# The Rustle of Silk

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*Betty Compson and Conway Tearle*

# THE RUSTLE OF SILK

BY

COSMO HAMILTON

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# PART I

# I

The man had followed her from Marble Arch,—not a mackerel-eyed old man, sensual and without respect, but one who responded to emotions as an artist and was still young and still interested. He had seen her descend from a motor omnibus, had caught his breath at her disturbing femininity, had watched her pass like a sunbeam on the garden side of the road, and in the spirit of a man who sees the materialization of the very essence of woman, turned and followed.

All the way along, under branches of trees that were newly peppered with early green, he watched her and saw other men's heads turn as she passed,—on busses, in taxicabs, in cars and in the infrequent horse-drawn carriage that was like a Chaucerian noun dropped into the pages of a modern book. He saw men stop as he had stopped and catch their breath and then pursue their way reluctantly. He noticed that women, especially passée, tired women, paid her tribute by a flash of smile or a sudden brightness of the eye. There was no conscious effort to attract in the girl's manner, nothing bizarre or even smart in her clothing. Her young figure, the perfection of form, was plainly dressed. She wore the clothes of a student of the lower middle class, of the small shopkeeping class, and probably either made them herself or bought them off the peg. There was no startling beauty in her face or anything wonderful in her eyes, and certainly nothing of challenge, of coquetry,—nothing but the sublime unself-consciousness of a child. And yet there was so definite and disordering a sense of sex about her that she passed through a very procession of tribute.

The man was a dramatist whose business was to play upon the emotions of sex, and to watch this child and the stir she made seemed to him to refute once more the ludicrous attempts of would-be reformers to remold humanity and prohibit the greatest of the urges of nature, and made him laugh. He wondered all the way along not who she was, because that didn't matter, but what she would do and become,—this girl with her wide-apart eyes, oval face and full red lips, with the nose of a patrician and the sensitive nostrils of a horse,—if she would quickly marry in her own class and drift from early motherhood into a discontented drabness, or burst the bonds and be transferred from her probable back yard into a great conservatory.

He marveled at her astonishing detachment and was amused to discover that she was playing at some sort of game all by herself. From time to time, as she danced along, she assumed suddenly a dignified and gracious personality, walking slowly, with a high chin, bowing to imaginary acquaintances and looking through the railings of Kensington Gardens with an air of proprietorship. Then she as quickly returned to her own obviously normal self and hurried a little, conscious of approaching dusk. Finally, with the cunning of city breed-

ing, she nicked across the road, and he saw her stop outside the tube station at Bayswater, arrested by the bill of an evening paper,—"Fallaray against reprisals. New crisis in the Irish Question. Notable defection from Lloyd-George forces."

He watched the girl stand in front of these glaring words and read them over and over with extraordinary interest. Standing at her elbow, he heard her heave a quick excited sigh. He imagined that she must be Irish and watched her enter the station, linger about the bookstall and fasten eagerly upon a magazine,—so eagerly that he slipped again to her elbow and looked to see why. On the cover of this fiction monthly was the photograph of the man whose name was set forth on the poster,—the Right Hon. Arthur Napier Fallaray, Home Secretary. He knew the face well. It was one of the few arresting faces in public life; one in which there was something medieval, something also of Savonarola, Manning, and, in the eyes, of Christ,—a clean-shaven face, thin and hawk-like, with a hatchet jaw line, a sad and sensitive mouth and thick brown hair that went into one or two deep kinks. It might have been the face of a hunchback or one who had been inflicted from babyhood with paralysis, obliged to stand aloof from the rush and tear of other children. Only the head was shown on the cover, not the body that stood six foot one, the broad shoulders and the long arms suggestive of the latent strength of a wrestler.

The flush that suffused the girl's face surprised the watcher and piqued his curiosity. Fallaray, the ascetic, the married bachelor who lived in one wing of his house while Lady Feodorowna entertained the resuscitated Souls in the other,—and this young girl of the lower middle class, worshiping at his shrine! He would have followed her for the rest of the afternoon with no other purpose than to study her moods and watch her stir the passers-by like the whir of an aeroplane or the sudden scent of lilac. But the arrival of a train swept a crowd between them and he lost her. He took a ticket to see if she were on one or other of the platforms, returned to the street and searched up and down. She had gone. Before he left, another bill was posted upon the board of the *Evening Standard*. "Fallaray sees Prime Minister. May resign from cabinet. Uneasiness in Downing Street," and as he walked away, no longer interested in the psychology of crowds, but with his imagination all eager and alight, the playwright in him had grasped at the germ of a dramatic experiment.—Take the man Fallaray, a true and sensitive patriot, working for no rewards; humanitarian, scholar, untouched by romance, deaf to the rustle of silk—and that girl, woman to the tips of her ears, Eve in every movement of her body——

## II

"Lola's late," said Mrs. Breezy. "She ought to have been home half an hour ago."

Without taking from his eye the magnifying glass through which he was peering into the entrails of a watch, John Breezy gave a fat man's chuckle. "Don't you worry about Lola. She's the original good girl and has more friends among strangers than the pigeons in Kensington Gardens. She's all right, old dear."

But Mrs. Breezy never gave more than one ear to her husband. She was not satisfied. She left her place behind the glistening counter of the little jewelry shop in Queen's Road, Bayswater, and went out into the street to see if she could see anything of her ewe lamb,—the one child of her busy and thrifty married life. On a rain-washed board above her head was painted "John Breezy, Watchmaker and Jeweler, Founded in 1760 by Armand de Brézé." The name had been Bowdlerized as a concession to the careless English ear.

On the curb a legless man was seated in a sort of perambulator with double wheels, playing a concertina and accompanying another man with no arms and a glass eye who sang with a gorgeous cockney accent, "Come hout, Come hout, the Spring is 'ere." A few yards farther down a girl with the remains of prettiness was playing the violin at the side of an elderly woman with the smile of professional supplication who held a small tin cup. The incessant crowd which passed up and down Queen's Road paid little attention either to these stray dogs or to those who occupied other competitive positions in this street of constant noises. Flappers with very short skirts and every known specimen of leg added to the tragic-comedy of a thoroughfare in which provincialism and sophistication were like oil and water. Here was drawn the outside line of polite pretence. The tide of *hoi polloi* washed up to it and over. Ex-governors of Indian provinces, utterly unrecognized, ex-officers and men of gallant British regiments, mostly out of employment, nurse girls with children, and women of semi-society who lived in those dull barrack houses of Inverness Terrace, where cats squabbled and tradesmen's boys fought, passed the anxious mother.

Not a day went by that she did not hear from Lola of one or perhaps a series of attempts, in the street, in the Tube, in busses and in the Park, to win her into conversation. The horror stirred by these accounts in the heart of the little woman, to say nothing of the terror, seemed oddly exaggerated to the daughter, who, with her eyes large and gleaming with fun, described the manner in which she left her unrestrained admirers flat and inarticulate. There was nothing vain in this acceptance of male admiration, the mother knew. It was something of which the child had been aware ever since she could remember; had accepted without regret; had hitherto put to no use; but which, deep down in her soul, was recognized as the all-powerful asset of a woman, not to be bought with money, achieved by art or simulated by acting.

Not in so many words had this "gift," as Lola called it, been interpreted and

discussed by Mrs. Breezy. On the contrary, she tried to ignore and hide it away as a dangerous thing which she would have been ashamed to possess. In the full flower of her own youth there had been nothing in herself, she thanked God, to lift her out of the great ruck of women except, as Breezy had discovered, a shrewd head, a tactful tongue and the infinite capacity for taking pains. And she was ashamed of it in Lola. It gave her incessant and painful uneasiness and fright and made her feel, in sleepless hours and while in church, that she had done some wicked thing before her marriage that must be punished. With unusual fairness she accepted all the blame but never had had the courage to tell the truth, either to herself or her husband, as to her true feelings towards this uncanny child, as she sometimes inwardly called her. Had she done so, she must have confessed that Lola was the only human being with whom she had come into touch that remained a total stranger; she must have owned to having been divided from her child almost always by a sort of wall, a division of class over which it was increasingly impossible to cross.

There were times, indeed, when the little woman had gone down to the overcrowded parlor behind the shop so consumed with the idea that she had brought into the world the offspring of another woman that she had sat down cold and puzzled and with an aching heart. It had seemed to her then, as now, that something queer and eerie had happened. At the back of her mind there had been and was still a sort of superstition that Lola was a changeling, that the fairies or the devil or some imp of mischief had taken her own baby away at the moment of her birth and replaced it with an exquisite little creature stolen from the house of an aristocrat. How else could she account for the tiny wrists, small delicate hands, those wide blue eyes, those sensitive nostrils and above all that extraordinary capacity for passing with superb unconsciousness and yet with supreme sophistication through everyday crowds.

There was nothing of John in this girl, of that fat Tomcat-like man, with no more brain than was necessary to peer into watches and repair jewelry, to look with half an eye at current events and grow into increasing content on the same small patch of earth. Neither was there anything of herself, nothing so vulgar as shrewdness, nothing so commonplace as tact and nothing so legitimate as taking pains. Either she did things on the spur of an impulse, by inspiration, or she dropped them, like the shells of nuts.

In spite of this uncanny idea, Mrs. Breezy loved her little girl, adopted though she seemed to be, and constant anxiety ran through her heart like a thread behind a needle. If any man had spoken to *her* on the street, she would have screamed or called a policeman. She certainly would have been immediately covered with goose flesh. Beyond that, if she had ever discovered that she had been born with the power to stir the feelings of men at first sight, as music stirs

the emotions of an audience or wind the surface of water, she would have been tempted to have turned Catholic and taken the veil.

Not an evening went by, therefore, that did not find Mrs. Breezy on the step of the shop in Queen's Road, Bayswater, looking anxiously up and down for the appearance of Lola among the heterogeneous crowd which infested that street. Always she expected to see at her side a man, perhaps *the* man who would take her child away. She had her worries, poor little woman, more perhaps than most mothers.

That evening, the light reluctant to leave the sky, Spring's hand upon the city trees, Lola did bring some one home,—a woman.

## III

Miss Breezy, sister of John, made a point of spending every Thursday evening at the neat and gleaming shop in Queen's Road. It was her night off. Sometimes she turned up with tickets for the theater given to her by the great lady to whom she acted as housekeeper, sometimes to a concert and once or twice during the season for the opera. If there were only two tickets, it was always Lola who enjoyed the other. Mr. and Mrs. Breezy were contented to hear the child's account of what they gladly missed on her behalf. Frequently they got more from the girl's description than they would have received had they used the tickets themselves.

It was this woman who unconsciously had made Fallaray the hero of Lola's dreams. She had brought all the latest gossip from the Fallaray house in which she had served since that strange wedding ten years before, when the son of the Minister for Education, himself in the House of Commons, had gone in a sort of trance to St. Margaret's, Westminster, and come out of it surprised to find himself married to the eldest daughter of the Marquis of Amesbury,—the brilliant, beautiful, harum-scarum member of a pre-war set that had given England many rude shocks, stepped over all the conventions of an already careless age and done "stunts" which sent a thrill of horror and amazement all through the body of the old British Lion; a set whose cynicism, egotism, perversion, hobnobbing with political enemies, manufacture of erotic poetry and ribald jests had spread like an epidemic.

Miss Breezy, whose Christian name was Hannah, as well it might be, entered in great excitement. "Have you seen the paper?" she asked, giving her sister-in-law peck to the watchmaker's wife. "Mr. Fallaray's declared himself against reprisals. He's condemned the methods of the Black and Tans. They yelled at him in the House this afternoon and called him Sinn Feiner. Just think of that! If any other man had done it, I mean any other Minister, Lloyd George

could have afforded to smile. But Mr. Fallaray! It may kill the coalition government, and then what will happen?"

All this was given out in the shop itself, luckily empty of customers. "Woo," said John. "Good gracious me," said Mrs. Breezy. "Just as I expected," said Lola, and she entered the parlor and threw her books into a corner and perched herself on the table, swinging her legs.

"'Just as you expected?' What do you know about it all, pray?" Miss Breezy regarded the girl with the irritation that goes with those who forget that little pitchers have ears. She also forgot that the question of Ireland, of little real importance among all the world's troubles, was being forced into daily and even hourly notice by brutal murders and by equally brutal reprisals and that England was, at that moment, racked from end to end with passionate resentment and anger with which even children were tainted.

And Lola laughed,—that ripple of laughter which had made so many men stand rooted to their shoes after having had the temerity to speak to her on the spur of the moment, or after many manœuverings. "What I know of Mr. Fallaray," she said, "you've taught me. I read the papers for the rest." And she heaved an enormous sigh and seemed to leave her body and fly out like a homing pigeon.

"Don't say anything more until I come back," cried Mrs. Breezy, rapping her energetic heels on the floor on the way out to close the shop.

Beamingly important, the bearer of back-stairs gossip, Miss Breezy removed her coat,—one of those curious garments which seem to be made especially for elderly spinsters and are worn by them proudly as a uniform and with the certain knowledge that everybody can see that they have gone through life in single blessedness, dependent neither for happiness nor livelihood on a mere man.

John Breezy, who had lost all suggestion of his French ancestry and spoke English with the ripest Bayswater, removed his apron. He liked, it is true, to remember his Huguenot grandfather and from time to time indulged in Latin gestures, but when he ventured into a few words of French his accent was atrocious. "Mong Doo," he said, therefore, and shrugged his fat shoulders almost up to his ears. He had no sympathy with the Irish. He considered that they were screaming fanatics, handicapped by a form of diseased egotism and colossal ignorance which could not be dealt with in any reasonable manner. He belonged to the school of thought, led by the *Morning Post*, which would dearly like to put an enormous charge of T. N. T. under the whole island and blow it sky high. "Of course you buck a good deal about your Fallaray," he said to his sister, "that's natural. You take his money and you live on his food. But I think he's a weakling. He's only making things more difficult. I wish to God I was in the House of Commons. I'd show 'em what to do to Ireland."

There was a burst of laughter from Lola who jumped off the table and threw her arms around her father's neck. "How wonderful you are, Daddy," she said. "A regular old John Bull!"

Returning before anything further could be said, Mrs. Breezy shut the parlor door and made herself extremely comfortable to hear the latest from behind the scenes. It was very wonderful to possess a sister-in-law who regularly, once a week, came into that dull backwater with the sort of thing that never got into the papers and who was able to bandy great names about without turning a hair. "Now, then, Hannah, let's have it all from the beginning and please, John, don't interrupt." She would have liked to have added, "Please, Lola," too, but knew better.

Then it was that Miss Breezy settled henwise among the cushions on the sofa and let herself go. It was a good thing for her that her family was unacquainted with any of those unscrupulous illiterates who wrote the chit-chat in the *Daily Mirror*.

"It was last night that I knew about all this," she said. "I went in to see Lady Feo about engaging a new personal maid. Her great friend was there,—Mrs. Malwood, who was Lady Glayburgh in the first year of the War, Lady Pytchley in the second, Mrs. Graham Macoover in the third, married Mr. Aubrey Malwood in the fourth and still has him on her hands. I was kept waiting while they finished their talk. Mrs. Malwood had to hurry home because she was taking part in the theatricals at the Eastminsters. I heard Lady Feo say that Mr. Fallaray had decided to throw his bomb in the House this afternoon. She was frightfully excited. She said she didn't give a damn about the Irish question—and I wish she didn't speak like that—but that it would be great fun to have a general election to brighten things up and give her a chance to win some money. I don't know how Lady Feo knew that her husband had decided to take this step, because they never meet and I don't believe he ever tells her anything that he has on his mind. I shouldn't be surprised if she got it from Mr. Fallaray's secretary. I've seen them whispering in corners lately and once she starts her tricks on any man, good-by loyalty. My word, but she's a wonderful woman. A perfect devil but very kind to me. I've no grumbles. If we do have a general election, and I hope to goodness we don't, there's only one man to be Prime Minister, and that's Mr. Fallaray. But there's no chance of it. All the Prime Minister's newspapers are against him, and all his jackals, and he has more enemies than any man in the Cabinet, and not a soul to back him up. Office means too much to them all and they're all in terror of being defeated in the country. He's the loneliest man in the whole of London and one of the greatest. That's what I say. I've been with the family ten years and there are things I like about Lady Feo, for all her rottenness. But I know this. If she'd been a good wife to that man and had given him a home to come back to and the

love that he needs and two or three children to romp with even for half an hour a day, there'd be a very much better chance for England in this mess than there is at present."

Stopping for breath, she looked up and caught the eyes of the girl whose face had flushed at the sight of the picture on the cover of the magazine. They were filled with something that startled her, something in which there was so great a passion that it threw a hot dart at her spinsterhood and left her rattled and confused.

## IV

Miss Breezy was to receive another shock that evening.

It happened that several neighbors came in unexpectedly and stayed to play cards. It was necessary, therefore, to adjourn from the cosy little parlor behind the shop and go up to the drawing-room on the second floor,—a stiff uncomfortable room used only on Sundays and when the family definitely entertained. It smelt of furniture polish, cake and antimacassars. Lola had no patience with cards and helped her mother to make coffee and sandwiches. Miss Breezy, who clung to certain old shibboleths with the pathetic persistence of a limpet, regarded a pack of cards as the instrument of the devil. Besides, she resented the intrusion of every one who put her out of the limelight. Her weekly orgy of talk emptied the cistern of her brain.

She suspected something out of the way when Lola suddenly jumped on the sofa like an Angora kitten, snuggled up and began to purr at her side, saying how nice it was to see her, how terribly they would miss her visits, and how well-informed she was. The little head pressed against her bosom was not uncomforting to the childless woman. The warm arm clasped about her shoulder flattered her vanity. But this display of affection was unusual. It drew from her a rather shrewd question. "Well, my dear, and what do you want to get out of me? I know you. This is cupboard love."

She won a gleam of teeth and a twinkle of congratulation from those wide-apart eyes. "How clever you are, Auntie. But it isn't cupboard love, at least not quite. I want to consult you about my future because you're so sensible and wise."

"Your future.—Your future is to get married and have babies. That was marked out for you before you began to talk. I never saw such a collection of dolls in a little girl's room in all my life. A born mother, my dear, that's what you are. I hope to goodness you have the luck to find the right sort of man in your own walk of life."

Lola shook her head and snuggled a little closer, putting her lips to the

spinster's ear. "There's plenty of time for that," she said. "And, anyway, the right man for me won't be in my own walk of life, as you call it."

"What! Why not?"

"Because I want to better myself, as you once said that every girl should do. I haven't forgotten. I remember everything that *you* say, Auntie."

"Oh, you do, do you? Well, go on with it." What a pretty thing she was with her fine skin and red lips and disconcerting nostrils. Clever as a monkey, too, my word. Amazing that Ellen should be her mother!

"And so I want to get away from Queen's Road, if I can. I want to take a peep, just a peep for a little while into another world and learn how to talk and think and hold myself. Other girls like me have become ladies when they had the chance. I can't, I *know* I can't, become a teacher as Mother says I must. You know that, too, when you think about me. I should teach the children everything they ought not to know, for one thing, you know I should, and throw it all up in a week. I overheard you say that to Mother the very last time you were here."

"My dear, your ears are too long. But you're right all the same. I can't see *you* in a school for the shabby genteel." A warm fierce kiss was pressed suddenly to her lips. "But what can I do to help you out? I don't know."

"But I do, Auntie. You're trying to find a personal maid for Lady Feo. Engage me. I may work up to become a housekeeper like you some day even. Who knows?"

So that was it.—Good heavens!

Miss Breezy unfolded herself from the girl's embrace and sat with her back as stiff as a ramrod. "I couldn't think of such a thing," she said. "You don't belong to the class that ladies' maids come from, nor does your mother. A funny way to better yourself, that, I must say. Don't mention it again, please." She got up and shook herself as though to cast away both the girl's spell and her absurd request. Her sister-in-law, after a long day's work, was impatient for bed and yawning in a way which she hoped would convey a hint to her husband's friends. She had already wound up the clock on the mantelpiece with extreme deliberation. "I think my cab must be here," said Miss Breezy loudly, in order to help her. "I ordered him to fetch me. Don't trouble to come down but do take the trouble to find out what's the matter with Lola. She's been reading too many novels or seeing too many moving pictures. I don't know which it is."

To Mrs. Breezy's entire satisfaction, her sister-in-law's departure broke up the party. There was always a new day to face and she needed her eight hours' rest. Mr. Preedy, the butcher whose inflated body bore a ludicrous resemblance to a punch ball and who smelt strongly of meat fat, his hard-bosomed spouse and Ernest Treadwell, the young man from the library who would have sold his soul for Lola, followed her down the narrow staircase. But it was Lola who got the last

word. She stood on the step of the cab and put a soft hand against Miss Breezy's cheek. "Do this for me, Auntie," she wheedled. "Please, please. If you don't——"

"Well?"

"There are other great ladies and very few ladies' maids, and if I go to one of them, how will you be able to keep your eye on me,—and you ought to keep your eye on me, you know."

"Well!" said Miss Breezy to herself, as the cab rattled home. "Did you ever? What an extraordinary child! Nothing of John about her and just as little of Ellen. Where does she get these strange things from?" It was not until she arrived finally at Dover Street that she added two words to her attempted diagnosis which came in the nature of an inspiration. "*She's French!*"

## V

It was a lukewarm night, without wind and without moon, starless. Excited at having got in her request, which she knew from a close study of her aunt's character was bound to be refused and after a process of flattery eventually conceded, Lola waved her hand to the Preedys and graciously consented to give a few minutes to Ernest Treadwell. The butcher and his wife, after a lifetime of intimacy with animals, had both taken on a marked resemblance to sheep. They walked away in the direction of their large and prosperous corner shop with wide-apart legs and short quick steps, as though expecting to be rounded up by a bored but conscientious dog. As she leaned against the private door of her father's shop, with the light of the lamp-post on hair that was the color of buttercups, she did look French. If Miss Breezy were to take the trouble to read a well-known book of memoirs published during the reign of Louis XIV, it would dawn upon her that the little Lola of Queen's Road, Bayswater, daughter of the cockney watchmaker and Ellen who came from a flat market garden in Middlesex, threw back to a certain Madame de Brézé, the famous courtesan. Whether her respect for her brother would become less or grow greater for this discovery it is not easy to say. Probably, being a snob, it would increase.

"Don't stand there without a hat, Lola dear. You may catch cold."

"Mother always says that," said Lola, "even in the middle of the summer, but she won't call again for ten minutes, so let's steal a little chat." She put her hand on Treadwell's shoulder with a butterfly touch and held him rooted and grateful. He had the pale skin that goes with red hair as well as the pale eyes, but as he looked at this girl of whom he dreamed by day and night, they flared as they had flared when he had seen her first as a little girl with her hair in a queue at the other end of a classroom. He stood with his foot on the step and his hands

clasped together, inarticulate. Behind his utter commonplaceness there was the soul of Romeo, the passion of self-sacrifice that goes with great lovers. He had been too young for gun fodder in the war but he had served in spirit for Lola's sake and had performed a useful job in the capacity of a boy scout messenger in the War Office. His bony knees and awkward body had been the joke of many a ribald subaltern, mud-stained from the trenches.

"What are you doing on Saturday afternoon?" asked Lola. "Shall we walk to Hampton Court and see the crocuses? They're all up now like little soldiers in a pantomime."

"I'll call for you at two o'clock," answered the boy, thrilling as though he had been decorated. "We'll have tea there and come back on top of a bus. I suppose your mother wouldn't let me take you to the theater? There's a great piece at the Hammersmith,—Henry Ainley. He's fine."

Lola laughed softly. "Mother's a dear," she said. "She lets me do everything I want to do after I've told her that I'm simply going to do it. Besides, she likes you."

"Do *you* like me, Lola?" The question came before the boy could be seized with his usual timidity. It was followed by a rush of blood to the head.

The girl's answer proved her possession of great kindness and an amazing lack of coquetry. "You are one of my oldest friends, Ernest," she replied, thereby giving the boy something to hope for but absolutely nothing to grasp. He had never dared to go so far as this before and like all the other boys who hung round Lola had never been able, by any of his crude efforts, to get her to flirt. Friend was the only word that any of them could apply to her. And yet even the least precocious of these boys was convinced of the fact that she was not innocent of her power.

"I love the spring,—just smell it in the air," said Lola, going off at a tangent, "but I shall never live in the country—I mean all the time. I shall go there and see things grow and get all the scent and the whispers and the music of the stars and then rush back to town. Do you believe in reincarnation, Ernest? I do. I was a canary once and lived in a cage, a big golden cage, full of seeds and water and little bells that jingled. It stood on the table in a room filled with tapestry and lovely old furniture. Servants in livery gave me a saucer for a bath and refilled my seed pans.—I feel like a canary now sometimes. I like to fly out, perfectly tame, and with no cats about, sing a little and imagine that I am perfectly free, and then flick back, stand on a perch and do my best singing to the noise of traffic." And she laughed again and added, "What rot we talk when we're young, don't we? I must go."

"No, not yet. Please not yet." And the boy put his hands out to touch her and was afraid. He would gladly have died then and there in that street just to

be allowed to kiss her lips.

"It's late. I must go, Ernest. I have to get up so awfully early. I hate getting up early. I would like breakfast in bed and a nice maid to bring me my letters and the papers. Besides, I don't want to worry Mother. She has all the worries of the shop. Good night and don't be late on Saturday." She held out her hand.

The boy seized it and held it tight, his brain reeling, and his blood on fire. He stood for an instant unable to give expression to the romance that she stirred in him, with his mouth open and his rather faulty teeth showing, and his big awkward nose very white. And when she had gone and the door of her castle was closed, the poor knight, who had none of the effrontery of the troubadour, paced up and down for an hour in front of the shop, saying half aloud all the things from Shakespeare which alone seemed fit for the ears of that princess,—princess of Queen's Road, Bayswater!

## VI

The room at the back of the house in which Lola had been installed since she had been old enough to sleep alone had been her parents' bedroom and was larger than the one to which they had retired. While Breezy had argued that he damned well didn't intend to turn out for that kid, Mrs. Breezy had moved the furniture. The best room only was good enough for Lola. The window gave a sordid view of back yards filled with packing cases, washing, empty bottles and one or two anæmic laburnum trees which for a few days once a year burst into a sort of golden smile and then became sullen again,—observation posts for the most corrupt of animals, the London cat. It was in this room that Mrs. Breezy, trespassing sometimes, stood for a few moments lost in amazement, feeling more than ever the changeling sense that she did her best to forget.

With the money that she had saved up—birthday money, Christmas money and a small allowance made to her by her father—Lola had bought a rank imitation of an old four-poster bed made probably in Birmingham. Over it she had hung a canopy of chintz with a tapestry pattern on a black background, copied from an illustration in the life of Du Barry. From time to time pillows with lace covers had been added to the luxurious pile, a little footstool placed at the side of the bed and—the latest acquisition—an eiderdown now lent an air of swollen pomp to the whole thing, which, to the puzzled and concerned mother, was immoral. Hers was one of those still existing minds which read immorality into all attempts to break away from her own strict set of conventions, especially when it was in the direction of beautifying a bed, to her, of course, an unmentionable thing. In America, without doubt, she would be a cherished and respected mem-

ber of the Board of Motion Picture Censors, as well as—having a cellar—a militant prohibitionist.

For the rest, the room possessed a sofa which was an English cousin to an Italian day bed and curtains of china silk in which there was a faint tinge of pink. A small table on which there was a collection of dainty things for writing, mementos of many Christmases and several lines of shelves crammed with books gave the room something of the appearance of a boudoir, and this was added to by half a dozen cheap French prints framed in gold which looked rather well against a wall paper of tiny bouquets tied up with blue ribbon. Lola's collection of books had frequently sent John Breezy into gusts of mirth. There was nothing among them that he could read. Very few of them were in English and those were of French history. The rest were the lives and memoirs of famous courtesans, including those of the Madame de Brézé, to whom the watchmaker always referred with a mixture of pride and levity,—but not when his wife was in hearing. A bulky French dictionary, old and dog-eared, stood in solitude upon the writing table.

It was to this room that Lola withdrew as often as possible to cut herself off from every suggestion of Queen's Road, Bayswater, and the shop below, and to forget her daily journeys to and from the Polytechnic where she was supposed to be taking a commercial course in bookkeeping and shorthand with a view either to going into an office or becoming a teacher in one of the many small schools which endeavored to keep their heads up in and about that portion of London.

The game of make-believe, which the dramatist who followed Lola from Hyde Park corner that afternoon had watched her play, had been carried on in this bed-sitting room ever since she had fallen under the spell of the de Brézé memoirs. It was here, especially on Sunday mornings, that this young thing let her imagination have full play while her father and mother, dressed in their Sabbath best, attended the Methodist Church near-by. Then, playing the part of her celebrated ancestress, she put on a little lace cap and a *peignoir* over her nightgown and sat up in bed to receive the imaginary friends, admirers and sycophants who came to her with the latest gossip, with rare and beautiful gifts and with the flattery of their kind, which, while it pleased her very much, failed to turn her head, because, after all, she had inherited much of her mother's shrewdness. With her door locked, her nose powdered and her lips the color of a cherry, Lola conducted, for her own amusement, a brilliant series of monologues which, if given on the stage in a setting a little more elaborate, would have set all London laughing.

The girl's mimicry of the people whom she brought to life from the pages of those French books was perfectly delightful. She brought her master to life. With a keen sense of characterization she built him up—unconsciously assisted

by Aunt Hannah—into as close a resemblance to Fallaray as she could,—a tired, world-worn man, starving for love and adoration, weighed down by the problems of a civilization in chaos, distrait and sometimes almost brusque, but always chivalrous and kind, who came to her for refreshment and inspiration and left her with a lighter tread and renewed optimism. Ancient dames whose days were over came to her with envy in their hearts and the hope of charity in their withered souls to tell her of their triumphs and the scandals of their time. But the character upon whom she concentrated all her humor and sarcasm was the friend of her master, an unscrupulous person who loved her and never could resist the opportunity of pressing his suit in flowery but passionate terms and with an accent which, elaborately Parisian, was reproduced from that of the French journalist who had taught Lola his language in a class that she had attended for several years. These word fencings had begun, of course, as a child would naturally have begun them, with the stilted sentences and high-flown remarks which she had lifted from Grimm's Fairy Tales. They had become more and more sophisticated as the years had passed and were now full of subtleties and insinuations against which, egging the man on, Lola defended herself with what she took to be great wit and cleverness.

If her little mother had ever gone so far as to put her ear to the keyhole of that bedroom, she would have listened to something which would probably have sent her to a doctor to consult him as to her daughter's mental condition. She would have heard, for instance, the well-modulated voice of that practised lovemaker and the laughing high-pitched replies of a girl not unpleased with his attentions but adamant to his pleadings and perfectly sure of herself. It is true that Mrs. Breezy would not have understood one word that was spoken because it was all in French, but the mere act of conducting long conversations with imaginary characters as a hobby would have struck deep at her sense of the fitness of things, especially as Sunday was the day chosen for such a game. The Methodist mind is strangely inelastic.

What would have been said to all this by a disciple of Freud it is easy to conceive. He would have read into it the existence of a complex proving a suppressed desire which must have landed Lola in a lunatic asylum. Common sense and a rudimentary knowledge of heredity might, however, have given to the mother and the psychoanalyst the key to all this. The fact was that Lola threw back to her French ancestress who, like herself, was the daughter of humble, honest people, and the glamor of the de Brézé memoirs had not only caught and colored her imagination, which was her strongest trait, but had shown her how to exploit the gift of sex appeal in a way that would make her essential to a man who had it in him to become a great political figure, the only way in which she, like the de Brézé, could be placed in a golden cage with all the luxuries, share in the se-

crets of government, meet the men who counted, bask in the reflected glory of power, and give in return so whole-hearted a love, devotion, encouragement and refreshment that her "master" would go out to the affairs of his country grateful and humanized. She could not, of course, ever hope to achieve this ambition by marriage. No such man would marry the daughter of a watchmaker. It was that the spirit of this woman lived again in the Breezys' little daughter; that in her there had been revived the same desire to force a place for herself in a world to which she had not been born, and that she had been endowed with the same feminine qualities that were necessary to such a scheme. In the knowledge of this and pinning her faith to a similar cause—the word was hers—Lola Breezy had gone through those curious years of double life more and more determined to perform this kind of courtesanship, believing that she had inherited the voice with which to sing the little songs of a canary in the secret cage of no less a man than one of proved ability and idealism, who was within an ace of premiership, and—so that her vanity might be satisfied in the proof of her own ability to help him—against whom was pitted all that was mean, ignorant, jealous and reactionary in a bad political system.

What more natural, therefore, than that the man who fulfilled all these requirements and whom she would give her life to serve was Fallaray. He had been brought home to her every Thursday evening by her aunt for ten years. She had read in the papers every word that he had spoken; had followed his course of action through all the years of the War which he had done his best to prevent; had watched his lonely struggle to substantiate a League of Nations free from blood lust and territorial greed; had seen him pelted with lies and calumny when he had cried out that Germany must be allowed to live if Europe were to live; and that very day had stood trembling in front of the billboard which announced that he would not stand for the bloody and disastrous reprisals in Ireland that were backed by the Prime Minister. He was the one honest man, the one idealist in English politics; the one great humanitarian who possessed that strength and fairness of mind which permitted him to see both sides of a question; to belong to a party without being a slave to its shibboleths; to commit the sudden volt-faces so impossible to brass hats and to the Junkers of all nationality; the one man in the House of Commons who didn't give a damn for limelight, self-aggrandizement, titles, graft and all the rest of the things which have been brought into that low and unclean business by men who would sell the country for a drink. And above all he was unhappy with his wife.

The housekeeper aunt had built up for this girl a hero who fitted exactly into the niche in her heart and ambitions. All the stories and backstairs gossip about him had excited her desire to become a second Madame de Brézé in his life and bring the rustle of silk to this Eveless man. Never once did there enter into

her game of make-believe or her dreams of achievement the idea of becoming Fallaray's wife, even if, at any time, he should be free to marry again. She had too keen a sense of psychology for that. She saw the need to Fallaray, as to other such men in his position, of a secret romance,—stolen meetings, brief escapes, entrancing interludes, and the desire—the paradox of asceticism—for feminine charms. She had read the story of Parnell and understood it; of Nelson and sympathized with it. She knew the history of other men of absorbing patriotism and great intellect who had kept their optimism and their humanity because of a woman's tenderness and flattery, and whenever she looked at the picture of Fallaray, in whom she recognized a modern Quixote tilting at windmills, she saw that he stood in urgent need of a woman who could do for him what Madame de Brézé had done for that minister of Louis XIV. During all her intelligent years, therefore, she had conducted herself in the hope, vague and futile as it seemed, of some day being discovered to Fallaray, and in her heart there had grown up a love and a hero worship so strong and so passionate that it could never be transferred to any other man.

The reason, then, why Lola had turned the whole force of her concentration upon entering the house in Dover Street as lady's maid becomes clear. Here, suddenly, was her chance. Once in this house, in attendance upon Lady Feo, it would be possible for her not only to learn the manners and the language of the only women who were known to Fallaray, but eventually, with luck and strategy, to exercise her gift, as she called it, upon Fallaray himself. What did she care whether, as her aunt had said, she went down a peg in the social scale by becoming a lady's maid? She would willingly become a crossing sweeper or a beggar girl.

If it were true that Fallaray never went into the side of the house that was occupied by his wife, then she would eventually, when she felt that her apprenticeship had been served, slip into the other side. Like all women she had cunning and like very few courage. Opportunity comes to those who make it and she was ready and eager to undergo any humiliation to try herself, so to speak, on Fallaray. Ernest Treadwell loved her and would, she knew, die for her willingly. There was the hero stuff in him. Other boys, too numerous to mention, would go through fire and water for her kisses. Life was punctuated with turned heads, sudden flashes of eye and everyday attempts to win her favor. Once in that house in Dover Street——

## VII

Saturday came. Ernest Treadwell arrived early, his face shining with Windsor

soap. He had bought a spring tie at Hope Brothers, the name and the season going well with his mood. It was a ghastly affair,—yellow with blobs of red. It was indeed much more suited to Mr. Prouty, the butcher. It illustrated something at which he frequently looked,—animal blood on a sawdust floor. But Ernest Treadwell was one of those men who could always be persuaded into wearing anything that was offered to him. He was a dreamer, the stuff that poets are made of, impractical, embarrassed. He went about with his young and incoherent brain seething with the tail end of big thoughts. If he had not been watched by a fond mother, he would probably have left the house with his trousers around his neck and his legs thrust through the sleeves of his coat. He walked up and down the street for half an hour with his cap on the back of his head and a tuft of hair sticking out in front of it,—an earnest, ungainly, intelligent, heroic person who might one day become a second Wells and write a Joan and Peter about the children of Joan and Peter.

Saturday was a good day for the Breezys and much of Friday night had been spent cleaning and rearranging the cheap and alluring silverware—birthday presents, wedding presents, lovers' presents—which invariably filled the windows. Twice Lola had looked down and watched her young friend as he marched up and down beneath, with an ecstatic smile on his face. It was after her second look that she made up her mind to desert the crocuses in Hampton Court and make that boy escort her to Dover Street. Acting under a sudden inspiration she determined to go and see her aunt. She knew perfectly well that Miss Breezy had had time to think over the point which had been suggested to her and was by now probably quite ready to accept it. That was the woman's character. She began by saying no to everything and ended, of course, by saying yes to most of them, and the more emphatic she was in the beginning the more easily she caved in finally. After all, she was very fond of her niece and would welcome the opportunity of having the girl's company at night and during the hours when Lady Feo was out. Lola knew all that and her entrance into Dover Street had become an obsession, a fixed idea, and if her aunt should develop a hitherto undemonstrated stiff back,—well then her hand must be forced, that's all, either by hook or by crook. Dressed as simply as usual but wearing her Sunday hat, Lola passed through the shop, dropped a kiss on her father's head, twiddled her fingers at her mother, who was "getting off" a perfectly hideous vase stuck into a filigree silver support and must not, therefore, be interrupted in her diplomatic flow of persuasion. She was met at the door by Ernest Treadwell, who sheepishly removed his cap. He would have given ten years of his life to have been able to doff it in the manner of Sir Walter Raleigh and utter a string of highly polished phrases suitable to that epoch-making occasion. Instead of which he said, "'Ello," and dropped his "h" at her feet.

Queen's Road wore its usual Saturday afternoon appearance and its narrow pavement was filled with people shopping for Sunday,—the tide of semi-society clashing with that of mere respectability. "Hampton Court'll look great to-day," said Ernest, who felt that with the assistance of the crocuses he might be able to stammer a few words of love and admiration.

Lola glanced up at the clear sky and the April sun which was in a very kindly mood. "I'm sure it will," she said, "but I'm afraid I've got a disappointment for Ernie. I want you to be a dear and take me to see my aunt in Dover Street. It's—it's awfully important."

The boy's eyes flicked and a curious whiteness settled about his nose. But he played the knight. "Whatever you say, Lola," he said, and forced himself to smile. Poor boy, it was a sad blow. He had gone to bed the night before, dreaming of this little adventure. It would have been the first time that he had ever spent an afternoon and evening alone with the girl who occupied the throne of his heart.

Lola knew this. She could see the whole story behind the boy's smile. So she took his arm to compensate him,—knowing how well it would. "There are crocuses in Kensington Garden," she said. "We'll have a look at those as we pass."

Every head that turned and every eye that flared made Ernest Treadwell swell with pride as well as resentment. A policeman held up the traffic for Lola at the top of the road and one of the keepers of the Gardens, an old soldier, saluted her as she went through the gates. She rewarded these attentions with what she called her best de Brézé smile. Some day other and vastly more important men should gladly show her deference. They followed the broad path which led to Marble Arch, raising their voices in order to overcome the incessant roar of traffic in the Bayswater Road. Lola did most of the talking that afternoon and it was all inspirational, to fire the boy into greater ambition and effort. She had read some of his poetry,—strange stuff that showed the influence of Masefield, crude and half-baked but not untouched with imagery. She believed in Ernest Treadwell and took a very real delight in his improvement. But for her encouragement it might have been some years before he broke out of hobble-de-hoydom and the semi-vicious ineptitude that goes with it. He was very happy as he went along with the warm hand on his arm. His vanity glowed under her friendship, as she intended that it should.

The old Gardens were green and fresh, gay with new leaves and daffodils. Only the presence of smashed men made it look different from the good days before the War. Would all those children who played under the eyes of mothers and nurses be laid presently in sacrifice upon the altars of the old Bad Men of politics who had done nothing to avert the recent cataclysm?

Lola was excited and on her mettle. She was nearing the crossroads. On the one that she had marked out stood Fallaray,—the merest speck. Success with

Aunt Hannah meant the first rung of her ladder. Oxford Street was like a once smart woman who had become *déclassé*. It seemed to be competing with High Street, Putney. There was something pathetically blatant in the shop window arrangements, a strained effort to catch what little money was left to the public after the struggle to make both ends meet and pay the overwhelming taxation. The two young people were unconscious of the change. Lola babbled incessantly. Among other things she said, "I suppose you're a socialist, aren't you, Ernest? You've never discussed it with me, but I think you must be because you write poetry, and somehow all poets seem to be socialists. I suppose it's because poetry's so badly paid."

"I dunno about that. I've never tried to sell my stuff. I'm against everything and everybody, if that's what you mean. But I don't know whether it's true to call it Socialism. There's a new word for it which suits me,—intelligensia. I don't think that's the way to pronounce it but it's near enough. It's in all the weekly papers now and stands for anarchy with hair oil on the bombs. Why do you ask me?"

Lola still had her hand on his arm. "Well, I'm afraid I'm going to give you a shock soon. I'm going to be a servant."

"Good God," said Ernest. His grandfather had been a valet, his father a piano tuner, he himself had risen to the heights of assistant librarian in a public library, and if his ambition to become a Labor member ever was realized he might very easily wind up as a peer. His children would then belong to the new aristocracy with Lola as Lady Treadwell. He gasped under the blow. "What will your mother say?"

"I'm afraid Mother will hang her head in shame until she gets my angle of it. Luckily I can always point to Aunt. She's a housekeeper, you see, and after all that's only a sort of upper servant, isn't it?"

"But,—what's the idea?"

This was not a question to which Lola had any intention of giving an answer. It was a perfectly private affair. She went off at one of her inevitable tangents so useful in order to dodge issues. She pointed to an enormous Rolls-Royce which stood outside Selfridge's. On the panel was painted a coat of arms as big as a soup tureen. She held Ernest back to watch the peculiar people who descended from it,—the man small and fat, with bandy legs and a great moustache waxed into points; the woman bulbous and wobbly, cluttered up with diamonds, made pathetic by a skirt that was almost up to her knees. What an excellent thing the War had been for them.

"New rich," said Lola. "I saw them the other day coming out of a house at the top of Park Lane which Father told me used to belong to a Duke. Good Lord, why shouldn't I be a servant without causing a crack in the constitution of the

country?"

Fundamentally snobbish as all socialists are, the boy shook his head. "You should lead, not serve," he said, quoting from one of his masters. And that was all he could manage. Lola,—a servant! They turned into Bond Street in which all the suburban ladies who were not enjoying the matinées were gluing their noses to the shop windows. Ernest Treadwell was unfamiliar with this part of London. He preferred the democratic Strand when he could get away from his duties. He felt more and more sheepish and self-conscious as Lola drew up instinctively at every shop in which corsets were displayed and diaphanous underwear spread out. The silk stockings on extremely well-shaped wooden legs she admired extremely and desired above all things. The bootmakers' shops also came in for her close attention. The little French shoes with high vamps and stubby noses drew exclamations of delight and envy. Several spots on the window of Aspray's bore the impression of her nose before she could tear herself away. A set of dressing-table things made of gold and tortoiseshell made her eyes widen and her lips part. Ernest Treadwell would willingly have sacrificed all his half-baked socialism to be able to buy any one of those things for Lola.

Finally they came to Dover Street, that oasis in the heart of Mayfair where even yet certain houses remain untouched by the hand of trade. The Fallaray house was on the sunny side, where it stood gloomily with frowning windows and an uninviting door. It was the oldest house in the street and wore its octogenarian appearance without camouflage. It had belonged originally to the Throgmorton family upon whom Fate had laid a hoodoo. The last of the line was glad to sell it to Fallaray's grandfather, the cotton man. What he would have said if he could have returned to his old haunts, opened his door with his latch key and walked in to find Lady Feo and her gang God only knows.

It was well known to Lola. Many times she had walked up and down Dover Street in order to gaze at the windows behind which she thought that Fallaray might be sitting, and several times she had been into her aunt's rooms which overlooked the narrow yards of Bond Street.

"Wait for me here, Ernest," she said. "I don't think I shall be very long. If I'm more than half an hour, give me up and we'll have another afternoon later on."

She waved her hand, went down the area steps and rang the bell. Ernest Treadwell, to whom the house had taken on a sinister appearance, sloped off with rounded shoulders and a tight mouth. They might have been in Hampton Court looking at the crocuses.—Lola,—a servant. Good God!

## VIII

Albert Simpkins opened the door.

It wasn't his job to open doors, because he was a valet. But it so happened that he was the only person in the servants' quarters who was not either dressing, lying down after a heavy lunch or out to enjoy an hour's fresh air.

"Miss Breezy, please," said Lola.

Simpkins gasped. If he had been passing through the hall and a footman had opened the front door to this girl he would have slipped into a dark corner to watch her enter, believing that she had come to visit Lady Feo. He knew a thoroughbred when he saw one. That she should have come to the area of all places seemed to him to be irregular, not in conformity with the rules of social rectitude which were his religion. All the same he thrilled, and like every other man who caught sight of Lola and stood near enough to catch the indefinable scent of her hair, stumbled over his words.

Lola repeated her remark and gave him a vivid friendly smile. If she carried her point with her aunt presently, this man would certainly be useful. "If you will please come in," said Simpkins, "I'll go and see if Miss Breezy's upstairs. What name shall I say?"

"Lola Breezy."

"Miss Lola Breezy. Thank you." He paused for a moment to bask, and then with a little bow in which he acknowledged her irresistible and astonishing effect, disappeared,—valet stamped upon his respectability like a Cunard label on a suit case.

Lola chuckled and remained standing in the middle of what was used by the servants as a sitting room. How easy it was, with her gift, to shatter men's few senses. She knew the place well,—its pictures of Queen Victoria and of famous race horses cut from illustrated papers cheaply framed and its snapshots of the gardens of Chilton Park, Whitecross, Bucks. Discarded books of all sorts were piled up on various tables. *The Spectator* and *The New Statesman*, Massingham's peevish weekly, *Punch*, *The Sketch* and *The Tatler*, *Eve* and the *Bystander*, which had come downstairs from the higher regions, were scattered here and there. They had been read and commented upon first by the butler and then downwards through all the gradations of servants to the girl who played galley slave to the cook. Lola wondered how long it would be before she also would be spending her spare time in that room, hobnobbing with the various members of the family below stairs. A few days, perhaps, not more,—now that she had fastened on this plan.

Simpkins returned almost immediately. "If you will follow me," he said, and gave her an alluring smile which disclosed a row of teeth that were peculiarly English. He led the way along a narrow passage up the back staircase and out upon a wide and imposing corridor, hung with Flemish tapestry and old portraits,

which appealed to Lola's sense of the decorative and sent her head up with a tilt of proprietorship. This was her atmosphere. This was the corridor along which her imaginary sycophants had passed so often to her room in Queen's Road, Bayswater. "We're not supposed to go through here," said Simpkins, eager to talk, "except on duty. But it's a short cut to the housekeeper's quarters and there's no one in to catch us. You look well against that hanging," he added. "Like a picture in the Academy,"—which to him was the Temple of Art.

A door opened and there were heavy footsteps.

"Look out. The governor." He seized Lola's arm and in a panic drew her into the shadow of a large armoire.

Her heart jumped into her mouth!—It was her hero in the flesh, the man at whose feet she had worshipped,—within a few inches of her, walking slowly, with his hands behind his back, his mouth compressed and a sort of hit-me-why-don't-you in his eye. Still with Simpkins's hand upon her arm she slipped out,—not to be seen, not with any thought of herself, but to watch Fallaray stride along the corridor; and get the wonder of a first look.

A door banged and he was gone.

"A pretty near thing," said Simpkins. "It always happens like that. I don't suppose he would have noticed us. Mostly he sees nothing but his thoughts,—looks inwards, I mean. But rules is rules. He lives in that wing of the 'ouse,—has a library and a bedroom there and another room fitted up as a gym where he goes through exercises to keep hisself fit. Give 'im enough in the House to keep 'im fit, you'd think, wouldn't yer? A wonderful man.—Come on, Miss, nick through here." He opened a door, ran lightly up a short flight of stairs and came back again into the servant's passage. "'Ere you are," he said and smiled brilliantly, putting in, as he thought, good work. This girl——! "I'll be glad to see you 'ome," he added anxiously.

Lola said, "Thank you, but I have some one waiting for me," and entered.

## IX

"Well!" said Miss Breezy.

"I hope so," said Lola, kissing the ear that was presented to her.

"I'm just rearranging my things. Her Ladyship's just given me some new pictures. They used to be in the morning room, but she got sick of them and handed 'em over to me. I'm going to hang them up." She might have added that nearly everything that the room contained had been given to her by Lady Feo with a similar generosity but her sense of humor was not very keen or else her sense of loyalty was. At any rate, there she stood in the middle of a nice airy

room with something around her head to keep the dust out of her hair, wearing a pair of gloves, a stepladder near at hand.

There were six fair-sized canvases in gold frames,—seascapes; bold, excellent work, with the wind blowing over them and spray coming out that made the lips all salty. They made you hear the mewing of sea gulls.

"Lady Feo bought them to help a young artist. He was killed in the War. She hates the sea, it makes her sick, and doesn't want to be reminded of anything sad. I don't wonder, and anyway, they'll look very nice here. Do you like them?"

Lola had sized them up in a glance. She too would have turned them out. They seemed to her rough and draughty. "Yes," she said, "they're very good, aren't they?" She mounted the ladder and held out her hands. She had come to ask a favor. She might as well make herself popular at once. "Hand them up, Auntie, and I'll hang them for you."

"Oh, well now, that's very nice. I get giddy on a ladder. You came just at the right moment. Can you manage it? It's very heavy. The first time I've ever seen you making yourself useful, my dear."

This enabled Lola to get in her first point. "Mother never allows me to be useful," she said, "and really doesn't understand the sort of thing that I can do best." She stretched up, hung the cord over a brass bracket and straightened it.

"Well, you can certainly do this job! Go on and do the rest while you're at it. I was looking forward to a very tiring afternoon. I didn't want to have any of the maids to help me. They resent being asked to do anything that is outside their regular duty."

And so Lola proceeded, hating to get her hands dirty and not very keen on indulging in athletics, but with a determination made doubly firm by the fleeting sight of Fallaray.

Miss Breezy was in an equable mood that afternoon,—less pompous than usual, less consumed with the importance of being the controlling brain in the management of the Fallaray "establishment," as she called it in the stilted language of the auctioneer. She became almost human as she watched Lola perform the task which would have put her to a considerable amount of physical inconvenience. When one is relieved of anything in the nature of work, equability is the cheapest form of gratitude.

The room was a particularly nice one, large, with a low ceiling and two windows which overlooked Dover Street. It didn't in the least indicate the character of the housekeeper because not a single thing in it was her own except a few books. Everything else had been given to her by Lady Feo, and like the pictures, had been discarded from one or other of the rooms below. The Sheraton sofa had come from the drawing-room. A Dowager Duchess had sat on it one evening after dinner and let herself go on the question of the Feo gang. It had

been thrown out the following morning. The armoire of ripe oak, made up of old French altarpieces—an exquisite thing worth its weight in gold—had suffered a similar fate. Rappé the ubiquitous photographer had taken a picture of Lady Feo leaning against one of its doors. It turned out badly. In fact, the angel on the other door looked precisely as though it were growing on Lady Feo's nose. It might have been good art but it was bad salesmanship. Away went the armoire. The story of all the other things was the same so that the room had begun to assume the appearance of the den of a dealer in old furniture. There were even a couple of old masters on the walls,—a Reynolds and a Lely, portraits of the members of Lady Feo's family whose faces she objected to and whose admonishing eyes she couldn't bear to have upon her when she came down to luncheon feeling a little chippy after a night out. These also were priceless. It had become indeed one of the nicest rooms in the house. Every day it added something to Miss Breezy's increasing air of dignity and beatitude.

Lola did not fail to admire the way in which her aunt had arranged her wonderful presents and used all her arts of flattery before she came round to the reason of her visit. This she did as soon as Miss Breezy had prepared tea with something of the ceremony of the Japanese and arranged herself to be entertained by the child for whose temperament she had found some excuse by labelling it French. Going cunningly to work, she began by saying, "What do you think? You remember Mother's friends, the Proutys, who were playing cards the other night?"

"Indeed I do," replied Miss Breezy. "Whenever I meet those people it takes me some time to get over the unpleasant smell of meat fat. What about them?"

"Cissie, the daughter, has gone into the chorus of the Gaiety, and is very happy there. She's going to be in the second row at first, but she's bound to be noticed, she says, because she has to pose as a statue in the second act covered all over with white stuff."

"Nothing else?"

"No, but it will take an hour to put on every night. And before the end of the run she'll probably be married at St. Margaret's to an officer in the Guards, she says. She told me that she couldn't hope to become a lady in any other way. I was wondering what you would say if I did the same thing?"

Miss Breezy almost dropped her cup as Lola knew that she would. "You don't mean to say you've come to tell me that you've got *that* fearful scheme in the back of your head, you alarming child? A chorus girl?"

Lola laughed. "You know *my* way of improving myself: to serve an apprenticeship as a lady's maid, a respectable way,—the way in which you're going to help me now that you've thought it all over."

The answer came like the rapping of a machine gun. "I've not thought it

over and what's more, I'm not going to begin to think it over. I told you so."

Without turning a hair Lola handed a plate of cakes. "But you wouldn't like me to follow Cissie's example, would you,—and that's the alternative." Poor dear old Aunt! What was the use of pretending to be firm. All the trumps were against her.

But for once Lola miscalculated her hand and the woman. "If you must make a fool of yourself," said Miss Breezy, "you must. I'm not your mother and luckily you can't break my heart. I told you the other night and I tell you again that I do not intend to be a party to your lowering yourself by becoming a servant and there's an end of it." And she waved her disengaged hand.

It was almost a minute before Lola recovered her breath. She sat back, then, and put her head on one side. "In that case," she said in a perfectly even voice, "I must try to get used to the other idea. I think I might look rather well in tights and Cissie tells me that if I were to join her at the Gaiety I should be put into a number in which five other girls will come on in underclothes in a bedroom scene. Of course I should keep my own name and before long you'd see my photograph in the *Tatler* as 'the latest recruit to the footlights,—the great-great-granddaughter of the famous Madame de Brézé.' I should tell the first reporter that, of course, to make it interesting."

Miss Breezy rocked to and fro, gripping her cup. How often had she shuddered at the sight of scantily dressed precocious girls sitting in alarming attitudes on the shiny paper of the *Tatler*. To think of Lola in underclothes, debasing a highly respectable name! Nevertheless, "I am not to be bullied," she said, wobbling like a turkey. "I have always given way to you before, Lola, but in this case my mind is made up. Can't you understand how awkward it would be to have you in the house on a level with servants who have to be kept in order by me? It would undermine my authority." That was the point, and it was a good one. And then her starchiness left her under the horror of the alternative. "As for that other thing,—well, you couldn't go a better way to kill your poor mother and surely you don't want to do that?"

"Of course I don't, Auntie."

"There's no call for you to think about any way of earning a living, Lola. Your parents don't want to get rid of you, Heaven knows, and even in these bad times they can get along very nicely and keep you too. You know that."

Lola had never dreamed of this adamantine attitude. Her aunt had been so easy to manage before. What was she to do?

Thinking that she was winning, Miss Breezy went at it again. "Come, now. Be a good child and forget both these schemes. Go on with your classes and it won't be long before a suitable person will turn up and ask you to marry him. Your type marries young. Now, will you promise me to think no more about it

all?"

But this was Lola's only chance to enter the first stage of her crusade. She would fight for it to the last gasp. "The chorus, yes," she said. "As for the other thing, no, Auntie. If you won't help me I must get the paper in the morning and search through the advertisements. I'm sure to come across some one who wants a lady's maid and after all, it won't very much matter who it is. You see, I want to earn my living, and I have made up my mind to do it in this way. There's good pay, a beautiful house to live in, no early trains to catch, no bad weather to go through, holidays in the country and with any luck foreign travel. I can't understand why many more girls like me don't go in for this sort of life. I only thought, of course, it would be so nice to be under your eye and guidance. Mother would much prefer it to be that way, I'm sure."

But even this practical argument had no effect except to rouse the good lady's dander. "You are a very nagging girl," she cried. "I can see perfectly well what you're driving at but you won't undermine my decision, I can tell you that. I will not have you in this house and that's final."

Lola was beaten. To her astonishment and chagrin she found that her nail was not to be hammered in. There was steel in the old lady's composition, after all. But there was steel in her own and she quickly decided to leave things as they stood and think out another line of attack before the following Thursday. And then, remembering Ernest Treadwell, who was living up to his name from one end of the street to the other and back, she rose to tear herself away with an air of great patience and affection. Just as she was about to bend down and touch the usual ear with her lips, the door suddenly swung open and a woman with bobbed hair, wearing a red velvet tam-o'-shanter and a curious one-piece garment of brown velvet which disclosed a pair of very admirable legs, stood smiling in the doorway. Her face was as white as the petals of a white rose. Her large violet eyes had lashes as black as her eyebrows and her wanton mouth showed a set of teeth as white and strong as a negro's. "Oh, hello, Breezy," she cried out, her voice round and ringing. "Excuse my barging in like this. I want to know what you've done about the table decorations for to-morrow night."

Miss Breezy rose hurriedly to her feet, and Lola, although she had never seen this woman before, followed her example, sensing the fact that here was the famous Lady Feo.

"I sent Mr. Biddle round to Lee and Higgins in Bond Street, my lady. You need have no anxiety about it."

"That's all right but I've altered my mind. I don't want flowers. I've bought a set of caricatures and I'm going to put one in front of every place. If it's too late to cancel the order, telephone to Lee and Higgins and tell them to send the flowers to any old hospital that occurs to them." Lady Feo had spotted Lola imme-

diately and during all this time had never taken her eyes away from the girl's face and figure, which she looked over with frank and unabashed curiosity and admiration. With characteristic effrontery she made her examination as thorough as she would have done if she had been sizing up a horse with a view to purchase. "Attractive little person," she said to herself. "As dainty as a piece of Sèvres. What the devil's she doing here?" Making conversation with a view to discover who Lola was, she added aloud, "I see you've hung the pictures, Breezy.—Breezy and seascapes; they go well together, don't they?" And she laughed at the little joke,—a gay and boyish laugh.

With her heart thumping and a ray of hope in front of her, Lola marked her appreciation of the joke with her most delighted smile.

And Miss Breezy indulged in a diplomatic titter.

"Isn't it a little remiss of you, Breezy, not to introduce me to your friend?"

"Oh, I beg your ladyship's pardon, I'm sure. This is my niece Lola." She wished the child in the middle of next week and dreaded the result of this most unfortunate interruption.

Lady Feo stretched out her hand,—a long-fingered able hand, born for the violin. "How do you do," she said, as though to an equal. "How is it that I haven't seen you before? Breezy and I are such old friends. I call her Breezy in that rather abrupt manner—forgive me, won't you?—because I'm both rude and affectionate. I hope I didn't cut in on a family consultation?"

Lola braced herself. Here was her opportunity indeed! "Oh, no, my lady. It *was* a sort of consultation, because I came to talk to Aunt about my future. It's time I earned my own living and as she doesn't want me to go on the stage, she's going to be kind enough to help me in another way." She got all this in a little breathlessly, with charming naïveté.

"What way?" asked Lady Feo bluntly. "I should think you'd make a great success on the stage."

Lola took no notice of her aunt's angry and frantic signs. She stood demure and modest under the searching gaze of Lady Feo and with a sense of extreme triumph took the jump. "The way I most wanted to begin," she said, "was to be your ladyship's maid. That's my great ambition."

"And for the love of heaven, why not? Breezy, why the deuce haven't you told me about this girl? I would like to have her about me. She's decorative. I wouldn't mind being touched by her and I'm sure she'd look after my things. Look how neat she is. She might have come out of a bandbox."

Miss Breezy bit her lip. She was bitterly annoyed. She was unaware of the expression but she felt that Lola had double-crossed her,—as indeed she had. "Well, my lady," she said, "to tell you the truth, I didn't think that you would care to have two people of the same family in your house. It always leads to trouble."

"Oh, rot," said Lady Feo, "I loathe those old shibboleths. They're so silly." She turned to Lola. "Look here, do you really mean to say that you'd rather be a lady's maid than kick your heels about in the chorus?"

"If you please, my lady," said Lola.

"Well, I think you'll miss a lot of fun, but as far as I'm concerned, you're an absolute Godsend. The girl I've had for two years is going to be married. Of course, I can't stop that, as much as I shall miss her. The earth needs repeopling, so I must let her go. The question has been where to get another. With all the unemployment no one seems very keen on doing anything but work in factories. I'd love to have you. Come by all means. Breezy, engage her. I hope we shall rub along very nicely together."

As much to hide the gleam in her eyes from her aunt as to show deference to her new mistress, Lola bowed. "I thank you, my lady," she said.

"Fine," said Lady Feo, "fine. That's great. Saves me a world of trouble. Pretty lucky thing that I looked in here, wasn't it?" She went to the door and turned. "When can you come, Lola?"

"To-morrow.—To-night."

"To-night. I will let Emily off at once. She'll be glad enough. I'll send you home in the car. You can pack your things and get back in time to brush my hair. I suppose you know something about your job?"

Miss Breezy broke in hurriedly. Even now perhaps it might not be too late to beat this girl at her own game. "That's it, my lady," she said, tumbling over her words. "She doesn't know anything about it. I'm afraid I ought to say——"

"Oh, well, Breezy, that's nothing new. They none of 'em know anything. I'll teach her. I don't want a sham expert with her nose in the air. All I need is a girl with quick fingers, nippy on her feet, good to look at, who will laugh at my jokes. You promise to do that, Lola?"

A most delicious smile curled all about Lola's mouth. "I promise, my lady," she said.

Lady Feo nodded at her. "She'll make a sensation," she thought. "How jealous they'll all be.—Righto, then. Seven o'clock. Don't be late. So long." And off she went, slamming the door behind her.

"You little devil," said Miss Breezy, her dignity in great slabs at her feet.

But Lola had won. And the amazing part of it was that the door of the house in Dover Street had been opened to her by Fallaray's wife.

# PART II

## I

Mrs. Malwood was hipped. She had been losing heavily at bridge, her Pomeranian had been run over in Berkeley Square and taken to the dog's hospital, her most recent flame had just been married to his colonel's daughter, and her fourth husband was still alive. Poor little soul, she had lots to grumble about. So she had come round to be cheered up by Feo Fallaray who always managed to laugh through deaths and epidemics to find her friend in the first stages of being dressed for dinner. She had explained her mental attitude, received a hearty kiss and been told to lie down and make herself comfortable. There she was, at the moment, in one of the peculiar frocks which had become almost like the uniform of Feo's "gang." She was not old, except in experience. In fact, she was not more than twenty-three. But as she lay on the sofa with her eyes closed and her lashes like black fans on her cheeks, a little pout on her pretty mouth and her bobbed head resting upon a brilliant cushion, she looked, in those clothes of hers, like a school girl whose headmistress was a woman of an aesthetic turn of mind but with a curious penchant for athleticism. Underneath her smock of duvetyn, the color of a ripe horse-chestnut, she wore bloomers and stockings rolled down under her knees,—as everybody could see. She might have been a rather swagger girl scout who never scouted, and there was just a touch of masculinity about her without anything muscular. She was, otherwise, so tiny a thing that any sort of a man could have taken her up in one hand and held her above his head. Very different from Lady Feo, whose shoulders were broad, whose bones were large, who stood five foot ten without her shoes, who could hand back anything that was given to her and swing a golf club like a man.

"I've just been dipping into Margot's Diary, Georgie. Topping stuff. I wish to God she were young again,—one of us. She'd make things hum. I can't understand why the critics have all thrown so many vitriolic fits about her book and called her the master egotist. Don't they know the meaning of words and isn't

this an autobiography? Good Lord, if any woman has a right to be egotistical it's Margot. She did everything well and to my way of thinking she writes better than all the novelists alive. She can sum up a character as well in ten lines as all our verbose young men in ten chapters. In her next book I hope to heaven she'll get her second wind and put a searchlight into Downing Street. Her poor old bird utterly lost his tail but the public ought to know to what depths of trickery and meanness politics can be carried.—You can make that iron a bit hotter if you like, Lola. Don't be afraid of it."

Lola gave her a glint of smile and laid the iron back on its stand.

During the process of being dressed, Lady Feo reclined in a sort of barber's chair—not covered with a *peignoir* or a filmy dressing jacket but in what is called in America a union suit—a one-piece thing of silk with no sleeves and cut like rowing shorts. It became her tremendously well,—cool and calm and perfectly satisfied with herself. She glanced at Lola, who stood quiet and efficient in a neat frock of black alpaca, with her golden hair done closely to her small head, and then winked at Georgie and gave a hitch to her elbow to call attention to the new maid whom she had already broken in and regarded as the latest actor in her private theatricals. Her whole life was a sort of play in which she took the leading part.

There was something in that large and airy bedroom which always did Mrs. Malwood good. She liked its Spartan simplicity, its white walls, white furniture, white carpet and the curtains and cushions which were of delicate water-color tones suggestive of sweet peas. It had once been wholly black as a background for Lady Feo's dead-white skin. But her friend had grown out of that, as she grew out of almost everything sooner or later.

"New, isn't she?" asked Mrs. Malwood without lowering her voice.

"A month old," replied Lady Feo, "and becoming more and more useful every moment. Aren't you, Lola?"

Lola bowed and smiled and once more put the hot tongs to the thick wiry hair which eventually would stand out around her mistress's head like that of some Hawaiian girl.

"Where did you pick her up?" asked Georgie.

"She fell into my lap like a ripe plum. She's a niece of my Breezy, the housekeeper. You'd never think it, would you? I'm more and more inclined to believe, as a matter of fact, that she escaped from a china cabinet from a collection of Dresden pieces."

Mrs. Malwood perched herself upon an elbow and examined Lola languidly,—who was quite used to this sort of thing, having already been discussed openly before innumerable people as though she were a freak.

They little knew how closely Lola was studying them in turn,—their man-

ner, their accent, their tricks of phrase and for what purpose she was undergoing this apprenticeship. Out for sensation, they would certainly have attained a thrilling one could they have seen into the mind of this discreet and industrious girl who performed her duties with the deftest fingers and went about like a disembodied spirit.

"Where are you dining?"

"Here," said Lady Feo. "I've got half a dozen of Arthur's friendly enemies coming. It will be a sort of Cabinet meeting. They're all in a frightful stew about his attitude on the Irish question. They know that he and I are not what the papers call 'in sympathy,' so why the dickens they've invited themselves I don't know,—in the hope, I suppose, of my being able to work on his feelings and get him to climb down from his high horse. The little Welshman is the last man to cod himself that his position is anything but extremely rocky and he knows that he can't afford to lose the support of a man like Arthur, whose honesty is sworn to by every Tom, Dick and Harry in the land; this is in the way of a *dernier ressort*, I suppose. I shall be the only woman present. Pity me among this set of indecisive second-raters who are all in a dead funk and utterly unable to cope with the situation, either in Germany, France, Ireland, India or anywhere else and have messed up the whole show. If I had Margot's pen, just think what a ripping chapter I could write in my diary if I kept one, eh, Georgie?" She threw back her head and laughed.

As far as Fallaray's hard-and-fast stand against reprisals was concerned she cared nothing. In fact, Ireland was a word with which she was completely fed up. She had erased it from her dictionary. It meant nothing to her that British officers were being murdered in their beds and thrown at the feet of their wives or that the scum of the army had blacked and tanned their way through a country burning with passion and completely mad. The evening was just one of a series of stunts to her out of which she would derive great amusement and be provided with enough chitchat to give her friends gusts of mirth for weeks.

"I saw Fallaray to-day," said Georgie. "He was walking in the Park. He only needs a suit of armor to look like Richard Cœur de Lion. Is he really and honestly sincere, Feo, or is this a political trick to get the Welshman out of Downing Street? I ask because I don't believe that any man can have been in the House as long as he has and remain clean."

"Don't you know," said Lady Feo, with only the merest glint of smile, "that Arthur has been divinely appointed to save civilization from chaos? Don't you know that?"

"Yes, but I know a good many of the others who have—when any one's looking. You really can't make me believe in these people, especially since the War. Such duds, my dear."

"All the same, you can believe in Arthur." She spoke seriously. "He has no veneer, no dishonesty, no power of escape from his own standards of life. That's why he and I are like oil and water. We don't speak the same language. He reminds me always of an Evangelist at a fancy-dress ball, or Cromwell at a varsity binge. He's a wonderful dull dog, is Arthur, absolutely out of place in English politics and it's perfectly ridiculous that he should be married to me. God knows why I did it. His profile fascinated me, probably, and the way he played tennis. I was dippy about both those things at the time. I'm awfully sorry for him, too. He needs a wife,—a nice cowlike creature with no sense of humor who would lick his boots, put eau de cologne on his high forehead, run to meet him with a little cry of adoration and spring out of bed to turn on his bath when he came home in the middle of the night. All Cromwells do and don't they love the smell of powder!—Good for you, Lola. Don't you get frightfully fed up with this thick wiry hair of mine?"

Lola smiled and shook her head. It was only when she was alone with her mistress that she permitted herself to answer questions. But as she listened and with a burning heart heard her hero discussed and dismissed and knew, better and more certainly than ever, the things that he needed, one phrase ran like a recurring motif through her brain,—the rustle of silk, the rustle of silk.

## II

Lola and Miss Breezy were not on speaking terms.

The elderly spinster considered that she had been used and flouted, treated as though she were in her dotage and had lost her authority to engage and dismiss the members of the Fallaray ménage. She had nursed, therefore, a feeling of bitter antagonism against Lola during her three weeks under the same roof. She had not treated her niece to anything in the nature of an outburst on her return from Queen's Road to take up her duties. "Dignity, dignity," she repeated again and again and steeled herself with two other wonderful words that have helped so many similar women in the great crisis of wounded vanity,—"my position." She had simply cut her dead. Since then they had, of course, met frequently and had even been obliged to speak to each other. They did so as though they were totally unrelated and had never met before.

All this led to a certain amount of comedy below stairs, it being perfectly well known to every one that Lola was the housekeeper's niece. What Lola did when Miss Breezy entered the servants' sitting room the night of her arrival filled the maids with astonishment, resentment and admiration,—astonishment because of her extraordinary capacity of holding in her laughter, resentment be-

cause she treated Miss Breezy with the sort of respect which that good lady never got from them, and admiration because of the innate breeding which seemed to ooze from that child's finger tips. She had risen to her feet. And ever since she had continued to do so—a thing, the possibility of which the others had never conceived—and when spoken to had replied, "Yes, Miss Breezy," with a perfectly straight face and not one glint of humor in her eye. It was wonderful. It was like something in a book,—an old book by a man who wrote of times that were as dead as mutton. It was gorgeous. It gave the girls the stitch from laughing. It became one of their standard jokes. "Up for Miss Breezy," the word went after that and there was a scramble out of chairs. All this made the elderly spinster angrier than ever. Not only had she been done by this girl but, my word, the child was rubbing it in.

It was curious to see the effect that Lola had upon the other servants. They were all tainted with the Bolshevism that has followed in the wake of the War. They drew their wages and grumbled, slurred their duties, ate everything that they could lay their hands on, thought nothing of destroying the utensils of the kitchen and the various things which they used in the course of work, went out as often as they could and stayed out much later than the rules of the house permitted. But under the subtle influence of this always smiling, always good-tempered girl who seemed to have come from another planet, ribaldry and coarse jokes and the rather loose larking with the footmen began gradually to disappear. Without resentment, because Lola was so companionable and fitted into her new surroundings like a key into a lock, they toned themselves down in her presence, and finding her absolutely without "side," hurried to win her friendship, went into her room at night, singly, to confide in her,—were not in the least jealous because Albert Simpkins, the butler and the two footmen competed with one another to grovel at her feet. In a word, Lola was as great a favorite below stairs as she was above. She had realized that the ultimate success of her plan depended on her popularity in the servants' sitting room and in winning these people to her side had used all her homogeneous sense, even, perhaps, with greater care and thoughtfulness than she had applied to her task of ingratiating herself with Lady Feo. She knew very well that if the servants didn't get on with her she would never be able to stay. They would make it impossible.

How Madame de Brézé would have chuckled had she been able to see her little imitator sitting on the sofa at night, beneath an oleograph of Queen Victoria, going through the current *Tatler* in the midst of a group of maids, with a butler and two footmen hanging over her shoulders and a perfect valet dreaming of matrimony sitting astride a chair as near as he could get. How she would have laughed at her descendant's small quips and touches of wit and irony as she discussed the people who were known to her companions by sight and by name

and seemed to belong to a sort of menagerie, separated from them by the iron bars of class distinction through which they could be seen moving about,—well fed and well groomed and performing for the public.

It was no trouble to Lola to do all this. She had done it almost all her life with the gradations of children with whom she had been at school,—admired by the girls, keeping the boys at arms' length and yet retaining their friendship. It was perfectly easy. Lady Feo had liked her instantly and so no effort was necessary. Tactfulness alone was required,—to be silent when her mistress obviously required silence, to be merry and bright when her mood was expansive and to anticipate her wishes whenever in attendance. All Lola's period of make-believe, during which she had played the celebrated courtesan in her little back bedroom, had taught her precisely how to conduct herself in her new surroundings. Had not she herself been in the hands of just such a lady's maid as she had now become and seen her laugh when she had laughed, remain quiet when she had demanded quietude? It merely meant that she had exchanged roles with Lady Feo for a time and was playing the servant's part instead of that of the leading lady. She reveled in the whole thing. It gave her constant delight and pleasure. Above all, she was under the same roof as her hero, of whom she caught a momentary glimpse from time to time,—from the window as he got into his car, from the gallery above the hall as he came back from the House of Commons, or late at night when he passed along the corridor to his lonely rooms, sometimes tired and with dragging feet, sometimes scornful and impatient, and once or twice so blazing with anger that it was a wonder that the things he touched did not burst into flames.

## III

The only one of the servants who took the remotest interest in the arrival of those members of the Cabinet who were to dine with Lady Feo was Lola. With the butler's connivance she stood inside the hat room in the hall and peeped through the door. To her there was something not only indescribably interesting in the sight at close quarters of men of whom she had read daily for years and who were admired or loathed by her father and his friends, but something moving, because they had it in their power to help or hinder the work of Fallaray. She found them to be a curiously smug and well-fed lot, undistinguished, badly dressed and not very different from the ordinary run of Queen's Road tradesmen. She thought that they looked like piano tuners and was astonished and disappointed.

The most important person, who arrived late and whose face was of course familiar to her from caricatures, made up for all the rest. He stood in the full light for a moment while he gave his coat and hat to a footman,—a soft dump hat and

a coat lined with very shiny black satin. He looked more than ever like a quack doctor, one who was a cross between a comedian and a revivalist. His uncut hair, very white now, flopped over the back of his collar in a most uncivilized manner and his little moustache of the walrus type was quite out of keeping with it. If he had been clean-shaven he could have passed for a poet, or a dramatist who desired to advertise the fact, as some of them do who flourished in the Victorian period. His short plebeian figure, with legs far too small and apparently too frail to carry his fat little trunk, gave him a gnome-like appearance, but in his eyes, which were very wonderful, there was a gleam of humor and resourcefulness which stamped him as a consummate leader of men, while his forehead denoted imagination and keen intelligence. It made Lola laugh to see the way in which he tried to win the callous footman with a cheery word, never losing an opportunity of making a client, and to watch his rabbit-like way of going upstairs to the drawing-room.

She was met by Simpkins, who darted quickly and eagerly to her side. "Look 'ere," he said in a whisper. "You're free for the evening. How about doing a show with me? I can get you back before Lady Feo'll want you again. What d'yer say?"

"Yes," said Lola, "I should love it. What shall we see?"

Simpkins was a gallery first nighter and an ardent patron of the drama. Whatever he recommended, therefore, was sure to be worth seeing. "Well," he said, "there's Irene Vanbrugh in a new American play,—'Miss Nell o' New Orleans.' I couldn't get to see it but I read old man Walkley and I saw what Punch said. I don't think the play's much, but Irene is orlright. Nip up and get your things on. Let's go and test it."

Lola nipped. Her little bedroom was in the servants' corridor. She was lucky that it wasn't, like most servants' bedrooms, in the basement, cheek by jowl with the coal cellar. She changed quickly, excited at the prospect of stealing a few hours away from the house in Dover Street. She had been home twice on her nights off, there to be gazed at in silent wonder by the little mother who seemed to know her even less than ever and to be put through an exhaustive cross-examination by her father, whose mind ran to small details, as was natural in one who wore a magnifying glass perpetually in his eye. She met Simpkins in the servants' sitting room,—very spruce in a tail coat and a bowler with his black tie ingeniously pulled through a gold ring in which there was a most depressed diamond.

She was received with a chorus of inquiries from the maids. "Hello, Lola," "On the loose with Simpky?" "This is something new, ain't it?" "Going to do the shimmy in 'Ammersmith?" and so forth. To all of which she replied in one sentence. "Mr. Simpkins is taking me to an organ recital," and won a scream of mirth.

Simpkins was ecstatic. He had made a bet with himself that his appeal would be refused. Always before Lola had turned him down and he knew that the frequent pestering of the butler and the two footmen had been unable to move her to adventure. "We've just time to do it," he said, put two fingers into his mouth and sent a piercing whistle into the muggy April evening. A prowling taxi drew up short and quivered, and a well-shaped head looked round to see from whom this urgent call had issued. Taking Lola's hand, Simpkins ran her across the street and opened the door. "The Dooker York's."

"Righto, Sir," said the driver, giving a quick and appreciative glance at his customer's companion. Exactly three years ago the owner of that particularly nice voice, straight nose and small moustache had commanded a battery of the R. F. A. and fired with open sights at the advancing enemy. With nothing to eat except apples plucked from the orchards through which he had retired with his ragged and weakening men, he had fought coolly and cheerily for many days and nights, utterly out of touch with the main army and eventually, looking like a scarecrow, had removed his guns from impossible positions and fallen on his face in Amiens. Thus does a grateful Parliament reward its saviors.

Simpkins slipped his hand through Lola's arm. "I've been looking forward to this," he said. "You don't know what you've done for me. I'm a different man since I saw you first."

"I," said Lola quickly, "am precisely the same girl," and very kindly and definitely gave him back his hand and drew a little farther into her corner of the cab. But Simpkins wasn't hurt. On the contrary he esteemed her the more highly for this action. She proved herself so to be different from the girls with whom he was acquainted and thus lived up to his preconceived idea of her. "Sorry," he said, "thank you," and glowed with love.

It was perfectly true that Simpkins was a different man since he had seen Lola. She had revolutionized his life and his thoughts and strengthened his ambitions. He was a good fellow, clean-minded, with one or two ideals to which he had clung faithfully and well through the many temptations which were provided by his like below stairs. He had character. He was illiterate but not unintelligent. He had something that the human sensibility is frequently without,—a soul, and because of that he had imagination and a sense of worship. He was the sort of man of whom fanatics are made under a crisis of deep emotion. As a gentleman's gentleman he regarded himself as having a sort of mission in life. He must be honest, always ready for his master's call; spruce, cheerful and discreet. When tempted to make himself acquainted with the contents of private letters he must never give anything away. He had held himself in waiting, so to speak, for a great love affair and had built up in his mind a good and wholesome picture of home and wife and children. Lola fitted into this picture and dominated it as no other

girl had ever done, and he had fallen actually and metaphorically before her like a shack before a hurricane. At any time now he could leave service and branch out for himself, because he had inherited from his father a sum of money which would enable him to buy a public house somewhere in the country—preferably on the upper Thames—and let rooms to nice people,—they would have to be nice people. He was a man in the middle thirties with plenty of time to add to his good nest egg, bring up a little family with great care and put his son in a good school with a view to making him a gentleman,—a dentist perhaps, or a clerk in Coutts's bank. He could see only Lola as the mother of this boy and the fact that she had accepted his invitation to go to the theater filled him with a great hopefulness; he rejoiced in her having disallowed his familiarity.

To Lola, Simpkins was less than the dust. She had already sized him up as a rather curious character to be respected and even liked but not, of course, to be considered as anything but an infrequent escort into the theater life of London.

She placed him among the Treadwells,—though not so high up in the list as Ernest. One of these fine days she hoped to be able to lift the Bayswater poet out of the public library into the public gaze, to do for him what Madame de Brézé had done for Paul Brissac.

They arrived at the theater in good time. With a curious touch of embarrassment, because he had seen at once that the cab was being driven by a gentleman, Simpkins handed over half a crown and said, "That's all right, you can keep the change." He received a crisp and unabashed "Thank you" and a little bow from the waist down which was a cross between extreme politeness and ineffable cheek, and before Lola turned to go into the theater she was given a pucka salute with the hand almost flat upon the ear. She returned a smile that was like one of those electric advertisements which flick in and out of the sky in all really progressive American cities. It nearly knocked the man over and almost caused him to collide with a policeman.

Simpkins was tempted to buy two seats in the stalls and could have done so without question in these after-war times when almost the only people who have enough money for their laundresses are the profiteers. But tradition prevailed and he took her up to the dress circle,—where nobody dressed. The people were coming reluctantly into the theater in the usual manner of Londoners. English people are not ardent theater goers and have to be dragged in to see a play almost in the same manner as in the old days of barnstorming, when the manager beat a drum on the threshold of the tent, the hero and the heroine stood at his elbow and made pathetic appeals to passers-by, and the villain, lurking in the background, grimaced at all the girls.

The orchestra had just begun to tune up and the scraping of fiddles sent a tingle through Lola's veins. It put her in the mood, as it always did, to forget

life, her own personality and the presence of Simpkins, and place herself into the character of the play's heroine. From an unexpected pocket Simpkins brought out a small box of chocolates. He was one of those strange people who, although they have just risen from a hearty meal, cannot go through an evening at the theater without munching something. "'Ave one," he said. "They're nice."

"You think of everything," said Lola, and in order not to hurt his feelings, took one and dropped it under the seat. "There's going to be a good house," she added.

"Irene always draws 'em in. By Gum, she's given me some good evenings in her time. She's what I call safe. You can bank on her. She dresses like a lady, too, and that gets me. Good old Irene." And then he put his face rather close to Lola's. "Some one said you thought of going on the stage before you joined us. That's not true, is it?"

"No," said Lola. "Not in the least true. I discussed it with my aunt. In fact, to be quite honest, I put it to her head like a pistol."

"Oh, I see." Simpkins heaved a sigh of relief. If Lola were to go on the stage,—and all these young officers buzzing about, treating marriage as though it were a betting transaction——

"I think," said Lola with naïve gravity, "that it's better to play a leading part in life than to be in the chorus on the stage. Cleverer acting is required, too, don't you think so?"

A leading part in life? Simpkins was worried. Would she consider the wife of a man who owned the "Black Bell" at Wargrave to be a leading part? "You're not ambitious, are yer?" he asked, peering at her patrician profile.

"Oh," she said, "Oh," and suddenly threw out her hands.

And then the lights went out and the buzz of talking ceased gradually as though bees were retiring in platoons from a feeding place.

## IV

They walked to Trafalgar Square. Lola was still in the old garden of Miss Nell among the Creoles and the music of the Mardi Gras frolickers. She had no ears for the expert criticisms of her escort. There were plenty of unoccupied taxis scouting for fares but Lola pulled up under the shadow of the National Gallery to watch the big play of life for a moment or two. From force of a habit which she had not yet conquered, she looked up at the sky, half expecting to see the great white beams of searchlights swing and stammer until they focussed upon something that looked like a silver fish, and then to twinge under the quick reports of anti-aircraft guns. Twice during the War she had been caught on that

spot during a raid and had stood transfixed to the pavement between fright and a keen desire to see the show. Memories of those never-to-be-forgotten incidents, small as they were and of no consequence in the story of the War—the loss of a few well-fed noncombatants who made themselves targets for stray shrapnel because they wouldn't dip like rabbits into funk holes—came back to her then, as well they might. The War's evidences forced themselves every day upon the notice even of those who desired to forget,—the processions of unemployed with their rattling collection boxes among the ugliest of them all.

Big Ben struck the quarter and Lola returned to earth. "Simpky," she said, "cab, quick." And he called one and gave the address. And then she began again to hear what the valet was saying. He had used up Miss Nell o' New Orleans and had come to Miss Lola of Queen's Road, Bayswater. "Look 'ere, can't we do this often, you and me? We can always sneak off when there's a dinner on or Lady Feo's out in the push. It don't cost much and I've got plenty of money."

"I should like to very much," said Lola. "Once a fortnight, say. You see, I go home every Wednesday night. I don't think we ought to do it more often than once a fortnight because, after all, I feel rather responsible to Auntie and I don't want to set a bad example to the other girls."

"Well, promise you won't go out with the other men. I let you into the 'ouse first, don't forget that, and that was a sort of omen to me and if you could bring yourself to look upon me as—well——" He broke off nervously and ran his hand over his forehead, which was damp with excitement.

But Lola was not in the least nonplussed. She had had so much practice. She was an expert in mentally making all sorts and conditions of men her brothers. She said, "Simpky,"—although the man looked extremely un-Russian,—"you mustn't spoil me. Also you must remember that Ellen Glazeby has hopes. She's a friend of mine."

"Oh, my God," said Simpkins, with a touch of melodrama. "If I'd been engaged to 'er and on the verge of marriage, and then 'ad seen you,—or even if I'd been married for a couple of years and was 'appy and 'ad seen you——Religious as I am——"

Lola turned to him with extreme simplicity. "But I'm a good girl, Simpky," she said.

And he gave a funny throaty sound, like a frog at night with its feet in water; and one of his hands fluttered out and caught hold of the end of Lola's piece of fur, and this he pressed to his lips. "Oh, my God," he said again, words failing.

And so Lola was rather glad when the cab drew up at the house in Dover Street.

A car arrived at the same time and honked impatiently and imperiously.

Simpkins leapt from the taxi and said, "Pull out of the way, quick." It did so. And as Lola descended and stood at the top of the area steps, she saw Fallaray go slowly up to the front door with rounded shoulders, as though he were Atlas with the weight of the world on his back. He was followed by a man whose step was light and eager.

## V

It was George Lytham.

The editor of a new weekly called *Reconstruction* which had not as yet done more than take its place among all those elder brothers on the bookstalls which were suffering from a combination of hardening of the arteries and shrinkage of the exchequer, Lytham was a live wire, a man who could make mistakes, eat his own words, and having gone halfway up the wrong road, turn around without giving a curse for what other men would call dignity and retrace his steps at a run. Eton and Balliol, he had been a wet-bob, had a chest like a prize fighter and a forearm as hard as a cricket bat. The third son of old Lord Lockinge, he had sat in the House as member for one of those agricultural constituencies which are too dull and scattered to attract Radical propagandists and nearly always plump for Unionism. He had quickly made his mark. *Punch* drew him in rowing shorts after his maiden speech and the Northcliff press made a point of referring to him as Young Lochinvar. But he had chucked the House in disgust after two years of it, one year of enormous enthusiasm during which he had worked like a dog and another year of sickly pessimism and disillusion brought about by contact with a set of political crows who fluttered over the carcass of England,—traditionless, illiterate, dishonest, of low minds and low accents, led by the Old Bad Men who had inherited the right or tricked their way to the front benches and had all died before the War but were still living and still clinging to office. He owed allegiance to no leader and had started *Reconstruction*, backed with the money of the great mine owners and merchants who should have been members of the Cabinet, for the purpose of cleaning out the Augean stables. He numbered among his contributors every political free-thinker in England,—ex-members of Parliament, ex-war correspondents who spoke with horror of brass hats, and men who had served in all capacities in the War and were, for that reason, determined to remove the frightful burden of taxation caused by the maintenance of a great war machine for the indulgence of escapades in Mesopotamia and Ireland.

Lytham was young,—not yet thirty-five; unmarried, so that his purpose was single, his time his own. His paper was his wife and he was out for blood,—not with a bludgeon, not with a gun, but with an intellect which, supported by other

intellects, alone provided some hope for the future of England and the Human Family. He had fastened upon Fallaray and dogged his heels. He regarded him as a brother, was ready to back him through thick and thin and had come home with him that night to discuss one or two of the great questions of the moment and to make plans for quick functioning.

When Fallaray led the way into his den and turned up the lights—all of them, so that there should be no shadows in the room and no ghosts—Lytham took his place with his back to the fire, standing in the frame of black oak like the picture of a crusader who had left his armor at home; he liked that room for its size and simplicity and tradition, its books and prints and unashamed early-Victorianism. He was as tall as Fallaray but not as thin and did not look as though the fires of his soul had burnt him down to the bone. His hair was brown and crisp and short, his moustache small, his nose straight and his eyes large and full of humor and irony. Except for his mouth there was nothing sensitive in his face and the only sign of restlessness that he permitted himself to show was in his habit of lighting one cigarette from the butt of another just finished,—the cheapest stinkers that were on the market and which had been smoked by the men of the regiment to which he had been attached from the beginning to the end of the War,—fags, in other words. His holder was far too long for the comfort of people who stood too close.

"Now, Fallaray," he said, "let's get down to it."

Fallaray sat on the edge of his desk which he gripped tight with both his hands. "I'm ready," he answered.

"The point is this. You have come out against reprisals, which means that you have dared to voice the overwhelming sentiment of the country at a moment when the Government has plumped for whole hoggism and given Sinn Fein its finest advertisement. So far so good. But this is only the beginning. To carry the thing on to its right conclusion, you must not only resign from the Cabinet but you must lead us to an immediate settlement of the Irish question. You must organize all that section of British opinion and American opinion—which counts for so much—and work for the overthrow of the coalition government. Will you do it?"

"Of course."

"Ah!"

"But wait a second. Here we are marching with France into Germany, occupying towns for the purpose of wringing out of these whimpering liars the fruits of victory which they say they cannot pay and which they may not be able to pay. Already the fires of Bolshevism are breaking out everywhere as a result. Are we to put the Irish question before one that is surrounded with the most amazing threads of difficulty and may lead to the death of Europe? In other words, my

dear Lytham, is murder and arson in one small island of greater importance to the world at this moment than the possibility of a new and even more terrible war in Europe, with disease and famine following at its heels? The men I have served with during the last war say 'no.' They have even gone so far as to dine here to-night with my wife to try and get her to move me out of what they call my rut,—to persuade me, because they have failed to do so, to shelve the Irish question and back up France in her perfectly righteous demand for reparations. I can't make up my mind whether I will see this German question through, or swing body and soul to the Irish question and handicap them in this new crisis. If you've got anything to say, for God's sake, say it."

For a moment Lytham had nothing to say. It did seem to him, as he stood there in that quiet room with all its books and with hardly a sound coming in from the street below, that the troubles of that green and egotistical island melted away before those which did not affect merely England and France and Germany, Austria, Russia, Poland, Belgium but America also. It did seem to him that the murder of a few Britishers, a handful of loyal Irishmen and the reprisals of the Black and Tans for cowardly ambushes, brutally carried out, were in the nature of a side show in a circus of shows, of a small family quarrel in a city of families who were up against a frightful epidemic,—and he didn't know what to say.

The two men looked into each other's eyes, searched each other's hearts and waited, listening, for an inspiration,—from God probably, whose children had become strangely out of hand.

Thus they stood, silent and without a sign, as others were standing,—bewildered, embarrassed, groping.

And then the door was flung open.

## VI

Feo Fallaray's ideas of evening clothes were curious. Her smock-frock, or wrapper, or whatever she called the thing, had a shimmer of green about it. Her stockings were green and she wore round her head a circlet of the most marvelous pieces of jade. The result was bizarre and made her look as though she were in fancy dress. She might have been an English Polaire ready to enter the smarter Bohemian circles of a London Montmartre. Or, to quote the remark of a woman in the opposite set, "a pre-Raphaelite flapper."

She drew up short on seeing Lytham. He was no friend of hers. He was far too normal, far too earnest, and both his hands were on the wheel. But with all the audacity of which she was past mistress, she gave him one of her widest smiles. "Oh, it's you," she said. "They told me some one was with my beloved

husband. Well, how's young Lochinvar?"

Lytham bowed profoundly and touched her hand with the tips of his fingers. "Very well, thank you," he said. How he detested green. If he had been married and his wife had dared to appear in such a frock, he would have returned her to her mother for good.

Fallaray rose from the desk on which he was sitting and walked to the farthest end of the room. There was no one in the world who gave him such a sense of irritation as this woman did.

"I'm not welcome, I know," said Feo, "but I thought you might like me to come and tell you what happened to-night, Arthur."

Fallaray turned, but did not look at her. "Thanks so much," he said. "Yes. You're very kind. I'm afraid you've been pretty badly bored."

She echoed the word, giving it all its dictionary interpretations and some which are certainly not in any dictionary.

"When I see those people," she said, "I marvel at our ever having got through the War. Well, the end of it is that I am to ask you to reconsider your attitude. The argument is that your secession puts them into the cart just at a moment when they think, rightly or wrongly, that they are forcing the fear of God into the Sinn Feiners. They can't imagine that my influence with you is absolutely nil, because they have the bourgeois idea of marriage and think that because two people are tied together by Church and law they must of necessity be in full sympathy. So all I can do is to make my report and add on my own account that I never saw such a set of petty opportunists in all my career."

Lytham gave her a match for the cigarette that she had put into a black holder with a narrow band of diamonds. "Did you give them any views of your own?" he asked.

[image]

*A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY.*

"Rather," she said, the light on her hair like moonlight on black water. "I held forth at length with my back to the fireplace. As a matter of fact, quite on the spur of the moment, I handed them a very brilliant idea."

"Yes?" It was a little incredulous.

"Yes, odd as it very obviously seems to you, Lochinvar. I said that I thought that this was the psychological moment for a nice piece of theatricality. I said that some one, probably Kipling, should draft a letter for the King, in which he should set forth the fact that he was going to withdraw every one of his soldiers

and all his officials from Ireland at once and leave the Irish to run themselves, giving them the same kind of dominion government that they have in Australia and Canada, wishing them Godspeed and a happy Easter,—a manly, colloquial letter, very simple and direct, and ending with a touch of real emotion, the sort of thing that the King would write on his own, better than any one."

There was a moment's pause, during which Lytham darted a quick look at Fallaray. A gleam came into the eyes of both men.

"What did they say to that?" he asked.

"My dear man, what do you suppose they said? Having no imagination and precious little knowledge of the facts of the case, they dragged in Ulster and talked about civil war, which I think is absurd, because already, as Arthur knows perfectly well, Ulster is feeling the pinch of the boycott and has deserted Carson to a man. They're longing for a settlement and only anxious to go on making bawbees in the good old Scotch Presbyterian manner.—They couldn't see, and I don't suppose they will ever be made to see, this lot, that a letter from the King would immediately have the effect of withdrawing all the sympathy from the Irish and reduce them from martyrs to the level of ordinary human beings. They couldn't see that every Irish grievance would be taken away in one fell swoop, that the priests would be left without a leg to stand on and that above all America would be the first to say 'Now show us.' It would be a frightful blow to Collins and de Valera and also to the Germans and the Sinn Feiners in the United States, and make all the world admire the British sense of sportsmanship,—which we have almost lost by everything that has been done during and since the War by our people in Ireland.—What do *you* think of it,—both of you?"

She threw her head back and waited for a scoffing laugh from Lytham and a look from her husband that would move her to ribaldry. Her long white neck rose out of her queer gown like a pillar, the pieces of jade in her hair shimmered oddly and there was the gleam of undergraduate ragging in her eyes.

Fallaray looked at his wife for the first time. "It was an inspiration," he said. "I confess that I have never thought of this solution."

Feo was amazed but bowed ironically. "Very generous, Arthur, very generous. I couldn't have been married to you all this time without having acquired a certain amount of intelligence, though, could I?" Even at such a moment she could not remain serious, although she was perfectly ready to confess to a considerable flutter of vanity at Fallaray's favorable comment.

"My God," said George Lytham, "it takes a woman to think of a thing like this."

"You'll make me swollen-headed in a moment, you two."

Lytham took no further notice of her. He strode over to Fallaray. "Could this be done? I quite agree with your wife in her interpretation of the effect of

such a letter and of course it could be made the sort of human document which would electrify the world. I agree, too, that once our soldiers were withdrawn with all the brass hats from the castle, the huge majority of reasonable Irishmen would insist on taking hold of things against the very small minority of Republicans who have merely used Ireland as a means of feathering their own nests, and be obliged to prove that they are fit to run their own country without bloody squabbles, cat-calling, filthy recriminations and all the other things for which they have earned a historical reputation. But—can it be done?"

Fallaray paced up and down the room with his hands clasped behind his back and his great shoulders rounded. Lytham and Lady Feo watched him. It was a peculiar moment. They both saw in it the test of Fallaray's imagination and, in a way, humor. They could see that he was looking at this thing from every possible angle, dissecting it as a chemist would dissect bad water. At last he gave a groan and stopped and faced them.

"Not with these men," he said. "Not with this political system, not in these times. Do you imagine for a moment that the present Cabinet holds a single man big enough, humble enough, patriotic enough to permit even the King to step on the stage and absorb the limelight? No. Not one. There is some microbe in the House of Commons, some atrocious cootie which gets under the skin of its members and poisons them so that they become the victims of a form of egomania of which they never can be cured. Then, too, my dear Lytham, we must get it into our heads that the Irish trouble is like a cancer in the body of the Constitution. We may hit upon a medicine that seems likely to give temporary relief—the withdrawal of the troops, the appointment of a new Lord Lieutenant, even the establishment of a Dominion Government—but we have got to remember that the hatred of the Irish for the English is fundamental and permanent. What may seem to us to-day to offer a solution to this age-old problem becomes futile and unworkable to-morrow. In our efforts to deal with the question we must not allow ourselves to be influenced by the quick transitory events that chase each other across the front pages of the paper. We must, if we can, go to the root of the malady,—the deep human emotion that burns in the hearts and souls of the Irish and endeavor to understand. Otherwise we are as children making foolish marks on shifting sand. What we write to-day is obliterated to-morrow."

He turned about, walked slowly over to the chair at his desk and dropped into it heavily, rising again immediately because Feo was standing.

Seeing which, and having an engagement to join Mrs. Malwood and several others at a private dance club, she made for the door. "Well," she said, "there it is. I did my best for you."

"An excellent best," said Fallaray. "Thank you again. Are you leaving us?"

She waved her hand, that long able hand which might have achieved good

things but for that fatal kink in her,—and went.

"Brilliant woman," said Fallaray. It was on the tip of Lytham's tongue to say "Brilliant what?" but he swallowed the remark.

And presently they heard Feo's high-pitched voice in the street below, giving an order to her chauffeur.

And they resumed the discussion, coming back always to the point from which they started. The Old Bad Man, shuffling, juggling, lying to others as well as themselves, without the sense to realize that something far worse than the War was coming hourly to a head, blocked every avenue of escape.

## VII

Lytham walked home in the small hours of that morning. He had the luck to live in the Albany, at the Piccadilly end. The streets, but for a silent-footed Bobby or two, were deserted. Even the night birds had given up hope and withdrawn to their various nests.

He wondered once more, as he went along, what on earth had made Fallaray marry Feo, of all women. It was one of his favorite forms of mental pastime to try and discover the reason of ninety-nine per cent, of the marriages which had come under his fairly intimate observation. It seemed to him, in reviewing the whole body of his friends, not only that every man had married the wrong woman but that every woman had married the wrong man.

There was his brother, for instance,—Charlie Lytham, master of foxhounds and one of the most good-natured creatures to be found on earth,—hearty, honest, charitable, full of laughter, a superb horseman, everybody's friend. For some unexplained and astounding reason he hadn't married one of the nice healthy English girls who rode and golfed and stumped about the countryside, perfectly content to live out of town for ten months of the year and enjoy a brief bust in London. He had been dragged to the altar by a woman who looked like a turkey and gobbled like one when she spoke, who wore the most impossible clothes with waggling feathers and rattling beads, spoke in a loud raucous voice and was as great a form of irritation to every one who came in contact with her as the siren of a factory. What was the idea?—Poor devil. He had condemned himself to penal servitude.

Then there was his sister, Helena Lytham, a beautiful decorative person born to play the queen in pageants and stand about as in a fresco in a rather thick nightgown which clung decorously to her Leightonian figure,—respectable but airy. On Lytham's return from Coblenz after the Armistice she had presented him to a little dapper person who barely came up to her shoulder, who smoked a

perpetual cigar out of the corner of his mouth, wore a waistcoat with a linoleum pattern, skin-tight trousers and boots with brown leather uppers. He realized George's idea of the riding master of a Margate livery stable. And so it went on all the way through.—And here was Fallaray.

The truth of the thing was that Fallaray had not married Lady Feo. Lady Feo had married Fallaray. What she had said to Mrs. Malwood was perfectly true. At eighteen her hobbies were profiles and tennis. At twenty-four Fallaray's profile was at its best. He looked like a Greek god, especially when he was playing tennis with a shirt open at the neck, and she had met him during the year that he had put up that superb fight against Wilding in the good old days. The fact that he was Arthur Fallaray, the son of a distinguished father, born and bred for a place on the front bench, a marked man already because of his speeches in the Oxford Union, didn't matter. His profile was the finest that she had seen and his tennis was in the championship class, and so she had deliberately gone for him, followed him from house party to house party with the sole intention of acquiring and possessing. At the end of six weeks she had got him. He had been obliged to kiss her. Her face had been purposely held in place to receive it. The rest was easy. Whereupon, she had immediately advertised the engagement broadcast, brought her relations down upon Fallaray in a swarm, sent paragraphs to the papers and made it literally impossible for the unfortunate man to do anything but go through with the damned thing like a gentleman,—dazed by the turn of events and totally unacquainted with the galloping creature who had seemed to him to resemble a thoroughbred but untrained yearling, kicking its heels about in a paddock. It had all been just a lark to her,—no more serious than collecting postage stamps, which eventually she could sell or give away. If ever she were to fall really in love, it would be perfectly simple, she had argued, either to be divorced or to juggle affairs so that she might divorce Fallaray. Any man who played tennis as well as he had done could do a little thing like that for her. The result was well known. A man of high ideals, Fallaray had gone through with this staggering marriage with every intention of making it work. Being in love with no other girl, he had determined to do his utmost to play the game and presently stand proudly among a little family of Fallarays. But he had found in Feo some one who had no standards, no sense of right and wrong, give and take; a girl who was a confirmed anarchist, who cared no more for law and order, Church and State or the fundamentals of *life*, *tradition*, *honor*, womanhood than an animal, a beautiful orang-outang, if there is such a thing, who or which delighted in hanging to branches by its tail and making weird grimaces at passers-by. The thing had been a tragedy, so far as Fallaray was concerned, an uncanny and terrible event in his life, almost in the nature of an incurable illness. The so-called honeymoon to which he never looked back, had been a nightmare filled with

scoffing laughter, brilliant and amazing remarks, out of which he had emerged in a state of mental chaos to plunge into work as an antidote. They had always lived under the same roof because it was necessary for a man who goes into politics to truckle to that curious form of hypocrisy which will never be eradicated from the British system. Her people and his people had demanded this, and his first constituency had made it a *sine qua non.* Not requiring much money, he had been and continued to be very generous in his allowance to his wife, who did not possess a cent of her own. On the contrary, it was frequently necessary for her to settle her brother's debts and even to pay her father's bills from time to time. The gallant old Marquis was without anything so bourgeois as the money sense and couldn't possibly play bridge under five pounds a thousand. There was also the system with which he had many times attempted to break the bank at Monte Carlo.

To-day, never interfering with her way of life and living in his own wing like a bachelor, he knew less of Feo's character than he did when she had caught him first. What he knew of her friendships and her peregrinations he got from the newspapers. When it was necessary to dine at his own table, he treated her as though she were one of his guests, or rather as though he were one of hers. There was no scandal attaching to his name, because women played absolutely no part in his life; and there was no actual scandal attaching to hers. Only notoriety. She had come to be looked upon by society and by the vast middle class who discussed society as a beautiful freak, an audacious strange creature who frittered away her gifts, who was the leader of a set of women of all ages, married and unmarried, who took an impish delight in flouting the conventions and believed that they established the proof of unusual intelligence by a self-conscious display of eccentricity.

## VIII

And in the meantime Lola continued to be an apt little pupil. Her quick ear had already enabled her to pick up the round crisp intonation of Lady Feo and her friends and at any moment of the day she could now give an exact imitation of their walk, manner of shaking hands and those characteristic tricks which made them different from all the women who had had the ill fortune to come into the world in the small streets.

Up in the servant's bedroom in Dover Street, before a square of mirror, Lola practised and rehearsed for her eventual debut,—the form of which was on the knees of the gods. She had entered her term of apprenticeship quite prepared to serve conscientiously for at least a year,—a long probation for one so young and

eager. Probably she would have continued to study and listen and watch, with gathering impatience, but for a sudden hurrying forward of the clock brought about by the gift of a frock,—rustling with silk. A failure, because the dressmaker, with the ineffable cheek of these people, had entirely departed from Feo's rigid requirements, it provided Lola with the key to life. Giving one yell at the sight of it, Feo was just about to rip it in pieces when she caught the longing eyes of her maid. Whereupon, with the generosity which is so easy when it is done with other people's money, she said, "Coming over," rolled it into a ball and threw it at Lola. It was, as may be imagined, a very charming and reasonable garment such as might have been worn by a perfectly respectable person.

On her way home that night, Lola dropped in to her own little dressmaker who lived in one of the numerous dismal villas off Queen's Road, for the purpose of having it altered to fit her. It was miles too large. She had eventually brought it back to Dover Street and hidden it away behind one of her day frocks in her only cupboard, and every time that she took a peep at it, her eyes sparkled and her breath came short and she wondered when and how she could possibly wear it.

Filled with a great longing to try her wings and fly out of the cage like the canary of which she had spoken to Ernest Treadwell, there were moments in her life now when she was consumed with impatience. The poet of the public library, the illiterate and ecstatic valet, the pompous butler and the two cockney footmen,—she had grown beyond all these. She was absolutely sure of herself as an honorary member of the Feo "gang." She felt that she could hold her own now with the men of their class. If she were right, her apprenticeship would be over. Fully fledged, she could proceed with her great scheme. The chance came as chances always do come, and as usual she took it.

Several days after Lytham's talk with Fallaray—which had left them both in that state of irresolution which seemed to have infected every one—Lady Feo went off for the week-end, leaving Lola behind. The party had been arranged on the spur of the moment and was to take place in a cottage with a limited number of bedrooms. If Lady Feo had given the thing a moment's thought, she would have told Lola to take three days holiday. But this she had forgotten to do. And so there was Lola in Dover Street with idle hands. The devil finds some mischief still——

At four o'clock that evening Simpkins entered the servants' sitting room. Lola happened to be alone, surrounded by *Tatlers*, *Punches* and *Bystanders*, fretting a little and longing to try her paces. "Good old," he said, "Mr. Fallaray has got to dine at the Savoy to-night with his Ma and Auntie from the country. One of them family affairs which, not coming too frequently, does him good. And you're free. How about another show, Princess?" He had recently taken to call-

ing her princess. "There's another American play on which ain't bad, I hear. Let's sample it. What do you say?"

Mr. Fallaray.—The Savoy——

Without giving the matter an instant's thought, Lola shook her head. "*Too bad, Simpky,*" she said, "I promised Mother to go home to-night. She has some friends coming and I am going to help her."

"Oh," said Simpkins, extremely disappointed. "Well, then, I'll take you 'ome and if I'm very good and put on a new tie I may be asked,—I say I may——" He paused, having dropped what he considered to be a delicate hint.

This was a most awkward moment. Mr. Fallaray—The Savoy—That new frock. And here was Simpkins butting in and standing with his head craned forward as if to meet the invitation halfway. So she said, as cool as a cucumber, "Mother will be very disappointed not to be able to ask you, Simpky, because she likes you so much. She enjoyed both times you came home with me. So did Father. But, you see, our drawing-room is very small and Mother has asked too many people as it is. Get tickets for tomorrow night and I shall be very glad to go with you."

There was no guile in Lola's eye and not the smallest hesitation in her speech. Simpkins bore up bravely. He knew these parties and the way in which some hostesses allowed their rooms to brim over. And, anyway, it was much better to have Lola all to himself. He could live for Saturday. "Righto," he said. "Let me know when you're ready to go and if you feel like a taxicab——"

"I couldn't think of it," said Lola. "You spend much too much money, Simpky. You're an absolute profiteer. I shall go by Tube and this time a friend of mine is fetching me."

"Treadwell?" She nodded and calmly examined a picture of Lopodoski in one of her latest contortions.

There was a black cloud on Simpkins's face. He had met Ernest at the Breezys' house. He had seen the way in which this boy gazed at Lola,—lanky, uncouth, socialistic young cub. He was not jealous, good Lord, no. That would be absurd. A junior librarian with a salary that was far less than any plumber got, and him a man of means with the "Black Bull" at Wargrave on the horizon. All the same, if he heard that Ernest Treadwell had suddenly been run over by a pantechnicon and flattened out like a frog——

And that was why he sat down on the sofa a little too close to Lola and dared to possess himself of her hand. "Princess,—you know 'ow I feel. You know what you've done to me."

Lola patted his hand and gave it back and rewarded him with a smile which she considered to be matronly. "Nice Simpky," she said. "Very nice Simpky," as though he were a rather faulty terrier a little too keen on the thrown stick. "I

must go now," she added and rose. "I have some sewing to do for Lady Feo."

And as Simpkins watched her go, his whole heart swelled, and something went to his head that blurred everything for a moment. He would sell his soul for that girl. For her sake he would even set light to the "Black Bull" and watch it burn, if that would give her a moment's amusement.

Mr. Fallaray.—The Savoy——

What Lola did in Lady Feo's room was not to sew but to seat herself at the dressing table, do her hair with the greatest care and practise with the make-up sticks,—rouge, and the brush of water colors with which she emphasized her eyebrows. Finally, time having flown, she borrowed a pair of lace stockings, some shoes and gloves, made her way stealthily along the servants' corridor to her own room, and packed them, with the new frock, into a cardboard box. Dressed and hatted for the street, she carried the magic costume in which she was going to transplant herself from Cinderella's kitchen to the palace of the Prince and went down to the servants' sitting room through which it was necessary for her to go in order to escape.

Miss Breezy was there, issuing, as she would have said, orders to one of the housemaids. That was lucky. It saved Lola from answering an outburst of questions. As it was, she gave a little bow to her aunt, said "Good evening, Miss Breezy," opened the door and nipped up the area steps into the street. A little involuntary laugh floated behind her like the petals of a rose. A prowling taxi caught her eye. She nodded and was in before any one could say Jack Robinson,—if any one now remembers the name of that mystic early Victorian.

The address she gave was 22 Castleton Terrace, Bayswater.

Mr. Fallaray.—The Savoy!

## IX

"My word," said Mrs. Rumbold, getting up from her knees and taking a pin out of her mouth. "I never see anything like it before. It's my opinion that you could 'old your own in that frock with any of the best, my dear. It's so quiet—yet so compelling. The best of taste. If I see you coming down the steps of the Ritz, I should nudge the person I was with and say, 'Duke's daughter. French mother probably.'"

"Thank you," said Lola. And that was exactly how she felt. Carried forward on the current of her impatience, she didn't stop to ask herself what was the use of going to the Savoy, of all places, alone,—the danger, the absurdity. "I wonder if you'll be so kind as to fold up my day dress, put it in the box and string it up. You're sure you'll be up as late as half-past eleven? If so, it won't take me a

moment to change and I'll leave the evening dress here."

"Oh, that'll be all right," said Mrs. Rumbold. "I shall be up, my dear. The old man's going to a dinner and will come staggering back later than that. He'll be a regular Mason to-night, bless him." And she stood back, looked Lola all over with the greatest admiration and a certain amount of personal pride. She was a good dressmaker, no doubt about it. An awful lot of stuff had had to be taken out of that frock. It must have been made for a woman with the shoulders of a rowing man. It wasn't for her to ask what the little game was, to inquire why a lady's maid was going out on the sly, looking like her mistress. She had her living to make and dressmaking was a precarious livelihood in these times. "Have a good evening, my dear," she said; "enjoy yourself. Only live once, yer know." And added inwardly, "And I'll lay you'll manage to do yourself pretty well,—a lot better than most, with that face and figure and the style and all. Lord, but how you've come on since I see yer last. All the zwar-zwar of the reg'ler thing, sweep-me-bob."

The taxi was still waiting at the door, ticking up sixpences, but in Lola's pocket was a little purse bulging with her savings. She turned at the door. "Mrs. Rumbold," she said, and it might have been Lady Feo who was speaking, "you certainly are one in a million."

There was a sudden cry of despair.

"Lord 'a' mercy, what's the trouble?"

Lola had become herself again, a tragic, large-eyed self. "I can't go like this," she said. "I have no evening cloak." The whole framework of her adventure flapped like the sides of a tent in a high wind.

"My dear!" cried Mrs. Rumbold. "Well, there's a nice lookout. What in the world's to be done?"

Fallaray.—The Savoy——

"Wait a second. I've got an idea." The woman with tousled hair made a dart at a curtain which was stretched across one of the corners of her workroom. She emerged immediately with something thin and black which gleamed here and there with silver. "Put that on," she said. "I've just made it for Mrs. Wimpole in Inverness Terrace. She won't be calling for it until to-morrer. If you'll promise to bring it back safe——"

All Lola's confidence returned and a smile of triumph came into her face. "That will do nicely," she said, and placed herself to receive the borrowed garment. A quick glance in the mirror showed her that if it wasn't exactly the sort of thing that she would have chosen, it passed.

"You're a brick, Mrs. Rumbold, a perfect brick. I can't tell you how grateful I am." And she bent forward and touched the withered cheek with her lips. One of these days she would do something for this hard-working woman whose eldest

boy sat legless in the back parlor,—something which would relieve the great and persistent strain which followed her from one plucky day to another.

And then, pausing for a moment on the top of the steps in order to make sure that there was no one in the street who could recognize her—Queen's Road was only just round the corner—Lola ran down and put her hand on the door of the taxi cab.

"The Savoy," she said.

# PART III

## I

Sir Peter Chalfont's cork arm had become one of the institutions of the town. Long ago the grimness had gone out of everybody's laughter at the tricks he played with it,—presenting it with the palm the wrong way, making it squeak suddenly and wagging it about from the wrist as a greeting to his friends. Every one had grown accustomed to his frequent changes of gloves and his habit of appearing at dinner with those dreadful stiff fingers in white buckskin. He had indeed trained the thing to perform as though it were an animal and he could do almost anything with it except tie a dress tie. That was beyond him.

At quarter to eight on the evening of Lola's first dip into life, he turned away from the telephone and presented himself to the man who had been his batman during the last year of the War. He had had three since the miracle of the Marne. He was rather bored because he had just been told by the girl who had promised to dine with him that she didn't feel like eating and he knew that meant that some one else had cropped up who was more amusing than himself. He had a great mind to give the Savoy a wide berth and walk round to Boodles and have dinner with the *Pall Mall Gazette.* But on second thoughts the idea of accompanying his cold salmon and cucumber with the accumulating mass of depressing evidence of the world's unrest, as set forth in the evening paper, appalled him. Charles was trying to edge his way back into Hungary. The Russian Reds were emptying their poison all over the map. English miners had gone out on strike and with

a callousness altogether criminal had left the pumps unmanned. Viviani had landed in the United States to endeavor to prove to the new President that if he did not jerk the Senate out of Main Street he would inevitably sentence Europe to death. And Lloyd George, even to the amazement of those who knew him best, was continuing his game of poker with Lenin and Trotsky.

It couldn't be done. And so, his tie duly tied by the clumsy-fingered man who had received lessons from a shop in the Burlington Arcade, the gallant Peter left his rooms in Park Place and stood on the curb in St. James's Street. Should he walk or drive? Should he try to raise a friend equally at a loose end, or carry on alone? How he missed his dear old father, who, until the day of his peaceful death, was always ready to join him in a cheery dinner at the Marlborough or the Orleans or at one of the hotels where he could see the pretty girls. After all, dining at the Savoy was not such a lonely proceeding as it seemed. Among the profiteers and the new rich there might be a familiar face. And there was at any rate an orchestra. With a dump hat at an angle of forty-five and a light overcoat over his dinner jacket, he was a mark for all the prowling cabs which found business worse than usual. Two or three of them knew this tall wiry man and had served in his Division. One of the youngest of the Brigadier Generals in the British Army, he had worn his brass hat as though it were the cap of a man with one pip; they loved him for that and any day and any night would cheerfully have followed him to hell. Many of them had called him "Beauty Chalfont," which had made him uncomfortable. It was better than "Bloody" Chalfont or "Butcher" Chalfont,—adjectives that had been rather too freely applied to some of his brother Brigadiers. So far as the majority of passers-by were concerned, this man to whom willing hands had gone up in salute and who had turned out to be a born soldier was, like so many demobilized officers all over the country, of no account, a nobody, his name and his services forgotten.

The pre-war cheeriness which had belonged to the Savoy was absent now. Chorus ladies and Guards officers, baby-faced foreign office clerks and members of the Bachelors, famous artists and dramatists and the ubiquitous creatures who put together the musical potpourris of the town, beautiful ladies of doubtful reputation and highly respectable ones without quite so much beauty no longer jostled the traveling Americans, tennis-playing Greeks and Indian rajahs in the foyer. Chalfont marched in to find the place filled with wrongly dressed men with plebeian legs and strange women who seemed to have been dug out of the residential end of factory cities. Their pearls and diamonds were almost enough to stir Bolshevism in the souls of curates.

Shedding his coat and hat and taking a ticket from a flunkey, on whose chest there was a line of ribbons, he looked across the long vista of intervening space to the dining room. The band was playing "Avalon" and a buzz of conversation

went up in the tobacco smoke. What was the name of that cheery little soul who had dined with him in March, 1914? March, 1914. He had been a happy-go-lucky Captain in the 21st Lancers in those days, drawing a generous allowance from the old man and squeezing every ounce of fun out of life. The years between had brought him up against the sort of realities that he did not care to think about when left without companionship and occupation. Two younger brothers dead and nearly all his pals.—Just as he was about to go down the stairs and be conducted to one of the small tables in the draught he saw a girl in a black cloak with touches of silver on it standing alone, large-eyed, her butter-colored hair gleaming in the light, and caught his breath. "Jumping Joseph," he said to himself, "look at that," and was rooted to the floor.

It was Lola, as scared as a child in the middle of traffic, a rabbit among a pack of hounds, asking herself, cold and hot by turns, what she had done—oh, what—by coming to that place with no one to look after her, wishing and wishing that the floor would open up and let her into a tunnel which would lead her out to the back room of the nerve-wrung dressmaker. Every passing man who looked her up and down and every woman who turned her head over her shoulder added stone after stone to the pile of her folly, so childish, so laughable, so stupendous. How could she have been such a fool,—the canary so far away from the safety of its cage.

Chalfont looked again. "She's been let down by somebody," he thought. "What sort of blighter is it who wouldn't break his neck to be on the steps to meet such a—perfectly——All these cursed eyes, greedily signaling. What's to be done?"

And as he stood there, turning it all over, his chivalry stirred, Lola came slowly out of her panic. If only Mrs. Rumbold had asked her with whom she was going, if only she had had, somewhere in all the world, one sophisticated friend to tell her that such a step as this was false and might be fatal. The way out was to stand for one more moment and look as though her escort were late, or had been obliged to go to the telephone, and then face the fact that in her utter and appalling ignorance she had made a mistake, slip away, drive back to that dismal Terrace and change into her Cinderella clothes. Ecstasy approaching madness must have made her suppose that all she had to do was to sail in to this hotel in Lady Feo's frock and all the rest would follow,—that looking, as well as feeling "a lady" now and loving like a woman, something would go out from her soul—a little call—and Fallaray would rise and come to her. Mr. Fallaray. The Savoy. They were far, far out of her reach. Her heart was in her borrowed shoes. And then she became aware of Chalfont, met his eyes and saw in them sympathy and concern and understanding. And what was more, she knew this man. Yes, she did. He was no stranger; she had seen him often,—that very day. It was a rescue!

A friendly smile curled up her lips.

Chalfont maintained his balance. Training told. He gave it fifty seconds—fifty extraordinary seconds—during which he asked himself, "Is she—or not?" Deciding not by a unanimous vote, he went across to her and bowed. "I'm awfully afraid that something must have happened. Can I be of use to you?"

"I'm longing for asparagus," said Lola in the manner of an old friend.

"That's perfectly simple," said Chalfont, blinking just once. "I'm alone, you're alone, and asparagus ought to be good just now."

"Suppose we go in then," said Lola, buying the hotel, her blood dancing, her eyes all free from fright. She was perfectly happy in the presence of this man because she recognized in him immediately a modern version of the Chevalier who had so frequently brought her bonbons to her room at Versailles which overlooked the back yard of Queen's Road, Bayswater.

"My name's Chalfont, Peter Chalfont." A rigid conventionality sat on his shoulders.

"I know," she said, and added without a moment's hesitation, "I am Madame de Brézé." And then she knew how she knew. How useful was the Tatler. Before the War, during the War, after the War, the eyes of this man had stared at her from its pages in the same spirit of protection. That very afternoon she had paused at his photograph taken in hunting kit, sitting on his horse beside the Prince of Wales, underneath which was printed, "Sir Peter Chalfont, Bart. V. C. Late Brigadier General,"—and somewhere among that crowd was Fallaray.

## II

As they went down the red-carpeted stairs and passed through what Peter called "the monkey house," the people who had dined at a cheap restaurant and now at the cost of a cup of coffee were there to watch the menagerie followed Lola with eager eyes. Some of them recognized Chalfont. But who was she? A chorus girl? No. A sister? He was certainly not wearing a brotherly expression. A lady? Obviously, and one who could afford not to wear a single jewel. What a refreshing contrast to the wives of profiteers. And she was so young, so finished,—a Personality. Even Grosvenor Bones, the man who made it his duty to know everybody and supplied the *Daily Looking Glass* with illiterate little paragraphs, was puzzled and, like a dramatic critic who sees something really original and faultless, startled, disconcerted.

Feeling her own pulse as she passed through the avenue of stares, Lola was amazed to find that her heart-beats were normal, that she was not in the least excited or frightened or uncertain of herself any longer. She felt, indeed—and

commented inwardly on the fact—as though dinner at the Savoy were part of her usual routine, and that Peter Chalfont was merely Albert Simpkins or Ernest Treadwell in a better coat and cast in a rarer mold. How Chalfont would have laughed if she had told him this. She felt, as a matter of fact, like a girl who was playing a leading part on the London stage as a dark horse, but who had in reality gained enormous experience in a repertory company in the Provinces. She thanked her stars that she had indulged in her private game for so long a time.

The bandmaster, a glossy person with a roving and precocious eye, bent double, violin and all, and signaled congratulations to Chalfont with ears and eyes, eyebrows and mouth. He had the impertinence of a successful jockey. A head waiter came to the entrance of the dining room and washed his hands,—his face wearing his best bedside manner. "For two, Sir Peter?" he asked, as though he were not quite sure that some miracle might not break them into three. And Peter nodded. But Lola was not to be hurried off to the first of the disengaged tables. Fallaray was somewhere in the room and her scheme was, if possible, to sit at a table well within his line of vision. She laid the tips of her fingers on Chalfont's arm and inspected the room.—There was Fallaray, as noticeable in that heterogeneous crowd as a Rodin figure among the efforts of amateur sculptors. "That table," she said to the head waiter and indicated one placed against a pillar. One or two of Chalfont's friends S. O. S.'d to him as he followed the young, slim erect figure across the maze. Luck with her once more, Lola found herself face to face with Fallaray, only two tables intervening. She decided that the charming old lady was his mother. The other had no interest for her.

A thousand questions ran through Chalfont's head. Madame de Brézé.—Widow of one of the gallant Frenchmen who had been killed in the War, or the wife, let down by her lover, of an elderly Parisian blood? He would bet his life against the latter conjecture, and the first did not seem to be possible because he had never seen any face so free from grief, pain or suffering. De Brézé. The name conveyed nothing. He had never heard it before. It had a good ring about it. But how was it that this girl talked English as well as his sister? She looked French. She wore her dress like a Frenchwoman. There was something about the neatness of her hair which Frenchwomen alone achieve. Probably educated in England. He was delighted with her acceptance of the situation. That was decidedly French. An English girl, even in these days, would either have frozen him to his shoes or lent to the episode a forced note of irregularity which would have made it tiresome and tasteless.

It was not until after the asparagus had arrived that Lola succeeded in catching Fallaray's eyes. They looked at her for a moment as though she were merely a necessary piece of hotel decoration and wandered off. But to her intense and

indescribable joy, they returned and remained and something came into them which showed her that he had focused them upon her as a human being and a woman. She saw that he wore the expression of a man who had suddenly heard the loud ringing of a bell, an alarm bell. And then, having seen that his stare had been noticed, he never looked again.

The rustle of silk!—The rustle of silk!

And presently, Chalfont being silent, she leant forward and spoke in a low voice. Luckily the band was not playing a jazz tune but at the request of some old-fashioned person Massenet's "Elegy." She said, "Sir Peter, will you do something for me?" And he replied, "Anything under the sun." "Well, then, will you introduce me to Mr. Fallaray before he leaves the room? He's at a table just behind you. I admire him so much. It would be a great—the greatest——"

Her voice broke and a flush ran up to her hair, and something came into her eyes that made them look like stars.

Luckily Chalfont was not looking at her face. Her request was a large order, and as usual when puzzled,—he was never disconcerted—he began twisting about his comic cork hand. "Fallaray?" he said, and raised his eyebrows. "Of course, I'd love to do it for you. I know him as well as anybody else does, I suppose—I mean ordinary people. But he doesn't remember me from Adam. He passed me to-night in the foyer, for instance, and looked clean through my head. I had to put up my hand to see that I hadn't left it at home. He's the only man, except the sweep who used to come to our house when I was a kid, of whom I've ever been afraid. However—you wish it and the thing must be done." And he gave her a little bow.

Lola could see that she had given her new friend a task from which he would do almost anything to escape. After all, there was not much in common between Fallaray, whose nose was at the grindstone, and Peter Chalfont, who had nothing to do but kill time. But she must meet Fallaray that night. It was written. Every man was a stepping-stone to this one man who needed her so, but did not know her yet. Therefore, with a touch of ruthlessness that came to her directly from her famous ancestress, she thanked him and added, "It can be managed near the place where you put your hat and coat."

Chalfont was amused and interested and even perhaps a little astonished at this pretty young thing who had the ways of a woman of the world. "I agree with you," he said, "but——" and looked at the menu.

Lola shook her head. "I hate buts. They are at the meat course and we've only just begun. Dinner doesn't really interest you and I'm a mere canary. The moment they rise from the table we can make a quick exit." It was on the tip of her tongue to quote Simpkins and say "nick out."

Chalfont grinned, pounced upon his roll and started to eat. "After all," he

said, "it will give me an admirable opportunity of inviting you to supper. Keep an eye on the old birds and as soon as they show a disposition to evacuate the situation we'll limber up and wait for them in the foyer. He's a hero of yours. Is that the idea?"

"Yes," she said simply.

"Do you happen to know Lady Feo?"

"Very well, indeed. She has been very kind to me. I like her."

Chalfont shifted his shoulders. That was quite enough. "Are you going to give me the whole of the evening?" he asked. "Or will that escort of yours show up sooner or later and claim you?"

"He's as good as dead, as far as I'm concerned. What do you suggest?"

He bent forward eagerly. "I dunno. A show of sorts. Not the theater. I can't stand that. We might drop into one of the Reviews or see what they are doing at the Coliseum. I love the red-nosed comedian who falls over a pin and breaks a million plates in an agony of economical terror. Do you like that sort of thing?"

Lola's experience of Reviews and Variety entertainments was limited to Hammersmith and the suburbs. "You're going to do something for me," she said, "so I am perfectly ready to do something for you. I'm rather keen about give and take."

Which was good hearing for Chalfont. He hadn't met many women who understood that golden rule. He could see even then that the little de Brézé was going to play ducks and drakes with his future plans, put him to a considerable amount of inconvenience and probably keep him hanging about town,—for which he had very little use now that the sun was shining. Already Lola's attraction had begun its disturbing effect. He was on the verge of becoming brother of a valet, a butler, two footmen and the Lord knew how many of the hobble-de-hoys of Queen's Road, Bayswater.

The fish came and they both fell to,—Lola watching Fallaray's table keenly. "I saw a rather decent photograph of you in the *Tatler* to-day," she said. It might have been Feo who spoke. "You won the point to point, didn't you?"

"I did," said Chalfont. "But I should have been beaten by the Boy if I hadn't had a better horse. He rode like the devil."

"You don't think that point to points are rather playing the fool just now, then?" The question came quietly but had the effect of making Chalfont suspend his fork in mid-air.

"Yes. I do. But under the present system what is the ordinary plain man to do but stand aside and watch our political muddlers mess everything up? I was asked to rejoin and take over a district in Ireland. Not me. I could see myself raising Cain in about ten minutes and washed out at the end of a week. Soldiers aren't required in Ireland."

"No?"

"No. Nor policemen, nor machine guns. Ireland stands in need of a little man with an Irish accent and the soul of Christ."

Lola rose to her feet. Fallaray had done the same thing and was bending over his mother.

And so Chalfont with, it must be confessed, a slightly rueful glance at his plate, told the waiter to give his bill to his chief, and followed Madame de Brézé along the lane between the tables and up the long path of the "monkey house." And presently, when Fallaray gave his number to the flunkey and waited for his coat and hat, Chalfont carried out his orders. He went forward. "How do you do?" he said. "Wonderful weather." It was a little lame.

Fallaray did not recognize the speaker except as a man who obviously had been a soldier. A left hand had been presented. The other was eloquent enough. "How are you?" he replied. "Yes, it *is* wonderful weather."

And then Chalfont made the plunge. "I want to introduce you, if I may, to one of our Allies who admires you very much, Madame de Brézé—Mr. Fallaray."

Fallaray turned. From the little eager hand that nestled into his own Lola sent a message of all the hero-worship and adoration that possessed her soul and all the desire to serve and love that had become the one overwhelming passion of her life. But neither spoke.

A moment later she was standing with Peter Chalfont, watching Fallaray on his way out with the two little ladies.—Her heart was fluttering like the wings of a bird.

But half-way through the evening, after having been swept away by Tschaikowsky's "Francesca da Rimini" and the Fantasy from "Romeo and Juliet" and stirred deeply by Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries," Fallaray underwent a strange and disconcerting experience. Leaving his place between his mother and old Lady Ladbroke, he went to smoke a cigarette in the foyer of the hall during the intermission. The music had gone to his brain and driven out of it for the moment the anxieties that beset him. All the vibrations of that wonderful orchestra flew about him like a million birds and the sense of sex that he had got from Lola's touch ran through his veins.

He went through the swing-doors and out onto the steps of the building. It was one of those wonderful nights which come sometimes in April and touch the city with magic. It was like the advance guard of June bringing with it the warmth and the scents of that exquisite month. The sky was clear and almost Italian, and the moonlight lay like snow on the roofs. It cast long shadows across the street. Fallaray looked up at the stars and a new and curious thrill of youth ran through him and a sort of impatience at having missed something—he hardly knew what. Wherever he looked he seemed to see two wide-apart eyes filled with adoration

and longing and a little red mouth half open. "De Brézé," he said to himself. "De Brézé." And the name seemed to hold romance and to carry his thoughts out of London, out of the present and back to the times of beflowered garments and powdered heads, of minuets and high red heels.

And as he stood there, far away from the bewilderment and futility of Parliament, a car drove up to the hall and two women got out. They were Mrs. Malwood and Feo and they were dressed in country clothes—the curious country clothes affected by them both. Mrs. Malwood, who was laughing and excited, passed Fallaray without noticing him and entered the building. But Feo drew up short in front of him, amazed at his expression. "Good Lord, Arthur," she said, "what are you doing here and what on earth are you thinking about?"

Music and the stars and Lola were in his eyes as he looked at her. "I thought you were in the country," he said.

"I was. I shall be again in an hour or two. In the middle of dinner I suddenly remembered that a protégé of mine, Leo Kirosch, was to sing here to-night. So I dashed up. He's in the second part of the program, so I shall be in time to hear him. It entirely rotted the party, but that couldn't be helped."

She had never seen that look in Fallaray's eyes before and was intrigued. It had never been brought to life by her. Could it be possible that this Quixote, this St. Anthony, had looked at last upon the flesh pots? What fun if he had! How delicious was the mere vague idea of Fallaray, of all men, being touched by anything so ordinary and human as love, and how vastly amusing that she, who had worked herself into a sort of half belief that she was attracted by this young Polish singer, should now stand face to face with the man to whom she was tied by law, though by no other bonds. The dash up from the country was worth it even though she had risen unsatisfied from dinner and missed her coffee and cognac.... Or was it that she herself, having dropped from the clouds, and looking as she knew she did, more beautiful and fresh than usual because of her imaginary love affair with this long-haired youth who sang like a thrush, had brought this unaccustomed look into her husband's eyes?... How very amusing!

"Do you mean to say that having only driven down this afternoon to the country, you've come all the way up again just to hear two or three songs?"

"I do," she said. "Mad, isn't it? 'That crazy woman Feo on the rampage again.' Is that what you're thinking?"

"Something like that," he answered, and smiled at her. He felt queerly and charmingly young that night and lenient and rather in sympathy with madness. The Cromwellianism in which he had wrapped himself had fallen temporarily from his shoulders. He put his hand under her elbow and brought her up to the top step on a level with himself.

"My God," thought Lady Feo, "the man's alive for once. He tingles. I *must* be

looking well." What did it matter if Leo Kirosch was singing and she would miss his songs? It was much better sport to stand on the steps of that old building and flirt with her husband. She took his arm and stood close against him and looked up into his face with her most winning smile. "It gave me the shock of my life to see you here," she said. "I didn't know that you had a penchant for these suburban orgies. Who are you with?"

"My mother and Aunt Betsy."

Under any other circumstances Feo would have thrown back her head and laughed derisively. Those two old birds. Instead of which she snuggled a little closer just to see the effect. It was ages since she had treated this man to anything in the nature of familiarity, in fact it was the first time since that night when she had made him kiss her because his profile and his tennis playing had obsessed her.

"After you've taken them home," she said, "why not motor back with us? It's a gorgeous night, and the Eliots' cottage is high up on a range of hills almost within reaching distance of the stars."

Her grotesque sense of humor carried her away. How immense it would be to tempt this man out of the stony path of duty and see what he would do. What a story for her little friends! What screams of mirth she could evoke in her recital of so amazing an event, especially as she could dress it all up as she alone knew so well how to do! And then to be able to add to it all the indignant broken English of Kirosch at finding himself deserted. He had promised to sing to her that night. What a frightfully funny story.

For a moment or two, with the intoxication of music and of those wide-apart eyes still upon him, Fallaray stood closer to his wife than he had ever been. It seemed to him that she had grown softer and sweeter and he was surprised and full of wonder, until he remembered that she had come to see Kirosch, whom she called her protégé—and then he understood.

Mrs. Malwood came out and luckily broke things up. "He's singing," she said. "Aren't you coming in? Good heavens, Feo, what the deuce are you playing at? You've dragged me up and ruined everything, only to miss the very thing you seemed so keen to hear. What is the idea?" She recognized Fallaray and said, "Oh, it's you."

And he bowed and got away—that kink in Feo's nature was all across her face like a birthmark.

And when Feo looked again, she saw in Fallaray's eyes once more the old aloofness, the old dislike. And she laughed and threw back her head. "*Cherchez la femme*," she said. "One of these days I'll get you to tell me why you looked like that." And she disappeared with Mrs. Malwood to smile down on Kirosch from her seat near the platform.

And Fallaray remained out under the stars, his intoxication all gone. Nowhere could he see and nowhere did he wish to see those wide-apart eyes with their adoration. The tingle of that little hand had left him. And just as he turned to go back into the building a newspaper boy darted out to a side street with a shrill raucous cry, "Speshall. Mines Floodin'. Riots in Wales. Speshall."

## III

The tears that blinded her eyes had gone when Chalfont came back from the cloakroom. He saw on Lola's face a smile that made him think of sunlight on a bank of primroses.

But they didn't go to the Coliseum, after all. It so happened that just as they were about to leave the Savoy, Chalfont was pounced upon by a little woman, the sight of whom made Lola long to burst into a laugh. She was amazingly fat, almost as fat indeed as one of those pathetic women who go round with circuses and sit in a tent all by themselves dressed in tinsel and present an unbelievable leg to gaping yokels and say, "Pinch it, dearie, and see for yourself." Her good-natured face, with eyes as blue as birds' eggs, ran down into three double chins. It was crowned with a mass of hair dyed a brilliant yellow, the roots of which grew blackly like last year's leaves under spring's carpet. With an inconceivable lack of humor she was dressed like a flapper. She was a comic note in a tragic world. "Oh, hello, Peter," she said. "You bad boy, you've deserted me," and then she looked at Lola with a beaming smile of appreciation and added, "No wonder."

More than a little annoyed, because the one thing that he most wanted was to keep Lola to himself, Peter presented his cork hand. "I've been in the country," he said. "I'm awfully sorry I had to miss your party. Lady Cheyne—Madame de Brézé."

"There, I knew you were French. I've been betting on it ever since you came in. We could see you two from our table." She waved her hand towards a group of six or seven people who were standing at the top of the stairs. "Come along home with me now," she said. "We're going to have some music. I've got a new Russian violinist—you needn't be afraid, he's been thoroughly disinfected—and a dear thing who sings the roof off. I can't pronounce her name. It's a cross between a sneeze and an oath. I believe she comes from Czecho-Slovakia. Also I've got Alton Cartridge, the poet. He's going to read one of his latest effusions. He's the great futurist, you know. That is, he doesn't bother himself about rhymes and not very much about reason. Why don't you both come?"

Chalfont looked quickly at Lola and signaled, "For God's sake, no."

So she said, "I should love to." The name and fame of Lady Cheyne was

well known to her through the medium of the "Letters of Evelyn."

"That's very sweet of you, my dear. One hundred Kensington Gore. Memorize it, because I know that Peter will forget. He always does. We can't raise a car between us so we're all going in taxis. See you later then."

She squeezed Lola's hand, nodded roguishly at Peter and bounced away to join her friends, watched hypnotically by people on their way out who, although she was one of London's landmarks, had never seen her before.

Chalfont was abominably disappointed. It would have been so jolly to have had Lola all to himself. "Wasn't that rather unkind of you?" he asked.

"Yes," said Lola, "it was, but I couldn't resist the chance to see Lady Cheyne at home and discover if all the stories about her are true. I'm so sorry, but after all we can do the Coliseum another night."

"Oh, well, then, that's all right." He brightened up considerably. "Probably you will be more amused at number One Hundred than you would have been at the Coliseum. Poppy manages to surround herself with all the latest freaks." He led her out, captured a cab and gave the man the address.

"Tell me about her," said Lola. "You know her very well, it seems."

"No, I don't. I've only met her twice. She arrives at Christian names within half an hour. She calls herself the mother of thousands, and is, although she's never had a child of her own. Nobody knows who she was before she married Sir William Cheyne, the contractor, but it's generally believed that she's the daughter of a country parson brought up between the Bible and the kitchen garden. She tells everybody that she was very pretty as a girl. It's her horticultural training that makes her look like a cauliflower. The old man died about ten years ago and left her very well off. She's really a remarkable little soul, greatly to be respected. Every struggling artist who has ever found his way into London has been financed by her. She has a heart of gold and during the War she was the chairman of one of the soldiers' entertainment committees. I shall never forget seeing her behind the lines, surrounded by muddy Tommies just relieved. She was a prime favorite out there and was known as Poppy throughout the British Army. How long are you going to be in London?" He switched suddenly to personalities.

"For the rest of the season," said Lola, "and then my plans are uncertain. I may go down to Buckinghamshire or I may spend July at Dinard. It isn't settled yet." She had heard Lady Feo talk over both places with Mrs. Malwood.

"I wonder if I've met your husband about London?"

"I am a widow," said Lola. Her tone was a little sad but, at the same time, it was filled with resignation.

That was something to know. There was no further information forthcoming, however, and as Peter was one of those men who had a great respect for

fourth walls, he left it at that.

They were the last to arrive. Their cab had stalled three times in Piccadilly and coughed badly through Knightsbridge. Every window of number One Hundred was alight and as they entered the hall a high soprano voice was sending piercing vibrations all through the house. A long oak settle in the hall was covered with strange coats and stranger hats and there were queer people sitting on the stairs. The drawing-room was obviously overflowing.

Lola picked her way upstairs, Chalfont following closely. Among these people who conveyed the impression of having slept in their clothes—Art is always a little shy of cold water—Lola felt a sense of distress. Democratic in her ability to make friends with all honest members of the proletariat, like those in the servants' sitting room in Dover Street, she felt hopelessly aristocratic when it came to affection with dandruff on its velvet collar.

The drawing-room, wide and lofty, was one great square of bad taste, filled, overfilled, with what America aptly calls "junk." Spurious Italian furniture jostled with imitation English oak. Huge pieces of fake tapestry hung on the walls side by side with canvases of extremely self-conscious nudes. Early Victorian whatnots covered with silver apostle spoons jostled with Tottenham Court Road antiques. All the lamp shades on the numerous electric lamps were red and heavy, so that the light crept through. To add to the conglomeration of absurdities the whole place reeked with burning josh sticks. A woman who dyes her hair a brilliant yellow invariably burns something on the altar of renewed optimism. The only thing that rang true in the room was the grand piano and that was kept in tune.

Sprawling on divans which were ranged around the walls Lola could make out the forms of men and women of all sizes, ages and nationalities. The men had more hair than the women. There must have been at least sixty people present, among whom Peter Chalfont looked like a greyhound and Lola like an advertisement of somebody's soap. A tremendous woman, standing with her feet wide apart like a sea captain in a gale, or a self-conscious golfer on the first tee, was singing Carmen's most flamboyant song. She was accompanied by a little person of the male gender whose lank black locks flapped over his eyes. They seemed to be competing in making the most noise because when the pianist attempted to overwhelm the voice with all the strength that he possessed, the singer filled herself with breath, gripped the floor with her well-trained feet, and sent forth sounds that must have been excessively trying to the Albert Memorial.

At the end of this shattering event Lady Cheyne bubbled forward and took Lola's hand. "What do you do, my dear?" she asked, as though she were a performing dog to be put through her tricks. To which Lola replied, "Nothing. Nothing at all," with rock-like firmness.

So the exhibitor of human vanities turned persuasively to Peter. "But you whistle, don't you?" she asked. And Peter with a stiffening spine replied, "Yes, but only for taxis."

"In that case," said Lady Cheyne, genuinely astonished that neither of the new arrivals showed any eagerness to jump at her suggestion to advertise, "find a corner somewhere. A little protégée of mine is going to dance for us. She is an interpreter of soul moods. So wonderful and inspiring. You'll love it, I'm sure."

Obeying orders, Peter led Lola into a distant corner, eyed by various artists who labeled him "Soldier" and dismissed him loftily. The passing of Lola sent a quiver through them and they were ready for the first available opportunity to attitudinize about her chair. At a sign from Lady Cheyne the little pianist commenced to play one of Heller's "Sleepless Nights" and a very thin girl, wrapped in a small piece of chiffon, dropped into the middle of the room like a beam of moonlight.

"A spring onion," said Chalfont, in a whisper, "newly plucked from the warm earth." The burst of applause drowned Lola's flutter of laughter. The interpretation of soul moods resolved itself, of course, into the usual series of prancings and high jumps, scuttlings round and roguish bendings, a final leap into the air and a collapse upon the floor.

And so the evening unwound itself. There were violin solos by men in a frenzy of false ecstasy, piano solos by women who put that long-suffering instrument through every conceivable form of torture, readings of nebulous drivel by the poet Cartridge in a high-pitched minor-canon voice, and recitations by women without restraint or humor,—disciples of the new poetry, which Chalfont, quoting from one of the precocious members of the Bachelors' Club, called "Loose Verse."

And then came supper, a welcome event for which all those sixty people had been waiting. This was served in the dining room, another large and eccentric apartment where an embittered man manipulated the punch bowl and was in great request. As soon as she had seen all her guests fully occupied with chicken salad and fish croquettes, Lady Cheyne returned to the deserted drawing-room where she found Chalfont and Lola in deep conversation. She burst upon them like a hand grenade, crying, "Aren't they darlings? Every one a genius and all of them hungry. They come to me like homing pigeons and I do my best to get them placed. Always I have here one or two of the great impressarios,—agents, you know, and sometimes I achieve the presence of an actor-manager. But Shakespeare is out of fashion now and so all my Romeos and Juliets stand a poor chance. I often sigh for dear Sir Herbert who came here for what he called 'atmosphere and local color.' You must come again, my dear. Peter will be very glad to bring you, I'm sure, and I shall be delighted to have you for my week-end parties. I

have a place at Whitecross, Bucks. The garden runs down to the Fallaray place, you know."

From that point on, that big point, Lola ceased to listen.

The whole evening had been filled with amazing sensations. Panic, the sudden switch to reassurance, the excitement of meeting Chalfont, the sweeping joy of touching Fallaray's hand and the knowledge that having broken through the hoop she could now continue to emerge from Dover Street with her new and eager companion to serve an apprenticeship for her final rôle. She had lived a year in an evening. But there was still another sensation lying in wait for her. The moment had come when she must return unseen to Castleton Terrace and get back to Dover Street in good time to reassume the part of lady's maid so that she might not be caught by the housekeeper and reported,—a chance for which Miss Breezy was eagerly waiting. And as she sat unconscious of Lady Cheyne's babble and the buzz of conversation which drifted in from the dining room, she switched on her brain.

How, in the name of all that was wonderful, was she to give Chalfont the slip. That was the new problem to solve; because, of course, he would naturally insist on seeing her home in the ordinary course of events. If he had thought about it at all, she knew that he must have imagined that she was staying either at the Ritz, the Carlton or the Berkeley, or that she was living in one of the smaller houses in Curzon Street, Half Moon Street or Norfolk Street, Park Lane. The jagged end of panic settled upon her once more and her hands grew icy. It was utterly essential to her future plans that Chalfont should remain in complete ignorance of her identity. He must be used by her during the remainder of the season. He must bring her again to this house. Lady Cheyne had become an important factor in her scheme because the garden of her country house ran down to Chilton Park. It was to Chilton Park that Fallaray loved to go alone for the week-end and wander about, gaining refreshment for his tired brain; and always it had seemed to Lola, when she had dared to look into the future, that this place, standing high up on the ridge of hills above the vale of Aylesbury, backed by a great beech forest and landmarked by the white cross that had been cut by the Romans, was the first milestone on her road to love and to the fulfillment of the dream which had held her all those years.

The problem of her escape and her Cinderella flight became more and more pressing. What fib could she invent to tell Chalfont? Without any doubt he would ask her for permission to call. He would want to know her telephone number and her address. In his eye already there was the Simpkins look, the Ernest Treadwell expression and, but for his innate chivalry and breeding, she knew that he would have given tongue to some of the things which she could see at the back of his eyes. It was past eleven. She had heard the clock in the hall strike just now.

She began to rehearse a series of scenes. She saw herself rise and say, "I must go now. A thousand thanks for all that you have done for me this evening. Will you please ask Lady Cheyne if I may have a taxi?" She saw herself standing on the doorstep, the taxi waiting, with Chalfont assuming that he was to play the cavalier and eventually stand bareheaded, holding her hand, opposite the shabby little villa in Castleton Terrace. Which would never do. Madame de Brézé did not live anywhere near Queen's Road, Bayswater.

She saw herself driven by Chalfont to the Ritz or the Carlton, escorted by him to the lift where he would wait to see the last of her as she was taken up to the rooms that she did not possess. That also was impossible. Great heavens, what was she to do? Trying again, her hands icier than ever, she saw Chalfont with growing incredulity listening to cock-and-bull stories which ran like this:

"I don't want you to see me home. As a matter of fact I'm very old-fashioned." Or, "We must say good night here. I'm staying with a puritanical aunt who will be sure to ask me who brought me home and when I say, 'Sir Peter Chalfont' her answer will be 'I didn't know you knew Sir Peter Chalfont. Where did you meet him?' And then I shall have to tell the story of how you picked me up. Can you imagine the result?"—And this was hopeless because, of course, Peter would say, "How in the name of all that's marvelous will your good old aunt know who brings you home? Good old aunts haven't got to know the truth. Besides, if it comes to that, you can drop me about ten doors from the house and then go on alone. It's perfectly easy, and it's done every day." And who, after all, was this aunt? Miss Breezy, the housekeeper.

Phew!

And then came an inspiration. "I'm very hungry," she said aloud. "I begin to remember that dinner was a little unsatisfactory." She laughed and Peter laughed. "But I must go and powder my nose. Please don't bother, Lady Cheyne. I'll find my way and rejoin you in a moment."

She picked up the cloak which she had brought into the drawing-room, threw at Chalfont a smile of the most charming camaraderie, touched Lady Cheyne's arm in a way that asked for friendship and left the drawing-room. With one quick look at the deserted hall with all its strange coats and stranger hats, she made for the front door, opened it, closed it behind her stealthily and ran down the stone path which led to the street. The theater traffic was all headed towards High Street, Kensington. There was not a vacant taxi to be seen. It would not do to stand about in front of the house, so the little Cinderella who had not waited for the magic hour of twelve and had taken good care not to leave her crystal slipper behind her ran up the street to the first turning and stood quivering with excitement and glee beneath a friendly lamp post. A little laugh floated into the muggy air.

"Yes, it's a funny world, ain't it?"

It was a Bobby who had sidled up from the shadow of a wall and towered above her, with a sceptical grin about his mouth.

Instantly a new thought came into Lola's head. "What would Lady Feo do?" She gave it five seconds and turned coolly, calmly and graciously to the arm of the law,—a strong and obviously would-be familiar arm. This girl—running about alone in evening dress—at that time of night.

"I told my car to wait here," she said. "Evidently there has been some mistake. Will you be good enough to call me a cab?"

A hand swept up to the peak of the helmet. "Nothing simpler, Madam."

By the grace of God and the luck that follows drunkards, a taxi was discharging a fare halfway down the road. The ex-sergeant of the Sussex regiment put two fingers into his mouth. With a new interest in life the cab made a wide turn and came up not without style, but with a certain amount of discretion, because of the uniform which could be seen beneath the lamp post.

The Bobby opened the door. There was admiration in his eyes. "A good fairy, ma'am," he said.

And Lola paused and looked up into his face,—a man face, with a big moustache and rather bristling eyebrows, a dent in a firm chin and the mark of shrapnel on the left cheek bone. "A very good fairy," she said. "You'll never know how good. Thanks, most awfully."

And once more the hand flicked to the brim of the helmet as Lola in an undertone gave her address to the driver. Not even the Bobby must see the anticlimax which would be brought about by such an address as Castleton Terrace.

————

A scrawny black cat rose and arched its back as Lola, telling the taxi man to wait, ran up the steps. One of those loose bells that jangle indiscreetly woke the echoes in the sleeping street, and the door was opened by the invincible Mrs. Rumbold, tired-eyed, with yawn marks all over her face. "Well, here you are, dearie," she said, as cheerful as usual, "absobally-lootely to the minute. The old man ain't turned up yet. But you're not going to keep the taxi waiting, are you?"

"Yes," said Lola.

"Gor blimey." The comment was a perfectly natural one under the circumstances.

And while Lola changed back again into the day clothes of the lady's maid, Mrs. Rumbold lent a willing hand and babbled freely. It was good to have some one to speak to. Her legless son had been put to bed two hours before, asking himself, "Have they forgotten?"

Finally the inevitable question, which Mrs. Rumbold, for all her lessons in discretion, simply could not resist. "Where have yer bin, dearie?"

And Lola said, "The Savoy. I dined with a knight in shining armor with a white cross on his chest."

"Oh," said Mrs. Rumbold, "he was going on to a fancy ball, I suppose. Lord, how these boys love to dress themselves up." But a lurking suspicion of something that was not quite right edged its way into that good woman's thoughts. What was little Lola Breezy from the shop round the corner doing with a gent as 'ad enough money to dine at the Savoy and sport about in old-time costumes? "Well, of course, as I said before, you can only live once. But watch your step, dearie. Lots of banana skins about."

And Lola threw her arms round the woman's neck and kissed her warmly. "Fate has swept the pavement for me," she said, once more as Feo would have spoken. "I shall not make any slip."

## IV

Ernest Treadwell faced her at the bottom of the steps, and beneath the peak of his flabby cap his eyes were filled with fright.

"Is anything the matter with Father or Mother?"

"No," he said.

"Why do you look like that, then?" Her hand fell away from his coat. If there was nothing wrong with her parents——

He edged her away from the cab and spoke quickly, without the usual stammer and timidity. He was laboring under a passion of apprehension. It made him almost rude. "I came this way round from the Tube and saw you get out of this cab dressed up like a—a lady. What are you doing? Where've you been?" He caught her by the wrist, excited by a sense of impending evil. Oh, God, how he loved this girl!

And Lola remembered this, although her brain was filled with pictures of the Savoy, of Chalfont and of Fallaray. Irritation, in which was mingled a certain degree of haughtiness, was dropped immediately. She knew that she had always been enthroned in this boy's heart. She must respect his emotion.

"Don't worry about me, Ernie," she said, soothingly. "Lady Feo gave me the dress. I changed into it at Mrs. Rumbold's and brought it back for her to work on again. It isn't quite right."

"But where could you go to wear a thing like that—and the cloak? You looked so—so unlike——" He could only see her as she used to be behind the shop counter and out for walks with him.

And Lola gave a little reassuring laugh because an answer was not ready. If instead of Ernest Treadwell the man who held her up had been Simpkins! "One of the girls had two stalls for the St. James's—her brother's in the box office—and so we both dressed up and went. It was great fun." Why did these men force her into lying? She took her hand away.

"Oh," he said, "I see," his fear rising like a crow and taking wings.

"And now if you've finished playing the glaring inquisitor, I'll say good night." She gave him her hand again.

Covered with the old timidity, he remained where he stood and gazed. There was something all about her, a glow, a light; a look in her eyes that he had put there in his dreams. "Can't I go with you to Dover Street?"

Why not? Yes, that might be good, in case Simpkins should be waiting. "Come along then. You've made me late. Tell him where to go."

The cab turned into Queen's Road and as it passed the narrow house with the jeweler's shop below—all in darkness now—Lola leaned forward and kissed her hand to it. Her father with the glass in his eyes, the ready laugh, the easy-going way, the confidence in her; her capable mother, a little difficult to kiss, peeping out of a shell; her own old room so full of memories, the ground in which she grew. They were slipping behind. They had almost been specks on the horizon during all that eventful night, during which she had found her wings. And this Treadwell boy, his feet in a public library, his soul among the stars, such clothes and such an accent.—And now there were Chalfont and Lady Cheyne and—Fallaray? No, not yet. But he had touched her hand and heard the songs of birds.

"Lola, it hurts me now you've gone. I hate to pass the shop. There's nothing to do but"—he knew the word and tumbled it out—"yearn." If only he might have held her hand, say halfway to the house that he hated.

"Is that a new cap, Ernie? Take it off. You don't look like a poet. Nothing to do? Have you forgotten your promise to read and learn? You can't become a Masefield in a day!"

He put his hands up to his face and spoke through sudden sobs. "With you away I shall never become anything, any time. Come back, Lola. Nothing's the same now you're away."

And she gave him her hand, poor boy. And he held it all too tight, like a drowning man, as indeed he felt that he was. Since Dover Street had come into life he hadn't written a line. The urge had gone. Ambition, so high before, had fallen like an empty rocket. Lola,—it was for her that he had worked his eyes to sightlessness far into all those nights.

"This will never do," she said. Inspiration—she could give him that, though nothing else—was almost as golden as love. He was to be Some One,—a modern

Paul Brissac. She needed that. And she refired him as the cab ran on, rekindled the cold stove and set the logs ablaze. Work, work, study, feel, express, eliminate, temper down. Genius could be crowded out by weeds like other flowering things.

And as the cab drew up the hand was raised to burning lips. But the shame of standing aside while the driver was paid—that added a very big log.

"Good night, Poet."

"Good night, Princess." (Oh-h, that was Simpkins's word.)

Dover Street—and the area steps.

# PART IV

## I

For a Marquis he was disconcertingly hairy. So much so that even those fast diminishing people who still force themselves to believe that a title necessarily places men on a high and ethereal plane were obliged to confess that Feo's father might have been any one,—a mere entomologist for instance, bland, concentrated and careless of appearance, who pottered about in the open after perfectly superfluous insects and forgot that such a thing as civilization existed. He had the appearance indeed of a man who sleeps in tents, scorns to consult a looking-glass and cuts his own hair with a pair of grass clippers at long intervals. On a handsome and humorous face, always somehow sun-tanned, white wiry hairs sprouted everywhere. A tremendous moustache, all akimbo, completely covered his mouth and spread along each cheek almost to his ears, from which white tufts protruded. The clean-cut jaw was shaved as high as the cheek bones, which were left, like a lawn at the roots of a tree, to run wild. Deep-set blue eyes were overhung by larky bushes and the large fine head exuded a thick thatch of obstreperous white stuff that was unmastered by a brush. And as if all this were not enough, there was a small cascade under the middle of the lower lip kept just long enough to bend up and bite in moments of deep calculation. There may have been hairs upon his conscience too, judging by his exquisite lack of memory.

His was, nevertheless, a very old title and a long line of buried Marquises

had all done something, good and bad, to place the name of Amesbury in the pages of history. Rip Van Winkle, as most people called the present noble Lord, had done good and bad things too, like the rest of us,—good because his heart was kind, and bad from force of circumstances. If he had inherited a fine fortune with his father's shoes instead of bricks and mortar mortgaged from cellar to ceiling, his might have been a different story and not one unfortunately linked up with several rather shady transactions. At fifty-five, however, life found him still abounding in optimism on the nice allowance granted to him by Fallaray, and always on the lookout, like all Micawbers, for something to turn up.

He had driven the large brake to the station to meet Feo and her party who were on their way down for the week-end. His temporary exile at Chilton Park, brought about by a universal disinclination to honor his checks, had been a little dull. He was delighted at the prospect of seeing people again, especially Mrs. Malwood. He was fond of Angoras and liked to hear them purr. So with a rather seedy square felt hat over one eye and a loose overcoat of Irish homespun over his riding kit, he clambered down from the high box, saw that the groom was at the horses' heads and strolled into the station to talk over the impending strike of the Triple Alliance with the station master,—the parlor Bolshevist of Princes Risborough. An express swooped through the station as he stood on the platform and made a parachute of his overcoat. The London train was not due for fifteen minutes.

Tapping on the door of Mr. Sparrow's room, he entered to find that worthy exulting over the morning paper, his pale, tubercular face flushed with excitement. The headlines announced that "England faces revolution. Mines flood as miners steal coal and await with confidence the entire support of allied unions. Great Britain on the edge of a precipice."

"All wrong," said Rip Van Winkle quietly. "Panicky misinterpretation of the situation, Sparrow,—much as you desire the opposite."

The station master whipped round, his fish-like eyes strangely magnified by the strong glasses in his spectacles. "What makes yer say that, m' Lord?" he asked, even at that moment flattered at the presence of a Marquis in his office. "Labor has England by the throat."

"England has Labor by the seat of the pants, you should say, Sparrow. Take my word for it, the strike is not only doomed to eventual failure, however the fluctuations go, but the Labor movement will grow less and less terrorist in its methods from this day onwards."

Mr. Sparrow threw back his head and laughed loudly,—showing an incomplete collection of very disastrous teeth. "Well, there won't be a damned train running by this time Monday," he said.

"I'll bet you a thousand oak apples to one there will," replied Lord Ames-

bury, "and I'll tell you why. Every sane and law-abiding Englishman, from the small clerk to the most doddering duke, has begun to organize and this mighty revolution of yours is already as dead as mutton."

"Oh, is that so?" Mr. Sparrow laughed again.

"That is so. You see, Sparrow, you Labor gentlemen, talking paradoxically, have got hold of the wrong end of the stick, not merely in this country but all over the world. You have been the bullies of the school and for a considerable number of years you have made our politicians stiff with fright. They have licked your boots and given way to you whenever you demanded higher wages. They pampered and petted you all through the War, from which you emerged with swollen heads and far too many pianos. When history turns its cold eye upon you, you will be summed up as a set of pretty dirty blackguards who did less to win the War than all the dud shells piled into a heap. You slacked, grumbled, threatened and held up governments for wages out of all proportion to your work. You proved the possession of criminal as well as unpatriotic instincts and you finally showed yourselves up in your true light when you deserted the mines and took the pumpers away. There isn't any word in any dictionary to define the sort of indignation which that dastardly and wanton action has caused. The result of it has been to put the first big nail in the coffin of Labor unions. You have been discovered as men with a yellow streak. Governments now see, what they have never been able to recognize before, that labor does not form the most important section of the three sections of society, the other two being capital and the purchasing power. You have made clear to them, Master Sparrow, that labor and capital are at the mercy of the third element,—the great middle class, the people who buy from capital, pay your wages and who can at any moment, by not buying, reduce both capital and labor to nothingness. The new strike, the epoch-making strike, is of this middle class, and they haven't struck against you but against strikes. At last the worm has turned and I venture to prophesy, foolish as it is, that after a series of damaging and expensive kicks, labor will descend to its proper place, with a just share in profits that will enable it to get a little joy out of life, freed from the tyrannical hand of unions, and with more spare time than is at present enjoyed by the members of the middle class who will continue to take the rough with the smooth, without squealing, as heretofore. In fact, I look upon this strike of miners as one of the best things that has ever happened in history and nothing gives me greater joy and greater satisfaction than to watch, as I shall do from to-day onwards, the gradual diminishing of the excessive size of the labor head.—How are your potatoes coming along?"

Without waiting for an answer, the tall old man turned quietly and left the room; while the parlor Bolshevist, stuffed with the pamphlets of Hyndman and Marks, Lenin and Trotsky, gave a vicious kick to the leg of the table and eyed the

receding figure with venom.

The train was late and so Rip Van Winkle killed time by studying the contents of the bookstall, looking with a sort of incredulity at the stuff on which the public is fed,—illiterate fiction with glaring covers and cheap weeklies filled with egregious gossip and suggestive drawings. The extra fifteen minutes of waiting was passed very pleasantly by his Lordship because many of his old friends from the village came up to him and talked. The chemist, who had driven down personally to collect his monthly box of drugs from London, was very affable. So also was the blacksmith who had known Lord Amesbury for many years and treated him with *bonhomie*. They talked racing with great earnestness. The postman, the gardener from the house of the war profiteer, and the village policeman, all of them very good friends of the man upon whom they looked as representing the good old days, livened things up. With the real democracy that belongs solely to the aristocrat, Rip Van Winkle knew all about the ailments of their wives, the prospects of their children, the number of their hens and pigs and their different forms of religious worship, which he duly respected, whether they were Little Baptists, Big Baptists or Middle-sized Baptists, Minor Methodists or Major Methodists, Independent Churchmen or Dependent Churchmen, Roman Catholics or Anglicans whose Catholicism is interpreted intelligently. The village consisted perhaps of twenty-five hundred souls, but they all had their different cures, and there were as many churches and chapels in and off the High Street as there were public houses. It had always seemed to Feo's father that honest beer is infinitely preferable to the various sorts of religion which were to be obtained in those other public houses in their various bottles, all labeled differently, and he hoped that the prohibition which had been the means of developing among the people of the United States so many drinks far more injurious than those in which alcohol prevailed would never be forced by graft and hypocrisy, self-seeking and salary-making upon the tight little island,—not always so tight as prohibitionists supposed.

Lady Feo bounded out of the train, followed by Mrs. Malwood and their two new friends recently picked up,—Feo's latest fancy, Gordon Macquarie, a glossy young man who backed musical plays in order that he might dally with the pretty members of his choruses, and Mrs. Malwood's most recent time-killer whose name was Dowth,—David Dowth, the Welsh mine owner, who had just succeeded to his father's property and had invaded London to see life. Cambridge was still upon the latter's face and very obviously upon his waistcoat. He was a green youth who would learn about women from Mrs. Malwood. They were both new to Rip Van Winkle and for that reason all the more interesting. Lola, carrying a jewel case, emerged from a compartment at the back of the train with Mrs. Malwood's maid, similarly burdened, and it was at Lola that Lord Amesbury

threw his most appreciative glance.

"French," he said to himself. "The reincarnation of those pretty little people made immortal by Fragonard."

Feo threw her arms round her father's neck and kissed him on those places of his cheeks which were clear of undergrowth. "Good old Rip," she said. "Always on the spot. Been bored, old boy?"

Lord Amesbury laughed. "To be perfectly frank, yes," he said. "I have missed my race meetings and my bridge at Boodles, but I have been studying the awakening of spring and the psychology of bird life, all very delightful. Also I have been watching the daily changes among the trees in the beech forest. Amazingly dramatic, my dear. But it's good to see you again and I hope your two friends are gamblers. Possibly I can make a bit out of them."

He patted her on the shoulder and looked her up and down with admiration not unmixed with astonishment. Among the many riddles which he had never been able to solve he placed the fact that he of all men was Feo's father. What extraordinary twist had nature performed in making his only daughter a girl instead of a boy? Standing there in her short skirt and manly looking golf shoes with lopping tongues, her beautiful square shoulders lightly covered with a coarsely knitted sweater of chestnut brown and a sort of Tyrolean hat drawn down over her ears, she looked like a young officer in the First Life Guards masquerading in women's clothes.

## II

When Lord Amesbury mounted the box with Feo at his side and turned out of the station yard into the long road which led to the old village of Princes Risborough, the first thing that caught Lola's eyes was the white cross cut by the Romans in the chalk of the hill, on the top of which sat Chilton Park. Again and again she had stood in front of photographs of this very view. They hung in Miss Breezy's room, neatly framed. Many times Miss Breezy herself had explained to Lola the meaning of that cross, so far as its historical significance went, and Lola had been duly impressed. The Romans,—how long ago they must have lived. But to her, more and more as her love and adoration grew, that white cross stood as a mark for the place to which Fallaray went from time to time for peace, to listen to the wind among the beech trees, to watch the sheep on the distant hills, to wander among the gardens of his old house and forget the falsity and the appalling ineptitude of his brother Ministers. The photographs had indicated very well the beauty of this scene but the sight of it in the life, all green in the first flush of spring, brought a sob to Lola's throat. Once more the feeling came

all over her that it would be at Chilton Park that she would meet Fallaray at last alone and discover her love to him,—not as lady's maid but as the little human thing, the Eve.

She sat shoulder to shoulder with the groom opposite to Mrs. Malwood's maid,—Dowth, Macquarie and Mrs. Malwood in close juxtaposition. But she had no ears for their conversation. As the village approached, not one single feature of it escaped her eager eyes,—its wide cobbled street, its warm Queen Anne houses, its old-fashioned shops, its Red Lion and Royal George and Black Bull, its funny little post office up three stairs, its doctor's house all covered with creeper, its ancient church sitting hen-wise among her children. It seemed to her that all these things, old and quiet and honest, had gone to the making of Fallaray's character; that he belonged to them and was part of them and represented them; and it gave her a curious feeling of being let into Fallaray's secrets as she went along.

From time to time people hatted Lady Feo and one or two old women, riddled with rheumatism, bobbed—not because of any sense of serfdom, but because they liked to do so—a pleasant though inverted sense of egotism which is at the bottom of all tradition. Rip Van Winkle saluted every one with his whip; the butchers—and there were several, although meat was still one of the luxuries—the landlords of the public houses who were not so fat as they used to be before the War, the vicar, a high churchman with an astonishingly low collar, and the usual comic person who invariably retires to such villages, lives in a workman's cottage among the remnants of passed glory and talks to any one who will listen to him of the good old days when he tooled his team of spanking bays and hobnobbed in London, when society really *was* society, with men of famous names and ladies of well-known frailty. This particular gentleman, Augustus Warburgh, pronounced Warborough, made himself up to look like Whistler and wore the sort of clothes which would have appealed greatly to a character actor. What he lived on no one knew. One or two people with nasty minds were convinced that his small income was derived from blackmail,—probably a most pernicious piece of libel. On his few pounds a week, however, he did himself extremely well and lived alone in a four-room cottage as antediluvian as himself, in which there were some very charming pieces of Jacobean furniture, a collection of excellent sporting prints and numerous books all well-thumbed, "Barry Lyndon" being the most favored.

In this little place, with its old beams and uneven floors of oak, Augustus Warburgh "did" for himself, cooking his own meals, making his own bed and bringing home from his occasional trips to London mysterious bottles filled with delicatessen from Appenrodts, amazing pickles and an occasional case of unblended Balblair which he got from a relative of his who owned half of the isle

of Skye. Nips of this glorious but dangerous juice he offered to his cronies in his expansive moods and delighted in seeing them immediately slide under his table with the expression worn by Charlie Chaplin after he has been plumped on the head with a meat axe. Needless to say that he and Rip Van Winkle got along together like a house on fire. They talked the same language, enjoyed the same highly spiced food, dipped back into the same period and had inevitably done the same people. The Warburgh bow as the brake passed in the High Street was not Albertian but Elizabethan.

Feo laughed as she waved her hand. "When he dies," she said, "and I don't think he ever will, Princes Risborough will lose one of its most beautiful notes,—like London when they did away with Jimmies. Not that I remember Jimmies, except from what you've told me about it. Let's have him up to dinner one night and make him drunk."

"You can't," said Lord Amesbury. "It's impossible. There is a hole in every one of the soles of his shoes through which all the fumes of alcohol leak. You can stew him, you can pickle him, you can float him, but you cannot sink him. When everybody else is down and out, that is the time when Augustus takes the floor and rises to the eloquence and vitriolic power of Dr. Johnson.—Tell me, Feo, who is that remarkable child that you have got in tow?"

"My maid, you mean? She's the niece of my old Breezy. Isn't she charming? Such an honest little soul too. Does her job with the most utter neatness and nicety of touch and listens excellently. I rescued her from the stage,—I mean, of course, the chorus. A good deed in a naughty world." That's how she liked to put it, her memory being a little hazy. "I don't know what will become of her. Of course, she can't be my maid forever. Judging from the way in which my male friends look at her whenever they get the chance, I shouldn't be a bit surprised if one of these days she eloped with a duke. It would fill me with joy to meet her in her husband's ancestral home all covered with the family jewels and do my best to win a gracious smile. Or else she'll marry Simpkins, who is, I hear, frightfully mashed on her, and retire to a village pub, there to imitate the domestic cat and litter the world with kittens. I dunno. Anything may happen to a girl like that. But whatever it is, it will be one of these two extremes. I hate to think about it because I like her. It's very nice to have her about me."

Rip Van Winkle smiled. "To parody a joke in last week's *La Vie Parisienne*, I am not so old as I look, my dear."

"You dare," said Feo. But she laughed too. "Good Lord, Father, don't go and do a thing like that. If I had to call that girl Mother, I think that even my sense of humor would crack."

"A little joke, Feo," said Rip. "Nothing more. I can't even keep myself, you see."

Whereupon, having left the village, the brake turned into the road that ran up to Whitecross at an angle of forty-five. The old man slowed the horses down to a walk and waved his whip towards the screen of trees which hid Chilton Park from the public gaze. "It's been a wonderful spring," he said. "I have watched it with infinite pleasure. It has filled my old brain with poetry and very possibly with regrets. All the same, I'm glad you have come down. I've been rather lonely here. The evenings are long and ghosts have a knack of coming out and standing round my chair.—How is Edmund? I regret that I have forgotten to ask you about him before. One somehow always forgets to ask about Edmund, although I see that he is regarded by George Lytham and his crowd as the new Messiah."

Feo laughed again, showing all her wonderful teeth. "I had a quaint few minutes with Edmund the other night on the steps of Langham Hall. He had taken his mother and Aunt Betsy to a symphony concert. Do you know, I rather think that George is right about Edmund? He has all the makings of a Messiah and of course all the opportunities. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he emerged from the present generation of second-raters and led England out of its morass. But he'll only achieve this if he continues to remain untouched by any feminine hand. Of course, he's absolutely safe so far as I'm concerned, but there was a most peculiar look in his face the other night which startled me somewhat. I thought he'd fallen in love with me,—which would have been most inconvenient. But I was wrong.—Well, here we are at the old homestead. How it reeks of Fallaray and worthiness."

## III

But the party was not a success. Very shortly after lunch, during which Feo and Mrs. Malwood had put in good work in an unprecedented attempt to charm their new acquisitions, they all adjourned to the terrace,—that wonderful old terrace of weather-beaten stone giving on to a wide view of an Italian garden backed by a panorama of rolling hills and of the famous beech forest ten miles deep, under which, in certain parts, especially in the Icknield Way through which the Romans had passed, the leaves of immemorial summers, all red and dry, lay twenty feet deep.

Gilbert Jermyn, Feo's brother, had dashed over on his motor bicycle from Great Marlow where he was staying with several friends, ex-flying men like himself and equally devoid of cash, trying to formulate some scheme whereby they might get back into adventure once more. Lord Amesbury had gone down to a pet place of his own to take a nap in the long grass with the sun on his face. Feo, who had been dancing until five o'clock that morning, was lying full stretch on a

dozen cushions in the shadow of the house, Macquarie in attendance. Mrs. Malwood, petulant and disgruntled, was sitting near by with David Dowth. Gilbert Jermyn, who could see that he was superfluous, sat by himself on the balustrade gazing into the distance. His clean-cut face was heavy with despondency. He had forgotten to light his cigarette.

"You're about the liveliest undertaker I've ever struck," said Feo. "What the deuce is the matter with you?"

Macquarie shrugged his shoulders,—his girlishly cut coat with its tight waist and tight sleeves crinkling as he did so. "Oh, my dear," he said, "it's no good your expecting anything from me to-day. Under the circumstances it's impossible for me to scintillate."

"What do you mean?" asked Feo roughly. She had ordered this man down in her royal way, being rather taken with his tallness, youngness and smoothness, and demanded scintillation.

"But look at the position! I hate to be mercenary and talk about money, but you know, my dear thing, almost every bob I've got is invested in the three musical comedies now running, and if things go on as they are, every one of them will be shut down because of the coal strike. That's a jolly nice lookout. I'm no Spartan, and I confess that I find it very difficult to be merry and bright among the gravestones of my hopes."

And while he went on like that, dropping in many "my dears" and "you dear things" as though he had known Feo all his life, instead of more or less for twenty minutes, making gestures in imitation of those of the spoilt small-part lady, Lord Amesbury's daughter and Fallaray's wife became gradually more and more aware of the fact that she had made a fool of herself. There was something broadly déclassé about this man which, even to one of her homogeneous nature, became a reproach. She was getting, she could see, a little careless in her choice of friends and for this one, whom she had picked out of semi-society and the musical comedy night life of London—so dull, so naked, so hungry and thirsty and so diamond seeking—to play the yellow dog and find excuses for his lack of entertainment left her, she found with astonishment, wholly without adjectives. It was indeed altogether beyond words. And she sat watching and listening to this vain and brainless person with a sort of admiration for his audacity.

As for Dowth and Mrs. Malwood they, too, were not hitting it off, and in reply to Mrs. Malwood's impatient question the young Welshman's answer had many points of excuse. "Three of my mines have been flooded," he said gravely, "which knocks my future income all cock-eyed. God knows how I shall emerge from this frightful business. A week ago I was one of the richest men in England. To-day I face pauperism. It's appalling. You expect me to sit at your feet and make love to you with the sword of Damocles hanging over my head. It can't be

done, Mrs. Malwood. And, mind you, even if the remainder of my mines escape ruin, I go under. That's as plain as the nose on my face. The Government, always in terror of labor, has been amazingly supported in this business by the whole sanity of England, but the end of it will be that the miners will be given less wages but large shares in the profits of the coal owners. I shall probably be able to make a better living by becoming a miner myself. You sit there petulant and annoyed because I am in the depths of despondency. You'll cry out for cake when bread has run out, like all the women of your kind, but you see in me a doomed man unable to raise a finger to save property which has been in my family for several generations. I simply can't jibber and giggle and crack jokes with you and talk innuendoes. I was a fool to come down at all."

"Oh," said Mrs. Malwood aghast. "Oh—I suppose you think that I ought to amuse *you*?"

"Yes, I do," said Dowth.

And Mrs. Malwood also was at a loss for adjectives.

And when, presently, Rip Van Winkle appeared, smiling and sun-tanned to join what he expected to be a jovial group, he found a strange silence and a most uncomfortable air of jarring temperaments. He was well accustomed to these little parties of Feo's and to watch her at work with new men whom she collected on her way through life. Usually they were rather riotous affairs, filled with mirth and daring. What in the name of all that was wonderful had happened to this one? He joined his son and put his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Gibbie," he said, "enlighten me."

But he got no explanation from this young man, who seemed to be like a bird whose wings had been cut. "My dear Father," he said, "I've no sympathy with Feo's little pranks. She and the Malwood girl seem to have picked up a bounder and a shivering Welsh terrier this time, and even they probably regret it. I ran over this afternoon to yarn with you, as a matter of fact. Come on, let's get out of this. Let's go down to the stream and sit under the trees and have it out."

And so they left together, unnoticed by that disconcerted foursome with whose little games fate had had the impudence to interfere. And presently, seated on the bank of the brook which ran through the lower part of the park, Lord Gilbert Jermyn, ex-major Royal Air Force, D. S. O., M. C., got it off his chest. "O God," he began, "how fed up I am with this infernal peace."

The old man gazed at his son with amazement. "I don't follow you," he said. "Peace? My dear lad, we have all been praying for it and we haven't got it yet."

The boy, and he was nothing more than that, sat with rounded shoulders and a deep frown on his face, hunched up, flicking pieces of earth into the bubbling water.

"I know all about that," he went on. "Of course you've prayed for peace.

So did everybody over twenty-four. But what about us,—we who were caught as kids, before we knew anything, and taught the art of flying and sent up at any old time, careless of death, the eyes of the artillery, the protectors of the artillery, the supermen with beardless faces. What about us in this so-called peace of yours? Here we are at a loose end, with no education, because that was utterly interrupted, able to do absolutely nothing for a living,—let down, let out, looked on rather as though we were brigands because we have grown into the habit of breaking records, smashing conventions and killing as a pastime. Do you see my point, old boy? We herd together in civics when we're not in the police courts for bashing bobbies and not in the divorce courts for running off with other people's wives, and we ask ourselves, in pretty direct English, what the hell is going to become of us,—and echo answers what. But I can tell you this. What we want is war, perpetual bloody war, never mind who's the enemy. You made us want it, you fitted us for it and for nothing else. We're all pretty excellent in the air and in consequence utterly useless on earth. And when I read the papers, and I never read more than the headlines anyway, I long to see that Germany is going to take advantage of the damned stupidity of all the Allied governments, including that of America, gather up the weapons that she hasn't returned and the men who are going to refuse to pay reparations and start the whole business over again. My God, how eagerly I'd get back into my uniform, polish up my buttons, stop drinking and smoking and get fit for flying once more. I'd sing like Caruso up there among the clouds and empty my machine gun at the first Boche who came along with a thrill of joy. That's my job. I know no other."

The old man's hair stood on end,—all of it, like a white bush.

## IV

Something happened that afternoon which might have swung Lola's life on to an entirely different set of rails and put Fallaray even farther out of her reach. The unrest which had followed the War had made the acquisition of servants very difficult. The young country girls who had been glad enough to go into service in the large houses now preferred to stick to their factories, because they were able to have free evenings. The housekeeper at Chilton Park was very short-handed and in consequence asked Lola and Mrs. Malwood's maid if they would make themselves useful. Mrs. Malwood's didn't see it. She had been well bitten by the trades-union bug and, therefore, was not going to do anything of any sort except her specific duties, and those as carelessly as she could. The housekeeper could go and hang herself. Violet, the girl in question, intended to lie on her bed and read *Scarlet Bits* until she was needed by her mistress. Lola, whose blood

was good, was very glad to lend a hand. With perfect willingness she committed an offence against lady's maids which shocked Violet to the very roots of her system. She donned a little cap and apron and turned herself into a parlor maid, a creature, as all the world knows, many pegs of the ladder beneath her own position as a lady's maid. When, therefore, tea was served on the terrace, Lola assisted the butler, looking daintier than ever, and so utterly free from coquetry, because there was no man in the world except Fallaray for her, that she might have been a little ghost.

But the trained eye of Gordon Macquarie looked her over immediately. He turned to Lady Feo, to whom he had not addressed a word for twenty minutes, and said with a sudden flash of enthusiasm, "Ye gods and little fishes, what a picture of a girl! Wouldn't she look perfectly wonderful in the front line of the chorus on the O. P. side! An actress too, I bet you. Look at the way she's pretending not to be alive. Of course she knows how perfectly sweet she looks in that saucy make-up."

If Mr. Gordon Macquarie had deliberately gone out of his way to discover the most brilliant method of sentencing himself to the lethal chamber he could not have been more successful than by using that outpouring of gushing words. Feo had fully realized, from the moment that she had left the dining room, that in acquiring Gordon Macquarie she had committed the gravest *faux pas* of her life. Not only was he a bounder but he did not possess the imagination and the sense of proportion to know that in being invited down to Chilton Park by Lady Feo he had metaphorically been decorated with a much coverted order. His egotism and his whining fright had made him unable to maintain his fourth wall and at least imitate the ways of a gentleman. Never before in her history had Feo spent an afternoon so unpleasant and so humiliating, and now, to be obliged to listen to a pæan of praise about her maid, if you please, was the last straw. Any other woman would probably have risen from her place among her cushions, followed Lola into the house and either boxed her ears or ordered her back to town.

But Feo had humor, and although her pride was wounded and she would willingly have given orders for Macquarie to be shot through the head, she pursued a slightly different method. She rose, gave Macquarie a most curious smile, waited until Lola had retired from the terrace, followed her and called her back just as she was about to disappear into the servants' quarters. "Lola," she said, "run up at once and pack my things. We are going back to town. Say nothing to anybody. Be nippy," the word was Simpkins's, "and in the meantime I will telephone for a car. Do you understand?"

"Yes, my lady." In Lola's voice there must have been something of the tremendous disappointment that swept over her. But it was ignored or unnoticed by her mistress. To leave Chilton Park almost as soon as she had seen it,—not to

be able to creep secretly into Fallaray's room and stand there all alone and get from it the feeling of the man, the vibrations of his thoughts,—not to be able to steal out in the moonlight and wander among the Italian gardens made magic by the white light and picture to herself the tall ascetic lonely figure in front of whom some night she intended to move Heaven and earth to stand.

But she turned away quickly, obeyed orders without a single question and ran up the wide staircase blindly, because, for the moment, her eyes were filled with tears. But only for the moment. After all, there was nothing in this visit that could help her scheme along. She must keep her courage and her nerve, continue her course of study, watch her opportunities and be ready to seize the real chance when it presented itself. Lady Feo was bored,—which, of course, was a crime. Macquarie was a false coin. Lola could have told her that. How many exactly similar men had ogled her in the street and attempted to capture her attention. She had been amazed to see him join Lady Feo at Paddington station that morning. She instantly put him down as a counter jumper from a second-rate linen draper's in the upper reaches of Oxford Street.—She was ready for Feo when she came up to put on her hat. Her deft fingers had worked quickly, and she was alert and bright, in spite of her huge disappointment.

It was characteristic of Feo to break up her houseparty with the most unscrupulous disregard for the convenience of the other members of it, and to care nothing for the fact that she would spoil the pleasure of her father. He and her brother, her little friend, Mrs. Malwood, and the two disappointing men must pay her bill. She never paid. It was characteristic of her, also, to turn her mind quickly, before leaving, upon some other way of obtaining amusement, as she dreaded to face a dull and barren Sunday in London. She remembered suddenly that Penelope Winchfield, one of the "gang," had opened her house near Aylesbury, which was only a short drive from Princes Risborough. It was a brain wave. So she went to the telephone and rang up, invited herself for the week-end and went finally into the car and slipped away with Lola without saying good-by to a single person. "How I hate this place," she said. "Something always goes wrong here." And she turned and made a face at the old building like a naughty child.

Any other woman—at any rate, any other woman whose upbringing had been as harum-scarum as Feo's—would have given Lola her notice and dropped her like an old shoe. But she had humor.

## V

Queen's Road, Bayswater, so far as the jeweler's little shop was concerned, was in for a surprise that evening. Just as Lola's mother was about to close up af-

ter a rather depressing day which had brought very little business—a few wrist watches to be attended to, nothing more—a car drove up, and from it descended Lola, carrying a handbag and smiling like a girl let out of school.

"Why, my dear," cried Mrs. Breezy, "what does this mean? I thought you were going to Chilton Park." But she held her ewe lamb warmly and gladly in her arms, while a shout of welcome came from behind the glass screen where the fat man sat with the microscope in his eye.

Lola laughed. "I went there," she said, "but something happened. I'll tell you about that later. And then Lady Feo altered her plans, drove over to Aylesbury and told me I might do anything I liked until Monday night, as there was no room for me in Mrs. Winchfield's house. And so, of course, I came home. How are you, Mummy darling? Oh, I'm so glad to see you." And she kissed the little woman again with a touch of exuberance and ran into the shop to pounce upon her father, all among his watches. It was good to see the way in which that man caught his little girl in his arms and held her tight.—A good girl, Lola, a good affectionate girl, working hard when there was no need for her to do so and improving herself. Good Lord, she had begun to talk like a lady and think like a lady, but she would never be too grand to come into the little old shop in Queen's Road, Bayswater,—not Lola.

He said all that rather emotionally and this too. "It isn't as if we hadn't seen yer for such a long time. You've never missed droppin' in upon us whenever you could get away, but this's like a sunny day when the papers said it was goin' to be wet,—like finding a real good tot of cognac in a bottle yer thought was empty." And he kissed her again on both cheeks and held her away from him, the Frenchman in him coming out in his utter lack of self-consciousness. He looked her all over with a great smile on his fat face and stroked the sleeve of her blue serge coat, touched the white thing at her throat and finally pinched the lobe of one of her tiny ears.

"It isn't that yer clothes are smarter, or that yer've grown older or anything like that. It's that you seem to have pulled yer feet out of this place, me girl. It doesn't seem to be your place now.—It's manner. It's the way yer hold yer head, tilt yer chin up.—It's accent. It's the way you end yer sentences. When a woman comes into the shop and speaks to me as you do, I know that she won't pay her bills but that her name's in the Red Book.—You little monkey, yer've picked up all the tricks and manners of her ladyship. You'll be saying 'My God' soon, as yer aunt tells us Lady Feo does! Well, well, well." And he hugged her again, laughed, and then, finding that he showed certain points of his French antecedents, began to exaggerate them as he had seen Robert Nainby do at the Gaiety. He was a consummate actor and a very honest person. The two don't always go together.

And then Mrs. Breezy, who in the meantime had been practical and shut

the shop, followed them into the parlor, which seemed to Lola to be shrinking every time she saw it and more crowded with cardboard boxes, account books, alarm clocks and the surplus from the shop, and sprang a little surprise. "Who do you think's coming to dinner to-night?" she asked.

"Is anybody coming to dinner? What a nuisance," said Lola, who had looked forward to enjoying the company of her father and mother uninterrupted.

John Breezy gave a roguish glance at his wife and winked. "Give yer ten guesses," he said.

"Ernest Treadwell."

"No," said Mrs. Breezy, "Albert Simpkins."

"Simpky? How funny. Did you ask him or did he ask himself?"

"He asked himself," said John Breezy.

"I asked him," said Mrs. Breezy.

"I see. The true Simpky way. He suggested that he would like to have dinner with you and you caught the suggestion. He comes of such a long line of men who have worn their masters' clothes that he is now a sort of second-hand edition of them all, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised if, when he falls in love, he goes to the parents first and asks their permission to propose to the daughter; and he'll probably ask not for the daughter herself but for her hand,—which never seems to me to be much of a compliment to the daughter."

Mrs. Breezy and her husband exchanged a quick glance. Either there was something uncanny about Lola or she knew that this very respectable man was madly in love with her. During his numerous visits to the jeweler's shop Simpkins had invariably led the conversation round to Lola, finding a thousand phases of her character which he adored. But the last time he had been with them there was something in his manner and voice which made it easy to guess that his visit that evening was for the purpose of asking them whether they considered him worthy of becoming their son-in-law. It may be said that they considered that he was, especially after he had told them about the money inherited from his father and his own savings and confided in them his scheme of buying that very desirable inn at Wargrave, in which they could, of course, frequently spend very pleasant week-ends during the summer months. They had before this recognized in him a man of great depth of feeling, of excellent principles and a certain strange ecstasy,—somewhat paradoxical in one who nearly always appeared in a swallow-tail coat, dark trousers and a black tie.

Seeing that this was an occasion of considerable importance, Mrs. Breezy had arranged to dine in the drawing-room. It now behooved her to hurry up to her room and change her clothes and lay an extra place for Lola. The dinner itself was being cooked at that moment by the baker next door,—duck, new peas and potatoes and apple pie with a nice piece of Gruyère cheese, which, with two

bottles of Beaujolais from the Breezy cellar, would be worthy of Mr. Simpkins's attention even though he did come from Dover Street, Mayfair.

As a matter of fact, Lola's remark about the daughter's hand was merely an arrow fired into the air. She had been encouraging Simpkins to look with favor upon the lovesick girl who sat so frequently upon her bed and poured out her heart. She never conceived the possibility of being herself asked for by good old Simpky, who had been so kind to her and was such a knowledgable companion at the theater. The idea of becoming his wife was grotesque, ridiculous, pathetic, hugely remote from her definite plan of life. She considered that the girl Ellen was exactly suited to him. Had she not inherited all the attributes of an innkeeper's wife from her worthy parents who had kept the Golden Sheaf at Shepperton since away back before the great wind? So she ran up to her room to tidy herself, with her soul full of Chilton Park and Fallaray.

Simpkins arrived precisely on time, smelling of Windsor soap and brilliantine. He had indulged in a tie which had white spots upon it, discreet white spots, and into this he had stuck a golden pin,—a horse-shoe for luck. He was welcomed by Mr. Breezy in the drawing-room and immediately twigged the fact that there were four places laid.

Mr. Breezy was waggish. It is the way of a parent in all such circumstances. "My boy, who do you think?"

"I dunno. Who?" His tone was anxious and his brows were flustered.

"Lola," said Mr. Breezy.

"Lola!—I thought she was at Chilton Park with 'er ladyship. I chose this evening because of that. This'll make me very—well——"

"Not you," said John Breezy. "You're all right, me boy. We like you. That inn down at Wargrave sounds good. I can see a nice kitchen garden. I shall love to wander in it in the early morning and pull up spring onions. I'm French enough for them still. You can take it that the missus and I are all in your favor,—formalities waived. We'll slip away after dinner, go for a little walk and you can plump the question. The betting is you'll win." And he clapped the disconcerted valet heartily on the back,—the rather narrow back.

"I'm very much obliged, Mr. Breezy," said Simpkins, who had gone white to the lips, "and also to Mrs. Breezy. It's nice to be trusted like this, and all that. But I must say, in all honesty, I wanted to take this affair step by step, so to speak. If I'd 'ad the good fortune to be encouraged by you in my desire to ask for Lola's 'and,"—there it came,—"I should 'ave taken a week at least to 'ave thought out the proper things to say to Lola 'erself. Sometimes there's a little laugh in the back of 'er eyes which throws a man off his words. I don't know whether you've noticed that. But this is very sudden and I shall 'ave to do a lot of thinking during the meal."

"Oh, you English," said John Breezy and roared with laughter. "Mong Doo!"

One of Simpkins's hands fidgeted with his tie while the other straightened the feathers on the top of his head. Jumping Joseph, he was fairly up against it! How he wished he was a daring man who had traveled a little and read some of the modern novels. It was a frightful handicap to be so old-fashioned.

And then the ladies arrived,—Mrs. Breezy in a white fichu which looked like an antimacassar, a thing usually kept for Christmas day and wedding anniversaries; Lola in a neat blue suit and the highest spirits,—a charming costume.

"Hello, Simpky."

"Good evening, Mr. Simpkins."

Simpkins bowed. He certainly had the Grandison manner. And while Lola brought him up to date with the state of affairs, so far as she knew them, Mrs. Breezy disappeared, stood on a chair against the fence in the back yard and received the hot dishes which were handed over to her by the baker's wife. A couple of scrawny cats, with tails erect, attracted by the aroma of hot duck, followed her to the back door,—but got no farther. "You shall have the bones," said Mrs. Breezy, and they were duly encouraged.

The dinner was a success, even although Simpkins sat through it in one long trance. He ate well to fortify himself and it was obvious to John Breezy, sympathetic soul that he was, that his guest was rehearsing a flowery speech of proposal. The unconscious Lola kept up a merry rattle of conversation and gave them a vivid description of the village through which she had passed that afternoon and of her drive back to town alone from Aylesbury. Of Chilton Park she said nothing. It was too sacred. And when presently John Breezy's programme was carried out, the table cleared, the two cats rewarded for their patience and Simpkins left alone with Lola, there was a moment of shattering silence. But even then Lola was unsuspecting, and it was not until the valet unbuttoned his coat to free his swelling chest and placed himself in a supplicating attitude on the sofa at her side, that she tumbled to the situation.

"Oh, Simpky," she said, "what *are* you going to do?"

It was a wonderful cue. It helped him to take the first ditch without touching either of the banks. The poor wretch slipped down upon his knees, all his pre-arranged words scattered like a load of bricks. "Ask you to marry me, Lola," he said. "Lola, darling, I love you. I loved you the very minute you came down the area steps, which was all wrong because I thought you'd come from heaven and therefore your place was the front door. I love you and I want you to marry me, and I'll buy the inn and work like a dog and we'll send the boy to Lansing or the City of London School and make a gentleman of 'im."

Not resentment, not amusement, but a great pity swept over Lola. This was a good, kind, generous man and his emotion was so simple and so genuine. And

she must hurt him because it was impossible, absurd.

And so for a moment she sat very still and erect, looking exactly like a daffodil with the light on her yellow head, and her eyes shut, because there might be in them that twinkle which Simpkins had noticed and which he must not see. And presently she said, putting her hand on his shoulder, "Oh, Simpky, dear old Simpky, why couldn't you have loved Ellen? What a difficult world it is."

"Ellen," he said. "Oh."

"I can't, Simpky. I simply can't."

And he sat on his heels and looked like a pricked balloon. "Ain't I good enough, Lola?"

"Yes, quite good enough. Perhaps too good. But, oh, Simpky, I'm so awfully in love with some one else and it's a difficult world. That's the truth. I have to tell it to you. I can never, never marry you, never. Please accept this. Whatever happens to me, and I don't know whatever *will* happen to me, I shall always remember how good you were and how proud you made me feel. But I'm so awfully in love with some one else. Awfully. And perhaps I shall never be married. That's the truth, Simpky."

And she bent down and kissed him on the forehead, and then got up quickly and raised the kneeling man to his feet. And he stood there, shattered, empty and wordless, with the blow that she had given him ever so softly marking his face, marking his soul.

And Lola was very, very sorry. Poor old Simpky. Poor little Ellen. It was indeed a difficult world.

## VI

The next day was Saturday,—a busy day for the Breezys, the one day in the week upon which they pinned their faith to make up for slack business during the remainder of it. In the morning Lola helped her mother to make an enticing display in the windows and along the counter in the shop itself. Mrs. Breezy had recently broadened out a little and now endeavored to sell kodaks and photographic materials, self-filling pens and stationery for ladies, which is tantamount to saying that it was stationery unfit for men. During this busy and early hour, while John Breezy, one-eyed, was looking into the complaints of wrist watches, most of which were suffering from having been taken into the bath, Lola answered her mother's silent inquiry as to what had happened the previous evening. With a duster in one hand and a silver sugar basin in the other, she looked up suddenly and said, "No, Mother, it wasn't and will never be possible. Poor old Simpky."

And Mrs. Breezy nodded and shrugged her shoulders. And Lola hoped that

that would be the end of it. But why should she have hoped so, knowing women? A few minutes later Mrs. Breezy began.

"The inn at Wargrave would have been so nice. He said that it had an orchard on one side and a large lawn running down to the river on the other, shaded with old trees,—little tables underneath and lovers' nooks and sweet peas growing in tubs. Ah, how nice after Queen's Road, Bayswater. And your father could have fished for hours and I could have rearranged the furniture—and very good furniture too, he said—and made things look spick and span. And he's a good man, is Albert Simpkins, a very unusual man, educated, religious, honest, with a sort of white flame burning in him somewhere. He would have made a good husband, dearie.—However, I suppose you know best." And she threw an anxious glance at her little girl who had become, if anything, more of an enigma to her than ever. It didn't matter about the apron that she wore; nor did the fact that she was very efficiently cleaning that silver thing detract from the new and subtle dignity and poise that she had acquired. And her accent, and her choice of words,—they were those of Mrs. Breezy's favorite actress who played fashionable women. It was very extraordinary. What a good ear the child must have and what a very observant eye,—rather like her father's, although he had to be assisted by a microscope. "You won't think it over, I suppose?" she asked finally, long after Lola had believed the subject to be closed. Mothers have an amazing way of recurring to old arguments. But Lola shook her head again and gave a little gesture that was peculiarly French, as who should say, "My dear! Marriage!"

As soon as the shop was opened and Mrs. Breezy was on duty and John Breezy was humming softly over his most monotonous job, Lola went upstairs to the little bedroom which she had completely outgrown now, put on her hat and presently slipped out of the house. All the usual musicians were already at work on the curbstone of Queen's Road. The strains of "Annie Laurie" were mixed with those of "Son o' Mine" and there was one daring creature with a concertina who was desecrating Gounod's "Ave Maria." Perambulators cluttered the pavements and eager housewives were in earnest conversation with butchers and greengrocers who had arranged their wares temptingly outside their shops so that they could be handled and considered and sampled. Lola made her way to Kensington Gardens filled with a desire which had been growing upon her ever since she woke up to make another Cinderella dash into the great world. She was seized with another overpowering eagerness to meet Fallaray on his own level. He was to be in town over the week-end. She knew that. The Government, as though it had not already enough troubles to contend with—Germany haggling and France ready to fly at her throat and America hiding her head in the sand of dead shibboleths like an ostrich—was in the throes of the big strike and its

members were hurrying from one conference to another with the labor leaders. Lady Feo away, she had a wonderful chance to use that night and nothing would be easier than to dress once more at Mrs. Rumbold's and slip into her mother's house with a latchkey. But she was not able to go into the Gardens because they had been closed to the public. They had been turned over to the military to be used as a center for the mobilization of supplies. She could see men in khaki everywhere, going about their work with a sort of merry energy. "Back to the army agin, Sergeant, back to the army agin." Unconcerned by the crisis which had fallen upon England and unable to wander along her favorite paths, she turned away just at the moment when a large car, followed by a line of motor busses and heterogeneous traffic, was being held up by a policeman to enable a company of boy scouts to cross the high road. She heard a shout. She saw a man in khaki with a red band round his cap and much brass on its peak and two long lines of ribbons on his chest become suddenly athletic under the stress of great excitement. The next instant her hand was seized and she looked up. It was Chalfont.

"I was just going to think about you," she said.

"I've never stopped thinking of you," said Chalfont. "What became of you? Where did you go? Where have you been? I searched every hotel in the town. I've been almost through every street, like Gilbert à Beckett, calling your name. Good God, why have you played with me like this?"

Somehow, for all his height and finish, in spite of his uniform and his big car and his obvious importance, he reminded her of Simpkins. ("Lola, I love you.") The same emotion was in the voice, the same desire in the eyes. What *was* there in her that made her do this thing to men,—while the one man was unattainable, unapproachable? It was a difficult world.

"I'm very sorry," she said. "I had to go away that night. But I was just on the verge of thinking about you again. You can't think how glad I am to see you."

Still holding her hand as though he would never let her escape, Chalfont mastered his voice. "You little lovely de Brézé," he said, not choosing his words. "You strange little bird. I've caught you again and I've a damned good mind to clip your wings and put you in a cage."

And Lola laughed. "I've always been a canary," she said, "and some day you may find me in a cage." But she didn't add, "not your cage, however golden." Fallaray's was the only cage and if that were made of bits of stick it would be golden to her.

"Well, you're back in town. That's the chief thing. Get into my car and I'll drive you home and let's do something to-night. Let's dine at the Savoy or the Carlton. I don't care. Or don't let's dine. Anything you like, so long as you're with me. I've got to go along to the War Office now, but I have my evening off, like any factory hand." And he drew her towards the car, which was waiting by

the curb.

"You can drive me as far as Marble Arch," said Lola. "I must leave you there because I want to buy something in Bond Street."

"All right, Bond Street then. I want to buy something there too." He helped her in and said to his man, "Masterman's, quick."

The scout master who had drawn his company up against the railings gave a command as Chalfont helped Lola in. The boys presented arms and Chalfont returned their salute with extreme gravity. "The future strike-breakers of the country," he said. "The best institution we've got.—How well you look. Don't you think you might have sent me a line? I felt like a man in a parachute dropping from twenty-two thousand feet in the dark when I found that you had left me. It was rather a rotten trick of yours."

"It was very rotten," said Lola, "but it couldn't be helped, and I may have to do it again. I don't want you to ask me why. I don't want you to ask me anything. There's a wee mystery about me which I must ask you to respect. Don't think about it. Don't let it worry you, but whenever we go out again just let me disappear. One of these days I'll tell you all about it, General, and probably you will be very much amused." She ran her finger along his ribbons and gave him a little smile of respect and admiration which almost made him blush. "Well, then," she added, "what about to-night? I'm free. That's why I was just going to think of you and really wasn't a bit surprised when you suddenly pounced upon me. Things happen like that, don't they? I can meet you at the Savoy or the Carlton or anywhere else you like. Personally, I'm all for the Carlton."

"The Carlton then," he said. "Seven-thirty, and after that,—what?"

"Let's leave it," said Lola. "I love doing things on the spur of the moment."

"You swear you'll come?"

And Lola made a little cross over her heart.

Chalfont heaved a sigh and settled back and looked at her, longing to touch her, longing, in front of all the world, to draw her into his arms and kiss her lips. God, if only this girl knew what she had done to him.—And all the while the car bowled along, competing with every other type of car for precedence, all selfish and many badly driven. Lola had no eyes for the undercurrent of excitement that gave the crowds the look that they had worn in the first days of the War or for the outbreak of khaki that lent the streets their old familiar appearance. She was thinking ahead and making plans and tingling at the idea of dipping once more into the current of life.

Masterman's, it turned out, was a florist's shop, filled attractively with lovely blossoms. Chalfont sprang out and gave Lola his hand. "Come in," he said, "and tell them where to send enough flowers to make a garden of your house. Please,—to celebrate my having found you at last." He wished to Heaven that

he might have taken her to Aspray's and covered her with diamonds. He would willingly have gone broke to do her honor.

And one of the men came forward to offer his eager services to one who certainly must be of great importance to appear so plainly dressed.

"How kind of you," said Lola. "Those, then," and she pointed to a bunch of proud red roses that were standing in a vase.

"Is that all?"

"I want to carry them," she said.

Chalfont was almost boyishly disappointed. He would like to have pictured her among a riot of color. He had not brought her there with a Machiavelian desire to hear her give her address. He was not that kind of man. "Won't you have some more?"

But somehow—what was it in her that did these things to men—Lola could see the inn at Wargrave, its orchard and its smooth lawn with little tables under the trees and the silver stream near by, and hear the words, "I love you, Lola; am I good enough——" And she shook her head. "No more," she said. "They're lovely," took them from the man and put them to her lips.

Chalfont gave his name and followed her to the street. "Now where?" he asked.

Lola held out her hand. "Nowhere else. I'm walking. A thousand thanks. Seven-thirty, the Carlton then."

And once more Chalfont saluted, not as though to a company of boy scouts but to a queen.

And when he had gone, Lola heaved a great big sigh and put the roses to her heart. If they had come from Chilton Park—if Fallaray had cut them for her—If.

# PART V

## I

Fallaray had been lunching with George Lytham at his rooms in the Albany. There had been half a dozen of the men who backed *Reconstruction* to meet him.

From one o'clock until three every one of the numerous troubles which affected England had been discussed and argued about,—disarmament, unemployment, the triple alliance, Mesopotamia, Indian unrest, the inevitable Ireland, the German chicanery and the hot-tempered attitude of France in the matter of Ruhr; and, as though with an impish desire to invent new troubles, George Lytham had brought up the subject of Bolshevism in the universities. Every one of the men present had, of course, his own pet solution to these questions, and as usual, argument had run about like a terrier out for a walk,—backwards and forwards and in circles. Finally, with his head in a whirl, Fallaray had broken up the party to go along to the House. He was down to answer questions from the critics of the Government, and, according to his custom, to dodge the truth as far as he could. He walked out into Piccadilly with his host and together these two tall men, who were giving themselves up to an apparently abortive attempt to put together again the peace of the world—deliberately and ruthlessly smashed by the country which now whined and squealed and cried out excuses while it hid money and machine guns in secret places—made for Westminster arm in arm.

"Where's your car?" asked young Lochinvar.

"I gave it up," said Fallaray. "The sight of our unemployed going about in processions made the keeping of a car grotesque. I've tried to cut down in every other way too. If I were a bachelor, I would let the house in Dover Street, go and live in two rooms and give the money I thus saved to the fund for out-of-work soldiers. I can't do that. There's Feo."

Lytham nodded and said to himself, "Yes, there's Feo and her old scamp of a father and Gilbert Jermyn,—with nothing back from any of them, not even gratitude." If he had stood in Fallaray's shoes he would long since have brought an action for divorce against that woman and gone in quest of a girl who understood the rudimentary rules of sportsmanship and the art of give and take. He held in utter contempt the old adage that having made your bed it is necessary to lie upon it. What bosh that was. Wasn't the town full of beds of every size and price? Sometimes, when he thought of the way in which Fallaray permitted himself to be run and worked and milked and used by his so-called wife and her family, by the Government, by all sorts of societies and even by himself, a huge impatience swept over him and he wanted to cry out, "Fallaray, for God's sake, kick somebody. Don't be so damned fair. Give a little consideration to yourself. Don't always look at everything from everybody else's point of view. Be selfish for a change."

And yet, all the while, different as he was from Fallaray in nature and character—with that strong streak of ruthlessness which permitted him to climb over the bodies of his opponents—Lytham loved Fallaray and would willingly have blacked his boots. There were moments when, looking into the eyes of his

friend, he saw behind them a spirit as pure, as unselfish and as merciful as that of Christ, and he stood back, almost in awe. It was all the more galling, therefore, to see his friend hipped and hedged in by the rotten tricks of his party, by the quick shifting changes of his chief and by the heavy blundering of the other old bad men. How could he stand it? Why didn't he give it all up, get out, try and find a corner of the earth where people didn't quarrel and cheat,—and fall in love. He needed, no man more so, the "rustle of silk."

Fallaray was on his own chain of thought. "Hookwood's line about the Irish leaders," he said suddenly, "if based on any truth, makes negotiations with them futile. They have got a great deal of American money in their possession,—every Irish servant girl in the United States has been forced by the priests to subscribe to the Sinn Fein funds. We know that. But if, as Hookwood says, the Irish Republican leaders are afraid of an inquiry as to how they have spent or misspent these funds, it stands to reason that they will continue to fight tooth and nail for something which they know they can never get. It's the only way in which they can maintain a barrier between themselves and disgrace and that brings us back to the beginning. Robert Cecil, Lord Derby, Horace Plunkett, Philip Gibbs and all the rest of us may just as well toss up the sponge. Don't you think so, Lytham?"

"Oh, God," said Lytham, "I'm sick of the Irish. The mere mention of the name gives me jaundice. A rabble of egomaniacs led by a set of crooks and gunmen who are no longer blessed by the Roman Catholic Church."

After which, as this was certainly a conversation stop, there was silence. They walked down St. James's Street into the Mall, through the Horse Guard's parade to Parliament Street and so to the courtyard of the House of Commons. The undercurrent of excitement and activity brought about by the strike was noticeable everywhere. Military lorries carrying men and kit moved about. St. George's barracks was alive with recruits and old soldiers going back. In and out of the Horse Guards ex-officers in mufti came and went. The girls who had served in the W. A. A. C.'s streamed back again to enroll, and through it all, sarcastic emblems of a peace that did not exist, sat the two figures on horseback in their plumes and brass.

"London enjoying itself," said Fallaray ironically. "There is the taste of blood in the mouths of all our people. Fighting has become a habit, almost a hobby."

And young Lochinvar nodded. Would he ever forget the similar scenes that had taken place away back in that August of '14?

"I'm tired," said Fallaray, with a groan. "I'm dog-tired. If Feo were not at Chilton Park this weekend, I would escape after question time and go down and lie on the earth and sleep.—Well, good by, my dear lad. Don't be impatient

with me. Bring out your numbers of *Reconstruction*, hit hard and truly from the shoulder and see what you can do, you young hot-heads. As for me——!"

They stood on the edge of the courtyard with all its indifferent pigeons struggling for a living, oblivious to the intricacies, secrecies and colossal egotisms of the men who passed into the House. But before they separated something happened which made both their hearts beat faster.

A tall, primly dressed elderly man, who had apparently been waiting, sprang forward, a glint of great anger in his eyes and two spots of color on his pale cheeks. He said, "Mr. Fallaray, a word with you, Sir."

And Fallaray turned with his usual courtesy and consideration. "What can I do?" he asked.

"I'll tell you what you can do. You can stop showing sympathy for the Irish murderers and assassins. You can stop pussyfooting. You can withdraw all your remarks about reprisals. That's what you can do. And if you're interested, I'll tell you why I say so." His voice shook and blood seemed to suffuse his pale eyes.

"My only son went all through the War from the beginning to the end. He joined as a Tommy because, as an insignificant doctor, I had no pull. He was promoted to a commission for gallantry and decorated with the M. C. for distinguished work in the field. He was wounded three times—once so severely that his life was given up—but he returned to his regiment and finally marched with it into Germany. He was almost the last officer to be demobbed. After which, failing to get employment because patriots are not required in the city, he volunteered for the Black and Tans. Last Friday afternoon, in the course of carrying out orders, he was set upon in the streets of Cork by a dozen men in masks, foully murdered and hideously desecrated. My God, Mr. Fallaray, do you wonder that my blood boils when I hear of your weak-kneed treatment of these dirty dogs?"

He stood for a moment shaking, his refined face distorted, his gentle unathletic figure quivering with rage and indignation. Then he turned on his heel and went away, walking like a drunkard.

Fallaray and George Lytham looked at each other and both of them made the same gesture of impotence.

It was a difficult world.

## II

Fallaray's position in the Cabinet was a peculiar one. It was rather like that of a disconcerting child in the house of orthodox church people who insisted on asking direct and pertinent questions on the Bible story, especially after having

read Wells's first volume of the "Outline of History." How did Adam and Eve get into Eden? If God never sleeps, isn't he very cross in the morning? And so on.

All through the War, Fallaray had been a thorn in the side of his chief. His honesty and his continual "why" were a source of irritation and sometimes of anger. He had no patience whatever with shiftiness, intrigue and favoritism, the appointment of mere duffers to positions of high responsibility. He made no bones whatever about expressing his opinion as to the frivolity that prevailed in certain quarters, together with the habit of dodging every grave issue. On the question of the League of Nations too, he was in close accord with Lord Robert Cecil and often made drastic criticisms of the frequent somersaults of his chief. His definite stand on the Irish question was extremely annoying to the brass-hat brigade and to the master-flounderer and weathercock, who showed himself more and more to be a mixture of Billy Sunday and Mark Anthony, crying out that black was white at one end of the town and ten minutes later that white was black at the other end. And yet, when it came to results, Fallaray might almost as well have been on the town council of Lower Muddleton as in the Cabinet of the British Government. Respected for his faithfulness to duty, he was disliked for his honesty and feared for his utter disregard for personal aggrandizement and the salary that went with it.

No wonder, therefore, that he was tired. He had been under a long and continual strain. In Parliament he found himself still dealing with the men who had suffered from brain anæmia before the War and had, therefore, been unable ever to believe, in spite of Lord Roberts, that war was possible,—that same body of professional politicians who were mentally and physically incapable of looking at the numerous problems of the hour, the day and the week with sanity and with courage. At home—if such a word could be used for Dover Street—there was Feo, who had no more right to be under his roof than any one of the women that passed him in the street. He was a tired and lonely man on the verge of complete disillusionment, disappointed with his fellow Ministers and deeply disappointed with the suspicion and jealousy which had grown up between England and her allies. It seemed to him, also, that the blank refusal of the United States to have anything to do with the League of Nations, even as revised from the original draft of President Wilson, the Messiah who had failed to function mainly because of the personal spite of the Republican leaders, jeopardized the future of the world and gave Germany a springboard which one of these days she would not fail to use. In spite of her reluctantly made promises, she was very busy inventing new and diabolical weapons of war and taking out patents for them in Washington, while pretending to observe the laws laid down by the Allies as to her disarmament and the manufacture of war materials under her treaty obligations. Krupps had designed new methods of artillery fire control, new fuses for projectiles, new

gas engines, new naval fire-control devices, new parts for airplanes, new chemicals and new radio apparatuses. To what end? In the face of these facts he could perfectly well understand the French attitude, hysterical as it seemed to be. They knew her for a liar, a cheat and an everlasting enemy and whenever Fallaray returned from those interminable conferences in Paris, he did so with the recollection upon him of something in the eyes of Foch and other Frenchmen whose love of country was a religion that put a touch of fear into his soul. What were they all doing, these politicians of England, of the United States, of Italy? Were they not those very same ostriches who during all the years that led up to the War had hidden their heads in the sand,—the same heads, precisely the same sand?

As he entered the House that afternoon to be heckled with questions which he dared not answer truthfully, he wished that he had been born not to politics but to sportsmanship. He wished that he had carried on his undergraduate love of games, had kept himself fit, had joined the army as a subaltern in August, '14, and had found the German bullet upon which his name had been written. In such a way, at any rate, he could better have served his country than by being at that grave moment an impotent piece on the political chessboard. Both publically and privately this man felt himself to be a failure. In the House of Commons he was more or less friendless, regarded as an unreliable party man. In his home he was a lodger, ignored by the woman who ran his house. He was without love, joy, kindness, the interest and devotion of any one sweet person who could put her soft fingers on his forehead and give him back his optimism. He was like Samson shackled to the windlass which he pushed round and round with gradually diminishing strength.

## III

Lola spent the afternoon with Ernest Treadwell. Loyalty to her old friend took her to the public library on her way back to lunch to ask him to fetch her for a little walk in the afternoon. The flash of joy that came into that boy's eyes at the sight of her rewarded her well and sufficiently. To tell the truth, she would much have preferred to devote the whole of that afternoon to daydreams, but she knew, no one better, the peculiar temperament of young Treadwell and his hungry need of the inspiration which she alone could give him. But just as the boy arrived, a telegram was handed in addressed abruptly to "Breezy, 77 Queen's Road, Bayswater." It was opened, naturally enough, by John, who, to the astonishment of half a dozen customers, emitted a howl of rage. Getting up from his chair behind the glass screen, he wobbled into the back parlor where Lola

was seated with Ernest, deciding as to whether they should take the motor bus to Wimbleton Common or the train to Windsor. With an air of comic drama, though he did not intend it to be comic, the watchmaker flung the telegram upon the crowded table. The remains of lunch hobnobbed with kodaks, tissue paper, balls of string and empty cardboard boxes. The telegram fell on a pat of butter and to Ernest Treadwell's imaginative eye it looked like a hand grenade stuck into a blob of clay. To him, somehow, there was always something sinister about a telegram. Was this one going to ruin the brief happiness of his afternoon?

It was from Feo and ran like this. "I shall need you at six o'clock. Sorry. You had better be at Dover Street at five-thirty. Am dining in town."

Lola read these words over again and again. Windsor was impossible. Even the trip to Wimbleton Common could not be made. But how was this going to affect the Carlton at seven-thirty? She longed above all things once more to get into the clothes and the proper social surroundings of Madame de Brézé, and hear people talking what had become her own language and listen to the music of a good orchestra. She felt that she deserved another adventure with Chalfont. This erratic twist by Lady Feo, whose movements seemed that week-end to resemble those of the woodcock, shattered all these plans. At least,—did they? Not if she knew it.

"Well, there it is," she said and gave the telegram to Ernest Treadwell, who had been watching her face with the most painful anxiety. "She who must be obeyed. I'm afraid this means that all we can do is to wander about for a couple of hours and that our little jaunt to Windsor must be postponed. And we never went to Hampton Court to see the crocuses, did we? Bad luck."

But while she was speaking, her brain was hitting all its cylinders and racing ahead. She would go to the Carlton, Lady Feo or no Lady Feo. She would get her dress from Mrs. Rumbold, with her shoes and stockings, and take them to Dover Street. She would have to dress at Dover Street, bribe Ellen to get her a taxicab and slip down at twelve o'clock to let her in to the area door. That must be the plan of action, whatever the risks might be.

She sprang to her feet and flung an arm round her father's neck,—her disappointed, affectionate father who had looked forward to a merry evening at the local music hall and to one of the old-time Sundays when he could march out in his best clothes and show off Lola to the neighbors. "It's life, Daddy," she said. "It can't be helped. You have your wrist watches. I have Lady Feo. What's the good of grumbling? Tell Mother when you get the chance. At the moment she is busy and mustn't be disturbed. Come on, Ernest, let's go."

But Ernest had other views, now that the country was impossible. "I've got something in my pocket I want to read to you," he said. "Might we go up to the drawing-room, do you think?"

That was excellent. That made things ever so much easier. She could give Ernest until four o'clock or a little after and then get rid of him, go round to Mrs. Rumbold and get eventually to Dover Street in time to have everything ready for Lady Feo on her arrival.

And so they went upstairs and opened up the aloof room, with its persistent and insular odor of the Sabbath and antimacassars, and drew up chairs to the window. The row of houses opposite, which had been converted into shops, was bathed in the afternoon sun. A florist's windows alight with flowers looked like a line from Tennyson in the middle of a financial article in a newspaper. Traffic roared in the street below but did not quite succeed in drowning a weather-beaten piano accompanying a throaty baritone singing, "She dwelt amid the untrodden wiys.—And h'oh the differ-rence ter me."

With a thoughtfulness that seemed to Ernest Treadwell to be exquisite, Lola shut the window so that she might not miss a single word that she was about to hear. Without any preliminaries and with the colossal egotism that is part and parcel of all writing, the young librarian took from his pocket a wad of manuscript, and in a deadly monotone commenced to read his epic. It was in blank verse and ran to about sixteen pages. It retold the old story of Paola and Francesca, not in the manner of Stephen Phillips and not in imitation of Masefield or any of the younger poets, but in the Treadwell way,—jerky, explosive and here and there out of key; but for all that filled with a rough picturesqueness and passion, with a quite extraordinary sense of color and feeling which held Lola breathless from beginning to end. It was this boy's greatest effort, on which he had been working for innumerable months, burning the midnight oil with the influence of Lola upon him, and his great love which lifted him into ecstasy.—And when he had finished and ventured to look into her face, he saw there something that crowned his head with laurels and filled his heart with tears.

"Oh," she said. "Oh.—Ernie, you've done it. It's beautiful. You are a poet. However far behind them all, you are in the line of great singers." And she reached out for the manuscript and saw that on the first page, in angular boyish writing, were the words, "To Lola,—of whom I dream."

Simpkins, Treadwell, Chalfont,—but, oh, where was Fallaray, her hero, the man who needed love?

## IV

When Feo bounced into her room a little after five-thirty she found a perfectly composed and efficient Lola who had laid out a selection of her mistress's most recent frocks with the accompanying shoes and stockings. There was nothing

about the girl to indicate her latent excitement and her determination under any circumstances to keep her appointment at the Carlton. The cardboard box from Mrs. Rumbold's was up in her room. Ellen had been interviewed and had promised to slip down and open the area door at twelve o'clock.

Feo nodded and gave one of her widest smiles. "Good for you, Lola," she said. "If you had been out for the day or something, I should, of course, have been able to do my hair, dress and get off,—but not so well as when you're here. If it came to a push I suppose I could do everything for myself, even cook my breakfast; but I should hate it and it wouldn't give me any pleasure.—That one," she said, and pointed to a most peculiar frock that looked like the effort of that overconscientious chameleon when it endeavored to imitate the tartan of the Gordon Highlanders. It was a very chaos of colors, but she was in the highest spirits and evidently felt in a riotous mood. And while she gave herself up to Lola, in order to have a few deep waves put in her wiry bobbed hair, she babbled as though she were talking to Mrs. Malwood or one of her other particular friends.

"I don't know what the devil's happened to this week-end," she said. "Every blessed thing's gone wrong. That glossy scoundrel at Chilton,—good Lord, I must be more careful,—and all those dullards at Aylesbury! We played bridge nearly all night and no one ever doubled. It was like going to a race meeting and finding the anti-vice brigade where the bookies ought to be. I simply couldn't stay there another night, so I slept until four o'clock this afternoon, had a cup of tea in my room and dashed up. To-night I hope for better things. An old friend of mine—and really old friends have their points—got back from India yesterday. I saw his name in the paper and rang him up at the Rag. We're going to dine and dance and so forth, quite like old times; so do your best with me, Lola. I haven't seen this man for five years.—Don't allow any of them to remain round my eyes.—Oh, by the way, I'm really awfully sorry to have smashed up your plans and I don't see how you can go back to your father and mother to-morrow because I shall want to be dressed about ten o'clock and I shall be home again to sleep. So it pretty well rots your day, Lola. Never mind, I'll see that you have a little holiday before long."

And she smiled up into Lola's face and for the moment looked very womanly and charming and perfectly sincere. For all her curious tangents and unexpected twists and the peculiar hardness and unscrupulous selfishness that she brought into her dealings with every one, this woman had good points; and even when she hurt her friends deeply she had an unexplainable knack of retaining their loyalty. She really liked Lola and admired her and would have gone very far out of her way to look after her.—The pity of it was that she had not been born a man.

She babbled on while Lola polished her up and did all those quite unnec-

essary things which modern life has invented for women before they will show themselves to the public. In the frankest possible way and without the least reserve she roughed out the history of the man who had come back,—a pucca soldier who had been in India since the War and was one of Feo's earliest friends. He had loved her violently, been turned down for Fallaray and had never married. It so happened that he had not seen Feo during his periods of leave while the War was on and had told her over the telephone that if he didn't see her then, at once, he'd either have apoplexy or be taken to Bow Street for smashing the town. Feo laughed when she repeated this.

"And he would too," she said. "He's just that sort. Those tall, dark men with a dash of the Oriental in them somewhere go through life with the apparent indifference of a greyhound until the bursting point comes, and when they give way,—whew, look out for the splinters."

She was excited,—almost as excited as Lola was. And finally, dressed and scented, with her nails pink and her full lips reddened, she had never looked more characteristically Feo, more virile, more audacious, more thoroughbred and at the same time more bizarre. "Now for the Ritz," she said (Ah, then the Carlton was safe), turned at the door and in a moment of impulse took a diamond bracelet from her wrist and pitched it at Lola as though it were a tennis ball. "You're a jolly good sportsman, child," she added, with her widest smile.

All the way downstairs she sang an aria from "Le Coq d'Or,"—a strange, wistful, moonlit thing.—And hardly had she gone before Lola seated herself at the dressing table, where she commenced those operations which would transform her also into a woman of the world.

## V

And then, with her nose in the air and her hands folded over her tummy, Miss Breezy marched into the dressing room. "Oh," she said, which was quite enough.

And Lola sprang to her feet, caught in the act of using her mistress's make-up. But it was so long, or it seemed to be so long, since she had held any conversation with her aunt that nearly all sense of relationship had faded out. This was Miss Breezy the housekeeper, natural enemy of servants and on the lookout especially to find something which would form the basis of an unfavorable report in regard to Lola.

"Good afternoon, Miss Breezy."

"Oh, don't be absurd. I'm your aunt and there's no getting away from it. This playing of parts makes me impatient." Her tone was snappy but there was, oddly enough, nothing antagonistic in her expression. On the contrary—and this

put Lola immediately on her guard—there was all about her a new air of armistice, an obvious desire to call off unfriendly relations and bury the hatchet.

The thought that ran through Lola's head was, "What does she want to know?"

With a touch of the adventurous spirit for which Lola had not given her credit, the good lady, who had recently somewhat increased in bulk, clambered into Feo's extraordinary chair, in which she looked exactly as if she were waiting to have a tooth filled. Her thinning hair, streaked with white, was scrupulously drawn away from her forehead. Her black shiny dress was self-consciously plain and prim, and she wore those very ugly elastic-sided boots with patent leather tips that are always somehow associated with Philistinism. She might have been the Chairwoman of a Committee of Motion Picture Censorship. "I spent Thursday evening with your mother and father," she said. "I'm glad to hear business is improving. Young Treadwell was there,—a precocious sort of person, I thought."

"A poet," said Lola.

"Poet, eh? Yes, I thought he was something of that sort. If I were his mother I'd spank the poetry out of him. What do we want poets for? Might as well have fiddlers to imitate whatever the man's name was who played frivolous tunes when some place or other was burning. Men should work these days, not write sloppy things about gravestones."

"He'll make his mark," said Lola.

"You should say a scratch," corrected Miss Breezy. "However, that isn't the point. It appears that Simpkins has become a friend of the family."

Ah, so that was it. She had heard the gossip about Simpky and it was curiosity, not kindness, which had brought her into the dressing room.

"Simpkins," said Miss Breezy, "is a warm member. His father left him some money and he has saved. For Ellen, for Elizabeth or even for Annie, whose father is a Baptist minister, he would make a very desirable husband. I have nothing to say against him—for them," and she looked Lola fully and firmly in the eyes.

And Lola nodded with entire agreement, adding, "Simpky is a good man."

"So there's nothing in that, then? Is that what you mean?"

"Nothing," replied Lola.

And Miss Breezy gave a sigh of relief. It was bad enough for her niece to have become a lady's maid.

Would she go now? Or was there something else at the back of her mind?

For several minutes Miss Breezy babbled rather garrulously about a number of quite extraneous things. She talked about the soldiers in the park, the coal strike, what was likely to happen during the summer, the effect of unemployment on prices, all obviously for the purpose of presently pouncing hawk-like on the unsuspecting Lola,—who, as a matter of fact, had no intention of falling

into any trap. "In yesterday's *Daily Looking Glass*," she said suddenly, "there was a short paragraph that set me thinking. I don't remember the exact wording but it was something like this. 'A short time ago a beautiful young French woman, bearing a name which occupies several interesting chapters in the past history of her country, paid a brief visit to London, dined at the Savoy with one of our best known generals and disappeared as though she had melted with the morning dew. The said general, we hear on the best authority, was distraught and conducted several days' search for his dinner companion. Inquiries were made at every hotel in town without success until the name of de Brézé became quite well known."

Lola had caught her breath at the beginning of this quotation which Miss Breezy obviously knew by heart, and had metaphorically clapped her hand over her mouth to prevent herself from crying out. But knowing that her aunt would turn round and fix her analytical eye upon her, Lola immediately adopted an attitude of mild impersonal interest.

The eye duly came, in fact both eyes, and they found Lola polite and unconcerned, the well-trained lady's maid who was forced to listen to the gossip of her overseer. So that was what it was! Good Heavens, how much did this woman know? And was she, acting on instinct, going to stay in that room until it would be too late for Lola to dress and keep her appointment "with one of our best known generals"? Never before had Lola hung so breathlessly on her aunt's words.

"Did *you* read these lines by any chance?"

"No," said Lola.

"I asked your father if there was anybody of the old name in France and he said he didn't think so. He said he understood from his grandfather that the name would die with him. It had already become Breezy in England. Somehow or other, I think this is rather strange."

"Oh, I don't know," said Lola. "You see these famous names are never allowed to die right out. This Madame de Brézé is probably an actress who is just using the name to suit herself. It has a good ring to it."

"That may be so, and it's true that actresses help themselves to any name that takes their fancy. You, I remember, when you threatened to go into the chorus, talked about claiming relationship with Madame de Brézé." And again she darted a sharp look at Lola.

"I have the right to do that," said Lola quietly, but with a very rapid pulse.

"Well, sometimes I go out of my way to satisfy a whim. It so happens that I have a friend in the detective department at Scotland Yard. I've asked him to keep his eye open for me and let me know what he finds out. As soon as he comes to me with any definite information, I'll share it with you, Lola, you may be sure."

"Oh, thank you, Auntie. That's very kind of you."

But being unable to force back a tide of color that swept slowly over her, Lola opened a drawer in the dressing table and began to put back the various implements that she had used upon her mistress and herself. To think of it! It was likely, then, that she was to be watched in future and that presently, perhaps, the story of her harmless adventures would become the property of her aunt and her parents, of Treadwell and Simpkins, and that the detective, whom she could picture with a toothbrush moustache and flat feet, would one day march into the rooms of General Sir Peter Chalfont and say to him, "Do you know that your friend Madame de Brézé is a lady's maid in the employment of the wife of Mr. Fallaray?"

With the peculiar satisfaction of one who has succeeded in making some one else extraordinarily uncomfortable, Miss Breezy gathered herself together, scrambled out of the chair which might have belonged to a dentist and left the room like an elderly peahen who had done her duty by the world.

And then, having locked the door, Lola returned to the dressing table. "Detective or no detective, I shall dine at the Carlton to-night," she said to herself. "You see if I don't."

## VI

"I want you to meet my sister, one day soon," said Chalfont. "She's a good sort. You'll like her."

"I'm sure I shall," said Lola. "Will she like *me*?"

Chalfont laughed and answered the question with a look of complete admiration. Who could help liking a girl so charming, so frank, so cool, whose love of life was so young and so peculiarly unspoilt? "You would do her good," he said. "Her husband was killed a week before the armistice. She adored him and is a lonely soul. No children, and will never marry again. She's looking after my place in Devonshire, buried alive. But I've persuaded her to come to London and hook on to things a bit and I'll bring you together one day next week,—if you're not going to disappear again. Are you?"

Lola shrugged her shoulders. "So far as I know at present, my plans will keep me in town until the end of June." How could she be more definite than that?

So Chalfont had to be satisfied and hope for the best. It was not his habit to drive people into a corner and force confidences. He had told Lola where he was to be found and she had promised to keep in touch with him. That, at any rate, was good. "We haven't decided where to go to-night," he said. "Don't you

think we'd better make up our minds?"

Lola rose from the table. The pleasant dining room at the Carlton was still well-filled, and the band was playing one of those French things with an irresistible march time which carry the mind immediately to the Alcazar and conjure up a picture of an outdoor stage crowded with dancing figures seen through a trickle of cigarette smoke and gently moving branches of young leaves. "Don't let's make up our minds what we'll do till we get to the very doors. Then probably one or other of us will have a brain wave. In any case I'm very happy. I've loved every minute of this evening and it's so nice to be with you again."

Chalfont touched her arm. He could not resist the temptation. "I'd sell my soul in return for a dozen such nights," he said, and there was a Simpkins quiver in his voice and a Treadwell look of adoration in his eyes. He was in uniform, having later to return to the Guards encampment in Kensington Gardens. They passed through the almost empty lounge into the hall with its cases of discreet, ruinous jewelry on the walls under gleaming lights, and there a man in plain clothes drew himself up as Chalfont approached and clicked his heels.

"Oh, hello, Ellingham," said Chalfont. "How are you, my dear chap? Thought you were in India."

"I was, Sir. Got back yesterday. Curious place, London, by Jove."

Chalfont turned to Lola. "Madame de Brézé, may I introduce my friend Colonel Ellingham?"

Those tall dark men with a touch of the Oriental in them somewhere—Lola caught her breath, but managed to smile and say the conventional thing.

But at the sound of her voice, the woman who had been standing with her back to them, talking to the obsequious *maître d'hôtel*, whirled round. It was Feo—Feo with her eyes wide and round and full of the most astonishing mischief and amusement—Feo with her mouth half open as though she were on the point of bursting into a huge laugh. Lola, that discreet little Lola, that little London mouse, niece of the stiff old Breezy, daughter of those little people in Queen's Road, Bayswater, with a brigadier general, if you please, the famous Sir Peter Chalfont with a comic cork arm to catch whom every match-making mother had spread her net for years!

Without turning a hair, Lola held out her hand impulsively. "My dear," she said in a ringing voice, "I thought you said that you were going to the Ritz."

Her own words as she had left her dressing room came back into Feo's mind. "You're a jolly good sportsman, child."—Well, although she could hardly believe her eyes and the incident opened up the widest range of incredulity, she would show this astonishing girl that there were other sportsmen about. "We went to the Ritz," she replied, as though to one of her "gang," "but it looked hideously depressing and so we came on here." And she went forward and put her arm

around Lola's shoulder in her most affectionate way. How well her old frock came out on that charming figure. She suspected the shoes and stockings. "So this is what you do, Lola, when the cat's away!"

And Lola laughed and said, "Oh, but doesn't one deserve a little holiday from time to time?"

"Of course,—and you who are so devoted to good causes."

"The best of causes and the most beautiful." Lola would return the ball until she dropped.

Feo knew this and had mercy, but there was an amazing glint in her eyes. The little monkey!

It was obvious to Lola that Feo had not met Chalfont or else that she had met him and was not on speaking terms. Either way how could she resist the chance that had been brought about by this extraordinary contretemps. So she said, "Lady Feo, may I introduce my old friend, Sir Peter Chalfont,—Lady Feodorowna Fallaray."

It so happened that these two had not met,—although Feo's was not the fault. It was that Chalfont disliked the lady and had gone deliberately out of his way to avoid her acquaintance. He bowed profoundly.—Lola, her name was Lola. What a dear little name.

"We've got a box at the Adelphi," said Feo. "Berry's funny and Grossmith's always good. There's room for four. Won't you come?" What did she care at the moment whether this invitation made Ellingham's eyes flick with anger or not. All this was too funny for words.—That little monkey!

"Thanks so much," said Lola, with a slight drawl, "but it so happens that we're going round to the House of Commons to hear a debate. Perhaps we can foregather some other night." And she looked Feo full in the face, as cool as a fish.

It didn't matter what was said after that. There was a murmur from the other three and a separation, Ellingham marching the laughing Feo away, Chalfont crossing over to the hatroom, greatly relieved. Lola, alone for a moment, stood in the middle of what seemed to be an ocean of carpet under hundreds of thousands of lights, with her heart playing ducks and drakes, but with a sense of thrill and exultation that were untranslatable. "What a sportsman," she thought.—"But of course she noticed her stockings."

And when Chalfont returned to her side he said, "I don't like your knowing that woman. You seem frightfully pally. You didn't tell me that she was a great friend of yours."

"Well," said Lola, "I haven't told you very much of anything, have I? That's because I like to hear you talk, I suppose."

"You draw me out," said Chalfont apologetically. "But what's all this about

the House of Commons? First I've heard of it."

"Oh, just an idea," said Lola lightly. "Couldn't you wangle it?" She had caught the word from him.

"I don't know a blessed soul in that monkey shop, except Fallaray."

"Who better?" asked Lola. "Let's go round, send in your name and ask Mr. Fallaray for a card."

"My dear Lola—I beg your pardon, I mean, my dear Madame de Brézé—if you remember, Fallaray didn't know me from Adam that night at the Savoy. I really don't think I can push myself in like that, if you'll forgive me. Let's take a chance at the Gaiety. No one's going to the theater just now. There's sure to be plenty of room."

By this time they were in the street, with a huge commissionaire waiting for a glance from Chalfont to bring up a taxi with his silver whistle. It was another lovely night, clear and warm and windless,—a night that would have been admirable for Zeppelins. Lola went over to the curb and looked up at all the stars and at the middle-aged moon. Think of that light so white and soft on the old gardens of Chilton Park.—"Don't let's go in to a fuggy building," she said. "Let's walk. London's very beautiful at night. If you won't take me to the House of Commons, at any rate walk as far as the Embankment. I want to see the river. I want to see the little light gleaming over Parliament. It's just a whim."

"Anything you say," said Chalfont. What did it matter where they went, so long as they were together? Lola,—so that was her name.

## VII

They crossed to Trafalgar Square, the figure of Nelson silhouetted against the sky. They went down Northumberland Avenue to the Embankment and crossed the road to the river side. The tide was high but the old river was deserted and sullen. Westminster Bridge faced them, alive with little lights, and on the opposite bank the dark buildings ran along until they joined the more cheerful looking St. Thomas's Hospital, whose every window was alight. Pre-war derelicts who were wont to clutter the numerous seats were back again in their old places, their dirty ranks swelled by members of the great new army of unemployed. Many of these had borne arms for England and wore service ribbons on their greasy waistcoats. Two or three of them, either from force of habit or in a spirit of irony and burlesque, sprang up as Chalfont approached and saluted. It threw a chill through his veins as they did so,—those gallant men who had come to such a pass. The House of Commons and the Victoria Tower loomed ahead of them.

To Chalfont, Parliament stood as a mere talking shop in which a number of

uninspired egotists schemed and struggled in order to cling to office and salaries while the rest answered to the crack of the party whip and used whatever influence they had for self-advertisement,—commercializing the letters which they had bought the right to place against their names. He detested the place and the people it sheltered and regarded it as a great sham, a sepulchre of misplaced hopes and broken promises. But to Lola, who walked silently at his side, it symbolized the struggles of Fallaray, stood dignified and with a beautiful sky line as the building in which that man might some day take his place as the inspired leader of a bewildered and a patient country. And as she walked along on the pavement which had been worn by the passing of many feet, glancing from time to time at the water over which a pageant of history had passed, her heart swelled and her love seemed to throw a little white light round her head. Was it so absurd, so grotesque, that she should have in a sort of way grown up for and given herself to this man who had only seen her once and probably forgotten her existence? Sometimes it seemed to her not only to be absurd and grotesque but impudent,—she, the daughter of the Breezys of Queen's Road, Bayswater, the maid who put waves into the wiry bobbed hair of an irresponsible lady of fashion, and who, from time to time, masqueraded in the great city under the name of a relative long since dead and forgotten. Nevertheless, a tiny figure at the side of Chalfont, her soul flowered at that moment and she knew that she would very willingly be burnt at the stake like Joan of Arc if, by so doing, she could rub away from Fallaray's face even one or two of the lines of loneliness which life had put upon it.

Chalfont was silent, because he was wondering how far he dared to go with this girl who had talked about a "wee mystery" and who did not hold him in sufficient confidence to tell him where she lived or let him see her home. This was only the second time that he had met her and he asked himself with amazement whether it could be true that he was ready to sacrifice career, position and everything else for her sake. There were other women who had flitted across his line of vision and with whom he had passed the time. They had left him untouched, unmoved, a confirmed bachelor. But during the days that he had spent in an eager search for Lola he knew that this child had conquered him and brought him down with a crash. He didn't give a single curse who she was, where she came from or what was this mystery to which she referred. He loved her. He wanted her, and he would go through fire and water to make her his wife. And having come to that conclusion, he broke the silence hitherto disturbed only by the odd wailing of machinery on the other side of the river and by the traffic passing over Westminster Bridge like fireflies. He put his hand under Lola's elbow, stopped her and drew her to the stonework of the embankment. "In an hour or two," he said, "I suppose you will disappear again and not give me another thought until

you cry out, 'Horse, horse, play with me,' and there isn't a horse. I can't let that happen."

Instinct and the subconscious inheritance of a knowledge of men kept Lola from asking why not. The question would obviously provide Chalfont with a dangerous cue.

So Chalfont went on unhelped. He said, "Look here, let's have all this out. I want you to marry me. I want you to be perfectly frank and treat me fairly. You're a widow and you appear to be alone. I don't want to force your hand or ask you to haul down your fourth wall. Nor do I hope that you will care more about me than any girl after two meetings. I just want to know this. Are there any complications? Is there anything in the way of my seeing you day after day and doing my utmost to show you that I love you more than anything on earth?"

Simpkins, Treadwell, Chalfont. But where, oh, where was Fallaray?

Lola didn't know what to say. What was there in her that did these things to men? She looked up into Chalfont's face and shook her head. "You're a knight," she said. "You stand in silver armor with a crusader's cross on your chest. You came to my rescue and proved that there are good men in this world. You have made an everlasting friend of me but,—I love some one else. Oh, Sir Peter Chalfont, I love some one else. He doesn't know it. He may never know it. I may never see him again. I may die of love like a field daisy put in a dry vase, but when I cross the Bridge I shall wait until he comes, loving him still."

Leaning on the parapet side by side they watched the waters go by, dark and solemn, undisturbed even by the passing of a barge, licking the stonework away below. And as they stood there, moved to great emotion, Big Ben sang the hour. It was ten o'clock. On a seat behind them four men were grouped in attitudes of depression,—hungry, angry. A little way to their right stood that place in which the so-called leaders sat up to their necks in the problems of the world, impotent, bewildered.

And finally Chalfont said, "I see. Well, I wish you luck, little Lola, and I congratulate you on loving like that. Oddly enough, we both love like that. I wish to God——"

And as Lola moved away she put her hand through his arm as a sister might have done, which was better than nothing; and they walked back along that avenue of broken men, that street of weary feet, up Northumberland Avenue and back into the lights and the whirl. "I think I'll leave you now," said Lola. "There's a cold hand on my heart. I want to be alone."

And so, without a word, Chalfont hailed a passing taxi, opened the door, handed Lola in, and stood back, very erect, very simple, with his cork arm most uncomic. And before the cab started he flung up his left hand to the peak of his cap, not as though saluting a company of boy scouts or a queen, but the woman

he loved, the woman he would always love, the woman for whom he would wait on the other side of the Bridge.

And all the way to Dover Street Lola wept.

## VIII

In the servants' sitting room Simpkins was sitting alone, not reading, not smoking; thinking of Lola and of the inn at Wargrave which had become so detestable,—a dead ambition, the ghost of a dream. And when the door opened and Lola let herself in, tear-stained, he sprang to his feet, gazing in amazement. Lola—dressed like a lady—crying.—But she held up her hand, went swiftly across the room and out, upstairs. She was back an hour and a half too soon. There was no need for Ellen to slip down and open the door. The evening had been a dismal failure. It would be a long time before she would play Cinderella again,—although the Prince loved her and had told her so.

But instead of going through the door which led to the servants' quarters, she stood for a moment in the corridor through which Simpkins had taken her when she had first become an inmate of that house and once more she stayed there against the tapestry with a cold hand on her heart. Simpkins loved her. Treadwell loved her. Chalfont loved her, but oh, where was Fallaray? What a little fool she had been ever to suppose, in her wildest dreams, that Fallaray, Fallaray would see her and stop to speak, set alight by the love in her eyes! What a silly little fool.

A door opened and Fallaray came out,—his shoulders rounded, his Savonarola face pale and lined with sleeplessness. At the sight of the charming little figure in evening dress he drew up. Mrs. Malwood perhaps, or another of Feo's friends. She was entertaining again, of course.

And Lola trembled like a frightened bird, with great tears welling from her eyes.

Fallaray was puzzled. This child did not look like one of Feo's friends,—and why was she crying? He knew the face, he remembered those wide-apart eyes. They had followed him into his work, into his dreams,—de Brézé, de Brézé,—the Savoy, the Concert.

He held out his hand. "Madame de Brézé," he said, "what have they done to you?"

And she shook her head again, trembling violently.

And Fallaray, with the old curious tingle running through his veins, was helpless. If she wouldn't tell him what was the matter, what was he to do? He imagined that some flippancy or some sarcasm had wounded this astonishing

girl and she had fled from the drawing-room and lost her way. But women were unknown to him, utter strangers, and he was called to work. He said, "My wife's room is there," stood irresolute for a moment, although his brain was filled with the songs of birds, and bowed and went away.

And when Lola heard the street door close, she moved like a bird shot through the wings, fumbled her way to the passage which led to her servant's bedroom and flung herself face downwards upon her bed. What was it in her that did these things to every man,—except Fallaray?

# PART VI

## I

To Ellingham's entire satisfaction, Feo did not sit out the performance at the Adelphi. She left in the middle of the second act. It was not a piece demanding any sort of concentration. That was not its métier. It was one of those rather pleasant, loosely made things, bordering here and there on burlesque, in which several comedians have been allotted gaps to fill between songs which, repeated again and again, give a large chorus of pretty girls an opportunity of wearing no dress longer than five minutes or lower than the knees. But Feo's mind was wandering. The last twenty-four hours had been filled with disappointment. She agreed with the adage that if you can't make a mistake you can't make anything. But this last one, which had taken the Macquarie person into her circle of light, proved to her that she was losing not only her sense of perspective but her sense of humor. It rankled; and it continued to rankle all through the jokes and songs and horseplay of the company behind the footlights that Saturday night.

Then, too, she found herself becoming more and more disappointed in Ellingham. He had aged. Still just on the right side of forty, he seemed to her to have had all the youth knocked out of him. His resilience had gone—sapped by the War—and with it his danger, which had been so attractive. He was now a quiet, repressed, responsible, dull—yes, dull,—man; in a sort of way the father of a family. When he talked it was about his regiment in India, his officers, his quar-

termaster sergeant, the health of his men, the ugly look of things in the East. All this made it seem to Feo that Beetle Ellingham had pulled away from her, left her behind. She was still fooling, while he, once as irresponsible as herself and almost as mad, had found his feet and was standing firmly upon them. Disappointment, disappointment.

"What to do?" she asked, as they got into a taxicab. She rather hoped that he would say "Nothing. I'll see you home and say good night."

But he didn't. "I'll drive you home and talk for an hour, if you can stand such a thing. I'm going to see my old people in Leicestershire to-morrow, and I don't suppose I shall be back in town for a month or two."

She told him to make it Dover Street, and he did so, and there was silence until the cab drew up at the door of the house in which the man—whom she had for the first time seriously considered as the new Messiah—burnt himself up in the endeavor to find some solution to all the troubles of his country, and, like a squirrel in a cage, ran round and round and round.

Feo let herself in and led the way to what she called her den,—a long, low-ceilinged room, self-consciously decorated in what purported to be a futuristic manner, the effect of which, as though it had been designed by an untrained artist striving to disguise his ignorance behind a chaos of the grotesque, made sanity stagger. And here, full stretch on an octagonal divan, she mounted a cigarette in her long green holder and commenced to inhale hungrily.

Hating the room and all its fake, Ellingham, who more than ever justified the nickname of Beetle which had been given to him at Eton because of his overhanging black eyebrows, prowled up and down with his hands in his pockets. He, too, was disappointed. It seemed to him that Feo had remained the hoyden, the overgrown, long-legged girl with boy's shoulders and the sort of sex illusiveness which had so greatly attracted him in the old days, and had set him to work to eliminate and replace. But now she was thirty something, and although he hated to use the expression about her of all women, he told himself that she was mutton playing lamb, and a futile lamb at that. Perhaps it was because he had been all the way through the War and had come out with a series of unforgettable pictures stamped upon his brain that he had expected to find some sort of emergement on the part of Feo, who, although she had been spared the blood and muck of Flanders, was the sister of a flying man, the relation of innumerable gallant fellows who had been made the gun fodder of that easily preventable orgy, and the friend of many a young soldier whose bones now lay under the shallow surface of French earth. So far as she was concerned, he could see that the War might never have happened at all. It made him rather sick. Nevertheless he had loved her violently and had never married because of his remembrance of her and he wanted to find out how she stood. He was entirely in the dark. He had not

been alone with her once since the end of July, 1914,—a night on the terrace of a house overlooking the Thames at Cookham, when all the world already knew that slaughter was in the air and the wings of the angel of death rustled overhead.

He stopped in front of her, all stretched out among cushions, her short and pleated frock making her appear to be in a kilt. "Well, how about it?" he asked.

And she shrugged her shoulders and tossed the ash of her cigarette at a small marble pot. "I dunno," she said. "Pretty badly, one way and another."

"How's that?"

"Oh, I dunno," she said again. "One gets nowhere and does really nothing and spends one's life looking for something that never turns up,—the glamour of the impossible. Disappointment, disappointment."

"H'm," said Beetle. "Is there no chance of your getting on better with Fallaray? He seems to be the only live creature in politics, the one honest man." He had never imagined that he would ever have put that question to her.

"That's true," said Feo. "He is. I have nothing but admiration for Edmund,—except dislike. Profiles and tennis are no longer my hobbies and there is no more hope of our getting on, as you call it, than of my becoming an earnest worker among the slums. Once Feo, always Feo, y'know. That's the sentence I labor under, Beetle. As a rule, I'm perfectly satisfied and have no grumbles. I rot about and play the giddy ox, wear absurd clothes, do my best to give a jar to what remains of British smugdom and put in a good-enough time. You mustn't judge me as you find me to-night. I have the megrims. Ghosts are walking and I'm out of form. To put it truthfully, I'm rather ashamed of myself. I've become a little too careless. I must relearn the art of drawing the line. That's all. But, for the Lord's sake, don't let me depress *you*,—that is, if I have any longer the power of doing so."

She hadn't, he found, and it hurt. In the old days he would have said so and in a sort of way got even with her for turning him down and marrying Fallaray. He would have taken a certain amount of joy in hitting her as hard as he could. But he had altered. He was not the old Beetle, the violent, hot-tempered, rather cruel individualist. Men had died at his side,—officers and Tommies. And so his days of hurting women were over. He was rather a gentle Beetle now. Curious how things shaped themselves. And so he prowled up and down with his hands in his pockets, inarticulate, out of touch,—like a doctor in a lunatic asylum, or an Oxford man revisiting the scenes of his giddy youth in his very old age.

And Feo continued to smoke,—smarting. Not because she cared for Beetle or had ever given him a thought. But because everything was edgeways, like a picture puzzle that had fallen in a heap. She would have given a great deal to have had this man take his hands out of his pockets and stop prowling and become the old violent Beetle once again. She would have liked to have heard

him curse Fallaray and accuse her of being a rotter. She would have liked to have seen the old hot look in his eyes and been compelled to laugh him off, using her old flippant words. Anything,—anything but the thing that was.

But even as he prowled—up round the wispy table and down in front of that damn-fool altar, or whatever it was—he became more and more the ancient friend, distantly related, who had little to talk about and little that he cared to hear. Once more he went over all the old India stuff, the regiment, the officers and men, their health, the underlying unrest of the East. Then he jerked, as a sudden glorious new thought, to his people and the place they lived in, but all the same this unsatisfactory reunion lasted twenty minutes less than the given hour.

Suddenly Ellingham stopped walking and stood in front of Feo and said, "Good-by. I don't suppose I shall see you again." And wheeled off and went, quickly, with relief.

And when Feo heard the front door bang, she remained where she was lying until the hour was fulfilled, with the hand that he had shaken all stiff, and with two tears running slowly down her face.

Disappointment.—Disappointment.

## II

Lola woke early and went to the window and pulled up the blind. The sun was shining and half a dozen London sparrows were chirping and hopping about in the back yard of one of the houses in Bond Street. One poor anæmic tree stood in the middle of it, and an optimist, condemned to live in the city, had worked on the small patch of earth and made a little garden where cats met at night and sang duets and swore, and talked over all the feline gossip of the neighborhood, fighting from time to time to keep their claws in, to the cruel derangement of the bed of geraniums, which looked that morning as though the Germans had passed over it.

All Lola's dreams during the night had been filled with tragedies, but the effect of the one that was upon her still was that she had died, withered up, after having been left by Fallaray in the corridor where she had been caught by him in tears,—unable, because, for some reason, there had been a cold hand on her heart, to jump at the great and wonderful opportunity that had come to her and which she had worked so long to achieve. And in this last just waking dream, the reality of which still left her awed, she had stood, bewildered, on the unfamiliar side of a short wide bridge, to be faced suddenly by a scoffing and sarcastic woman who had taunted her for her impotence and lack of grit and called her middle class,

without cunning and without the necessary strength to be unscrupulous, so vital to success.

And as she stood facing a new day with these words ringing in her ears, she told herself that she ought to have died, that she deserved death, for having lost her nerve and her courage. She accepted the biting criticism of the successful de Brézé and offered no excuses. This was far too big a thing to win by a series of easy steps. And up to that time they all had been easy and had led actually to Fallaray. Everything seemed to have played into her hands and it was she, Lola, who had failed. If she had possessed even half the cunning of which the de Brézé had spoken, with what avidity and delight she must have seized her opportunity when Fallaray had come suddenly upon her. But she had proved herself to be witless and without daring, a girl who had played at being a courtesan in a back room, who had sentiment and sympathy and emotion and whose heart, instead of being altogether set on the golden cage, had become soft with love and hero worship and the delay of hope,—just Lola Breezy, the watchmaker's daughter, the little Queen's Road girl suffering from the reaction of having set alight unwillingly all the wrong men, stirring, finally, her friend Chalfont, who had been so kind and good. So that when Fallaray had come to her at last, remembering her name, she had let him go unstirred, without an effort, because she was thinking of him and not of herself and her love and the passionate desire of her life. Yes, she deserved to be dead, because her courage had oozed out of her finger tips and left her trembling.

But what was she to do now? Give up? Devote herself to lady's maiding and develop into an Ellen, or resign from this position and return home to help her mother in the shop and dwindle into love-sickness? Give up and shake herself back to a normal frame of mind in which, some day, she would walk to chapel with Ernest Treadwell,—or go to Chalfont and tell him the truth and put his love to the test? Or, refusing to own herself a weakling, a dreamer and a failure, begin all over again, this time with as much of cunning as she could find in her nature and all the disturbing influence of that too well-proved gift? Which?

And the answer came in a woman's voice, ringing and strong. "Go on, go on, de Brézé. Begin all over again. You were born to be a canary, with the need of a golden cage. You inherit the courtesan nature; you must let it have its way. As such there's a man you can rescue, lonely and starved of love. It is not as wife that he needs you, but as one with the rustle of silk——"

"I will go on," said Lola. "I will begin again." And with a high head once more and renewed hope and eagerness and courage, she set her brain to work. All the rungs of the ladder were without the marks of her feet. But she waved her hand to the pathetic patch of miniature garden with its anæmic city tree, caught its optimism and began to think. Where was she to begin?

Into her mind came some of the gossip of the servants' sitting room, to which as a rule she paid no attention. Ellen had given out that Simpkins had said that he was to have time off from the following Friday to Tuesday because Mr. Fallaray had made his plans to go down alone to Chilton Park for a short holiday. To Chilton Park for a short holiday! Ah! Here was a line to be followed up. Here was something which might enable her to pick up the thread again.

She began to walk up and down her little room, in a nightgown which certainly did not belong to a courtesan, repeating to herself again and again "Chilton Park, Chilton Park," worrying the thing out like a schoolgirl with a difficult lesson. By some means, by hook or by crook, she also must get to Chilton Park during that time; that was certain, even if she had to ask Lady Feo to let her give up her position as lady's maid. But following this thought came another, instantly,—that she would regret above all things to put her mistress to inconvenience, because she was grateful for many kindnesses and maids were scarce. And she was glad that the de Brézé could not hear her think and call out "weakness, weakness." How to get there? How to be somewhere in the neighborhood so that she might be able to slip one night into the garden to be seen by Fallaray, and then, for the first time, prove to herself and to him that she was not any longer the Lola Breezy of Queen's Road, Bayswater, the little middle-class girl, timid and afraid, but the reincarnation of her famous ancestress, as she had always supposed herself to be, and had played at being so often, and had tried to be during her brief escapes into life.

[image]

*A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY.*

How?—How?

She might, of course, ask Lady Feo for a week's leave—a large order—go to Whitecross and engage a room at the little inn that she had noticed at the corner of the road at the top of the hill. But what would be the use of that? How could she play Madame de Brézé in such a place, with one evening frock and her own plain everyday dress with two undistinguished hats and a piece of luggage that yelled of Queen's Road, Bayswater? It was absurd, impossible. Brick wall number one. And so she tackled the task grimly, thinking hard, swinging from one possibility to another, but with no better luck. Everything came back to the fact that all her savings amounted to no more than ten pounds. How could she go forward, unaided, on that? And then in a flash she saw herself at the house in Kensington Gore with Chalfont and remembered the words of Lady Cheyne,

who, in asking her to come down to her little place in the country, had said that the garden ran down to Chilton Park. It had been pigeonholed in her brain and she had found it! And with a little cry of delight she pounced upon it like a desert wanderer on water.

Lady Cheyne,—that kindly soul who was never so happy as when giving a hand to a stray dog. It might easily happen, the weather being so good, that she had already left town. That would be wonderful. But if not, if she were still busy with her musicians and their concerts, then she must be seen and influenced to leave town, or, better still, called up on the telephone at once. A tired little woman of the world needed a breath of fresh air and the peace of a country garden. Would Lady Cheyne take mercy on her, as she took mercy on so many people, and give her this peace and this quietude?—Yes, that was the way. It was a brain wave.

Filled with determination no longer to wait for an opportunity, but to make one, not to rely on fate, as she had been doing, but to treat fate as though it were something alive, a man—Simpkins, Treadwell or Chalfont—and cajole him, Lola proceeded to dress, with the blood tingling in her veins, and imbued with the feeling of one who faces a forlorn hope. But it was still too early to use the telephone to the elderly lady who, if she were in town, had probably listened to music into the small hours. She must wait and go on thinking. There were other things to overcome, even if this one came right. How to wheedle a holiday; to hint, if she dared, at her lack of clothes, a suit-case, shoes.

The servants' sitting room was empty. On Sunday, the ménage, except for the cook, slept late. And so Lola marked time impatiently, achieving breakfast from the sulky woman by flattery. Lady Feo had given out that she was not to be disturbed until her bell rang. She would wake to find Sunday in London,—a detestable idea. There was nothing for which to get up.

Watching a clock that teased her with its sloth, Lola went over and over the sort of thing to say to Lady Cheyne, disturbed in her current of thought by the suddenly garrulous cook who insisted on telling the whole story of her life, during the course of which she had buried a drunkard and married a bigamist and lost her savings and acquired asthma,—a dramatic career, even for a cook. But at nine-thirty, unable to control herself any longer, she ran upstairs to Feo's alarming den, hunted out Lady Cheyne's number in the book and eventually got into communication with an operator who might, from her autocratic manner, very easily have been Mrs. Trotsky, or the wife of a labor leader, or a coal-miner's daughter, or indeed a telephone operator of the most approved type.

A sleepy and rather irritable voice said, "Well?—but isn't it a little early to ring any one up and on a Sunday morning too?"

Lola made a wry face. That was not a good beginning. And then, in her

sweetest voice, "Am I speaking to dear Lady Cheyne?"

"Yes, it's Fanny Cheyne, lying in bed with this diabolical instrument on her chest, but not feeling very dear, my dear, whoever you are, and I don't know your voice."

"It's Madame de Brèzè and I'm so very sorry to disturb you."

"Why did you then, if I may say so,—de Brézé. I'm sorry too, but really I hear so many names, just as odd.—If it's about being photographed, please no. I'm far too fat. Or if it's about a subscription for the starving children of Cochin China, I have too many starving children of my own."

Quick, de Brézé, quick, before the good old lady cuts off.

"The Savoy, the little widow, Sir Peter Chalfont, your wonderful house so full of genius, and what do you do, my dear.—Don't you remember, dear Lady Cheyne?"

"Oh,—let me think now." (The tone was brighter, interest was awakening! Good for you, de Brézé.) "My dear Peter with the comic-tragic leg—no, arm—the Savoy——"

"You were with Alton Cartridge and the disinfected Russian violinist, and you betted on my being French and invited me to Whitecross and when I went up to powder my nose——"

"You never came back! Golden hair like butter-cups, wide-apart eyes and fluttering nostrils, a mouth designed for kissing and all about you the rattle of sex. You dear thing! How sweet of you to ring me up and on a Sunday too. Where on earth did you go?"

Go on, de Brézé, go on! A little mystery, a touch of sadness, a hint of special confidence, flattery, flattery.

"Ah, if only I could see you. I dare not explain that sudden disappearance over the telephone,—which must have seemed so rude. You are the only woman in all the world who could keep an amazing secret and advise a troubled woman in a tangle of romance——"

"Secret, romance—who but Poppy for that!"

It worked, it worked! Lola could *see* the kind little lady struggle into a sitting posture, alert and keen, her vanity touched. Go on, de Brézé, go on.

"Ever since then I've been thinking of you, dear Lady Cheyne, and, at last, this morning, on the spur of the moment, longing for help, driven into a corner, remembering your kind invitation to Whitecross——"

"My dear, you excite me and I adore excitement. Of course you must see me, at once. But to-day's impossible. I've a thousand things to do. And to-morrow—let me see now. How can I fit you in? Probably you don't want to be seen at my house or the Savoy, you mysterious thing. So what can we arrange? I know. I have it. Quite French and appropriate. Meet me on the sly at a place where no

one ever would dream of our being. Mrs. Rumbold's, a jobbing dressmaker. I'm going to see her to-morrow to alter some clothes. Castleton Terrace, Bayswater, 22. She used to work for me. A poor half-starved soul, but so useful. Half-past eleven. And we'll arrange for a week-end at my place, perhaps, or elsewhere, wherever you like."

"Oh, Whitecross, Whitecross,—it sounds so right."

"And, it is so right,—romance in every rose bowl. To-morrow then, and I shall love to see you, my dear, and thank you for thinking of Poppy. I'm so excited. Good-by."

"Good-by, dearest Lady Cheyne,—a thousand thanks."

Well played, de Brézé. That's the way to do it. Keep on like that and prove your grit, my dear.

And presently for Lady Feo, who would certainly have something to say about the Carlton episode, and if all went well the frocks, the hats, the shoes,—but nothing yet about the holiday. That must wait until after the interview at Mrs. Rumbold's to-morrow.

## III

After all, then, Feo was to spend a dull and dreary Sunday in London; but she had slept endlessly, hour after hour, and when at last she woke at twelve o'clock, the sun was pouring into her room. Wonder of wonders, there was nothing dull about this Sunday! London lay under an utterly blue sky and those of its people who had not fled from its streets to the country, afraid of its dreariness, were out, finding unexpected touches of beauty in their old city and a lull of traffic that was restful.

The sight of Lola as she came into the room in the discreet garments of her servitude brought instant laughter back to Feo's lips. Only a few hours ago she had been claimed as an intimate friend by the girl, with all the confidence and aplomb of a member of the enclosure. How perfectly delightful. She took her cup of tea and sat up in bed, forgetting everything except the backwash of her great amusement. Madame de Brézé.—By Jove, those quiet ones,—they knew their way about. When she had been undressed the night before, Feo had been in no mood to chaff her maid, then a mere human machine, about her general and her escapade. Depression, disappointment and humiliation had driven the Carlton incident out of the way. But now the sun was shining again and she had slept in a great chunk. What did Gilbert Macquarie count in the scheme of things now, or, for the matter of that, Ellingham? She thanked all her gods that she possessed the gift of quick recovery.

And now to pull the little devil's leg. "Oh, hello, old girl," she said, carrying on her attitude of the previous night, "how awfully nice of you to bring me my tea." She expected utter embarrassment and confusion, and certainly an apology. Good Lord, the girl had pinched those stockings!

But the answer was quiet and perfectly natural. "That's all right, Feo. Only too glad."

After the first gasp of surprise there was a loud guffaw. Nothing in this world was more pleasing to Feo than the unexpected. "Sunday in London! But this is as good and a jolly sight better than Saturday night at the Adelphi. Bravo, Lola. The bitter bit. Keep it up. I love it."

And with her black hair all tousled, her greenish eyes dancing with amusement, her large mouth wide open and the collar of her black silk pajamas gaping, she stirred her tea and waited for the fun.

And seeing that her mistress was all for laughing and that she had hit the right note, Lola kept it up. Witless and without daring, eh? Well, wait and see.

"I rather wish we'd gone on with you to the theater," she said, lighting a cigarette and sitting on the arm of a chair in a Georgie Malwood pose. "It might have amused you to see something of Peter Chalfont, who has refused to join the gang."

Feo was amazed at the perfection of what was, of course, an imitation of herself. Breezy's niece was a very dark horse, it seemed.

"But where the deuce did you pick him up?" she asked, continuing the game.

"Oh, my dear, I've known him for years. He was an old pal of the man I married in my teens and was always hanging about the place. I call him the White Knight because he has such a charming way of rescuing women in distress. If you're keen about getting to know him, I'll work it for you, with all the pleasure in life."

Back went that black head with hair like a young Hawaiian. Oh, but this was immense. A lady's maid and a bedside jester, rolled into one. And how inimitably the girl had caught her intonation and manner of expression. A born actress, that was what she was.

"Don't bother about me. What are you going to do with him? That's what I want to know."

Lola shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, I dunno," she said, with a lifelike Feo drawl. "What can I do with him? Only trail him round."

"Marry him, of course. That man's a catch, you fool. Stacks of money, three show places in the country, a title as old as Rufus, and only one hand to hit you with."

"But I'm not marrying," said Lola.

And that was too much for Feo. She threw the clothes back and kicked up her heels like a schoolgirl. But before she could congratulate her lady's maid on a delightful bit of acting and an egregious piece of impertinence that was worth all the Sundays in London to watch, the telephone bell rang and brought her back to facts.

"Just see who that is, will you? And before you say I'm here, find out who it is."

"Yes, my lady," said Lola. The little game was over. It hadn't lasted long. But if it had put her ladyship into a generous mood——

It was Mrs. Winchfield, calling up from Aylesbury.

"Oh, well," said Feo, with the remembrance of great dullness. "Give me the 'phone and get my bath ready. And tell them to let me have lots of breakfast in half an hour, here. I could eat a horse."

"Very good, my lady."

And when Lola returned, having carried out her orders and still tingling with the triumph of having proved her courage and her wit, she found Lady Feo lying in the middle of the room, on her back, doing exercises. "All the dullards have left the Winchfields'," she said. "There's to be a pucca man there this afternoon, one I've had my eye on for weeks. Quick's the word, Lola. Get me dressed and into the car. This is Sunday and I'm in London. It's perfectly absurd. I shall stay the night, of course, and I shan't want you till to-morrow at six. What'll you do? Lunch at the Carlton?"

"I shall go home, my lady." But the twinkle returned.

"Oh, yes, of course. I spoilt your holiday, didn't I? By the way, does your mother know that you're in society now?"

And Lola replied, "The bath is ready, my lady."

And once more Feo laughed, lit a cigarette and went towards the bathroom. Here she turned and looked at the now mouse-like Lola with a peculiarly mischievous glint in her eyes. "Wouldn't it be a frightful spree if I went after Peter Chalfont and told him all I know about you?" Two minutes later she was singing in the bath.

Tell Peter Chalfont!—But Lola knew that this was an empty threat. Mr. Fallaray's wife was a sportsman. *Mr. Fallaray's wife.*

For the first time in all this business, these words stood out in ghastly clearness, with all that they meant to Lady Feo and her, who was "after" Mr. Fallaray. Was she, Lola, a sportsman too? The question came suddenly, like a bomb dropped from a Zeppelin, and drew the girl up short. But the answer followed quickly and it was Yes, yes, because this woman was *not* Fallaray's wife and never had been.

But there was more than a little irony in the fact that she liked Lady Feo,

was grateful to her, had seen many of her best points and so far as the Carlton episode went, recognized in her a most unusual creature, imbued with a spirit of mischief which was almost like that of a child. And yet for all that, she *was* Fallaray's wife.—It was more than conceivable, as Lola could guess, that if the whole story were confided in detail, with the de Brézé background all brought out, Lady Feo would first of all laugh and then probably help her little lady's maid for the fun of the thing, and to be able, impishly, one night when she met Fallaray coming back from the House worn and round-shouldered, to stand in front of him, jumping to conclusions, and say, "Ha, ha! Sooner or later you *all* come off your pedestal, don't you? But look out, Master Messiah. If the world spots you in the first of your human games, pop goes the weasel, and you may as well take to growing roses."

Still singing, and back again in the highest spirits, Feo breakfasted in her room and Lola dressed her for the country. Not once but many times during the hour that followed she endeavored to pump Lola about Chalfont and as to the number of times that she had gone out into "life." But Lola was a match for her and evaded all questions; sometimes with a perfectly straight face, sometimes with an answering twinkle in her eye. Although she was piqued by the girl's continued elusiveness, Feo was filled with admiration at her extraordinary self-control,—a thing that she respected, being without it herself. And then Lola, with a little sigh, and as though drawn at last, got to *her* point in this strange and intimate talk. "I'm afraid I shall never be able to see Sir Peter again," she said sadly. "I have only one evening frock and he has seen it twice."

At which Feo went to her wardrobe, flung open the doors, took down dress after dress, threw them on her bed and said, "Take your choice. Of course, you can't always wear the same old frock. Sir Galahad has a quick eye. Take what stockings you need also and help yourself to my shoes. There are plenty more where these came from,—you little devil. If you catch that man, and I shan't be a bit surprised if you do, you will have done something that nearly every girl in society has taken a shot at during the last five years. I make one bargain with you, Lola, in return for these things. Spend your honeymoon at Chilton Park and let me present you at Court."

An icy hand had touched her heart again. A honeymoon at Chilton Park,—with Chalfont.

## IV

And so Lola was free to go home again and spend the remainder of Sunday with her people, after all. But when, having tidied up and dressed herself, she ran

downstairs into the servants' sitting room on her way to the area steps, there sat Simpkins, a crestfallen and tragic figure, looking at a horizon which no longer contained the outline of his dream upon the banks of the Thames. He got up as Lola entered,—done for, but in the spirit of a protector, a Cromwellian spirit. "Where 'ad you bin last night?" he asked, "in them clothes?" He had not slept for thinking of it. His Lola, dressed like a lady, coming in with a tear-stained face, late at night, alone, from a devouring world. All his early chapel stuff had been revived at the sight. Disappointment had stirred it up.

Another cross-examination! Wasn't the world large enough for so small a little figure to escape notice?

"Dear old Simpky," she said, with that wide-eyed candor of hers, "I'm in such a hurry. With any luck I shall just be able to catch the bus that will take me home to lunch."

But Simpkins put his back against the door. "No," he said. "Not like that. Even if I've lost yer, I love yer, and it's my job to see you don't come to no 'arm. You've got to tell me what you're doing."

There was something in the man's eyes and in the whiteness of his face that warned Lola immediately of the need to be careful. Her mother had said that Simpkins was a good man with something of ecstasy in his nature, and she guessed intuitively that the latter might take the form eventually, in his ignorance and his love, of a dangerous watchfulness. So she was very patient and quiet and commonplace, remembering a similar scene which had taken place with Treadwell outside Mrs. Rumbold's battered house.

"I went to a concert with a married friend of mine. Lady Feo gave me the frock. It's very kind of you to worry, Simpky. And now, please——"

And after a moment's hesitation Simpkins opened the door and with a curious dignity gave the girl her freedom. He loved her and believed in her. She was Lola and she was good, and but for some catastrophic accident she might be engaged to be married to him.

But Lola didn't go immediately. She turned round and put her hand on the valet's arm. "What are you going to do?" she asked, affectionately concerned.

"There isn't anything for me to do," he said, "now."

"Come home with me."

But he shook his head. "I couldn't," he said. "Your father is a friend of mine and might slap me on the back and tell me to go on 'oping—and there isn't any—*is* there?"

And she said, "No, Simpky dear. I'm sorry to say there isn't. But you can't sit here looking at the carpet with the sun shining and so much to see. Why not come on the bus as far as Queen's Road and then go for a walk. It would do you good."

And he said, "Nothing can do me good."

And she could see that he had begun to revel in his pain, and nurse it, and elevate it to a great tragedy. And for the first time she recognized in this man a menace to her scheme. He loved her too well and she had made him a fanatic.

This scheme of hers, so like one of the Grimm's fairy tales in which the woodcutter's daughter dared to love the prince,—was it to get all over the town? Miss Breezy had a friend in Scotland Yard, a detective. Lady Feo was on the watch, and here was Simpkins turned into a protector. And all the while Prince Fallaray lived in the same house and did nothing more than just remember her name, thinking that she was a friend of the woman who called herself his wife.

Never mind; the sun was shining, tears had dried, courage had returned, frocks and shoes and stockings had come and the impossible was one of the things that nearly always happened.

An hour later the door of the watchmaker's shop opened in answer to her knock. There stood the fat man with his beaming smile of welcome and surprise, and out of the little parlor came an enticing aroma of roast lamb and mint sauce.

## V

That evening, controlling her excitement and anxious to make her people happy, Lola went to the family chapel with them,—the watchmaker in a gargantuan tail coat, a pair of pepper and salt trousers, and a bowler hat in which he might have been mistaken for the mayor of Caudebac-sur-Seine or a deputy representing one of the smaller manufacturing towns of France. Beside him his little wife stood bluntly for England. Everything that she wore told the story not only of her birth and tradition but of that of several grandmothers. There must have been at that moment hundreds of thousands of just such women, dressed in a precisely similar manner, on their way to answer the summons of a bell which was not very optimistic,—the Church having fallen rather low in popular favor. It had so many rivals and some of them were, it must be confessed, more in the mood of the times.

It was a sight worth seeing to watch these Breezys ambling up Queen's Road, proudly, with their little girl. And it was because Lola knew that she was conferring a great treat upon her parents that she submitted herself to an hour and a half of something worse to her than boredom. Only a little while ago she had looked forward to the evening service on Sundays and had been gently moved by the hymns, by the reading from the Scripture and even by the illiterate impromptus of the minister; and she had found, in moments that were dull, the usual feminine pleasure in casting surreptitious glances about the small, plain un-

beautiful building to see what Mrs. This wore or Mrs. That. But now she found herself going through it all like a fish out of water. As Ellingham had outgrown Lady Feo, so had she outgrown that flat, uninspired, and rather cruel service, in which the name of God was always mentioned as a monster of vengeance, without love and without forgiveness, and with a suspicious eye to the keyhole of every house. With a sort of shame she found herself finding fault with the rhymes of the hymns, which every now and then were dreadful, and were, oh, so badly sung; and when a smug-faced, uneducated man came forward, shut his eyes, placed himself in an attitude of elaborate piety and let himself go with terrible unction, treating God and death and life and joy and humanity as though they were butter, or worse still, margarine, goose flesh broke out upon her and a curious self-consciousness as though she were intruding upon a scene at which she had no right to be present. Away and away back, church had not been like this to her. Out of a dream she seemed to hear the deep reverberation of a great organ, the high sweet voices of unseen boys and the soft murmur of an old scholar retelling the simple story of Christ's pathetic struggle, and of God's mercy.—Oh, the commonplace, the misinterpretation, the hypocrisy, the ignorance. No wonder the busses were filled, she thought, the commons crowded on the outskirts of the city. To her there was more religion in one shaft of evening sun than in all those chapels put together.

It was with thankfulness and relief that Lola went back with her parents to the street and turned into Queen's Road again, which wore a Sunday expression. Gone for a brief time were the itinerant musicians, the innumerable perambulators, the ogling flappers with their cheap silk stockings and misshapen legs, the retired colonels eking out a grumbling living on infinitesimal pensions.

"Let's take a little walk," said Mrs. Breezy. "It's nice now. The Gardens look more like the country in the twilight."

"Of course," said Breezy, "walk. Best exercise in the world. Oils a man up." But all the same he didn't intend to go far. Athleticism was a pose with him. He had grown so fat sitting on that backless chair behind the glass screen, looking into the works of sick watches like a poor man's doctor who treated a long line of ailing people. If it wasn't the mainspring, then it was over-winding. Very simple.

But Lola steered them away from Kensington Gardens because soldiers were there under canvas, and Chalfont was in command of the London district, and it might happen easily that all of a sudden that purring car would draw up at the curb and her name be called by the man with the cork arm.

"Let's go the other way," she said, "for a change. I love to look at all the houses that are just the same and wonder what the people are like who live in them, and whether they're just the same."

It was her evening. She was no longer the little girl to be told to do this

or that and taken here and there with or against her will. She had broken out of all that, rather strangely and quietly and suddenly; and in a sort of way her parents had become her children. It always happens. It is one of the privileges of parenthood eventually to obey. It is the subtle tribute paid by them to a son or daughter of whom they are proud, who is part of them and who has come through all the vicissitudes of childhood and adolescence under their care and guidance. It is one of the nicer forms of egotism.

And so these three little people, the Breezys, went into the labyrinths of villadom, up one street and down another. Some of the houses were smarter than the rest, with little trees in tubs, and Virginia creepers twined about their pillars, and perhaps a fat Cupid, weather-stained, standing in a little square of cat-fought garden, or with two small lions eying each other from opposite sides of the doorway with bitter antagonism. But the waning light of a glorious day still clung to the sky, in which an evening star had opened its eye, and even Bayswater, that valley of similitude, wore beauty of a sort. And all the way along, up and down and across, the high-sounding names of the various terraces ringing with sarcasm, they went together, these three little people, one far from little outwardly, in great affection. To Lola there was something unreal, almost uncanny about the whole thing. She had grown out of all these streets, all this commonplace, that entire world. She felt like some one who hears a very old tune played in a theater and looks down with surprise and a little thread of pain from a seat in a box,—a tune which seemed to take her back, away and away to far distant days, and stir dim memories.—Only last night she had been sitting in the Carlton with Chalfont as Madame de Brézé, and next Friday, if all went well——

With a sudden thrill of intense excitement and longing, she then and there made up her mind that some day it would be her privilege and joy to lift those two estimable people out of Queen's Road and place them, not too old for enjoyment, among spreading trees and sloping lawns and all the color of an English garden,—away from watches and silver wedding presents, kodaks and ugly vases, from need of work, from clash of traffic and the inevitable voices of throaty baritones. Ah, that was what she wanted to do, so much, and if possible before it was too late. Time has an ugly way of slipping off the calendar.

And when, presently, they returned to the shop and let themselves in, it was Lola, with a curious emotion, because she might never see them again as she was that night, who got the supper, who placed them, arguing, in the stuffy drawing-room, and made many journeys up and down the narrow staircase to the kitchen. "Please," she said. "Please. This is my evening. Even a lady's maid can lay a supper if she tries hard enough." And they did as they were told, reluctantly, but delighted,—and a little surprised. It was something of a change. And before the evening was over Treadwell came, wearing a flapping tie, the mark of the

poet, and a suit of reach-me-downs egregiously cut but with something in his face that lived it down,—love. Poor boy, he had a long way to go alone.

When at last, having said good night, Lola went upstairs to the room in which she had played that little game of hers so often and sat in the dark as quiet as a mouse, holding her breath, not one, no, not a single one of all her old friends came in to see her,—not the ancient marquis with his long finger nails and curious rings and highly polished boots; not the gossipy old women in furbelows and dangling beads; not the gallant courtier with his innuendoes and high flow of compliments; and not the little lady's maid who was wont to do her hair. They were dead. But in their place came Fallaray, stooping, pale and bewildered, hungry for love, hungry for comfort, dying for inspiration and the rustle of silk. And when he had sat down with his chin in his hand, she crept up to his chair and went on her knees and put her golden head against his heart, and said, "I love you. I love you. I've always loved you. I shall love you always. And if you never know it and never see me and miss me altogether in the crowd, I shall wait for you across the Bridge,—and you will see me then."

But as she got up from her knees, blinded with tears, the voice came to her again, strong and full.

"Go on, go on, de Brézé,—courage, my girl, courage. You have not yet won the right to cry."

## VI

There were two reasons, then, for the visit to Castleton Terrace.

Feo's handsome present to Lola reacted most favorably upon Mrs. Rumbold and came at a moment in that poor woman's existence when cash was scarce and credit nil. Optimism also had been running a little low. But for this divine gift how many more suicides there would be every year.

Mrs. Rumbold was sitting in her workroom in the front of the house, waiting, like Sister Ann, for some one to turn up, when Lola's taxi stopped at the door, and with a thrill of hope she saw the driver haul out a large dress case on which the initials F. F. were painted. This was followed by Lola, an hour early for her appointment with Lady Cheyne, and they were both met at the top step by the woman who saw manna.

"Well," she cried, shabby and thin, with wisps of unruly hair. "You're a sight for sore eyes, I will say. I knew I was in for a bitter luck to-day. I read it in the bottom of me cup. Come in, miss, and let's have a look at what you've brought me."

The case was deposited in the middle of the room in which half a dozen

headless and legless trunks mounted on a sort of cage were ranged along one wall, out of work and gloomy. Because the driver had been batman to a blood in the 21st Lancers, the case was duly unfastened by him,—a courtesy totally unexpected and acknowledged by Mrs. Rumbold in astonished English.

"Thank you very much," said Lola, with a rewarding smile. "It's very kind of you."

"Honored and delighted," was the reply, added to by a full-dress parade salute with the most wonderful waggle before it finally reached the ear and was cut away.—And that meant sixpence extra. So every one was pleased.

And when Mrs. Rumbold, with expert fingers, drew out one frock after another, all of them nearly new and bearing the name of a dressmaker who hung to the edge of society by a hyphen, exclamation followed upon exclamation.

"Gorblime," she cried out. "Where in the world did you get 'em? I never see anything like it. It's a trousseau."

And Lola laughed and said, "Not this time."

And Mrs. Rumbold started again, putting Feo's astonishing garments through a more detailed inspection. "Eccentric, of course," she said. "But, my word, what material, and look at these 'ere linings. Pre-war stuff, my dear. Who's your friend?"

And Lola told her. Why shouldn't she? And extolled Lady Feo's generosity, in which Mrs. Rumbold heartily concurred. "I know what you want," she said. "What I did to the last one. Let 'em down at the bottom and put a bit of somethin' on the top. That's it, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Lola. "That's it. As quickly as you can, Mrs. Rumbold, especially with the day frocks."

"Going away on a visit, dearie?"

"No—yes," said Lola. "I don't know—but, like you, I live a good deal on hope."

The woman made a wry face. "Umm," she said. "You can get awful scraggy on that diet. Keeps yer girlish, I tell yer." And then she looked up into Lola's face. It was such a kind face, with so sympathetic a mouth, that she had no hesitation in letting down her professional fourth wall. "I'd be thankful if you could let me have a bit on account, miss," she added, with rather pathetic whimsicality. "Without any bloomin' eyewash, not even Sherlock Holmes could find as much as a bob in this house, and I have a bill at the draper's to be met before I can sail in and give 'em perciflage."

"Nothing easier," said Lola, who had come armed to meet this very request, having imagination. And out came her little purse and from it five nice pristine one-pound notes which she had most carefully hoarded up out of her wages.

And then for an hour and more Lola transferred herself, taking her time,

from frock to frock, while Mrs. Rumbold did those intricate things with pins and a pair of scissors which only long practice can achieve. But Lady Cheyne failed to appear. Had she forgotten? Had some one steered her off? Ten minutes, fifteen minutes, twenty minutes, thirty minutes. Lola's heart began to sink into her shoes. But just as she was about to lose hope, there was a loud and haughty ring at the bell which sent Mrs. Rumbold helter-skelter to the window, through which she peered eagerly. "Well, upon my word," she cried in a hoarse whisper. "If you ain't a bloomin' mascot. It's Lady Cheyne who used to be one of my best customers, and I haven't seen 'er for a year." And she ran out excitedly and opened the door and hoped her neighbors would be duly impressed by the rather dilapidated Mercedes which was drawn up in front of the house.

There was a burst of welcome, and then Lady Cheyne entered the workroom much in the same way as a broad-beamed cargo-boat floats into harbor. And then followed another surprise for Mrs. Rumbold, who was in for a day of surprises, it appeared. "Well, you dear thing, here you are. Punctual to the minute, as I always am. How are you, and where have you been, and why haven't you run in to see me, and how sweet you look." And the kind and exuberant little lady, whose amazing body seemed to require more than one dressmaker to cover it up, drew Lola warmly to her side and kissed her. It is true that she had forgotten her name again. She saw so many people so often who had such weird and unpronounceable names that she never even made an effort to remember any of them. But that golden head and those wide-apart eyes reminded her of the conversation over the telephone, brought back that evening at her house and linked them with the tall figure of the one-armed soldier,—her dear friend Peter something, so good looking, *such* a darling, but *so* unkind, never coming near her. "Extraordinary enough, I was thinking of you only a few nights ago. I was dining at the Savoy and the little crowd who were with me spoke of you. They had been with me the night I met you there and were *so* interested. One of the men said that if I could find you and take you to his concert he would try and draw your lips to his with the power of his art. He often says things like that. But he's only an artist, so it doesn't matter. Mrs. Rumstick, I want you to find something to do in the next room until I call you. No, leave my things alone. I'll explain what has to be done to them in my own good time. That's right.—We're alone, my dear. Now tell me all about it." She sat on a chair that had the right to groan and caught hold of Lola's hand.

"It's love," said Lola.

"Ah!"

"It's love and adoration and long-deferred hope."

"Oh, my dear, how you excite me!"

"And it can't come right without you."

"Me! Good gracious, but what can I do?"

Lola leaned closer. The pathetic farcicality of the dear old lady's wreaths and becks left the seriousness of all this untouched. She clasped the dimpled hand in both her own and set her will to work. "Bring us together," she whispered, setting fire to romance, so that Lady Cheyne bobbed up and down. "Help us to meet where no one can see, quickly, quickly. The world is getting old."

"Well, there's the library at Number One Hundred! No one has ever been in there except me since Willy passed away. You can come there any time you like and not a soul will see you. And he, if he doesn't mind his trousers, can climb over the back wall, so that he shan't be seen going into the house. I wouldn't do it for any one but you, my dear. That room has dear memories for me."

Kind and sweet,—but what was the use? It must be Chilton, Chilton, or nothing at all. And so Lola kissed her gratitude upon the hot, rouged cheek, but shook her head and sighed. (Go on, de Brézé, go on.)

"He wouldn't dare," she said. "Nowhere in town; it's far too dangerous. The least whisper, the merest hint of gossip——"

Lady Cheyne wobbled at the thought. There was more in this than met the eye,—a Great Romance, love in High Places. How wonderful to be in, perhaps, on History. "But at night," she said. "Late, when every one's in bed. I assure you that after twelve One Hundred might be in the country."

"Ah," said Lola, "the country. Isn't there some place in the country, high up near the sky, with woods behind it where we can meet and speak——"

"Whitecross!" cried Lady Cheyne, brilliantly inspired. "Made for love and kisses, if ever there was a place. How dull of me only just to have thought of that."

"Whitecross? What is that?" How eager the tone, how tremulous the voice.

"My darling nest on the Chilterns, where I'm so seldom able to live. If only I could get away,—but I'm tied to town."

"Next Friday, perhaps,—that's the last, the very last——"

"Well, then, it must be Friday. I can't resist this thing, my dear, so I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll leave on Thursday. It will give a new bevy of my protégés a little rest and a quiet time for practise. And you can come down on Friday."

"You darling!" (Good for you, de Brézé. Very well done, indeed.)

"Now get a pencil and a piece of paper and write everything down. The station is Princes Risborough." (As if Lola didn't know that!) "You go from Paddington and you catch the two-twenty arriving there just before four. I can't send a car to meet you, because my poor old ten-year-old outside would drop to pieces going up to Whitecross. So you must take a station cab and be driven up in time for tea, and you will find one Russian, one Pole, two Austrians, one Dane and a dear friend of mine with a voice like velvet who was a Checko-Slovak during the

War and German before and after. A very nice lot, full of talent. I don't know where they're all going to sleep and I'm sure they don't care, so what's it matter? They'll give us music from morning to night and all sorts of fun in between. Killing two birds with one stone, eh?"

Was it the end of the rainbow at last? "Oh, dear Lady Cheyne, what can I say?"

"Nothing more, now, you dear little wide-eyed celandine; wait till we meet again. Run away and leave me to Mrs. Rumigig. It's a case of old frocks on to new linings. Income tax drives us even to that. But I'm very glad, oh, so very glad you came to me, my dear!"

And Lola threw her arms round the collector of stray dogs and poured out her thanks, with tears. One rung nearer, two rungs nearer.—And in the next room, having heroically overcome an almost conquering desire to put her ear to the keyhole, stood Mrs. Rumbold, still suffering from the second of her surprises.

"Do your best to let me have two day frocks and an evening frock," said Lola. "And I will come for them sometime Friday early. Don't fail me, will you, Mrs. Rumbold? You can't think and I couldn't possibly explain to you how important it is."

"Well, I should say not. I should think it is important, indeed! Little Lola Breezy's doing herself well these days, staying with the nobility and gentry and all."

The woman was amazed to the extent of indiscretion. How did a lady's maid, daughter of the Breezys of Queen's Road, Bayswater, perform such a miracle? They were certainly topsy-turvy times, these.

And then Lola turned quickly and caught Mrs. Rumbold's arm. "You are on your honor to say nothing about me to Lady Cheyne, remember, and if, by any chance, you mention my name, bear in mind that it is Madame de Brézé. You understand?"

There was a moment's hesitation followed by a little gasp and a bow. "I quite understand, Modum, and I thank you for your custom."

But before Mrs. Rumbold returned to her workroom, in which the trunks looked more perky now, she remained where she stood for a moment and rolled her eyes.

"Well," she asked herself, "did you *ever*? Modum de Brézé!—And she looks it too, and speaks it. My word, them orders! Blowed if the modern girl don't cop the current bun. It isn't for me to say anything, but for the sake of that nice little woman in the watchmaker's shop, I hope it's all right. That's all.—And now, your ladyship, what can I have the pleasure of doing for you, if you please? And thank you for comin', I'm sure. Times is that dull——"

# VII

When Lola went into Feo's room that evening it was with the intention of asking for her first holiday. It was a large order; she knew that, because her mistress had made innumerable engagements for the week. But this was to be another and most important rung in that ladder, which, if not achieved, rendered useless the others that she had climbed.

She was overjoyed to find Feo in an excellent mood. Things had been going well. The world had been full of amusement and a new man had turned up, a pucca man this time, discovered at the Winchfields', constant in his attentions ever since. He owned a string of race horses and trained them at Dan Thirlwall's old place behind Worthing, which made him all the more interesting. Feo adored the excitement of racing. And so it was easy for Lola to approach her subject and she did so at the moment when she had her ladyship in her power, the curling irons steaming. "If you please, my lady," she said, in a perfectly even voice and with her eyes on the black bobbed hair, "would it be quite convenient for you if I had a week off from Thursday?"

"But what the devil does that matter?" said Feo. "If I don't give you a week off, I suppose you'll take it."

Lola's lips curled into a smile. It was impossible to resist this woman and her peculiar way of putting things. "But I think you know me better than that," she said, twining that thick wiry hair round the tongs as an Italian twines spaghetti round a fork.

"What makes you think so? I don't know you. I haven't the remotest idea what you're like. You never tell me anything. Ever since you've been with me you've never let me see under your skin once. I don't even believe that you're Breezy's niece. I've only her word for it. After Sunday morning's exhibition, I'm quite inclined to believe that you *are* Madame de Brézé masquerading as a lady's maid. If the War was still going on, I might think that you were a spy. A great idea for you to get into this house and pinch the papers of a Cabinet Minister. Yes, of course you can have a week off. What are you going to do? Get married, after all?"

Lola shook her head and the curl went away from her lips. "I want to go down to the country for a little rest," she said.

Something in the tone of Lola's voice caught Feo's ears. She looked sharply at her reflection in the glass and saw that the little face which had captured her fancy and become so familiar had suddenly taken on an expression of so deep a yearning as to make it almost unrecognizable. The wide-apart eyes burned with emotion, the red lips and those sensitive nostrils denoted a pent-up excitement that was startling. What was it that this strange, secretive child had made up her

mind to do—to commit—to lose? "There is love at the bottom of this," she said.

And Lola replied, "Yes, my lady," simply and with a sort of pride. And then took hold of herself, tight. If there had been any one person in all the world to whom she could have poured out her little queer story of all-absorbing love and desire to serve and comfort and inspire and entertain and rejuvenate—— But there wasn't one—and it was Mr. Fallaray's wife who fished to know her secret. Was it one of the ordinary coincidences which had brought, them together—meaningless and accidental—or one of those studied ironies which fate, in its mischievous mood, indulges in so frequently?

"It wouldn't have been any good to deny it. It's all over you like a label. It's an infernal nuisance, Lola, but I'll try and get on without you. If you're not going to get married, watch your step, as the Americans say. I don't give you this tip on moral grounds but from the worldly point of view. You have your living to make and there's Breezy to think about and your people."

She put her hand up and grasped the one in which Lola held the tongs, and drew her round. Strangely enough, this contradictory creature was moved. Whether it was because she saw in Lola's eyes something which no one had been able to bring into her own, who can say? "It's a married man," she told herself, "or it's Chalfont who isn't thinking of marriage." "Go easy, my dear," she added aloud. "Believe only half you hear and get that verified. Men are the most frightful liars. Almost as bad as women. And they have a most convenient knack of forgetting."

And then she released the girl so that she might resume her job, as time was short, and she was dining rather early with the new man at Ranelegh where "Twelfth Night" was to be acted as a pastoral by Bernard Fagan's players. All the same, her mind dwelt not so much with curiosity as with concern upon Lola's leave of absence, because she liked the girl and had found her very loyal, consistently cheery and always ready to hand.

"Let me see," she said, with an uncharacteristic touch of womanliness that must have been brought out by the flaming feminism of Lola. "Among the frocks that I hurled at you on Sunday there's pretty certain to be something that you can wear. Help yourself to anything else that you need. You must look nice. I insist on that. And you'll also want something to put these things in. Tucked away somewhere there are one or two dress cases without my initials. They've come in useful on other occasions. Rout them out. I can't think of anything else, but probably you will." And she waved her hand with those long thin capable fingers, as much as to say, "Don't thank me. You'd do the same for me if I were in your shoes."

But Lola did thank her and wound up an incoherent burst by saying, "You're the most generous woman I've ever imagined."

"Oh, well, I have my moments," replied Feo, who liked it all the same.

"Y'see, 'The Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady are sisters under the skin.'" She was very generous and very much interested and if the truth were to be told a little worried too. For all her coolness at the Carlton, Lola seemed to her to be so young and so obviously virginal,—just the sort of girl who would make a great sacrifice, taking to it a pent-up ecstasy for which she might be asked to pay a pretty heavy price. And it was such a mistake to pay, according to Feo's creed.

Finally, dressed and scented and wearing a pair of oddly shaped lapis earrings, she stood in front of a pier glass for a moment or two, looking herself over, finding under her eyes for the first time one or two disconcerting lines. What was she? Ten years older than this girl whose face was like an unplucked flower? Ten years certainly,—all packed with incidents, not one of which had been touched by ecstasy.

When she turned away it was with a short quick sigh. "Damn," she said, off on one of her sudden tangents. "I can see myself developing into one of those women who join the Salvation Army because they've lost their looks, or get out of the limelight to read bitter verses about dead sea fruit, if I'm not precious careful." And her mind turned back to the hour with Ellingham in that foolish futuristic room of hers and the way in which he had paced up and down, inarticulate, hands in pockets, and eventually been glad to go. Glad to go,—think of it.—Never mind, here was the man with the race horses. He might be a little medieval, perhaps. And on her way out she put her hand under Lola's chin and tilted up her face. "Mf," she said, "you *have* got it, badly, haven't you?"

And Lola replied, "Yes, my lady," and felt as though she had never left Queen's Road, Bayswater.

"Well, good luck." And Feo was gone.

## VIII

So once again Lola stepped out on to the platform of Princes Risborough station to wait while a sulky porter, thoroughly trades-union in all his movements, made up his mind to carry Feo's two cases out to a cab. He first of all read the name on the labels, pronouncing Brézé to himself as it was known to Queen's Road, Bayswater. Then, with great deliberation and condescension, having placed a new quid in his mouth, he tilted them on to the barrow and wheeled them along the platform to the station yard, followed by Lola. "Want a cab?" he asked. To which Lola replied, "I don't think I'm quite strong enough to carry them myself."

And he gave her a quick look. "Cheeky," he thought. "Knows enough English fer that, all right." Whereupon he chi-iked the cab driver who was asleep on his box and yelled out, "Don't yer want ter occupy yerself once in a way? Sittin'

up there orl day, doin' nothin'! Do yer good to 'ave my job fer a bit. Come on darn. Give a hand with these 'ere. What d'yer think I'm paid fer?"

Lola opened the door of the rickety and rather smelly cab for herself. Neither of the men had thought of that. And then she handed the porter a shilling and looked him straight in the face with her most winning smile. "It doesn't reward you for your great politeness," she said. "But these are hard times."

And as the cab drove slowly off, the porter spat upon the coin. What did he care for snubs? He was as good as anybody else and a damned sight better, he was, with his labor union and all. Politeness! Heh!—Missionaries have introduced the gin bottle to the native and completely undermined his sense of primitive honor while trades unions have injected the virus of discontent into the blood of the English workman and made him a savage.

And so once more the white cross seen above the village; once more the Tillage with its chapels and other public houses,—warm old buildings as yet untouched by the hand of progress, which generally means a cheap shop-front and goods made in Germany; once more the road leading up to the Chiltons, with the shadows of old trees cast across. Chilton Park was passed on the right, with its high wall, time-worn, behind which Fallaray might even then be walking among his gardens. And presently the cab turned in to the driveway of what had once been a farmhouse, to which, by an architect who was an artist and not a builder, wings had been added. The long uneven roof was thatched, the walls all creeper covered, the windows diamond paned, the door low, wide and welcoming. A smooth lawn was dignified with old oaks and beeches and ablaze with numerous beds of sweet Williams and pansies and all the rustic flowers. A charming little place, rather perhaps self-consciously pretty, like a set on the stage. But oh, how delightful after Queen's Road, Bayswater, and the labyrinths of similitude.

Lady Cheyne was followed to the door by all her guests and for a moment Lola thought that she had stumbled on a place crowded with European refugees. A more eccentric collection of human various she had never seen, even during that epoch-making evening at Kensington Gore.

"Here you are, then, looking just as if you had stepped out of one of the pictures in the boudoir of the Duchess de Nantes." Lola received a hearty kiss on both cheeks, and her hostess took the opportunity, while so close, of asking an important question in a whisper. "Your name, my dear. I'm too sorry, but really my capacity for remembering names has gone all loose like a piece of dead elastic."

Lola laughed and told her, and then followed her introduction to the little group of hairy children who were all waiting on tenterhooks for a chance to act. It was a comical introduction, because by the time Lady Cheyne had said "Lola de Brézé" she had forgotten the names of all her other guests. And so, with a

gurgle of laughter, she pointed to each one in turn,—and they stepped forward and spoke; first the women, "Anna Stezzel," a bow and a flash of teeth, "Regina Spatz," a bow and a gracious smile, and then the men, "Salo Impf," "Valdemar Varvascho," "Simon Zalouhou," "Max Wachevsky," "Willy Pouff," fired in bass, baritone and tenor and accompanied by a kiss upon the little outstretched hand. It was all Lola could do to stop herself from peals of laughter.

Zalouhou, the violinist, was one of the biggest men Lola had ever seen. He stood six foot six in a pair of dilapidated boots and possessed a completely unathletic figure with hips like a woman, large soft hands with long loose fingers and a splendid leonine head with a mass of black hair streaked with white. He towered over the other little people like a modern Gulliver. His face was clean-shaven, with fine features and a noble forehead and a pair of eyes which had never failed to do more to attract crowded matinées of his country women in the old days than the beauty of his playing and the mastery of his technique. He had only just arrived in London, penniless, and in a suit of clothes in which he had slept on many waysides. He had fought for his country and against his country, never knowing why and never wanting to fight, and all the while he had clung desperately to his violin which he had played to ragamuffin troops in order to be supplied with an extra hunk of bread and a drink of coffee. The story of his five or six years of mental and physical chaos, every moment of which was abhorrent to his gentle spirit, was stamped deeply upon his face.

Even as Lola was being escorted upstairs to her room by a thrilled country maid, there was a crash upon the piano in the hall and an outburst of song. What that little house thought of all those extraordinary people who could not keep quiet under any circumstance would have filled a book. The ghosts of former residents, farming people, must have stood about in horror and surprise. And yet, as Lady Cheyne well knew, they were all simple souls ready to go into ecstasies at the sight of a daisy and imbued with genuine loyalty towards each other.

Lady Cheyne followed Lola up. She arrived in the tiny bedroom, whose ceiling sloped down to two small windows, breathless and laughing. "You can't swing a cat in here," she said. "But, after all, who ever does swing a cat? I hope you'll be comfortable and I know you'll be amused. I just want to tell you one thing, my dear. You are at perfect liberty to do whatever you like, to wander away out of range of the piano, with or without any of my dear delightful babies, or stay and listen to them and watch the fun. Until sleep overcomes them they will sing and play and applaud and have the time of their lives,—which is exactly what I've brought them here to do, poor things. All the men will fall in love with you, of course. But you're perfectly used to that, aren't you? You'll look like a miniature among oleographs, but the change will do you good and show you another side of life. One thing I can guarantee. You won't be disturbed in the morning before

eleven o'clock. No one thinks of getting up until then. I'm particularly anxious for you to like Zalouhou. I predict that he will have an extraordinary success in London when he makes his appearance next week at Queen's Hall. Did you ever see such a man? If I know anything about it at all, women will rush forward to the platform to kiss his feet,—not because he plays the violin like Kreisler but because of those magnetic eyes. Success in every walk of life is due entirely to eyes. You know that, my dear. And as to the Great Affair, I will ask no questions, see nothing and hear nothing, but rejoice in believing that I am being of use. It is exactly right, isn't it, golden head? Ah, me, those dear dead days. Now come and have some tea and taste my strawberries. They're wonderful this year."

But before going down—and how kind everybody was—Lola stood at one of her windows from which she could see a corner of Chilton Park, and her heart went out to Fallaray like a white dove. It was in the air, in the cloudless sky, in the birds' songs, in the rustle of the leaves, in the beauty and glory of the flowers that her time had come at last, that all her work and training were to be put to the supreme test. Success would mean the little gold cage of which she had heard again in her dream but which would be the merest lead without love. Failure——

Her appearance eventually in the hall, a long, many-windowed room, with great bowls of cut flowers on gate-legged tables and old dressers, was celebrated by Salo Impf with an improvisation on the piano that was filled with spring and received with noisy approval. Imbued with a certain amount of crude tact, the men of the party did nothing more than pay tribute to Lola with their eyes while they surrounded Lady Cheyne as though she were a queen, as indeed she was, having it in her power not only to provide them with bed and board but to bring them out and give them a chance in a country always ready to support talent. It was a funny sight to see this amazingly fat, kind woman pouring tea at a tiny table into tiny cups surrounded by people who seemed to be perpetually hungry, but who sang even while they ate, and laughed and jabbered in between.

"What would Simpkins say if he could see me here?" thought Lola. "And Mother and Ernest and Sir Peter Chalfont—and Lady Feo?"

But she felt happy and in a way comforted among these people. Like her, they were all struggling towards a goal, all striving after something for which they had served their apprenticeship. Not one of them had yet successfully emerged and they were living on what Mrs. Rumbold called, "the scraggy diet of hope." It did her good to be among them at that moment, to hear their discussions in amazingly broken English of a début in London, to be aware of the extraordinary encouragement which they gave to each other, without jealousy,—which was so rare. She found herself listening enthralled to the arias sung by Anna Stezzel, and the Grieg songs which were so perfectly played by Impf. But it was when Zalouhou stood up with his violin and played some of the wistful folk songs

of his country that she sat with her hands clasped together, leaning forward and moved to a deep emotion. Hunger, the daily wrestle with surly earth, illness, the subjection to a crushing autocracy, and beneath it self-preservation,—they were all in these sad, fierce songs, which sometimes burst into passionate resentment and at others laughed a little and jogged along. What a story they told,—so much rougher and so much sterner than her own. They gave her courage to go forward but they left her uncertain as to what was to be her next step.

When Zalouhou played, it was with his eyes on Lola. Her sympathy and understanding drew out his most delicate and imaginative skill and gave him inspiration; and when he had finished and laid aside his violin, he went to the sofa on which she was sitting and crouched hugely at her feet, and said something softly in his own tongue. He spoke no English, but she could guess his meaning because in his eyes there was the look with which she was familiar in the eyes of Treadwell, Simpkins and Chalfont. And she said to herself, "As there is something in me that stirs the hearts of men, give me the chance, O God, to let it be felt by the only man I shall ever love and who is all alone on earth!" And while the room rang with music, she went forward in spirit to the gate in the wall of Chilton Park, which she had seen from her window, opened it and went inside to look for Fallaray. The intuition which had been upon her so long that she might touch the heart of Fallaray in Chilton Park was strong upon her then, once more.

But she had to wait until after dinner before her opportunity came to slip away, and this she did when her fellow-workers had returned to the hall, drawn back to the piano as by a magnet. And then she escaped, in Feo's silver frock, stole into the placid garden which was filled with the aroma of sweet peas and June roses, went down to the gate in the high wall, and stood there, trembling.

(Go on, de Brézé, go on!)

## IX

Except for the servants, Fallaray was alone in his house.

He had slept late that morning, put newspapers aside, and allowed the telephone to ring unanswered. He was determined, at least for a few days, to cut himself off from London and especially from the new and futile turn that was taking place in politics. It didn't seem to him to matter that, because his chief had boxed the political compass again and, like Gladstone, talked with furious earnestness on both sides of every question only to leave anger and stultification at every step, the papers were making a dead set at him, holding him up to ridicule and abuse and working with vitriolic energy against his government at every bi-election. If this man were dragged at last from the seat that he had won

by a trick and held by trickery, another of the same kidney and possibly worse principles would be put into his place to build up another and a similar rampart about himself with bribes and honors. It was the system. Nothing could prevent it. Professional politicians had England by the throat and they were backed by underground money and supported by politically owned newspapers. What use to struggle against such odds? He wanted to forget Ireland for a little while, if it were possible to forget Ireland even for so short a space of time as his holiday would last. He wanted to put out of his mind, the horrible mess in Silesia which was straining the *entente cordiale* to the breaking point, and the bungling over the coal strike, and so he had been wandering among his rose gardens, hatless, with the breeze in his hair, and the scent of new-mown hay in his nostrils, listening to the piping of the thrush, to the passionate songs of larks, and watching bees busy themselves from flower to flower with a one-eyed industry and honesty which he did not meet in men.

He had lunched out on the terrace and looked down with a great refreshment upon the sweeping valley of Aylesbury, peaceful beneath the sun. He had slept again in the afternoon, out of doors, lulled by the orchestra of birds, and had then gone forth to walk behind those high walls into the forest of beech trees, the dead red leaves of innumerable summers at their roots, and to listen to the tramping feet of the ghosts of Roman armies whose triumphs had left no deeper mark on history than the feet of sea gulls on the sands. And as his brain became quiet and the load of political troubles fell from his shoulders, he began to imagine that he was a free man once more, and a young man, and the old aspirations of adolescence returned to him like the echo of a dream,—to love, to laugh, to build a nest, to wander hand in hand with some sweet thing who trusted him and was wholly his. O God, how good. That was life. That was truth. That was nature.

And when, after dinner, he strolled out once more to look at the sky patterned with stars, dominated by a moon in its cold elusive prime, he was no longer the London Fallaray, round-shouldered, anxious, overworked, immeshed like an impotent fly in the web of the bad old spiders. His chin was up, his shoulders back, a smile upon his lips. That gorgeous air filled his lungs and not even from the highest point of vantage could there be seen one glimpse of the little light burning in the tower of the House of Commons. He was nearer heaven than he had been for a very long time. Exquisite lines from the great poets floated through his mind and somewhere near a nightingale poured out a love song to its mate.

And when presently he took a stand on that corner of the terrace which overlooked the Italian garden, it seemed to him that the magic of the moonlight had stirred some of the stone figures to life. The arm of Cupid seemed to bend

and send an arrow into the air and where it fell he saw a shimmer of silver and heard the rustle of silk. And he saw and heard it again and laughed a little at the pranks which imagination played, especially on such a night. And not believing his eyes or his ears, he saw this silver thing move again and come slowly up along the avenue of yews like a living star; and he watched it a little breathlessly and saw that it was a woman, a girl, timid, like a trespasser, but still coming on and on with her head up, and the moonlight in her hair,—golden hair wound round her head like an aureole. And when at last, born as it seemed of moonlight and poetry, she came to the edge of the terrace and stopped, he bent down with the blood tingling in his veins, hardly believing that she was there, still under the impression that he had brought her to that spot out of his never realized longing and desire, and saw that she was not a dream of adolescence but a little live thing with wide-apart eyes and red lips parted and the white halo of youth about her head.

## X

A bat blundered in between them and broke the spell.

And Fallaray climbed over the parapet and dropped on his feet at Lola's side. All that day, as indeed, briefly, in the House, at his desk, at night in dreams, ever since the introduction at the Savoy, the eyes of that girl and the thrill of her hand had come back to him like a song, to stir, like the urge of spring. And here, suddenly, she stood, moonlit, but very real, in answer to his subconscious call.

"This is wonderful," he said, blurting out the truth like a naïve boy. "I've been thinking of you all day. How did you get here?"

His eager clasp sent a rush of blood through Lola's body. His alone among men's, as she had always known, was the answering touch. "I'm staying with Lady Cheyne," she said. "I saw the gate in the wall and it wasn't locked and I tiptoed in."

"You knew that I was here?"

"Yes, and I came to find you." She blurted out the truth like an unsophisticated girl.

Was it moonlight, the magic of the night, the throbbing song of the nightingale that made him seem as young as she?—No. What then? And as he looked into the eyes of that girl and caught his breath at her disturbing femininity and disordering sense of sex and the sublime unself-consciousness of a child, without challenge and without coquetry, he knew that it was something to be summed up by the words "the rustle of silk," which epitomized beauty and softness and scent, laughter, filmy things and love. And he thanked his gods that not even Feo

and the wear and tear of politics had left him out of youth.

And he thanked her for coming to break his loneliness and led her through the sleeping flowers, and those figures which had died again since life had come amongst them, to the arbor made of yews where he had slept that afternoon. And there, high above the sweeping valley among whose villages little lights were blinking like far-off fireflies, they sat and talked and talked, at first like boy and girl, meeting after separation, telling everything but nothing, shirking the truth to save it for a time, and then, presently, with no lights left below and all the earth asleep, like man and woman, reading the truth in eyes that made no effort to disguise it; telling the truth, in broken words; learning the truth from heart that beat to heart until the moon had done her duty and stars had faded out and up over the ridge of hills, reluctantly, a new day came.

# PART VII

## I

Fallaray was to meet Lola at the gate in the wall at four o'clock. He wanted to show her how the vale looked in the light of the afternoon sun. But it was a long time to wait because, instead of going to bed after he had taken Lola to Lady Cheyne's cottage at the moment when a line in the sky behind it had been rubbed by a great white thumb, he had walked up and down the terrace and watched the dawn push the night away and break upon him with a message of freedom.

He paced up and down while the soft blur of the valley came out into the clear detail of corn fields, rolling acres of grass, sheep dotted, a long white ribbon of road twisting among villages, each one marked by the delicate spire of an old church, spinneys of young trees and clumps of old ones, gnarled and twisted and sometimes lonely, standing like the sentinels that receive "the secret whispers of each other's watch."

He stood up to the new day honestly and without shame. Like a man who suddenly breaks away from a Brotherhood with whose creeds he has found himself no longer in sympathy, he rejoiced in his release. Lola had come to him at

the moment when he was lying on his oars at the entrance to a backwater. He had been in the main river too long, pulling his arms out against the stream. He was tired. It was utterly beyond argument that he had failed. He had nothing in him of the stuff that goes to the making of a pushing politician. He detested and despised the whole unholy game of politics. In addition, he had come to the dangerous age in the life of a man, especially the ascetic man. He was forty. He had never allowed himself to listen to the rustle of silk. He had kept his eyes doggedly on what he had conceived to be his job, wifeless. And when Lola came, the magnet of her sex drew him not only without a struggle but with an insatiable hunger into the side of life against which Feo had slammed the door, leaving him stultified and disgusted. He had welcomed in this girl what he now regarded as the unmet spirit of his adolescence, and he fell to her as only such a man can fall. The fact that she loved him and had told him of her love with the astounding simplicity of a child gave the whole thing a beauty, a depth and permanence that made him regard the future with wonder and delight, though not yet with any definite plan. At present this *volte face* was too astonishing, too new in its happening, to be dissected and balanced up. For a few days at least he wanted irresponsibility, for a change. He wanted, like a man wrecked on the shore of Eden, to explore into beauty and dally, unseen, with love. The time was not yet for a decision as to which way he would go, when, as was certain, some one would discover the wreckage and send out a rescue party. He had promised himself a holiday and all the more now he would insist upon its enjoyment. Whether at the end of it he would refuse ever to go back into the main stream, or go back and take Lola with him, were questions that he was not yet formulating in his mind. But as to one thing he was certain, even then. Lola was his; she had brought back his youth like a miracle, and he would never let her out of his sight.

He breakfasted in his library, ignoring the papers. Their daily story of chaos made more chaotic by the lamentable blundering of fools and knaves, seemed to deal with a world out of which he had dropped, hanging to a parachute. He went smiling through the morning, watching the clock with an impatience that was itself a pleasure. He felt the strange exhilaration of having lived his future with all his past to spend, of returning as a student to a school in which he had performed the duties of a Master. And there were times when he drew up short and sent out a great boyish laugh that echoed through his house, at the paradox of it all. And once, but only once, he stood outside himself and saw that he was placing his usefulness upon the altar of passion. And before he leaped back into his skin and while yet he retained his sanity and cold logic, he saw that he loved Lola for her golden hair and wide-apart eyes, her red lips and tingling hand, her young sweet body,—but not her soul, not the intangible thing in a woman that keeps a man's love when passion passes. But to this he said, "I am young again.

I have the need and the right. When I have had time to find her soul, she shall have my quiet love."

And finally, at three o'clock, with an hour still to drive away, he went down to the gate in the wall, eager and insatiable to wait for the rustle of silk.

## II

Lady Cheyne had encouraged her flock to lateness in order that she might lock the door after Lola had come back. She was terrified of burglars, and although she had sold most of her pearls and diamonds to help her various protégés over rainy days, she shuddered at the thought of being disclosed by a flash light to a probably unshaven man. Nothing could shake her from her belief that a man who could go bearded after five o'clock in the afternoon must be a criminal,—and this in spite of the fact that she had lived among artists for years. But she was a woman who cultivated irrational idiosyncrasies as other women collect old fans or ancient snuffboxes. She would never live in a flat, for instance, because if she passed away in one it would be so dreadfully humiliating to be taken down to the street in a lift, head first.

Becoming irritable from want of sleep, she had kept everybody up until two in the morning, by which hour even Salo had ceased from Impfing and Willy could Pouff no more. Zalouhou, who was as natural as a dog, had yawned hugely. And then, sending her party up to bed, she had proved the sublimity of her kindness by doing something that she had never done before. She had left a lamp burning in the hall and the front door wide open.

It was four o'clock when, a very light sleeper, she woke at the sound of creaking stairs and went out, giving Lola time to arrive at her room, to peer over the banisters to see that the lamp was out and the front door closed. Then, returning to bed, she lay in great rotundity and with a wistful smile, to think back to the days when she had been as young and slim as Lola and just as much in love.

It was not until after breakfast, at which Lola did not appear, that she became aware of a curiosity that was like the bite of a mosquito. Where had that girl been all those hours and who was the man? But it was not a sinister curiosity, all alive to gather gossip and spread innuendoes, as women give so much to do. It was the desire to share, however distantly, in what she had at once imagined was a Great Romance. Age had turned sentiment into sentimentality in this kind fat lady and she thought of everything to do with the heart in capital letters. Lola's words in Mrs. Rumbold's parlor came back to her. "It's love and adoration and long-deferred hope," and she was stirred to a great sympathy. Shutting the

drawing-room door upon the after-breakfast rush to music, she went upstairs to Lola's room in the newest wing, distressed at her inability to creep. The dear thing was in her care and must be looked after.

It was nearly midday and the house had echoed with scales and badinage, bursts of operatic laughter and pæans of soprano praise to the gift of life for an hour and more. And so, of course, she expected to find her young friend lying in a daydream, reluctantly awake. But when she opened the door of Lola's room as quietly as she could, it was to see the silver frock spilt upon the floor like a pool of moonlight and the girl lying under the bedclothes in the attitude of a child in irresistible sleep, breathing like a rose. Her golden hair was streaming on her pillow, the long, dark lashes of her wide-apart eyes seemed to be stuck to her cheeks. Her lips were slightly apart and one arm was stretched out, palm up, with fingers almost closed upon something that she had found at last and must never let go.

"Love and adoration and long-deferred hope,"—the words came back again and told their story to the woman of one great love, so that she was moved to renewed sympathy and re-thrilled. She stood over the slight form in its utter relax and saw the lips tremble into a smile and the fingers close a little more. She said to herself, little knowing how exact was the simile upon which she stumbled, "She has found the gate in the wall." But before leaving the room to keep her song birds as quiet as possible, in order that her friend might sleep her fill, she caught sight of a book that lay open on the dressing table, upon the inner cover of which was pasted the photograph of a familiar face. "Fallaray!"—She read the title: "Memoirs de Madame de Brézé." And she looked again at the strong, ascetic face, with the lonely eyes, the unwarmed lips, the cold high brow. It might have been that of St. Anthony.

And she stood for a moment before going down to her children—her only children—and repeated to herself, with great excitement, her former thought. "A Great Romance, Love in High Places. How wonderful to be in, perhaps, on History."

## III

If, during all their inarticulate talks, Fallaray had ever remembered to ask Lola about herself, she would have told him, with perfect truth, the little story of her life and love. She was now wholly without fear. She had found the gate in the wall and had entered to happiness. But Fallaray went through that week-end without thinking, accepting the union that she had brought about without question and with a joy and delight as youthful as her own. From the time that she had found

him at four o'clock waiting for her, not caring where she came from so that she came, and saw that she had brushed the loneliness from his eyes and brought a smile to his mouth, all sense of being merely temporary lifted from her heart. In the eagerness of his welcome, in the hunger of his embrace, she saw that she belonged, was already as much a possession and a fact as the old house, hitherto his one treasure and refreshment.

They went hand in hand through those lovely days, like a boy and a girl. He led her from one pet place to another and lay at her feet, watching her with wonder, or going close to kiss her eyes and hair, to prove again and yet again that she was not a dream. And every moment smoothed a line from his face and pointed the way to his need of her in all the days to come. But while he showed that he had lived his future and had begun to spend his past, she, even then, forgot her past and turned her eyes to the future. Those holiday days which bound them together must come to an end, of course. And while she reveled in them as he did and avoided any mention of the work to which he must return, she had found herself in finding him, and becoming woman at last, saw her great responsibility and developed the sense of protection that grows with woman's love.

And this new sense was strengthened and made all the more necessary because his desire to make holiday had come about through her. And while she lay in his arms in all the ecstasy of love, she knew that she would fall far short of her achievement if she should become of more importance in his life than the work that he seemed to have utterly forgotten. It was for her, she began to see, to send him back with renewed energy and fire, and then, installed in a secret nest, to fulfil the part marked out for her as she conceived it and give him the rustle of silk.

If she had been the common schemer, using her sex magnetism to provide luxuries and security—the golden cage, as she had called it in her youth—the way was easy. But love and hero-worship had placed her on another level. Her cage was Fallaray's heart, in which she was imprisoned for life. Looking into the future with the suddenly awakened practicality that she had inherited from her mother, she began to lay out careful plans. She must find a girl to take her place with Lady Feo. Gratitude demanded that. She would go home until such time as she could take a furnished flat to which Fallaray could come without attracting attention. What her parents were to be told required much thinking. All her ideas of a Salon, of meeting political chiefs, of going into a certain set of society were foolish, she could see. The second of the most important of her new duties, she told herself, was to shield Fallaray from gossip which would be of use to his political enemies and so-called friends; the first to dedicate her life henceforward, by every gift that she possessed and could acquire, to the inspiration and the

relaxation of the man who belonged more to his country than he did to her.

She knew from the observation of specific cases and from her study of the memoirs and the lives of famous courtesans that men were not held long by sex attraction alone, although by that, rather than by beauty and by wit, they were captured. She must, therefore, she owned, with her peculiar frankness, apprentice herself anew, this time to the cultivation of intelligence. She must be able, eventually, to talk Fallaray's language, if possible, and add brain to what she called her gift.

All these things worked in her mind, suddenly set into action like one of her father's doctored watches, while she wandered through the sunny hours with Fallaray. All that was French and thrifty and practical in her nature awoke with all that was passionate and love-giving. And when at night she had to leave him to return to the cottage of the sympathetic woman whose discretion deserved a monument, she lay awake for hours to think and plan. She was no longer the lady's maid, going with love and adoration and long-deferred hope from one failure to another, no longer the trembling girl egged forward to a forlorn hope. She had found the gate in the wall, entered into a golden responsibility and blossomed into a woman.

## IV

Feo's new man, Clive Arrowsmith, had driven her down to the races at Windsor. Two of his horses, carrying colors new to the betting public, were entered. No one knew anything about them, so that if they won, and they were out to win, the odds would be good. There was a chance of making some money, always useful.

"I rather like this meeting," she said. "It's a sort of picnic peopled with caricatures," and sailed into the enclosure, elastically, in more than usually characteristic clothes. She had discarded the inevitable tam-o'-shanter for once in favor of a panama hat, which looked very cool and light and threw a soft shadow over her face. She was in what she called a soft mood,—meaning that she was playing a feminine role and leading up to a serious affair. Arrowsmith was obviously pucca and his height and slightness, well-shaped, close-cropped head, small straw-colored moustache, straight nose, strong chin with a deep cleft, and gray eyes which had a way, most attractive to women, of disbelieving everything they said had affected Feo and "really rather rattled" her, as she had confessed to Georgie Malwood late one night. After her recent bad picks, which had left a nasty taste of humiliation behind, she was very much in the mood for an old-fashioned sweep into sentiment. She had great hopes of Arrowsmith and had

seen him every day since Sunday. He was not easy. He erected mental bunkers. He was plus two at the game, which was good for hers. Altogether he was very satisfactory, and his horses added to the fun, on the side.

"It's rather a pet of mine," he said, looking round with a sort of affectionate recognition, "because when I was at Eton I broke bounds once or twice and had the time of my life here. Everything tastes better when there's a law against drinking. But I never thought I should come here with you."

"Have you ever thought about it then?"

"Yes," he said, leaning on the rail and looking under her hat with what was only the third of his un-ironical examinations. She had memorized the other two. Was she approaching the veteran class? "The day you were married I happened to be passing St. Margaret's and the crowd of fluttering women held me up. I saw you leave the church and I said to myself, 'My God, if I ever know that girl, I'll have a try to put a different smile on her face,'"

"You interest me, Cupid," she said, giving him a nickname on the spur of the moment. "What sort of smile, if you please?"

"One that wouldn't make me want to hit you," he answered, still looking.

"You'll never achieve your object on the way out of church."

"No, that's dead certain."

And she wondered whether he had scored or she had. She would like to feel that he was hard hit enough to go through this affair hell for leather, into the Divorce Court and out into marriage. It came to her at that moment, for the first time, that she liked him,—more than liked him; that he appealed to her and did odd new things to her heart. She felt that she could make her exit from the gang with this man.

As for Arrowsmith, he was sufficiently hard hit to hate Feo for the record that she had made, sufficiently in love with her to resent her kite-tail of indiscriminations. He loved but didn't like her, and this meant that he would unmagnetize himself as soon as he could and bolt. The bunkers that she had found in his nature were those of fastidiousness, not often belonging to men. But for being the son of Arrowsmith, the iron founder, whose wealth had been quadrupled by the War, he would have been a poet, although he might never have written poetry. As it was, he considered that women should be chaste, and was the object of derision for so early-Victorian an opinion. The usual hobby thus failing, he raced, liking thoroughbreds who played the game. A queer fish, Arrowsmith.

Georgie Malwood came up. She was with her fourth mother-in-law, Mrs. Claude Malwood, whose back view was seventeen, but whose face was older than the Pyramids. And Arrowsmith drifted off to the paddock.

But they lunched and spent the day together and one of the horses, "Mince Pie," won the fourth race at six to one, beating the favorite by a short head. And

so Feo had a good day. They got away ahead of the crowd, except for the people of the theater, who had to dine early and steady down before entering upon the arduous duties of the night, especially those of the chorus who, in these days of Reviews, are called upon to make so many changes of clothes. Art demands many sacrifices.—It had been decided that the Ritz would do for dinner and one of the dancing clubs afterwards. But on the way out Gilbert Macquarie pranced up to Feo, utterly inextinguishable, with a hatband of one club and a tie of another and clothes that would have frightened a steam roller. "Oh, hello, old thing," he cried, giving one of his choicest wriggles. "How goes it?"

To which Feo replied, with her most courteous insolence, "Out, Mr. Macquarie," touched Arrowsmith's arm and went.

But the nasty familiarity of that most poisonous bounder did something queer to Arrowsmith's physical sense, and he couldn't for the life of him play conversational ball with Feo on the road home. "To follow *that*," he thought, and was nauseated.

But Feo was in her softest, her most feminine mood. After dinner she was going to dance with this man and be held in his arms. It was a delightful surprise to discover that she possessed a heart. She had begun to doubt it. She had been an experimentalist hitherto. And so she didn't have much to say. And when they emerged from the squalor of Hammersmith and were passing Queen's Road, Bayswater, the picture of Lola came suddenly into her mind, the girl in love, and she wondered sympathetically how she was getting on. "What shall I wear tonight? I hate those new frocks.—I hope the band plays Bohème at the Ritz.—No diamonds, just pearls. He's a pearl man, I think. And I'll brush Peau d'Espagne through my hair. What a profile he has,—Cupid."

And she shuddered. She had married a profile, the fool. To be set free was impossible. The British public did not allow its Cabinet Ministers to be divorced.

At Dover Street Arrowsmith sprang from the car. He handed Feo out and rang the doorbell.

"You look white," she said. "What's the matter?"

He was grateful for the chance. "That old wound," he said. "It goes back on me from time to time."

"That doesn't mean that you'll have to chuck tonight?" She was aghast.

"I'm awfully afraid so, if you don't mind. It means bed, instantly, and a doctor. Do forgive me. I can't help myself. I wish to God I could."

She swallowed an indescribable disappointment and said "Good night, then. So sorry. Ring me up in the morning and let me know how you feel."

But she knew that he wouldn't. It was written round his mouth. And as she went upstairs she whipped herself and cursed Macquarie and looked back at her kite-tail of indiscriminations with overwhelming regret. Arrowsmith was a

pucca man.

## V

Ernest Treadwell watched the car come and go.

Lola had given out at home that she was to be away with Lady Feo, but that morning he had seen in the paper that her ladyship was in town. She had "been seen" dining at Hurlingham after the polo match with Major Clive Arrowsmith, D. S. O., late Grenadier Guards. Dying to see Lola, to break the wonderful news that his latest sonnet on Death had been printed by the *Westminster Gazette*, the first of his efforts to find acceptance in any publication, Treadwell had hurried to Dover Street, had ventured to present himself at the area door and had been told by Ellen that Lola was away on a holiday.

For half an hour he had been walking up and down the street, looking with puzzled and anxious eyes at the house which had always seemed to him to wear a sinister look. If she had not been going away with Lady Feo, why had she said that she was? A holiday,—alone, stolen from her people and from him to whom hitherto she had always told everything? What was the meaning of it?—She, Lola, had not told the truth. The thought blew him into the air, like an explosion. Considering himself, with the egotism of all half-baked socialists, an intellectual from the fact that he read Massingham and quoted Sidney Webb, he boasted of being without faith in God and constitution. He sneered at Patriotism now, and while he stood for Trades-Unionism remained, like all the rest of his kind, an individualist to the marrow. But he had believed in Lola because he loved her and she inspired him, and without her encouragement and praise he knew that he would let go and crash. Just as he had been printed in the *Westminster Gazette*!

And she had not told the truth, even to her people. Where was she? What was she doing? To whom could she go to spend a holiday? She had no other relation than her aunt and she also was in town. Ellen had told him so in answer to his question.—Back into a mind black with jealousy and suspicion—he was without the habit of faith—came the picture of Lola, dressed like a lady, getting out of a taxicab at the shady-looking house in Castleton Terrace. Had she lied to him then?

Dover Street was at the bottom of it all, and her leaving home to become a lady's maid to such a woman as Lady Feo. She must have caught some of the poison of that association, God knew what! In time of trouble it is always the atheist who is the first to call on God.

He was about to leave the street in which the Fallaray house had now assumed the appearance of a morgue to him when Simpkins came up from the area,

with a dull face. After a moment of irresolution he followed and caught the valet up. "Where's Miss Breezy?" he asked abruptly.

Simpkins was all the more astonished at the question for the trouble on that young cub's face. He looked him over sharply,—the cheap cap, the too long hair, the big nose, the faulty teeth, the pasty face, the un-athletic body, the awkward feet. Lola was in love. He knew that well enough. But not with this lout, that was certain, poet or no poet. "I don't know as 'ow I've got to answer that question," he said, just to put him in his place.

"Yes, you have. Where is she?"

"You ought ter know." He himself knew and as there was no accounting for tastes and Lola had made a friend of this anæmic hooligan, why didn't *he*? He lived round the corner from the shop, anyhow.

"But I don't know. Neither do her father and mother."

"What's that?" Simpkins drew up short. "You don't know what you're talkin' about. She went 'ome last Thursday to get a little rest until to-morrer,—Tuesday."

Treadwell would have cried out, "It isn't true," but he loved Lola and was loyal. He had met Simpkins in Queen's Road, Bayswater, and had seen him on familiar terms with Mr. Breezy, but he was a member of the Fallaray household and as such was not to be let into this—*this* trouble. Not even the Breezys must be told before Lola had been seen and had given an explanation. They didn't love her as much as he did,—nor any one else in the world. And so he said, loyalty overmastering his jealousy and fear, "Oh, is that so? I haven't had time to look in lately. I didn't know." And seeing a huge unbelief in Simpkins's pale eyes, he hurried on to explain. "Being in the neighborhood and having some personal news for Lola, I called at your house. Was surprised to hear that she was away. That's all. Good night." And away he went, head forward, left foot turning in, long arms swinging loose.

But he had touched the spring in Simpkins to a jealousy and a fear that were precisely similar to his own. Lola was *not* at home. Treadwell knew it and had called at Dover Street, expecting to find her there. They had all been told lies because she was doing something of which she was ashamed. The night that she had come in, weeping, dressed like a lady.—The words that had burned into his soul the evening of his proposal,—"so awfully in love with somebody else and it's a difficult world.—Perhaps I shall never be married and that's the truth, Simpky. It's a difficult world."

"Hi," he called out. "Hi," and started after Treadwell, full stride.

But rather than face those searching eyes again, at the back of which there was a curious blaze, Treadwell took to his heels, and followed hard by Simpkins, whose fanatical spirit of protection was stirred to its depths, dodged from one

street into another. The curious chase would have ended in Treadwell's escape but for the sudden intervention, in Vigo Street, of a policeman who slipped out of the entrance to the Albany and caught the boy in his arms.

"Now then, now then," he said. "What's all this 'ere?"

And up came Simpkins, blowing badly, with his tie under his left ear. "It's—it's alri, Saunders. A friendly race, that's all. He's—he's a paller mine. Well run, Ernie!" And he put his arm round Treadwell's shoulders, laughing.

And the policeman, whose wind was good, laughed, too, at the sight of those panting men. "Mind wot yer do, Mr. Simpkins," he said, to the nice little fellow with whom he sometimes took a drink at the bottom of the area steps. "Set up 'eart trouble if yer not careful."

Set up heart trouble? Simpkins looked with a sudden irony at the boy who also would give his life to Lola. And the look was met and understood. It put them on another footing, they could see.

After a few more words of badinage the policeman mooched off to finish his talk with the tall-hatted keeper of the Albany doorway. And Simpkins said gravely and quietly, "Treadwell, we've got to go into this, you and me. We're in the same boat and Lola's got ter be—looked after, by both of us."

Treadwell nodded. "I'm frightened," he said, without camouflage.

"So am I," said Simpkins.

And they went off together, slowly, brought into confidence by a mutual heart trouble that had already set up.

## VI

But there was no uneasiness in Queen's Road, Bayswater. John Breezy and his good wife were happy in the belief that their little girl was enjoying the air and scents of the country with her ladyship. They had neither the time nor the desire to dig deeply into the daily papers. To read of the weathercock policy of the overburdened Prime Minister, traditionally, nationally, and mentally unable to deal with the great problems that followed upon each other's heels, made Breezy blasphemous and brought on an incapacity to sit still. And so he merely glanced at the front page, hoping against hope for a new government headed by such men as Lord Robert Cecil, Lord Derby, Lord Grey and Edmund Fallaray, and for the ignominious downfall of all professional scavengers, titled newspaper owners and mountebanks who were playing ducks and drakes with the honor and the traditions of Parliament. He had no wish to be under the despotism of a Labor Government, having seen that loyalty to leaders was unknown among Trades Unionists and that principles were things which they never had had and never

would have the courage to avow.

As for Mrs. Breezy, she never had time for the papers. She didn't know and didn't care which party was in power, or the difference between them, and when she heard her husband discuss politics with his friends, burst into a tirade and get red in the face, as every self-respecting man has the right to do, she just folded her hands in her lap, smiled, and said to herself, "Dear old John, what would he do in the millennium, with no government to condemn!" Therefore, these people had not seen in the daily "Chit Chat about Society" the fact that Lady Feo had not left town. They never read those luscious morsels. Because Lady Feo had not left town Aunt Breezy had been too busy to come round on her usual evening, when she would have discovered immediately that Lola was up to something and put the fat in the fire. And so they were happy in their ignorance,—which is, pretty often, the only state in which it is achieved.

Over dinner that night—a scrappy meal, because whenever any one entered the shop Mrs. Breezy ran out to do her best to sell something—the conversation turned to the question of Lola's marriage, as it frequently did. That public house on the river, with its kitchen garden, still rankled. "You know, John," said Mrs. Breezy suddenly, "I've been thinking it all over. We were wrong to suppose that Lola would ever have married a man like Simpkins."

"Why? He's a good fellow, respectable, clean-minded, thinks a good deal of himself and has a nice bit of money stowed away. You don't want her to become engaged to one of these young fly-by-nights round here, do you,—little clerks who spend all their spare money on clothes, have no ambition, no education and want to get as much as they can for nothing?"

"No," said Mrs. Breezy. "I certainly do not, though I don't think it matters what you and I want, my dear. I've come to the conclusion that Lola knows what she's going to do, and we couldn't make her alter her mind if we went down on our knees to her."

Breezy was profoundly interested. Many times he had discovered that the little woman who professed to be nothing but a housewife, and very rarely gave forth any definite opinions of her own, said things from time to time which almost blew the roof off the shop. She was possessed of an uncanny intuition, what he regarded almost as second sight, and when she was in that mood he squashed his own egotism and listened to her with his mouth open.

So she went on undisturbed. "What I think is that Lola means to aim high. I've worked it out in my mind that she got into the house in Dover Street to learn enough to rise above such men as Simpkins and Ernest Treadwell, so that she could fit herself to marry a gentleman. And I think she's right. Look at her. Look at those little ankles and wrists and the daintiness of her in every way. She's not Queen's Road, Bayswater, and never was. She's Mayfair from head to foot, mind

and body. We're just accidents in her life, you and I, John, my dear. She will be a great lady, you mark my words."

Breezy didn't altogether like being called an accident. He took a good deal of credit for the fact that Lola was Mayfair, as Emily called it, rather well. And he said so, and added, "How about the old de Brézé blood? You forget that, my being a little jeweler in a small shop. She's thrown back, that's what she's done, and I'll tell you what it is, missus. She won't be ashamed of us, whoever she marries. *She* doesn't look upon us as accidents, whatever you may do, and if some man who's A 1 at Lloyd's falls in love with her and makes her his wife, her old father and mother will be drawn up the ladder after her, if I know anything about Lola. But it's a dream, just a dream," hoping that it wasn't, and only saying so as a sort of insurance against bad luck. It was a new idea and an exciting one, which put that place on the Thames into the discard. Personally he had hitherto regarded the Simpkins proposal in a very favorable light. That little man had more money than he himself could ever make, and, after all, a highly respectable public house on the upper Thames, patronized by really nice people, had been, in his estimation, something not to be sneezed at, by any means.

"Well," said Mrs. Breezy, "you may call it a dream. I don't. Lola thinks things out. She's always thought things out. She became a lady's maid for a purpose. When she's finished with that, she'll move on to something else. I don't know what, because she keeps things to herself. But she knows more than you and I will ever know. I've noticed that often. And when she was here on Sunday, and we walked about the streets, she was no more Lola Breezy than Lady Feo is, and there was something in the way she laid the dinner and insisted on waiting on us which showed me that she knew she wasn't. She was what country people call 'fey' that night. Her body was with us, but her brain and heart and spirit were far out of our reach. I'm certain of that, John, and I'm certain of something else, too. She's in love, and she knows her man, and he's a big man, and very soon she'll have a surprise for us, and it will *be* a surprise. You mark my words."

[image]

*A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY.*

And when she got up to answer the tinkle of the bell on the shop door, she left the fat John Breezy quivering with excitement and a sort of awe. Emily was not much of a talker, but when she started she said more in two minutes than other women say in a week. And after he had told himself how good it would be for his little girl to win great happiness, he put both his pale hands on the table,

and heaved a tremendous sigh. "Oh, my God," he said. "And if she could help us to get out of this shop, never to see a watch again, to be no longer the slave of that damned little bell, to go away and live in the country, and grow things, and listen to the birds, and watch the sunsets."

## VII

At that moment George Lytham drove his car through the gates of Chilton Park and up to the old house. He asked for Mr. Fallaray, was shown into the library and paced up and down the room with his hands deep in his pockets, but with his chin high, his eyes gleaming and a curious smile about his mouth.

The moment had come for which he had been waiting since the Armistice, for which he had been working with all his energy since he had got back into civilian clothes. He had left London and driven down to Whitecross on a wave of exhilaration. There had been a meeting at his office at which all the men of his party had been present,—young men, ex-soldiers and sailors temporarily commissioned, who had come out of the great catastrophe to look things straight in the face. "Fallaray is our man," they had all said unanimously. "Where is he?" And Lytham, who was his friend, had been sent to fetch him and bring him back to London that night. The time was ripe for action.

But when the door opened and Fallaray strolled in—he had never seen him stroll before—George drew up short, amazed.—But this was not Fallaray. This was not the man he had seen the previous Friday with rounded shoulders, haggard face and eyes in the back of his head. Here was one who looked like a younger brother of Fallaray, a care-free younger brother, sun-tanned, irresponsible, playing with life.

"My dear Fallaray," he said, hardly knowing what to say, "what have you done to yourself?"

And Fallaray sent out a ringing laugh and clapped young Lochinvar on the shoulder. "You notice the change, eh? It's wonderful, wonderful. I say to myself all day long how wonderful it is." And he flung his hands up and laughed again and threw himself into a chair and stuck his long legs out. "But what the devil do you want?" he asked lightly, enjoying the opportunity of showing the serious man who came out of a future that he himself had forgotten that he was beginning to revel in his past. "I said that some one would jolly soon see the wreckage on the shore of my Eden and send out a rescue party, and here you are."

Lytham didn't understand. The words were Greek to him and the attitude so surprising that it awakened in him a sort of irritation. Good God, hadn't this

man, who meant so much to them, read the papers? Wasn't he aware of the fact that the time had arrived in the history of politics when a strong concerted effort might put a new face upon everything? "Look here, Fallaray," he said, "let's talk sense."

"My dear chap," said Fallaray, "you've come to the wrong man for that. I know nothing about sense, and what's more, I don't want to. Talk romance to me, quote poetry, tell me your dreams, turn somersaults, but don't come here and expect any sense from me. I've given it up."

But Lytham was not to be put off. He said to himself, "The air of this place has gone to Fallaray's head. He needed a holiday. The reaction has played a trick upon him. He's pulling my leg." He drew up a chair and leaned forward eagerly and put his hand on Fallaray's knee. "All right, old boy," he said. "Have your joke, but come down from the ether in which you're floating and listen to facts. The wily little P. M. who's been between the devil and the deep sea for a couple of years is getting rattled. With the capitalists pushing him one way and the labor leaders shouldering him the other, he's losing his feet. The by-elections show the way the wind's blowing in the country and they've made a draught in Downing Street. Trust a Celt as a political barometer."

"There's been no wind here, George," said Fallaray, putting his hands behind his head. "Golden days, my dear fellow, golden days, with the gentlest of breezes."

But Lytham ignored the interruption. In five minutes, if he knew his man, he would have Fallaray sitting up straight. "Our anti-waste men are winning every seat they stand for," he went on, "and this means the nucleus of a new party, our party. The country is behind us, Fallaray, and if we keep our heads and get down to work, the next general election will not be a walk-over for the labor men but for us. Lloyd George is on his last legs, in spite of his newspapers, and with him the Coalitionists disappear to a man. As for Trades-Unionism, the coal strike has proved that it oscillates between communism and socialism, the nationalizing of everything—mines, railways, land, capital—and the country doesn't like it and isn't ready for it. The way, therefore, is easy if we organize at once under a leader who has won the reputation for honesty, and that leader is yourself. But there is not a moment to waste. My car is outside. Drive up with me now and meet us to-morrow morning. Unanimously we look to you." He sprang to his feet and made a gesture towards the door.

But Fallaray settled more comfortably into his chair and crossed one long leg over the other. "Do you know your Hood?" he asked.

"Hood?—Why?"

"Listen to this:

"'Peace and rest at length have come,
All the day's long toil is past,
And each heart is whispering Home,
Home at last.'"

"But what has that got to do with it?"

"That's my answer to you, George." And Fallaray waved his hand, as though the question was settled.

If Lytham had been older or younger, and if his admiration and esteem for Fallaray had not become so deep-rooted, he must have broken out into a torrent of incredulity and impatience. What he did, instead, persuading himself, easily enough, that his friend had not recovered from his recent disappointments, although he had obviously benefited in health, was to go over the whole ground again, more quietly and in greater detail, and to wind up with the assertion that Fallaray was essential to the cause.

To all of which Fallaray listened with a sort of respectful interest but without the slightest enthusiasm, and remained lolling in his chair. He might have been a Buckinghamshire Squire who knew no language but his own, hearing a Frenchman holding forth for no apparent reason on Napoleon. He watched his friend's mouth, appraised his occasional gestures, ran his eyes with liking over his well-knit body and found his voice pleasant to the ear. Beyond that, nothing.

Lytham began to feel like a man who throws stones into a lake. All his points seemed to disappear into an unruffled and indifferent surface of water. It was incomprehensible. It was also indescribably baffling. What on earth had come over this man who, until a few days before, had been burning with a desire to reconstruct and working himself into a condition of nervous exhaustion in an endeavor to pull his country out of chaos?

"Well," he said, after an extraordinary pause, during which everything seemed to have fallen flat. "What are you going to do?"

"But I've told you, my dear George," said Fallaray, with a long sigh of happiness. "I have found a home, at last."

"You mean that you are going to let us down?"

"I mean that I am going to live my own life."

"That you're out of politics?"

"Yes. My resignation goes in to-morrow."

"My God! Why?"

Fallaray got up and went to the window. He stood for a moment looking out at a corner of the terrace where several steps led down to a fountain in which, out of an urn held in the hands of a weather-worn boy, water was flowing, colored like a rainbow by the evening sun.

And Lytham followed him, wondering whether he had gone off his head, become feeble-minded as the result of overstrain. And then he saw Lola sitting on the edge of the fountain, with her face tilted up, her hands clasped round one of her knees and her golden hair gleaming.

And there both men remained, gazing,—Fallaray with a smile of possession, of infinite pride and pleasure; Lytham with an expression of profound amazement and quick understanding.

"So it's a woman," he thought. And as he continued to look, another picture of that girl came back into his mind. He had seen her before. He had turned as she had passed him somewhere and caught his breath. He remembered to have said to himself as she had walked away, "Eve, come to life! Some poor devil of an Adam will go to hell for her."—The Carlton—Chalfont—the foyer with its little cases of glittering jewels, the long strip of carpet leading to the stairs of the dining room—the palms—the orchestra. It all came back.—Well, this might be a form of madness in a man of Fallaray's age and womanless life, but, thank God, it was one with which he could deal. It was physical, not mental, as he had feared. Fallaray might very well play Adam without going into hell.

"Can't you combine the two," he said. "Politics and that girl? It's been done before. It's being done every day. The one is helped by the other."

But Fallaray shook his head. "I am not going to do it," he said. "I have had a surfeit of one and nothing of the other. Take it from me finally, George,—I am out of the political game. I think I should have been out of it in any case, because I came here acknowledging failure, fed up, nauseated. I am not the man to juggle with intrigues, to say one thing to placate the capitalists to-day and another to fool labor to-morrow. It isn't my way and I shall not be missed. On the contrary, my resignation will be accepted with eagerness. I am going to begin all over again, free, perfectly firm in my belief that there are better men to do my job. I was a bull in a china shop, and it will remain a china shop, whether it's run by one party or another. It's the system. Nothing can alter it. I couldn't, you and your party won't be able to. It's gone too far. It's a cancer. It will kill the country. And so I'm out. I consider that I have earned the right to love and make a home. Row off from my Eden, my dear fellow, and leave me in peace. I am not going to be rescued."

"We'll see about that," thought Lytham. "This is not Fallaray who speaks. It's the man of forty suddenly hit by passion. I'll fight that girl to the last gasp. We must have this man, we *must*."

He turned away, deeply disappointed at the queer tangent at which his chief had gone off, bitterly annoyed to find that here was a fight within a fight at a time when unity was vital. He was himself a perfectly normal creature who regarded the rustle of silk as one of the necessities, like golf and tobacco, but to

sacrifice a career or let down a cause for the sake of a woman was to him an act of unimaginable weakness and folly. If only Fallaray had been younger or older, or, better still, had been contentedly married to Feo! Cursed bad luck that he had been caught at forty.—But, struck with an idea in which he could see immediate possibilities, he stopped on his way to the door and went back to Fallaray. To work it out in his usual energetic way he must use strategy and appear to accept his friend's decision as irreparable. "All right," he said. "You know best. I'll argue no more. But as there's no need now for me to dash back to town, mayn't I linger with you in Arcadia for a couple of hours?"

Fallaray was delighted. Lola was to dine at Lady Cheyne's, and he would be alone. It would be very jolly to have George to dinner, especially as he saw the futility of argument and recognized an ultimatum. "Stay and have some food," he said. "I've much to tell you. But will you let me leave you for ten minutes?"

That was precisely what young Lochinvar intended to do before he drove away,—speak to that woman.

He watched Fallaray join Lola at the fountain, give her his hand and wander off among the rose trees, wearing what he called the fatuous smile of the middle-aged man in love. And then, so that he might obtain a point or two for future use, he rang the bell for Elmer. The butler and he had known each other for years. He would answer a few nonchalant questions without reserve. "Good afternoon, Elmer," he said, when the old man came in.

"Good afternoon to you, Sir." He might have been an actor who in palmy days had played Hamlet at Bristol.

"I'm staying to an early dinner with Mr. Fallaray. A whiskey and soda would go down rather well in the meantime."

"Certainly, Sir."

"Oh, and Elmer."

"Sir?" His turn and the respectful familiar angle of his head were only possible to actors of the good old school.

"The name of the charming lady who has so kindly helped to brighten up Mr. Fallaray's week-end."

"Madame de Brézé, Sir."

"Oh, yes, of course." He had never heard it before. Married then, or a widow. French. 'Um. "And she is staying with——"

"Lady Cheyne, Sir."

"Oh, yes,—that house——"

"A stone's throw from the gate in the wall, Sir. You can see the roof from this window."

"Thanks very much, Elmer. How's your son getting on now?"

"Very well indeed, Sir, thank you, owing to your kindness."

"A very good fellow,—a first-rate soldier. One of our best junior officers. Not too much soda, then."

"No, Sir." He left the room like an elderly sun-beam.

"Good!" said George Lytham. "Get off early, hang about by the gate, intercept this young woman on her way back to Fallaray and see what her game is. That's the idea."

And he sat down, lit a cigarette and picked up a copy of Hood that lay open on the table. His eyes fell on some marked lines.

"Peace and rest at length have come,
All the day's long toil is past,
And each heart is whispering Home,
Home at last."

And he thought of Feo whom he had seen several nights running with Arrowsmith and before that, for a series of years, with Dick, Tom and Harry. Never with Fallaray.

"Poor devil," he thought. "He's been too long without it. It won't be easy to rescue him now."

## VIII

And at the gate in the wall Fallaray held Lola close in his arms and kissed her, again and again.

"My little Lola," he said softly, "how wonderful you are,—how wonderful all this is. You had been in the air all round me for weeks. I used to see your eyes among the stars looking down at me when I left the House. I used to wake at night and feel them upon me all warm about my heart. Lots of times, like the wings of a bird, they flashed between me and my work. And the tingle of your hand that never left me ran through my veins like fire. I could have stopped dead that night at the Savoy and followed you away. And when I found you weeping in the corridor in Dover Street I was confused and bewildered because then I was old and I was fighting against you for the cause. De Brézé, de Brézé,—the name used to come to me, suddenly, like the forerunner of rain to a dried-up plant. And at last I got away and came down here, as I know now, to throw off my useless years and go back, past all the milestones on a long road, and wait for you. And then you heard my cry and opened the gate and walked among those stone figures of my life and gave me back my youth."

"With love and adoration and long-deferred hope," she said and crept closer

to his heart. "I love you. I love you. I've always loved you. And if I'd never found you, I should have waited for you on the other side of the Bridge,—loving you still."

"My dear—who am I to deserve this?"

"You are Fallaray. Who else?"

And he laughed at that and held up her face and kissed her lips and said, "No. I'm no longer Fallaray, that husk of a man, emptying his energy on the ribs of chaos. I'm Edmund the boy, transformed to adolescence. I'm Any Man in love."

And again she went closer, feeling the far-off shudder of thunder, with a new-born fear of opening the gate in the wall. "Who was that man who came to see you?"

"Young Lochinvar,—Lytham. He's interested in politics."

"What did he want to see you about?"

"Nothing." And he brushed away the lingering recollection with his hand.

"No. Tell me. I want to know."

"I forget." And he laughed and kissed her once again.

"But in any case you have to go back to-morrow?"

He shook his head and ran his fingers over her hair.

"But you said you'd have to,—that night."

"Did I? I forget." And he put his hand over her heart and held it there.

And again there came that thunder shudder, and she eyed the gate with fear. "Did he want you to go back to-night? Tell me; I've *got* to know." And she drew away a little—a very little—in order to force her point.

But he drew her back and kissed her eyes. "Don't look like that," he said. "What's it matter? Let him want. I'm not going back. I'm never going back. If George Lytham were multiplied by a hundred thousand and they all landed on my island with grappling irons, I'd laugh them back to sea. They shan't have me. I've given them all I had. I've found my youth and I'll enjoy it, here, anywhere, with you." He stretched out and opened the gate. "And now, I must let you go, my sweet. But don't be longer than you can help. Get dinner over quickly and come back to me again. Wear that silver frock and I'll wait for you on the terrace, as I did before. I want to be surprised again as you shimmer among those cold stones." He let her go.

And she went through the gate and stood irresolute, as the shudder came again. With a little cry she turned and flung her arms round his neck as though she were saying, "Good-by."

And yet there was only a cloud as big as a man's hand in that clear sky.

## IX

No one, it might be thought, could hear to think at the narrow table in Lady Cheyne's house. Those natural, childlike creatures who, if they had ever learned the artificialities forget them, talked, argued, sang and screamed each other down all at the same time. They could not really be musicians if they didn't.

Zalouhou, whose only preparations for dinner consisted in bushing out his tie and hair, sat at his hostess' left; Willy Pouff, in an evening suit borrowed from a waiter friend who had gone to a hospital with a poisoned hand, on her right. Lola, at the end of the table, sat between Valdemar Varvascho and Max Wachevsky, who had remembered, oddly enough, to wash their faces, though Varvascho's beard had grown darkly during the day. Both the women had changed and made up for artificial light. The result of Anna Stezzel's hour was remarkable, as well, perhaps, as somewhat disconcerting. A voluptuous person, with hair as black as a wet starling, she had plastered her face with a thick coating of white stuff on which her lips resembled blood stains in the snow. Her beaded evening gown saved the company from panic merely by an accident and disclosed also the whole wide expanse of a rather yellow back. Regina Spatz was built on Zuluesque lines, too, but more by luck than judgment a white blouse tempered her amazing ampleness. She had used henna on her hair so that it might have been fungus in a tropic sea and sat in a perpetual blush of indiscriminate rouge. Salo Impf was wedged against her side and looked like a Hudson River tugboat under the lee of the *Aquitania*.

Like all fat women, Lady Cheyne was devoted to eating and had long since decided to let herself go. "One can only live once," she said, in self-defense; "and how does one know that there'll be peas and potatoes in the next world." The dinner, to the loudly expressed satisfaction of the musicians, was substantial and excellent. Each course was received with a volley of welcome, expressed in several languages. The hard exercise of singing, playing, gesticulating, praising and breathing deeply gave these children of the exuberant Muse the best of appetites. It was a shattering meal.

But Lola could hear herself think, for all that. She sat smiling and nodding. Her body went through the proper mechanics, but her spirit was outside the gate in the wall, trembling. There was a cloud in the sky, already. Fallaray was going to make her more important than his work, and she had not come to him for that. Her métier was to bring into his loveless life the rustle of silk,—love, tenderness, flattery, refreshment, softness, beauty, laughter, adoration, which would send him out of her secret nest strengthened, humanized, eager, optimistic. She must fail lamentably if the effect of her absorbed him to the elimination of everything that made him necessary to the man who had come from London and to all that he represented. George Lytham, of *Reconstruction*, the organizer of the Anti-waste Party,—she had heard him discussed by Lady Feo. Without Fallaray he might be

left leaderless,—because of her.

She went upstairs as soon as she could to put on the silver frock. There had been no time to change before dinner. Fallaray had kissed her so often that she had been late. She was joined immediately by Lady, Cheyne, who was anxious. She had seen something in Lola's eyes.

"What is it, my dear?" she asked. "I'm worried about you."

And Lola went to her, as to a mother, and shut her eyes and gave a little cry that seemed to come from her soul.

"There's something wrong!—Has he hurt you? Tell me."

And Lola said, "Oh, no. He would never hurt me, never. He loves me. But I may be hurting him, and that's so very much worse."

"I don't understand. You mean—his reputation? But what if you are? We're all too precious careful to guard the reputations of our politicians, to help them along in their petty careers."

"But he isn't a politician, and he isn't working for a career." She drew away sharply. No one must have a word against Fallaray.

"Well, what is it then? I want you to be happy. I want this to be a Great Romance. And, good Heavens, my darling, it's only three days old."

Lola spoke through tears. Yes, it was only three days old. "He may love me too much," she said. "I may become more important than his work."

Lady Cheyne's anxiety left her, like smoke. And she gave a laugh and drew what she called that old-fashioned child into her arms again. "My dear," she said, "don't let *that* distress you. Make yourself more important than his work. Encourage him to love you more than himself. He'll be different from most men if he is capable of that! But perhaps happiness is something new in his life, and I shouldn't wonder, with Lady Feo for a wife."

It never occurred to Lola to ask her friend how she had discovered the secret. She listened eagerly to her sophistries, trying to persuade herself that they were true.

"Get him to take you away. There are beautiful places to go to, and he never will be missed. There'll be a paragraph,—'ill-health causes the resignation of Mr. Fallaray'; the clubs will talk, but the people will believe the papers, and presently Lady Feo will sue for divorce, desertion. A nice thing,—she being the deserter! And you and he,—what do you care? Is happiness so cheap that you can throw it away, either of you? If he loves you, *that's* his career, and a very much better one than leading parties and making empty promises and becoming Prime Minister. If he loves you well enough to sacrifice all that, for the sake of womanhood see that he does it, and you will build a bigger statue for him than any that he could win."

And she kissed her little de Brézé, who seemed to have undergone a per-

fectly natural *crise de neuf*, being so much in love, and patted her on the shoulder. "Take an old woman's advice, my pet. If you've won that man, keep him. He'll live to thank you for it one of these days."

And finally, when Lola slipped into the twilight in her silver frock, there didn't seem to be a single cloud in the sky. Only an evening star. What Lady Cheyne had said she believed because she wanted to believe it, because this Great Romance was only three days old and hope had been so long deferred.—She stopped in the old garden and picked a rose and pulled its thorns off so that she might give it to Fallaray, and she lingered for a moment taking in the scents and the quiet sounds of that most lovely evening,—more lovely and more unclouded even than that other one, which was locked in her memory. And then she went along the path through the corner of a wood. A rabbit disappeared into the undergrowth, but the fairies were not out yet, and there was no one to spy. Was happiness so cheap that she could throw it away,—his and her own? "If you've won that man, keep him." She danced all the rest of the way and over the side road to the gate in the wall,—early, after all, by half an hour. She would wait outside until she heard Fallaray's quick step and watch the star. "I'll get him to take me away," she thought. "There are beautiful places to go to, and he never will be missed."

She turned quickly, hearing some one on the road. She saw a car drawn up a little distance away, and a man come swinging towards her.

It was young Lochinvar.

## X

"Madame de Brézé," he said, standing bareheaded, "my name is Lytham. May I ask you to be so kind as to give me ten minutes?"

"Twenty," she answered, with the smile that she had flashed at Chalfont that night at the Savoy. "I have just that much to spare."

"Thank you." But now that he was there, after all his strategy, after saying good-by to Fallaray, driving all the way down the hill from Whitecross and up again into that side road, he didn't know how to begin, or where. This girl! God,—how disordering a quality of sex! No wonder she had shattered poor old Fallaray.

"Shall we walk along the lane? It turns a little way up and you can see the cross cut in the hill."

"Yes," he said. "But there are so many crosses, aren't there, and they're all cut on somebody's hill." He saw that she looked at him sharply and was glad. Quick to take points, evidently. This interview would not be quite so difficult,

after all.

"You came down from town to see Edmund?" She called him by his Christian name to show this man where he stood.

"On the most urgent business," he said, "I saw you sitting at the side of the fountain. It's a dear old place."

She was not beautiful, and she was not sophisticated. That way of dragging in Fallaray's Christian name was childish in its naïveté. But all about her there was something so fresh and young, so sublimely unselfconscious, so disturbingly feminine, so appealing in its essence of womanhood that he had to pay her tribute and measure his words. He would hate to hurt this girl. De Brézé—Madame de Brézé—how was it that he hadn't heard of her before? She knew Chalfont. She was staying with Poppy Cheyne. Fallaray had met her somewhere. Odd that he had missed her in the crowd.

"I'll come to the point, if I may," he said. "And I must bore you a little with a disquisition on the state of affairs."

"I'm interested in politics," she said, with a forlorn attempt to keep a high head.

"Then perhaps you know what's happened, to a certain extent, although probably not as much as those of us who stand in the wings of the political stage and see the actors without their make-up,—not a pretty sight, sometimes."

"Well?" But the cloud had returned and blotted out the evening star, and there was the shudder of distant thunder again.

"Well, the people are turning against the old gang, at last. The Prime Minister has only his favorites and parasites and newspapers left with him. The Unionists are scared stiff by the sudden uprising of the Anti-waste Party and Labor has been drained of its fighting funds. The Liberals have withered. There is one great cry for honest government, relief from crushing taxation, a fair reward for hard work, and new leadership that will make the future safe from new wars. We must have Fallaray. He's the only man. I came here this evening to fetch him. He refuses to come because of you. What are you going to do?"

As he drew up short and faced her, she looked like a deer surrounded by dogs. He was sorry, but this was no time for fooling. What stuff was this girl made of? Had she the gift of self-sacrifice as well as the magnetism of sex? Or was she just a female, who would cling to what she had won, self before everything?

"I love him," she said.

Well, it was good to know that, but was that an answer? "Yes," he said. "Well?" He would like to have added "But does he love you and can you keep him after passion is dead,—a man like Fallaray, who, after all, is forty." But he hadn't the courage or the desire to hurt.

"And because I love him he must go," she said.

He leaned forward and seized her hand. He was surprised, delighted, and a little awed. She had gone as white as a lily. "You will see to that? You will use all your influence to give him back to us?" He could hardly believe his ears and his eyes.

"All my influence," she said, standing very straight.

He bent down and touched her hand with his lips.

They were at the gate. They heard steps on the other side of the wall.

"Go," she said, "quickly."

But before he went he bowed, as to a queen.

And then Lola heard the voice again, harshly. "Go on, de Brézé, go on. Don't be weak. Stick to your guns. You have him in the palm of your hand."

But she shook her head. "But I'm not de Brézé. I've only tried to be. I'm Lola Breezy of Queen's Road, Bayswater, and this is love."

She opened the gate and went in to Fallaray.

# PART VIII

## I

There was a hooligan knock on Georgie Malwood's bedroom door.

Saying "Aubrey" to herself without any sign either of irritation or petulance, she put down her book, gathered herself together, and slid off the bed. In a suit of boy's pajamas she looked as young and undeveloped as when, at seventeen, she had married Clayburgh in the first week of the War. Her bobbed hair went into points over her ears like horns, and added to her juvenile appearance. She might have been a schoolgirl peeping at life through the keyhole, instead of a woman of twenty-four, older than Methuselah.

She unlocked the door. "Barge in," she said, standing clear.

And Aubrey Malwood, with his six foot two of brawn and muscle, his yellow Viking hair, eyebrows and moustache, barged, as he always did.

"I've just dropped in to tell you," he said, going straight to the looking-glass, "that Feo rang up an hour ago. She wants you to lunch with her in Dover Street."

Perching herself on the window seat, like a pillow girl in Peter Pan, Georgie gazed uninterestedly at that portion of the Park at Knightsbridge which is between the barracks and the Hotel.

"Oh, damn," she said, "I wish she'd leave me alone." Young Malwood was so astonished at this sentiment that he was drawn away from self-admiration. He liked his type immensely.

"I never expected to hear you say that! What's the notion?"

His much-married wife's doglike worship of Feo Fallaray had, as a matter of fact, immediately eliminated him from her daily pursuits and long ago sent him after another form of amusement.

"Oh, I dunno," said Georgie. "She's been different lately; lost her sense of humor, and become serious and sentimental,—the very things she's always hated in other people. You're so fond of yourself that I don't suppose you've ever noticed the shattering effect of having the teacher you imitated go back suddenly to the sloppy state you were in at the beginning of your lessons. I'll go this time and then fall away. Feo's over."

Malwood went back to the glass and posed as a gladiator with an imaginary sword and shield. His magnificent height and breadth and bone made him capable of any gladiatorial effort. Only as to brain was he a case of arrested development. At twenty-eight he was still only just fit for Oxford. In any case, as things were, this desertion from her leader would leave Georgie exactly what she was,—someone who had the legal right to provide him with funds.

"Well," he said, "it's your funeral," and let it go. The fact that the elaborate dressing table was covered with framed photographs of his three equally young predecessors, as well as toilet things bearing their crests and initials, left this perpetual undergraduate unmoved. He had never been in love with Georgie. He had been somewhat attracted by her tinyness and imperturbability, but what had made him ask her to be his wife was the fact that everybody was talking about her as a creator of a record,—three times a widow in five years,—and he was one of those men, who, being unable to attract attention by anything that he could do, felt the need of basking in reflected glory. He had been fatuously satisfied to follow her into a public place and see people nudge each other as she passed. It was a thousand to one that if he had not married Georgie, he would have hunted London to find a girl who had won her way into the *Tatler* as a high diver or a swallower of knives. Why Georgie had married him was the mystery. Having acquired the married habit, it was probable that she had accepted him before she had had time to discover that beneath his astonishing good looks and magnificent physique there was the mind of a potato. He had turned out to be an expensive hobby because when his father's business had been ruined by the War, he possessed nothing but his pay as a second lieutenant. Peace had removed even

that and left him in her little house in Knightsbridge with eight pairs of perfect riding boots, a collection of old civvies, and an absolute incapability of earning a legitimate shilling. With characteristic cold-bloodedness she had, however, immediately advertised that she would not be responsible for his debts, and made him an allowance of ten pounds a week, a fourth of her income after the depredation of income tax. An invulnerable sponge, with a contagious chuckle, a fairly good eye for tennis, and a homogeneous nature, he managed to hang on by the skin of his teeth and was perfectly happy and satisfied. But for Georgie, he must have been a farm laborer in Canada or a salesman in a motor-car shop on the strength of his appearance. Or he might have gone to Ireland in the Black and Tans.

"Well," he said, having delivered his message, "cheerio. I'm going to Datchet for a week to stay on the Mullets' houseboat."

Georgie looked round at him, stirred to a slight curiosity.

"Mullet? New friends?"

"Yes. War profiteers. Rolling in the stuff. Great fun. Know everybody. Champagne and diamonds for breakfast. Haven't got a loose fiver about you, I suppose?"

With a faint smile Georgie pointed to her cigarette case on the dressing table. And without a qualm Malwood opened it, removed his wife's last night's bridge winnings, murmured, "Thanks most awfully," and barged out, whistling a tune from "The League of Notions."

"All right, then. For the last time, lunch with Feo," thought Georgie, moving from the window seat lazily. "She's over."

## II

For the first time since Feo had lifted Georgie Malwood into her intimacy, in that half-careless, half-cautious way that belongs usually to the illegitimate offspring of kings, her small, unemotional friend was late for her appointment. Always before, like every other member of the gang, Georgie Malwood had reported on the early side of the prescribed moment and killed time without impatience until it had occurred to Feo to put in an appearance. That morning, which was without word from Arrowsmith, as she had predicted with the uncanny intuition that makes women suffer before as well as after they are hurt, Feo was punctual. She entered her den with the expectation of finding Georgie curled up on the sofa, halfway through a slim volume of new poems. The room was empty and there had been no message of apology, no hastily scribbled note of endearment and explanation.

During the longest forty-five minutes that she had ever spent, Feo passed from astonishment to anger and finally into the chilly realization that her uncharacteristic behavior of the last few weeks had been discussed and criticized, and that the judgment of her friends was unmistakably reflected in the new attitude of the hitherto faithful and obsequious Georgie,—always the first to catch the color of her surroundings. She, Feo, the Queen of Flippancy, the ringleader of eroticism, had had the temerity to play serious, an unforgivable crime in the estimation of the decadent set which had ignored the War and emerged triumphantly into the chaos of peace. Well, there it was. A long and successful innings was ended. She would be glad to withdraw from the field.

She waited in her favorite place with her beautiful straight back to the fireplace, both elbows on the low mantel board and one foot on the fender. Her face was as white as a candle, her large violet eyes were filled with grim amusement, and her wide, full-lipped mouth was a little twisted. She wore a frock that was the color of seaweed, cut almost up to her knees, with short sleeves, a loose belt, and a great blob of jade attached to a thin gold chain lying between her breasts. Her thick, wiry hair was out of curl and fell straight, like that of a page in the Court of Cesare Borgia. For all her modernity there was something about her that was peculiarly medieval, masculinely girlish rather than effeminately boyish. She might have been the leading member of a famous troupe of Russian ballet dancers, ready at a moment's notice to slip out of her wrapper and spring with athletic grace high into the air.

Her first remark upon Georgie's lazy entrance was Feoistic and disconcerting.

"So I'm over, I see," she said, and waited ironically for its effect.

Not honest enough to say, "Yes, you are," Georgie hedged, with some little confusion.

"What makes you think so, Feo?"

"Your infernal rudeness, my dear, which you wouldn't have dared to indulge in a week ago. You've all sensed the fact that I'm sick to tears of the games I've led you into, and would gladly have gone in for babies if I'd had the luck to seem desirable to the right man." She made a long arm and rang the bell. "I am ripe for repentance, you see, or perhaps it might be more accurate, though less dramatic, to say eager for a new sensation. It isn't coming off, but you can all go and hang yourselves so far as I'm concerned. I'm out. I'm going to continue to be serious. Bring lunch in here," she added, as a footman framed himself in the doorway, "quickly. I'm starving."

Almost any other girl who had been the favorite of such a woman as Feo would have found in this renunciation of leadership something to cause emotion. Mere gratitude for many favors and much kindness seemed to demand that. But

this young phlegmatic thing was just as unmoved as she had been on receipt of the various war office telegrams officially regretting the deaths of Lord Clayburgh, Captain Graham Macoover, and Sir Harry Pytchley. She lit the inevitable cigarette, chose the much-cushioned divan, and stretched herself at full length.

"I can do with a little groundsel too," she said, as though the other subject had been threshed out.

And so it had, for the time being. Feo, oddly enough, had no bricks to throw. She could change her religion, it seemed, without pitching mud at the church of her recent beliefs. It was not until lunch was finished and the last trickle of resentment at Georgie's failure to apologize had gone out of her system that she returned to the matter and began, in a way, to think aloud. It was not as indiscreet as it might have been, because Georgie Malwood was completely self-contained and had developed concentration to such a degree, her first three husbands having been given to arguing, that she could lie and follow her own train of thought as easily in a room in which a mass of women were playing bridge as in a monkey house. Her interest in Feo was dead. She was over.

And so Feo gave herself away to a little person whose ears were closed.

"I don't know what exactly to do," she said. "At the moment, I feel like a fish out of water. If Arrowsmith had liked me and been ready to upset the conventional ideas of his exemplary family, I'd have eloped with him, however frightfully it would have put Edmund in the cart. I don't mind owning that Arrowsmith is the only man I've ever met who could have turned me into the Spartan mother and worthy *haus-frau.* I had dreams of living with him behind the high walls of a nice old house and making the place echo with the pattering feet of babes. It's the culminating disappointment of several months of 'em,—the bad streak which all of us have to go through at one time or another, I suppose. However, he doesn't like me, worse luck, and so there it is. So I think I'd better make the best of a bad job and cultivate Edmund. I think I'd better study the life of Lady Randolph Churchill and make myself useful to my husband. Politics are in a most interesting state just now, with Lloyd George on the verge of collapse at last, and the brainy dishonesty of a woman suddenly inspired with political ambition is exactly what Edmund needs to push him to the top. He has been too long without a woman's unscrupulous influence."

She began to pace the room with long swinging strides, eagerly, clutching at this new idea like a drowning man to a spar. Her eyes began to sparkle and the old ring came back to her voice. Here was a way to use her superabundant energy and build up a new hobby.

"I'm no longer a flapping girl with everything to discover," she went on, "I've had my share of love stuff. By Jove, I'll use my intelligence, for a change. I'll get into the fight and develop strategy. Every one's looking to Edmund as the

one honest man in the political game, and I'll buckle to and help him. He's an amazing creature. I've always admired him, and there's something that suits my present state of mind in making up to him for my perfectly rotten treatment all these years. If I can't make a lover into a husband, by Jingo, I can set to work to make a husband into a lover. There's an idea for you, Feo, my pet! There's a mighty interesting scheme to dig your teeth into, my broad-shouldered friend!"

She sent out an excited laugh and flung up her hand as though to welcome a brain wave. Her amazing resilience stood her in good stead in this crisis of her life,—to say nothing of her courage and queer sense of humor. Her blood began to move again. Fed up with decadence, she would plump whole-heartedly for usefulness now, be normal, go to work, get into the good books of George Lytham and his party, surprise Fallaray by her sudden allegiance to his cause and to him, and gradually break down the door that she had slammed in his face.

"I'll let my hair grow," she continued gayly, working the vein that was to rescue her from despondency and failure with pathetic eagerness.

"I'll chuck eccentric clothes. I'll turn up slang and blasphemy. I'll teach myself manners and the language of old political hens. I'll keep brilliance within speed limits. Yes, I'll do all that if I have to work like a coolie. And I'll tell you what else I'll do. I'll bet you a thousand pounds to sixpence that before the end of the year I'll be the wife—I said the wife, Georgie—of the next Prime Minister. Will you take it?"

She drew up short, alight and excited, her foot already on the beginning of the new road, and paused for a reply.

Georgie stretched like a young Angora cat and yawned with perfect frankness.

"I'll take whatever I can get, Feo," she said. "But what the devil are you talking about? I haven't heard a blessed word."

And Feo's laugh must have carried into Bond Street.

## III

And when Georgie had transferred herself from the many-cushioned divan to her extremely smart car, in which, with an expressionless face and a mind as calm as a cheese, she was going to drive to Hurlingham to be present at, rather than to watch, the polo, Feo went upstairs.

She felt that she must walk, and walk quickly, in an endeavor to keep up with her new line of thought, at the end of which she saw, more and more clearly, a most worth-while goal. Before she could arrive at this, she could see a vista of bunkers ahead of her to negotiate which all her gifts of intrigue would have,

happily, to be exercised. To give interest and excitement to her plan of becoming Fallaray's wife in fact, as well as by law, she required bunkers and needed difficulties. The more the merrier. She knew that, at present, Fallaray was as far away from her as though he were at the North Pole,—and as cold. She was dead certain of the fact that she had been of no more account to him, from the first few hours of their outrageous honeymoon, than a piece of furniture in one of the rooms in his house of which he never made use. That being so, she could see the constant and cunning employment of the brains that she had allowed to lie fallow through all her rudimentary rioting,—brains that she possessed in abundance, far above the average. In the use of these lay her salvation, her one chance to swing herself out of the great disappointment and its subsequent loose-endedness which had been brought about by Arrowsmith's sudden deflection. Her passionate desire for this man was not going easily to die. She knew that. Her dreams would be filled with him for a considerable time, of course. She realized, also, looking at that uncompleted episode with blunt honesty, that, but for him, she would still be playing the fool, giving herself and her gifts to the entertainment of all the half-witted members of the gang. To the fastidious Arrowsmith and her unrequited love she owed her sudden determination to make herself useful to Fallaray and finally to become, moving Heaven and earth in the process, his wife. This was the paradoxical way in which her curious mind worked. No tears and lamentations for her. She had no use for them. On the contrary, she had courage and pride, and by setting herself the most difficult task that she could possibly have chosen, two things would result,—her sense of adventure would be gratified to the hilt and Arrowsmith shown the stuff of which she was made.

But on her way to her room, which was to be without Lola until the following morning, she stopped in the corridor, turned and went to the door of Fallaray's den. After a moment's hesitation she entered, feeling that she was trespassing, never before having gone into it of her own volition. She could not be caught there because Fallaray had escaped to his beloved Chilton, she remembered. Her desire was to stand there alone for a few moments, to merge herself into its atmosphere; to get from its book-lined walls and faint odor of tobacco something of the sense of the man who had unconsciously become her partner.

The vibrations of the room as they came to her were those of one which had belonged to an ascetic, long dead and held in the sort of respect by his country that is shown by the preservation of his work place. It was museum-like and tidy, even prim. The desk was in perfect order and had the cold appearance of not having been used for a century. The fireplace was clean and empty. The waste-paper basket might never have been employed. There was nothing personal to give the place warmth and life. No photographs of women or children. No old pipes. And even in the cold eyes of the bust of Dante that looked down upon her

from the top of one of the bookcases there was no expression, either of surprise or resentment at her intrusion.

Most women would have been chilled, and a little frightened, there. It would have been natural for them, in Feo's circumstances, had they possessed imagination, to have been struck with a sense of remorse. It should have been their business, if nothing else, to see that this room lived and had personality, comfort and a little color,—flowers from time to time, and at least one charming picture of a youngster on the parental desk. And Feo did feel, as she looked about in her new mood, a little shiver of shame and the red-hot needle of repentance pricking her hitherto dormant conscience.

"Poor old Edmund," she said aloud, "what have I done to him? This place is dry, bloodless, like a mausoleum. Well, I'll alter it all. I have a job, thank God. Something to set my teeth into. Something to direct my energy at,—if it isn't too late."

And as this startling afterthought struck her, she wheeled round, darted across the room to the place where a narrow slip of looking-glass hung in an old gold frame, and put herself through a searching examination.

"Mf! Still attractive in your own peculiar way," she said finally, with relief. "The early bloom gone, of course; lines here and there, especially round the eyes. Massage and the proper amount of sleep will probably rub those away. But there's distinction about you, Feo dear, and softness can be cultivated. You're as hard as an oil painting now, you priceless rotter. However, hope springs eternal, and where there's a will there's a way."

She laughed at herself for these nursery quotations and clenched her fists for the fray. But as she turned, fairly well satisfied with the result of her inspection, she heard steps in the corridor—Fallaray's steps—and the blood rushed into her face. By George, she was going to be caught, after all.

## IV

Fallaray? This sun-tanned, smiling man with shoulders square, chin high, and a song in his eyes, who came into the room like a southwest gale?

If he felt surprise at the unfamiliar sight of Feo in his den, he allowed nothing of it to show. He held out a cordial hand and went to her eagerly.

"I've come up to town to see you," he said. "You must have got my S. O. S."

The manner provided the second shock. But Feo returned the pressure of his hand and tried instantly to think of an answer that would be suitable to her new rôle.

"I think I must have done so," she said quietly, returning his smile. "Your

holiday has worked wonders, Edmund."

"A miracle, an absolute miracle!"

A nearer look proved that his word was the right one. Here was almost the young Fallaray of the tennis courts and the profile that she had set herself impishly to acquire in those old days. Good Heavens, could it be that she *was* too late, and that another woman had brought about this amazing change? She refused to permit the thought to take root. She told herself that she had had her share of disappointments. He had needed rest and his beloved Chilton, bathed in the most un-English sunlight, had worked its magic. It must be so. Look at this friendliness. That wasn't consistent with the influence of another woman. And yet, as an expert in love, she recognized the unmistakable look.

"I'm only staying the night here," he said. "I'm off to Chilton again in the morning. So there's no time to lose. Can you give me ten minutes?"

"Of course," she said. "And as many more as you care to ask for. I'm out of the old game." She hurried to get that in, astonished at her uncharacteristic womanliness.

But he was one-eyed, like a boy. What at any other time would have brought an incredulous exclamation left him now incurious, without surprise. He was driving hard for his own goal. Anything that affected Feo, or any one else, except Lola, didn't matter. Her revolutionary statement passed almost unheard. He pushed an armchair into place.

"Sit down," he said, "I want to talk to you."

And as she sat down it was with a sudden sense of fatalism. There was something in all this that was predetermined, inevitable. That flame had been set alight in him by love, and nothing else. She felt, sitting there, like that most feeble of all figures, Canute. What was the use in trying to persuade herself that what she dreaded to hear was not going to be said? She was too late. She had let this man go.

He walked up and down for a moment, restless and wound up, passing and repassing the white-faced woman who could have told him precisely what he was about to say.

"I want to be set free," he said, with almost as little emotion as would have been called up by the discussion of a change of butchers. "I want you to let me arrange to be divorced. Something has happened that has altered my entire scheme of life. I want to begin all over again. I have come back this afternoon to put this to you and to ask you to help me. I think I know that many times since we've been married you would have asked me to do this, if I hadn't been in politics. I'm grateful to you, as I'm sure you know, for having respected what was my career to that extent. I am going out. My resignation is in my pocket. It is to be sent to the P. M. to-night. When I go back to-morrow, it will be as a free

man, so far as Westminster is concerned. I want to return to Chilton, having left instructions with your lawyers, with your permission, to proceed with the action. The evidence necessary will be provided and the case will be undefended. I shall try to have it brought forward at the earliest possible moment. May I ask you to be kind enough to meet me in this matter?"

He drew up in front of her and waited, with as little impatience as breeding would permit.

If this question had been put to her a week ago, or yesterday, she would have cried out, "Yes," with joy and seen herself able to face a future with Arrowsmith, such as she had pictured in her dreams. It came upon her now, on top of her determination to turn over a new leaf, like a breaker, notwithstanding the fact that she had seen it coming. But she got up, pride and courage and tradition in every line of her eccentrically dressed body, and faced him.

"You may," she replied. "And I will help you in every possible way. It's the least that I can do."

"Thank you," he said. "I am deeply grateful. I knew that you would say just that." And he bowed before turning to go to his desk. "Who *are* your lawyers?"

She hadn't any lawyers, but she remembered the name of the firm in which one of the partners was the husband of a woman in the gang, and she gave it to him.

He wrote it down eagerly. "I'm afraid it will be necessary for you to see these people in the morning. Is that perfectly convenient?"

"Perfectly," she said. "I have no engagements, as it happens."

"Then I will write a statement of the facts," he said, "at once. The papers can be served upon me at Chilton."

It was easy to get out of marriage as it had been to get into it.

"Is that all?" she asked, with a touch of her old lightness.

He rose. "Yes, thank you," he said, and went to the door to open it for her. There were youth and elasticity and happiness all about him.

But as she watched him cross the room, something flashed in front of her eyes, a vivid ball of foolish years which broke into a thousand pieces at her feet, among the jagged ends of which she could see the ruins of a great career, the broken figure of a St. Anthony, with roses pinned to the cross upon his chest.

He stopped her as she was going and held out his hand again.

"I am very grateful, Feo."

And she smiled and returned his grasp. "The best of luck," she said. "I hope you'll be very happy, for a change."

## V

Having now no incentive to go either to her room or anywhere else, her new plan dying at its birth, Feo remained in the corridor, standing with her back against one of the pieces of Flemish tapestry which Simpkins had pointed out to Lola. She folded her arms, crossed one foot over the other, and dipped her chin, not frowning, not with any sort of self-pity, but with elevated eyebrows and her mouth half open, incredulous.

"Of course I'm not surprised at Edmund's being smashed on a girl," she told herself. "How the Dickens he's gone on so long is beyond belief. I hope she's a nice child,—she must be young; he's forty; I hope he's not been bird-limed by one of the afterwar virgins who are prowling the earth for prey. I'm very ready to make way gracefully and have a dash at something else, probably hospital work, sitting on charity boards with the dowagers who wish to goodness they had dared to be as loose as I've been. But—but what I want to know is, who's shuffling the cards? Why the devil am I getting this long run of Yarboroughs? I can't hold anything,—anything at all, except an occasional knave like Macquarie. Why this run of bad luck now? Why not last year, next year, next week? Why should Edmund deliberately choose to-day, of all days, to come back, with no warning, and put a heavy foot bang in the middle of my scheme of retribution? Is it—meant? I mean it's too beautifully neat to be an accident. Is it the good old upper cut one always gets for playing the giddy ox, I wonder?—Mf! Interesting. Very. More to come, too, probably, seeing that I'm still on my feet. I've got to get it in the solar plexus and slide under the ropes, I suppose, now they're after me. 'Every guilty deed holds in itself the seed of retribution and undying pain.' Well, I'm a little nervous, like some poor creature on the way to the operating table; and—and I'll tell you what else I am, by George! I'm eaten up with curiosity to know who the girl is, and how she managed to get into the line of vision of this girl-blind man,—and I don't quite know how I shall be able to contain myself until I satisfy this longing.—Oh, hullo, Lola. This is good. I didn't expect you till the morning. But I don't mind saying that I've never been so pleased to see anybody as you, my dear. Had a good time?"

She went to the top of the stairs and waited for Lola to come up, smiling and very friendly. She was fond of this girl. She had missed her beyond words,—not only for her services, which were so deft, so sure-fingered, but also for her smile, her admiration. Good little Lola; clever little Lola too, by George. That Carlton episode,—most amusing. And this recent business, which, she remembered, was touched with a sort of—what? Was ecstasy the word? Good fun to know what had happened. Thank the Lord there was going to be a pause between knock-outs, after all.

Dressed in her perfectly plain ready-made walking frock, her own shoes and a neat little hat that she had bought in Queen's Road, Bayswater, Lola came

upstairs quickly with her eyes on Feo's face. She seemed hardly to be able to hold back the words that were trembling on her lips. It was obvious that she had been crying; her lids were red and swollen. But she didn't look unhappy or miserable, as a girl might if everything had gone wrong; nor in the least self-conscious. She wore neither her expression as lady's maid, nor that of the young widow to whom some one had given London; but of a mother whose boy was in trouble and must be got out of it, at once, *please*, and helped back to his place among other good boys.

"Will you come down to your room, Lady Feo?" she asked. "Mr. Lytham will be here in a few minutes and I want you to see him."

Lytham—young Lochinvar! How priceless if he were the man for whom she had dressed this child up.

"Why, of course. But what's the matter, Lola? You've been crying. You look fey."

Lola put her hand on Feo's arm, urgently. "Please come down," she said. "I want to tell you something before Mr. Lytham comes."

Well, this seemed to be her favor-granting day, as well as one of those during which Fate had recognized her as being on his book. First Edmund and then Lola,—there was not much to choose between their undisguised egotism. And the lady's maid business,—that was all over, plainly. George Lytham,—who'd have thought it? If Lola were in trouble, she had a friend in that house.

And so, without any more questions, she went back to her futuristic den which, after her brief talk with Fallaray, seemed to belong to a very distant past. But before Lola could begin to tell her story, a footman made his appearance and said that Mr. Lytham was in the hall.

"Show him in here," said Feo and turned to watch the door.

She wondered if she would be able to tell from his expression what was the meaning of her being brought into this,—a disinclination on his part to take the blame, or an earnest desire to do what was right under the circumstances? She never imagined the possibility of his not knowing that Lola was a lady's maid dressed in the feathers of the jay. Unlike Peter Chalfont, who accepted without question, Lytham held things up to the light and examined their marks.

There was, however, nothing uncomfortable in his eyes. On the contrary, he looked more than ever like the captain, Feo thought, of a County Cricket Club, healthy, confident and fully alive to his enormous responsibility. He wore a suit of thin blue flannels, the M. C. C. tie under a soft low collar, and brown shoes that had become almost red from long and expert treatment. He didn't shake hands like a German, with a stiff deference contradicted by a mackerel eye, or with the tender effusion of an actor who imagines that women have only to come under his magnetism to offer themselves in sacrifice. Bolt upright, with his head

thrown back, he shook hands with an honest grip, without deference and without familiarity, like a good cricketer.

"How do you do, Lady Feo," he said, in his most masculine voice. "It's kind of you to see us." Then he turned to Lola with a friendly smile. "Your telephone message caught me just as I was going to dash off for a game of tennis after a hard day, Madame de Brézé," he added.

Oh, so this was another of the de Brézé episodes, was it, like the one with Beauty Chalfont. Curiosity came hugely to Feo's rescue. Here, at any rate, was a break in her run of bad luck, very welcome. What on earth could be the meaning of this quaint meeting,—George Lytham, the earnest worker pledged to reconstruction, and this enigmatic child, who might have stood for Joan of Arc? If Lola had caught Lytham and brought him to Dover Street to receive substantiation, Feo was quite prepared to lie on her behalf. What a joke to palm off the daughter of a Queen's Road jeweler on the early-Victorian mother of the worthy George!

"Well?" she said, looking from one to the other with a return of her impish delight in human experimentation.

"Mr. Lytham can explain this better than I can," said Lola quietly.

"I'm not so sure about that, but I'll do my best."

He drew a chair forward and sat down. Under ordinary circumstances, where there was the normal amount of happiness, or even the mutual agreement to give and take that goes with the average marriage, his task would have been a difficult one. But in the case of Feo and his chief he felt able to deal with the matter entirely without self-consciousness, or delicacy in the choice of words.

"I needn't worry you with any of the details of the new political situation, Lady Feo. You know them, probably, as well as I do. But what you don't know, because the moment isn't yet ripe for the publication of our plans, is that Mr. Fallaray has been chosen to lead the Anti-waste Party, which is concentrating its forces to rout the old gang out of politics at the next General Election, give Parliament back its lost prestige, and do away with the pernicious influence of the Press Lords. A big job, by Jove, which Fallaray alone can achieve."

"Well?" repeated Feo, wondering what in the world this preamble had to do with the case in question.

"Well, at the end of the meeting of my party yesterday, I was sent down to Chilton Park to tell Mr. Fallaray our plans. I was stultified to be told that he had decided to chuck politics."

"And go in for love. Yes, I know. But what has this got to do with Lola,—with Madame de Brézé?"

That was the point that beat Feo, the thing that filled her with a sort of impatient astonishment. Was this uncommunicative girl, who seemed to her to

be so essentially feminine, whose métier in life was obviously to purr under the touch of a masculine hand, who had been given a holiday to go on a love chase with Chalfont, presumably, somehow connected with politics? It was incredible.

"Oh, you've seen Fallaray."

"Yes, my dear man, yes! He broke the news to me the moment he came in,"

"Did he ask you to give him a divorce?"

"He did, without a single stutter."

"And you said——"

"But—my dear young Lochinvar, may I make so bold as to ask why this perfectly personal matter has to be discussed in the open, so to speak?" She made her meaning unmistakably clear. This girl was not so close a friend as he might have been led to suppose.

"What did you say to Mr. Fallaray?" asked Lola, leaning forward eagerly.

And Lytham waited with equal anxiety for an answer.

It did not come for an extraordinary moment and only then in the form of a tangent. Feo turned slowly round to the girl who was in the habit of dressing her and putting her to bed. With raised eyebrows and an air of amused amazement, she ran her eyes over every inch of her, as though trying very hard to find something to palliate the insufferable cheek that she was apparently expected to swallow.

"My good Lola," she said finally, "what the devil has this got to do with you?"

"Madame de Brézé is the *dea ex machina*," said Lytham, evenly.

It didn't seem to him to be necessary to lead up to this announcement like a cat on hot bricks, considering that Lady Feo had openly flouted his chief from the first. She had no feelings to respect.

"*What did you say?*"

He repeated his remark, a little surprised at the gaping astonishment which was caused by it.

"Madame de Brézé—Lola—the woman for whom I am to be asked to step aside?—Is this a joke?"

"No," he said. "Far from a joke."

"Ye Gods!" said Feo. And she sat for a moment, holding her breath, with her large intelligent mouth open, her dark Italian eyes fixed on Lytham's face, and one of her long thin capable hands suspended in mid-air. She might have been struck by lightning, or turned into salt like Lot's inquisitive wife.

It was plain enough to Lola that her mistress was reviewing in her mind all the small points of their connection,—the engagement in the housekeeper's room, the knowledge of her parentage, the generous presents of those clothes for her beautification, the half-jealous, half-sympathetic interest that had been

shown in her love affair with Chalfont, as she had allowed Lady Feo to imagine. She had come to Dover Street, not to take this woman's husband away, but to give him back, to beg that he should be retained by all the hollow ties of Church and law; bound, held, controlled, rendered completely unable to break away,—not for Feo's sake, and not for his, but for his country's. And so, having committed no theft because Fallaray was morally free, and being unashamed of her scheme which had been merely to give a lonely man the rustle of silk, she hung upon an answer to her question.

Once more Feo turned to look at Lola, leaning forward, and for a moment something flooded her eyes that was like blood, and a rush of unformed words of blasphemous anger crowded to her lips. With distended nostrils and widening fingers, she took on the appearance, briefly, of a figure, half man, half woman, stirred to its vitals with a desire to kill in punishment of treachery, suffering under the sort of humiliation that makes pride collapse like a toy balloon. And then a sense of humor came to the rescue. She sprang to her feet and burst into peal after peal of laughter so loud and irresistible and prolonged, that it brought on physical weakness and streaming tears. Finally, standing in her favorite place with her back to the fireplace, dabbing her eyes and steadying her voice, she began to talk huskily, with anger, and sarcasm, and looseness, puncturing her sometimes pedantic choice of words with one that was appropriate to a cab driver.

"Well, I'll be damned," she said, "Lola—purring little Lola, and in those clothes, too! I don't mind confessing that I would never have believed it possible. I mean for you to have had the courage to aim so high. It's easy to understand *his* end of it. The greater the ascetic, the smaller the distance to fall. Ha!—And you, you busy patriot, you earnest, self-confident young Lochinvar, if only I could make clear to you the whole ludicrous aspect of this bitter farce, this mordant slice of satire. You wouldn't enjoy it, because you're a hero-worshipper, with one foot in the Albert period. And in any case I can't let you into it because my inherited instinct of sportsmanship is with me still, even in this. And so you'll miss the point of the orgy of laughter that gave me the stitch. But I don't mind telling you that it's a scream, and would make a lovely chapter in the history of statesmen's love affairs."

That Fallaray should have turned from her to pick up this bourgeois little person, a servant in his house,—that was what rankled, in spite of her saying that she understood his end of it. Good God!

But to Lytham, who knew Lola as Madame de Brézé, and had found her to be willing to make a great sacrifice for love, the inner meaning of Feo's outburst was lost. He told himself, as he had often done before, that Feo was an extraordinary creature, queer and erotic, and came back to the main road bluntly.

"May I ask you to be so kind as to tell me," he said, "what answer you gave

to Mr. Fallaray when he asked you to give him a divorce? A great deal depends upon that."

"You mean because of his career and the success of your political plans?"

"Yes."

"And why do you want to know, pray?" Feo shot the question at Lola.

"Because of Mr. Fallaray's career," Lola replied simply, "and the success of these political plans."

But this was something much too large to be swallowed, much too good to be true. Regarding Lola as a deceitful minx, a most cunning little schemer, Feo took the liberty to disbelieve this statement utterly, although on the face of it Lola appeared to have thrown in her lot with Lytham. Why?—What was she up to now?—An impish desire to keep these two on tenterhooks and get a little fun out of all this—it was the only thing that she could get—suddenly seized Feo strongly. Here was a gorgeous chance for drama. Here was an epoch-making opportunity unexpectedly to force Lytham and the young vamp, as she called her, to ask Fallaray himself for an answer to this question, and watch the scene. It was probably the only opportunity to satisfy an avid curiosity to see how Fallaray would behave when faced with his "affinity," and find out what game the girl who had been her servant was playing. This high-faluting attitude of Lola's was all nonsense, of course. She had caught Fallaray with her extraordinary sexiness and meant to cling to him like a limpet. To become the second Mrs. Fallaray was naturally the acme of her ambition, even although she succeeded to a man who must place himself on the shelf in order to indulge in an amorous adventure. A great idea! But it would have to be carried out carefully, so that no inkling of it might escape.

"Excuse me for a moment," said Feo, and marched out of the room with a perfectly expressionless face.

Shutting the door behind her, she caught the eye of a man servant who was on duty in the hall. He came smartly forward.

"Go up to Mr. Fallaray and say that I shall be greatly obliged if he will come to my den at once on an important matter." And then, having taken two or three excited turns up and down the hall, she controlled her face and went back into the room.

"Saint Anthony, Young Lochinvar, the lady's maid," she said to herself, "and the ex-leader of the erotics. A heterogeneous company, if ever there was one."

Once more, standing with her back to the fireplace, her elbows on the low mantel board, Feo looked down at Lola, whose eyes were very large and like those of a child who had cried herself out of tears.

"Where have you been?" she asked.

"At Whitecross, with Lady Cheyne," replied Lola.

"Oh!—The little fat woman who has the house near the gate in the wall? I see. And you came back this afternoon?"

"Yes," said Lola.

"With my husband?"

"No," said Lola.

"Does he know that you intended to give me the pleasure of seeing you here with our mutual friend?"

"No," said Lola.

Was that a lie or not? The girl had been crying, that was obvious. Something had evidently gone wrong with her scheme. But why this surreptitious meeting, this bringing in of Lytham? It was easy, of course, to appreciate *his* anxiety. He needed an impeccable Fallaray. He was working for his party, his political campaign, and in the long run, being an earnest patriot, for his country.—She had a few questions to put to him too.

"Where did you meet Lola de Brézé, Young Lochinvar?" she asked.

"At Chilton Park," said Lytham, who had begun to be somewhat mystified at the way in which things were going; and, if the truth were told, impatient. All he had come to know was whether he had an ally in Lady Feo or an enemy, and make his plans accordingly. He could see no reason for her to dodge the issue. His game of tennis looked hopeless. What curious creatures women were.

"When?"

There was the sound of quick steps in the hall.

"Last night."

The door opened and Fallaray walked in.

With a gleeful smile Feo spoke through his exclamation of surprise. "Edmund, I would like you to tell your friends what my answer was to your request for a divorce."

Hating to be caught in what was obviously an endeavor to influence his chief's wife against a decision to unhitch himself from marriage and politics, Lytham sprang to his feet, feeling as disconcerted as he looked.

Lola made no movement except to stiffen in her chair.

Watching Fallaray closely, Feo saw first a flare of passion light up his eyes at the sight of Lola, and then an expression of resentment come into them at not being able, others being present, to catch her in his arms. An impetuous movement had taken him to the middle of the room, where he drew up short and stood irresolute and self-conscious and looking rather absurd under the gaze of Lytham and his wife.

"What is all this?" he asked, after an awkward pause, during which he began to suspect that he had been tricked by Feo and was faced by a combination of objection.

"Don't ask me," said Feo, waving her hand towards Lytham and Lola.

"Then I must ask you, George," said Fallaray, making an effort to disguise his anger. He could see that he had been made the subject of discussion, as if he were some one to be coerced and who did not know his own business.

"This is not quite fair," said Lytham. "Our intention was to see Lady Feo, get her views and cooperation, and then, to-night or to-morrow, come to you and beg you to do the sane thing in this affair. We had no hand in your being dragged into this private meeting."

He too was angry. Feo had cheated and brought about the sort of crisis that should have been avoided. Any one who knew Fallaray's detestation of personalities must have seen what this breaking down of his fourth wall would bring about.

"Who do you mean by 'we'?" demanded Fallaray.

"Madame de Brézé and myself," said Lytham.

"What! You ask me to believe that Madame de Brézé has come here with you to persuade my wife to go back on her promise to set me free? What do you take me for?" He laughed at the utter absurdity of the idea and in doing so, broke the tension and the stiltedness of the scene, as he realized that Feo had deliberately intended it to become. And then, with a certain boyishness that went oddly with his monk-like face, he went over to Lola and put his hand on her shoulder.

"All right," he added. "Let's have this out and come to a final understanding. It will save all further arguments. Just before you brought Lola here, having, as I can see, worked on her feelings by talking about your party and telling her that her coming into my life would ruin my career—I know your dogged enthusiasm, George—I saw my wife. I put my case to her at once and she agreed very generously to release me. A messenger will be here in ten minutes to take my statement to her lawyers and my resignation to the Prime Minister. I shall return to Chilton to-morrow to wait there, or wherever else it may suit me, until the end of the divorce proceedings. You won't agree with me, but that is what I call doing the sane thing. Finally, all going well, as please God it may, this lady and I will get married and live happily ever after."

He spoke lightly, even jauntily, but with an undercurrent of emotion that it was impossible for him to disguise.

And then, to Feo's complete amazement, Lola, who had been so quiet and unobtrusive, rose and backed away from Fallaray, her face as white as the stone figures at Chilton under moonlight, her hands clasped together to give her strength, her eyes as dry as an empty well. She was bereft of tears.

"But I am not going to marry you," she said, "because if I do everything will go badly."

Fallaray sprang forward to take her in his arms and kiss her into love and life and acquiescence, as he had done before,—once at the gate and once again last night under the stars.

But she backed away and ranged herself with Lytham.

"I love Fallaray," she said. "Fallaray the leader, the man who is needed, the man who has made himself necessary. If I were to marry Fallaray the deserter, there would be no such thing as happiness for me or for him."

Fallaray's eager hands fell suddenly to his sides. The word that had come to Lola as an inspiration, though it broke her heart to use it, hit him like a well-aimed stone. Deserter!—A man who turned and ran, who slunk away from the fight at its moment of crisis, who absconded from duty in violation of all traditions of service, thinking of no one but himself. Deserter! It was the right word, the damnable right word that rears itself up for every man to read at the crossroads of life.—And he stood looking at this girl who had brought him back to a momentary youth through a glamor that gave way to the cold light of duty. His was a pitiful figure, middle-aged, love-hungry, doomed to be sacrificed upon the altar of public service.

Lytham didn't rejoice at the sight, having sympathy and imagination. Neither did Feo, who had just lost her own grasp upon a dream.

"Is it possible that you love me so much?" he asked.

And Lola said, "Yes, yes!"

It was on Lytham's tongue to say, "My dear man, don't you gather what I mean by the 'sane thing'? There's no need to take this in the spirit of a Knight Crusader. A little nest somewhere, discreetly guarded."

And it was on Feo's tongue to add, also completely modern, "Of course. Why not? Isn't it done every day? No one need know, and if it's ever found out, isn't it the unwritten law to protect the reputations of public men so long as there is no irate husband to stir up our hypocritical moral sense by bringing the thing into the open?"

But neither spoke. There was something in the way in which Lola stood, brave but trembling, that kept them silent; something in Fallaray's expression of adoration and respect that made them feel ashamed of their materialism. They were ignorant of all that had gone to the making of Lola's apprenticeship to give that lonely man the rustle of silk, and of the fact that he had grown to love this girl not as a mistress, but as a wife.

And after a silence that held them breathless, Fallaray spoke again. "I must be worthy of you, my little Lola," he said, "and not desert. I will go on with the glory of your love as a banner—and if I die first, I will wait for you on the other side of the Bridge."

"I will be faithful," she said.

He held out his arms, and she rushed into them with a great cry, pressed herself to his heart, and took her last living kiss.

"Till then," said Fallaray finally, letting her go.

But nothing more came from Lola except a groping movement of her hands.

At the door, square of shoulder, Fallaray beckoned to Lytham and went out and up to his room.

It was Feo who wept.

## VI

Leaving his cubby-hole behind the screen and taking the inevitable glass out of his eye, John Breezy waddled through the shop to the parlor to enjoy a cup of tea. It was good to see the new brightness and daintiness assumed by the whole of that little place since Lola had come back and put her touch upon everything. It was good also to break away from the mechanism of unhealthy watches for a quarter of an hour and get into contact with humanity that was cheerful and well.

"Hurray!" he said, "what should I do without my cupper tea?"

With one eye on the shop door and the other on the teapot, Mrs. Breezy presided at the chaotic table. The tea tray had cleared an opening among the heterogeneous mass of accumulation. It was the ritual of week-day afternoons, faithfully performed year in and year out,—and of late, since Lola had been helping in the shop, more frequently interrupted than ever before. Now that she had fallen into the steady habit of sitting behind the counter near the window, business had perked up noticeably and it was astonishing how many young men were discovering the need of safety-razor blades, Waterman's fountain pens, silver cigarette cases, and the like. Was it astonishing?

"Nice weather for Lola's afternoon off," said Breezy, emptying his cup into his saucer, cabman's fashion. Tea cooled the sooner like that and went down with a more succulent sound. "Hampton Court again?"

"Yes, dear," replied Mrs. Breezy, "with Ernest. Wonderful how much better he looks since Lola came back,—cleaner, more self-respecting. He had another poem in the paper yesterday. Did you read it?"

"Um. I scanned it over. Pretty good coming from behind a face like that. Somehow, I always think of a poet as a man with big eyes, a velvet coat, hair all over his face, who was born with a dictionary in his hand. Funny thing, breaking out in a lad like Ernest. Caused by the War, p'raps. It's left a lot of queer things behind it. He'd make more money if he tried to turn out stories like Garvice wrote. I think I shall speak to him about it and get him to be practical."

"No, don't," said Mrs. Breezy, "you'd upset Lola. She believes in Ernest and wants him to make a name."

"What's the good of a name without money? However, I won't interfere. You—you don't suppose that Lola's thinking of marrying that boy some day, do you?" It was a most uncomfortable thought. His little girl must do better than that.

Mrs. Breezy was silent for a moment and her face wore a look of the most curious puzzlement.

"I don't know what she thinks, John. To tell you the truth, dear, I don't know anything about her, and I never did. I don't know why she went to Dover Street or why she came back. She's never told me and I've never asked her. When I catch her face sometimes, I can see in it something that makes my heart miss a beat. I can't describe it. It may be pain, it may be joy,—I don't know. I can't tell. But it isn't regret and it isn't sorrow. It lights her up like, as though there was something burning in her heart. John, our little girl's miles away from us, although she's never been nearer. She dreams, I think, and walks in another world with some one. We've got to be very kind to her, old man. She's—she's a strange, strange child."

Breezy pushed himself out of the sofa as a rather heavily laden boat is oozed out of mud. He was irritable and perhaps a little frightened.

"I don't find her strange," he said. "Strange! What a word! She's a good girl, that's what she is,—as open as a book, with nothing to hide. And she's our girl, and she's doing her job without grumbling, and she's doubling the business. And what's more, she's cheerful and happy and loving. I'm damned if I can see anything strange about her. You certainly have a knack of saying queer things about Lola, one way 'n' another, you have!" And he marched out of the parlor in a kind of fat huff, only to march back again immediately to put his arm round the little woman's neck and give her an apologetic kiss. He was one of these men who loved peace at any price and erected high barriers round himself in order that he shouldn't see anything to disturb his ease of mind. It was the same form of brain anæmia, the same lack of moral courage from which the Liberal Government had suffered in the face of the warning of Lord Roberts. In other words, the policy of the ostrich. Knowing very well that his wife had all the brains of the partnership and never said anything for the mere sake of saying it, he was quite sure that she was right as to Lola, and he had himself almost swallowed one of the little screws that played so large a part in the interior of his watches on seeing the look that Mrs. Breezy had described on the face of his little girl as she sat perched up on a high stool waiting for the next customer, with her eyes on something very far away. And because this gave him a jar and frightened him a little, he persuaded himself that what he had seen he had not seen, because it was uncomfortable

to see it. It is a form of mental dope and it suits all sorts of constitutions,—like religion.

And so, blotting out of his mind the little conversation which had taken place over the teapot, Breezy returned to his job, his fat hands working on the intricate mechanisms of his Swiss and American invalids with astonishing delicacy of touch; and all the while he whistled softly through his teeth. He was never at a loss for a tune because the flotsam and jetsam that came in and went out of Queen's Road, Bayswater, with their tired pianos, their squeaky fiddles, and their throaty baritones provided him with all the sentimental ballads of yesterday and to-day.

It was seven o'clock when he looked up and saw Lola enter with Ernest Treadwell,—the girl with a reflection of all the flowers of Hampton Court in her eyes and the boy with love and adoration in his. It was true that all about him there was a great improvement, a more healthy appearance, a look of honest sleep and clean thinking. But he was still the same ugly duckling with obstreperous hair and unfortunate teeth and a half-precocious, half-timid manner. All the same, the fairies had touched him at his birth and endowed him with that strange thing that is called genius. He had the soul of a poet.

"Come up," said Lola, "you're not doing anything to-night, so you may as well stay to dinner. I've found something I want to read to you."

She waved her hand to her father, smiled at her mother who was selling note-paper to a housemaid from Inverness Terrace for love letters—and so the paper was pink—and led the way upstairs to the drawing-room which had been opened up and put in daily use. Its Sabbath look and Sabbath smell, its antimacassars had disappeared. There were books about, many books; sevenpenny editions of novels that hadn't fallen quite stillborn from the press, and one or two by Wells and Lawrence and Somerset Maugham.

"Sit down for a moment, Ernie," she said, "and make yourself happy. I'll be with you again in five minutes." And he looked after her with a dog's eyes and sat down to watch the door with a dog's patience.

In her own room she went to her desk, unlocked a drawer and took out a page cut from *The Tatler* on which was reproduced a photograph of Fallaray. She had framed it and kept it hidden away under lock and key, and always when she came home from her walks, and several times a day when she could slip up and shut herself in for a moment or two, she took it out to gaze at it and press it to her breast. It was her last link, her last and everlasting link with the foolish dreams with which that room was so intimately associated,—a room no longer made up to represent that of a courtesan; a normal room now, suitable to the daughter of a watchmaker in Queen's Road, Bayswater.

The evening sun gilded the commonplace line of the roofs opposite as she

stood in the window with Fallaray's face against her heart.

"I love you," she said, "I love you. I shall always love you, and if I die first, I shall wait for you on the other side of the Bridge."

She returned it to its hiding place, took off her hat, tidied her hair, picked up a little book and went back to the drawing-room.

"Listen," she said, "this is for you.

"'I shall see my way as birds their trackless way.
I shall arrive,—what time, what circuit first,
I ask not; but unless God send His hail
Or blinding fire-balls, sleet or stifling snow,
In some time, His good time, I shall arrive;
He guides me and the bird. In His good time.'"

And as the boy watched her and saw her light up as though there were something burning in her heart, he knew that those lines were as much for herself as for him.

THE END

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