ever having to be done again. I've about fifteen minutes in which to convince Patricia both of her own folly and of the fact that the man is an unmitigated cad, and to get him off the place quietly, so that Anne will suspect nothing. And I never knew any reasonable argument to appeal to Patricia, and the man will be desperate! Yes, it's a large contract, and I'd give a great deal—a very great deal to know how I'm going to fulfil it."

At this moment, his wife and Mr. Charteris, carrying two portmanteaus, came around a bend in the road not twenty feet from him. They were both rather cross. An elopement seemed silly in the clean, brave light of morning; moreover, Patricia had had no breakfast, and Charteris had been much annoyed by his wife, who had breakfasted with him, and had insisted on driving him to the station. It was an unimportant fact, but, perhaps, not unworthy of notice, that Patricia was carrying her own portmanteau.

The three faced one another in the cool twilight. The woods stirred lazily about them. The birds were singing on a wager now.

"Ah," said Mr. Musgrave, "so you've come at last. I've been expecting you for a long time."

Patricia dropped her portmanteau, sullenly. Mr. Charteris placed his carefully by the side of the road, and said, "Oh!" It was the only thing that occurred to him to say.

"Patricia," Musgrave began, very kindly and very gravely, "you're about to do a foolish thing. At the bottom of your heart, even now, you know you're about to do a foolish thing—a thing you will regret bitterly and unavailingly for the rest of time. You're turning your back on the world—on our world—on the one possible world you can ever be happy in. You can't be happy in the half-world, Patricia; you aren't that sort. But you can't come back to us then, Patricia; it doesn't matter what the motive was, what the temptation was, or how great the repentance is—you can't ever come back. That's the law, Patricia; perhaps, it isn't always a just law. We didn't make it, you and I, but it's the law, and we must obey it. Our world merely says you can't come back; that is the only punishment it awards you, for it knows, this wise old world of ours, that it's the bitterest that can ever be devised for you. Our world has made you what you are; in every thought and ideal and emotion you possess, you're a product of our world. You can't live in the half-world, Patricia; you're a product of our world that can never take root in that alien soil. Come back to us, Patricia! We may not always act justly, but, in the main, we're right. We must have clean-minded, honest women to be the mothers of our children. Come back to us, Patricia! You belong to us and not to the world you're sinking to. Ah, I know we seem a very careless and futile lot, at times; we prattle a great deal about customs and cravats and other trifles, and we're lax about many things; but not about this. We aren't always consistent; but, in the main, we're kindly and sensible, and we have the root of the matter. We must have

clean-minded, honest women to be the mothers of our children. Come back to us, Patricia!"

Musgrave shook himself all over, rather like a Newfoundland dog coming out of the water, and the grave note died from his voice. He smiled, and rubbed his hands together. "And now," said he, "I'll stop talking like a problem play, and we'll say no more about it. Give me your portmanteau, my dear, and upon my word of honor, you'll never hear a word further from me in the matter. Charteris, here, can take the train, just as he intended. And—and you and I'll go back to the house, and have a good, hot breakfast together. Eh, Patricia?"

She was thinking, unreasonably enough, how big and strong and clean her husband looked in the growing light. It was a pity Jack was so small. However, she faced Musgrave coldly. Charteris was lighting a cigarette, with a queer, contented look. He knew the value of Patricia's stubbornness now; still, he appeared to be using an unnecessary number of matches.

"I should have thought you would have perceived the lack of dignity, as well as the utter uselessness, in making such a scene," Patricia said, after a little pause. "We aren't suited for each other, Rudolph; it is better—far better for both of us—to have done with the farce of pretending to be. I am sorry that you—you still care for me. I didn't know that. But, for the future, I intend to live my own life." Patricia's voice faltered, and she stretched out her hand a little toward her husband. He looked so kind; he wasn't smiling in that way she never liked. "Surely—surely, that isn't so unpardonable a crime, Rudolph?" she asked, almost humbly.

"Ah, my dear," he answered, "it isn't unpardonable—it's impossible. You can't lead your own life, Patricia; none of us can. It's bound up with many others, and every rash act of yours, every hasty word of yours, must affect to some extent the lives of those who are nearest and most dear to you. Why, you haven't thought,

Patricia! It isn't merely a question of you and me and this man, here; it's a question of many, many others who must suffer for what you're about to do. What you're about to do will drag two old people down into the grave; it will cast a shadow over the life of a boy scarcely out of the cradle. You haven't thought of these things, my dear! Why, there's your father, Patricia; you're the one thing in the world that grim old man really cares about. You're the one person—the one person in all the whole wide world—who knows the way to his heart; are you going to use that knowledge to wound him there? There's your mother, Patricia; she's a good woman and a strict woman, but there's nothing, nothing you can do she won't pardon and find excuses for. Ah, she'll find excuses to give the world; but, deep down in her spotless heart, she won't believe a word of them. Deep down there, she will know that you, her only child, aren't the most beautiful and the most clever and the most immaculate woman in all the world. She's always thought you were, Patricia. And, when she knows better—do you realize what that knowledge means? It means death, Patricia."

Charteris inhaled, lazily; yet, he did not like the trembling about Patricia's mouth. Her hands, too, opened a little and shut tight before she spoke.

"It is too late now," she said, dully.

Patricia was remembering a time when Rudolph's voice always held that grave, tender note in speaking to her; it seemed a great while ago. And—and he was big and manly, just like his voice, Rudolph was; he looked very kind. Surely, those horrible things he was saying were not true; they couldn't be true. Desperately, Patricia began to count over the times her husband had offended her. Hadn't he talked to her in the most unwarrantable manner only yesterday afternoon? Or—or had she to him? Patricia began to realize that she had done a deal of the talking on that occasion.

"Not a bit of it!—oh, not a bit of

it!" Musgrave cried. His voice sank, persuasively. "Why, Patricia, you're only thinking the matter over for the first time. You've only begun to think of it. Why, there's the boy—our boy, Patricia! Surely, you hadn't thought of him?"

Ah, he had found the right chord, at last! It quivered and thrilled under his touch; the sense of mastery leaped in his blood. Of a sudden, he knew himself dominant, absolute. Her face went red and white, and her eyes fell before the blaze of his, that fixed her, compellingly.

"Now, honestly, just between you and me," he said, confidentially, "was there ever a better and braver and handsomer boy born in the world? Why, Patricia, surely, you wouldn't willingly—of your own accord—go away from him, and never see him again? Oh, you haven't thought, I tell you! Think, Patricia! Don't you remember that first day, when I came into your room, and he—ah, how wrinkled and red and old-looking he was then, wasn't he, little wife? Don't you remember how he was lying on your breast, and how I took you both in my arms, and held you close for a moment, and how for a long, long while there wasn't anything left of the whole wide world except just us three and God smiling down upon us? Don't you remember, Patricia? Don't you remember his first tooth?—why, we were so proud of it, you and I, as if there had never been a tooth before in all the history of the world! Don't you remember the first day he walked? Why, he staggered a great distance—oh, nearly two yards!—and caught hold of my hand, and laughed and turned back—to you. You—you didn't run away from him then, Patricia. Are you going to do it now?"

Silence. She struggled under his look. She had an absurd desire to cry, just that he might console her. She knew he would. Oh, why was it so hard to remember that she hated Rudolph! Of course, she hated him; she—oh, yes, she loved that other man yonder. His name was Jack. She



turned toward that gentleman, and the reassuring smile with which he greeted her, struck her as being singularly nasty. She hated both of them; she wanted only her boy—her soft, warm little boy who had eyes like Rudolph's.

"I—I—it's too late, Rudolph," she stammered, parrot-like. "If you'd only taken better care of me, Rudolph! If— It's too late, I tell you! You will be kind to him. I'm only weak and frivolous and heartless. I'm not fit to be his mother. I'm not fit, Rudolph! Rudolph, I tell you, I'm not fit! Ah, let me go, my dear!—in mercy, let me go! For I haven't loved the boy as I ought to, and I'm afraid to look you in the face, and you won't let me take my eyes away—you won't let me! Ah, Rudolph, let me go!"

"Not fit?" His voice thrilled with strength, and pulsed with many little tender cadences. "Ah, Patricia, I'm not fit to be his father! But, between us—between us, mightn't we do much for him? Come back to us, Patricia—to me and the boy! We need you, my dear. Ah, I'm only a stolid, unattractive man, I know; but you loved me once, and—I am the father of your child. I've been careless and I've neglected you, no doubt; but I'm the father of your child. You must—you *must* come back to me and the boy!" Musgrave caught her face between his hands, and lifted it toward his. "Patricia, don't make any mistake! There's nothing you care for so much as that boy. You can't give him up! If you had to walk over red-hot ploughshares to come to him, you would do it; if you could win him a moment's happiness by a lifetime of poverty and misery and degradation, you would do it. And so would I, little wife. That's the tie that unites us; that's the tie that's too strong ever to break. Come back to us, Patricia—to me and the boy."

"I—Jack, Jack, take me away!" she wailed, helplessly.

Charteris came forward with a smile. He was quite sure of Patricia now. "Mr. Musgrave," he said, with a faint

drawl, "if you have entirely finished your highly edifying and, I assure you, highly entertaining monologue, I will ask you to excuse us. I—oh, man, man!" Charteris cried, not unkindly, "don't you see it's—the only possible outcome?"

Musgrave faced him, grimly. The glow of hard-earned victory was pulsing in his blood, but his eyes were chill stars. "Now, Mr. Charteris," he said, equably, "I'm going to talk to you. In fact, I'm going to discharge a highly agreeable duty toward you."

Musgrave drew very close to him. Charteris shrugged his shoulders; his smile, however, was not entirely satisfactory. It did not convince.

"I don't blame you for being what you are," Musgrave went on, curtly. "You were born so, doubtless. I don't blame a snake for being what it is. But, when I see a snake, I claim the right to set my foot on its head; when I see a man like you—well, this is the right I claim, Mr. Charteris!"

Thereupon, Musgrave struck Mr. Charteris in the face with his open hand. He was a strong man, and, on this occasion, he made no effort to curb his strength. "Now," Musgrave concluded, "you are going away from this place very quickly, and you are going alone. You will do this, because I tell you to do so, and because you are afraid of me. Understand, Mr. Charteris, that the only reason I don't give you a thorough thrashing is that I don't think you are worth the trouble. I only want Patricia to perceive exactly what sort of a man you are."

The blow staggered Charteris. Of a sudden, he seemed to grow smaller. His very clothes seemed to hang more loosely about him. His face went white, and the red mark showed very plainly upon it.

"Sir," said Mr. Charteris, "I am not here to engage in a vulgar brawl. You—you are beneath my notice. Come, Patricia!" And he turned to her, and reached out his hand.

She shrank from him. She drew away from him, without any vehe-

mence, as if he had been some slimy, harmless reptile. A woman does not love to see fear in a man's eyes; and there was fear in Mr. Charteris's eyes, for all that he smiled. Patricia's heart quickened in her. She loathed him, and she was a little sorry for him.

"Oh, you cur, you cur!" she gasped, in a wondering whisper. Patricia went to her husband, and held out her hands, timorously. She was afraid of him. She was proud of him, the strong, brave, victorious male animal. "Take me away, Rudolph," she said, simply; "take me away from that—that coward. Take me away, my dear. You may beat me, too, if you like, Rudolph. I have deserved it."

Musgrave took both her hands in his, very gently. He smiled at Charteris.

The novelist returned the smile, intensifying its sweetness. "I fancy, Mr. Musgrave," he said, "that, after all, I shall have to take that train alone." Mr. Charteris paused a moment; a new note came into his voice, and he spoke with some nobility. "It is only by an accident you have won, you know. I wasn't born with the knack of enduring physical pain; I am a coward, if you like; but I was born so. Personally, if I had been consulted in the matter, I should have preferred the usual portion of valor. However, you have won, and—and, after all, the woman is not worth fighting about." There was exceedingly little of the mountebank in him now; he kicked Patricia's portmanteau, very frankly and very viciously, as he stepped over it to lift his own. Holding it in one hand, Mr. Charteris spoke, this time, at least, honestly: "Mr. Musgrave, I have been much mistaken in you. You are a brave man—we physical cowards, you know, admire that above all things—and a strong man and a clever man; and, with all that, you are a good man. You have won your wife back in fair fight. I fancy, by the way, that you have rather laid up future trouble for yourself in doing so, but I honor the skill you have shown. Mr. Musgrave, it is to you

that I take off my hat." Thereupon, Mr. Charteris uncovered his head with perfect gravity, and turned on his heel, and went down the road, whistling melodiously.

Musgrave stared after him, for a while. The lust of victory died in him; the tumult and passion and fervor were gone from his soul. He could very easily imagine the things Charteris would say to Anne concerning him; he knew that she would believe them all. He had won the game; he had played it, heartily and skilfully and successfully; and his reward was that the old bickerings with Patricia should continue, and that Anne should be taught to loathe him. He saw it all very plainly as he stood, hand in hand with his wife. But Anne would be happy. It was for that he had played.

They came back to Kingsland almost silently. The spell of the dawn was broken; it was honest, garish day now, and they were both hungry.

Patricia's spirits were rising, as a butterfly's might after a thunderstorm. Her husband was evidently infatuated with her; she had dim visions of a larger allowance and Rudolph always carrying her wraps in public places. It would be very agreeable to have Rudolph for an escort, because he was so big and strong. He would have to give up smoking, though, now they were to see so much of each other; she never could bear the odor.

"Ah, Rudolph, Rudolph!" she cooed, "if I had only known all along that you loved me!"

"Dear Patricia," he protested, fondly, "it seemed such a matter of course." He was a little tired, perhaps; the portmanteau seemed very heavy.

"A woman likes to be told—a woman likes to be told every day. Otherwise, she forgets," Patricia murmured. Then, her face grew tenderly reproachful. "Ah, Rudolph, Rudolph, see what your carelessness and neglect had nearly led to! It nearly led to my running away with a man like—like that! It would have been all your

fault, Rudolph, if I had. You know it would have been, Rudolph." And Patricia sighed once more, and then laughed and became magnanimous. "Yes—yes, after all, you are the boy's father." She smiled up at him, very kindly and indulgently. "I forgive you, Rudolph," said Patricia.



## A KISS

SWEETHEART, the simile is old  
 In poetry and prose,  
 Yet it must please you to be told  
 Your mouth is like a rose.

For that red rose, the nightingale  
 My heart has been for long,  
 And not until its kisses fail  
 Shall cease the lover's song.

O lips of love! O petals sweet!  
 O rose of rhyme and bliss!  
 Hear now the nightingale repeat  
 The lyric of a kiss!

FRANK DEMPSTER SHERMAN.



## HIS BLACKSTONIAN CIRCUMLOCUTION

"I RECEIVED, this afternoon," said the bright-eyed, common-sense girl, the while a slight blush of maidenly coyness tinted her peach-hued cheeks, "a written proposal of marriage from Horace J. Pokelong, the rising young attorney, and——"

"Huh! that petrified dub!" jealously ejaculated the young drygoods dealer, who had been hanging back because of his timidity and excessive adoration.

"He says," proceeded the maiden, gently ignoring the interruption, and reading aloud from the interesting document, "'I have carefully and comprehensively analyzed my feelings toward you, and the result is substantially as follows, to wit: I respect, admire, adore and love you, and hereby give, grant and convey to you my heart and all my interest, right and title in and to the same, together with all my possessions and emoluments, either won, inherited or in any other manner acquired, gained, anticipated or expected, with full and complete power to use, expend, utilize, give away, bestow or otherwise make use of the same, anything heretofore stated, expressed, implied or understood, in or by my previous condition, standing, walk, attitude or actions, to the contrary notwithstanding; and I furthermore——'"

"I—I—!" fairly shouted the listener, springing to his feet, and extending his arms. "Miss Brisk—Maud—I love you! Will you marry me?"

"Yes, I will!" promptly answered the lass, as she contentedly snuggled up in his encircling embrace. "And I'll reply to the ponderous appeal of that pedantic procrastinator with the one expressive slangism, 'Nit!' I am yours, Clarence!"