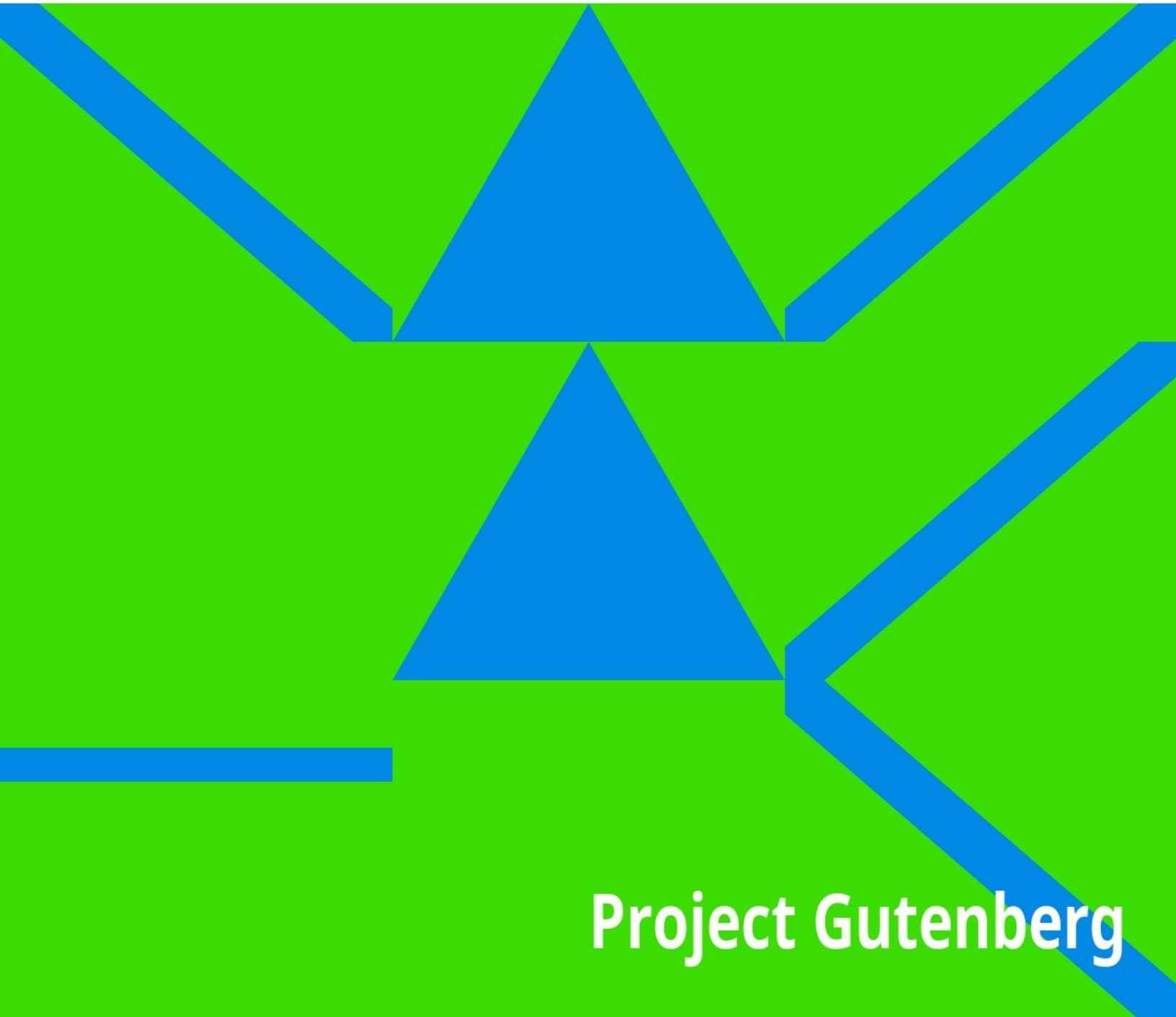


Man and Maid

Elinor Glyn



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MAN AND MAID

Suzette (Renee Adoree) makes the tedious hours of the wounded Sir Nicholas Thormonde (Lew Cody) seem less monotonous. (A scene from Elinor Glyn's production "Man and Maid" for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer)

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MAN AND MAID

By ELINOR GLYN

emblem

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MAN AND MAID

I

February, 1918.

I am sick of my life—The war has robbed it of all that a young man can find of joy.

I look at my mutilated face before I replace the black patch over the left eye, and I realize that, with my crooked shoulder, and the leg gone from the right knee downwards, that no woman can feel emotion for me again in this world.

So be it—I must be a philosopher.

Mercifully I have no near relations—Mercifully I am still very rich, mercifully I can buy love when I require it, which under the circumstances, is not often.

Why do people write journals? Because human nature is filled with egotism. There is nothing so interesting to oneself as oneself; and journals cannot yawn in one's face, no matter how lengthy the expression of one's feelings may be!

A clean white page is a sympathetic thing, waiting there to receive one's impressions!

Suzette supped with me, here in my *appartement* last night—When she had gone I felt a beast. I had found her attractive on Wednesday, and after an excellent lunch, and two Benedictines, I was able to persuade myself that her tenderness and passion were real, and not the result of some thousands of francs,—And then when she left I saw my face in the glass without the patch over the socket, and a profound depression fell upon me.

Is it because I am such a mixture that I am this rotten creature?—An American grandmother, a French mother, and an English father. Paris—Eton—Cannes—Continuous traveling. Some years of living and enjoying a rich orphan's life.—The war—fighting—a zest hitherto undreamed of—unconsciousness—agony—and then?—well now Paris again for special treatment.

Why do I write this down? For posterity to take up the threads correctly?—

Why?

From some architectural sense in me which must make a beginning, even of a journal, for my eyes alone, start upon a solid basis?

I know not—and care not.

Three charming creatures are coming to have tea with me to-day. They had heard of my loneliness and my savageness from Maurice—They burn to give me their sympathy—and have tea with plenty of sugar in it—and chocolate cake.

I used to wonder in my salad days what the brains of women were made of—when they have brains!—The cleverest of them are generally devoid of a logical sense, and they seldom understand the relative value of things, but they make the charm of life, for one reason or another.

When I have seen these three I will dissect them. A divorcée—a war widow of two years—and the third with a husband fighting.

All, Maurice assures me, ready for anything, and highly attractive. It will do me a great deal of good, he protests. We shall see.

Night. They came, with Maurice and Alwood Chester, of the American Red Cross. They gave little shrill screams of admiration for the room.

"*Quel endroit délicieux!*—What *boiserie!* English?—Yes, of course, English *dix-septième*, one could see—What silver!—and cleaned—And everything of a *chic!*—And the hermit so *séduisant* with his air *maussade!*—*Hein.*"

"Yes, the war is much too long—One has given of one's time in the first year—but now, really, fatigue has overcome one!—and surely after the spring offensive peace *must* come soon—and one must live!"

They smoked continuously and devoured the chocolate cake, then they had liqueurs.

They were so well dressed! and so lissome. They wore elastic corsets, or none at all. They were well painted; cheeks of the new tint, rather apricot coloured—and magenta lips. They had arranged themselves when they had finished munching, bringing out their gold looking-glasses and their lip grease and their powder—and the divorcee continued to endeavour to enthrall my senses with her

voluptuous half closing of the eyes, while she reddened her full mouth.

They spoke of the theatre, and the last *bons mots* about their *chères amies*—the last liasons—the last passions—They spoke of Gabrielle—her husband was killed last week—'So foolish of him, since one of Alice's 'friends' among the Ministers could easily have got him a soft job, and one must always help one's friends! Alice adored Gabrielle.—But he has left her well provided for—Gabrielle will look well in her crepe—and there it is, war is war—*Que voulez vous?*'

"After all, will it be as agreeable if peace does come this summer?—One will be able to dance openly—that will be nice—but for the rest? It may be things will be more difficult—and there may be complications. One has been very well during the war—very well, indeed—*N'est ce pas ma chérie—n'est ce pas?*"

Thus they talked.

The widow's lover is married, Maurice tells me, and has been able to keep his wife safely down at their place in Landes, but if peace should come he must be *en famille*, and the wife can very well be disagreeable about the affair.

The divorcée's three lovers will be in Paris at the same time. The married one's husband returned for good—"Yes, certainly, peace will have its drawbacks—The war knows its compensations—But considerable ones!"

When they had departed, promising to return very soon—to dinner this time, and see all the "exquisite *appartement*," Burton came into the room to take away the tea things. His face was a mask as he swept up the cigarette ash, which had fallen upon the William and Mary English lac table, which holds the big lamp, then he carefully carried away the silver ash trays filled with the ends, and returned with them cleaned. Then he coughed slightly.

"Shall I open the window, Sir Nicholas?"

"It is a beastly cold evening."

He put an extra log on the fire and threw the second casement wide.

"You'll enjoy your dinner better now, Sir," he said, and left me shivering.

I wish I were a musician, I could play to myself. I have still my two hands,

though perhaps my left shoulder hurts too much to play often. My one eye aches when I read for too long, and the stump below the knee is too tender still to fit the false leg on to, and I cannot, because of my shoulder, use my crutch overmuch, so walking is out of the question. These trifles are perhaps, the cause of my ennui with life.

I suppose such women as those who came to-day fulfill some purpose in the scheme of things. One can dine openly with them at the most exclusive restaurant, and not mind meeting one's relations. They are rather more expensive than the others—pearl necklaces—sables—essence for their motor cars—these are their prices.—They are so decorative, too, and before the war were such excellent tango partners. These three are all of the best families, and their relations stick to them in the background, so they are not altogether *déclassé*. Maurice says they are the most agreeable women in Paris, and get the last news out of the Generals. They are seen everywhere, and Coralie, the married one, wears a Red Cross uniform sometimes at tea—if she happens to remember to go into a hospital for ten minutes to hold some poor fellow's hand.

Yes, I suppose they have their uses—there are a horde of them, anyway.

To-morrow Maurice is bringing another specimen to divert me—American this time—over here for "war work." Maurice says one of the cleverest adventuresses he has ever met; and I am still irresistible, he assures me, so I must be careful—(for am I not disgustingly rich!)

Burton is sixty years old—He is my earliest recollection. Burton knows the world.

Friday—The American adventuress delighted me. She was so shrewd. Her eyes are cunning and evil—her flesh is round and firm, she is not extremely painted, and her dresses are quite six inches below her knees.

She has two English peers in tow, and any casual Americans of note whom she can secure who will give her facilities in life. She, also, is posing for a 'lady' and 'a virtuous woman,' and an ardent war worker.

All these parasites are the product of the war, though probably they always existed, but the war has been their glorious chance. There is a new verb in America, Maurice says—"To war work"—It means to get to Paris, and have a

splendid time.

Their *toupé* is surprising! To hear this one talk one would think she ruled all the politics of the allies, and directed each General.

Are men fools?—Yes, imbeciles—they cannot see the wiles of woman. Perhaps I could not when I was a human male whom they could love!

Love?—did I say love?

Is there such a thing?—or is it only a sex excitement for the moment!—That at all events is the sum of what these creatures know.

Do they ever think?—I mean beyond planning some fresh adventure for themselves, or how to secure some fresh benefit.

I cannot now understand how a man ever marries one of them, gives his name and his honour into such precarious keeping. Once I suppose I should have been as easy a prey as the rest. But not *now*—I have too much time to think, I fear. I seem to find some ulterior motive in whatever people say or do.

To-day another American lunched with me, a bright girl, an heiress of the breezy, jolly kind, a good sort before the war, whom I danced with often. She told me quite naturally that she had a German prisoner's thigh bone being polished into an umbrella handle—She had assisted at the amputation—and the man had afterwards died—"A really cute souvenir," she assured me it was going to be!

Are we all mad—?

No wonder the finest and best "go West."—Will they come again, souls of a new race, when all these putrid beings have become extinguished by time? I hope so to God....

These French women enjoy their crepe veils—and their high-heeled shoes, and their short black skirts, even a cousin is near enough for the trappings of woe.—Can any of us feel woe now?—I think not....

Maurice has his uses—Were I a man once more I should despise Maurice—He is so good a creature, such a devoted hanger on of the very rich—and faithful too. Does he not pander to my every fancy, and procure me whatever I momentarily

desire?

How much better if I had been killed outright! I loathe myself and all the world.

Once—before the war—the doing up of this flat caused me raptures. To get it quite English—in Paris! Every *antiquaire* in London had exploited me to his heart's content. I paid for it through the nose, but each bit is a gem. I am not quite sure now what I meant to do with it when finished, occupy it when I did come to Paris—lend it to friends?—I don't remember—Now it seems a sepulchre where I can retire my maimed body to and wait for the end.

Nina once proposed to stay with me here, no one should know, Nina?—would she come now?—How dare they make this noise at the door—what is it?—Nina!

Sunday—it was actually Nina herself—"Poor darling Nicholas," she said. "The kindest fate sent me across—I 'wangled' a passport—really serious war work, and here I am for a fortnight, even in war time one *must* get a few clothes—"

I could see I was a great shock to her, my attraction for her had gone—I was just "poor darling Nicholas," and she began to be motherly—Nina motherly!—She would have been furious at the very idea once. Nina is thirty-nine years old, her boy has just gone into the flying corps, she is so glad the war will soon be over.

She loves her boy.

She gave me news of the world, our old world of idle uselessness, which is now one of solid work.

"Why have you completely cut yourself off from everything and everybody, ever since you first went out to fight?—Very silly of you."

"When I was a *man* and could fight, I liked fighting, and never wanted to see any of you again. You all seemed rotters to me, so I spent my leaves in the country or here. Now you seem glorious beings, and I the rotter. I am no use at all—"

Nina came close to me and touched my hand—

"Poor darling Nicholas," she said again.

Something hurt awfully, as I realized that to touch me now caused her no thrill. No woman will ever thrill again when I am near.

Nina does know all about clothes! She is the best-dressed Englishwoman I have ever seen. She has worked awfully well for the war, too, I hear, she deserves her fortnight in Paris.

"What are you going to do, Nina?" I asked her.

She was going out to theatres every night, and going to dine with lots of delicious 'red tabs' whose work was over here, whom she had not seen for a long time.

"I'm just going to frivol, Nicholas, I am tired of work."

Nothing could exceed her kindness—a mother's kindness.

I tried to take an interest in everything she said, only it seemed such aeons away. As though I were talking in a dream.

She would go plodding on at her war job when she got back again, of course, but she, like everyone else, is war weary.

"And when peace comes—it will soon come now probably—what then?"

"I believe I shall marry again."

I jumped—I had never contemplated the possibility of Nina marrying, she has always been a widowed institution, with her nice little house in Queen Street, and that wonderful cook.

"What on earth for?"

"I want the companionship and devotion of one man."

"Anyone in view?"

"Yes—one or two—they say there is a shortage of men, I have never known so many men in my life."

Then presently, when she had finished her tea, she said—

"You are absolutely out of gear, Nicholas—Your voice is rasping, your remarks are bitter, and you must be awfully unhappy, poor boy."

I told her that I was—there was no use in lying.

"Everything is finished," I said, and she bent down and kissed me as she said good-bye—a mother's kiss.

And now I am alone, and what shall I do all the evening? or all the other evenings—? I will send for Suzette to dine.

Night—Suzette—was amusing—. I told her at once I did not require her to be affectionate.

"You can have an evening's rest from blandishments, Suzette."

"*Merci!*"—and then she stretched herself, kicked up her little feet, in their short-vamped, podgy little shoes, with four-inch heels, and lit a cigarette.

"Life is hard, *Mon ami*"—she told me—"And now that the English are here, it is difficult to keep from falling in love."

For a minute I thought she was going to insinuate that I had aroused her reflection—I warmed—but no—She had taken me seriously when I told her I required no blandishments.

That ugly little twinge came to me again.

"You like the English?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"They are very *bons garçons*, they are clean, and they are fine men, they have sentiment, too—Yes, it is difficult not to feel," she sighed.

"What do you do when you fall in love then, Suzette?"

"*Mon ami*, I immediately go for a fortnight to the sea—one is lost if one falls in love *dans le metier*—The man tramples then—tramples and slips off—For everything good one must never feel."

"But you have a kind heart Suzette—you feel for me?"

"Hein?"—and she showed all her little white pointed teeth—"Thou?—Thou art very rich, *mon chou*. Women will always feel for thee!"

It went in like a knife it was so true—.

"I was a very fine Englishman once," I said.

"It is possible, thou art still, sitting, and showing the right profile—and full of *chic*—and then rich, rich!"

"You could not forget that I am rich, Suzette?"

"If I did I might love you—*Jamais!*"

"And does the sea help to prevent an attack?"—

"Absence—and I go to a poor place I knew when I was young, and I wash and cook, and make myself remember what *la vie dure* was—and would be again if one loved—Bah! that does it. I come back cured—and ready only to please such as thou, Nicholas!—rich, rich!"

And she laughed again her rippling gay laugh—

We had a pleasant evening, she told me the history of her life—or some of it—
They were ever the same from Lucien's Myrtale.

When all of me is aching—Shall I too, find solace if I go to the sea?

Who knows?

II

I have been through torture this week—The new man wrenches my shoulder each day, it will become straight eventually, he says. They have tried to fit the false leg also, so those two things are going on, but the socket is not yet well enough for anything to be done to my left eye—so that has defeated them. It will be months before any real improvement takes place.

There are hundreds of others who are more maimed than I—in greater pain—more disgusting—does it give them any comfort to tell the truth to a journal?—or are they strong enough to keep it all locked up in their hearts?—I used to care to read, all books bore me now—I cannot take interest in any single thing, and above all, I loathe myself—My soul is angry.

Nina came again, to luncheon this time. It was pouring with rain, an odious day. She told me of her love affairs—as a sister might—Nina a sister!

She can't make up her mind whether to take Jim Bruce or Rochester Moreland, they are both Brigadiers now, Jim is a year younger than she is.

"Rochester is really more my mate, Nicholas," she said, "but then there are moments when I am with him when I am not sure if he would not bore me eventually, and he has too much character for me to suppress—Jim fascinates me, but I only hold him because he is not sure of me—If I marry him he will be, and then I shall have to watch my looks, and remember to play the game all the time, and it won't be restful—above all, I want rest and security."

"You are not really in love with either, Nina?"

"Love?" and she smoothed out the fringe on her silk jersey with her war-hardened hand—the hand I once loved to kiss—every blue vein on it!—"I often, wonder what really is love, Nicholas—I thought I loved you before the war—but, of course, I could not have—because I don't feel anything now—and if I had really loved you, I suppose it would not have made any difference."

Then she realized what she had said and got up and came closer to me.

"That was cruel of me, I did not mean to be—I love you awfully as a sister—always."

"Sister Nina!—well, let us get back to love—perhaps the war has killed it—or it has developed everything, perhaps it now permits a sensitive, delicious woman like you to love two men."

"You see, we have become so complicated"—she puffed smoke rings at me—"One man does not seem to fulfill the needs of every mood—Rochester would not understand some things that Jim would, and *vice versa*—I do not feel any glamour about either, but it is rest and certainty, as I told you, Nicholas, I am so tired of working and going home to Queen Street alone."

"Shall you toss up?"

"No—Rochester is coming up from the front to-morrow just for the night, I am going to dine with him at Larue's—alone, I shall sample him all the time—I sampled Jim when he was last in London a fortnight ago—"

"You will tell me about it when you have decided, won't you, Nina. You see I have become a brother, and am interested in the psychological aspects of things."

"Of course I will"—then she went on meditatively, her rather plaintive voice low.

"I think all our true feeling is used up, Nicholas—our souls—if we have souls—are blunted by the war agony. Only our senses still feel. When Jim looks at me with his attractive blue eyes, and I see the D.S.O. and the M.C., and his white nice teeth—and how his hair is brushed, and how well his uniform fits, I have a jolly all-overish sensation—and I don't much listen to what he is saying—he says lots of love—and I think I would really like him all the time. Then, when he has gone I think of other things, and I feel he would not understand a word about them, and because he isn't there I don't feel the delicious all-overish sensation, so I rather decide to marry Rochester—there would be such risk—because when you are married to a man, it is possible to get much fonder of him. Jim is a year younger than I am—It would be a strain, perhaps in a year or two—especially if I got fond."

"You had better take the richer," I told her—"Money stands by one, it is an attraction which even the effects of war never varies or lessens," and I could hear that there was bitterness in my voice.

"You are quite right," Nina said, taking no notice of it—"but I don't want money

—I have enough for every possible need, and my boy has his own. I want something kind and affectionate to live with."

"You want a master—and a slave."

"Yes."

"Nina, when you loved me—what did you want?"

"Just you, Nicholas—just you."

"Well, I am here now, but an eye and a leg gone, and a crooked shoulder, changes me;—so it is true love—even the emotion of the soul, depends upon material things—"

Nina thought for a while.

"Perhaps not the emotion of the soul—if we have souls?—but what we know of love now certainly does. I suppose there are people who can love with the soul, I am not one of them."

"Well, you are honest, Nina."

She had her coffee and liqueur, she was graceful and composed and refined, either Jim or Rochester will have a very nice wife.

Burton coughed when she had left.

"Out with it, Burton!"

"Mrs. Ardilawn is a kind lady, Sir Nicholas."

"Charming."

"I believe you'd be better with some lady to look after you, Sir—."

"To hell with you. Telephone for Mr. Maurice—I don't want any woman—we can play piquet."

This is how my day ended—.

Maurice and piquet—then the widow and the divorcée for dinner—and now alone again! The sickening rot of it all.

Sunday—Nina came for tea—she feels that I am a great comfort to her in this moment of her life, so full of indecision—It seems that Jim has turned up too, at the Ritz, where Rochester still is, and that his physical charm has upset all her calculations again.

"I am really very worried Nicholas," she said, "and you, who are a dear family friend"—I am a family friend now!—"ought to be able to help me."

"What the devil do you want me to do, Nina?—outset them both, and ask you to marry me?"

"My dearest Nicholas!" it seemed to her that I had suggested that she should marry father Xmas! "How funny you are!"

Once it was the height of her desire—Nina is eight years older than I am—I can see now her burning eyes one night on the river in the June of 1914, when she insinuated, not all playfully, that it would be good to wed.

"I think you had better take Jim my dear, after all. You are evidently becoming in love with him and you have proved to me that the physical charm matters most, —or if you are afraid of that, you had better do as another little friend of mine does when she is attracted—she takes a fortnight at the sea!"

"The sea would be awful in this weather! I should send for both in desperation!" and she laughed and began to take an interest in the furnishings of my flat. She looked over it, and Burton pointed out all its merits to her (My crutch hurts my shoulder so much to-day I did not want to move out of my chair). I could hear Burton's remarks, but they fell upon unheeding ears—Nina is not cut out for a nurse, my poor Burton, if you only knew—!

When she returned to my sitting room tea was in, and she poured it out for me, and then she remarked.

"We have grown so awfully selfish, haven't we, Nicholas, but we aren't such hypocrites as we were before the war. People still have lovers, but they don't turn up their eyes so much at other people having them, as they used. There is more tolerance—the only thing you cannot do is to act publicly so that your men friends cannot defend you—'You must not throw your bonnet over the windmills'—otherwise you can do as you please—."

"You had not thought of taking either Jim or Rochester for a lover to make certain which you prefer?"

Nina looked unspeakably shocked—.

"What a dreadful idea Nicholas!—I am thinking of both *seriously*, not only to pass the time of day remember."

"That is all lovers are for, then Nina?—I used to think—."

"Never mind what you thought, there is no reason to insult me."

"Nothing was farther from my desire."

Nina's face cleared, as it had darkened ominously.

"What will you do if, having married Rochester, you find yourself bored—Will you send for Jim again?"

"Certainly not, that would be disaster. I shan't plunge until I feel pretty certain I am going to find the water just deep enough, and not too deep—and if I do make a mistake, well I shall have to stick to it."

"By Jove what a philosopher," and I laughed—She poured out a second cup of tea, and then she looked steadily at me, as though studying a new phase of me.

"You are not a bit worse off than Tom Green, Nicholas, and he has not got your money, and Tom is as jolly as anything, and everybody loves him, though he is a hopeless cripple, and can't even look decent, as you will be able to in a year or two. There is no use in having this sentiment about war heroes that would make one put up with their tempers, and their cynicism! Everybody is in the same boat, women and men, we chance being maimed by bombs, and we are losing our looks with rough work—for goodness sake stop being so soured—."

I laughed outright—it was all so true.

Friday—Maurice brings people to play bridge every afternoon now. Nina has gone back to England—having decided to take Jim!

It came about in this way—She flew in to tell me the last evening before she left for Havre. She was breathless running up the stairs, as something had gone wrong with the lift.

"Jim and I are engaged!"

"A thousand congratulations."

"Rochester had a dinner for me on Wednesday night. All the jolliest people in Paris—some of those dear French who have been so nice to us all along, and some of the War Council and the Ryvens, and so on—and, do you know, Nicholas—I *heard* Rochester telling Madame de Clerté the same story about his *bon mot* when a shell broke at Avicourt—as I had already heard him tell Admiral Short, and Daisy Ryven!—that decided me—. There was an element of self-glorification in that modest story—and a man who would tell it *three times*, is not for me! In ten years I should grow into being the listener victim—I could not face it! So I said good-bye to him in the corridor, before up to my room—and I telephoned to Jim, who was in his room on the Cambon side, and he came round in the morning!"

"Was Rochester upset?"

"Rather! but a man of his age—he is forty-two, who can tell a self-story three times is going to get cured soon, so I did not worry."

"And what did Jim say?"

"He was enchanted, he said he knew it would end like that—give a man of forty-two rope enough and he'll be certain to hang himself, he said, and, Oh! Nicholas—Jim is a darling, he is getting quite masterful—I adore him!"

"Senses winning, Nina! Women only like physical masters."

She grew radiant. Never has she seemed so desirable. "I don't care a fig Nicholas! If it is senses, well, then, I know it is the best thing in the World, and a woman of my age can't have everything. I adore Jim! We are going to be married the first moment he can get leave again—and I shall 'wangle' him into being a 'red tab'—he has fought enough."

"And if meanwhile he should get maimed like me—what then, Nina?"

She actually paled.

"Don't be so horrid Nicholas—Jim—Oh! I can't bear it!" and being a strict Protestant, she crossed herself—to avert bad luck!

"We won't think of anything but joy and happiness, Nina, but it is quite plain to me you had better have a fortnight at the sea!"

She had forgotten the allusion, and turned puzzled brown eyes upon me.

"You know—to balance yourself when you feel you are falling in love"—I reminded her.

"Oh! It is all stuff and nonsense! I know now I adore Jim—good-bye Nicholas"—and she hugged me—as a sister—a mother—and a family friend—and was off down the stairs again.

Burton had brought me in a mild gin and seltzer, and it was on the tray, near, so I drank it, and said to myself, "Here is to the Senses—jolly good things"—and then I telephoned to Suzette to come and dine.

* * * * *

There is a mole on the left cheek of Suzette, high up near her eye, there are three black hairs in it—I had never seen them until this morning—*c'est fini—je ne puis plus!*

* * * * *

Of course we have all got moles with three black hairs in them—and the awful moment is when suddenly they are seen—That is the tragedy of life—disillusion.

I cannot help being horribly introspective, Maurice would agree to whatever I said, so there is no use in talking to him—I rush to this journal, it cannot look at me with fond watery eyes of reproach and disapproval—as Burton would if I let myself go to him.

May 16th—The times have been too anxious to write, it is over two months since I opened this book. But it cannot be, it cannot be that we shall be beaten—Oh! God—why am I not a man again to fight! The raids are continuous—All the fluffies and nearly everyone left Paris in the ticklish March and April times, but now their fears are lulled a little and many have returned, and they rush to cinemas and theatres, to kill time, and jump into the rare taxis to go and see the places where the raid bombs burst, or Bertha shells, and watch the houses burning and the crushed bodies of the victims being dragged out. They sicken me, this rotten crew—But this is not all France—great, dear, brave France—It is only one section of useless society. To-day the Duchesse de Courville-Hautevine came to call upon me—mounted all the stairs without even a wheeze—(the lift gave out again this morning!)—What a personality!—How I respect her! She

has worked magnificently since the war began, her hospital is a wonder, her only son was killed fighting gloriously at Verdun.

"You look as melancholy as a sick cat," she told me.

She likes to speak her English—"Of what good *Jeune homme*! We are not done yet—I have cut some of my relatives who ran away from Paris—Imbeciles! Bertha is our diversion now, and the raids at night—jolly loud things!"—and she chuckled, detaching her scissors which had got caught in the purple woolen jersey she wore over her Red Cross uniform. She is quite indifferent to coquetry, this grande dame of the *ancien regime*!

"My *blessés* rejoice in them—*Que voulez vous?*—War is war—and there is no use in looking blue—Cheer up, young man!"

Then we talked of other things. She is witty and downright, and her every thought and action is kindly. I love la Duchesse—My mother was her dearest friend.

When she had stayed twenty minutes—she came over close to my chair.

"I knew you would be bitter at not being in the fight, my son," she said, patting me with her once beautiful hand, now red and hardened with work, "So I snatched the moments to come to see you. On your one leg you'll defend if the moment should come,—but it won't! And you—you wounded ones, spared—can keep the courage up. *Tiens!* you can at least pray, you have the time—I have not—*Mais le Bon Dieu* understands—."

And with that she left me, stopping to arrange her tightly curled fringe (she sticks to all old styles) at the lac mirror by the door. I felt better after she had gone—yes, it is that—God—why can't I fight!



III

Is some nerve being touched by the new treatment? I seem alternately to be numb and perfectly indifferent to how the war is going, and then madly interested. But I am too sensitive to leave my flat for any meals—I drive whenever one of the "fluffies" (this is what Maurice calls the widow, the divorcée and other rejoicers of men's war hearts) can take me in her motor—No one else has a motor—There is no petrol for ordinary people.

"It reminds one of Louis XV's supposed reply to his daughters"—I said to Maurice yesterday. "When they asked him to make them a good road to the Château of their dear *Gouvernante*, the Duchesse de la Bove—He assured them he could not, his mistresses cost him too much! So they paid for it themselves, hence the '*Chemin des Dames*.'"

"What reminds you of what—?" Maurice asked, looking horribly puzzled.

"The fluffies being able to get the petrol—."

"But I don't see, the connection?"

"It was involved—the mistresses got the money which should have made the road in those days, and now—."

Maurice was annoyed with himself; he could not yet see, and no wonder, for it *was* involved!—but I am angry that the widow and the divorcée both have motors and I none!

"Poor Odette—she hates taxis! Why should she not have a motor?—You are *grinchant, mon cher!*—since she takes you out, too!"

"Believe me, Maurice, I am grateful, I shall repay all their kindnesses—they have all indicated how I can best do so—but I like to keep them waiting, it makes them more keen."

Maurice laughed again nervously.

"It is divine to be so rich, Nicholas"!

All sorts of people come to talk to me and have tea (I have a small hoard of sugar sent from a friend in Spain). Amongst them an ancient guardsman in some inspection berth here—He, like Burton, knows the world.

He tests women by whether or no they take presents from him, he tells me. They profess intense love which he returns, and then comes the moment (he, like me, is disgustingly rich). He offers them a present, some accept at once, those he no longer considers; others hesitate, and say it is too much, they only want his affection—He presses them, they yield—they too, are wiped off the list—and now he has no one to care for, since he has not been able to find one who refuses his gifts. It would be certainly my case also—were I to try.

"Women"—he said to me last night—"are the only pleasure in life—men and hunting bring content and happiness, work brings satisfaction, but women and their ways are the only *pleasure*."

"Even when you know it is all for some personal gain?"

"Even so, once you have realized that, it does not matter, you take the joy from another point of view, you have to eliminate vanity out of the affair, your personal vanity is hurt, my dear boy, when you feel it is your possessions, not yourself, they crave, but if you analyse that, it does not take away from the pleasure their beauty gives you—the tangible things are there just as if they loved you—I am now altogether indifferent as to their feelings for me, as long as their table manners are good, and they make a semblance of adoring me. If one had to depend upon their real disinterested love for their kindness to one, then it would be a different matter, and very distressing, but since they can always be caught by a bauble—you and I are fortunately placed, Nicholas."

We laughed our vile laughs together.—It is true—I hate to hear my own laugh. I agree with Chesterfield, who said that no gentleman should make that noise!

As I said before, all sorts of people come to see me, but I seem to be stripping them of externals all the time. What is the good in them? What is the truth in them? Strip me—if I were not rich what would anyone bother with me for? Is anyone worth while underneath?

One or other of the fluffies come almost daily to play bridge with me, and any fellow who is on leave, and the neutrals who have no anxieties, what a crew! It amuses me to "strip" them. The married one, Coralie, has absolutely nothing to charm with if one removes the ambience of success, the entourage of beautiful things, the manicurist and the complexion specialist, the Reboux hats, and the Chanel clothes. She would be a plain little creature, with not too fine ankles,—but that self-confidence which material possessions bring, casts a spell over people.—Coralie is attractive. Odette, the widow, is beautiful. She has the brain of a turkey, but she, too, is exquisitely dressed and surrounded with everything to enhance her loveliness, and the serenity of success has given her magnetism. She announces platitudes as discoveries, she sparkles, and is so ravishing that one finds her trash wit. She thinks she is witty, and you begin to believe it!

Odette can be best stripped, people could like her just for her looks. Alice, the divorcée, appeals to one.—She is gentle and feminine and clinging—she is the cruelest and most merciless of the three, Maurice tells me, and the most difficult to analyse: But most of one's friends would find it hard to stand the test of denuding them of their worldly possessions and outside allurements, it is not only the fluffies, who would come out of not much value!

Oh! the long, long days—and the ugly nights!

One does not sleep very well now, the noise of "Bertha" from six A.M. and the raids at night!—but I believe I grow to like the raids—and last night we had a marvelous experience. I had been persuaded by Maurice to have quite a large dinner party. Madame de Clerté, who is really an amusing personality, courageous and agreeable, and Daisy Ryven, and the fluffies, and four or five men. We were sitting smoking afterwards, listening to de Volé playing, he is a great musician. People's fears are lulled, they have returned to Paris. Numbers of men are being killed,—"The English in heaps—but what will you!" the fluffies said, "they had no business to make that break with the Fifth Army! Oh! No! and, after all, the country is too dull—and we have all our hidden store of petrol. If we must fly at the last moment, why on earth not go to the theatre and try to pass the time!"

de Volé was playing "Madame Butterfly"—when the sirens went for a raid—and almost immediately the guns began—and bombs crashed. One very seldom sees any fear on people's faces now, they are accustomed to the noise. Without asking any of us, de Volé commenced Chopin's Funeral March. It was a very wonderful moment, the explosions and the guns mingling with the splendid chords. We sat

breathless—a spell seemed to be upon us all—We listened feverishly. de Volé's face was transfigured. What did he see in the dim light?—He played and played. And the whole tragedy of war—and the futility of earthly interests—the glory, the splendour and the agony seemed to be brought home to us. From this, as the noise without became less loud, he glided into Schubert, and so at last ceased when the "all clear" commenced to rend the air. No one had spoken a word, and then Daisy Ryven laughed—a queer little awed laugh. She was the only Englishwoman there.

"We are keyed up," she said.

And when they had all gone I opened my window wide and breathed in the black dark night. Oh! God—what a rotter I am.

Friday—Maurice has a new suggestion—he says I should write a book—he knows I am becoming insupportable, and he thinks if he flatters me enough I'll swallow the bait, and so be kept quiet and not try him so much.—A novel?—A study of the causes of altruism? What?—I feel—yes, I feel a spark of interest. If it could take me out of myself—I shall consult the Duchesse—I will tell Burton to telephone and find out if I can see her this afternoon. She sometimes takes half an hour off between four and five to attend to her family.

Yes—Burton says she will see me and will send me one of her Red Cross cars to fetch me, then I can keep my leg up.

I rather incline to a treatise upon altruism and the philosophical subjects. I fear if I wrote a novel it would be saturated by my ugly spirit, and I should hate people to read it. I must get that part of me off in my journal, but a book about—Altruism?

I must have a stenographer of course, a short-hand typist, if I do begin this thing. There are some English ones here no doubt. I do not wish to write in French—Maurice must find me a suitable one.—I won't have anything young and attractive. In my idiotic state she might get the better of me! The idea of some steady employment quite bucks me up.

* * * * *

I felt rather jarred when I arrived at the Hotel Courville—the paving across the river is bad; but I found my way to the Duchesse's own sitting room on the first

floor—the only room apparently left not a ward—and somehow the smell of carbolic had not penetrated here. It was too hot, and only a little window was open.

How wonderfully beautiful these eighteenth century rooms are! What grace and charm in the panelling—what dignity in the proportions! This one, like all rooms of women of the Duchesse's age, is too full—crammed almost, with gems of art, and then among them, here and there, a shocking black satin stuffed and buttoned armchair, with a bit of woolwork down its centre, and some fringe! And her writing table!—the famous one given by Louis XV to the ancestress, who refused his favours—A mass of letters and papers, and reports, a bottle of creosote and a feather! A servant in black, verging upon ninety, brought in the tea, and said Madame la Duchesse would be there immediately—and she came.

Her twinkling eyes kindly as ever "Good day Nicholas," she said and kissed me on both cheeks, "Thou art thy mother's child—*Va!*—And I thank thee for the fifty thousand francs for my *blessés*—I say no more—*Va!*—."

Her scissors got caught in her pocket, not the purple jersey this time, and she played with them for a minute.

"Thou art come for something—out with it!"

"Shall I write a book?, that's it. Maurice thinks it might divert me—What do you think?"

"One must consider," and she began pouring out the tea, "paper is scarce—I doubt, my son, if what you would inscribe upon it would justify the waste—but still—as a *soulagement*—an asperine so to speak—perhaps—yes. On what subject?"

"That is what I want your advice about, a novel?—or a study upon Altruism, or—or—something like that?"

She chuckled and handed me my tea, thin tea and a tiny slice of black bread, and a scrape of butter. There is no cheating of the regulations here, but the Sevres cup gave me satisfaction.

"You have brought me your bread coupon, I hope?" she interrupted with,—"if you eat without it one of my household has less!"

I produced it.

"Two days old will do here," then she became all interest in my project again and chuckled anew.

"Not a novel my son, at your age and with your temperament, it would arouse emotions in you if you created them in your characters, you are better without them.—No!—Something serious; Altruism as well as another, by all means!"

"I expected you to say that, you are always so practical and kind, then we will choose a research subject to keep me busy."

"Why not the history of Blankshire, your old county where the Thormondes have sat since the conquest—*hein?*"

This delighted me, but I saw the impossibility. "I cannot get at the necessary reference books, and it is impossible to receive anything from England."

She realized this before I spoke.

"No—philosophy it must be—or your pet hobby, the furniture of your William and Mary!"

This seemed the best of all, and I decided in a moment. This shall be my subject. I really know something of William and Mary furniture! So we settled it. Then she became reflective.

"The news is *très grave* to-day, my son," she whispered softly, "the fearful ones predict that the Boche will be within range in a few days.—Why not leave Paris?"

"Are you going, Duchesse?"

"I,—*Mon Dieu!*—Of course not!—I must stay to get my *Blessés* out—if the worst should come—but I never believe it.—Let the cowards flee—. Some of my relatives have gone again. Those I speak to will have become a minority when peace arrives, it would seem!"—then she frowned angrily. "Many are so splendid—devoted, untiring, but there are some—!—*Mon Dieu!* the girls play tennis at the *tix aux pigeons!*—and the Germans are sixty-five kilometers from Paris!"

I did not speak, and then, as though I had said something disparaging and she must defend them—"But you must not judge them hardly—No!—it is not possible with our National temperament that young girls of the world can nurse

men—No—No—and our ministry of War won't employ women—what can they do—ask yourself, what can they do?—but wait and pray! Other nations must not judge us—our men know what they want of us—yes, yes—"

"Of course they do."

"My niece Madelaine—a lighthead—dragged me to the Ritz to lunch last week, before the wild rush cleared them off again—*Mon Dieu!* what a sight there in that restaurant!—Olivier and the waiters are the only things of dignity left! The women dressed to the eyes as Red Cross nurses. Some Americans, and, yes, French—nursing the well English officers I must believe—no nearer wounded than that!—floating veils, painted lips—high heels—Heavens! it filled me with rage—I who know the devoted and good of both nations who are not seen, and you English—. But there it is easy for you with your temperament to be good and really work—France is full of sensible kind Americans and English—but those in Paris—they make me sick! Quarter of an hour twice a day—to have the right to a passport to come—and to wear a uniform—Pah! Sick, sick!—"

I thought of the fluffies!—they too played at something the first year of the war, but now have given up even the pretence of that.

The Duchesse was still angry.

"My nephew Charles, le Prince de Vimont, eats chicken and cutlets on the meatless days, he told me with pride, his *maître d'hôtel*—he of the one eye—like thou, Nicholas, is able to procure plenty on the day before from friends in the trade, and with ice—*Mon Dieu!*—and I pay twenty-eight francs apiece for the best poulets for my *blessés* for extra rations!—and ice!—impossible to procure—. Oh! I would punish them all, choke them with their own meat—it is they who should be "food for the guns" as you English say,—they, these few disgrace our brave France, and make the other nations laugh at us."

I tried to assure her that no one laughed, and that we all understood and worshipped the spirit of France, that it was only the few, and that we were not deceived, but I could not calm her.

"It makes me weep" at last she said and I could not comfort her.

"Heloise de Tavantaine—my Cousin's Jew daughter-in-law—paid four thousand francs for a new evening dress, which did not cover a tenth of her fat body—Four thousand francs would have given my *blessés*—Ah!—well—I rage, I rage."

Then she checked herself—.

"But why do I say this to thee Nicholas?—because I am sore—it is ever thus—we are all human, and must cry to someone."

So after all there is some meaning in my journal.

"*One must cry to someone!*"

Burton is delighted that I shall write a book!—He wrote at once to my aunt Emmeline to tell her that I was better. I have her letter with congratulations in it to-day. Burton does the correspondence with my few relations, all war working hard in England. I am becoming quite excited, I long to begin, but there is no use until Maurice finds me a stenographer. He has heard of two. One a Miss Jenkins, aged forty—sounds good, but she can only give three hours a day—and I must have one at my beck and call—There is a second one, a Miss Sharp—but she is only twenty-three—plain though, Maurice says, and wears horn spectacles—that should not attract me! She makes bandages all the evening, but is obliged to work for her living so could come for the day. She is not out of a job, because she is very expert, but she does not like her present one. I would have to pay her very highly Maurice says—I don't mind that, I want the best.—I had better see Miss Sharp, and judge if I can stand her. She may have a personality I could not work with. Maurice must bring her to-morrow.

The news to-night is worse.—The banks have sent away all their securities.—But I shall not leave—one might as well die in a bombardment as any other way. The English Consul has to know all the names of the English residents in case of evacuation. But I will not go.

Bertha is making a most fiendish noise, there were two raids last night,—and she began at six this morning—one gets little sleep. I have a one horse Victoria now, driven by Methusala; I picked Maurice up at the Ritz this evening at nine o'clock—there was not a human soul to be seen in the *Rue de la Paix*, or the *Place Vendôme*, or the *Rue Castiglione*—a city of the dead—And the early June sky full of peace and soft light.

What does it all mean?

IV

Maurice brought Miss Sharp to-day to interview me. I do not like her much, but the exhibition she gave me of her speed and accuracy in short-hand satisfied me and made me see that I should be a fool to look further. So I have engaged her. She is a small creature, palish with rather good bright brown hair—She wears horn rimmed spectacles with yellow glasses in them so I can't see her eyes at all. I judge people by their eyes. Her hands look as if she had done rather a lot of hard work—they are so very thin. Her clothes are neat but shabby—that is not the last look like French women have—but as if they had been turned to "make do"—I suppose she is very poor. Her manner is icily quiet. She only speaks when she is spoken to. She is quite uninteresting.

It is better for me to have a nonentity—then I can talk aloud my thoughts without restriction. I am to give her double what she is getting now—2000 francs a month—war price.

Some colour came into her cheeks when I offered that and she hesitated,

I said "Don't you think it is enough?"

She answered so queerly.

"I think it is too much, and I was wondering if I would be able to accept it. I want to."

"Then do."

"Very well—I will of course do my very best to earn it"—and with that she bowed and left me.

Anyhow she won't make a noise.

Nina writes since she has married Jim—which she did just before the offensive in March—she has been too happy—or too anxious, to remember her friends—even dear old ones—but now fortunately Jim is wounded in the ankle bone which will keep him at home for two months so she has a little leisure.

"You can't think, Nicholas, what a different aspect the whole war took on when I knew Jim was in the front line—I adore him—and up to now I have managed to keep him adoring me—but I can see I'll have to be careful if he is going to be with me long at a time."

So it would seem that Nina had not obtained the rest and security she hoped for.

I hope my writing a book will rest me. I have arranged all my first chapter in my head—and to-morrow I begin.

June 26th—Miss Sharp came punctually at ten—she had a black and white cotton frock on—There is nothing of her—she is so slight—(a mass of bones probably in evening dress—but thank goodness I shall not see her in evening dress,) she goes at six—She is to have her lunch here—Burton has arranged it. An hour off for lunch which she can have on a tray in the small salon, which I have had arranged for her work room.—Of course it won't take her an hour to eat—but Burton says she must have that time, it is always done. It is a great nuisance for perhaps when 12:30 comes I shall just be in the middle of an inspiration and I suppose off she'll fly like the housemaids used when the servants' hall bell went at home. But I can't say anything.

I was full of ideas and the beginning of my first chapter spouted out, and when Miss Sharp had read it over to me I found she had not made any mistake. That is a mercy.

She went away and typed it, and then had her lunch—and I had mine, but Maurice dropped in and mine took longer than hers—it was half past two when I rang my hand bell for her (it is a jolly little silver one I bought once in Cairo) She answered it promptly—the script in her hand.

"I have had half an hour with nothing to do," she said—"Can you not give me some other work which I can turn to, if this should happen again?"

"You can read a book—there are lots in the book case" I told her—"Or I might leave you some letters to answer."

"Thank you, that would be best"—(She is conscientious evidently).

We began again.

She sits at a table with her notebook, and while I pause she is absolutely still—that is good. I feel she won't count more than a table or chair. I am quite pleased

with my work. It is awfully hot to-day and there is some tension in the air—as though something was going to happen. The news is the same—perhaps slightly better.—I am going to have a small dinner to-night. The widow and Maurice and Madame de Clerté—just four and we are going to the play. It is such a business for me to go I seldom turn out.—Maurice is having a little supper in his rooms at the Ritz for us. It is my birthday—I am thirty-one years old.

Friday—What an evening that 26th of June! The theatre was hot and the cramped position worried me so—and the lights made my eye ache—Madame de Clerté and I left before the end and ambled back to the Ritz in my one horse Victoria and went and sat in Maurice's room. We talked of the situation, and the effect of the Americans coming in, bucking everyone up—we were rather cheerful. Then the sirens began—and the guns followed just as Maurice and Odette got back—They seemed unusually loud—and we could hear the bits of shrapnel falling on the terrace beneath us, Odette was frightened and suggested going into the cellar—but as Maurice's rooms are only on the second floor, we did not want to take the trouble.

Fear has a peculiar effect upon some people—Odette's complexion turned grey and she could hardly keep her voice steady. I wondered how soon she would let restraint slip from her and fly out of the room to the cellar. Madame de Clerté was quite unmoved.

Then the dramatic happened—Bang!—the whole house shook and the glass of the window crashed in fragments—and Maurice turned out the one light—and lifted a corner of the thick curtain to peep out.

"I believe they got the *Colome Vendôme*" he said awed—and as he spoke another bomb fell on the Ministère beside us—and some of the splinters shot into space and buried themselves in our wall.

We were all blown across the room—and Madame de Clerté and I fell in a heap together by the door, which gave way outwards—Odette's shrieks made us think that she was hurt, but she was not, and subsided into a gibbering prayer—Maurice helped Madame de Clerté to rise and I turned on the torch I keep in my pocket, for a minute. I was not conscious of any pain. We sat in the dark and listened to the commotion beneath us for some time, and the crashing bombs but never one so near again.—Maurice's voice soothing Odette was the only sound in our room.

Then Madame de Clerté laughed softly and lit a cigarette.

"A near thing that, Nicholas!" she said—"Let us go down now and see who is killed, and where the explosion actually occurred—The sight is quite interesting you know you can believe me."

"When Bertha hit the —— two days ago, we rushed for taxis to go down to see the place—Coralie—has petrol for her motor since two weeks you know"—and she smiled wickedly—"Monsieur le Ministre must show his gratitude somehow mustn't he?—Coralie is such a dear—Yes—?—So some of us packed in with her—we were quite a large party—and when we got there they were trying to extinguish the fire, and bringing out the bodies—You ought to come with us sometime when we go on these trips—anything for a change."

These women would not have looked on at the sufferings of a mouse before the war—.

The sight in the hall when we did arrive there after the "all clear" went—was remarkable—the great glass doors of the salon blown in and all the windows broken—and the *Place Vendôme* a mass of debris—not a pane whole there I should think.

But nobody seems very much upset—these things are all in the days work—.

I wonder if in years to come we shall remember the queer recklessness which has developed in almost everyones mentality, or shall we forget about the war and go on just as we were before—Who knows?

I said to Miss Sharp this morning—

"What do you do in the evenings when you leave here"?

I had forgotten for a moment that Maurice had told me that she makes bandages. She looked at me and her manner froze—I can't think why I *felt* she thought I had no right to question her—I say "looked at me"—but I am never quite sure what her eyes are doing, because she never takes off her yellow glasses—Those appear to be gazing at me at all events.

"I make bandages."

"Aren't you dead tired after working all day with me?"

"I have not thought about it—the bandages are badly needed."

Her pencil was in her hand, and the block ready—she evidently did not mean to go on conversing with me. This attitude of continuous diligence on her part has begun to irritate me. She never fidgets—just works all the time.

I'll ask Burton what he thinks of her at luncheon to-day—As I said before, Burton knows the world.

"What do you think of my typist, Burton?"

He was putting a dish of make-believe before me—it is a meatless day—my one-legged cook is an artist but he thinks me a fool because I won't let him cheat—our want of legs makes us friendly though.

"And with a brother in the trade I could get Monsieur chickens and what he would wish!" he expostulates each week.

"A-hem"—Burton croaked.

I repeated the question.

"The young lady works very regular."

"Yes—That is just it—a kind of a machine."

"She earns her money Sir Nicholas."

"Of course she does—I know all that—But what do you think of her?"

"Beg pardon Sir Nicholas—I don't understand?"

I felt irritated.

"Of course you do—What kind of a creature I mean—?"

"The young lady don't chatter Sir—She don't behave like bits of girls."

"You approve of her then Burton?"

"She's been here a fortnight only, Sir Nicholas, you can't tell in the time"—and that is all I could get out of him—but I felt the verdict when he did give it would be favourable.

Insignificant little Miss Sharp—!

What shall I do with my day—? that is the question—my rotten useless idle day?—I have no more inspiration for my book—besides Miss Sharp has to type the long chapter I gave her yesterday. I wonder if she knows anything about William and Mary furniture really?—she never launches a remark.

Her hands are very red these last days—does making bandages redden the hands?

I wonder what colour her eyes are—one can't tell with that blurred yellow glass—.

Suzette came in just as I wrote that; she seldom turns up in the afternoon. She caught sight of Miss Sharp typing through the open door.

"*Tiens!*" she spit at me—"Since when?"

"I am writing a book, Suzette."

"I must see her face," and without waiting for permission, Suzette flounced into the small salon.

I could hear her shrill little voice asking Miss Sharp to be so good as to give her an envelope—She must write an address! I watched her—Miss Sharp handed her one, and went on with her work.

Suzette returned, closing the door, without temper, behind her.

"Wouff!" she announced to me—"No anxiety there—an *Anglaise*—not appetizing—not a *fausse maigre* like us, as thin as a hairpin! Nothing for thou Nicholas—and *Mon Dieu!*—she does the family washing by her hands—I know! mine look like that when I have taken one of my fortnights at the sea!"

"You think it is washing?—I was wondering—."

"Does she take off her glasses ever, Nicholas?"

"No perhaps she has weak light eyes. One never can tell!"

Suzette was not yet quite at ease about it all—. I was almost driven to ask Miss Sharp to remove her glasses to reassure her.

Women are jealous even of one-legged half blind men! I would like to ask my cook if he has the same trouble—but—Oh! I wish anything mattered!

Suzette showed affection for me after this—and even passion! I would be quite good-looking she said—when I should be finished. Glass eyes were so well made now—"and as for legs!—truly my little cabbage, they are as nimble as a goat's!"

Of course I felt comforted when she had gone.

* * * * *

The hot days pass—Miss Sharp has not asked for a holiday, she plods along, we do a great deal of work—and she writes all my letters. And there are days when I know I am going to be busy with my friends, when I tell her she need not come—there was a whole week at the end of July. Her manner never alters, but when Burton attempted to pay her she refused to take the cheque.

"I did not earn that" she said.

I was angry with Burton because he did not insist.

"It was just, Sir Nicholas."

"No, it was not, Burton—If she did not work here, she was out of pocket not working anywhere else. You will please add the wretched sum to this week's salary."

Burton nodded stubbornly, so I spoke to Miss Sharp myself.

"It was my business as to whether I worked or did not work for a week—therefore you are owed payment in any case—that is logic——."

A queer red came into her transparent skin, her mouth shut firmly—I knew that I had convinced her, and that yet for some reason she hated having to take the money.

She did not even answer, just bowed with that strange aloofness that is not insolent. Her manner is never like a person of the lower classes, trying to show she thinks she is an equal. It has exactly the right note—perfectly respectful as one who is employed, but with the serene unselfconsciousness that only breeding gives. Shades of manner are very interesting to watch. Somehow I *know* that Miss Sharp, in her washed cotton, with her red little hands, is a lady.

I have not seen my dear Duchesse lately—she has been down to one of her country places—where she sends her convalescents, but she is returning soon.

She gives me pleasure—.

August 30th—The interest in the book has flagged lately—I could not think of a thing, so I proposed to Miss Sharp to have a holiday. She accepted the fortnight without enthusiasm. Now she is back and we have begun again—Still I have no *flair*—Why do I stick to it?—Just because I have said to the Duchesse that I *will* finish it?—I have an uneasy feeling that I do not want to probe my real reason—I would like to lie even to this Journal. Lots of fellows have been upon the five days' leave lately, things are going better—they jolly one, and I like to see them, but after they go I feel more of a rotten beast than ever. The only times I forget are when Maurice brings the fluffies to dine with me—when they rush up to Paris from Deauville. We drink champagne—(they love to know how much it costs) and I feel gay as a boy—and then in the night I have once or twice reached out for my revolver. They have all gone back to Deauville now.

Perhaps it is Miss Sharp who irritates me with her eternal diligence—What is her life—who are her family? I would like to know but I will not ask—I sit and think and think what to write about in my book. I have almost come to the end of grinding out facts about Walnut and ball fringe—and she sits taking it all down in short-hand, never raising her head, day after day—.

Her hair is pretty—that silky sort of nut brown with an incipient wave in it—her head is set on most gracefully, I must admit, and the complexion is very pale and transparent—But what a firm mouth!—Not cold though—only firm. I have never seen her smile. The hands are well shaped really—awfully well shaped, if one watches them—How long would it take to get them white again I wonder? She has got good feet, too, thin like the hands—. How worn her clothes look—does she never have a new dress—?

Yes Burton, I will see Madame de Clerté—.

* * * * *

Solonge de Clerté is a philosopher—she has her own aims—but I do not know them.

"Writing a book, Nicholas?" There was the devil of a twinkle in her eye—"There is a poor boy wounded in the leg who would make a perfect secretary if you are not satisfied."

I grew irritated—.

"I am quite satisfied"—we heard the noise of the typing machine from beyond—these modern doors allow nothing to be unknown.

"Young, is she?" Madame de Clerté asked turning her glance in that direction.

"I don't know and don't care—she types well"—.

"*Hein?*"

She saw that I was becoming enraged.—My dinners are good and the war is not yet over—.

"We shall all be terribly interested—yes—when we read the result—."

"Probably"—.

Then she told me of complications occurring about Coralie's husband.

"Of an insanity to attempt the three at once" she sighed—.

And now I can turn to my journal again—Good God—the last pages have all been about Miss Sharp—ridiculous, exasperating Miss Sharp! did I write ridiculous?—No—it is I who am ridiculous—I shall go for a drive—!

* * * * *

God! what is the meaning of it all—!

I have been in hell—I came in from my drive very quietly, it was early, a quarter to six, Miss Sharp goes at six—It was a horribly chilly evening and Burton had lit a bright wood fire—and I suppose its crackling prevented my hearing the sounds which were coming from the next room for a minute. I sat down in my chair—.

What was that?—the *roucoulements* of a dove?—No, a woman's voice cooing foolish love words in French and English—and a child's treble gurgling fondness back to her. It seemed as if my heart stopped beating—as if every nerve in my spine quivered—a tremendous emotion of I know not what convulsed me.—I lay and listened and suddenly I felt my cheek wet with tears—then some shame, some anger shook me, and I started to my feet, and hobbled to the door which was ajar—I opened it wide—there was Miss Sharp with the *concierge's*

daughter's baby on her lap fondling it—the creature may be six months old. Her horn spectacles lay on the table. She looked up at me, the slightest flash of timidity showing—but her eyes—Oh! God! the eyes of the Madonna—heavenly blue, tender as an angel's—soft as a doe's—. I could have cried aloud with some pain in the soul—and so that brute part of me spoke—.

"How dare you make this noise"?—I said rudely—"do you not know that I have given orders for complete quiet"—.

She rose, holding the child with the greatest dignity—The picture she made could be in the Sistine Chapel.

"I beg your pardon" she said in a voice which was not quite steady—"I did not know you had returned, and Madame Bizot asked me to hold little Augustine while she went to the next floor—it shall not occur again!"

I longed to stay and gaze at them both—I would have liked to have touched the baby's queer little fat fingers—I would have liked—Oh—I know not what—And all the time Miss Sharp held the child protectively, as though something evil would come from me and harm it.—Then she turned and carried it out of the room—and I went back into my sitting-room and flung myself down in my chair—.

What had I done—Beast—brute—What had I done?

And will she never come back again?—and will life be emptier than ever—?

I could kill myself—.

It shall not be only Suzette but six others for supper to-night—.

Five a.m.—The dawn is here and it is not the rare sound of an August pigeon that I am listening to, but the tender cooing of a woman and a child—God, how can I get it out of my ears.



V

This morning I feel as if I could hardly bear it until Miss Sharp arrives—I dressed early, ready to begin a new chapter although I have not an idea in my head, and, as the time grows nearer, it is difficult for me to remain still here in my chair.

Have I been too impossible?—Will she not turn up?—and if she does not, what steps can I take to find her?—Maurice is at Deauville with the rest, and I do not know Miss Sharp's home address—nor if she has a telephone—probably not. My heart beats—I have every feeling of excitement as stupid as a woman! I analyse it all now, how mental emotion reacts on the physical—even the empty socket of my eye aches—I could hardly control my voice when Burton began a conversation about my orders for the day just now.

"You would not be wishin' for the company of your Aunt Emmeline, Sir Nicholas"?—he asked me—.

"Of course not, Burton, you old fool—"

"You seem so much more restless, sir—lately—"

"I am restless—please leave me alone."

He coughed and retired.

Now I am listening again—it wants two minutes to the hour—she is never late.

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten—. It feels as if the blood would burst the veins—I cannot write.

She came after all, only ten minutes beyond her usual time, but they seemed an eternity when I heard the ring and Burton's slow step. I could have bounded from my chair to open the door myself.—It was a telegram! How this always happens when one is expecting anyone with desperate anxiety—A telegram from Suzette.

"I shall return to-night, *Mon Chou*."

Her cabbage!—*Bah!* I never want to see her again—.

Miss Sharp must have entered when the door was opened for the telegram, for I had begun to feel pretty low again when I heard her knock at the door of the sitting-room.

She came in and up to my chair as usual—but she did not say her accustomed cold good morning. I looked up—the horn spectacles were over her eyes again, and the rest of her face was very pale—while there was something haughty in the carriage of her small head, it seemed to me. Her eternal pad and pencil were in her little thin, red hands.

"Good morning"—I said tentatively, she made a slight inclination as much as to say—"I recognize you have spoken," then she waited for me to continue.

I felt an egregious ass, I knew I was nervous as a bird, I could not think of anything to say—I, Nicholas Thormonde, accustomed to any old thing! nervous of a little secretary!

"Er—would you read me aloud the last chapter we finished"—I barked at last lamely.

She turned to fetch the script from the other room—.

I must apologize to her, I knew.

She came back and sat down stiffly, prepared to begin.

"I am sorry I was such an uncouth brute yesterday," I said—"It was good of you to come back—. Will you forgive me?"

She bowed again. I almost hated her at that moment, she was making me feel so much—A foolish arrogance rose in me—

"We had better get to work I suppose," I went on pettishly.

She began to read—how soft her voice is, and how perfectly cultivated.—Her family must be very refined gentlefolk—ordinary English typists have not that indescribable distinction of tone.

What voices mean to one!—The delight of that exquisite sound of refinement in the pronunciation. Miss Sharp never misplaces an inflection or slurs a word, she never uses slang, and yet there is nothing pedantic in her selection of language—

it is just as if her habitual associates were all of the same class as herself, and that she never heard coarse speech.—Who can she be—?

The music of her reading calmed me—how I wish we could be friends—!

"How old is Madame Bizot's grandchild?" I asked abruptly, interrupting.

"Six months," answered Miss Sharp without looking up.

"You like children?"

"Yes—."

"Perhaps you have brothers and sisters?"

"Yes—."

I knew that I was looking at her hungrily—and that she was purposely keeping her lids lowered—.

"How many?"

"Two—."

The tone said, "I consider your questions impertinent—."

I went on—

"Brothers?"

"One brother."

"And a sister?"

"Yes."

"How old?"

"Eleven and thirteen."

"That is quite a gap between your ages then?"

She did not think it necessary to reply to this—there was the faintest impatience in the way she moved the manuscript.

I was so afraid to annoy her further in case she should give me notice to go, that

I let her have her way, and returned to work.

But I was conscious of her presence—thrillingly conscious of her presence all the morning. I never once was able to take the work naturally, it was will alone which made me grind out the words.

There was no sign of nervousness in Miss Sharp's manner—I simply did not exist for her—I was a bore, a selfish useless bore of an employer, who was paying her twice as much as anyone else would, and she must in return give the most perfect service. As a man I had no meaning. As a wounded human being she had no pity for me—but I did not want her pity—what did I want?—I cannot write it—I cannot face it—. Am I to have a new torment in my life?—Desiring the unattainable?—Eating my heart out; not that woman can never really love me again, but that, well or ill, the consideration of *one* woman is beyond my reach—.

Miss Sharp is not influenced because I am or am not a cripple—If I were as I was when I first put on my grenadier's uniform, I should still not exist for her probably—she can see the worthless creature that I am—Need I always be so?—I wish to God I knew.

Night.

She worked with her usual diligence the entire day almost, not taking the least notice of me, until at five o'clock when my tea came I rang for her—Perhaps it was the irritation reacting upon my sensitive wrenched nerves, but I felt pretty rotten, my hands were damp—another beastly unattractive thing, which as a rule does not happen to me—I asked her to pour out the tea.

"If you will be so kind," I said—"I have let Burton go out"—Mercifully this was true—she came in as a person would who knew you had a right to command—you could not have said if she minded or no.

When she was near me I felt happier for some reason.

She asked me how I took my tea—and I told her—.

"Are you not going to have some with me?" I pleaded.

"Mine is already on my table in the next room—thank you"—and she rose.

In desperation I blurted out—.

"Please—do not go!—I don't know why, but I feel most awfully rotten to-day."

She sat down again and poured out her cup.

"If you are suffering shall I read to you?" she said—"It might send you to sleep —" and somehow I fancied that while her firm mouth never softened, perhaps the eyes behind the horn spectacles might not be so stony. And yet with it all something in me resented her pity, if she felt any. Physical suffering produces some weaknesses which respond to sympathy, and the spirit rages at the knowledge that one has given way. I never felt so mad in all my year of hell that I cannot be a man and fight—as I did at that moment.

A French friend of mine said—In English books people were always having tea—handing cups of tea! Tea, tea—every chapter and every scene—tea! There is a great deal of truth in it—tea seems to bring the characters together—at tea time people talk, it is the excuse to call at that hour of leisure. We are too active as a nation to meet at any other time in the day, except for sport—So tea is our link and we shall go down through the ages as tea fiends—because our novelists who portray life accurately, chronicle that most of the thrilling scenes of our lives pass among tea cups!—I ventured to say all this to Miss Sharp by way of drawing her into conversation.

"What could one describe as the French doing most often?"—I asked her—.

She thought a moment.

"They do not make excuses for anything they do, they have not to have a pretext for action as we have—They are much less hypocritical and self-conscious."

I wanted to make her talk—.

"Why are we such hypocrites?"

"Because we have set up an impossible standard for ourselves, and hate to show each other that we cannot act up to it."

"Yes, we conceal every feeling—We show indifference when we feel interest—We pretend we have come on business when we have come simply to see someone we are attracted by—."

She let the conversation drop. This provoked me, as her last remark showed how

far from stupid she is.

That nervous feeling overcame me again—Confound the woman!

"Please read," I said at last in desperation, and I closed my one eye.

She picked up a book—it happened to be a volume of de Musset—and she read at random—her French is as perfect as her English—The last thing I remember was "*Mimi Pinson*"—and when I awoke it was past six o'clock and she had gone home.

I wonder how many of us, since the war, know the desolation of waking—alone and in pain—and helpless—Of course there must be hundreds. If I am a rotter and a coward about suffering, at all events it does not come out in words—and perhaps it is because I am such a mixture that I am able to write it in this journal—If I were purely English I should not be able to let myself go even here—.

Suzette came to dinner—I thought how vulgar she looked—and that if her hands were white they were podgy and the nails short. The three black hairs irritated my cheek when she kissed me—I was brutal and moved my head in irritation—.

"*Tiens?! Mon Ami!*"—she said and pouted.

"Amuse me!" I commanded—.

"So! it is not love then, Nicholas, thou desirest—Bear!"

"Not in the least—I shall never want love again probably. Divert me!—tell me—tell me of your scheming little mouse's brain, and your kind little heart—How is it '*dans le metier*'?"

Suzette settled herself on the sofa, curled up among the pillows like a plump little tabby cat. She lit a cigarette—.

"Very middling," she whiffed—"Cases of love where all my good counsel remains untaken—a madness for drugs—very foolish—A drug—yes to try—but to continue!—*Mon Dieu!* they will no longer make fortunes '*dans le metier*'—"

"When you have made your fortune, Suzette, what will you do with it?"

"I shall buy that farm for my mother—I shall put Georgine into a convent for the nobility, and arrange a large dot for her—and for me?—I shall gamble in a controlled way at Monte Carlo—."

"You won't marry then, Suzette?"

"Marry!" she laughed a shrill laugh—"For why, Nicholas?—A tie-up to one man, *hein?*—to what good?—and yet who can say—to be an honored wife is the one experience I do not know yet!"—she laughed again—.

"And who is Georgine—you have not spoken of her before, Suzette?"

She reddened a little under her new terra cotta rouge.

"No?—Oh! Georgine is my little first mistake—but I have her beautifully brought up, Nicholas—with the Holy Mother at St. Brieux. I am then her Aunt—so to speak—the wife of a small shop keeper in Paris, you must know—She adores me—and I give all I can to *St. Georges-des-Près*—. Georgine will be a lady and marry the Mayor's son—one day—."

Something touched me infinitely. This queer little *demi-mondaine* mother—her thoughts set on her child's purity, and the conventional marriage for her—in the future. Her plebeian, insolent little round face so kindly in repose.

I respect Suzette far more than my friends of the world—.

When she left—it was perhaps in bad taste, but I gave her a quite heavy four figure cheque.

"For the education of Georgine—Suzette."

She flung her arms round my neck and kissed me frankly on both cheeks, and tears were brimming over in her merry black eyes.

"Thou hast after all a heart, and art after all a gentleman, Nicholas—*Va!*—"—and she ran from the room.



VI

For two days after I last wrote, I tried not to see Miss Sharp—I gave short moments to my book—and she answered a number of business letters. She knows most of my affairs now,—Burton transmits all the bills and papers to her.—I can hear them talking through the thin door. The excitement of that time I was so rude seems to have used up my vitality, an utter weariness is upon me, I have hardly stirred from my chair.

The ancient guardsman, George Harcourt, came to lunch yesterday. He was as cynically whimsical as ever—He has a new love—an Italian—and until now she has refused all his offers of presents, so he is taking a tremendous interest in her—.

"In what an incredible way the minds of women work, Nicholas!" he said—"They have frequently a very definite aim underneath, but they 'grasshopper'—."

I looked puzzled I suppose—.

"To 'grasshopper' is a new verb!" he announced—"Daisy Ryven coined it.—It means just as you alight upon a subject and begin tackling it, you spring to another one—These lovely American war workers 'grasshopper' continuously.—It is impossible to keep pace with them."

I laughed.

"Yet they seem to have quite a definite aim—to get pleasure out of life."

Alathea (Harriet Hammond) disguised with colored glasses and plain clothes arrives to take up her duties as secretary to Sir Nicholas (Lew Cody). (A scene from Elinor Glyn's production "Man and Maid" for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer)

[Alathea \(Harriet Hammond\) disguised with colored glasses and plain clothes arrives to take up her duties as secretary to Sir Nicholas \(Lew Cody\). \(A scene from Elinor Glyn's production "Man and Maid" for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer\)](#)

"To 'grasshopper' does not prevent pleasure to the grasshopper.—It is only fatiguing to the listener. You can have no continued sensible conversation with any of these women—they force you to enjoy only their skins—"

"Can the Contessa talk?"

"She has the languour of the South—She does not jump from one subject to another, she is frankly only interested in love."

"Honestly, George—do you believe there is such a thing as real love?"

"We have discussed this before, Nicholas—You know my views—but I am hoping Violetta will change them. She has just begun to ask daily if I love her"—

"Why do women always do that—even one's little friends continually murmur the question?"

"It is the working of their subconscious minds——Damn good cigars these, my dear boy—pre-war eh?——Yes it is to justify their surrender—They want to be assured *in words* that you adore them—because you see the actions of love really prove nothing of love itself. A stranger who has happened to appeal to the senses can call them forth quite as successfully as the lady of one's heart!"

"It is logical of women then to ask that eternal question?"

"Quite—I make a point of answering them always without irritation."

——I wonder—if Miss Sharp loved anyone would she?——but I am determined not to speculate further about her—.

When Colonel Harcourt had gone—I deliberately rang my bell—and when she came into the room I found I was not sure what I had rung for—It is the most exasperating fact that Miss Sharp keeps me in a continual state of nervous consciousness.

Her manner was indifferently expectant, if one can use such a paradoxical description—.

"I—I—wondered if you played the piano?"—I blurted out.

She looked surprised—if one can ever say she looks anything, with the expression of her eyes completely hidden. She answered as usual with one word —.

"Yes."

"I suppose you would not play to me?—er—it might give me an inspiration for the last chapter—"

She went and opened the lid of the instrument.

"What sort of music do you like?" she asked.

"Play whatever you think I would appreciate."

She began a Fox trot, she played it with unaccountable spirit and taste, so that the sound did not jar me—but the inference hurt a little. I said nothing, however. Then she played "Smiles," and the sweet commonplace air said all sorts of things to me—Desire to live again, and dance, and enjoy foolish pleasures—How could this little iceberg of a girl put so much devilment into the way she touched the keys? If it had not been for the interest this problem caused me, the longing the sounds aroused in me to be human again, would have driven me mad.

No one who can play dance music with that lilt can be as cold as a stone—.

From this she suddenly turned to Debussy—she played a most difficult thing of his—I can't remember its name—then she stopped.

"Do you like Debussy?" I asked.

"No, not always."

"Then why did you play it?"

"I supposed you would."

"If you had said in plain words, 'I think you are a rotter who wants first dance music, then an unrestful modern decadent, brilliantly clever set of disharmonies,' you could not have expressed your opinion of me more plainly."

She remained silent—I could have boxed her ears.

I leaned back in my chair, perhaps I gave a short harsh sigh—if a sigh can be harsh—I was conscious that I had made some explosive sound.

She turned back to the piano again and began "Waterlily" and then "1812"—and the same strange quivering came over me that I experienced when I heard the cooing of the child.—My nerves must be in an awful rotten state—Then a

longing to start up and break something shook me, break the windows, smash the lamp—yell aloud—I started to my one leg—and the frightful pain of my sudden movement did me good and steadied me.

Miss Sharp had left the piano and came over to me—.

"I am afraid you did not like that," she said—"I am so sorry"—her voice was not so cold as usual.

"Yes I did—" I answered—"forgive me for being an awful ass—I—I—love music tremendously, you see—"

She stood still for a moment—I was balancing myself by the table, my crutch had fallen. Then she put out her hand.

"Can I help you to sit down again?"—she suggested.

And I let her—I wanted to feel her touch—I have never even shaken hands with her before. But when I felt her guiding me to the chair, the maddest desire to seize her came over me—to seize her in my arms to tear off those glasses, to kiss those beautiful blue eyes they hid—to hold her fragile scrap of a body tight against my breast, to tell her that I loved her—and wanted to hold her there, mine and no one else's in all the world—My God! what am I writing—I must crush this nonsense—I must be sane—. But—what an emotion! The strongest I have ever felt about a woman in my life—.

When I was settled in the chair again—things seemed to become blank for a minute and then I heard Miss Sharp's voice with a tone—could it be of anxiety? in it? saying "Drink this brandy, please." She must have gone to the dining-room and fetched the decanter and glass from the case, and poured it out while I was not noticing events.

I took it.

Again I said—"I am awfully sorry I am such an ass."

"If you are all right now—I ought to go back to my work," she remarked—.

I nodded—and she went softly from the room. When I was alone, I used every bit of my will to calm myself—I analysed the situation. Miss Sharp loathes me—I cannot hold her by any means if she decides to go—. The only way I can keep her near me is by continuing to be the cool employer—And to do this I must see

her as little as possible—because the profound disturbance she is able to cause in me, reacts upon my raw nerves—and with all the desire in the world to behave like a decent, indifferent man, the physical weakness won't let me do so, and I am so bound to make a consummate fool of myself.

When I was in the trenches and the shells were coming, and it was beastly wet and verminy and uncomfortable, I never felt this feeble, horrible quivering—I know just what funk is—I felt it the day I did the thing they gave me the V.C. for. This is not exactly funk—I wish I knew what it was and could crush it out of myself—.

Oh! if I could only fight again!—that was the best sensation in life—the zest—the zest!—What is it which prompts us to do decent actions? I cannot remember that I felt any exaltation specially—it just seemed part of the day's work—but how one slept! How one enjoyed any old thing—!

Would it be better to end it all and go out quite? But where should I go?—the *me* would not be dead.—I am beginning to believe in reincarnation. Such queer things happened among the fellows—I suppose I'd be born again as ugly of soul as I am now—I must send for some books upon the subject and read it up—perhaps that might give me serenity.

The Duchesse returned yesterday. I shall go and see her this afternoon I think,—perhaps she could suggest some definite useful work I could do—It is so abominably difficult, not being able to get about. What did she say?—She said I could pray—I remember—she had not time, she said—but the *Bon Dieu* understood—I wonder if He understands me—? or am I too utterly rotten for Him to bother about?

The Duchesse was so pleased to see me—she kissed me on both cheeks—.

"Nicholas! thou art better!" she said—"As I told you—the war is going to end well—!"

"And how is the book?" she asked presently—"It should be finished—I am told that your work is intermittent—."

My mind jumped to Maurice as the connecting link—the Duchesse of course must have seen him—but I myself have seen very little of Maurice lately—how did he know my work was intermittent—?

"Maurice told you?" I said.

"Maurice?"—her once lovely eyes opened wide—she has a habit of screwing them up sometimes when she takes off her glasses.—"Do you suppose I have been on a *partie de plaisir*, my son—that I should have encountered Maurice —!"

I dared not ask who was her informant—.

"Yes, I work for several days in succession, and then I have no ideas. It is a pretty poor performance anyway—and is not likely to find a publisher."

"You are content with your Secretary?"

This was said with an air of complete indifference. There was no meaning in it of the kind Madame de Clerté would have instilled into the tone.

"Yes—she is wonderfully diligent—it is impossible to dislodge her for a moment from her work. She thinks me a poor creature I expect."

The Duchesse's eyes, half closed now, were watching me keenly—.

"Why should she think that, Nicholas—you can't after all fight."

"No——but—."

"Get well, my boy—and these silly introspective fancies will leave you—Self analysis all the time for those who sit still—they imagine that they matter to the *Bon Dieu* as much as a *Corps d'Armée*—!"

"You are right, Duchesse, that is why I said Miss Sharp—my typist—probably thinks me a poor creature—she gets at my thoughts when I dictate."

"You must master your thoughts——"

And then with a total change of subject she remarked.

"Thou art not in love, Nicholas?"

I felt a hot flush rise to my face—What an idiotic thing to do—more silly than a girl—Again how I resent physical weakness reacting on my nerves.

"In love!"—I laughed a little angrily—"With whom could I possibly be in love, *chère amie*?! You would not suggest that Odette or Coralie or Alice could cause

such an emotion!"

"Oh! for them perhaps no—they are for the senses of men—they are the exotic flowers of this forcing time—they have their uses—although I myself abhor them as types—but—is there no one else?"

"Solonge de Clerté?—Daisy Ryven?—both with husbands—."

"Not as if that prevented things" the Duchesse announced reflectively—"Well, well—Some of my *blessés* show just your symptoms, Nicholas, and I discover almost immediately it is because they are in love—with the brain—with the imagination you must understand—that is the only dangerous kind—. When it is with a pretty face alone—a good dose and a new book helps greatly."

"There would be no use in my being in love, Duchesse—"

"It would depend upon the woman—you want sympathy and a guiding hand—*Va!*—"

Sympathy and a guiding hand!

"I liked ruling and leading when I was a man—"

"——We all have our ups and downs—I like my own bed—but last night an extra batch of *blessés* came in—and I had to give it up to one whose back was a mass of festers—he would have lain on the floor else—. What will you—*hein?*—We have to learn to accommodate ourselves to conditions, my son."

Suddenly the picture of this noble woman's courage came to me vividly, her unvarying resourcefulness—her common sense—her sympathy with humanity—her cheerfulness—I never heard her complain or repine, even when fate took her only son at Verdun—Such as these are the glory of France—and Coralie and Odette and Alice seemed to melt into nothingness—.

"The war will be finished this autumn—" she told me presently—"and then our difficult time will begin—. Quarrels for all the world—Not good fighting—But you will live to see a Renaissance, Nicholas—and so prepare for it."

"What can I do, dear friend—If you knew how much I want to do something!"

"Your first duty is to get well.—Have yourself patched together—finished so to speak, and then marry and found a family to take the place of all who have perished. It was good taste when I was young not to have too many—but now!—"

France wants children—and England too. There is a duty for you, Nicholas!"

I kissed her hand—.

"If I could find a woman like you!" I cried—"indeed then I would worship her —."

"So—so—! There are hundreds such as I—when I was young I lived as youth lives—You must not be too critical, Nicholas."

She was called away then, back to one of the wards, and I hobbled down the beautiful staircases by myself—the lift was not working. The descent was painful and I felt hot and tired when I reached the ground floor, it was quite dusk then, and the one light had not yet been lit. A slight wisp of a figure passed along the end of the corridor. I could not see plainly, but I could have sworn it was Miss Sharp—I called her name—but no one answered me so I went on out,—the servant, aged ninety, now joining me, he assisted me into my one horse Victoria beyond the concierge's lodge.

Miss Sharp and the Duchesse!—? Why if this is so have I never been told about it?—The very moment Maurice returns I must get him to investigate all about the girl—In the meantime I think I shall go to Versailles—. I cannot stand Paris any longer—and the *masseur* can come out there, it is not an impossible distance away.



VII

RESERVOIRES, VERSAILLES.

September 10th.

How I love Versailles—the jolliest old hole on earth—(I wonder why one uses slang like this, I had written those words as an exact reflection of my thoughts—and nothing could be more inexact as a description of Versailles! It is as far from being "jolly" as a place can be—nor is it a "hole!") It is the greatest monument which the vanity of one man ever erected, and like all other superlatives it holds and interests. If the *Grand Monarque* squandered millions to build it, France has reaped billions from the pockets of strangers who have come to look at it. And so everything that is well done brings its good. Each statue is a personal friend of mine—and since I was a boy I have been in love with the delicious nymph with the shell at the bottom of the horse-shoe descent before you come to the *tapis vert* on the right hand side. She has two dimples in her back—I like to touch them—.

Why did I not come here sooner? I am at peace with the world—Burton wheels me up onto the terrace every evening to watch the sunset from the top of the great steps. All the masterpieces are covered with pent houses of concrete faced with straw, but the lesser gods and goddesses must take their chance.

And sitting here with peaceful families near me—old gentlemen—soldiers on leave—a pretty war widow with a great white dog—children with spades—all watching the glorious sky, seated in groups on the little iron park chairs, a sense of stupefaction comes over me—for a hundred or two kilometres away men are killing one another—women are searching for some trace of their homes—the ground is teeming with corpses—the air is fœtid with the smell of death! And yet we enjoy the opal sunset at Versailles and smile at the quaint appearance of the camouflaged bronzes!

Thus custom deadens all painful recollections and so are we able to live.

I wonder what Louis XIV would say if he could return and be among us? He,

with all his faults being a well bred person, would probably adapt himself to circumstances, as the Duchesse does.

Suzette suggested that she should come and stay the week end out here—She wants change of air she says. I have consented.—Miss Sharp does not bring her eternal block and pencil until Tuesday—when Suzette will have left.

Now that I am peaceful and have forgotten my perturbations, Suzette will jolly me up—I have used the right term there!—Suzette does jolly one—! I feel I could write out here, but not about William and Mary furniture—! I could write a cynical story of the Duc de Richelieu's loves.—Armande, the present duc, tells me that he has a dispatch box filled with the love letters his ancestor received—their preservation owed to a faithful valet who kept them all separated in bundles tied with different ribbons—and every lock of hair and souvenir attached to each.—There is an idea!—I wonder if Burton has ever thought of keeping mine? He would not have had a heavy job in these last years—!

I read all the mornings, seated in the sun—I read Plato—I want to furbish up my Greek—For no reason on earth except that it is difficult, and perhaps if I start doing difficult things I may get more will.

* * * * *

Suzette arrived in an entirely new set of garments—the "*geste*" had altered, she said, one had to have a different look, and she was sure the autumn fashions would be even more pronounced.

"As you can readily understand, my friend, one cannot be *démodé, dans le metier*,—especially in war time!—"

Naturally I agreed with her—.

"The only unfortunate part is that it obliged me to break into the sum for Georgine's education."

"That is at least reparable"—I answered, and reached for my cheque-book—Suzette is such a good little sort—and clothes give her pleasure—and fancy being able to give *real pleasure* for a few thousand francs—pleasure, not comfort, or charity, or any respectable thing, but just *pleasure*! The only worry about this cheque was that Suzette was a little too affectionate after it!—I would nearly always rather only talk to her—now.

She accompanied my bath chair on to the terrace. Her ridiculous little outline and high heels contradicting all ideas of balance, and yet presenting an indescribable elegance. She prattled gaily—then when no one was looking she slipped her hand into mine.

"*Mon cher! Mon petit chou!*" she said.

We had the gayest dinner in my sitting-room—.

"The war was certainly nearing its close—Toinette, the friend of one of the Generals, assured her—people were thoroughly bored, and it was an excellent thing to finish it—."

"But even when peace comes, never again the restaurants open all night to dance, Nicholas!—there is a sadness, my friend!"

That was one of the really bad aspects of wars—the way they upset people's habits—, she told me. Even "*dans le metier*" things became of an uncertainty! '—One was never sure if the *amant* would not be killed—and it might be difficult to replace him advantageously!"

"It is perhaps fortunate for you that I am wounded and an institution, Suzette!"

"Thou—Nicholas!—Just as if I did not understand—I represent nothing but an agreeable passing of some moments to thee—Thou art not an *Amant*!—Not even a little pretense of loving me thou showest!"—

"But you said you never allowed yourself to care—perhaps I have the same idea —"

She shook with laughter.

"An artist at love thou, Nicholas—but no lover!"

"It is a nice distinction—would you like me better if I were a lover?"

"We have before spoken of this, *Mon ami*—If you were a lover—that is, if you loved—you would be dangerous even with your one leg and your one eye—a woman could be foolish for you. There is that air of *Grand seigneur*—that air of —mocking—of—*Mon Dieu!* Something which I can't find my word for—Thou art *rudement chic cheri!*"

I wished then that I had made the cheque larger—because there was something

in her merry black eyes which told me she meant what she said—at the moment. I must be grateful to my money though after all—I could not be "*rudement chic*" or a "*Grand seigneur*" without it—Thus we get back to material things again!

——I wonder if material things could affect Miss Sharp?—One side of her certainly—or she could not have played that dance music——What can she think about all day?—certainly not my affairs, attending to them must be purely mechanical—. I know she is not stupid. She plays beautifully—she thinks—she has an air, and knowledge of the world. If I were not so afraid of losing her I would act toward her quite differently—I would chance annoying her by making her talk—but that fear holds me back.

George Harcourt says that between men and women, no matter what the relation may be, one or the other holds the reins and is the real arbiter of things, and that if you find yourself not in the happy position of master, there are many occasions when a man must look ridiculous.—I feel ridiculous when I think about Miss Sharp. I am "demand" and she is "supply"—I am wanting every moment of her time, and to know all her thoughts—and she is entirely uninterested in me, and grants nothing.

Suzette left last evening in the best of moods—I made the cheque larger—and now I am awaiting Miss Sharp in my sitting-room—I love this hotel—it has an air of indifference about it which is soothing, and the food is excellent.

* * * * *

Miss Sharp arrived about eleven to-day. Her cheeks were quite pink when she came in, and I could see she was warm with walking.—I wish I had remembered to send to the station to meet her.

"Do you think we shall be able to work here?" I asked her—"we have only the *résumé* chapter to do, and then the book will be finished."

"Why not here as well as any other place?"

"Does not environment matter to you?"

"I suppose it would if I were creating it, it does not matter now."

"Do you ever write—I mean write on your own?"

"Sometimes."

"What sort of things?"

She hesitated for a moment and then said as though she regretted having to speak the truth.—

"I write a journal."

I could not prevent myself from replying too eagerly—.

"Oh! I should like to see it!—er—I write one too!"—

She was silent. I felt nervous again—.

"Do you put down your impressions of people—and things?"

"I suppose so—."

"Why does one write a journal?—" I wanted to hear what she would answer.

"One writes journals if one is lonely."

"Yes, that is true. Then you are lonely?"

Again she conveyed to me the impression that I had shown bad taste in asking a personal question—and I felt this to be unjust, because in justice, she would have been forced to admit that her words were a challenge.

"You explain to me why one writes journals, and then when I presume upon the inference you snub me—You are not fair, Miss Sharp—"

"It would be better to stick to business," was all she answered—"will you dictate, please?"

I was utterly exasperated—.

"No, I won't!—If you only admit by inference that you are lonely, I say it right out—I am abominably lonely this morning and I want to talk to you.—Did I see you at the Duchesse de Courville-Hautevine's on Wednesday last?"

"Possibly."

I literally had not the pluck to ask her what she was doing there. However, she went on—.

"There are still many wounded who require bandages—."

That was it! of course—she was bringing bandages!

"She is a splendid woman, the Duchesse, she was a friend of my mother's—" I said.

Miss Sharp looked down suddenly—she had her head turned towards the window.

"There are many splendid women in France—but you don't see them—the poor are too wonderful, they lose their nearest and dearest and never complain, they only say it is '*la Guerre!*'."

"Have you any near relations fighting?"—

"Yes"—

It was too stupid having to drag information out of her like this—I gave it up—and then I was haunted by the desire to know what relations they were?—If she has a father he must be at least fifty—and he must be in the English Army—why then does she seem so poor?—It can't be a brother—her's is only thirteen—would a cousin count as a near relation?—or—can she have a *fiancé*?!

The sudden idea of this caused me a nasty twinge—But no, her third finger has no ring on it.—I grew calmer again—.

"I feel you have a hundred thousand interesting things to say if you would only talk!" I blurted out at last.

"I am not here to talk, Sir Nicholas—I am here to do your typing."

"Does that make a complete barrier?—Won't you be friends with me?"

Burton came into the room at that moment—and while he was there she slipped off to her typing without answering me. Burton has arranged a place for her in his room, which is next to mine, so that I shall not be disturbed by the noise of her machine clicking.

"Miss Sharp must lunch with me"—I said.

Burton coughed as he answered.

"Very good, Sir Nicholas."

That meant that he did not approve of this arrangement—why?—Really these old servants are unsupportable.

The antediluvian waiters come in to lay the table presently, and I ordered peaches and grapes and some very special chablis—I felt exultant at my having manoeuvred that Miss Sharp should eat with me!

She came in when all was ready with her usual serene calm—and took her place at right angles to me.

Her hands are not nearly so red to-day, and their movements when she began to eat pleased me—her wrists are tiny, and everything she does is dainty.

She did not peck her food like a bird, as very slight people sometimes do—and she was entirely at ease—it was I who was nervous—.

"Won't you take off your glasses," I suggested—but she declined—.

"Of what use—I can see with them on."

This disconcerted me.

The waiter poured out the chablis carefully. She took it casually without a remark, but for an instant a cynical expression grew round her mouth—What was she thinking of?—it is impossible to tell, not seeing her eyes—but some cynical thought was certainly connected with the wine—By the direction of her head she may have been reading the label on the bottle—Does she know how much it cost and disapprove of that in war time—or what?

We talked of French politics next,—that is, she answered everything I said with intelligence, and then let the subject drop immediately—Nothing could be more exasperating because I knew it was deliberate and not that she is stupid, or could not keep up the most profound conversation. She seemed to know the war situation very well—Then I began about French literature—and at the end of the meal had dragged out enough replies to my questions to know that she is an exquisitely cultivated person—Oh! what a companion she would make if only I could break down this wretched barrier of her reserve!

She ate a peach—and I do hope she liked it—but she refused a cigarette when I offered her one—.

"I don't smoke."

"Oh, I am so sorry I did not know—" and I put out mine.

"You need not do that—I don't mind other people smoking, so long as I need not do it myself."

I re-lit another one—.

"Do you know—I believe I shall have my new eye put in before Christmas!" I told her just before she rose from the table—and for the first time I have known her, the faintest smile came round her mouth—a kindly smile—.

—"I am so very glad," she said.

And all over me there crept a thrill of pleasure.

After lunch I suggested the *parc*, and that I should dictate in some lovely cool spot. She made no objection, and immediately put on her hat—a plain dark blue straw. She walked a little behind my bath chair as we turned out of the Reservoirs courtyard and began ascending the avenue in the *parc*, so that I could not converse with her. By the time we had reached the *parterre* I called to her—

"Miss Sharp"—

She advanced and kept beside me—.

"Does not this place interest you awfully?" I hazarded.

"Yes."

"Do you know it well?"

"Yes."

"What does it say to you?"

"It is ever a reminder of what to avoid."

"What to avoid! but it is perfectly beautiful. Why should you want to avoid beauty?!"

"I do not—it is what this was meant to stand for and what human beings failed in allowing it to do—that is the lesson."

I was frightfully interested.

"Tell me what you mean?"

"The architects were great, the king's thought was great—but only in one way—and everyone—the whole class—forgot the real meaning of *noblesse oblige*, and abused their power—and so the revolution swept them away—They put false value upon everything—false values upon birth and breeding—and no value upon their consequent obligations, or upon character—."

"You believe in acknowledging your obligations I know"—

"Yes—I hope so—Think in that palace the immense importance which was given to etiquette and forms and ceremonies—and to a quite ridiculous false sense of honour—they could ruin their poor tradesmen and—yet—."

"Yes"—I interrupted—"it was odd, wasn't it?—a gentleman was still a gentleman, never paying his tailor's bills—but ceased to be one if he cheated at cards—."

Miss Sharp suddenly dropped her dark blue parasol and bent to pick it up again—and as she did she changed the conversation by remarking that there were an unusual quantity of aeroplanes buzzing from Buc.

This was unlike her—I cannot think why she did so. I wanted to steer her back to the subject of Versailles and its meaning—.

Burton puffed a little as we went up the rather steep slope by the *Aile du Nord*, and Miss Sharp put her hand on the bar and helped him to push the chair.

"Is it not hateful for me being such a burden"—I could not help saying—.

"It leaves you more time to think—."

"Well! that is no blessing—that is the agony—thinking."

"It should not be—to have time to think must be wonderful"—and she sighed unconsciously.

Over me came a kind of rush of tenderness—I wanted to be strong again, and protect her and make her life easy, and give her time and love and everything in the world she could wish for—But I dared not say anything, and she hung back again a little, and once more it made the conversation difficult—and when we reached a sheltered spot by the "*point du jour*" I felt there was a sort of armour around her, and that it would be wiser to go straight to work and not talk further

to-day.

She went directly from the *parc* to catch her train at five o'clock—and I was wheeled back to the hotel.

And now I have the evening alone before me—but the day is distinctly a step onward in the friendship line.



VIII

I spent a memorable day with Miss Sharp in the *parc* yesterday. I do not even remember what I did in the intermediate time—it seems of so little importance—but this Thursday will always stand out as a landmark of our acquaintance.

We drove in a fiacre to the Little Trianon after she arrived, with Burton on the box to help me out, and then I walked with my crutch to a delicious spot I know, rather near the grotto, and yet with a view of the house—I was determined I would entice her to talk as much as I could, and began very cautiously so as not to provoke her to suggest work.

"Have you ever read that wonderful story called 'An Adventure'—The two old ladies seeing Marie Antoinette and some other ghosts here?"

"No."

So I told her about it, and how they had accounted for it.

"I expect it was true," she said.

"You believe in ghosts then?"

"Some ghosts."

"I wish I did—then I should know that there is a beyond—."

I felt she was looking surprised.

"But of course there is a beyond—we have all been there many times during our evolution, after each life."

"That is what I want to know about—that theory of reincarnation," I responded eagerly—"can you tell me?"

"I could get you a book about it—."

"I would much rather hear it personally explained—the merest outline,—please

tell me, it might help me not to be such a rotter—."

She looked away toward the giant trees, her mouth had a slightly sad expression, I could have torn those glasses off her blue eyes!

"We came up through the animal group soul—and finally were re-born individualized, into man—and from then onward the life on this earth is but a school for us to learn experience in, to prepare us eventually for higher spheres. When we advance far enough we need not be re-born again—."

"Yes—as a theory—I follow that—."

She went on—

"Everything is *cause* and *effect*—We draw the result of every action we commit, good or bad—and sometimes it is not until the next re-birth we pay for the bad ones, or receive the result of the good ones—."

"Is that why then that I am a cripple and life seems a beastly affair—?"

"Of course—You drew that upon yourself by some actions in your last life—. Also it may be to teach you some lesson in the improvement of the soul—."

"I don't seem to have learned anything—I believe I am rebellious all the time—."

"Probably."

"Miss Sharp—you could really help me if you would. Please explain to me—I will be a diligent pupil."

"Perhaps you were in a position of great power the last time, and were lavish and kind to people in a way—or you would not be so rich now—but you caused suffering and relied upon yourself, not on anything divine—you must have caused much suffering, perhaps mentally even, and so you had to be re-born and be wounded—to teach you the lesson of it all;—that is called your Karma. Our Karma is what we bring on with us from life to life in the way of obligations which we must discharge—so you see it rests with each one of us not to lay up more debts to pay in the future."

Her refined voice was level, as though she were controlling herself, not to allow any personal feeling to enter her discourse—her gloved hands were perfectly still in her lap—She was in profile to me so that I could see that her very long eyelashes seemed to be rather pressed against the glasses—I have not before

been so close to her in a bright light.—Why does she wear those damned spectacles? I was thinking, when she said—

"You find it hard to be confined to your chair and not to be able to fight, don't you?—Well when you could fight it was not always the pleasure of going over the top? You had to have times in the trenches too, hadn't you—when you just had to bear it?"

"Of course—?"

"Well—you are in the trenches now, don't you see—and it is according to how your soul learns the lesson of them, as to whether in this life you will ever be allowed to go over the top again—or even to have peace."

"What is the lesson?"

"I am not God—I cannot tell you—but we would all know what our lesson to learn is, if we were not too vain to face the truth into ourselves."

"The aim being?"—

"Why of course to improve character and learn strength."

"What qualities do you most admire in a person, Miss Sharp?"

"Self control and strength."

"You have no sympathy with weaklings?"

"None whatever—bad strong people are better than weak good ones."

I knew this was true. This fragile creature suggests infinite repose and strength—what could she have done in a former life to bring her back in such unkind surroundings, that she must spend her days in drudgery, so that she has never even leisure to think?—I longed to ask her, but did not dare.

"Shall we not begin work now," she suggested—and I demonstrated my first lesson in self control by agreeing, and we did not talk again until luncheon time.

"If you don't mind we shall go to the little café by the *lac*," I said—"and then afterwards we can find another place and work again—Burton will have had my wheeled chair brought down there, so we can choose a decent spot in one of the *bosquets*."

She nodded slightly—Now that it was not to help my moral regeneration she did not intend to talk any more, it seemed!

As we got into the fiacre I slipped in the slightest degree, and caught on to her arm—It was bare to the elbow in the little cheap cotton frock, and as I touched the fine, fine skin, that maddening feeling came over me again to clasp her in my arms.—I pulled myself together, and she got in beside me. She has a darling tiny curl which comes behind her ear, slipped down probably because her hair is so unfashionably dressed—None of Suzette's "*geste*," nor even the subtle perfect taste of the fluffies.—It is just torn back and rolled into a tight twist. But now that I see her out of doors and in perspective I realize that she has a lovely small figure, and that everything is in the right place. I had told Burton to order the nicest lunch he could think of in that simple place, and our table under one of the umbrellas was waiting for us when we arrived.

There were only four other people there besides ourselves, and a few came in afterwards.

I had forgotten my bread tickets, so Miss Sharp gave me one of hers. She had relapsed into absolute silence. The only words she had uttered as we came down that avenue from The Trianon to the *lac* were when I exclaimed at the beauty of it—I judged by her mouth that she was admiring it too—and she said softly—

"For me, Versailles is the loveliest spot on earth!"

My mind flew then to the thought of what it would be to buy a really nice house here and spend the summers—with her—for my own—. I found myself clutching at my crutch—.

I tried to make conversation at lunch. There is nothing in the world so difficult as to keep this up when you are nervous with interest, and the other person is determined not to say a sentence which is unnecessary. A chill crept over me.

Burton turned up in time to pay the bill and put me into my chair.

"I don't think you look well enough to stay out the afternoon, Sir Nicholas"—he said—"Better go straight back to the hotel and rest—."

Miss Sharp joined in.

"I was going to say that"—she said.

I felt like a cross, disappointed child—I knew they were both right though; I was feeling pretty tired and had not an idea in my head. But if I did that, there would be a chance to see her lost—and all the long hours to face alone—.

"I am quite all right and I want to work," I said fretfully—and we started off.

We went up through the lovely *allées* past *Enceledus*—and on to the *Quinconce du Nord*, Miss Sharp walking a little behind my chair.

Here Burton bent over me—.

"It would be good for you to be taking a nap, Sir Nicholas—Indeed it would."

It seemed as if Miss Sharp was abetting him, for she came to my side—.

"If you can get quite comfortable—I would read to you, and you might sleep," she said—.

"We've no book"—I retorted—peevish, and yet pleased at the idea.

"I have one here which, will do"—and she took a little volume from her bag.—"I have wanted it for a long time, and I bought it at the *Foire* as I came from the station to-day—it cost a franc!"

It was a worn eighteenth century copy of François Villon—.

"Yes, that will be nice," I agreed—and leaned back while Burton settled my cushion, and then retired to a distance. Twelve years on and off of Paris has not taught him French—at least not the French of François Villon!

Miss Sharp took a little *parc* chair and I was able to watch her as she read—I did not even hear the words—because, as she was looking down I had not to guard myself, but could let my eye devour her small oval face. All my nerves were thrilling again and there was no peace—how I longed—ached—to take her into my arms!

She looked up once after an hour, to see if I were asleep, I suppose.—She must have observed passionate emotion in my eye—she looked down at the book instantly, but a soft pink flush came into her cheeks—which have a mother of pearl transparency usually. This caused me deep pleasure—I had been able to make her feel something at any rate! but then I was frightened—perhaps she would suggest going if she found the situation uncomfortable. Her voice had a fresh tone in it as she went on, and finally it faltered, and she stopped.

"If it is not putting you to sleep" she remarked—"perhaps you would not object if I walked on and typed what I took down this morning—It seems a pity to waste this time."

I knew that if I did not let her have her way there might be difficulties, so I agreed—and said that I would go back to the hotel and rest upon the sofa in the salon—So the procession started, and as we took the *allée*, to bring us to the Reservoirs on the level—I suddenly caught sight of Coralie and her last favoured one!—both of whom are supposed to be at Deauville with the rest!

Coralie was exquisitely dressed, Duquesnois in uniform.

I realized that she had seen us, and that she could not avoid coming up to talk, although that had not been her intention—When one is supposed to be at Deauville with one's family, and is in reality at Versailles with one's lover—one does not seek to recognize one's friends!

She came forward with *empressement* when she found the meeting was inevitable—.

"Nicholas!" she cooed "—what happiness!"—

Then she eyed Miss Sharp mischievously, making a movement as though she expected me to introduce them—.

But Miss Sharp defeated this by immediately walking on—.

"*Tiens!*" said Coralie—.

"That is Miss Sharp—my secretary—What are you doing—here Coralie?"

"Perhaps the same as you, *cher ami*—" and she rippled with laughter—"Versailles is so tranquil a place!"

I could have slapped her—fortunately Miss Sharp was out of earshot—.

Jean Duquesnois now joined in—he was back from the front for two days—things were going better—peace would certainly be declared before Christmas—.

Coralie meanwhile was looking after Miss Sharp with an expression upon her clever face which only a Frenchwoman is able to put there—It said as plainly as words, "So this is the reason Nicholas!—Well you have chosen something very

every-day and inexpensive this time!—Men are certainly crazy in their tastes!"

I pretended not to notice, and so she spoke.

"Why if you can come here cannot you come to Deauville, Nicholas?—there must be some irresistible attraction stronger than to be with your friends!"

"Yes—he is an excellent Swedish masseur who is glued to Paris.—Also I like solitude sometimes—."

"Solitude!" and Coralie glanced at Miss Sharp's rapidly disappearing figure—. "*Hein?*"

I would not permit myself to grow angry.

"The book is nearly finished—you can tell the rest—."

"That old book! You were much more entertaining before you commenced it, Nicholas! Perhaps the idea has come to me why!"

I would not be drawn—I threw the war into the enemy's country.

"You are staying at the Reservoirs?"

I saw that she was—and that now the thought of my being there disconcerted her—.

"But no!" she lied sweetly—"I am merely out here for the day to see Louise, who has a son in the hospital—."

It was my turn to say—

"*Tiens?*"

And then we both laughed—and I let them go on—.

But when I got into my salon—I heard no typing—only there was a note from Miss Sharp to say that some slight thing had gone wrong with the machine, so she had taken the work to finish it at home—.

I cursed Coralie and all the fluffies in the world, and then in pain laid down upon my bed.



IX

Saturday Morning:

Yesterday I was so restless I could not settle to anything. I read pages and pages of Plato and was conscious that the words were going over in my head without conveying the slightest meaning, and that the other part of my mind was absorbed with thoughts of Miss Sharp—. If I only dared to be natural with her we surely could be friends, but I am always obsessed with the fear that she will leave me if I transgress in the slightest beyond the line she has marked between us—. I see that she is determined to remain only the secretary, and I realize that it is her breeding which makes her act as she does—. If she were familiar or friendly with me, she would feel it was not correct to come to my flat alone—She only comes at all because the money is so necessary to her—and having to come, she protects her dignity by wearing this ice mask.—I know that she was affronted by Coralie's look on Thursday, and that is why she went home pretending the typing machine was out of order—Now if any more of these *contretemps* happen she will probably give me warning. Burton instinctively sensed this, and that is why he disapproved of my asking her to lunch—If she had been an ordinary typist Burton would not have objected in the least,—as I said before, Burton knows the world!

Now what is to be done next?—I would like to go and confide in the Duchesse, and tell her that I believe I have fallen in love with my secretary, who won't look at me, and ask her advice—but that I fear with all her broad-minded charity, her class prejudice is too strong to make her really sympathetic. Her French mind of the *Ancien Régime* could not contemplate a Thormonde—son of Anne de Mont-Anbin—falling in love with an insignificant Miss Sharp who brings bandages to the Courville hospital!

These thoughts tormented me so all yesterday that I was quite feverish by the evening—and Burton wore an air of thorough disapproval. A rain shower came on too, and I could not go up on the terrace for the sunset.

I would like to have taken asperines and gone to sleep, when night came—but I

resisted the temptation, telling myself that to-morrow she would come again.

I am dawdling over this last chapter on purpose—and I have re-read the former ones and decided to rewrite one or two, but at best I cannot spread this out over more than six weeks, I fear, and then what excuse can I have for keeping her? I feel that she would not stay just to answer a few letters a day, and do the accounts and pay the bills with Burton. I feel more desperately miserable than I have felt since last year—And I suppose that according to her theory, I have to learn a lesson. It seems if I search, as she said one must do without vanity, that the lesson is to conquer emotion, and be serene when everything which I desire is out of reach.

Saturday Night:

To-day has been one of utter disaster and it began fairly well. Miss Sharp turned up at eleven as I shut my journal. I had sent to the station to meet her this time—She brought all the work she had taken away with her on Thursday, quite in order—and her face wore the usual mask. I wonder if I had not ever seen her without her glasses if I should have realized now that she is very pretty—I can see her prettiness even with them on—her nose is so exquisitely fine, and the mouth a Cupid's bow really—if one can imagine a Cupid's bow very firm. I am sure if she were dressed as Odette, or Alice, or Coralie, she would be lovely. This morning when she first came I began thinking of this and of how I should like to give her better things than any of the fluffies have ever had—how I would like her to have some sapphire bangles for those little wrists and a great string of pearls round that little throat—my mother's pearls—and perhaps big pearls in those shell ears—And how I would like to take her hair down and brush it out, and let it curl as it wanted to—and then bury my face in it—those stiff twists must take heaps of hair to make.—But why am I writing all this when the reality is further off than ever, and indeed has become an impossibility I fear.

We worked in the sitting-room—it was a cloudy day—and presently, after I had been dreaming on in this way, I asked her to read over the earlier chapters of the book.—She did—.

"Now what do you think of the thing as a whole?" I asked her.

She was silent for a moment as though trying not to have to answer directly, then that weird constitutional honesty seemed to force out the words.

"It perhaps tells what that furniture is."

"You feel it is awful rot?"

"No—."

"What then?"

"It depends if you mean to publish it?"

I leaned back and laughed—bitterly! the realization that she understood so completely that it was only a "*soulagement*"—an "asperine" for me, so to speak as the Duchesse said—cut in like a knife. I had the exasperated feeling that I was just being pandered to, humored by everyone, because I was wounded. I was an object of pity, and even my paid typist—but I can't write about it.

Miss Sharp started from her chair, her fine nostrils were quivering, and her mouth had an expression I could not place.

"Indeed, it is not bad," she said—"You misunderstand me—."

I knew now that she was angry with herself for having hurt me—and that I could have made capital out of this, but something in me would not let me do that.

"Oh—it is all right—" I replied, but perhaps my voice may have been flat and discouraged—for she went on so kindly.

"You know a great deal about the subject of course—but I feel the chapters want condensing—May I tell you just where?"

I felt that the thing did not interest me any more, one way or another, it was just a ridiculous non-essential—. I saw it all in a new perspective—but I was glad she seemed kindly—though for a moment even that appeared of less importance. Something seemed to have numbed me. What, what could be the good of anything?—the meaning of anything?—I unconsciously put my head back against the cushion of my chair in weariness—I felt the soft silk and shut my eye for a moment.

When Miss Sharp spoke again, her voice was full of sympathy—and was it remorse—?

"I would like to help you to take interest in it—again—won't you let me?" she pleaded.

I was grateful that she did not say she was sorry she had hurt me—that I could not have stood—.

I opened my eye now and looked at her, she was bending nearer to me, but I felt nothing particular, only a desire to go to sleep and have done with it all. It was as if the fabric of my make-believe had been rent asunder.

"It is very good of you," I answered politely—"Yes—say what you think."

Her tact is immense—she plunged straight into the subject without further imputation of sympathy,—her voice, full of inflections of interest and friendliness, her constrained self-control laid aside for the time. She spoke so intelligently, showing trained critical faculties—and at last my numbness began gradually to melt, and I could not help some return of sensation. There may have been soothing syrup in the fact that she must have been interested in the work, or she could not have dissected it chapter by chapter, point by point, as she was doing.

She grew animated as we discussed things, and once unconsciously took off her glasses—It was like the sun coming out after days of storm clouds—her beautiful, beautiful blue eyes!—My "heart gave a bound"—(I believe that is the way to express what I mean!)—I felt a strange emotion of excitement and pleasure—I had not time to control my admiration, I expect,—for she took fright and instantly replaced them, a bright flush in her cheeks—and went on talking in a more reserved way—Alas!—

Of course then I realized that she does not wear the glasses for any reason of softening light or of defective sight, but simply to hide those blue stars and make herself unattractive—.

How mysterious it all is!—

I wish I had been able to conceal the fact that I had noticed that the glasses were off—Another day I would certainly have taken advantage of this moment and would have tried to make her confess the reason of her wearing them; but some odd quality in me prevented me from reaping any advantage from this situation, so I let the chance pass.—Perhaps she was grateful to me, for she warmed up a little again.

I began to feel that I might write the fool of a book right over from the beginning—and suggested to her that we should take it in detail.

She acquiesced—.

Then it suddenly struck me that she had not only spoken of style in writing, of method in book making—but had shown an actual knowledge of the subject of the furniture itself.—How could little Miss Sharp, a poverty stricken typist, be familiar with William and Mary furniture? She has obviously not "seen better days," and only taken up a stenographic business lately, because such proficiency as she shows, not only in this work but in account keeping and all the duties of a secretary, must have required a steady professional training.

Could she have studied in Museums?

But the war has been on for four years and I had gathered that she has been in Paris all that time—Even if she had left England in 1914, she could only have been eighteen or nineteen then, and girls of that age do not generally take an interest in furniture. This thought kept bothering me—and I was silent for some moments. I was weighing things up.

Her voice interrupted my thoughts.

"The Braxted chair has the first of the knotted fringes known"—it was saying.

I had spoken of the Braxted chair—but had not recorded this fact—.

How the devil could she have known about it?

"Where did you find that?"

"I knew someone who had seen it—" she answered in the same voice, but her cheeks grew pinker—.

"You have never seen it yourself?"

"No—I have never been in England—."

"——Never been in England?"

I was stupefied.

She went on hurriedly—I was going to write feverishly,—so quickly did she rush into questions of method in arranging the chapters, her armour was on again—she had become cautious, and was probably annoyed with herself for ever having allowed herself to slip off her guard.

I knew that I could disconcert her, and probably obtain some interesting admissions from her—and have a thrilling fencing match, but some instinct warned me not to do so—I might win out for the time being, but if she has a secret which she does not wish me to discover, she will take care not again to put herself in a situation where this can happen. I have the apprehension always hanging, like Damocles' sword, over my head, of her relinquishing her post. Besides, why should I trouble her for my own satisfaction?—However, I registered a vow then that I would find out all I could from Maurice.

The inference of everything she says, does and unconsciously infers, is that she is a cultivated lady, accustomed to talking with people of our world—people who know England and its great houses well enough to have made her familiar with the knowledge of where certain pieces of famous furniture are.—The very phrasing of her sentences is the phrasing of our Shibboleth, and not the phrasing of the professional classes.

And yet—she is meanly dressed—does housework—and for years must have been trained in professional business methods. It is profoundly interesting.

I have never even questioned Maurice as to how he heard of her.

Well, I write all this down calmly, the record of the morning, to let myself look back on it, and to where the new intimacy might have led us, but for the sickening end to the day.

Burton did not question her lunching with me this time—he had given the order as a matter of course—He is very fine in his distinctions, and understood that to make any change after she once had eaten with me would be invidious.

By the time the waiters came in to lay the table, that sense of hurt, and then of numbness, had worn off—I was quite interested again in the work, and intensely intrigued about the possible history of the Sharp family!

I was using cunning, too, and displaying casual indifference, so watchfulness was allowed to rest a little with the strange girl.

"I believe if you will give me your help I shall be able to make quite a decent book of it after all,—but does it not seem absurd to trouble about such things as furniture with the world in ruins and Empires tottering!"—I remarked while the ark-relic handed the omelette—.

"All that is only temporary—presently people will be glad to take up civilized

interests again."

"You never had any doubt as to how the war would end?"

"Never."

"Why?"

"Because I believe in the gallantry of France, and the tenacity of England, and the—youth of America."

"And what of Germany?"

"The vulgarity."

This was quite a new reason for Germany's certain downfall—! It delighted me —.

"But vulgarity does not mean weakness!"

"Yes it does—Vulgar people have imperfect sensibilities, and cannot judge of the psychology of others, they appraise everything by their own standard—and so cannot calculate correctly possible contingencies—that shows weakness."

"How wise you are—and how you think!"

She was silent.

"All the fighting nations will be filled with vulgarians even when we do win, though with most of the decent people killed—" I ventured to say—.

"Oh! no—Lots of their souls are not vulgar, only their environment has caused their outward self-expression to seem so. Once you get below the pompous *bourgeoisie* in France, for instance, the more delightful you find the spirit, and I expect it is the same in England. It is the pretentious aspiring would-bes who are vulgar—and Germany seems filled with them,"

"You know it well?"

"Yes, pretty well."

"If it is not a frightfully impertinent question—how old are you really, Miss Sharp—?" I felt that she could not be only twenty-three after this conversation.

She smiled—the second smile I have seen—.

"On the twentieth of October I shall be twenty-four."

"Where on earth did you learn all your philosophy of life in the time!"

"It is life which teaches us everything—if we are not half asleep—especially if it is difficult—."

"And the stupid people are like me—not liking to learn any lessons and kicking against the pricks—.",

"Yes—."

"I would try to learn anything you would teach me though, Miss Sharp."

"Why?"

"Because I have confidence in you"—I did not add—because I loved her voice and respected her character and——.

"Thank you"—she said.

"Will you teach me?"

"What?"

"How not to be a rotter—."

"A man knows that himself—."

"How to learn serenity then?"

"That would be difficult."

"Am I so impossible?"

"I cannot say—but."

"But—what?"

"One would have to begin from the beginning—."

"Well?"

"And I have not time—."

I looked at her as she said this—there was in the tone a faint echo of regret, so I

wanted to see the expression of her mouth—It told me nothing.

I could not get anything further out of her, because the waiters came in and out after this rather frequently, changing the courses—and so I did not have any success.

After lunch I suggested as it had cleared up that we should go at least as far as the parterre, and sit under the shadow of the terrace—the flower beds are full of beans now—their ancient glories departed. Miss Sharp followed my bath chair, —and with extreme diligence kept me to the re-arranging of the first chapter. For an hour I watched her darling small face whenever I could. A sense of peace was upon me. We were certainly on the first rung of the ladder of friendship—and presently—presently—If only I could keep from annoying her in any way!

When we had finished our task she rose—.

"If you don't mind, as it is Saturday I have promised Burton"—and she looked at him, seated on a chair beyond earshot enjoying the sun—"to do up the accounts and prepare the cheques for you to sign—. So I will go in now and begin."

I wanted to say "Damn the accounts"—but I let her go—I must play the tortoise in this game, not the hare. She smiled faintly—the third smile—as she made me a little bow, and walked off.

After a few paces she came back again.

"May I ask Burton for the bread ticket I lent you on Thursday," she said—"No one can afford to be generous with them now, can they!"

I was delighted at this. I would have been delighted at anything which kept her with me an extra minute.

I watched her as she disappeared down towards the Reservoirs with longing eyes, then I must have dozed for a while, because it was a quarter to five when I got back to my sitting-room.

And when I was safely in my chair there was a knock on the door, and in she came—with a cheque-book in her hand. Before I opened it or even took it up I knew something had happened which had changed her again.

Her manner had its old icy respect as of a person employed, all the friendliness which had been growing in the last two or three days had completely departed. I

could not imagine why—.

She put the cheque-book open, and handed me a pen to sign with, and then I signed the dozen that she had filled in, and tore them off as I did so. She was silent, and when I had finished she took them, saying casually that she would bring the corrected chapter typed again on Tuesday, and was now going to catch her train—and before I could reply, she had gone into the other room—.

A frightful sense of depression fell upon me—What could it possibly be—?

Idly I picked up the cheque-book—and absently fingered the leaves—then my eye caught a counterfoil where I had chanced to open it. It was not in Miss Sharp's handwriting, although this was the house cheque-book which Burton usually keeps, but in my own and there was written, just casually as I scribble in my private account.—"For Suzette 5000 francs" and the date of last Saturday—and on turning the page there was the further one of "For Suzette 3000 francs" and the date of Monday!!

The irony of fate!—I had picked this cheque-book up inadvertently I suppose on these two days instead of my own.



X

It is quite useless for me to comment upon the utterly annoying circumstance of that mixup of cheque-books—Such things are fate—and fate I am beginning to believe is nothing but a reflex of our own actions. If Suzette had not been my little friend, I should not have given her eight thousand francs—but as she has been—and I did—I must stand by the consequences.

After all—a man?—Well—what is the use of writing about it. I am so utterly mad and resentful that I have no words.

It is Sunday morning, and this afternoon I shall hire the one motor which can be obtained here, at a fabulous price, and go into Paris. There are some books I want to get out of my bookcase—and somehow I have lost interest here. But this morning I shall go and sit in the parish church and hear Mass.—I feel so completely wretched, the music may comfort me and give me courage to forget all about Miss Sharp. And in any case there is a soothing atmosphere in a Roman Catholic church, which is agreeable. I love the French people! They are a continual tonic, if one takes them rightly. So filled with common sense, simply using sentiment as an ornament, and a relaxation; and never allowing it to interfere with the practical necessities of life. Ignorant people say they are hysterical, and over passionate—They are nothing of the kind—They believe in material things, and in the "*beau geste*." Where they require a religion, they accept a comforting one; and meanwhile they enjoy whatever comes in their way and get through disagreeables philosophically. *Vive la France!*

I am waiting for the motor now—and trying to be resigned.—Mass did me good—I sat in a corner and kept my crutch by me. The Church itself told me stories, I tried to see it in Louis XV's time—I dare say it looked much the same, only dirtier—And life was made up with etiquette and forms and ceremonies, more exasperating than anything now. But they were ahead of us in manners, and a sense of beauty.

A little child came and sat beside me for about ten minutes, and looked at me and my crutch sympathetically.

"*Blessé de la guerre*," I heard her whisper to her mother—"Comme Jean."

The organ was not bad—and before I came out I felt calmer.

After all it is absurd of Miss Sharp to be disgusted about Suzette—She must know, at nearly twenty-four, and living in France, that there are Suzettes—and I am sure she is not narrow-minded in any way—What can have made her so censorious? If she took a personal interest in me it would be different, but entirely indifferent as she is, how can it matter to her?—As I write this, that hot sense of anger and rebellion arises in me—I'll have to keep saying to myself that I am in the trenches again and must not complain.

I'll make Burton find out if Coralie is really staying here, and get her to dine with me to-night—Coralie always pretended to have a *béguin* for me—even when most engaged elsewhere.

Monday:

Sunday was a memorable day—.

I went through the *Bois de Marne* on that bad road because the trees were so lovely—and then through the *parc de St. Cloud*. Even in war time this wonderful people can enjoy the open air life!—

I think of Henriette d' Angleterre looking from the terrace of her Château over the tree tops—The poor Château! not a stone of which is standing to-day—Did she feel sentimental with her friend the Comte de Guiche—as I would like to feel now?—If I had someone to be sentimental with. Alas! There was an ominous hot stillness in the air, and the sky beyond the Eiffel tower had a heavy, lurid tone in it.

When we got across the river into the *Bois de Boulogne* it seemed as if all Paris was enjoying a holiday. I told the chauffeur to go down a side *allée* and to go slowly, and presently I made him draw up at the side of the road. It was so hot, and I wanted to rest for a little, the motion was jarring my leg.

I think I must have been half asleep, when my attention was caught by three

figures coming up another by-path obliquely—the tallest of them was undoubtedly Miss Sharp—but Miss Sharp as I had never seen her before!—

And a boy of thirteen, and a girl of eleven were at either side of her, the boy clinging on to her arm, he was lame and seemed to be a dreadfully delicate, rickety person. The little girl was very small and sickly looking too—but Miss Sharp—my secretary!—appeared blooming and young and lovely in her inexpensive foulard frock—No glasses hid her blue eyes. Her hair was not torn back and screwed into a knot, but might have been dressed by Alice's maid—and her hat, the simplest thing possible, was most becoming, with the proper modish "look."—

Refinement and perfect taste proclaimed themselves from every inch of her, even if everything had only cost a small sum.

So that dowdy get-up is for my benefit, and is not habitual to her!—Or is it, that she has only one costume and keeps it for Sundays and days of *fête*?—

In spite of my determination to put all thought of her from me—a wild emotion arose—a passionate longing to spring from the car and join her—to talk to her, and tell her how lovely I thought she was looking.

They came nearer and nearer—I could see that her face was rippling with smiles at something the little brother had said—Its expression was gentle and sympathetic and it was obvious that fond affection held all three.

The children might have been drawn by Du Maurier in Punch long ago, to express a family who were overbred. Race run to seed expressed itself in every line of them. The boy wore an Eton jacket and collar and a tall hat—and it looked quite strange in this place.

As they got close to me I could hear him cough in the hollow way which tells its own story—.

I cowered down behind the hood of the motor, and they passed without seeing me—or perhaps Miss Sharp did see me but was determined not to look—. I felt utterly alone and deserted by all the world—and the same nervous trembling came over me which once before made me suffer so, and again I was conscious that my cheek was wet with a tear.

The humiliation of it! the disgrace of such feebleness!—

When they had gone by, I started forward again to watch them—I could hear the little girl cry, "Oh! look Alatheia!" as she pointed to the sky, and then all three began to quicken their pace down another *allée*, in the direction of Auteuil, and were soon out of sight.

Then, still quivering with emotion, I too glanced heavenward—Ye Gods! what a storm was coming on—!

Where were they going? there into the deep wood?—it was a good mile or two from the Auteuil gate—They would be soaked to the skin when the rain did commence to fall—and there was a thunder storm beginning also—were they quite safe?

All these thoughts tormented me, and I gave the chauffeur orders to take a road I thought might cut across the path they had followed, and when we reached the spot, I made him wait.

The livid lightning rent the sky and the thunder roared like guns, and the few people in sight rushed, panic-stricken, in a hopeless search for shelter—far greater fear on their faces than they show at German bombs.

My chauffeur complained audibly, as he got down to shut the car—Did Monsieur wish to be struck by lightning? he demanded, very enraged.

Still I waited—but no Sharp family appeared—and at last I knew I had missed them somehow—a very easy thing in that path-bisected wood. So I told him he could drive like hell to my *appartement* in the *Place des Etats Unis*—and off we rushed in the now torrential rain—It was one of the worst thunder storms I have ever seen in my life.

I was horribly worried as to what could have happened to that little party, for that *allée* where I had seen them, was in the very middle of the *Bois*, and far from any gate or shelter. They must have got soaking wet if nothing worse had happened to them. And how could I hear anything about them?—What should I do? Was the Duchesse in Paris?—Could I find the address possibly from her? But would she be likely to know it? just because Miss Sharp—"Alatheia"—(what a lovely Greek name!) brought bandages to the hospital?

However, this was worth trying, and I could hardly wait to get out of the motor, and get to the telephone. The *conciierge* came out with an umbrella in great concern and took me up in the lift herself—and there was Burton waiting for me,

he had come in by train to take me back safely later on.

How I cursed my folly in not having asked Miss Sharp herself for her address! Could Burton possibly know it?—How silly of me not to have thought of that before!

"Burton, I saw Miss Sharp and her family in the *Bois*—do you know their address by chance?—I want to ring up and find out if they got home all right."

Burton could see my anxiety—and actually hurried in his reply!

"They live in Auteuil, Sir Nicholas, but I can't exactly say where—the young lady never seems very particular to give me the address. She said I should not be needing it, and that they were likely to move."

"Get on to the Duchesse de Courville-Hautevine as quickly as you can—."

Burton did so at once, but it seemed a long time.

—No, Madame la Duchesse was down at Hautevine taking some fresh convalescents, and would not return until the middle of the week—if then!

I nearly swore aloud—.

"Are they talking from the *conciergerie's* lodge or the hotel?—Burton ask at both if they know the address of a Miss Sharp who brings bandages to the hospital!"

Of course by this time the connection had been cut off, and it took quite ten minutes to get on again, and by that time I could have yelled aloud with the feverish fret of it all, and the pain!

No one knew anything of a "Mees Shearp."

"Mees Shearp—*Mais non!*"

Many ladies brought bandages, *hein?*!

I mastered myself as well as I could and got into my chair—.

And in a few moments Burton brought me a brandy and soda, and put it into my hand.

"It won't be cleared up enough to go back to Versailles before dinner, Sir Nicholas," he said—and coughed—"I was just thinking maybe—you'd be liking

some friends to come in and dine—Pierre can get something in from the restaurant, if you'd feel inclined."

The cough meant that Burton knows I am dreadfully upset, and that under the circumstances anything to distract me is the lesser of two evils—!

"Ask whom you please," I answered and drank the brandy and soda down.

Presently, after half an hour, Burton came back to me, beaming—I had been sitting in my chair too exhausted even to feel pain meanwhile—.

He had telephoned everywhere, and no one was in town, but at last, at the Ritz, where the *concierge* knows all my friends, he had been informed that Mrs. Bruce (Nina) had arrived the night before, alone—he had got connected up at her *appartement*, and she would be "round at eight o'clock, very pleased to dine!"

Nina!—A pleasant thrill ran through me—Nina, and without Jim—!

The wood fire was burning brightly, and the curtains were drawn when Nina, fresh as a rose, came in—.

"Nicholas!" she cried delightedly—and held out both hands.

"Nina!—this is a pleasure, you old dear!—now let me look at you and see what marriage has done—."

Nina drew back and laughed!

"Everything, Nicholas!" she said—.

A feeling of envy came over me—Jim's ankle is stiff for life—it seems hard that an eye can make such a difference!—Nina is in love with Jim, but no woman can be in love with me.

Her face is much softer, she is more attractive altogether.

"You look splendid, Nina," I told her—"I want to hear all about it."

"So you shall when we have finished dinner," and she handed me my crutch as I got up from my chair.

Pierre had secured some quite respectable food, and during dinner and afterwards when we were cosily smoking our cigarettes in the sitting-room, Nina gave me all the news of our friends at home.—Every single one of them was still

working, she said.

"It is marvelous how they have stuck it," I responded—.

"Oh no, not at all," Nina answered. "We as a nation are people of habit—the war is a habit to us now—heaps of us work from a sense of duty and patriotism, others because they are afraid what would be said of them if they did not—others because they are thankful to have some steady job to get off their superfluous energy on—So it ends by everyone being roped in—and you can't think, Nicholas, how divine it is to get home after long hours of drudgery, to find the person you love waiting for you, and to know you are going to have all the rest of the time together, until next day!"

"No, I can't imagine the bliss of that, Nina—."

She looked at me suddenly—.

"Well, why don't you marry then, dear boy?"

"I would, if I thought I could secure bliss—but you forget, it would be from pity and not love that a woman would be kind to me."

"I am—not quite sure of that, Nicholas"—and she looked at me searchingly—"You are changed since last time—you are not so bitter and sardonic—and you, always have that—oh! you know what Elinor Glyn writes of in her books—that "it."—Some kind of attraction that has no name—but I am sure has a lot to do with love—."

"So you think I have got 'it,' Nina?"

"Yes, your clothes fit so well—and you say rather whimsical things—Yes, decidedly, Nicholas, now that you are not so bitter—I am sure—."

"What a pity you did not find that out before you took Jim, Nina!"

"Oh! Jim! that is different—You have much more brain than Jim, and would not have been nearly so easy to live with!"

"Is it going well, Nina?"

"Yes—perfectly—that is why I came to Paris alone—I knew it would be good for him—besides I wanted a rest, Nicholas."

"I thought you had married for a rest!"

"Well, if a man 'in love' is what you really want,—and not his just 'loving' you—you have to use your wits; it can't be a rest, not if he has made you care too.—When I was just tossing up between Jim and Rochester, then I had not to bother about how I behaved to them. You see I was the, as yet, unattained desired thing—but having accepted one of them, he has time to think of things, not having to fight to get me, and so I have to keep him thinking of things which have still speculation in them—don't you see?"

"You have to keep the hunting instinct alive, in fact."

"Yes—"

"You don't think it would be possible to find someone who was just one's mate so that no game of any sort would be necessary?"

She thought hard for a moment.

"That, of course, would be heaven—" then she sighed—"I am afraid it is no use in hoping for that, Nicholas!"

"Someone who would understand so well that silence was eloquent—someone who would read books with one, and think thoughts with one. Someone who would lie in one's arms and respond to caresses—and not be counting the dollars—or—doing her knitting—. Someone who was tender and kind and true—Oh! Nina!"

I suppose my voice had taken on a tone of emotion—I was thinking of Miss Sharp—Alathea—that shall be her name always for me now—.

"Nicholas!" Nina exclaimed—"My dear boy, of course you are in love!"

"And if so?"

Instantly I became of more value to Nina—she realized that she had lost me, and that some other woman drew me and not herself—and although Nina is the best sort in the world and more or less really in love with Jim, I knew that a new note could grow in our friendship if I wished to encourage it—Nina's fighting instinct had been aroused to try to get me back!

"Who with?" she demanded laconically.

"With a dream—."

"Nonsense! you are much too cynical—Is it anyone I know?"

"I should not think so—she has not materialised yet."

"This is frightfully interesting, my dear old boy!"

"So you think I'll have a chance then?"

"Certainly when you are all finished."

"My new eye is to be in before Christmas, and my new leg after the new year, and my shoulder gets straighter every day!"

Nina laughed—.

"Real love would be—I suppose—if you could make her adore you before you looked any handsomer!"

And this sentence of Nina's rang in my ears long after she had gone, and often in the night. I could not sleep, I felt something had happened and that fate might be going to take Miss Sharp—Alathea—from me—.

.

And then before morning in fretful dreams I seemed to be obsessed by the cooing of love words between a woman and a child—.



XI

Monday was a perfectly impossible day—I spent all the morning before I returned to Versailles in writing to Maurice, telling him he must find out all about Miss Sharp—Alathea—I felt if I told him her Christian name it would be a clue—and yet even to assist in that, which was, at the moment, my heart's desire, I could not overcome my personal dislike to pronounce it to Maurice!—it seemed as something sacred to me alone—which makes me reflect upon how egotistical we all are—and how we would all rather fail in attaining what is our greatest wish than not to be able to express our own personality—!

Nina had suggested before she left that I should stay in Paris and come to the theatre with her—.

"We could have some delicious old times, Nicholas, now that you are so much better."

Once this would have thrilled me—only last Spring! but now the contrariness in me made me say that it was absolutely necessary that I returned immediately to Versailles. I believe I should have answered like that even if there had been no Miss Sharp,—Alathea—in the case, just because I now knew Nina really wanted me to stay—every man is like that, more or less, if only women knew!—The whole sex relation is one of fence—until the object has been secured—and then emotion dies out altogether, or is revived in one or the other, but very seldom in both. Love—real love—is beyond all this I suppose, and does not depend upon whether or no the other person excites one's desire for conquest. Love must be wonderful—I believe Alathea—(I have actually written it naturally this time!—) could love. I never used to think I could, at the best of moments I have analysed my emotions, and stood aside as it were, and measured just how much things were meaning to me.

But when I think of that scrap of a girl, with her elusive ways, her pride, her refinement, even her little red hands—! I have a longing—a passionate longing to hold her always near me—to know that she is mine—that for the rest of time I should be with her, learning from her high thoughts, comforted by her strength

of character—believing in her—respecting her—Yes, that is it—*respecting her*. How few women one meets with attractions that one really respects.—One respects many elderly ones, of course, and abstract splendid creatures, but bringing it down to concrete facts, how few are the women who have drawn one's admiration or excited one's desire, who at the same time one revered!—Love must mean reverence—that is it.

And what is reverence—?

The soul's acknowledgment of the purity of another—and purity in this sense means truth and honor, and lofty aims—not the denial of all passion, or the practice of asceticism.

I utterly reverence Alatheia, and yet I am sure with that mouth—if she loved me she would be anything but cold. How on God's earth can I make her love me—?

I went back to Versailles after luncheon, having had to see the specialist about my eye, he thinks the socket is so marvelously healed lately, that I could have the glass one in now much sooner than Christmas. I wonder if some self confidence will return when I can feel people are not revolted when looking at me?—That again is super-sensitiveness. Of course no one is revolted—they feel pity—and that is perhaps worse. When I get my leg too, shall I have the nerve to make love to Alatheia and use all the arts which used to be so successful in the old days?

I believe if I were back in 1914—I should still be as nervous as a cat when with her—Is this one of the symptoms of love again?

George Harcourt has many maxims upon the subject of love—One is that a Frenchman thinks most of the methods of love—An Englishman more of the sensations of love—and an Austrian of the emotions of love—. I wonder if this is true? He also says that a woman does not really appreciate a man who reverences her sex in the abstract, and is chivalrous about all women,—she rather thinks him a simpleton—. What she does appreciate is a man who holds cynical views about the female sex in general, and shows reverence and chivalry towards herself in particular!

This I feel is probably the truth—!

I did not expect to hear anything of Alatheia on the Monday, she was not due until Tuesday at eleven o'clock, but when I came in from my sunset on the terrace, I found two telegrams, all the first one said was—

"Extremely sorry will be unable to come to-morrow,
brother seriously ill.

A. Sharp—."

And no address!

So I could not send sympathy, or even offer any help—I could have sworn aloud! The storm had wrecked its vengeance on someone, then, and the poor little chap had probably taken cold.

If I could only be of some use to them—Perhaps getting the best Doctor is out of their reach. I was full of turmoil while I tore open the other blue paper—this was from Suzette—.

"I come this evening at eight."

It was nearly seven o'clock now, so I could not put her off—and I am not sure that I wanted to—Suzette is a human being and kindly, and her heart is warm.

When Burton was dressing me I told him of Miss Sharp's telegram.

"The poor young lady!" he said—.

Burton always speaks of her as the "young lady"—he never makes a mistake about class.

Suzette for him is "Mam'zell"—and he speaks of her as a mother might about her boy's noisy, tiresome rackety school friends—necessary evils to be put up with for the boy's sake—The fluffies he announces always by their full titles—"Madame la Comtesse"—etc., etc., with a face of stone. Nina and the one or two other Englishwomen he is politely respectful to, but to Miss Sharp he is absolutely reverential—she might be a Queen!

"I expect the poor little fellow got wet through yesterday," I hazarded—.

"He's that delicate," Burton remarked.

So Burton knows something more about the family than I do after all—!

"How did you know he was delicate, Burton, or even that Miss Sharp had a brother?"

"I don't exactly know, Sir Nicholas—it's come out from one time to another—the

young lady don't talk."

"How did you guess, then?"

"I've seen her anxious when I've brought in her tray—sometimes, and once I ventured to say to her—'I beg pardon Miss, but can I do anything for you,' and she took off her glasses sudden like—and thanked me, and said it was her little brother she was worrying about—and you may believe me or not as you like, Sir Nicholas, but her eyes were full of tears."

I wonder if Burton guessed the deep emotion he was causing me—My little darling! with her beautiful blue eyes full of tears, and I impotent to comfort or help her—!

"Yes—yes?" I said—.

"She told me then that he'd been delicate since birth, and she feared the winter in Paris for him—I do believe Sir, it's that she works so hard for, to get him away south."

"Burton—what the devil can we do about it?"

"I don't very well know, Sir Nicholas—Many's the time I've badly wanted to offer her the peaches and grapes and other things, to take back to him—but of course I know my place better than to insult a lady—t isn't like as if she were of another class you see Sir—she'd have grabbed 'em then, but bein' as she is, she'd have been bound to refuse them, and it might have tempted her for him and made things awkward."

Burton not only knows the world but has tact—!

He went on, now once started.

"I saw her outside a wine shop once when I got off the tram at Auteuil—She was looking at the bottles of port—and I made so as to pass, and her not see me, but she turned and said friendly like—'Burton, do you suppose this shop would keep really good port—?' I said as how I would go in and see, and she came with me—They had some fairly decent—though too young, Sir Nicholas, and it was thirty-five francs the bottle—I saw she had not an idea it would be as much as that—her face fell—Do you know, Sir, I could see she hadn't that much with her,—it was the day before she's paid you see—her colour came and went—then she said—I wonder Burton if you could oblige me with paying the ten extra francs

until to-morrow—I must have the best!"—You may believe me, Sir Nicholas, I got out my purse quick enough—and then she thanked me so sweet like—"The Doctor has ordered it for my mother, Burton," she said—"and of course she couldn't drink any but the best!"

"Who on earth can she be, Burton? It does worry me—can't you possibly find out? I would so like to help them."

"I feel that, Sir—but here's the way I figure it—When gentry lives in foreign towns and don't seem anxious for you to know their address it don't seem right like to pry into it."

"Burton, you dear old brick!—well supposing we don't try to pry, but just try how we can possibly help her—You could certainly be sympathetic about the brother since she has spoken to you—and surely something can be done—? I saw her at the Duchesse's you know—do you suppose she knows her—?"

"I do, Sir Nicholas—I never meant to speak of it, but one day Her Grace came to see you and you were out and she caught sight of Miss Sharp through the half open door—and she jumped like a cat, Her Grace did, 'Halthee'—she cried out—or some name like that,—and Miss Sharp started up and went down the stairs with her—She seemed to be kind of explaining, and I am not sure that Her Grace was too pleased—."

(Burton thinks all Duchesses should be called "Grace" whether they are French or English.)

"Then we should certainly be able to find out from the Duchesse—."

"Well, I would not be so sure of that Sir Nicholas—You see the Duchesse is a very kind lady, but she is a lady of the world, and she may have her reasons."

"Then what do you suggest, Burton?"

"Why, I hardly know—perhaps to wait and see, Sir Nicholas."

"Masterly inactivity!"

"It might be that I could do a bit of finding out if I felt sure no harm could come of it."

I was not quite certain what Burton meant by this—What possible harm could come of it?

"Find out all you can and let me know—."

.

Suzette opened the door and came in just as I finished dressing—Burton left the room.—She was pouting.

"So the book is not completed, Nicholas?—and the English Mees comes three times a week—*hein?*"

"Yes—does that upset you?"

"I should say!"

"May I not have a secretary?—You will be objecting to my Aunt coming to stay with me, or my dining with my friends—next!"

I was angry—.

"No—*mon ami*—not that—they are not for me—those—but a secretary—a 'Mees'—*tiens?*—for why do you want us two?"

"You two! good Lord! Do you think, Suzette—*Mon Dieu!*"—I now became very angry. "My secretary is here to type my book—. Let us understand one another quite—You have overstepped the mark this time, Suzette, and there must be an end. Name whatever sum you want me to settle on you and then I don't ever wish to see you again."

She burst into frantic weeping. She had meant nothing—she was jealous—she loved me—even going to the sea could do nothing for her! I was her *adoré*—her sun, moon and stars—of what matter a leg or an eye—! I was her life—her *Amant!*!

"Nonsense, Suzette!—you have told me often it was only because I was very rich—now be sensible—these things have to have an end some day. I shall be going back to England soon, so just let me make you comfortable and happy and let us part friends—."

She still stormed and raged—"There was someone else—it was the "Mees"—I had been different ever since she had come to the flat—She, Suzette, would be revenged—she would kill her—!"

Then I flew into a rage, and dominated her, and when I had her thoroughly

frightened I appealed to the best in her—and when she was sobbing quietly Burton came in to say that dinner was ready—his face was eloquent!

"Don't let the waiters see you like that," I said.

Suzette rushed to the glass and looked at herself, and then began opening her gold chain bag to get out her powder and lip grease—I went on into the salon and left her—.

What an irony everything is—! When I was yearning for tenderness and love—, even Suzette's, I was unable to touch her, and now because I am quite indifferent, both she and Nina, in their separate ways, have begun to find me attractive. So there is nothing in it really, it is only as to whether or no you arouse the hunting instinct!

Suzette wore an air of deep pathos during our repast—. She had put some blue round her eyes to heighten the effect of the red of the real tears, and she appeared very pretty and gentle—It had not the slightest effect upon me—I found myself looking on like a third person. The mole with its three black hairs seemed to be the only salient point about her.

Poor little Suzette!—How glad I felt that I had never even pretended a scrap of love for her!

That astonishing sense of the fitness of things which so many of these women possess, showed itself as the evening wore on—. Finding the situation hopeless, Suzette accepted it, curbed the real emotion in herself and played the game—She tried to amuse me—and then we discussed plans for her future. A villa at Monte Carlo she decided at last—A *bijou* of a place! which she knew of—. And when we parted at about eleven o'clock everything was arranged satisfactorily. Then she said good-bye to me—She would go back to Paris by the last train—.

"Good-bye, Suzette!"—and I bent down and kissed her forehead—"You have been the jolliest little pal possible—and remember that I have appreciated it,—and you will always have a real friend in me!"

She burst into tears once more—real tears—.

"*Je t'aime bien!*" she whispered—"I shall go to Deauville—*Va!*"

We wrung hands, and she went to the door, but there she turned, and some of her old fire came back to her—.

"Pah! these English Meeses! thin, stiff, *ennuyeuse*!—thou wilt yet regret thy Suzette, Nicholas!" and with this she left me.

So that episode in my life is ended—and I shall never repeat the experiment.

But are not women the most amazing creatures!

You adore them and give them abject devotion and they treat you as dirt—nothing can be so cruel as the tenderest hearted woman is to a male slave—! Another woman appears upon the scene—then the first one begins to treat you with some respect. You grow masterful—love is aroused in her. You become indifferent—and very often it is she who then turns into the slave!—The worst of it is that when you really care you are incapable of playing a game successfully. The woman's subconscious mind *knows* that it is merely pretense—and so she remains a tyrant.—It is only when she herself has ceased to put forth sufficient attraction to keep you and you are growing numb that you can win out and find your self-respect again.

There was a moment when I was very angry with Suzette and almost shaking her, when I saw in her eyes the first look of real passionate affection—!

Are there any women in the world who could be mates?—who would be able to love one, and hold one at the same time—satisfying one's mind and one's spirit and one's body—?—Could Alatheia—?—I do not know.

I had got this far in my speculations when a note was brought to me by a smart French maid—it was now past eleven at night—.

It was from Coralie—.

"I am here, *cher Ami*—I am rather in a difficulty—Can I come to your sitting-room?"

I scribbled "of course"—and in a moment she came—seductive and distressful. Duquesnois had been recalled to the front suddenly—her husband would be back on the morrow—. Might she stay and have some St. Galmier water with me—could we ring the bell and order it, so that the waiter might see her there?—because if the husband asked anything—he could be sure it was only the much wounded Englishman, and he would not mind—!!

I was sympathetic!—the St. Galmier came.

Coralie did not seem in a hurry to drink it, she sat by the fire and talked, and looked at me with her rather small expressive eyes—and suddenly I realized that it was not to save any situation that even a complacent and much-tried war-husband might object to, but just to talk to me alone—!!

She put forth every charm she possessed for half an hour—I led her on—watching each move with interest and playing right cards in return. Coralie is very well born and never could be vulgar or blatant, so it was all entertaining for me. This is the first time she has had the chance of being quite alone. We fenced—I showed enough *empressement* not to discourage her too soon—and then I allowed myself to be natural, which was being completely indifferent—and it worked its usual charm!

Coralie grew restless—she got up from the sofa she stood by the fire—she came at last quite close up to my chair—.

"What is there about you, Nicholas," she cooed, "which makes one forget that you are wounded—. When I saw you even in the *parc*—with that *demoiselle* I felt—that—"—She looked down with a sigh—.

"How hard upon Duquesnois, Coralie! a good-looking, whole man!"

"I have tired of him, *Mon ami*—he loves me too much—the affair has become tame—."

"And I am wild, is that it?"

"A savage—yes—One feels that you would break one's bones if you were angry—and would mock most of the time,—but if you loved. *Mon Dieu!*—it would be worth while!"

"You have had immense experience of love Coralie, haven't you?"

She shrugged her shoulders—.

"I am not sure that it has been love—."

"Neither am I."

"They say that you have given millions to the little *demi-mondaine* Suzette la Blonde—and that you are crazy about her, Nicholas—Did I see her on the

stairs just now?"—

I frowned—. She saw in a moment it was not the right line—. "For that! it is nothing, Nicholas—they are very attractive, those ladies—one understands—but—your book and your secretary?—*hein?*—"

I lit a cigarette with supreme calm, and did not answer, so that she was obliged to go on—.

"Her face is pretty in spite of those glasses, Nicholas—and one saw that she walked well as she went on."

"May not a secretary have a decent appearance then?"

"When they have they do not remain secretaries long."

"You had better ask Miss Sharp if she means to stay when next you chance upon her then—I don't exchange much conversation with her myself."

There is no exact English word which would describe Coralie's face—She was longing to believe me—but felt she could not—quite—! She knew it was foolish to bait me, and yet the female in her was too strong for any common sense to win—Her personality had to express herself just as strongly about her jealousy of my secretary, as mine had to express itself about not telling Maurice, Alatheia's name,—in both cases we cut off our noses to spite our faces. I was aware of my folly, I do not know if Coralie was aware of hers. Her exasperation so increased in a few moments that she could not control herself—and she spoke right out—.

"When we have all been so kind to you, Nicholas, it is too bad for you to waste your time upon that—!"

I became stern, then, as I had earlier become with Suzette, and made Coralie understand that I would have no interference from anyone. I frightened her—and presently she left me more attracted than she has ever been—. As I said before, women are amazing creatures.



XII

On Wednesday morning I received a reply from Maurice at Deauville—he hastened to answer he said—He had heard of Miss Sharp through a man in the American Red Cross, where Miss Sharp had been employed. He knew nothing more about her, he had seen her once when he was interviewing her, and Miss whatever the other woman's name was, he had forgotten now—and he had thought her suitable and plain and capable, that is all.

I had tried to word my letter not to give the impression of peculiar interest, but no doubt Coralie, who had returned to the band on Monday, had given him her view of the case, for he added that these people were often designing although they looked simple—and in my loneliness he felt sure I would be happier and better at the sea with my friends—!

I would have been angry, only there was something humorous in the way everyone seems to think I am incapable of managing my own affairs!—What is it they all want of me—? Not that I should be happy in my own way, but that I should contribute to their happiness—they want to participate in what my money is able to procure—and they do not want interference from outside. Every one of my friends—and relations—would be hostile if I were to announce that I was in love with Miss Sharp, and wanted to marry her—Even though it was proved to them that she was pretty—a perfect lady—intelligent—virtuous—clever! She is not of their set and might, and probably would, be a stumbling block in their path when they wished to make use of me!—so she would be taboo! None of them would put it in that way of course, their opposition would be (and they might even think they were sincere) because they were thinking of *my* happiness!

Burton is the only person whose sympathy I could count upon!

How about the Duchesse?—that is the deepest mystery of all—I must find out from Burton what was the date about when she came to my *appartement* and found Alatheia. Was it before that time when she asked me if I were in love—and I saw that dear little figure in the passage?—Could she have been thinking of her

—?

By Thursday when there was no further news I began to feel so restless that I determined to go back to Paris the following week. It was all very well to be out in the *parc* at Versailles with a mind at ease, but it feels too far away when I am so troubled.

I sent Burton in on Friday to Auteuil—.

"Just walk about near the wine shop, Burton, and try to find out by every clue your not unintelligent old pate can invent, where Miss Sharp lives, and what is happening? Then go to the Hotel de Courville and chat with the concierge—or whatever you think best—I simply can't stand hearing nothing!"

Burton pulled in his lips.

"Very good, Sir Nicholas."

I tried to correct my book in the afternoon. I really am trying to do the things I feel she thinks would improve my character—But I am one gnawing ache for news—Underneath is the fear that some complication may occur which will prevent her returning to me. I find myself listening to every footstep in the passage in case it might be a telegram, so of course quite a number of messages and things were bound to come from utterly uninteresting sources, to fill me with hope and then disappoint me—It is always like that. I really was wild on Friday afternoon, and if George Harcourt had not turned up—he is at the Trianon Palace now with the Supreme War Council—I don't know what I should have done with myself. Lots of those fellows would come and dine with me if I wanted them—some are even old pals—but I am out of tune with my kind.

George was very amusing.

"My dear boy," he said, "Violetta is upsetting all my calculations—she has refused everything I have offered her—But I fear she is beginning to show me too much devotion!"

This seemed a great calamity to him.

"It is terribly dangerous that, Nicholas!—because you know, my dear boy, when a woman shows absolute devotion, a man is irresistibly impelled to offer her a back seat—it is when she appeals to his senses, shows him caprice, and remains an insecure possession, that he will offer her the place his mother held of highest

honour."

"George, you impossible cynic!"

"Not at all—I am merely a student of human instincts and characteristics—Half a cynic is a poor creature—A complete one has almost reached the mercy and tolerance of Christ."

This was quite a new view of the subject—!

He went on—.

"You see, when men philosophize about women, they are generally unjust, taking the subject from the standpoint that whatever frailties they have, the male is at all events exempt from them. Now that is nonsense—Neither sex is exempt—and neither sex as a rule will contemplate or admit its failings.—For instance, the sense of abstract truth in the noblest woman never prevents her lying *for* her lover or her child, yet she thinks herself quite honest—In the noblest man the sense is so strong that it enables him to make only the one exception, that of invariably lying *to* the woman!"

I laughed—he puffed one of my pre-war cigars—.

"Women have no natural sense of truth—they only rise to it through sublime effort,"—

"And men?"

"It is ingrained in them, they only sink from it to cover their natural instincts of infidelity."

His voice was contemplative now—.

"How we lie to the little darlings, Nicholas! How we tell them we have no time to write—when of course we have always time if we really want to—we never are at a loss for the moments before the creatures are a secure possession!"

"The whole thing gets back to the hunting instinct, my dear George—I can't see that one can be blamed for it—."

"I am not blaming, I am merely analysing. Have you remarked that when a man feels perfectly secure about the woman he will give his hours of duty to his country, his hours of leisure to his friends who flatter him, and the crumbs

snatched from either to the poor lady of his heart! But if she excites his senses, and remains problematic, he will skimp his duty, neglect his friends, and snatch even hours from sleep to spend them in her company!"

"You don't think then that there is something higher and beyond all this in love, George?—something which you and I have never come across perhaps?"

"If one met a woman who was all man in mind, all woman in body, and all child in soul—it is possible—but where are these phoenixes to be discovered, my son?—It is wiser not to dissatisfy oneself by thinking of them—but just go on accepting that which is always accorded to the very rich!—By the way, I saw Suzette la Blonde dining last night with old Solly Jesse—*Monsieur le Comte Jessé!*—She had a new string of pearls on and was stroking his fat hand, while her lips curled with love—I thought—??"

I lay back in my chair and laughed and laughed—And I had imagined that Suzette really felt for me, and would grieve for at least a week or two—but I am replaced in four days—!

I do not think I even felt bitter—all those things seem so far away now.

When George had gone, I said to myself—"All man in mind"—yes I am sure she is—"All woman in body"—Certainly that—"All child in soul"—I want to know about her soul—if we have souls, as Nina says—by the way, I will send a messenger into the Ritz with a note to ask Nina to spend the day with me tomorrow. We have got accustomed to the impossible difficulty of telephoning to Paris, and waiting hours for telegrams—a messenger is the quickest in the end.

How the war drags on—! Will it really finish this year after all—people are very depressed these last days—I do not write of any of this in my journal—others will chronicle every shade—When I let myself think of it I grow too wild. I become feverish with longing to be up and with the old regiment—When I read of their deeds—then I grow rebellious.

Monday:

No news—yet—It is unbearable—Burton returned from Auteuil with no clue whatsoever—except that the *concierge* at the Hotel de Courville had never heard of the name of Sharp! That proves to me that "Sharp" is not Alatheia's name at all. He was a newcomer—and there were so many young ladies who came and

went to see Madame la Duchesse that he could not identify anyone in particular by description.

Nina turned up early on Saturday in time for lunch—She was looking ravishing in entirely new clothes—like Suzette, she has found that the "*geste*" is altering—Germans may be attacking Paris—Friends and relations may be dying in heaps, but women must have new clothes and fashion must have her say as to their shapes—And what a mercy it is so! If there was nothing to relieve war and seriousness—all the nations would be raving lunatics by now.

"Jim will be crazy about you, Nina, when he sees you in that hat!"

"Yes, won't he! I put it on to make you crazy now!"

"Of course I always am!"

"No, Nicholas—you were once—but you are altered, some quite new influence has come into your life—you don't say half such horrid things."

We lunched in the restaurant. Some of the Supreme War Council were about at the different tables, and we exchanged a few words—Nina preferred it to my sitting-room.

"Englishmen do look attractive in uniform, Nicholas, don't they," she said—. "I wonder if I had seen Jim in ordinary things if I would have been so drawn to him?"

"Who knows? Do you remember how sensible you were about him and Rochester!—it is splendid that it has turned out so well."

"... Where is happiness, Nicholas?" and her eyes became dreamy,—"I have a well balanced nature, and am grateful for what has been given me in Jim, but I can't pretend that I have found perfect content—because some part of me is always hungry—. I believe really that you were the only person who could have fulfilled all I wanted in a man!"

"Nina, you had not the least feeling for me when you first saw me after I was wounded, do you remember you felt like a sister—a mother—and a family friend!"

"Yes, was not that odd!—because of course the things which used to attract me in you and which could again now, were there all the time."

"At that moment you were so occupied with 'Jim's blue eyes,' and his 'white nice teeth,' and 'how his hair was brushed,' and 'how well his uniform fitted'—to say nothing of his D.S.O. and his M.C. that you could not appreciate anything else."

"You have a V.C., your teeth are divine, and you too have blue eyes, Nicholas —."

"Eye—please,—the singular or plural in this case makes all the difference, but I shall have my new one in fairly soon now and then illusion will help me!"

Nina sighed—.

"Illusion! I am just not going to think of what perhaps might have happened if I had not been surrounded with illusion, last February—."

"Well, you can always have the satisfaction of knowing that as your interest in Jim diminishes, so his will increase—George Harcourt and I thrashed it all out the other day—and you yourself admitted it, when we dined. To keep the hunting instinct alive is the thing—You will have the fondest lover when you go back to Queen Street, Nina!"

"I—suppose so—. But would it not be wonderful if one had not to play any game, but could just love and be so satisfied with each other that there would not be any fear—."

Nina's eyes were sad—Did she remember my words at our last meeting?

"Yes that would be heaven!"

"Is that what you are dreaming about, Nicholas?"

"Perhaps."

"What a fortunate woman she will be!—And of yourself, what shall you give her?"

"I shall give her passion—and tenderness, and protection, and devotion—she shall share the thoughts of my mind and the aspirations of my soul—."

"Nicholas!—you talking in this romantic way—she must be a miracle!"

"No—she is just a little girl."

"And it is she who has made you think about souls?"

"I expect so—."

"Well, I must not think of them, or of anything but what a good time we shall all have when the war is over, and what nice things I've bought in Paris—and of how good-looking Jim is—Let us talk of something else!"

So we spoke of every-day matters—and then we went into the *parc*—and Nina stayed by my bath chair and amused me. But she does not know anything about Versailles or its history—and she cannot make psychological deductions—and all the time I was understanding with one part of me that her hat was awfully becoming, and everything about her perfect; and with another part I was seeing that her brain is limited—and that if I had married her I should have been bored to death!

And when the evening came and she left me, after our long day, I felt a sense of relief—Oh! there can be no one in the world like my Alatheia—with her little red hands, and cheap cotton garments! I realize now that life used to be made up of the physical—and that something,—perhaps suffering, has taught me that the mental and the spiritual matter more.

Even if she does come back—how am I to break through the wall of ice which she has surrounded herself with since the Suzette cheque business?—I can't explain—she won't even know that I have parted with her.

Of course she has heard the fluffies often in the next room when they have come to play bridge in the afternoon. Perhaps she may even have heard the idiotic things they talk about—yes—of course she must have an awful impression of me —.

The contrast of her life and theirs—and mine! I shall go on with my Plato—it bores me—it is difficult, and I am tired—but *I will!*.



XIII

Suspense is the hardest thing to bear—what a ridiculous truism! It has been said a thousand times before and will be said a thousand times again!—because it has come to everyone at some moment, and so its pain is universally understood. To have attained serenity would mean that one was strong enough not to allow suspense to cause one a moment's doubt or distress. I am far from serenity, I fear—for I am filled with unrest—I try to tell myself that Alatheia Sharp does not matter in my life at all—that this is the end—that I am not to be influenced by her movements or her thoughts, or her comings and goings—I try not to think of her even as "Alatheia"—And then when I have succeeded in some measure in all this, a hideous feeling of sinking comes over me—that physical sensation of a lead weight below the heart. What on earth is the good of living an ugly maimed life?

It was ten times easier to carry on under the most disgusting and fearsome circumstances when I was fighting, than it is now when everything is done for my comfort, and I have all that money can buy.

What money cannot buy is of the only real consequence though. I must read Henley again, and try to feel the thrill of pride I used to feel when I was a boy at the line "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul."

——What if she does not come back, and I do not hear any more of her?

Stop! Nicholas Thormonde, this is contemptible weakness!

This evening it was wonderful on the terrace, the sun set in a blaze of crimson and purple and gold, every window in the *Galerie des Glasses* seemed to be on fire—strange ghosts of by-gone courtiers appeared to be flitting past the mirrors.

What do they think of the turmoil they have left behind them, I wonder? Each generation torn by the same anguish which the worries of love bring?—And what is love for?—Just to surround the re-creative instinct with glamour and

render it æsthetic?

Did cave men love?—They were exempt from pain of the mind at all events. Civilization has augmented the mental anguishes, and pleasures of love, and when civilization is in excess it certainly distorts and perverts the whole passion.

But what is love anyway? the thing itself I mean. It is a want, and an ache and a craving—I know what I want. I want firstly Alatheia for my own, with everything which that term implies of possession. Then I want to share her thoughts, and I want to feel all the great aspirations of her soul—I want her companionship—I want her sympathy—I want her understanding.

When I was in love with Nina—and five or six others—I never thought of any of these things—I just wanted their bodies: Therefore it is only when the spiritual enters into the damned thing, I suppose, that one could call it love. By that reasoning I have loved only Alatheia in all my life. But I am stumped with this thought—If she had one eye and no leg below the knee—should I be in love with her? and feel all these exalted emotions about her? I cannot honestly be certain how I would answer that question yet, so this shows that the physical plays the chief rôle even in a love that seems spiritual.

Matho—in Flaubert's *Salammbô* was beaten to a jelly but his eyes still flamed with love for his princess—But when she saw him as this revolting mass, did her love flame for him? Or was she exalted only by the incense to her vanity—and a pity for his sufferings? Heloise and Abelard were pretty wonderful in their love, but his love became transmuted much sooner than hers, because all physical emotions were gone from him. Plato's idea that man gravitates towards beauty for some subconscious soul desire to re-create himself through perfection, and so attain immortality, is probably the truth. And that is why we shrink from mutilated bodies—. Until I can be quite sure that I should love Alatheia just the same were she disfigured as I am—I cannot in justice expect her to return my passion—.

Nina became re-attracted (if I can coin that word)—because I was out of reach. The predatory instinct in woman had received a rebuff, and demanded renewed advance.—She still keeps a picture in some part of her mental vision of what I was too, therefore, I am not so revolting to her—but Alatheia has not this advantage, and has seen me only wounded.

I have done nothing to earn her respect—She has apprehended my useless life in these last months—She has heard the chattering of my companions, whom I

have been free to choose—the obvious deduction being that these are what I desire—And finally, she knows that I have had a mistress.—In heaven's name *why* should she be anything but what she is in her manner to me!—Of course she despises me. So that the only thing I could possibly allure her by would be that intangible something which Nina and Suzette and even Coralie—have inferred that I possess—"It"!!—. And how would that translate itself to a mind like Alatheia's?—It might mean nothing to her—It probably would not. The only times I have ever seen any feeling at all in her for me were when she thought she had destroyed a wounded man's interest in a harmless hobby—and felt remorse—And the freezing reserve which showed when she handed me the cheque-book—and the perturbation and contempt when I was rude about the child.—At other times she has shown a blank indifference—or a momentary consciousness that there was admiration in my eye for her.

Now what do I get out of the iciness over Suzette's cheque?

Two possibilities—.

One—that she is more prudish than one of her literary cultivation, and worldly knowledge is likely to be, so that she strongly disapproves of a man having a "*petite amie*"—or—

Two—that she has sensed that I love her and was affronted at the discovery that at the same time I had a—friend?—

The second possibility gives me hope, and so I fear to entertain a belief in it—but taken coldly it seems the most likely.—Now if she had *not* been affronted at this stage, would she have gone on believing I loved her, and so eventually have shown some reciprocity?

It is just possible—.

And as it is, will that same instinct which is in the subconscious mind of all women—and men too for the matter of that—which makes them want to fight to retain or retake what was theirs, influence her now unconsciously to feel some, even contemptuous, interest in me? This also is possible—.

If only fate brings her to me again—. That is where one is done—when absence cuts threads.

To-morrow it will be Monday—a whole week since I received her telegram.

I shall go up to Paris in the morning if I hear nothing and go myself to the Hotel de Courville to try and obtain a trace of her—if that is impossible I will write to the Duchesse.—

Reservoirs—Night:

As I wrote the last words—a note was brought to me by Burton—someone had left at the Hotel.

"Dear Sir Nicholas—(it ran)

I am very sorry I have been unable to come out to do my work—but my brother died last Tuesday, and I have been extremely occupied—I will be at Versailles at eleven on Thursday as usual.

Yours truly,

A. Sharp."

Her firm writing, more like a man's than a woman's looked a little shaky at the end—Was she crying perhaps when she wrote the letter—the poor little girl—What will the death mean to her eventually? Will the necessity to work be lessened?

But even the gravity of the news did not prevent a feeling of joy and relief in me—I would see her again—Only four days to wait!

But what a strange note!—not any exhibition of feeling! she would not share even that natural emotion of grief with me. Her work is business, and a well bred person ought not to mix anything personal into it.—How will she be—? Colder than ever? or will it have softened her—.

She will probably be more unbending to Burton than to me.

The weather has changed suddenly, the wind is sighing, and I know that the summer is over—I shall have the sitting-room fire lighted and everything as comfortable as I can when she does turn up, and I shall have to stay here until

then since I cannot communicate with her in any way. This ridiculous obscurity as to her address must be cleared away. I must try to ask her casually, so as not to offend her.

A week has passed—.

Alathea came on Thursday—I was sickeningly nervous on Thursday morning. I resented it extremely. As yet the only advance I have made is that I can control most of the outward demonstrations of my perturbations, but not the sensations themselves. I was sitting in my chair quite still when the door opened, and in she came—Just the scrap of a creature in dead black. Although there was no crepe, one could see that the garments were French trappings of woe, that is, she had a veil hanging from her simple small hat. I felt that she had had to buy these things for the funeral, and probably could not afford a second set of more dowdy ones for her working clothes, so that there was that indescribable air of elegance about her appearance which had shown in the *Bois* that Sunday. The black was supremely becoming to her transparent white skin, and seemed to set off the bright bronze brown of her hair—the rebellious little curls had slipped out beside her ears, but the yellow horn spectacles were as uncompromising as ever—I could not see whether her eyes were sad or no—her mouth was firm as usual.

"I want to tell you of my sympathy," I said immediately—"I was so sorry not to know your address that I might have expressed it to you before—I would have wished to send you some flowers."

"Thank you," was all she answered—but her voice trembled a little.

"It was so stupid of me not to have asked you for your address before—you must have thought it was so careless and unsympathetic."

"Oh! no"—.

"Won't you give it to me now that I may know in the future?"

"We are going to move—It would be useless—it is not decided where we go yet."

I knew I dared not insist.

"Is there some place where I could be certain of a message reaching you then?"

because I would have asked you to come to the flat to-day and not out here if I could have found you."

She was silent for a moment. I could see she was in a corner—I felt an awful brute but I had said it all quite naturally as any employer would who was quite unaware that there could be any reluctance to give the information, and I felt it was better to continue in this strain not to render her suspicious.

After a second or two she gave the number of a stationer's shop in the Avenue Mosart—.

"I pass there every day," she said.

I thanked her—.

"I hope you did not hurry back to your work—I can't bear to think that perhaps you would have wished to remain at home now."

"No, it does not matter"—There was an infinite weariness in her tone—A hopeless flatness I had never heard before, it moved me so that I blurted out—.

"Oh! I have felt so anxious, and so sorry—I saw you in the *Bois* two Sundays ago in the thunder storm, and I tried to get near the path I thought you would cross to offer you the carriage to return in, but I missed you—Perhaps your little brother caught cold then?"

There was a sob in her voice—.

"Yes—will you—would you mind if we just did not speak of anything but began work."

"Forgive me—I only want you to know that I'm so awfully sorry—and Oh, if there was anything in the world I could do for you—would you not let me?"

"I appreciate your wish—it is kind of you—but there is nothing—You were going to begin the last chapter over again—Here is the old one—I will take off my hat while you look at it," and she handed it to me.

Of course I could not say anything more—I had had a big bunch of violets put on the table where she types, in Burton's room adjoining—they were the first forced ones which could be got in Paris—and I had slipped a card by them with just "my sympathy" on it.

When she came back into the room hatless, her cheeks were bright pink below the glasses—and all she said was "Thank you" and then I saw a little streak of wet trickle from under the horn rims. I have never had such a temptation in my life—to stretch out my arms and cry "Darling one, let me comfort you, here clasped close to me!"—I longed to touch her—to express somehow that I felt profoundly for her grief.—

"Miss Sharp—" I did burst out—"I am not saying anything because I know you don't want me to—but it is not because I do not feel—I'm—I'm—awfully sorry—May not I perhaps send some roses to—your home—or, perhaps there is someone there who would like them—flowers are such jolly things!"—Then I felt the awfully ill chosen word "jolly" was—but I could not alter it.

I believe that *gaucherie* on my part helped though a little, her fine senses understood it was because I was so nervously anxious to offer comfort—a much kinder note came into her voice—.

"I'll take the violets with me if you will let me," she said—"Please don't trouble about anything more—and do let us begin work."

So we started upon the Chapter.

Her hands were not so red I noticed. I am becoming sensitive to what is called "atmosphere" I suppose, for I felt all the currents in the room were disturbed—that ambience of serenity did not surround Alatheia and keep me unconsciously in awe of her as it always has before—I was aware that my natural emotions were running riot and that my one eye was gazing at her with love in it, and that my imagination was conjuring up scenes of delight with her as a companion. Her want of complete control allowed the waves to reach her, I expect—for I knew that she was using all her will to keep her attention upon the work, and that she was nearly as disturbed as I was myself—.

But how was she disturbed?—was she just nervous from events—or was I causing her any personal trouble? The moment I felt that perhaps I was, a feeling of assurance and triumph came over me—! Then I used every bit of the cunning I possess—I tried to say subtle things—I made her talk about the ridiculous book, and the utterly unimportant furniture—I made her express her opinion about styles, and got out of her that a simple Queen Anne was what she herself preferred.—I *knew* that she was giving way and talking with less stiffness because she was weak with sorrow, and probably had not had much sleep—I *knew* that it was not because she had forgotten about the Suzette cheque or really

was more friendly. I *knew* that I was taking an unfair advantage of her—but I continued—Men are really brutes after all!—and gloried in my power every time the slightest indication showed that I possessed it! I lost some of my diffidence—If I could only have stood upon two feet and seen with two eyes—I know that even the morning would have ended by my taking her in my arms, cost what might; but as I was glued to my chair she was enabled always at this stage to stay out of reach—and fenced gallantly with me by silence and stiff answers—but by luncheon time there was a distinct gain on my side—I had made her feel something, I no longer was a nonentity who did not count—.

Her skin is so transparent that the colour fluctuates with every emotion. I love to watch it. What a mercy that I had very strong sight!—for my one eye sees quite clearly.

At luncheon we talked of the time of the Fronde—Alathea is so wonderfully well read. I make dashes into all sorts of subjects, and find she knows more of them than I do myself—What a mind she must have to have acquired all this in her short twenty-three years.

"You are not thinking of leaving Paris, I hope when you move," I said as we drank coffee. "I am going to begin another book directly this one is finished."

"It is not yet decided," she answered abruptly.

"I could not write without you."

Silence.

"I would love to think that you took an interest in teaching me how to be an author—."

The faintest shrug of the shoulders—.

"You don't take any interest?"

"No."

"Are not you very unkind?"—

"No—If you have anything to complain of in my work I will listen attentively and try and alter it."

"You will never allow the slightest friendship?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Why should I?"

"I must be grateful even that you ask a question, I suppose—Well, I don't know quite myself why you should—You think I am a rotter—You despise my character—you think my life is wasted and that—er—I have undesirable friends."

Silence.

"Miss Sharp! you drive me crazy never answering—I can't think why you like to be so provoking!" I was stung to exasperation.

"Sir Nicholas," and she put down her cup with displeasure—"If you will not keep to the subject of work—I am sorry but I cannot stay as your secretary."

Terror seized me—.

"I shall have to if you insist upon it—I suppose—but I am longing to be friends with you—and I can't think why you should resent it so—We are both English, we are both—unhappy—we are both lonely—."

Silence!—

"Somehow I don't feel it is altogether because I am a revolting object to look at that you are so unkind—you must have seen lots like me since the war—."

"I am not unkind—I think you are—May I go to my work now?"

We rose from the table—And for a second she was so near to me the pent up desire of weeks mastered me and the tantalization of the morning overcame me so that a frantic temptation seized me—I *could not* resist it—I put out one arm while I steadied myself with the other by the back of a chair, and I drew her tiny body towards me, and pressed my lips to her Cupid's bow of a mouth—And Oh God the pleasure of it—right or wrong!

She went dead white when I released her, she trembled, and in her turn held on to the back of the chair—.

"How dare you!" she panted—"How dare you!—I will go this minute—You are not a gentleman."

The reaction came to me—.

"That is it, I suppose—" I said hoarsely—"I am not a gentleman underneath—the civilization is mere veneer—and the *man* breaks through it—I have nothing to say—I was mad, that is all. You will have to weigh up as to whether it is worth your while to stay with me or not. I cannot judge of that. I can only assure you that I will try not to err again—perhaps some day you will know how you have been making me suffer lately—I shall go to my room now, and you can let me have your decision in an hour or so—."

I could not move because my crutch had fallen to the floor out of my reach—She stood in indecision for a moment and then she bent and picked it up and gave it to me. She was still as white as a ghost. As I got to the door I turned and said—.

"I apologize for having lost my self-control—I am ashamed of that—and do not ask you to forgive me—Your staying or not is a business arrangement. I give you my word I will try never to be so weak again."

She was gazing at me—For once I had taken the wind out of her sails—.

Then I bowed and hobbled on into my bedroom, shutting the door after me.

Here my courage deserted me. I got to the bed with difficulty and threw myself down upon it and lay there, too filled with emotion to stir. The thought tormenting me always. Have I burnt my boats—or is this only the beginning of a new stage?

Time will tell.



XIV

I lay and wondered and wondered what were Alatheia's emotions after I left her. Should I ever know? When the hour was up I went back into the sitting-room. I had struggled against the awful depression which was overcoming me. I suppose every man has committed some action he is sorry and ashamed of, forced thereto by some emotion, either of anger or desire, which has been too strong for his will to control—. This is the way murders must often have been committed, and other crimes—I had not the slightest intention of behaving like a cad—or of doing anything which I knew would probably part us forever.—If my insult had been deliberate or planned, I would have held her longer, and knowing I was going to lose her by my action, I would have profited by it. As I lay on my bed in great pain from the wrench in getting there alone—I tried to analyse things. The nervous excitement in which she always plunges me must have come to the culminating point. The only thing I was glad about was that I had not attempted to ask forgiveness, or to palliate my conduct. If I had done so she would undoubtedly have walked straight out of the hotel—but having just had the sense to leave her to think for a while—perhaps—?

Well—I was sitting in my chair—feeling some kind of numb anguish—which I suppose those going to be hanged experience, when Burton brought in my tea—and I heard no sound of clicking next door—I asked him as naturally as I could if Miss Sharp had gone—.

"Yes, Sir Nicholas," he answered, and the shock, even though it was expected, was so great that for a second I closed my eye.

She had left a note, he further added,—putting the envelope down on the table beside the tray—.

I made myself light a cigarette and not open it, and I made myself say casually—

"I am afraid she feels her brother's death dreadfully, Burton!"

"The poor young lady, Sir Nicholas!—She must have kept up brave like all the time this morning, and then after lunch when I come in—while you were resting,

Sir—it got too much for her, I expect, sittin' alone—for she was sobbin' like to break her heart—as I opened the door. She looked that forlorn and huddled up—give you my word, Sir Nicholas—I was near blubberin' myself."

"I am so awfully sorry—What did you do, Burton?"

"I said, '—Let me bring you a nice cup of tea, Miss.'—It is always best to bring ladies tea when they are upset, Sir Nicholas, as you may know—She thanked me sweet like, as she always does—and I made so bold as to say how sorry I was, and I did hope she had not had any extra trouble to deal with over it; and how I'd be so glad to advance her her next week's salary if it would be any convenience to her—knowing funerals and doctors is expensive—Out of my own money of course I gave her to understand—because I knew she'd be bound to refuse yours, Sir Nicholas.

"—At that her tears burst out afresh—She had no glasses on, and she looked no more than sixteen years old, give you my word Sir—She thanked me like as if it was something real kind I'd thought of—I felt sort of ashamed I could not do more—

"Then she seemed to be having a struggle with herself—just as if she'd rather die than take anything from anybody—and yet knew she had to—She turned them, blue eyes on me streamin' with tears, and I had to turn away, Sir Nicholas—I had really.—

"'Burton,' she says—. 'Have you ever felt that you wanted to be dead and done with it all—that you couldn't fight any more?'

—"I can't say as I have, Miss,' I answered her—'but I know my master feels that way often—' Perhaps she felt kinder, sorry for you too, Sir Nicholas, because as I said that, she gave a sort of extra sharp sob and buried her face in her hands—.

"I slipped out of the room then and brought the tea as quick as I could you may believe me Sir—and by that time she had pulled herself together—'It is stupid to have any proud feelings—if you have to work Burton' she said—'I will be—grateful for the loan of your money—and I am happy to have such a friend' ... and she put out her little bit of a hand—She did, Sir Nicholas—and I never felt so proud in my life—She's just a real lady to her finger tips. She is, Sir—I shook it as gentle as I could, and then was obliged to blow my nose, I felt that blubberish—I left the room at once, and when I come back for the tray, and to bring the money she had her hat on, and the note written for you Sir—I took the

violets and began putting them in the box for her to take—but she stopped me—.

"'Violets fade so soon—I will not take them, thanks,' she said—'I have to do some shopping before I go home and I could not carry them.' But I knew it was not that.—She did not want to take them—perhaps she felt she'd given up enough of her pride to take my money—for one day—So I said nothing,—but that I did hope she would be feeling better by the time she came to the *appartement* on Saturday. She did not speak, she just nodded her head and smiled kind like at me and went."

I could not answer Burton—I too just nodded my head—and the dear old boy left me alone—My very heart seemed bursting with pain and remorse—When he had gone—I seized the letter and opened it.

"To Sir Nicholas Thormonde, Bart, V.C.," (it began, and then)

"Dear Sir:

Circumstances force me to work—so I shall have to remain in your service—if you require me. I am unfortunately quite defenceless, so I appeal to whatever chivalry there is in you not to make it so impossible that I must again give in my resignation.

Yours faithfully,
A. Sharp."

I fell back in my chair in an agony of emotion—My darling! My queen!—whose very footprints I worship—to have had to write such a letter—to me!

The unspeakable brute beast I felt! All my cynical calculations about women fell from me—I saw myself as I had been all day—utterly selfish—not really feeling for her grief, only making capital out of it for my own benefit—. At that moment, and for the rest of the day and night, I suffered every shade of self reproach and abasement a man can feel. And next day I had to stay in bed because I had done some stupid thing to my leg in lying down without help.

When I knew I could not get into Paris by Saturday when Alatheia was to come to the flat—I sent Burton in with a note to the shop in the Avenue Mosart.

"Dear Miss Sharp—(I wrote)

"I am deeply grateful for your magnanimity. I am utterly ashamed of my weakness—and you will not have called upon my chivalry in vain, I promise you.—I have to stay in bed, so I cannot be at the flat, and if you receive this in time I shall be obliged if you will come out here again on Saturday.

Yours very truly,
Nicholas Thormonde."

Then I never slept all night with thoughts of longing and wondering if she would get it soon enough to come.

Over and over in my vision I saw the picture of her sitting there in Burton's room sobbing—My action was the last straw—My shameful action!—Burton showed the good taste and the sympathy and understanding for her which I should have done—. And to think that she is troubled about money, so that she had to take a loan from my dear old servitor—far greater gentleman than I am—. And that I cannot be the least use to her—and may not help her in any way! I can go on no longer in this anguish—as soon as I feel that peace is in the smallest measure restored between us—I will ask her to marry me, just so that I can give her everything. I shall tell her that I expect nothing from her—only the right to help her family and give her prosperity and peace—.

Sunday:

I was still in bed on Saturday morning at eleven—the Doctor came out to see me very early and insisted that I be kept quite still until Monday—So Burton had my bed table brought, and all my papers and things—There had come a number of letters to answer, and he had asked me if Miss Sharp could not do them as soon as she arrived.

"Burton, perhaps she'll feel not quite at ease with me alone in here like this. Could you not make some excuse to be tidying drawers and stay while I am dictating," I said.

"Very good, Sir Nicholas."

When he replies with those words I know that he is agreeing—with reservations—.

"Out with what you are thinking, Burton."

"Well, Sir Nicholas"—and he coughed—"Miss Sharp—is that understandin' sh'd know in a minute your things wasn't likely to be in a mess, and that you'd got me there on purpose—It might make her awkward like—."

"You may be right, we will see how things turn out."

Presently I heard Alatheia in the sitting-room and Burton went in to see her.

"Sir Nicholas is very poorly to-day, Miss"—I heard him say—"The Doctor won't let him out of bed—I wonder if you'd be so kind as to take down his letters—they are too much for him himself not being able to sit up—and I have not the time."

"Of course I will, Burton," her soft voice answered.

"I've put the table and everything ready—and I thank you kindly—" Burton went on—"I am glad to see you looking better, Miss."

I listened intently—It seemed as if I could hear her taking off her hat—and then she came into the room to me—but by that time my heart was beating so that I could not speak loud.

I said "good morning" in some half voice, and she answered the same—then she came forward to the table. Her dear little face was very pale and there was something pathetic in the droop of her lips—her hands, I noticed, were again not so red—.

"All the letters are there"—and I pointed to the pile—"It will be so good of you if you will do them now."

She took each one up and handed it to me without speaking and I dictated the answer.—I had had one from Suzette that morning thanking me for the villa—but I was clearly under the impression that I had put it with the one from Maurice and one from Daisy Ryven at the other side of the bed, so I had no anxiety about it—Then suddenly I saw Alatheia's cheeks flame crimson and her mouth shut with a snap—and I realized that the irony of fate had fallen upon me again, and that she had picked up Suzette's lavender tinted, highly scented missive. She handed it to me without a word—.

The letter ended:

*"Adieu Nicholas! tu es,
Toujours Mon Adoré
Ta Suzette."*

but the way it was folded only showed "*Toujours Mon Adoré—Ta Suzette*"—and this much Alatheia had certainly seen—.

I felt as if there was some evil imp laughing in the room—There was nothing to be said or done. I could not curse aloud—so I simply took the letter, put it with Daisy Ryven's—and indicated that I was waiting for the next one to be handed to me—So Alatheia continued her work.—But could anything be more maddening—more damnably provoking!—and inopportune—Why must the shadow of Suzette fall upon me all the time?—

This of course will make any renewal of even the coldest friendliness impossible, between my little girl and me—. I cannot ask her to marry me now, and perhaps not for a long time, if ever the chance comes to me again, in any case. Her attitude, carriage of head, and expression of mouth, showed contempt, as she finished the short-hand notes. And then she rose and went into the other room to type, closing the door after her.

And I lay there shivering with rage and chagrin,

I saw no more of Alatheia that morning—She had her lunch in the sitting-room alone, and Burton brought the dishes in to me, and after luncheon he insisted that I should sleep for an hour until half-past two o'clock. He had some accounts for Miss Sharp to do, he said.

I was so exhausted that when I did fall asleep I slept until nearly four—and awoke with a start and an agony of apprehension that she might have gone—but no—Burton said she was still there when I rang for him—and I asked her to come in again—.

We went over one of the earlier chapters in the book and I made some alterations in it; she never showed the slightest interest, nor did she speak—; she merely took down what I told her to—.

"Do you think that will do now?" I asked when it was complete.

"Yes."

Tea came in then for us both.—She poured it out, still without uttering a word—

she remembered my taste of no sugar or milk, and put the cup near me so that I could reach it. She handed me the plate of those nasty make-believe biscuits, which is all we can get now—then she drank her own tea.

The atmosphere had grown so tense it was supremely uncomfortable. I felt that I must break the ice.

"How I wish there was a piano here," I remarked *à propos* of nothing—and of course she greeted this, with her usual silence.

"I am feeling so rotten if I could hear some music it would make me better."

She made the faintest movement with her head, to show me I suppose that she was listening respectfully, but saw no occasion to reply.

I felt so unspeakably wretched and helpless and useless lying there, I had not the pluck to go on trying to talk, so I closed my eye and lay still, and then I heard Alatheia rise and softly go towards the door—.

"I will type this at home—and return it to the flat on Tuesday if that will be all right," she said—and: I answered:

"Thank you" and turned my face to the wall—And after a little, when she had gone, Burton came in and gave me the medicine the Doctor had told him to give me, he said—but I have a strong suspicion it was simply asperine, for then I fell into a dreamy sleep and forgot my aching body and my troubled mind.

And now I am much better in health again—and am back in Paris and to-night Maurice, up from Deauville at last, is coming to dine with me.

But what is the good of it all?

XV

I was awfully glad to see old Maurice again—he was looking brown and less dilettante—though his socks and tie and eyes matched as well as ever! He congratulated me on the improvement in health in myself too, and then he gave me all the news—.

Odette has been "painting the lily," and used some new skin tightener which has disfigured her for the moment, and she has retired to the family place near Bordeaux to weep until her complexion is restored again—.

"Very unfortunate for her," Maurice said—"because she had nearly secured a roving English peer who had enjoyed 'cushy' jobs during the war, and had been recruiting from the fatigues of red-taping at Deauville—and now, with this whisper of a spoiled skin, he had transferred his attentions to Coralie—and there was trouble among the graces!"—Alice's plaintiveness had actually caught a very rich neutral who was forwarding philanthropic schemes for great ladies—and she hoped soon to wed.

Coralie seemed in the most secure and happy case, since she is already established, and can enjoy herself without anxiety.—Maurice hinted that but for her *béguin* for me, she could land the English peer, and divorce poor René—her docile war husband—and become an English Countess!

"Thou hast upset everything, Nicholas. Duquesnois is desolated—Coralie changed directly she saw you here—he says—and then to divert herself and forget you, took Lord Brockelbank from Odette!"

"*Vieux coquin! Va!*" and Maurice patted me on the back—.

They were enchanted with my presents to them lately, he added, and were all longing to return to Paris soon and thank me.

The war was simply growing into a nuisance and the quicker it was over the better for everyone.(!)

Then he beat about the bush for a little longer and at last began to grow nearer the vital subject!—

He had seen some of my Mont Aubin relations—fortunately for me, they have been far from Paris in this last year—and they had anxiously asked him if I thought of marrying?—What in fact was I doing with myself now that my wounds were healing?

I laughed—.

"I am so glad my mother was an only child and they are none of them near enough to have the right to bore me—they had better continue their good works at Biarritz—I am told my cousin Marguerite's convalescent home is a marvel! I have sent her frequent donations."

Then Maurice plunged in—.

"You are not—becoming entangled in any way with your secretary, are you *Mon ami*?" he asked.

I had decided beforehand that I would not get angry at anything he said—so I was ready for this.

"No, Maurice—" and I poured out a second glass of port for him—Burton had left us alone by now—. "Miss Sharp does not know that I exist—she is simply here to do her work, and is the best secretary any man could want—I knew Coralie would infect you with some silly idea."

Maurice sipped his port.—"Coralie said that in spite of the girl's glasses there was some air of distinction about her—as she walked on—and that she *knew* and *felt* you were interested."

I remained undisturbed.

"I am, immensely interested—I want to know who she really is. She is a lady—even a lady of our world.—I mean she knows about things in England—where she has never been—that she could not possibly know unless her family had spoken of them always. She has that unconscious air of familiarity and ease with subjects which would surprise you. Can't you find anything out for me, old boy, as to who she is?"

"I will certainly try—Sharp?—it is not a name of the great world—no—?"

"Of course that is not her real name—"

"Why not ask her yourself, *Mon brave!*"

"I'd like to find a man with pluck enough to ask her anything she did not wish him to!"

"That little girl!—but she appeared meek and plain, and respectable, Nicholas—You intrigue me!"

"Well, put your wits to work Maurice, and promise me you will not talk to the others about anything. I shall be very angry if you do."

He gave me every assurance he would be silent as the grave—and then he changed the topic to that of Suzette—He was sorry I had given her her congé, because I would find it hard to replace her—Those so honest and really not too rapacious, were very difficult to find—Since he had heard that Suzette was no longer my little friend, he had been looking out for me, but as yet had seen nothing suitable!!

"You need not trouble, Maurice," I told him, "I am absolutely finished with that part of my life—I loathe the whole idea of it now—."

Maurice inspected me with grave concern—.

"My dear chap—this appears serious—You are not *in love* with your secretary are you?—or is it possible that you are bluffing, and that she has replaced Suzette, and you wish tranquility about the subject?"

I felt a hot flush mounting to my forehead—The very thought of my adored little girl in the category of Suzette!—I could have struck my old friend—but I had just sense enough to reason things. Maurice was only speaking as any of the Paris world would speak. A secretary, whom a man was obviously interested in, was certainly not out of the running for the post of "*Maitresse-en-titre!*"

He meant no personal disrespect to Alatheia. For him women were either of the world or they were not!—True, there was an intermediate class "*Les braves gens*"—*Bourgeoises*—servants, typists, etc., etc.—But one could only be interested in one of these for one reason. That is how things appeared to Maurice. I knew his views; perhaps I had shared them in some measure in my unregenerate days.

"Look here Maurice—I want you to understand—that Miss Sharp is a lady in every way—I have already told you this but you don't seem to have grasped it—and that she has my greatest respect—and it makes me sick to think of anyone talking of her as you have just done. Although I know you did not mean anything low, you old owl!—She treats me as though I were a tiresome, elderly employer—whom she must give obedience to, but is not obliged to converse with. She would not permit the slightest friendship or familiarity from any man she worked for."

"Your interest is then serious, Nicholas?"

Maurice was absolutely aghast!

"My *respect* is serious—my curiosity is hot—and I want information."——

Maurice tried to feel relieved—.

"Supposing financial disaster fell upon your family, old boy—would you consider your sister less of a lady because she had to earn bread for you all by being a typist!"

"Of course not—but it would be very dreadful!—Marie!—Oh! I could not think of it!"

"Then try to get the idea into your thick head that Miss Sharp is Marie—and behave accordingly—That is how I look at her."

Maurice promised that he would, and our talk turned to the Duchesse—he had seen her at a cross country station as he came up, and she would be back in Paris the following week—This thought gave me comfort. Everyone would be back by the fifteenth of October he assured me, and then we could all amuse ourselves again—.

"You will be quite well enough to dine out, Nicholas—Or if not you must move to the Ritz with me, so that you at least have entertainment on the spot, *Mon cher!*"

We spoke then of the book—Furniture was a really refined and interesting subject for me to be delving into. Maurice longed to read the proofs, he averred.

When he had left me, I lay back in my chair and asked myself what had happened to me?—that Maurice and all that lot seemed such miles and miles

away from me—as miles and miles as they would have seemed in their triviality, when we used to discuss important questions in "Pop" at Eton.

How I must have sunk in the years which followed those dear old days, ever even to have found divertisement among the people like Maurice and the fluffies. Surely even a one-eyed and one-legged man ought to be able to do something for his country politically, it suddenly seemed to me—and what a glorious picture to gaze at!—If I could some day go into Parliament, and have Alatheia beside me, to give me inspiration and help me to the best in myself. How her poise would tell in English political society! How her brain and her power of exercising her critical faculties! Apart from the fact that I love every inch of her wisp of a body—What an asset that mind would be to any man!—And I dreamed and dreamed in the firelight—things all filled with sentiment and exaltation, which of course no fellow could ever say aloud, or let anyone know of—A journal is certainly an immense comfort, and I do not believe I could have gone through this hideous year of my life without it.

How I would love to have Alatheia for my wife—and have children—It can't be possible that I have written that! I loathe children in the abstract—they bore me to death—Even Solonge de Clerté's two entertaining angels—but to have a son—with Alatheia's eyes—God! how the thought makes me feel!—How I would like to sit and talk with her of how we should bring him up—I reached out my hand and picked up a volume of Charles Lamb and read "Dream Children"—and as I finished I felt that idiotic choky sensation which I have only begun to know since something in me has been awakened by Alatheia—or since my nerves have been on the rack—I don't remember ever feeling much touched, or weak, or silly, before the war—.

And now what have I to face—?

A will, stronger, or as strong as my own—A prejudice of the deepest which I cannot explain away—A knowledge that I have no power to retain the thing I love—No guerdon to hold out to her mentally or physically—Nothing but the material thing of money—which because of her great unselfishness and desire to benefit her loved ones, she might be forced to consider. My only possibility of obtaining her at all is to buy her with money. And when once bought,—when I had her here in my house,—would I have the strength to resist the temptation to take advantage of the situation?—Could I go on day after day never touching her,—never having any joys?—until the greatness of my love somehow melted her dislike and contempt of me—?

I wish to God I knew.

She will never marry me unless I give my word of honour that the thing will only be an empty ceremony—of that I feel sure even if circumstances aid me to force her into doing this much. And then one has to keep one's word of honour. And might not that be a greater hell than I am now in of suffering?

Perhaps I had better go to the sea—like Suzette—and try to break the whole chain and forget her—.

I rang the bell for Burton then, and told him of my new plan, as he put me to bed. We would go off to St. Malo,—for a week, and I gave orders that he should make the necessary arrangements to get permits. To travel anywhere now is no end of a difficulty.

I wrote to Alatheia without weakening—I asked her to collect the Mss. and make notes of what she thought still should be altered—during my absence—I wrote as stiffly, and in as business like a manner as possible—and finally I went to sleep, and slept better than I have done for some time.

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St. Malo:

How quaint these places are! I am at this deserted corner by the sea—where the hotel is comfortable, and hardly touched by the war—I am not happy—the air is doing me good, that is all—I have brought books—I am not trying to write—I just read and endeavor to sleep—and the hours pass. I tell myself continually that I am no more interested in Alatheia—that I am going to get well, and go back to England—that I have emerged, and am a man with a free will once more—and I am a great deal better—.

After all, how absurd to be thinking of a woman, from morning to night!

When I get my new leg, and everything is all healed, up in a year or two, shall I be able to ride again?—Of course I shall, no doubt, and even play a little tennis?—I can shoot anyway—if we will be allowed to preserve partridges and pheasants when the war is over in England.

Yes, of course life is a gorgeous thing—I like the fierce wind to blow in my face—and yesterday, much to Burton's displeasure, I went out sailing—.

How could I be such a fool, he inferred—as to chance a wrench putting me back some months again—But one has to chance things occasionally. I never enjoyed a sail more because of this very knowledge.

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A week has passed since we came to this end of the earth—and again I have grown restless—perhaps it is because Burton came in just now with a letter in his hand—. I recognized immediately Alatheia's writing.

"I made so bold as to leave the young lady our address before we left, Sir Nicholas, in case she wanted to communicate with us, and she writes now to say, would I be good enough to ask you if you took with you Chapter Seven, because she cannot find it anywhere."

Then he went on with evident constraint to tell me that the rest of the letter said that while she was working on Friday a "Mademoiselle la Blonde" called, and insisted upon passing Pierre who answered the door—and coming in to her—"It was Mam'zelle of course, Sir Nicholas!" Burton snapped!) And that she had demanded my address—but Miss Sharp had not felt she was justified in giving it to her—but had said letters would be forwarded—.

"I hope to goodness that the baggage made no scene with the young lady, Sir Nicholas," Burton growled—"Of course she don't say in the letter—but it's more than likely—I would not have her insulted for the world."

"Nor I either," I retorted angrily—"Suzette ought to know better now that I have given her everything she wanted—Will you let her understand please that this must not occur again—."

"I'll see that the lawyer does it, Sir—that is the only way to deal with them persons—though Mam'zelle was the best of her sort. Seems to me Sir Nicholas, they are more bother than they are worth. I said it always, even when I was younger—They leave their trail of trouble where ever they go."

How I agreed with him!

So here was a fresh barrier arisen between Alatheia and myself!—a fresh barrier which I cannot explain away. The only comfort I get out of the whole thing is that imperative necessity must have been driving my little darling—or she would not put up with any of these things for a moment, and would have given her *demission* at the same time as she wrote.

If money is so necessary to her—perhaps after all I could get her consent to marry me—The very thought made my pulses bound again—and all my calm flew to the winds! All the sage reasoning which was beginning to have an effect upon me evaporated!—I knew that once more I was as utterly under the spell of her attraction, as the moment when my passionate lips touched her soft reluctant ones—Ah! that thought! that memory—One I have never let myself indulge in—but now, all resistance broken on every side,—I spent the rest of the day dreaming about the joy of that kiss—until by night time I was as mad as a hatter, and more full of cruel unrest than ever—.

I hate this place—I hate the sea—It is all of no use—I shall go back to Paris.



XVI

The first thing I learned when I reached the *appartement* was that the Duchesse had returned, and wished to see me. This was good news—and without even telephoning to Maurice, I got into my one horse Victoria and repaired to the Hotel de Courville—.

The Duchesse was sitting in her boudoir upstairs when I got in.—She had a quaint expression upon her face. I was not certain that her greeting was as cordial as usual—Has gossip reached her ears also?

I sat down near her and she took my crutch from me tenderly, her instinct for "*blessés*" never failing her.

I thought I would begin at once before she could say anything which might make questioning her impossible.

"I have been longing to see you, Duchesse, to ask you if you could help me to find out who my secretary, Miss Sharp, is?—because I saw her here in the passage one day, and I thought you might possibly be able to identify her—."

"*Tiens?*"

"Her christian name is 'Alathea'—I heard her little sister call her that once when I saw them and they did not see me, in the *Bois*—She is a lady—and I feel Sharp is not her name at all."

The Duchesse put on her eyeglasses—.

"She has not shown a sign that she wishes you to know her history?"

"No—"

"Then, my son, do you think it is very good taste to endeavor to discover it?"

"Perhaps not—" I was nettled—I hated that the Duchesse should be displeased with me, then I went on—"I fear that she is very poor and I know that her little

brother died just lately, and I would give anything in the world to help them in some way."

"Sometimes one helps more by showing discretion."

"You won't assist me then, Duchesse? I *feel* that you know Miss Sharp."

She frowned—.

"Nicholas—if I did not love you really, I should be angry.—Am I the character to betray friends—presuming that I have friends—for a young man's curiosity?"

"Indeed it is not curiosity—it is because I want to help—."

"Camouflage!"

I felt angry now.

"You assume that your secretary is a *demoiselle du monde*"—she went on—"if you have reached that far—you should know that there is some honor, some *tenue* left in old families,—and so you should treat her with consideration, and respect her incognito.—All this is not like you, my son!"

The Duchesse had dropped the "thee and thou"—it hurt me.

"I want to treat her with every respect—" I reiterated.

"Then believe me it is unnecessary for you to know her name—I am not altogether pleased with you, Nicholas."

"Dear Duchesse! that grieves me—I wish I could explain—I have only wanted to be kind—and I don't even know her address and could not send flowers when her brother died."

"They did not want flowers, perhaps—Take my advice—of the best I can give—Pay your secretary her wages—as high ones as she will accept—and then treat her as if she were fifty years old—and wore glasses!"

"She does wear glasses—abominable yellow horn rimmed spectacles!" I announced excitedly.—"Have you never seen them?"

The Duchesse's eyes flashed—.

"I have not said I ever met Miss Sharp, Nicholas—"

I knew the affair was now hopeless—and that I would only risk the real displeasure of my dear old friend if I continued in this way. So I subsided.—I had some instinct too that I would not receive sympathy even if I owned that my intentions were strictly honourable.

"I will say no more—except that should you know these people *cherè Duchesse*—and you ever discover that I could help them in any way—that you will call upon me to any extent."

The fiery vixen Suzette (Renee Adoree) is enraged to learn of Sir Nicholas' (Lew Cody) attentions to other women, and leaves in a flurry. (A scene from Elinor Glyn's production "Man and Maid" for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer)

[The fiery vixen Suzette \(Renee Adoree\) is enraged to learn of Sir Nicholas' \(Lew Cody\) attentions to other women, and leaves in a flurry. \(A scene from Elinor Glyn's production "Man and Maid" for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer\)](#)

She looked at me very searchingly and said laconically.

"*Bien.*"

Then we talked of other things, and I tried to reingratiate myself—The war was going better—Foch would wish to push his advantage. Things must have some end—in the near future.—When was I going to England?—All these subjects we discussed.

"When I am out of the hands of these doctors and have my new leg and eye—I will return, and then, I want to go into Parliament."

The Duchesse warmed up at once.—That was just the thing for me to do—that and to marry some nice girl of my own world, of which there must be an embarrassment of choice—with all the men killed in my country!

"I would want such an exceptional woman, Duchesse!"

"Do not look for the moon, my son—Be thankful if she has been sufficiently well brought up to have a decent conduct—the manners of the young girls now revolt me.—I try to go with the times—but these new fashions are disgusting."

"Do you think a woman ought to be perfectly innocent and ignorant of life to make the marriage happy—" I asked.

"The insides of the minds of young girls one is never sure of, but the *tendue* should be correct at all costs, so that they may have something to uphold them as well as religion—which is no longer so surrounding as it used to be."

"Duchesse, I want someone who would love me passionately, and whom I could passionately love."

"For that, my poor boy—" and she sighed—"it is not found among young girls—these things come after one knows, and can discriminate—put them aside from your thoughts—they are temptations which one resists if one can, and at all events makes no scandals about.—Love! *Mon Dieu*, it is the song of the poets, it cannot happen in the world—with satisfaction—It must be a pain always—Do your duty to your race, and your class—and try not to mix up sentiment with it!"

"There is no hope of my finding someone I could really love, then?"

"I do not know—in your own country it may be—here it is the wife of someone else who holds the charm—and if it were not for *tendue* society could not exist.

"All that one must ask of the young is that they act with discretion, so that they can reach the autumn of life without scandals against their names—If the *Bon Dieu* adds love—then they have been indeed fortunate."

"But Duchesse—with your great heart—have you never loved—?"

Her eyes seemed to grow beautiful and young again—they diffused a fire—.

"Loved—Nicholas—! All women love once in their lives—happy for them if it has not burnt their souls in its passage—Happy if the *Bon Dieu* has let it merge into love for humanity—" And soft tears dimmed the dark blue brilliancy.

I leaned forward and kissed her hand with deep devotion—then the ancient servitor came in and she was called to a ward—but I left feeling that if there is really some barrier of family between Alatheia and me—there would be no use in my appealing to the Duchesse—Sorrows she understands—and war and suffering—and self-sacrifice—Love she understands and passion—and all that appertains thereto—but all these things go to the wall before the conception of the meaning of *noblesse oblige* which ruled when Adelaide de Mont Orgeuil—wedded the Duc de Courville-Hautevine, in the eighties! The only thing left now was to telephone to Maurice—.

He came in for a few minutes just before dinner—.

He has questioned Alwood Chester of the American Red Cross, who had told him that Miss Sharp had been Miss Sharp always while she worked for them, and that no one knew anything further about her.

Well!—if her father is a convict, and her mother—in a mad house, and her sister consumptive—I still want her for herself—.

Is that true—Could I face disease and insanity coming into my family—?

I don't know—All I know is that I do not believe whatever curse hangs over the rest it has touched her—She is the picture of health and balance and truth—Her every action is noble—and I love her—I love her—there!

Next day she came in at ten as usual—She brought all the chapters annotated—. As her attitude towards me had been as cold as it was possible for an attitude to be, I cannot say that there was any added shade of contempt since her interview with Suzette—What had passed between them perhaps Burton will be able gradually to discover—.

I controlled myself, and behaved with a businesslike reserve—She had nothing to snub me for, or to disturb her—She took the papers at twelve o'clock—and I sighed as she left the room—I had watched her furtively for nearly two hours—Her face was a mask—And she might indeed really have been concentrating upon the work in hand. Her hands are whitening considerably—. I believe their redness had something to do with her little brother, perhaps she put very hot things on his chest.—I have never seen such a white skin—it shows like mother of pearl against the cheap black frock—The line of the throat is like my fascinating Nymph with the shell—indeed the mouth is not unlike her's also. I wonder if she has dimples—but I had better not think of those things—!

I am now determined to ask her to marry me on the first occasion I can screw up my courage sufficiently. I have decided what I am going to say. I am going to be quite matter of fact—I shan't tell her that I love her even—I feel if I can secure her first I shall have a better chance afterwards. If she thought I loved her, her nature is of that honest kind that she might think it was dishonorable to make so uneven a bargain with me—but if she just thinks I want her for my secretary and to play to me—and even perhaps that there is some brute part which she despises mixed up in my feeling for her—and which I would promise to keep in check—she may feel that it is fair for her to take my name, and my money, and give me nothing in return.

After lunch, which we did not have together, George Harcourt came in, and diverted me until four o'clock.

After we had discussed the war news for a long time he began as usual about Violetta—.

She was perfection!—She had fulfilled all he had ever asked of a woman—but— or rather in consequence of this—she had begun to bore him, while a new vixen with no heart and the brain of a rabbit—now drew him strangely!

"And what are you going to do about it, my dear George?"

"Deceive her of course, Nicholas. It is a painful necessity that my kind heart forces me to perpetrate."

He was smoking contemplatively.

I laughed—.

"You see, dear boy—one can't be brutal with the little darlings, so that is the only course open to one, for their limited reasoning power does not enable them to grasp that it is not one's fault at all when one ceases to care—the trouble lies with their own weakening attraction.—So one has to go on bluffing until they themselves weary, or find out inadvertently that one's affection has been transferred!"

"Don't you think there are some to whom you could tell the truth?"

"I have not met any—if they do exist."

"If I were a woman it would insult me far more for a man to think I was so stupid that he could deceive me, than if he said frankly he no longer cared."

"Probably—but then women don't reason in that way—you might prove by every law of logic that it was because they themselves had disillusioned you, and that you had no control over the coming or going of your emotion—but at the end of your peroration they would still reproach you for being a fickle brute, and believe themselves blameless, and sinned against!"

"It is all very difficult!"—I sighed unconsciously—.

—"Are you in some mess, my son?" George asked concernedly.—"In your case with Suzette, money can always smooth things—she has perhaps been

annoying?"

"I have entirely finished with Suzette—George, how a man pays for all his follies—Have you, with all your affairs, ever got off scot free?"

George leaned back in his chair—his well cut face which expresses as a rule a rather kindly whimsical cynicism grew stern—and his very voice altered.

"Nicholas—one has to pay one's shot every time—A man pays in money, or in jewels or in disgrace, or in regret and remorse—and he has to calculate beforehand to what extent that which he desires is worth the price which will become due—It is a brainless idiot who does not calculate, or who laments when he has to stump up. I admit women are of supreme interest to me, and their companionship and affection—bought or otherwise—are necessary to my existence—So I resignedly discharged my debt every time."

"How will you pay it then about Violetta whom you say is an angel, and blameless?"

"I shall have some disgusting moments of discomfort and remorse—and feel a moral Bluebeard—I shan't go scot free—."

"And she—? That won't help her."

"She will pay in tears for having been weak enough to love me—she will feel the consolation of martyrdom—and soon forget me."

"And you don't think one incurs some kind of hoodoo—in indulging in these things—I am thinking of Suzette—her shadow—almost one would say projected by fate, is what is causing me trouble now, not any deliberate action she is committing against me."

"Part of the price, my boy! You can't steal anything, or do anything against the law, be it of man or of morals or of the spirit—that you don't have to pay for it—and there is no use in haggling beforehand or in squealing after. The thing is to learn early enough in life what is worth while and what you really want, before you lay up for yourself limitations."

"That is true—."

"Now let us analyse what gains and losses you have had in the Suzette business. Let us take the gains first—You had a jolly little companion during some months

of pain and weariness—She helped you over a difficult moment—You were not leading her astray. To be the friend of war-heroes was her *métier*—you paid her highly in solid cash—You are under no obligation to her—. But the law has decreed that man must have no illicit relations, so the force of that current, or belief, or whatever it is, makes you pay some price for having broken the law—Accept it and get through with it—And if the price has been too heavy decide not to incur such debts again. The whole bother occurs because you don't look ahead, my boy! There was a case when I was a youngster and just joined my Battalion of Guards which will illustrate what I mean, of Bobby Bulteel, Hartelford's brother.—He cheated at cards—He was a kind of cousin of my mother's so the family felt the scandal awfully—He was kicked out of course, and utterly broke, and Lady Hilda Marchant ran off with him, and left her husband. She adored the fellow who had every charm—Well that was not worth while—The odds are too heavy for anyone ever to have the ghost of a chance to pull cheating off. He was simply a fool, you see. Take chances, but never when the scales have gone beyond the angle of forty-five degrees!"—Then having finished his cigar George rose in the best of tempers—.

"You may take it from me Nicholas—it sounds old fashioned—but to behave like a gentleman and always be ready to discharge your obligations, are the best rules for life.—Ta ta, dear boy—Shall look in on you soon again—" and he went!

Of course his logic is unanswerable—So I had better accept the shadow of Suzette falling upon my relation with Alatheia, and try to gain my end in spite of it—And what is my very end?

Not of course that I shall spend the rest of my life as Alatheia's husband-in-name-only, hungry and longing and miserable—but that after securing her certain companionship I shall overcome her prejudices, conquer her aversion, and make her love me.—But to have the chance to do all this it is absolutely necessary that I shall be near her always—So my idea of marriage is not so far-fetched after all!

And if she will accept me, someday, upon *any terms*—provided they do not mean separation—I shall believe that half the battle is won—I feel more cheerful already!—How sound reasoning does one good, even if it is as baldly brutal as George's!



XVII

Burton gave forth some information this evening, as he was dressing me for dinner. He had now discovered from Pierre how Suzette had behaved when she intruded upon Alatheia. She had entered the room—"Passing Pierre without so much as asking his leave, and he with his wooden leg not so nimble as might be!" She had gone to the writing table and demanded my address. "An affair of business which must be attended to at once," she had announced. Pierre standing at the door had heard all this. Burton added "He said that Mam'zelle was that scented and that got up, of course Miss Sharp must have known what she was."

Alatheia apparently had answered with dignity, that she had received no orders to give any address, but that letters would be forwarded.

"She took no more notice of Mam'zelle than if she was a chair," Pierre had told him—who, having his own troubles with women, was prepared to see a conflict! Suzette became nonplussed, and losing her temper a little told Alatheia that she hoped she would get as much out of the situation as she herself had done! Alatheia continued writing as though she had not heard, and then told her quite politely in French, that if she would kindly leave whatever letters were to be sent on, she would see that they went that night, and had added:

"Now, I need not detain you longer." Suzette became furious, and stamping, said she was "Mademoiselle la Blonde," and had more right there than Alatheia!

Pierre had here interfered, and catching hold of Suzette's arm, had dragged her from the room.

I tingled with shame and wrath. That the person I respect most in the world should have been exposed to such a scene—! Burton too was horrified—.

I had the most awful sensation of discomfort—the very fact of having to hear of all this through servants was sufficiently disgusting, without the events themselves being so degrading.

What must Alatheia think of me! And I cannot even allude to the subject. How

wonderful her dignity has been that she has allowed no extra contempt to come into her manner.

How shall I have the pluck to ask her to marry me? I mean to do so to-morrow when she comes.

Saturday:

I am going to write the events of these last days down without any comment.

I came in to the sitting-room after Alatheia had arrived. She was writing at her desk in the little salon. I looked in and asked her if she would come in and speak to me. Then I got to my chair. She entered obediently with the block in her hand, ready to begin work.

"Will you sit down, please," I said, indicating a chair, where she would face me and the light, so that no shade of her expression should be lost upon me. (I shall become quite an expert in reading mouths. I am obliged to study hers so closely!)

I felt less nervous than I have ever felt when with her. I thought there was the faintest shade of alertness in her manner.

"I am going to say something which will surprise you very much, Miss Sharp," I began.

She raised her head a little.

"I will put the case to you quite baldly—I am very rich as you know—I am still horrid to look at—I am lonely and I want a companion who would play the piano to me, and who would help me to write books, and who would travel with me. I cannot have any of these simple things because of the scandal people would make—so there is only one course open to me—that is to go through the marriage ceremony—Miss Sharp—under those terms will you marry me?"

Her attitude had become tense—her face did not flush, it became very pale. She remained perfectly silent for a moment. I felt just the same as I used to do before going over the top—a queer kind of excitement—a wonder if I'd come through or not.

As she did not answer I went on. "I would not expect anything from you except a

certain amount of your company. There would not be any question of living with me as a wife—I would promise even to keep in check that side which you once saw and which I was so sorry about. I would settle lots of money on you, and give anything to your family you might wish. I would not bother you, you would be quite free—only I would like you to take interest in my work in a way—and to play to me—even if you would not talk to me."

My voice broke a little at the end of this; I was conscious of it, and of how weak it was of me. Her hands clasped together suddenly—and she appeared as though she was going to speak, then remained silent.

"Won't you answer me at all?" I pleaded.

"It is such a strange proposal—I would wish to refuse it at once——"

"It is quite bald, I know," I interrupted quickly. "I want to buy you—that is all—you can name the price. I know if you consented it would merely be for the same reason which makes you work. I presume it is for your family, not for yourself; therefore, I am counting upon that to influence you. Whatever you would want for your family I should be delighted to give you."

She twisted her locked hands—the first sign of real emotion I have seen in her.

"You would marry me—without knowing anything about me? It is very strange —."

"Yes. I think you are extremely intelligent—if you would consent to talk to me sometimes. I want to go into Parliament—when I am patched up and more decent looking, and I believe you would be of the greatest help to me."

"You mean the whole thing simply as a business arrangement?"

"I have already stated that."

She started to her feet.

"The bargain," I went on, "would be quite a fair one. I am offering to buy a thing which is not for sale—therefore, I am willing to pay whatever would tempt the owner to part with it. I am not mixing up any sentiment in the affair. I want the brain of you for my scheme of life, and the laws of the quaintly civilized society to which we belong, do not permit me to hire it—I must buy it outright. I put it to you net—is there any way we can effect this deal?"

Her lips were quivering—.

"You would say this, no matter what you might hear of my family?"

"I am quite unconcerned as to their history. I have observed you, and you possess all the qualities which I want in the partner who can help me to live my new life. For me you are just a personality—" (thus I lied valiantly!) "not a woman."

"Can I believe you?" she asked a little breathlessly.

"You are thinking of that day when I kissed you—" her lips told me by their sudden drawing in, that she was agitated.

"Well—I expect really that you know men well enough, Miss Sharp, to know that they have sudden temptations—but that a strong will can overcome them. I was very much moved about your grief that afternoon, and the suppressed emotion, and the exasperation you had caused me, unbalanced me—I am quite unlikely ever to feel again—if you will marry me, I will give you my word I will never touch you, or expect anything, of you except what you agree to give in the bargain. You can lead your own life—and I can lead mine."

I felt suddenly that these last words were not very wise—for they aroused in her mind the thought that I should go on having friends like Suzette. I hastened to add—

"You will have my deepest respect, and as my wife shall be treated with every courtesy and honour."

She sat down again and raised her hands to her eyes as though to remove her glasses, and then remembered and dropped them.

"I see that you would rather not answer to-day, Miss Sharp—you might prefer to go now and think about it?"

"Thank you." She turned and walked back into the little salon without a word more, and when she went I closed my eye exhausted with the great strain.

But I did not feel altogether hopeless until Burton came in to tell me lunch was ready and said that Alatheia had gone.

"The young lady said as how she would not be back she expected, and she took her own pens and things in her bag. She was as white as a lily, give you my word, Sir Nicholas."

I am ashamed to say that I felt a little faint then. Had I overstepped the mark, and should I never see her again?

A whole party of the fluffies were coming to dinner, and we were to have a very gay evening. I ordered my one horse Victoria and went for a drive in the *Bois*, to calm myself, and the trees with their early autumn tints seemed to mock at me. I could see too much beauty in them, and it hurt. Everything hurt! This was certainly the worst afternoon I have had to bear since I came to on No-Man's Land near Langemarke. But I suppose at dinner I played the game, for Coralie and the rest congratulated me.

"Getting quite well, Nicholas! And of a *chic*! *Va!*"

We played poker afterwards and the stakes were high, and I was the winner the whole time, until I could see anxiety creep into more than one eye (pair of eyes! I have got so accustomed to writing of eyes in the singular that I forget!) We had quantities of champagne and some exotic musicians Maurice had procured for me, and a nude Hindoo dancer.

Everyone went more or less mad.

They left about four in the morning, all rather drunk, if one must write it. But the more I had drunk the more hideously sober and filled with anguish I seemed to become, until when I had called the last cheery good-night and was at last alone in my bed, I felt as if the end had come, and that death would be the next and only good thing which could happen to me.

I have never before had this strange detached sense in such measure as this night. As of a hungry agonized spirit standing outside its wretched body, and watching its feeble movements, conscious of their futility, conscious of being chained to the miserable thing, and only knowing rebellion and agony.

Burton gave me a sleeping draught, and I slept far into the next day to awake more unhappy than ever, obsessed with self-contempt and degradation.

In the afternoon, I received a note from Maurice, telling me that he had inadvertently heard that a fellow in the American Red Cross had seen Miss Sharp's passport, when she had been sent down to Brest for them, and the name on it was Alatheia Bulteel Sharp, and judging that the second name sounded as if it might be a well-known English one, he hastened to tell me, in case it should be a clue. I could not think where I had heard it before, or with what memory it was

connecting in my brain. I had a feeling it was something to do with George Harcourt. I puzzled for a while, and then I looked back over the pages of my journal, and there found what I had written of his conversation—Bobby Bulteel—Hartelford's brother—cheating at cards—and married to Lady Hilda Marchant

Of course!—The whole thing became plain to me! This would account for everything. I hobbled up and got down the peerage. I turned to the Hartelford title, and noted the brothers—the Hon'bles—John Sinclair, Charles Henry, and Robert Edgar. This last must be "Bobby" Then I read the usual things—"Educated at Eton and Christchurch, etc., etc." "Left the Guards in 1893." "Married in 1894—Lady Hilda Farwell, only daughter of the Marquess of Braxted (title extinct) and divorced wife of William Marchant, Esquire." "Issue —"

"Alathea—born 1894, John Robert born 1905, and Hilda born 1907."

So the whole tragic story seemed to unfold itself before me.

Alathea is the child of that great love and sacrifice of her Mother—I read again the words George had used: "She adored the fellow who had every charm." All the world might cast him out, but that one faithful woman gave up home and name and honour, to follow him in his disgrace. That was love indeed, however misplaced! I looked again at the dates and made a calculation of the time divorces took then, and I saw that my little darling girl could only have escaped illegitimacy by perhaps a few hours!

What had her life been? I pictured it. They must have hidden diminished heads in hole and corner places during the dreary years. Such a man as Bobby Bulteel must have been, as George said, a weakling. The Hartlefords were poor as church mice, and were not likely to assist a scapegrace, who had dishonoured them. I remembered hearing that on the old Lord Braxted's death years ago, Braxted was sold to the Merrion-Walters, Ironfounders from Leeds. No doubt the old man had cut his daughter off without the traditional shilling, but even so, some hundreds a year must have been theirs. What then did the poverty of Alathea suggest? That some constant drain must be going on all the time. Could the scapegrace still be a gambler, and that could account for it? This seemed the most probable explanation.

Then all over me there rushed a mad worship for my little love. Her splendid unselfishness, her noble self-sacrifice, her dignity, her serenity. I could have

kissed the ground under her feet.

I made Burton spend untold time telephoning to the Embassy, and then to Versailles to Colonel Harcourt—would he not dine with me? He was sorry he was engaged but he would lunch the next day. Then when the long evening was in front of me alone—I could hardly bear it. And, driven to desperation at last, when Burton was undressing me, I said to him:

"Did you ever know anything of the Hartlefords, Burton—Buldeel is the family name?"

"Can't say as I did personally, Sir Nicholas," he answered, "but of course, when I was a young boy taking my first fourth-footman's place, before I came to your father, Sir Guy, at Her Grace of Wiltshire's, I could not help hearing of the scandal about the cheating at cards. The whole nobility and gentry was put to about it, and nothing else was talked of at dinner."

"Try and tell me what you remember of the story."

So Burton held forth in his own way for a quarter of an hour. There had been no possible doubt of the crime, it was the week after the Derby, and Buldeel had lost heavily it was said. He was caught red-handed and got off abroad that night, and the matter would have been hushed up probably but for the added sensation of Lady Hilda's elopement with him. That set society by the ears, and the thing was the thrill of the season. Mr. Marchant had been "all broken-up" by it, and delayed the divorce so that as far as Burton could remember, Captain Buldeel could not marry Lady Hilda for more than a year afterwards. All this coincided with what I already knew. Lord Braxted too, "took on fearful," and died of a broken heart it was said, leaving every cent to charity. The entail had been cut in the generation before and the title became extinct at his death.

I did not tell Burton then of my discovery, and lay long hours in the dark, thinking and thinking.

What did the Duchesse's attitude mean? In the eyes of the Duchesse de Courville-Hautevine, *née* Adelaide de Mont Orgeuil—to cheat at cards would be the worst of all the cardinal sins. Such a man as Bobby Buldeel must be separated from his kind. She knew Lady Hilda probably (the Duchesse often stayed in England with my mother) and she probably felt a disapproving pity for the poor lady. The great charity of her mind would be touched by suffering, if the suffering was apparent, and perhaps she had some affection for the girl Alatheia.

But no affection could bridge the gulf which separated the child of an outcast from her world. The sins of the father would inevitably be visited upon the children by an unwritten law, and although she might love Alatheia herself, she could not countenance her union with me. The daughter of a man who had cheated at cards should go into a convent. I instinctively felt somehow that this would be her viewpoint.

Does Alatheia know this tragedy about her father? Has she had to live always under this curse? Oh! The pity of it all.

Morning found me more restless and miserable than I have ever been, and it brought no sign of my love!



XVIII

George Harcourt was called suddenly to Rome that morning and so even hearing him talk further about the Bulteels was denied me for the time. I passed some days of the cruelest unrest. There was no sign of Alatheia. I allowed Maurice to drag me out into the world and spent my evenings among my kind.

A number of my old pals have been killed lately, such an irony when the war seems to be drawing to a close! There is still an atmosphere of tension and unrestfulness in the air, though.

After an awful week George Harcourt came back and dropped in to see me. I opened fire at once, and asked him to tell me all that he knew of the Bulteels, especially his old brother officer Bobby.

"I have a particular reason for asking, George," I said.

"Very curious your speaking of them, Nicholas, because there has just been the devil of a fuss in the French Foreign Legion about that infernal blackguard; it came to my knowledge in my work."

"Has he been cheating at cards again?"

George nodded.

"Tell me from the beginning."

So he started—many of the bits I already knew. Lady Hilda had been a great friend of his and he dwelt upon the life of suffering she had had.

"There were a few years of frantic love and some sort of happiness, I expect, and then funds began to give out, and Bobbie's insane desire to gamble led him into the shadiest society, at Baden-Baden and Nice, and other warm spots. Poor Hilda used to go about with him then in a shamed, defiant way, running from any old friend, or staring over his head. I happened upon them once or twice in my wanderings; then I lost sight of them for some years, and the next thing was someone told me the poor woman had broken down and was a nervous wreck,

and two children had been born in quick succession, when the first one was about eleven years old, and the whole family were in miserable straits. I think relations paid up that time—with the understanding that never again were they to be applied to. And since then I have heard nothing until the other day it came to my ears that the eldest girl—she must be over twenty now, was supporting the entire family. One of the children died lately, and now Bobby has put the cap on it. I am sorry for them, but Bobby is impossible."

Oh! My poor little girl, what a life! How I longed to take her out of it!

He went on.

"Strange how certain instincts show themselves under every condition. Bobby was no physical coward, and to talk to and mix with casually, the most perfect gentleman you ever met. Awfully well read and a topper at classics and history, and sang like a bird. He had the grand manner, and could attract any woman, though to give the devil his due—I believe for some years he was faithful to Lady Hilda."

"I should think so!" I said indignantly. "After accepting her great sacrifice!"

"Nothing lasts, my dear boy, that is not fundamental. Bobby was a rotter through and through, and so he couldn't even behave decently to the woman who had given up everything for him, once her charm went. But—that something in human beings which is unaccountable, when they are well bred, made him join the French Foreign Legion immediately war broke out, and behave with great gallantry."

"What brought on the last episode?"

"He was probably bored in the dull post where he was, with not much fighting to do lately, and resorted to his old game to cover up losses, which he could not pay, and had the bad luck to be caught for the second time. I told you he was a fool and did not know how to calculate the price of his follies."

"When did you hear of this?"

"Only last night on my return, and there will be a disgusting scandal, and the old story will be raked up and it is pretty beastly for Englishmen."

"Can money keep it quiet, George?"

"I expect so, but who would be fool enough to pay for such a fellow?"

"I would, and will, if you can manage it without letting my name appear."

"My dear boy, how does it interest you? Why should you do such a quixotic thing? It is twenty-five thousand francs."

"Only twenty-five thousand francs! I'll give you the cheque this minute George, if you can, in your own way, free the poor devil."

"But Nicholas—you must be mad my dear boy!—Or you have some strong motive I do not know of."

"Yes, I have—I want this chap freed from disaster, not for his sake, but for the sake of the family. What must that poor lady have gone through, and that poor girl!"

George looked at me with his whimsical cynical eye.

"It's awfully decent of you, Nicholas," was all he said though, and I reached for my cheque-book, and wrote a cheque for thirty thousand francs with my stylo.

"You may need the extra five thousand, George—to make sure of the thing, and I count on you to patch it up as soon as you can."

He left after that, promising to see into the affair at once, and telephone me the result—and when he had gone I tried to think over what it all means?

Alathea did not know of this when I asked her to marry me last week. She must never know that I am paying, even if that makes matters easy enough for her to refuse me. The reason of her long silence is because this fresh trouble has fallen upon them, I am sure. I feel so awfully, not being able to comfort her. The whole burden upon those young shoulders.—

Just as I wrote that yesterday, Burton came in to say that Miss Sharp was in the little salon, and wished to see me, and I sent him to pray her to come in. I rose from my chair to bow to her when she entered, she never shakes hands. I was awfully pained to see the change in her. Her poor little white face was thin and woebegone and even her lips pale, and her air was not so proud as usual.

"Won't you sit down," I said with whatever of homage I could put into my voice.

She was so humbled and miserable, that I knew she would even have taken off

her glasses if I had asked her to, but of course I would not do that.

She seemed to find it hard to begin. I felt troubled for her and started.

"I am awfully glad that you have come back."

She locked her hands together, in the shabby, black suede gloves.

"I have come to tell you that if you will give me twenty-five thousand francs this afternoon, I will accept your offer, and will marry you."

I held out my hand in my infinite joy, but I tried to control all other exhibition of emotion.

"That is awfully good of you—I can't say how I thank you," I said in a voice which sounded quite stern. "Of course I will give you anything in the world you want." And again I reached for my cheque-book and wrote a cheque for fifty thousand and handed it to her.

She looked at it, and went crimson.

"I do not want all that, twenty-five thousand is enough. That is the price of the bargain."

I would not let this hurt me.

"Since you have consented to marry me, I have the right to give you what I please—you may need more than you have suggested, and I want everything to be smooth and as you would wish."

She trembled all over.

"I—I cannot argue now, I must go at once; but I will think over what I must say about it."

"If you are going to be my wife, you must know that all that is mine will be yours; so how can a few thousand francs more or less now make any difference, though if you have any feeling concerning it, you can pay me back out of your first month's dress allowance!" and I tried to smile.

She started to her feet.

"When shall I see you again?" I pleaded.

"In two days."

"When will you marry me?"

"Whenever you arrange."

"Must you go now?"

"Yes—I must—I am grateful for your generosity, I will fulfill my side of the bargain."

"And I mine."

I tried to rise, and she handed me my crutch, and then went towards the door, there she turned.

"I will come on Friday at ten o'clock as usual, Good-bye," and she bowed and left me.

What a remarkable way to become an engaged man!! But only joy filled me at that moment. I wanted to shout and sing—and thank God!

Alathea will be mine, and surely it will only be a question of time before I can make her love me, my little girl!

I rang for Burton. I must have rung vigorously for he came in hurriedly.

"Burton," I said, "Congratulate me, my old friend—Miss Sharp has promised to marry me."

For once Burton's imperturbability deserted him, he almost staggered and put his hand to his head.

"God bless my soul, Sir Nicholas," he gasped, and then went on, "Beg pardon, Sir, but that is the best piece of news I ever did hear in my life."

And his dear old eyes were full of tears while he blew his nose vigorously.

"It will be a very quiet wedding, Burton. We shall have it at the Consulate, and I suppose at the church in the *Rue d'Agasseau*, if Miss Sharp is a Protestant—I have never asked her."

"The wedding don't so much matter, Sir Nicholas. It is having the young lady always here to look after you."

"Without her glasses, Burton!"

"As you say Sir, without them horn things." And there was a world of understanding in his faithful eyes.

He left the room presently with the walk of a boy, so elated was he, and I was left alone, thrilling in every nerve with triumph. How I long for Friday I cannot possibly say.

In the afternoon Maurice and Alwood Chester, and Madame de Clerté came to see me, and all exclaimed at my improved appearance.

"Why you look like a million dollars, Nicholas," Alwood said, "What is up, old bird?"

"I am getting well, that is all."

"We are going to have a party on Sunday to introduce you to the loveliest young girl in Paris," Solonge announced. "The daughter of a friend of mine without a great dot, but that does not matter for you, Nicholas. We think that you should marry and marry a *jeune fille française*!"

"That is sweet of you. I have shown how I appreciate young girls, have not I?"

"For that—no!" she laughed, "But the time has come—."

I felt amused, what will Alatheia think of these, my friends? Solonge is the best of them.

Maurice had an air of anxiety underneath his watchful friendliness. He's fine enough to *feel* atmospheres, or whatever it is that comes from people, not in words. He felt that some great change had taken place in me, and he was not sure what aspect it would have in regard to himself. He came back after he had seen Madame de Clerté to her coupé!—She has essence also now,—and his rather ridiculous, kindly, effeminate, little dark face was appealing.

"*Eh bien, mon ami?*" he said.

"*Eh bien?*"

"There is something, Nicholas, what? Was the clue of any use to you?"

"Yes, thank you a thousand times, Maurice, I could trace the whole thing. Miss Sharp comes of a very distinguished family, which I know all about. Her uncle is

a miserable Earl! That is respectable enough, especially a tenth Earl! And her maternal grandfather was a 'Marquess.'"

"*Vrai, mon vieux?*"

"Quite true!"

Maurice was duly interested.

"You were right then about the breeding, it always does show."

I had difficulty in not telling him my news, but I thought it wiser to remain silent until after Friday! Friday! Day of days!

Maurice suspected that there was something beyond in all this, and was not sure which course would be the best to pursue; one of sympathy or unconsciousness. He decided upon the latter and presently left me.

Then I telephoned to Cartier to have some rings sent up to look at. I have a feeling that I must be very discreet about giving Alatheia presents, or she will be resentful and even suspect that my bargain is not entirely a business one. I am afraid I seemed a little too pleased at our interview; I must be indifferently aloof on Friday.

I suppose I had better not give her my mother's pearls until after the ceremony. I wonder if there will be a fuss when I suggest her going to the *Rue de la Paix* for clothes? I apprehend that there will be a stubborn resistance to almost everything I would wish to do.

How will the Duchesse take it! Probably philosophically, once it is an accomplished fact.

At that moment Burton brought me in a note from that very lady! I opened it eagerly, and its contents made me smile.

The Duchesse wrote to remind me of a request I once made her, that if a certain family were in trouble that I would assist them to any amount. Twenty-five thousand francs were now absolutely necessary on the moment, if I could send them to her by bearer, I would know that I was doing a good deed!

For the third time that day I reached for my cheque-book and wrote a cheque, but for only the sum asked on this occasion, and then when Burton had brought me note paper, I sent a little word with it, to the Duchesse, and when I was alone

again I laughed aloud.

Three people determined upon it must surely save the scapegrace!—I wonder which of the three will get there first!

I would not go out anywhere to dinner, I wanted to be alone to think over the whole strange turn of fate. Do strong desires influence events? Or are all these things settled beforehand? Or is there something in reincarnation, which Alatheia believes in, and the actions of one life cause that which looks like fate in the next? We shall have many talks on this subject, I hope.

I wonder, how long it will take for my little love to come voluntarily into my arms?——?



XIX

Saturday:

I wonder how long I shall go on writing in this Journal? I suppose once I should be happy it would not be necessary; well the moment has not yet come, in spite of my being the *fiancé* of the woman I desire.

At ten o'clock I was waiting for her in the sitting-room, and I was thinking of that other time when I waited in anxiety, in case she did not return at all. I was very excited, but it was more the exhilaration I used to feel when we were going to have some stunning marauding expeditions over No-Man's Land. The old zest was in my veins.

I heard Alatheia's ring, and after she had taken off her hat she came into the room. I believed that her anxieties must be assuaged because George Harcourt had telephoned late on Thursday night to say that he had been successful, and that he had four thousand francs to hand back to me, the affair having been concluded for twenty-six thousand. So what was my surprise to see Alatheia's face below her glasses more woebegone than ever! At first it gave me a stab of pain. Does she really hate me so? She did not mention the money, so I wonder if it is that she does not yet know her father is cleared? I bowed as coldly as I used always to do, and she asked me if I had a chapter ready for her to type? I answered that I had not, because I had been too busy with other things to have composed anything.

"I think we had better discuss the necessary arrangements for our marriage before we can settle down to our old work," I said.

"Very well."

"I shall have to have your full name and your father's and mother's and all that, you know, to make it legal. My lawyer will attend to all the formalities—they are quite considerable, I believe. He arrives from London on Monday. I got him a passport by pulling a lot of strings."

She actually trembled. It seemed as if the idea of all this had not come to her, some of the value of her sacrifice would be diminished if the family skeleton should be laid bare, I could see she felt, so I reassured her.

"Believe me, I do not wish you to tell me anything about your family. As long as you can give just sufficient facts to satisfy the law, I have no curiosity to see them unless I can be of use."

"Thank you."

"I think a fortnight is the quickest that everything can be settled in.—Will you marry me on the seventh of November, Miss Sharp?"

"Yes."

"Do you care for the church ceremony, or will the one at the Consulate do?"

"I should think that would be quite enough for us."

The ring cases were all lying upon the table by me—I pointed to them.

"I wonder if you would choose an engagement ring?" and I began opening the lids. "It is customary, you know," I went on as she started reluctantly. I intended to be firm with her in all the points where I had rights.

"Don't you think it is a little ridiculous?" she asked. "A ring for a mere business arrangement?"

I would not allow myself to be hurt, but I was conscious that I felt a little angry.

"You would prefer not to choose a ring then? Very well, I will decide for you," and I took up one really magnificent single stone diamond, set as only Cartier can set stones.

"This is the last thing in modernity," and I handed it to her. "A hard white diamond of egregious size, it cannot fail to be a reminder of our hard business bargain, and I shall ask you to be good enough to wear it."

I suppose she saw that I was not pleased, for she drew in her lips a little, but she took the ring.

Her hands seemed very restless as she held it, they were certainly not nearly so red as they formerly were.

"Am I to put it on now?"

"Please."

She did so, only she put it on her right third finger, her cheeks growing pink.

"Why do you do that?" I asked.

"What?"

"Put the ring on the wrong hand."

She changed it reluctantly, then she burst out:

"I suppose I ought to thank you for such a very splendid gift, but I can't, because I would much rather not have it, please do let us keep to business in every way, and please don't give me any more presents. I am going to be just your secretary, with my wages commuted into some lump sum, I suppose."

I felt more angry, and I think she saw it. I remained silent, which forced her to speak.

"Do you intend that I shall live here, in the flat?"

"Of course. Will you please choose which of the two guest rooms you would prefer, they both have bathrooms, and you will have the decoration re-done as you wish."

Silence.

My exasperation augmented.

"Will you also please engage a maid, and go and order every sort of clothes which you ought to have. I know by the way you were dressed when I saw you in the *Bois* that Sunday, that your taste is perfect."

She stiffened as I spoke. It was quite plain to be seen that she loathed taking anything from me, but I had no intention of ceding a single point where I had the right to impose my will.

"You see you will be known as my wife, therefore you must dress according to the position, and have everything my mother used to have. Otherwise, people would not respect you, and only think that you were invidiously placed."

Her cheeks flamed again at the last words.

"It is difficult to picture it all," she said; "Tell me exactly what you expect of me daily."

"I expect that when you have breakfasted, in your room if you wish, that you will come and talk to me, perhaps do a little writing, or go out to drive, or what you wish, and that we shall lunch, and in the afternoon do whatever turns up. You will want to go out and see your friends and do what you please. And perhaps you will play to me as often as you feel inclined, and after dinner we can go to the theatre, or read, or do whatever you like. And as soon as my treatments with these doctors are concluded, and I have my new leg and eye, and we shall hope war is finished, we can travel, or go back to England, and then I shall begin taking up a political career, and I shall hope you will take a real interest in that and help me as though I were your brother."

"Very well."

"You will order the clothes to-day?"

"Yes."

She was subdued now, the programme was not very formidable, except that it contained daily companionship with me.

"Have you told the Duchesse de Courville-Hautevine yet that we are engaged?" I asked after a moment's pause.

Discomfort grew in her manner.

"No."

"Do you think that she will not approve of the marriage?"

"She may not."

"Perhaps you would rather that I told her?"

"As you please."

"I want you to understand something quite clearly, Alatheia." She started when I said her name, "and that is that I expect you to treat me with confidence, and tell me anything which you think that I ought to know, so that we neither of us can be put in a false position, beyond that, believe me, I have no curiosity. I desire a

companionship of brain, and a sort of permanent secretary who does not feel hostile all the time, that is all."

I could see that she was controlling herself with all her will, and that she was overwrought and intensely troubled. I knew that some barrier was between us which I could not at present surmount. All she said after a minute was:

"How did you know that my name was 'Alathea'?"

"I heard your little sister call you that the day I saw you in the *Bois*. I think it a very beautiful name."

Silence.

Her discomfort seemed to come to a climax, for after a little she spoke.

"The twenty-five thousand francs beyond the twenty-five I asked you for, I cannot return to you. I feel very much about it, and that you should pay for my clothes, and give me presents. It is the hardest thing I ever had to do in my life, —to take all this."

"Do not let it bother you, I am quite content with the bargain. Perhaps you would rather go now after we have selected which room you will have."

"Thank you."

She gave me my crutch, and I led the way and she followed. I knew instinctively that she would choose the room which was furthest from mine. She did!

"This will do," she said immediately we entered it.

"The look-out is not so nice, it only gets the early morning sun," I ventured to remark.

"It is quieter."

"Very well."

"It was rather arranged for a man, and is perhaps severe. Do you wish anything changed?"

She did not appear to take any more interest in it than if it had been a hotel room. She had given it the merest glance, although it is quite a little masterpiece in its way, of William and Mary—even the panelling being English, and of the time,

and the old rose silk window and bed curtains.

"I don't want anything altered, thank you."

It seemed a strange moment, to be talking thus calmly to the woman who, in a fortnight, will be my wife. I feel that a volcano is really working under our feet, and that adds to the excitement!

When we got back to the sitting-room I offered to send the carriage for her to go and do her shopping, but she refused, and I thought it was wiser to let her go. We shall have years to talk in presently, and there is always the danger of our coming to an open rupture, and the bargain being off, if we see much of one another now.

"Good-bye," she said a little nervously, and I bowed and said "Good-bye," and she went from the room.

And when she had gone I laughed aloud, and began to analyse the situation.

George Harcourt has paid the gambling debt, therefore the fifty thousand I gave Alatheia cannot have been used for that. Some fresh worry is perhaps upon the wretched family. The obvious thing for me to do is to go and see the Duchesse, and yet I have some strange sort of wish that it should be Alatheia herself who tells me everything, and not that she becomes aware, by inference, that I must know. I feel that our future happiness depends upon her giving up all this stubborn pride. What is at the back of her mind? I do not know. That resentment and dislike of me has only become crystallized since the Suzette affair. I am sure she thinks that Suzette is my mistress still, and this insults her, but she reasons that with the bargain as it is, she has not the smallest right to object. She is furious with herself to think that it should matter to her. That is a thought! Why indeed should it matter if she is utterly indifferent to me? Is it possible? Can it be that? No—I dare not think of it, but, in any case it will be the most thrilling situation, once she is my wife.

I believe it would be wisest for me not to go to the Duchesse's but simply to write her a note telling her of my news, then anything she may tell me will be gratuitous.

I had just finished doing this when once again a letter was brought in from that lady, and this time it was to thank me for my cheque, and to tell me that it had been the means of preventing a most disagreeable scandal and bringing peace to

a family!

Sardonic mirth overcame me. So three separate people seem to be under the impression that they have paid this gambler's debts! Each apparently unaware that there was anyone else in the running! It looks as if "Bobby" had wolfed the lot! Does Alatheia know, and is this the extra cause of her worry?

I sent my note back by the Duchesse's messenger, who still waited, and went to my luncheon.

In about an hour the telephone rang—a request from the Hotel de Courville that I should repair there immediately without fail.

"Her Grace spoke herself," Burton said, "and said it was most important, Sir Nicholas."

"Very well, order the carriage. By the way. Burton, did you congratulate Miss Sharp?"

Burton coughed.

"I did make so bold, Sir Nicholas, as to tell the young lady how very glad I was, but she took it queer like, she stiffened up and said it was only a business arrangement, to be able to write your letters and do your work without people talking about it. That seemed funny to me, so I said nothing more."

"Burton it is funny for the moment, Miss Sharp is only marrying me for some reason for her family, the same one which forces her to work, but I hope I can make her think differently about it some day."

"Pardon the liberty I am taking, Sir Nicholas, but perhaps she don't like the idea of Mam'zelle, and don't know she's gone for good."

"That is probably the case."

Burton's wise old face expressed complete understanding, as he left the room, and presently I was on my way to the Hotel de Courville, a sense of exhilaration and of excitement and joy in my heart!



XX

The Duchesse was playing impatiently with her glasses when I was announced by the servant of ninety! Her face expressed some strong feeling. I was not sure if it was tinged with displeasure or no. She helped me to sit down, and then she began at once.

"Nicholas, explain yourself. You tell me you are engaged to your secretary! So this has been going on all the time, and you have not told me. I, who was your mother's oldest friend!"

"Dear Duchesse, you are mistaken, it has only just been settled. No one was more surprised at my offer than Miss Sharp herself."

"You know her real name, Nicholas? And her family history? You have guessed, of course, from my asking you for the twenty-five thousand francs, that they were in some difficulty?"

"Yes, I know Alatheia is the daughter of the Honorable Robert and Lady Hilda Bulteel."

"She has told you all of the story, perhaps?—but you cannot know what the money was for, because the poor child does not know it herself. It is more just that I should inform you, since you are going to marry into the family."

"Thank you, Duchesse."

She then began, and gave me a picture of her old friendship with Lady Hilda, and of the dreadful calamity which had befallen in her going off with Bobby Bulteel.

"It was one of those cases of mad love, Nicholas, which fortunately seem to have died out of the modern world, though for the truth I must say that one more *séduisant* than *ce joli Bulteel*, I have never met! One could not, of course, acknowledge them for a crime like that, but I have ever been fond of poor Hilda and that sweet little child. She was born here, in this hotel. Poor Hilda came to

me in her great trouble, and I was in deep mourning myself then for my husband,—the house is large, and it could all pass quietly."

I reached forward and took the Duchesse's hand and kissed it, and she went on:

"Alatheé is my godchild, one of my names is Alatheé. The poor little one, she adored her father, in all those first years. They wandered much and only came to Paris at intervals, and each time they came, a little poorer, a little more troubled, and then after a lapse I heard those two were born at Nice—wretched little decadents, when my poor Hilda was a mass of nerves and disillusion. Alatheé was eleven then. It was, *par hazard*, when she was about fourteen that she heard of her father's crime. She was the gayest, most sweet child before that, through all their poverty, but from that moment her character was changed. It destroyed something in her spirit, one must believe. She set firmly to education, decided she would be a secretary, cultivated herself, worked, worked, worked! She worshipped her mother, and resented immensely her father's treatment of her."

"She must always have had a wonderful character."

"For that, yes," and the Duchesse paused a moment, then went on:

"Quite a tremendous character, and as Bobby sank and poor Hilda became more ill, and wretched, that child has risen in strength, and supported them all. Since the war came they have almost lived upon her earnings. The father is without conscience, and of a selfishness unspeakable! His money all went to him for his use, and Alatheé was left to supplement the mother's wretched two or three thousand francs a year. And now that brute has again cheated at cards, and poor Hilda came to me in her great distress, and remembering your words, Nicholas, I called upon you. It would have been too cruel for the poor woman to have had to suffer again. Hilda took the money and gave it to this infamous husband, and the affair was settled that night. Alatheé knows nothing about it."

Light was dawning upon me. The admirable Bobby has evidently played upon the feelings of both wife and daughter!

"Duchesse, why did you not wish me to know the real name, and would not help me at all about 'Miss Sharp,'—won't you now tell me your reason?"

The Duchesse shaded her eyes from the fire with a hand-screen, and it came between us, and I could not see her face, but her voice changed.

"I was greatly surprised to find the girl in your flat one day. I had not understood

with whom she was working. I was not pleased about it, frankly, Nicholas, because one cannot help knowing of your existence and your friends, and I feared your interest for a secretary might be as for them, and I disliked that my godchild should run such a risk. When *jeunes filles* of the world have to take up menial positions they are of course open to such situations, and have to expect difficulties. I wished to protect her as well as I could."

Suddenly I saw myself, and the utterly rotten life I had led, that this, my old friend, even, could not be sure of my chivalry. I loathed the lax, cheap honor of the world and its hypocrisy. I could not even be indignant with the Duchesse, judging me from that standpoint. She was right, but I did tell her that men had a slightly different angle in looking upon such things in England, where women worked, and were respected in all classes, and that the idea of making love to any secretary would never have entered my head. It was the intelligence and the dignity of Alatheia herself which had made me desire her for a companion.

"It is well that you are English, Nicholas. No Frenchman of family could have married the daughter of a man who had cheated at cards."

"Even if the girl was good and splendid like Alatheia, Duchesse?"

"For that, no, my son, we have little left but our traditions, and our names, and those things matter to us. No, frankly, I could not have permitted the union had you been my son."

So I had been right in my analysis of what would be the bent of my old friend's mind.

"You are pleased now, though, dear Duchesse?" I pleaded.

"It seems impossible, from my point, and I would not have encouraged it, but since it is done, I can but wish my dear Alatheé and you, my dear boy true happiness."

Again I took and kissed her kind hand.

"In England, especially in this war time, questions are not asked, *n'est ce pas*? She can be 'Sharp' simply and not Bulteel, then it may pass. For the girl, herself, you have a rare jewel, Nicholas—unselfish, devoted, true, but the will of the devil! You shall not be able to turn her as you wish, if her ideas go the other way!"

"Duchesse, the situation is peculiar, there is no question of love in it. Alatheia is marrying me merely that she may give money to her family. I am marrying that I may have a secretary without scandal. We are not going to be really husband and wife."

The Duchesse dropped her fire-screen, her clever-eyes were whimsical and sparkling.

"*Tiens!*" she said, and never has the delicious word conveyed so much meaning! "You believe that truly Nicholas? Alatheé is a very pretty girl when properly dressed—"

"And without glasses!"

"As you say, without glasses, which I hear cover her fine eyes when in your society!"

"I asked her to marry me under those terms, and it was only upon those terms she accepted me."

The Duchesse laughed.

"A nice romance! Well, my son, I wish you joy!"

"Duchesse," and I leaned forward, "do you really think I can make her love me? Am I too awful? Is there a chance?"

The Duchesse patted my arm and her face shone with kindness.

"Of course, foolish boy!" And she broke into French, using the "thee" and "thou" again affectionately. 'I was very handsome!—that which remained,—and all would look the same as ever when the repairing should be complete!'

"So very tall and fine, Nicholas, and hair of a thickness, and what is best of all, that air of a great gentleman. Yes, yes, women will always love thee, *sans* eye, *sans* leg, do not disturb thyself!"

"Don't tell her I love her, Duchesse," I pleaded. "We have much to learn of each other. If she did not believe it was a bargain equal on both sides, she would not marry me at all!"

The Duchesse agreed about this.

"Whatever she has promised she will perform, but why she does not love thee

already I cannot tell."

"She dislikes me, she thinks I am a rotter, and I expect she was right, but I shall not be in the future, and then perhaps she will change."

When I left the Hotel de Courville it had been arranged that the Duchesse would receive my wife with honour, her world only knowing that I had married an English "Miss Sharp."

I heard no more of my *fiancée* until next morning, when she telephoned. Did I wish her to come that day?

Burton answered that I hoped she would, about eleven o'clock.

I intended to tell her that I thought that it might be wiser now if she did not come again until the wedding, as once we were engaged I would not allow her to run the risk of meeting anyone and giving a false impression. I think the strain would be too great in any case.

I did not come in to the salon until she was there, and she rose as I entered. She was whiter than ever, and very stern.

"I have been thinking," she said, before I could speak, "that if I promise to fulfill the bargain, and live here in the flat with you, going through the ceremony at the Consulate is quite unnecessary. Your caprice of having me for your wife merely in name in England, may pass, and it seems ridiculous to be tied. I am quite indifferent to what anyone thinks of me. I would prefer it like that."

"Why?" I asked, and wondered for a moment what had occurred.

"There are so many stupid law things, if there is a marriage, and if you have the same from me without, surely you see that it is better."

I first thought that it was this fear of my knowing her family history which was at the root of this suggestion, but then I remembered that she would know that I would hear it in any case from the Duchesse. What then could it be?

I felt cruel, I was not going to make things too easy for her. If she has the will of the devil, she has also the pride!

"If you are indifferent to such an invidious position as your new idea would place us in, I am not, I do not wish my friends to think that I am such a cad as presumably to have taken advantage of your being my secretary."

"You wish to go on with the marriage then?"

"Of course."

She clasped her hands together suddenly, as if she could control herself no longer, and I thought of what she had said to Burton about feeling that she could not fight any more. I would not allow myself to sympathize with her. I was longing in every nerve of my being to take her into my arms, and tell her that I loved her, and knew everything, but I would not do this. I cannot let her master me, or we shall never have any peace. I will not tell her that I love her until her pride is broken, and I have made her love me and come to me voluntarily.

She was silent.

"I have informed the Duchesse de Courville that we are engaged. I saw her yesterday."

She started perceptibly.

"She has told you my real name?"

"I have known that for some time. I thought I had made it plain to you that I am not interested about the subject, we need not mention it again, you have only to talk to old Robert Nelson, my lawyer, when he comes on Monday. He will tell you the settlements I propose to make, and you can discuss with him as to whether or not you think them satisfactory. Perhaps you on your side will tell me what reason you have strong enough to make a girl of your natural self-respect, willing to take the position of my apparent mistress?"

She burst out for a second, throwing out her hands, then controlling herself.

"No, I won't tell you.—I will tell you nothing, I will just stick to the bargain if I must. You have no right to my thoughts, only my actions!"

I bowed; disagreeable as she was, there was a distinctly pleasant zest in fighting!

"Perhaps of your courtesy, you will take off those glasses now, since I am aware that you only wear them to conceal your eyes, and not that they are necessary for your sight."

She flushed with annoyance.

"And if I refuse?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"I shall think it very childish of you."

With a petulance which I had never seen in her she tossed her head.

"I don't care, at present I will not."

I frowned but did not speak. This will be discussed between us later. My fighting spirit is up, she *shall* obey me!

"Did you order the clothes yesterday?"

"Yes."

"Enough, I hope."

"Yes."

"Well, now, I have a suggestion to make which I am sure will please you, and that is that you will appoint some meeting place with Mr. Nelson for Tuesday morning, since you do not trust my good taste far enough even to let me know your home address. Perhaps at the Hotel de Courville, if the Duchesse will permit, and that then we do not meet until the seventh of November at the ceremony. Mr. Nelson will arrange with you all the law of the thing and what witnesses you must have, and everything, and this will save these useless discussions, and give you a little breathing space."

This seemed to subdue her, and she agreed less defiantly.

"And now I will not detain you longer," I said stiffly. "*Au revoir* until the seventh of November at whatever hour is arranged, or if we must meet before at the signing of the contract," and I bowed.

She bowed also, and walked haughtily to the door, and left.

And greatly exhilarated, I decided to go and lunch with Maurice at the Ritz.

As I came from the lift, Madame Bizot's daughter came out of the concierge's lodge with her baby, and it was making its same little cooing, gurgling noises that caused me so to feel that time when Alatheia first began to interest me. I stopped and spoke to the mother, a comely young woman, and the little creature put out its tiny hand and clasped one of my fingers, and over me there came a weird thrill. Shall I ever hear noises like that, and have a son of Alatheia's and

mine to take my hand. Well the game of her subjection is interesting enough anyway, and rather ashamed of my emotion, I went on into the Victoria and was crawled to the Ritz.

Here I ran into a fellow in the Flying Corps, who told me that Nina's boy, Johnnie, had been killed the night before, in his first fight with a Boche plane. I do not know that any of the tragedies of the war have affected me more. My poor Nina! She really loved her son. I telegraphed to her at once my fondest sympathies, and the thought of her grief would not leave me all the way, war-hardened as I am.

I did not tell Maurice of my approaching wedding. I have a plan that he shall only know when I ask him to come to the Hotel de Courville to be presented to my wife.

The Fluffies have returned from Deauville, and Coralie and Alice joined us at luncheon. They have the most exquisite new garments, and were full of sparkle and gaiety. Alice's wedding, to the rich neutral, seems really to be coming off. Her air was one of subdued modesty and gentleness, and when I congratulated her she made the tenderest acceptance of it, which would have done justice to a young virgin of the *ancien regime*! Coralie met my eye with her shrewd small ones, and we looked away! After lunch we sat in the hall for a little, Maurice taking Alice to try on her clothes, so Coralie and I were left alone.

"You are looking quite well now Nicholas," she whispered, "Why don't you ask me to come and dine with you, at your adorable flat,—alone?"

"You would be bored with me before the evening was over."

"Arrange it, and try! Always there are the others, except that night at Versailles. There is an air with you Nicholas,—one has forgotten all about your eye. I have thought and thought of you.—You have interfered with all my pleasures in life!"

"I am going back to England quite soon, Coralie, won't you come now to the *rue de la Paix* and let me buy you a little souvenir of all the lovely times we have had together in the last year?"

So she came, and selected a gem of an opera glass. An opera glass is discreet, it can be accepted by anyone; even a woman determined to impress my mind with her dignity and charm, as Coralie was attempting to do, upon our expedition. She had made up her mind that I should no longer be just a benefit to the three of

them, but her own especial property, and she is clever enough to see that I am in a mood to admire dignity and discretion! I spent a most amusing hour with her, enjoying myself in the spirit of watching a good play at the *Comedie Française*. At about four o'clock, when we returned to the Ritz, Coralie was baffled. I could see that she was keener than ever, and beginning to be a little worried and unsure of herself!

As I drove back to my flat, taking a roundabout way through the Bois, I mused and analysed things. And what is the psychological reason for some presents being quite correct to give and some not? It all goes back to the re-creative instinct and through what this manifests itself. Gifts which have any relation to the body, to give it pleasure, or to decorate it, are the expressions of the sex relationship, and so presumably the subconscious mind, which only sees the truth in everything, only feels harmonious when these gifts are given by either parents or relations, as a dower, so to speak, or the husband or prospective husband. Hence through the ages, the unconscious relegation of certain presents as acceptable only from certain people. Any present which gives pleasure to the mind alone is the tribute of friendship, but those to touch the body are presumably not. I could give Coralie an opera glass as a mark of my esteem, but a bracelet which she would wear on her arm would have another meaning!

Alathea resents every present, those for the body because they suggest my possession of her, those for the mind because she feels no friendship for me at all!

Well, well!

What will she do I wonder during the fortnight of our engagement? I feel that I can afford to wait with patience and certainty. But the thought that I do not even know my *fiancée's* address, and that she is resentful and defiant, and rebellious at everything, and yet intends to marry me, on the seventh of November, is really almost humorous!

And now it behooves me to put my house in order, and map out exactly what I mean to do!



XXI

The days go slowly on, my preparations are complete. My good friend Nelson arrived on Monday and took charge of the affair. He was entirely aware of the Bulteel story, it was the great scandal of twenty-five years ago. He expressed no opinion as to my marrying into such a family, but went about the business end with diligence. I made a very nice settlement upon Alatheia, more than he thought was necessary. Then he spoke of arrangements for possible children, and fixed that, too. I wonder what she will say when she reads that part! I have settled with the Duchesse, who is entering into the spirit of the thing with her usual delicious whimsical understanding, that some time soon after the wedding she shall ask about ten of our principal mutual friends to come in the afternoon, and she will present Alatheia to them, and if anyone makes comments upon the matter, she will say that she is the daughter of an old English friend, and even if Coralie recognizes her as the girl who was with me at Versailles, she will not dare to say a word about any protégée of the Duchesse's. She is much too afraid of offending her, being received at the Hotel de Courville herself on sufferance only because of her birth and family. As for Maurice, I can manage him! Now I am beginning to wonder what Alatheia would prefer to do? I don't want to see her until the ceremony, but I suppose I must.

The Duchesse has arranged that I should meet my *fiancée* in her sitting-room and sign the contract there on the day before the wedding, five days from now. Alatheia, she tells me is like a frozen image, but faithful to her promise to me, my dear old friend has not made any comment or tried to aid matters. I think she rejoices that I shall have such an interesting time in the breaking down of the barrier.

Nina writes heartbrokenly; Johnnie was very dear to her; sorrow seems to have brought out all that is best in her. She says she feels that she just drifted along, taking all good and happiness for granted, and not doing enough for other people, and that now she is going to devote her life to making Jim happy and contented, and hopes some day, not too far off, to have another child to care for. Darling old Nina! She always was the best sort in the world.

Of Suzette I have heard nothing, although Burton says he caught sight of her on the stairs just whisking into the flat above mine, which has been taken by a lovely actress, a cousin of hers, who has married a rich retired Jew *antiquaire*!

There are still possibilities of complications here!

But I feel quite serene, Alatheia will be mine. She cannot get away from me. I can insidiously, from day to day, carry out my plan of winning her, and the tougher the fight is, the more it will be worth while afterwards!

November 6th.

To-day was really wonderful! Mr. Nelson has presumably seen Alatheia and her family several times. I have refused to hear anything about it, and he arrived with her alone at the Hotel de Courville. I had understood that her mother was coming with her, but she was ill and did not turn up.

The Duchesse and I were talking when the two were announced. Alatheia was in a nice little grey frock and had her glasses on. I think she knew the Duchesse would not approve of that camouflage, because there was an air of defiance about her, her rebellious Cupid's bow of a mouth was shut sternly, she was even quite repellant,—she has never attracted me more!

The Duchesse was sweet to her and made no remark about the glasses, but was called back to the ward almost immediately for a little, and while she was gone Mr. Nelson read over the settlement.

"I think you are giving me a great deal too much," Alatheia said annoyedly. "I shall feel uncomfortable,—and chained."

"I intend my wife to have this." I answered quietly. "So I am afraid you will have to agree."

She pulled in her lips but said no more until the part about the children came, when she started to her feet, her cheeks crimson.

"What is this ridiculous clause?" she asked angrily.

Old Mr. Nelson looked unspeakably shocked. "It is customary in all marriage settlements, my dear young lady," he said reprovingly, and Alatheia looked at me with suspicion, but she said nothing, and the Duchesse, returning then to the room, all was soon signed, sealed and delivered! Mr. Nelson withdrew, saying he

would call for Miss Bulteel next day for the wedding.

When we were alone the Duchesse kissed us both.

"I hope for your happiness, my children," she said. "I know you both, and your droll characters, the time will come when you may know each other, and in any case, I feel that you will both remember that *tenuë*, a recognition of correct behaviour, helps all situations in life, and the rest is in the hands of the *Bon Dieu*."

Then she left us again, and Alatheia sat stiffly down upon an uncompromising little Louis XV *canapé* out of my reach. I did not move or speak, indeed I lit a cigarette casually.

Alatheia's face was a study! I watched her lazily. How had I ever thought her plain? Even in those first days, disguised with the horn spectacles, and the tornback hair, the contour of her little face is so perfectly oval, and her neck so round and long, but not too long. There is not the least look of scragginess about her, just extreme slenderness, a small-boned creature of perhaps five foot four or five, with childish outline. To-day in the becoming little grey frock, and even with the glasses on she is lovely, perhaps she seems so to me because I now know that the glasses are not necessary. The expression of her mouth said, "Am I being tricked? Does the man mean to seize me when he gets me alone? Shall I run away and have done with it?"

She was restless, her old serenity seems to have deserted her.

"I wanted to ask you," I began calmly, "What you would like to do immediately after the wedding. I mean would you prefer that we went to Versailles? The passport business makes everything so difficult, or would you rather go down to the Riviera? Or just stay at the flat?"

"I don't care in the least," she replied ungraciously.

"Then if you don't care, we will stay at the flat, because if I do not interrupt my treatment I shall be the sooner well to go to England. Have you engaged a maid?"

"Yes."

"You will give orders that your trunks are sent in in the morning, then, and that she has everything ready for you."

"Very well."

All this time her face was turned away from me as much as possible. For one second a fear came to me that after all perhaps it is real hate she has for me, which will be unsurmountable, and I was impelled to ask her:

"Alathea, do you detest the idea of marrying me so much that you would rather break the whole thing?"

She turned and faced me now, and I feel sure blue fire was coming from those beautiful eyes, could I have seen them!

"It is not a question of what I would wish or not, nor of my feelings in any way. I am going through with the ceremony, and shall be your permanent secretary, because I am under great monetary obligations to you, and wish for security for my family in the future. You put it to me that you wanted to buy me, and I could name the price—you have overpaid it. I shall not go back upon my promise, only I want to feel perfectly sure that you will expect nothing more of me than what we have arranged."

"I shall expect nothing more; your sense of the fitness of things will suggest to you not to make either of us look ridiculous in public by your being over disagreeable to me, we shall carry on with a semblance of mutual respect, I hope."

She bowed.

The temptation to burst out and tell her of my feelings was extraordinary. I absolutely trembled with the control it required not to rise from my chair and go and take her hands; but I restrained every sign and appeared as indifferent as she is. The Duchesse came back in a few moments and I said I would go.

I did not even then shake hands with Alathea, and the Duchesse came out into the passage with me, to see me safe into the lift, she is always so kind to anything crippled.

"Nicholas," she whispered, "Her manner to you is very cruel, but do not be discouraged!—I feel that it is more promising than if she were kind. She has also had a dreadful time with the father, who has now been transferred to the *poste* in the desert in Africa. One must hope for good, and her poor mother is going off to Hyères with little Hilda and their faithful old maid, the only servant they had, so after the wedding you will have your bride all to yourself!"

"Perhaps the thought of that is what is making her so reluctant and icy to-day!"

The Duchesse laughed as she handed me my crutch and closed the lift door. "Time will tell, my son!" and she waved her hand as I disappeared below.

And now I am alone before the crackling fire in my sitting-room,—and I wonder how many men have spent the eve of their marriages in so quiet a manner? I feel no excitement even. I have re-read this journal, it is a pretty poor literary effort, but it does chronicle my emotions, and the gradual growing influence Alatheia has been exercising upon me. By putting down what happens between us each day like this, I can then review progress once a week, and can take stock of little shades which would not be remembered otherwise.

At that moment the telephone rang, and George Harcourt asked if he might come round and smoke a cigar.

"Your pre-war ones are so good, Nicholas," he said. He was in at the Ritz, from Versailles, for the night.

I answered "Yes." I like to talk to old George, I don't know why I call him old always, he is forty-eight perhaps, and absolutely well preserved, and women love him passionately, more perhaps than when he was young.

When we were settled in two comfortable arm chairs before the fire, he held forth as usual. He had arranged the affairs of Bobby Bulteel only in the nick of time. "I have all the receipts, Nicholas, to hand to you," he said.

"The wretched creature was overcome with gratitude. We had a long chat, and he plans to clear out and start life afresh in the Argentine as soon as War is over and he can be released from his commission. He is bound to end in hell with his temperament, but it won't matter so long as poor Lady Hilda is not dragged down too. He agreed to leave the family here unmolested now, and not return for years to them, when he does retire from the army."

Then I told my old friend that I intended to marry the daughter on the morrow. He was very surprised.

"I could not imagine what your interest could be, Nicholas, unless it had something to do with a woman, but where did you ever meet the girl, my dear boy?"

I explained.

"You might come to the wedding, George," I said.

Alathea (Harriet Hammond) realizes that Suzette (Renee Adoree) is the only woman that stands between her and the love of Sir Nicholas (Lew Cody). (A scene from Elinor Glyn's production "Man and Maid" for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer)

Alathea (Harriet Hammond) realizes that Suzette (Renee Adoree) is the only woman that stands between her and the love of Sir Nicholas (Lew Cody). (A scene from Elinor Glyn's production "Man and Maid" for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer)

He promised he would, then he smoked for a minute or two in silence. "Pretty terrible thing, marriage," and he puffed blue rings with perfect precision. "I have never been able to face it. What has made you slip into the mesh?"

"Because I think I have found someone who will be a good companion and not bore me."

"You are not in love then? It is a sensible arrangement, and in that way you have a chance of happiness; also the girl has had a hard life, and may be grateful for comfort and kindness."

"What do you suppose men really want, George?"

"The continuous stimulation of the hunting instinct, of course. It is satiety which kills everything, but what a small percentage of women know how to keep it alive, on the mental side!"

I waited for him to go on.

"You see, dear boy, love which is only the camouflaged aspect of the creative instinct, cannot really hold, but a clever woman acts as a spur to the mind, keeps it hunting in the abstract, as well as gratifying, not too generously, the physical desires. Unfortunately it has never been my good fortune to encounter such a being, so I have never been able to remain faithful. You are very much in luck if Bobby's girl shows intelligence. She ought to be a remarkable creature because she was born at the white heat of passion on both parents' side, and self-sacrifice and devotion added on the mother's."

"She is, George."

"My best wishes, Nicholas. I think you are wise, probably wounded as you are, it will be nice for you to have an agreeable companion," and he sighed.

"You have quite finished with Violetta?"

"Now that is the odd part," and he actually removed his cigar from his lips. "I thought I had, but when I went to see her with the certain intention of deceiving her and backing out gracefully,—that vixen Carmencita was drawing me so strongly!—I found Violetta quite tranquil. She said she had realized that I was cooling off, and her rule was to hold nothing which did not wish to stay, so she was quite prepared to part from me. She was very tender, she looked beautiful, and you know when it came to saying farewell, I found myself quite unable to do so! I had prepared a lot of lies about my not being justified in giving the time from my work, but before I could tell them Violetta had forestalled me by assuring me that she knew I must really stick closer to my office, and she would no longer expect much of my company. You know, Nicholas, I suddenly found her charm renewed tenfold, and I could only congratulate myself upon the fact that the affair with Carmencita had not gone far enough to amount to anything, and now I am in pursuit of Violetta again, and 'pon my soul, Nicholas, if she only keeps me wondering, I believe I shall be really in love!"

"Shall you marry, George?"

He looked almost bashful.

"It is just possible,—Violetta is a widow."

Then our eyes met and we both laughed aloud.

"You can contemplate happiness, George with your widow, because you feel that she now knows how to handle you, and I contemplate happiness with my little girl, because I respect her character and adore every inch of her, and by Jove! old man, I believe we shall both get what we are looking for!"

Then our talk drifted to politics and the war, and it was just about midnight before old George left, and when he had gone I opened the window wide, and looked out on the night, there was a half moon almost set, and the air was still, and very warm for the beginning of November. There are nights like that, mysterious and electric when all sorts of strange forces seem to be abroad. And something of romance in me exalted my spirit, and I found myself saying a prayer that I might be true to my trust, and have strength enough of will to wait patiently until my Alatheia comes voluntarily into my arms.

And how I wonder what she is thinking about, there at Auteuil?

I went along into the room which is to be hers to-morrow, and I saw that it was all arranged, except the flowers, which would come in fresh in the morning. And then I hobbled back to my own room and rang for Burton. The faithful creature waits for me no matter how late I am.

When I was safely in bed, he came over to me, and his dear old face showed emotion.

"I do indeed wish you happiness, Sir Nicholas, to-morrow will be the best day of my life."

We shook hands silently, and he left me, still writing in this journal!

I feel no excitement, rather as if another act in the drama of life was ended, that is all, and that to-morrow I am starting upon a new one which will decide whether the end of the play shall be tragedy or content?



XXII

I am not going to describe the wedding in this Journal. A civil ceremony is not interesting in its baldness. I had literally no emotions, and Alatheia looked as pale as her white frock. She wore a little sable toque and a big sable cloak I had sent her the night before, by Nelson. The ring was the new diamond hoop set in platinum. No more gold fetters for modern girls!

Old George and Mr. Nelson were our witnesses, and the whole thing was over in a few minutes, and we were being congratulated. Burton was by far the happiest face there, as he helped me into the automobile, lent by the Embassy. Alatheia had just shaken hands with Mr. Nelson and been wished joy by George. I wonder what he thought of the glasses, which even for the wedding she had not taken off!

"May you know every happiness, Lady Thormonde," he said. "Take care of Nicholas and make him quite well, he is the best fellow on earth."

Alatheia thanked him coldly. He is such a citizen of the world that he showed no surprise, and finally we were off on our way to the flat.

Here Madame Bizot and her daughter, and the baby, awaited us! And in the creature's tiny hand was a bunch of violets. This was the first time Alatheia smiled. She bent and kissed the wee face. These people know and love her. I stayed behind a few moments to express my substantial appreciation of their friendly interest. Burton had been beside the chauffeur to help me in and out, and while we had been driving Alatheia had not spoken a word. She had turned from me, and her little body was drawn back as far in the corner as possible.

My own emotions were queer. I did not feel actually excited. I felt just as I used when we were going to take up a new position on the line where great watchfulness would be necessary to succeed.

The maid Alatheia had engaged arrived in the morning, and I had had the loveliest flowers put in all the rooms. Pierre intended to outdo himself for the wedding *déjeuner*, I knew, and Burton had been able to find somewhere a really

respectable looking footman, not too obviously wounded.

Alathea handed me my crutch as we got out of the lift. Perhaps she thinks this is going to be one of her new duties!

We went straight into the sitting-room and I sat down in my chair. Her maid, named Henriette, had taken her cloak and hat in the hall, and I suppose from sheer nervousness, and to cover the first awkward moments, Alathea buried her face in the big bowl of roses on a table near another arm chair, before she sat down in it.

"What lovely flowers!" she said. They were the first words she had spoken to me directly.

"I wondered what would be your favorites. You must tell me for the future. I just had roses because they happen to be mine."

"I like roses best too."

I was silent for quite two minutes. She tried to keep still, then I spoke, and I could hear a tone of authority in my voice.

"Alathea, again I ask you please to remove your glasses, as I told you before, I know that you wear them only so that I may not see your eyes, not for sight or light or anything. To keep them on is a little undignified and ridiculous now, and irritates me very much."

She colored and straightened herself.

"To remove my glasses was not part of the bargain. You should have made it a condition if you had wanted to impose it. I do not admit that you have the least right to ask me to take them off, and I prefer to wear them."

"For what possible reason?"

"I will not tell you."

I felt my temper rising. If I had not been a cripple I could not have resisted the temptation to rise and seize her in my arms, tear the d—— d things off! and punish her with a thousand kisses. As it was, I felt an inward rage. What a fool I had been not to have actually made the removal of them a *sine qua non* before I signed the contract!

"It is very ungenerous of you, and shows a spirit of hostility which I think we agreed that you would drop."

Silence.

The desire to punish her physically, beat her, make her obey me, was the only thing I felt. A nice emotion for a wedding day!

"Do you mean to wear them all the time, even when we go out in the world?" I asked when I could control my voice.

"Probably."

"Very well then, I consider you are breaking the bargain in spirit, if not in the letter. You, yourself, said you were going to be my permanent secretary—no secretary in the world would insist upon doing something she knew to be a great irritation to her employer."

Silence.

"You are only lowering yourself in my estimation by showing this obstinacy. Since we have now to live together, I would rather not have to grow to despise you for childishness."

She started to her feet, and with violence threw the glasses on to the table. Her beautiful eyes flashed at me; the lashes are that peculiar curly kind, not black, but soft and dusky, a little lighter near the skin. It is the first time I have ever seen such eyelashes on a woman's lids. One sees them quite often on little boys, especially little vagabonds in the street. The eyes themselves are intensely blue, and with everything of passion and magnetism, and attraction, in them. It is no wonder she wore glasses while having to face the world by herself! A woman with eyes like that would not be safe alone in any avocation where men could observe her. I have never seen such expressive, fascinating eyes in my life. I thrilled in every fibre of my being, and with triumph also to think that our first battle should be won!

"Thank you," I said, making my voice very calm. "I had grown so to respect your balance and serenity, I should have been sorry to have to change my opinion."

I could see that she was palpitating with fury at having been made to obey. I felt it wise to turn the conversation.

"I suppose lunch will be ready soon."

She went towards the door then, and left me. I wondered what she would say when she got to her room and found the three sapphire bangles waiting for her on the dressing table!

I had written on a card inside the lid of the box:

"To Alatheia with her husband's best wishes."

Burton announced lunch before she returned to the sitting-room. I sent him to say that it was ready, and a moment after she came in. She had the case in her hand which she put down on the table, and her cheeks were very pink, her eyes she kept lowered.

"I wish you would not give me presents," she gasped a little breathlessly, coming close up to my chair. "I do not care to receive them, you have loaded me with things—the sables, the diamond ring, the clothes, everything, and now these."

I took the case and opened it, removing the bangles.

"Give me your wrist," I said sternly.

She looked at me too surprised at my tone to speak.

I put out my hand and took her bare arm, her sleeves were to the elbows, and I deliberately put the three bracelets on while she stood petrified.

"I have had enough of your disagreeable temper," I said in the same voice. "You will wear these, and anything else I choose to give you, though your rudeness will soon remove my desire to give you anything."

She was absolutely flabbergasted, but I had touched her pride.

"I apologize if I have seemed rude," she said at last. "I—suppose you have the right really—only—" And her whole slender body quivered with a wave of rebellion.

"Let us say no more about the matter, but go into lunch, only you will find that I am not such a weakling, as you no doubt supposed you would have to deal with." I hobbled up from my chair, Burton discreetly not having entered the room. Alatheia gave me my crutch, and we went in to the dining-room.

While the servants were in there I led the conversation upon the war news, and

ordinary subjects, and she played the game, but when we were alone with the coffee, I filled her glass with Benedictine, which she had refused when Burton handed the liqueurs. She had taken no wine at all.

"Now drink whatever toast you like," I told her. "I am going to drink one to the time when you don't hate me so much and we can have a little quiet friendship and peace."

She sipped her glass, and her eyes became inscrutable. What she was thinking of I do not know.

I find myself watching those eyes all the time. Every reflection passes through them, they are as expressive of all shades of emotion as the eyes of a cat, though the beautiful Madonna tenderness I have never seen again since the day when she held the child in her arms, and I was rude to her.

When we went back into the salon I knew that I was passionately in love with her. Her restiveness is absolutely alluring, and excites all my hunting instinct. She looks quite lovely, and the subtle magnetism which drew me the first days, even when she appeared poor and shabby, and red of hand, is stronger than ever—I felt that I wanted to crush her in my arms and devour her, the blood thumped in my temples, I had to use every atom of my will with myself, and lay back in my chair and closed my eye.

She went straight to the piano and began to play. It seemed as though she were talking, telling me of the passion in her soul. She played weird Russian dances and crashed agonizing chords, then she played laments, and finally a soft and soothing thing of McDowell's, and every note had found an echo in me, and I had followed, it almost seemed, all her pain.

"You play divinely, child," I said, when she had finished. "I am going to rest now, will you give me some tea later on?"

"Yes," and her voice was quite meek, while she helped me with my crutch, and I went to the door of my room.

"I would like you to wear nice soft teagowns. My eye gets so wearied with everything bright after a while. I hope—you have got all you want, and that your room is comfortable?"

"Yes, thanks."

I bowed and went on into my room and shut the door. Burton was waiting to help me to lie down.

"It has been a very tiring day for you, Sir Nicholas," he said, "and for her Ladyship also."

"Go and have a rest yourself, Burton, you have been up since cock crow, the new man Antoine can call me at five." And soon I was in a land of blissful dreams.

Of course it was the very irony of fate that Suzette should have selected this very afternoon to come in and thank me for the Villa which she was just now going down to see—!

Antoine opened the door to her while Burton was out. I heard afterwards that she told him she had an appointment with me when he had hesitated about letting her in. She was quite quietly dressed and had no great look of the *demi-monde*, and a new footman, blunted with war service, was probably impervious even to the very strong scent which she was saturated with—that perfume which I had never been able entirely to cure her liking for, and which she reverted to using always when she went away from me, and had to be corrected of again and again when she returned.

Antoine came to my room by the passage, and said "a lady was in the salon to see me by appointment."

For a moment I was not suspicious. I thought it might be Coralie, and fearing Alatheia might be somewhere about, and it might be awkward for her, I hastened to rise and go in to see and get rid of the inopportune guest. I told Antoine he must never let anyone in again without permission.

It was just growing dim in the salon, about half-past four o'clock, and a figure rose from the sofa by the fire as I entered.

"*Mon chou—mon petit cheri!*" I heard, simultaneously with a softly closing sound of the door behind the screen, which masks the entrance to the room from the hall—Antoine leaving I supposed at the time, probably it was Alatheia I surmised afterwards!

"Suzette!" I exclaimed angrily. "Why do you come here?"

She flew to me and held out her arms, expressing affection and grateful thanks. She had come for no other reason only just to express her friendly appreciation!

To get rid of her was all I desired. I never was more angry, but to show it would have been the poorest game. I did not tell her it was my wedding day. I just said I was expecting some relatives, and that I knew she would understand and would go at once.

"Of course," she said, and shook me by the hand. I was still standing with my crutch. She was passing to see her cousin Madame Angier, in the flat above, and could not resist the temptation to come in.

"It must be the very last time, Suzette," I said. "I have given you all that you wanted, and I would rather not see you again."

She pouted, but agreed, and I drew her to the door and saw her into the corridor, and even followed her to the front door. She was chatting all the time. I did not answer. I was speechless with rage, and could have sworn aloud, when at last I heard the door shut between us, then I strode back into my room, praying that Alatheia *had* been unaware of my visitor.

Nemesis, on one's wedding day!

I waited until five and then went back into the sitting-room to my chair, and Antoine brought in the tea, and turned on the lights, and a moment or two afterwards Alatheia came in. Her eyes were stony, and as she advanced up the room she sniffed the air disgustedly, her fine nostrils quivering. Suzette's pungent perfume was no doubt still present to one coming from outside!

Hauteur, contempt and disgust, expressed themselves in my little darling's blue eyes. There was nothing to be said—*qui s'excuse s'accuse*—!

She wore a soft lavender frock, and was utterly delectable, and when I reflected that but for this impassable barrier, which my own action in the past had been the means of erecting between us, I might now have made her love me, and that on this, our wedding day, she might have been coming into my arms. I could have groaned aloud.

"May I open the window," she said with the air of an offended Empress.

"Yes, do, open it wide," and then I laughed aloud cynically. I could as easily have cried.

Alatheia would not of course have spoken about her suspicions, to do so would have inferred that she took an interest in me beyond that of a secretary; every

impression she always has given me is that nothing in my life can matter to her one jot. But I know that this affair of Suzette does matter to her, that she resents it bitterly, that it is the cause of her smouldering anger with me. She resents it because she is a woman, and, how I wish I might believe that it is because she is not as indifferent towards me as she pretends.

She poured out the tea. I expect my face looked like the devil, I did not speak, I knew I was frowning angrily. A rising wind blew the curtain out and banged the window. She got up and shut it, then she threw some cedar dust on the fire from the box which it is kept in on a table near. She had seen Burton do this no doubt. I love the smell of cedar burning.

Then she came back and poured out the tea and we both drank it silently.

The room looked so comfortable and home like, with its panelling of old pitch pine, cleaned of its paint and mellowed and waxed, so that it seems like deep amber, showing up the greyish pear-wood carvings. One might have been in some room in old England of about 1699. Everything looked the setting for a love scene. The glowing lamps, apricot shaded, and the firelight, and the yellow roses everywhere, and two human beings who belonged to one another and were young, and not cold of nature, sitting there with faces of stone, and in each one's heart bitterness. Again I laughed aloud.

The mocking sound seemed to disturb my bride. She allowed her tea cup to rattle as she put it down nervously.

"Would you like me to read to you," she asked icily.

And I said "Yes."

And presently her beautiful cultivated voice was flowing along. It was an article in the *Saturday Review* she had picked up, and I did not take in what it was about. I was gazing into the glowing logs, and trying to see visions, and gain any inspiration of how to find a way out of this tangle of false impression. I must wait and see, and endeavor when we get more accustomed to one another—somehow to let Alatheia know the truth.

When she finished the pages she stopped.

"I think he is quite right," she said, but I had not heard what the argument was, so I could only say "Yes!"

"Will it interest you going to England?" I then asked.

"I dare say."

"I have a place there you know. Shall you care to live in it after the war is over?"

"I believe it is the duty of people to live in their homes if they have inherited them as a trust."

"And I can always count upon you to do your duty."

"I hope so."

Then I exerted myself and talked to her about politics and what were my views and aims. She entered into this stiffly, and so an hour passed, but all the time I could feel that her inner self was disturbed, and more resentful and rebellious than ever. We had been two puppets making conversation all the time, neither had said anything naturally.

At last the pretense ended, and we went to our separate rooms to dress for dinner.

Burton had returned by now, and I told him of the detestable thing which had happened, at which he was much concerned.

"Best of her sort was Mam'zelle, Sir Nicholas, but I've always said they bring trouble, every one of them,—if I may make so bold!"

And as I hobbled back into the salon to meet my wife for our first dinner alone, once more I heartily agreed with him!



XXIII

Alathea looked perfectly lovely when she came into the salon dressed for dinner. It is the first time I have seen her in anything pertaining to the evening. She had a gauzy tea-gown on, of a shade of blue like her eyes. Her nut brown hair was beautifully done, with the last "look" like Coralie's, showing her tiny head. Whether she likes it or no, I must give her some pearl earrings, and my mother's pearls. That will be a moment! But I had better wait a little while. Her eyes were shining with excitement or resentment, or a mixture of both. She was purely feminine. She intended to attract me I am certain, her subconscious mind did at all events, even though she would not have admitted it to herself. She was smarting still about Suzette. The situation fills her with distrust and uneasiness, but I know now, after analysing every point, when I could not sleep last night, that she is not really indifferent to me. And it is because she is not, that she is angry.

I registered a vow that I would *make* her love me without explaining about Suzette, fate can let her find out for herself.

I had not come to the comforting conclusion that she is not indifferent at the beginning of the evening though, so the sense of self-confidence and triumph did not uplift me then. I was still worried at the events of the afternoon.

I had troubled to put on a tail coat and white waistcoat, not a dinner jacket as usual, and had even a buttonhole of a gardenia, found by Burton for this great occasion!

I looked into her eyes with my one blue one, which is I suppose, as blue as her own. She instantly averted her glance.

"I cannot offer you my arm, milady," I said rather sarcastically, "So we will have to go in after each other."

She bowed and led the way.

The table was too beautifully decorated, and the dinner a masterpiece! while the

champagne was iced to perfection, and the Burgundy a poem! The pupils of Alatheia's eyes before the partridge came, were black as night. Burton discreetly marshalled Antoine out of the room each time after the dishes were handed.

"When will you get your new eye?" my wife—I like to write that!—asked in the first interval when we were alone, "and your new leg?"

"I suppose they will both be restored to me in a day or two. It will be so wonderful to walk again."

"I should think so."

Then something seemed to strike her suddenly, of how hateful it must all have been for me. Her hard expression changed and she almost whispered:

"It—will seem like a new life."

"I mean to make a new life, if you will help me. I want to get away from all the old useless days. I want to do things which are worth while."

"Shall you soon go into Parliament?"

"I suppose it will take a year or two, but we shall begin to pave the way directly we go back to England, and I hope that will be for Christmas."

She avoided looking at me. I could never catch her eye, but her adorable little profile was good enough to contemplate, the crisp curl by her ear delighted me, and another in the nape of her neck filled me with wild longings to kiss it, and the pearly skin beneath it!

I think I deserve great praise for the way I acted, for the whole thing was acting. I was cold, and as haughty and aloof as she was herself, but I used every art I knew of to draw her out and make her talk.

She is such a lady that she fell into the stride and spoke politely as if to some stranger who had taken her into dinner at a party.

At last we talked of the Duchesse, and we discussed her interesting character, such a marvel of the *ancien régime*!

"She is so very good and charitable," Alatheia said, "and has always a twinkle in her eye which carries her through things."

"You laugh sometimes, too?" I asked with assumed surprise. "That is delightful!

I adore the 'twinkle in the eye,' but I was afraid you would never unbend far enough so that we could laugh together!"

I think this offended her.

"Life would be impossible without a sense of humor, even if it is a grim one."

"Well, nothing need be grim any more, and we can both smile at the rather absurd situation between us, which, however, suits us both admirably. You will never interfere with me, or I with you."

"No—" There was a tone in this which let me feel that her thoughts had harked back to Suzette.

"The Duchesse is going to have a little tea party for us on Saturday, you know, so that you may be introduced as my wife."

Alathea became embarrassed at once.

"Will people know my real name?"

"No—we shall tell no stories, but we shall not be communicative. You will be introduced as an old English friend of the Duchesse's."

She looked at me for an instant and there was gratitude in her expression.

"Alathea, I want you to forget all about the troubles which must have clouded your life. They are all over now, and some day, perhaps you will introduce me to your mother and little sister."

"I will, of course when they come back from the South. My mother has often been so ill."

"I want you to feel that I would do anything for them. Are you sure they have all they want?"

She protested.

"Indeed—yes, far more. You have given too much already."

She raised her head with that indescribable little gesture of hauteur, which becomes her so beautifully. I could read her mind. It said, "I loathe receiving anything from him, with that woman in the background!"

When we went into the salon I wondered what she would do. I did not speak. She took my crutch and shook up my cushion, taking great care not to touch me. I could not look up. I knew that a powerful electric current would pass from my eye to hers, if I did, and that she would see that I was only longing to take her to my heart.

I remained silent and gazed into the fire. She sat down quietly on the sofa at the side, so that I would have to turn my head to look at her. Thus we remained for quite five minutes, speechless. The air throbbed with emotion. I dared not move.

At last she said, "Would you care that I should read to you again, or play?"

"Play for a little." My voice was chilly. I was quite determined the iciness should come from me first, not her, for a few days.

She went to the piano, and she began the Debussy she had played that afternoon when I had first asked her to play—I never can remember its name—and when she had finished she stopped.

"What made you play that now?" I asked.

"I felt like it."

"It wrenches my nerves. What makes you feel all unrestful and rebellious and defiant, Alatheia, am I not keeping the bargain?"

"Yes, of course."

"You are bored to death then?"

"No, I am wondering."

"Wondering what?"

She did not answer. I could not see her without getting up out of my chair.

"Please come here," I asked in an indifferent cold voice. "You know it is so difficult for me to move."

She came back and sat down upon the sofa again. The light of the apricot lamp fell softly on her hair.

"Now tell me about what you were wondering."

Her mouth grew stubborn and she did not speak.

"It is so unlike you to do these very female things, beginning sentences and not going on. I never saw anyone so changed; once I looked upon you as the model for all that was balanced, and unlike your sex. It was I who used to feel nervous and ineffectual, now, ever since we have been engaged, you seem to be disturbed, and to have lost your serenity. Don't you think as it is the first evening that we are alone together that it would be a wise thing to try and get at each other's point of view? Tell me the truth Alatheia, what has caused the alteration in you?"

Now she looked straight at me, and there was defiance in her expressive eyes.

"That is just what I was wondering about. It is true, I seem to have lost my serenity, I am self-conscious—I am conscious of you."

A delicious sensation of joy flowed through me, and the feeling of triumph began which is with me still. If she is conscious of me—!

"Do you mind if I smoke?" I asked with complete casualness to hide my emotions. She shook her head, and I lit a cigarette.

"You were uneasy because you did not trust me, you thought underneath there might be some trap, and that I would seize you once you belonged to me. There was a moment when I might have felt inclined to do so, though I would never have broken my word, but you have cured me of all that, and there is nothing to prevent our being quite good acquaintances,—even if your prejudice does not ever allow you to be friends."

For a second a blank look came into her expression. I was banking on my knowledge of the psychology of a human mind, the predatory instinct must inevitably be aroused in her by my attitude of indifference, if I can only act well enough and keep it up! I should certainly win in a fairly short space of time. But she is so attractive, I do not yet know if I shall have the strength of mind to do so.

"Are you not going to give me some regular work to do each day?" she asked with a tone of mock respect in her voice. "None of the letters have been answered lately, or the bills paid."

"Yes. I scrambled through them all myself while I was waiting, but if you will look over the book again, we might finally send it to a publisher."

"Very well."

"I don't want you to feel that you have ever to stay in or do any work you don't feel inclined for. We shall have lots of time, for the rest of our lives. No doubt tomorrow you would wish to spend with your mother, if she is going away."

"I said good-bye to her this morning. There is no need for me to go back. I came prepared to stay. Unless of course you would rather be alone, then I can go out for a walk." This last with a peculiar tone in the words.

"Naturally you will want to go for walks, and drives, and shopping. You don't imagine that I shall expect you to be a prisoner, just waiting on my beck and call!"

"Yes, that is how I took the bargain. It is quite unfair otherwise. I am here as a paid dependant and receiving really too high wages for any possible work I can give in return. I would not have entered into it otherwise or on any other terms. I loathe to receive favors."

"Madame Lucifer!"

She flashed blue sparks at me!

"I am not forced to command you to work you know," I went on "that is not part of the bargain, the bargain is entirely concerned with my not asking *you* to give me any favors, personal favors, like affection, or caresses, etcetera, or that I shall ever expect you to be really my wife."

She frowned.

"Well, you may put your mind entirely at rest, you have been so awfully disagreeable to me for so long, ever since we were at Versailles in the summer, that you don't attract me at all now, except your intellect and your playing. So if you will talk sometimes and play sometimes, that will be all right. I don't desire anything else. Now, assured about this, can't you be at ease and restful again?"

I know why she wore glasses. She cannot control the expression of her eyes! The pupils dilate and contract and tell one wonderful things! I know that this attitude of mine is having a powerful effect upon her, the feminine in her hates to feel that she has lost power over me—even over my senses. I could have laughed aloud, I was so pleased with my success, but I did not dare to look at her much, or I could never have kept the game up. She was more delectable than I can ever

describe.

"It would interest me so much to know why your hands used to be so red," I asked after a little pause. "They are getting so much whiter now."

"I had work to do, dishes to wash, our old nurse was too ill, as well as my mother, and my little brother then—" there was a break in her soft voice. "I do not like red hands any more than you do. They distressed my father always. I will try to take care of them now."

"Yes—do."

The evening post had come in, and been put by Burton discreetly on a side table. He naturally thought such mundane things could not interest me on my wedding night. I caught sight of the little pile and asked Alatheia to bring them to me.

She did. One from Coralie was lying on top and one immediately under it from Solonge de Clerté! Alatheia saw that they were both in female writing. The rest were bills and business.

"Do you permit me to open them?" I asked punctiliously.

"Of course," and she reddened. "Are you not master here? How absurd to ask me!"

"It is not; you are Lady Thormonde, even if you are not my wife, and have a right to courtesy."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Why did you put—'To Alatheia from her husband' on the bracelets? You are 'Sir Nicholas' and not my husband."

"It was a *bêtise*, a slip of the pen; I admit you are right," and indifferently I opened Coralie's effusion, smiling over it. I put up my hand as if to shade my eye, and looked at Alatheia through the fingers. She was watching me with an expression of slightly anxious interest. I could almost have believed that she was *jealous*!

My triumph increased.

I removed my hand and appeared only to be intent upon Coralie's letter.

"Perhaps we each have friends which might bore the other, so when you want to

have parties tell me, and I will arrange to go out, and when I want to, I will tell you. In that way we can never have any jars."

"Thank you, but I have no friends except the Duchesse, or very humble people who don't want to come to parties."

"But you will be making plenty of new friends now. I have some which you will meet out in the world which I daresay you won't care about, and some who come and dine with me sometimes, who probably you would dislike."

"Yes,—I know."

"How do you know?" I asked innocently, affecting surprise.

"I used to hear them when I was typing."

I smiled. I did not defend them.

"If you should chance to meet, would you be civil to them?"

"Of course, 'Coralie,' 'Odette,' and 'Alice,' the Duchesse has often described them all! It was 'Coralie' who came to talk to you at Versailles in the park, was it not?"

Her voice was contemptuously amused and indifferent, but her little nostrils quivered. Underneath she was disturbed I knew.

"Yes, Coralie is charming, she knows more about how to put clothes on becomingly than any other woman."

"Do they dine often? Because I could perhaps arrange to go and have my music lesson with Monsieur Trani on those evenings, twice a week or oftener?"

"You would refuse to meet them?" I pretended to be annoyed.

"Certainly not, one does not do ridiculous things like that. I will meet whoever you wish. I only thought it might spoil your pleasure if I were there, unless of course you have told them that I am only a permanent secretary masquerading under the name of your wife—so that they need not restrain themselves."

Her face had become inscrutable. She was quite calm now. I grew uncertain again for a moment. Had I carried the bluff far enough?

"They have all quite charming manners, but as you infer they might not be so amused to come to the dinner of a married man. I think the last part of your

speech was rather a reflection upon my sense of being a gentleman though. I of course have not informed anyone of our quaint relations.—But remember you told me once you did not think I was a gentleman, so I must not be offended now."

She did not speak, she was looking down and her eyelashes made a shadow on her cheeks. Her mouth was sad.

Suddenly something pathetic about her touched me. She is such a gallant little fighter. She has had such an ugly cruel life, and Oh! God she is growing to love me, and soon shall I be able to tell her that I worship the ground she walks on, and appreciate her proud spirit and great self-respect? But I cannot chance anything. I must go on and follow what I know to be sound psychological reasoning.

I felt my will weakening then, she looked so perfectly exquisite there in the corner of the sofa. We were alone.—It was nearly ten o'clock at night, the flowers were scenting the air, the lights were soft, the dinner had been perfection. After all I am a man, and she legally belongs to me. I felt the blood rushing wildly in my veins. I had to clench my hands and shut my eye.

"I expect you are tired now," I said a little breathlessly. "So I will say good-night—Milady, and hope that you will sleep well the first night in your new home."

I got up and she came forward quickly to hand me my crutch.

"Good-night," she whispered quite low, but she never looked at me, then she turned and went slowly from the room, never glancing back. And when she had gone instead of going to bed I once more sank into my chair. I felt queerly faint, my nerves are not sound yet I expect.

Well, what a strange wedding night!

Burton's face was a mask when he came to undress me. Among the many strange scenes he has witnessed and assisted at, after forty years spent in ministering to the caprices of the aristocracy, I believe he thinks this is the strangest!

When I was in bed and he was about to go, I suddenly went into a peal of bitter laughter. He stopped near the door.

"Beg pardon, Sir Nicholas?" he said as though I had called to him.

"Aren't women the weirdest things in the world, Burton!"

"They are indeed, Sir Nicholas," and he smiled. "One and all, from Mam'zelle to ladies like her Ladyship, they do like to feel that a man belongs to themselves."

"You think that is it, Burton?"

"Not a doubt of it, Sir Nicholas."

"How do you know them so well, never having married, you old scallywag!"

"Perhaps that's why, Sir. A married man loses his spirit like—and his being able to see!"

"I seem lonely, don't I Burton," and I laughed again.

"You do, Sir Nicholas, but if I may make so bold as to say so, I don't think you will be so very long. Her Ladyship sent out for a cup of tea directly she got to her room."

And with an indescribable look of blank innocence in his dear old eyes, this philosopher, and profound student of women, respectfully left the room!



XXIV

The day after my marriage I did not come into the salon until just before luncheon, at half-past twelve o'clock. My bride was not there.

"Her Ladyship has gone out walking, Sir Nicholas," Burton informed me as he settled me in my chair.

I took up a book which was lying upon the table. It was a volume of Laurence Hope's "Last Poems." It may have come in a batch of new publications sent in a day or two ago, but I had not remarked it. It was not cut all through, but someone had cut it up to the 86th page and had evidently paused to read a poem called "Listen Beloved," the paper knife lay between the leaves. Whoever it was must have read it over and over, for the book opened easily there, and one verse struck me forcibly:

"Sometimes I think my longing soul remembers
A previous love to which it aims and strives,
As if this fire of ours were but the embers
Of some wild flame burnt out in former lives.
Perchance in earlier days I *did* attain
That which I seek for now, so all in vain.
Maybe my soul and thine were fused and wed
In some great night, long since dissolved and dead."

And then my eye travelled on to the bottom of the page.

"Or has my spirit a divine prevision
Of vast vague passions stored in days to be
When some strong souls shall conquer their division
And two shall be as one eternally."

We are both strong souls, shall we have the strength to conquer outside things and be really "one eternally"?

Alathea must have been looking at this not an hour or more ago, what did it

make her think of, I wonder?

I determined to ask her to read the whole poem presently, when we should be sitting together in the afternoon.

It had come on to rain and was a wretched dismal day, I wondered why Alatheia had gone out. Probably she is as restless as I am, and being free to move, she can express her mood in rapid walking!

I began to plan my course of action.

To go on disturbing her as much as possible—

To give her the impression that I once thought her perfection, but that she herself has disillusioned me, and that I am indifferent to her now.

That I am cynical, but am amused to discuss love in the abstract.

That I have friends who divert me, and that I really only want her to be a secretary and companion, and that any interest I may show in her is merely for my own vanity, because she is, to the world, my wife!

If I can only keep this up, and not soften should I see her distressed, and not weaken or give the show away, I must inevitably win the game, perhaps sooner than I dare hope!

I felt glad she had not been there, so that I could pull myself together, and put my armour on, so to speak, before we met.

I heard her come in just before luncheon and go to her room, and then she came on to the sitting-room without her hat.

Her taste is as good as Coralie's, probably her new clothes come from the same place, she appeared adorable, and now that I can observe her at leisure, she seems extremely young,—the childish outline, and the perfect curve of the little cheek! She does not look over eighteen years old, in spite of the firm mouth and serene manner.

I had the poems in my hand.

"I see you have been reading these," I remarked after we had given each other a cold good-morning.

The pupils of her eyes contracted for a second, she was annoyed with herself that

she had left the paper cutter in the book.

"Yes."

"After lunch will you read to me?"

"Of course."

"You like poetry?"

"Yes, some."

"This kind?"

Her cheeks became softly pink.

"Yes, I do. I daresay I should have more classical tastes, but these seem real, these poems, as if the author had meant and felt what she was writing about. I am no judge of poetry in the abstract, I only like it if it expresses some truth, and some thought—which appeals to me."

This was quite a long speech for her!

"Then poems about love appeal to you?" I asked surprised.

"Why not?"

"Why not indeed, only you always have seemed so austere and aloof, I hardly thought such a subject would have interested you!"

She gave a little shrug of her shoulders.

"Perhaps even the working bees have dreams."

"Have you ever been in love?"

She laughed softly, the first time I have ever heard her laugh. It gave me a thrill.

"I don't think so! I have never talked to any men. I mean men of our class."

This relieved me.

"But you dream?"

"Not seriously."

Burton announced luncheon at that moment, and we went in.

We spoke of the rain, and she said she liked being out in the wet. She had walked all down the *Avenue Henri Martin* to the *Bois*. We spoke of the war news, and the political situation, and at last we were alone again in the salon.

"Now read, will you please."

I lay back in my chair and shaded my eye with my hand.

"Do you want any special poem?"

"Read several, and then get to 'Listen Beloved,' there is a point in it I want to discuss with you."

She took the book and settled herself with her back to the window, a little behind me.

"Come forward, please. It is more comfortable to listen when one can see the reader."

She rose reluctantly, and pulled her chair nearer me and the fire, then she began. She chose those poems the least sensuous, and the more abstract. I watched her all the time. She read "Rutland Gate," and her voice showed how she sympathized with the man. Then she read "Atavism," and her little highly bred face looked savage! I realized with a quiver of delight that she is the most passionate creature,—of course she is, with that father and mother! Wait until I have awakened her enough, and she will break through all the barriers of convention and reserve, and pride.

Ah! That will be a moment!

"Now read 'Listen Beloved.'"

She turned the pages, found it, and began, and when she reached the two verses which had so interested me, she looked up for a second, and her lovely eyes were misty and far away. Then she went on and finished, letting the book drop in her lap.

"That accords with your theory of reincarnation, that souls meet again and again?"

"Yes."

"In one of the books I got upon the subject it said all marriages were karmic debts or rewards. I wonder what our marriage is, don't you? Perhaps we were two enemies who injured each other, and now have to make up by being of use, each to each."

"Probably," she was looking down.

"Do you ever have that strange feeling that you are searching for something all the time, something of the soul, that you are unsatisfied?"

"Yes, often."

"Read those last verses again."

Her voice is the most beautiful I have ever heard, modulated, expressive, filled with vibrant vitality and feeling, but this is the first time she has read anything appertaining to love. I could hear that she was restraining all emphasis, and trying to give the sensuous passionate words a commonplace cold interpretation. Never before has she read so monotonously. I knew, ("sensed" is the modern word), that this was because she probably felt and understood every line and did not want to let me see it. Suddenly I found myself becoming suffused with emotion.

Why all the delay, the fencing, the fighting, to obtain this desired thing! This woman—my mate!

That she is my mate I know. My mate because my love is not based upon the senses alone, but is founded upon reverence and respect. I hope—believe—I *am certain* that we shall one day realize the truth of the words:

"When some strong-souls shall conquer their division,
And two shall be as one eternally!
Finding at last upon each others breasts
Unutterable calm and infinite rest."

For me, that means love, not the mere gratifying of the hunting instinct, not the mere primitive passion for the longed for body, but a union of the souls, which can be satisfied, having soared beyond the laws of change.

What is it which causes unrest? Obviously because something is wanting upon one of the planes on which we love, and so that part which is unsatisfied, unconsciously struggles to have its hunger assuaged elsewhere.

There is no aspect of mind, body and soul in me, which I feel would find no counterpart in Alatheia. If I reached out to any height spiritually, she could go as high, or higher. The cleverest working of the brain I could hope to manifest would find a complete comprehension in her. And as for the body! Any student of physiognomy can see that those delicate little nostrils show passion, and that cupid's bow of a mouth will delight in kisses!

Oh! My loved one, do not make we wait too long!

Ye Gods! What a state of exaltation I was in when I wrote those lines last night! But they are the truth, even if I now laugh at my expansion!

I wonder how many men are romantic underneath like I am and ashamed to show it?

When Alatheia had finished the verses for the second time, she again dropped the book in her lap.

"What is your conception of love?" I asked casually.

"As I shall always have to crush it out of my life from now onward I would rather not contemplate what my conception of it might have been."

"Why must you crush it out?" I asked blandly. "Your fidelity to me was not part of the bargain, fidelity has to do with the sex relationships, which do not concern us. One would not ask a secretary to become a nun, on account of one. One would only ask her to behave decently, so as not to shock the world's idea of the situation she was supposed to be filling."

Her face grew subtle, a look came into the eyes which might have come into George's or mine. I suddenly realized how well she really knows the world from the hard school the circumstances of her life have caused her to learn in.

"Then I may take a lover, some day, should I desire to?" she asked a little cynically.

"Certainly, if you tell me about it and don't deceive me, or make me look ridiculous. The bargain would be too unfair to you at your age otherwise."

She looked straight into my eye now and hers were a little fierce.

"And you—shall you take a mistress?"

I watched the smoke of my cigarette curling.

"Possibly," I answered lazily, as though the matter were too much a foregone conclusion to discuss. "Should you mind?"

A faint movement showed in her throat as if she had stopped herself swallowing. She looked down. I know she finds it very difficult to lie, and could not possibly do so if we were gazing at each other.

"Why should I mind?"

"No of course, why should you?"

She looked up then, but not at me. Her eyes flashed and her lip curled in contempt.

"Two seems vulgar though," she snapped.

"I agree with you, the idea wounds my aesthetic senses."

"Then we need not expect another—in the flat just yet?"

At last it was out!

I appeared not to understand, and smoked on calmly, and before I could answer the telephone rang. She handed me the instrument, and I said "Hello." It was Coralie! She spoke very distinctly, and Alatheia, who was near, must have been able to hear most of the words in the silence.

"Nicholas, I am going to be by myself this evening, you will have a dinner for me? Just us alone, *hein?*"

I permitted my face to express pleasure and amusement. *My wife* watched me agitatedly.

"*Non, chère Amie*—Alas! To-night I am engaged. But I shall see you soon."

"*Est il vrai—ce mensonge-la?*"

Coralie said this loud!

I put up my hand so as to be able to continue observing Alatheia's face. It was the picture of disgust and resentment.

"Yes, it is perfectly true, Coralie—*Bon soir*."

In a temper, one could gather, Coralie put the receiver down! And I laughed aloud.

"You see I prefer your intellectual conversation to any of my friends!" I told Alatheia.

Alatheia's cheeks were a bright pink.

"It is not that," her tone was sarcastic, "so much as that you probably have a sense of *tenue*, as the Duchesse says. After a little while you will not have to observe it so strictly," and she rose from her chair and went to the window. "If you are going to rest now, I would wish to go out," her voice was a little hoarse.

"Yes, do go, and if you will be near the *rue de la Paix* go into Roberts' and ask if the new menthol preparation has come, and if so bring it back to me, it takes ages for things to be sent now."

"I was not going to the *rue de la Paix*. I was going to a hospital."

"Never mind then, and don't hurry back, Burton will give me my tea. So *au revoir* until dinner Miladi."

I had to say all this because I was at breaking point, and could not any longer have kept up the game, but would have made an ignominious surrender, and have told her I loved her, and loathed the idea of a mistress, and would certainly murder any lover she should ever glance at!

She went from the room without a word more. And left alone I tried to sleep, but it was no good. I was too excited. I don't think I am such a fool as to flatter myself. I am trying to look at the situation abstractedly. And it seems to me that Alatheia is certainly interested in me, certainly jealous of Suzette, of Coralie, furious with herself for being so, really convinced now that she has lost her hold upon me,—and is uneasy, rebellious, disturbed and unhappy!

All this is perfectly splendid,—my darling little girl!

After a while I went to sleep in my chair, and was awakened by Burton coming in to turn on the lamps.

"Her Ladyship has ordered tea in her room, Sir Nicholas," he told me, "Shall I bring yours here?"

"Her Ladyship has come in then?" I said.

"Her Ladyship did not go out, Sir," Burton answered surprised.

What did this mean I wondered? But I saw no sign of Alatheia until she came in ready for dinner as the clock struck eight.

She was pale but perfectly composed, she had evidently been having some battle with herself and had won.

All through dinner she talked more politely and indifferently than she has for a long time. She was brilliantly intelligent, and I had a most delightful repast. We both came up to the scratch, I think.

She longs to visit Italy, she told me; she has not been there since she was a child. I said I would take her directly the war would be over, and things in the way of travel had become possible again. How strong her will must be to have so mastered herself. No slightest sign of emotion, one way or another, showed now. She was the serene, aloof companion of the day at Versailles, before Suzette's shadow fell upon us. I grew puzzled, as the evening wore on, and just a little unsure of myself. Had I gone too far? Had I over disgusted her? Had all interest died out, and so is she enabled to fulfill the bargain without any more disturbance of mind?

I asked her to play to me at last, I was growing so apprehensive, and she went from one divine thing to another for quite an hour, and then at ten o'clock stopped and said a dignified and casual "good-night" leaving me sitting in my chair.

I heard twelve and one strike after I too went to bed, no sleep would come, I was reviewing things, and strengthening my courage. Then I got up and hobbled into the salon to get the "Last Poems," the door was open, why I don't know, nor do I know what impelled me to go out into the passage and towards Alatheia's room, some powerful magnet seemed to draw me. The carpets are very deep and soft, no noise of footfalls can be heard. I crept near the door and stopped. What was that faint sound? I listened, yes it was a sob. I crept nearer.

Alatheia was crying.

A soft continued moaning as of one in resigned distress. I could hardly bear it. I could hardly prevent myself from opening the door and going to her to comfort her.

My darling, darling little girl!

Flight was my only resource. So I left her to her tears, and returned to my bed, and when I was safely there and could think, a wild sense of triumph and power and satisfaction filled me! The weight, which all the evening her marvelous self-control had been able to make me feel, lifted from my heart, and I rejoiced!

Is it possible that the primitive instinct of the joy of conquest could make of me such a brute!

It gave me pleasure to know that my little love suffered!

The sooner would she belong to me—quite!



XXV

Marriage is the most turbulent state I could have imagined! Whether or not Alatheia and I will ever get the tangle straightened out I am not certain. Now as I write—Saturday afternoon, the ninth of November, 1918—it looks as if we were parted forever, and I am so irritated and angry that as yet I feel no grief.

The quarrel all arose from my fault, I suppose. When Alatheia came into the sitting-room at about ten o'clock she had blue circles round her eyes, and knowing what caused them I determined to ask her about them and disturb her as much as possible! This was mean of me.

"You poor child! You look as if you had been crying all night. I do hope nothing is troubling you?"

Her cheeks flushed.

"Nothing, thank you."

"Your room cannot be properly aired then, or something. I have never seen you looking so wretchedly. I do wish you would be frank with me. Something must have worried you. People don't look like that for nothing."

She clasped her hands together.

"I hate this talk about me. What does it matter how I look, or am, so long as I do the things I am engaged for?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I suppose it ought not to, but one has a feeling that one hates anyone under one's roof to be unhappy."

"I am not unhappy. I mean not more unhappy than I have always had to be."

"But the causes which made you sad before have been removed surely, only things which are occurring now from day to day between you and me, can bring fresh trouble. Is it something I have done?"

Silence.

"Alathea, if you knew how you exasperate me by your silences! I was always taught that it was very rude not to answer when one was spoken to."

"It depends upon who speaks, and what about, and whether they have a right to an answer."

"Then the inference is that I have no right to an answer, when you are silent?"

"Probably."

I grew irritated.

"Well, I think I have a right, I ask you a plain question—have I done anything which has caused you distress—distress which is so evident that you must have been crying!"

She threw up her arms.

"Why on earth cannot you keep to business, it is quite unfair. If I were really your secretary and nothing more you would never persecute me for answers like this!"

"Yes I would. I have a perfect right to know why anyone in my service is unhappy. Your fencing tells me that it is something which I have done which has hurt you, and I insist upon knowing what it is."

"I shall not tell you," defiantly.

"I am very angry with you, Alathea," my voice was stern.

"I don't care!" hers was passionate.

"I think you are very rude."

"You have told me that before—well I am rude then! I will tell you nothing. I will do nothing but just be your servant to obey orders which relate to the work I have been engaged for."

I felt so furious I had to lie back in my chair and shut my eye.

"You have a very poor sense of a bargain, if you only keep it in the letter. Your underneath constant hostility makes everything so difficult, the inference of your

whole attitude toward me, and of everything you say and do, is that you feel injured, that you have some grudge against me."

I tried to speak levelly.

"What on earth have I ever done to you except treat you with every courtesy? Except that one day when you had the baby in your arms and I was rude, but apologized, and that one other time when I kissed you, and God knows I was sorry enough afterwards and have regretted it ever since. What is the reason of your attitude; it is absolutely unfair?"

This seemed to upset her considerably. She hated the idea that she was thought unfair. It may have made her realize too that she *had* a definite sense of injury. She lost her temper, she stamped her scrap of a foot.

"I hate you!" she burst out. "You and your bargain! I wish I was dead!" and then she sank into the sofa and covered her face with her hands, and by the shaking of her shoulders, I saw that she was crying!

If I had been cool enough to think then, I suppose I could have reasoned that all this was probably most flattering to me, and an extra proof of her state of mind, but the agitation it had plunged me into made me unable to balance things, and I too allowed my temper to get the better of me, and I got up as best I could and seizing my crutch, I walked towards my bedroom door.

"I shall expect an apology," was all I said, and went in and left her alone.

If we are to go on fighting like this, life won't be worth living!

I tried to calm myself and went in the window, but the servants came into the room to make the bed, so I was forced to go back again to the sitting-room. Alatheia had gone into the little salon, I suppose, because for the same reason, she could not have returned to her room. I sat down in my chair quite exhausted. I did not feel like reading or doing anything.

It was to-day that we were to go to the Duchesse's in the afternoon for Alatheia to be presented to our friends as my wife! I wondered if she had forgotten this!

After an hour Burton came in with the second post.

"You do look badly, Sir Nicholas!" he said. His face was perplexed and troubled. "Can I get you anything?"

"Where is Her Ladyship, Burton?"

Then he told me that she had gone out. I could see he wanted to say something. His remarks are generally valuable.

"Out with it, Burton."

"I do think it is Mam'zelle that's causing all the trouble. As bad luck would have it, as I opened the door to let Her Ladyship out, who should come up the stairs a moment after but Mam'zelle! They must have passed on the floor below. Neither had taken the lift, which as you know, Sir Nicholas, is out of order again, since last night."

"Then she thinks Suzette has come in here to see me Burton. By Jove what a devilish complication! I think we had better move from the flat as quickly as we can."

"It seems as if it would be advisable, Sir Nicholas."

"Can you suggest anything, Burton? I really am quite knocked over to-day."

"Her Ladyship don't chat to servants like some ladies, or I could easily let her maid know that Mam'zelle don't visit here, so that won't do," he mused. "You could not tell her yourself straight out. Sir Nicholas, could you?"

"It would be difficult, because it presupposes I think she minds about it, and for me to let her know that would insult her more than anything."

"Beg pardon, Sir Nicholas, but there was a young woman some twenty years ago, who had a temper like, and I always found it was best just to make a fuss of her, and not do no reasoning. That is what they wants, Sir Nicholas, indeed it is. I've watched them in all classes for a matter of many years. You can get what you want of them if you only make a fuss of them."

"What does 'to make a fuss of' exactly mean Burton?"

"Well, it is not for me to tell you Sir, knowing ladies as you do, but it is just kissing and fondling them, and them things, makin' them feel that they're just everything,—even reasonable, Sir Nicholas."

Burton's dryly humorous face delighted me. His advice was first class, too!

"I'll think it over," I told him, and he left me alone.

That would be one way of winning or losing everything certainly! But it would also be breaking my word, and I don't believe I could do that.

Alathea came in in time for luncheon. Her face was set in a mutinous obstinate mould. We went into the dining-room immediately, and so there was no chance of conversation. I noticed that she wore no bracelets or rings, nothing of mine, not even the wedding ring.

We were icy to each other during the meal, and made conversation, and when we were alone with the coffee I just said:

"I hope that you have not forgotten that at four o'clock we are to go to the Duchesse's to meet the friends that she thinks it is suitable for you to know."

Alathea started. I could see she had not registered this fact for this date.

"I would rather not go," she said resentfully.

"I daresay you would. So would I, but we owe the Duchesse gratitude for all her kindness to us, and I fear we must."

We did not speak further. I could not talk until she apologized, and I rose to go out of the room. She gave me my crutch. Her not apologizing made me burn with resentment.

I had not been in the salon a minute, however, before she came in, her face crimson. She stood in front of me.

"I apologize for showing my temper this morning. Would it not do after to-day if I just lived out somewhere, and came in and worked as before? It is a perfect farce that I live here, and wear a wedding ring, even the servants must be laughing at me."

"I notice you do not wear a wedding ring. Your whole attitude is perfectly impossible, and I demand an explanation. What is the reason of it? We made a bargain, and you are not keeping it."

"If you will give me time to work, I will pay you back the fifty thousand francs, and the clothes and jewels I can leave behind me—I want to go."

She spoke with a break in her voice now.

"Why do you want to go suddenly, there is nothing different to-day to yesterday

or any other day? I refuse to be the puppet of your caprices."

She stood clasping and unclasping her hands, never looking at me.

"Alathea," I said sternly, "look me straight in the face and tell me the truth. *What* is your reason."

"I can't" still her eyes were down.

"Is there someone else?" My voice sounded fierce to my own ears. I had a sudden fear.

"But you said it would not matter if there was someone else—if I told you," she answered defiantly.

"There is someone else then?" I tried to be casual. "Look at me."

Slowly she raised her eyes until they met my one.

"No, there is no one.—I just don't want to live here, in this flat any longer."

"Unless you can give me some definite reason for this extraordinary behaviour on your part, I am afraid I must refuse to discuss the situation, and meanwhile will you please go to your room and fetch the rings and bracelets."

She turned and left without a word—I daresay she wondered what I was going to do with them.

She brought them back.

"Come here close."

She came rebelliously.

"Give me your hand."

"I won't."

"Alathea, I will seize it, crippled as I am, and make you obey me by force if you will not for asking."

Her whole face expressed furious resentment, but she is too sensible and level headed to make a scene, so she gave me her hand. I put the wedding ring back, and the big diamond one.

"Now you will wear them until you convince me of your reason so thoroughly that I myself take them off, the bracelets you can do as you like about—throw them away, or give them to your maid. And this afternoon I hope I can count upon your instincts of being a lady to make you behave so that no one can chatter about us."

She drew away her hand, as though my touch burnt her. Her expression was contemptuously haughty.

"Of course you can count upon me for this afternoon," and she turned and went out of the room again.

And now I am waiting for her to come back dressed for the Duchesse's reception, it is ten minutes to four o'clock. The volcano upon which we are living cannot go on simmering much longer, there is bound to be an explosion soon!

Later:

Things are developing! My bride and I never spoke a word on the way to the Hotel de Courville. She was looking the most desirable morsel a man could wish to present to his friends. The sable cloak and the most perfect frock and hat. Her maid is evidently a splendid hairdresser. She was "of a *chic*," as Maurice afterwards told me.

I had telephoned and broken the news to him while I was waiting for Alatheia to come. He was not surprised, he pretended, and now that the marriage is an accomplished fact, he is too well bred not to fall into the attitude of delight about it. Maurice has no intention of dropping me—married or single!

Thus when we arrived, and went up in the lift to the sitting-room, we found him among the first to greet us.

The Duchesse kissed us both fondly, and said many pleasant things, and having placed me in a suitable chair, brought everyone to me, and presented Alatheia to them all.

They were the very *crème de la crème* of the Faubourg who could be collected in Paris—many are still in the country. Coralie was there, with two resentful pinpoints in her clever little eyes, but the most gracious words on her lips.

They none of them could find fault with the appearance of my wife—nor her manner. She has the ways of the *ancien régime* like the Duchesse. I could see that she was having a huge success.

While everything seemed to be going beautifully and all the company had gone on into another small anti-room where the "*goûter*" was, my dear old friend came to me.

"It is not progressing Nicholas—*Hein?*"

"There is some screw very loose, Duchesse. She absolutely hates me and wants to go and live out of the flat!"

"*Tiens!*—She is jealous of some one. Nicholas, it is not possible that you have still—?"

I did not grow angry.

"No indeed, that is over long ago, but I do believe she thinks it is not. You see the person in question comes to see a relative who has married an *antiquaire* on the floor above me, and Alatheia has seen her on the stairs and imagines she comes to see me!"

"And you cannot tell her?"

"I am not supposed to know it would matter to her!"

"*Bon.* Do you really love the child, Nicholas?"

"*Chère Amie*, with my whole heart. I only want her in all the world."

"And she is being impossible for you surely! I know her character—if she thinks you have a mistress—her pride is of *le diable!*"

"It is indeed."

The Duchesse laughed.

"We must see what can be done, dear boy. Imagine though what I have discovered! That infamous father took that money that you gave, when the affair had already been settled by *le Colonel* Harcourt with your money! A relation of mine attested at the investigation and had to know the facts. Nicholas, you *preux chevalier!* You paid twice, and never said a word! You are of a devotion! It was splendid of you, but my poor Hilda is heartbroken that you have been so

pillaged."

At that moment the crowd returned from the other room and the Duchesse rose and left me.

Coralie now sat with me.

"*Mes compliments*, Nicholas! She is lovely! But what a fox,—thou!"

"Am I not? It is so delicious to find things out for oneself!"

Coralie laughed; she has a philosophic spirit, as I have found always those much love-battered ones possess. She accepts my defection and again looks to the main chance to see how she can benefit by it.

At last the whole thing was over, and Maurice and I had a cigarette together in the tea room.

People would be crazy, "simply crazy, my dear chap," about Alatheia, he told me. She was "*séduisante*," how right I had been! How fortunate I was! When was I going to England?

He said farewells after this, and once more *my wife* and I were alone in the brougham.

Alatheia wore her mask. Having been received now as my wife, and by the Duchesse whom she loves and respects, she knows she cannot go on suggesting she will not live in the flat with me. She cannot bring herself to speak about Suzette, because the inference would be that she objects. I wondered if the Duchesse had been able to say anything to her.

She did not speak at all and went straight to her room when we arrived.

It was five minutes past eight when she came in to the sitting-room.

"I am sorry if I have kept you waiting," were her first words.

At dinner we spoke ceremoniously of the party. And when we went back to the salon she went straight to the piano and played divinely for an hour.

The music soothed me. I felt less angry and disturbed.

"Won't you come over and speak now?" I called in a pause, and she came over and sat down.

"Don't let us talk to-night," she said. "I am trying to adjust things in my mind. I want to go to my mother to-morrow, if you will agree. She is ill again, and has not been able to start. From there I will tell you if I can force myself to keep on with it, or no."

"I cannot understand why it should be so difficult, the idea did not affright you when we first talked of it. You voluntarily accepted the proposal, made your bargain, promised to stick to it, and here after three days you are trying to break out, and are insinuating that the circumstances are too horrible for you to continue bearing it. Surely your reason and common sense must tell you that your behaviour is grotesque."

The same agitation which always shows when we talk thus overcame her again. She did not speak.

"I could understand it better if you were a hysterical character. You did not seem to be so, but now no ridiculous school miss of romance could be more given to the vapours. You will absolutely destroy the remaining respect I have for you, unless you tell me the truth, and what is underneath in your mind influencing you to behave so childishly."

This stung her to the quick, as I had meant that it should. She bounded up.

"Well,—I will then. I hate being in the house—with your mistress!"

She was trembling all over, and as white as marble.

I leaned back and laughed softly. My joy was so immense I could not help it.

"To begin with, I have no mistress, but if I had how can it possibly matter to you, since you hate me, and yourself arranged to be only my secretary."

"You have no mistress!" I could see she thought I was lying ignobly.

"I had one, as of course you know, but the moment I began to think that you might be an agreeable companion, I parted from her, at the time when you saw the counterfoils in the cheque-book, and changed to me from that moment."

"Then—?" she still looked incredulous.

"She has a cousin living in the flat above, married to an *anticaire*. She comes to see her. You have no doubt met on the stairs. And on our wedding day she came in here, not knowing, to thank me for a villa I had given her at Monte Carlo as a

good-bye present. I am very angry that she intruded, and it shall never happen again."

"Is this true?" She was breathless.

That made me angry.

"I am not in the habit of lying," I said haughtily.

"*Mademoiselle la Blonde*," and her lips curled. "She came in while you were at St. Malo. She inferred you had not parted then!"

"That was because she was jealous, and is very temperamental. I had thought that quality was confined to her class."

I too can hit hard when I am insulted!

Alathea flashed at me. She was beginning to realize that she was at a disadvantage.

"You are not unutterably shocked that I should have had a—friend, are you?"

Her face grew contemptuous.

"No, my father had one. Men are all beasts."

"They may be in the abstract, but are not when they can find a woman worth love and respect."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"My mother is an angel."

"Now that your mind is at rest as to this question, have you any other cause of complaint against me? Though why it should matter to you what I do or don't do in this respect, as long as I am courteous to you, and fulfill my side of the bargain, I cannot think. One could imagine you were jealous!"

"Jealous!" she flared furiously. "Jealous, I! How ridiculous.—One has to care to be jealous!" and then she flounced out of the room.

Yes,—even when they appear all that is balanced, there is nothing so amazing as a woman!



XXVI

Sunday:

I slept last night soundly for some strange reason, and woke quite late on Sunday morning.

One frequently has some sense of depression or some sense of exhaltation before one is quite conscious, and quite often cannot account for either state. Presumably Alatheia had left me full of contemptuous indifference, but I awoke with a feeling of joy and satisfaction, which gradually changed to flatness, when I became fully aware of things.

For indeed what reason had I for great rejoicing? None, except that the menace of the Suzette bogie may be lifted.

I rang for Burton. It was nine o'clock.

"Has Her Ladyship breakfasted yet, Burton?"

"Her Ladyship breakfasted at eight, and left the house at half-past, Sir Nicholas."

My heart sank. So I was going to have a lonely morning. She had said she wanted to go to her mother, I remembered now. I did not hurry to get up. The doctors were coming with the wonderful artist who is making my new foot, at twelve o'clock, and I am to have it on to-day for the first time. This would be a surprise for Alatheia when she returned to lunch. I read my journal in bed, and thought over the whole of our acquaintance. Yes, certainly she has greatly changed in the last six weeks. And possibly I am nearer my goal than I could have dared to hope.

Now my method must be to be sweet to her, and not tease her any more.

How wonderful it will be when she does love me. I have not thought much about my own feelings lately. She has kept me so often irritated and angry, but I know that there is a steady advance, and that I love her more than ever.

To see her little mutinous rebellious face softening—?—it will be worth all the waiting. But meanwhile she is out, and I had better get up!

I wonder if all the hundreds of other fellows who lost a leg below the knee and were cripples for eighteen months felt the same as I did when the new limb was fixed, and they stood upon two feet again for the first time.

A strange, almost mad sense of exaltation filled me. I could walk! I was no longer a prisoner, dependent upon the devotion of attendants!

I should no longer have to have things placed within reach, and be made to realize impotency!

It hurt and was awkward for a while.—But Oh! the joy, joy, joy!!

After the doctors and the specialist had gone with hearty congratulations, my dear old faithful servant had tears in his eyes as he dressed me.

"You must excuse me, Sir Nicholas, but I am so glad."

Excuse him! I could have hugged him in my own joy.

He arrayed me in one of Mr. Davies's pre-war masterpieces, and we both stood in front of the long glass in my bedroom, and then we solemnly shook hands!

It was too glorious!

I wanted to run about! I wanted to shout and sing. I played idiotic tricks, walking backwards and forwards, like one of Shackleton's penguins. Then I went back to the glass again, actually whistling a tune! Except for the black patch over my eye, I appeared very much the same as I used to do before the war. My shoulder is practically straight now. I am a little thinner, and perhaps my face bears traces of suffering, but in general I don't look much altered.

I wonder what Alatheia will say when she sees me! I wonder if it will make any difference to her?

To-morrow morning they are going to put in my eye.

I have not written all this in my journal, it seemed too good to be true, and I had a kind of superstitious feeling that I must not even think of it, much less write, in case it did not come off. But now the moment has come! I am a man again on

two feet. Hurrah!

I looked out of the window and kissed my hand to a young girl in the street. I wanted to call to her, "I could walk with you now, perhaps soon I could run!" She looked at me with the corner of her eye!

Then I planned how I would surprise Alatheia! I would be in my bedroom when I knew she was in the salon before lunch, and then I would walk in!

I became excited, there was about a quarter of an hour to wait. I tried to sit down and settle to a book, but it was useless, the words conveyed no sense. I could not even read the papers!

I began listening to every sound, there were not many things passing at this time on a Sunday morning, but of course she was walking, not driving. One o'clock struck. She had not returned. Burton came in to ask if I would postpone lunch.

"Her Ladyship did not say when she would be back," he said.

"We had better not wait then. I believe now she told me she would not be in."

Burton had opened a pint of champagne. On this tremendous occasion he felt I should drink my own health!

I had begun to lose some of my joy.—I wished she had been here to share it with me.—

* * * * *

I have walked up and down—up and down. It is four o'clock now, and she has not returned. No doubt her mother is ill, perhaps,—perhaps—

Midnight:

I have spent a beastly day. My exhilaration has all evaporated now. I have had no one to share it with me. Maurice and everyone is leaving me discreetly alone, knowing I am supposed to be on my honeymoon—Honeymoon!

I spent the afternoon waiting, waiting. And after tea when Alatheia had not arrived I began taking longer turns, walking up and down the broad corridor, and at last I paused outside her room, and a desire came over me to look in on it, and see how she had arranged it.

There was silence. I listened a moment, then I opened the door.

The fire was not lit, it all seemed cold and cheerless. I turned on the light.

Except for the tortoise-shell and gold brushes and boxes I had had put on the dressing table for her, there was not an indication that anyone stayed there, none of the usual things women have about in their rooms. One could see she looked upon it just as an hotel, and not a permanent abode. There were no photographs of her family, no books of her own, nothing.

Only the bracelets were on the table still in their case, and on looking nearer, I saw there was a bottle of scent. It had no label, and when I opened it I smelled the exquisite perfume of fresh roses that she uses. Where does she get it? It is the purest I have ever smelt in my life.

I looked at the quaint little fourpost bed that I had found in that shop at Bath, a perfect specimen of its date, about 1699, with the old deep rose silk pressed over the shell carving.

I had an insane desire to open the drawers in the chest and touch her stockings and gloves. I had a wild feeling altogether I wanted my love, rebellious, unrelenting, anyhow! I just longed for her.

I resisted my stupidities and made myself leave the room, and then tried to feel joy again in my leg.

Burton was turning on the lamps when I got back to the salon.

"There are rumours that something is going to happen, Sir Nicholas,—talk of an Armistice I heard when I was out. Do you think Foch will do it?"

But I know all these rumours and talks, we have heard them before, so this did not affect me. I could feel nothing, as time went on, but a passionate ache. Why, why must she be so cruel to me? Why does she leave me all alone?

Alathea, I would never be so unkind to you. And yet I don't know, if I were jealous and angry, as I suppose she is, I could of course be much crueler.

Her Ladyship's maid had been given the day out by her mistress, Burton informed me, so that we could gain no information from her. We waited until half-past eight for dinner, but still my little girl did not come, and in solemn state in a white tie and tail coat, I dined—alone!

In spite of the champagne, which Burton again handed, apprehension set in. What can have happened to her? Has she had an accident? Does she mean never to return? Are all my calculations of no sense, and has she left me forever?

In despair, at ten o'clock I telephoned the Hotel de Courville.

Lady Thormonde had been there in the morning, I was told, but the Duchesse had left for Hautevine at two o'clock.—No one was in the house now.—No, they did not know Lady Hilda Bulteel's telephone number. She had no telephone they supposed.—No, they did not know the address.

Auteuil, and the name Bulteel, that is all! Perhaps something could be done on a week-day, but on a Sunday night, in war time, all was impossible. And at last in an agony of doubt and apprehension, I consented to retire to bed.

Had I made some mistake? I tried to remember. She had said she meant to decide if she could bear the situation or no, and that she was going to her mother. She wanted to be with her. She had been ill and could not start. Yes, of course that is it. The mother is ill, and they have no telephone. I must wait until the morning. She cannot really mean not to come back. In any case she would have let me know.

But what an agony of suspense!

Burton came and gave me my medicine, when I was in bed, and although I knew it was a camouflaged sleeping draught, I drank it. I just could not bear it any longer.

But I only slept until four, and now I am sitting up writing this, and I feel as if every queer force was abroad, and that all sorts of momentous things are happening.—Oh, when will daylight come—

* * * * *

I was awakened by cannon!

I leaped from my bed. Yes, leaped! I had been dreaming that a surprise party of Germans were attacking the trench, and I was just rallying the men for a final dash when heavy guns began a bombardment which was unexpected.—Oh God! let me get up and over the top in time!

Wild with excitement, I was now wide awake!

Yes, there were cannons booming!

Had Bertha begun again?

What was happening?

Then I heard murmurs in the street. I rang the bell violently. I had slept very late. Burton rushed in.

"An Armistice, Sir Nicholas," he cried joyously.

"It's true after all!"

An Armistice! Oh, God!

So at last, at last we have won, and it has not been all in vain!

I shook with emotion. How utterly absorbed in my own affairs I had been not to have taken in that this was coming. George Harcourt had telephoned that he had news for me, I remember now, while we were at the Hotel de Courville on Saturday, and I had paid no attention.

I was too excited all through breakfast to feel renewed anxiety about Alatheia. I was accepting the fact that she had stayed with her mother. Surely, surely she would be in soon now!

The oculist, and his artist-craftsman, would be arriving soon, at eleven o'clock, if the excitement of an Armistice does not prevent them! I hope all that won't be going on when Alatheia does come in!

Burton has questioned her maid. She knows nothing of Miladi's movements only that she herself had been given permission to go out for the day.

All the servants have gone more or less crazy! Pierre hopped in just now, jolly old chap! and in his excitement embraced me on both cheeks!

(He has a wooden stump, not a smart footed thing like mine, but I shall change all that now!).

Antoine could not contain himself, and heaven knows what the underservants did!

I told them all to run out and see what was happening, but Pierre said no, the *déjeuner* of Monsieur must not be neglected. Time enough in the afternoon!

Eleven came, and with it the oculist, and by luncheon time I had a second blue eye! But Oh! the shouting in the streets and the passionate joy in the air!

The two men preened themselves upon keeping this appointment upon so great a day, and indeed my gratitude was deep. But the same gladness did not hold me as when my leg was given back to me. Everything was now swallowed up in an overwhelming suspense.

What could have kept Alatheia?

I walked to the glass soberly when the doctors had gone, eager to get away and join the rejoicers. And what I saw startled me. How astonishing the art of these things is now! Unless I turn my glance in some impossible way I have apparently two bright blue eyes, with the same lids and lashes, the scrap of shrapnel only injured the orb itself, and did not touch the lid, fortunately, and the socket had healed up miraculously in the last month. I am not now a disgusting object. Perhaps, possibly—Yes, can I induce her to love me soon?

But what is the good of it all? She has not returned, and now something must be done.

But on this day of days no one could be found to attend to anything! Shops were shut, post offices did not work. The city was mad with rejoicing.

At luncheon I ate,—gulped down my food. Burton's calm reassured me.

"You don't think anything has happened, do you Burton?"

"No, Sir Nicholas. Her Ladyship is no doubt with her family. I don't feel that anything is amiss. Her Grace returns to-morrow anyway, and we can hear for sure then. Would you not care to drive out and see the people, Sir? It is a day!"

But I told him no. He must go, they all could go. I would wait in and could now attend to myself! But I knew somehow that the dear old boy would not leave me.

The hours went by, the shouting grew louder, as bands passed on their way to the *Champs Elysées* to see the cannon, which I heard were now dragged there. Burton came in from time to time to tell me the news, gathered from the *concierge* below.

I telephoned to Maurice, he was wild with delight! They were going to have a great dinner at the Ritz and then go and *farandole* in the streets with the people,

would not we (we!) join them!

Everyone was going. Odette telephoned too, and Daisy Ryven. All were rejoicing and happy.

The agony grew and grew. What if she means to leave me and has just disappeared, not telling me on purpose to punish me? At this thought I went frantically into her room again, and looked on the dressing-table. The ring cases were there in a drawer in the William and Mary looking-glass, but no rings. No, if she had not meant to return she would have left them behind her. This gave me hope.

I had the fire lit. Burton lit it, everyone else was out.

Of course the crowd has prevented her returning. There would be great difficulty in getting back from Auteuil.

Some of the fellows of the Supreme War Council rang up. They were less exhilarated by the news. A pity, they thought. Foch could have entered Berlin in a week!

At last, when I had been pacing like a restless tiger, and twilight was coming, I sank into my chair overcome with the strain.

I did not mean to feel the drivel of self pity, but it is a ghastly thing to be all alone and anxious, when everyone else is shouting for joy.

I was staring into the fire. I had not had the lights lit on purpose. I wanted the soft shadows to soothe me. Burton had gone down again to the *conciergerie*.

A bitterness and a melancholy I cannot describe was holding me. Of what good my leg and my eye if I am to suffer torment once more? A sense of forsakenness held me. Perhaps I dozed, because I was worn out, when suddenly I was conscious of a closing door, and opening my eye, I saw that Alatheia stood before me.

A log fell and blazed brightly, and I could see that her face was greatly moved.

"I am so sorry if you have been anxious.—Burton says you have. I would have been back earlier but I was caught in the crowd."

I reached out and turned on the lamp near me, and when she saw my eye and leg, she fell upon her knees at my side.

"Oh! Nicholas," she cried brokenly, and I put out my hand and took her hand.

* * * * *

What a thing is joy!

My heart beat madly, the blood rushed in my veins. What was that noise I heard in my ear beyond the shouting in the street?

Was it the cooing which used to haunt my dreams?

Yes it was. And Alatheia's voice was murmuring in French:

"Pardon, pardon, j' etais si bien ingrate—Pardonnez moi—Hein?"

I wanted to whisper:

"Darling you have returned,—nothing matters any more," but I controlled myself. She must finally surrender first!

Then she sprang to her feet and stood back to look at me. I rose too and there towered above her.

"Oh, I am so glad, so glad," she said tremulously. "How wonderful,—how miraculous!—It is for this great day!"

"I thought that you had left me altogether." I was a little breathless, "I was so very sad."

Now she looked down.

"Nicholas," (how I loved to hear her pronounce my name) "Nicholas, I have heard from my mother of your great generosity. You had helped us without ever telling me, and then paid again to stop my mother's anxiety, and again to stop mine. Oh! I am ashamed,—humbled, that I have been as I have been to you, forgive me, forgive me, I ask you to from my heart."

"I have nothing to forgive child. Come let us sit down and talk everything over," and I sank into the sofa and she came beside me.

She would not look at me, however, but her little face was gentle and shy. "I cannot understand though why you did all that. I cannot understand anything about it all.—You do not love me.—You only wanted me for your secretary, and yet you paid over a hundred thousand francs! The generosity is great."

I gazed and gazed at her.

"And you hate me," I said as coolly as I could "and let me buy you, so that you could save your family.—Your sacrifice was immense."

Suddenly she looked straight up at me, her eyes filled with passion, so that wild fire kindled in my blood.

"Nicholas,—I do not hate you."

I took both her hands and drew her to me, while outside in the street they were singing the *Marseillaise* and yelling for joy.

"Alathea, tell me the truth, what then do you feel?"

"I don't know. I wanted to murder Suzette. I could have drowned Coralie.—Perhaps you can tell me,—here in your arms—!"

And with wild abandon she fell forward into my fond embrace.

Ah! God! The bliss of the next few moments with her soft lips pressed to mine! Then I could not repeat often enough that I loved her, nor make her tell me how she loved me in return!

Afterwards, I grew masterful and ordered her to recount to me everything from the very beginning.

Yes, she had been attracted by me from the first day, but she hated the friends I had round me, and she did not like the aimlessness of my life.

"Whenever I used to be growing too contemptuous though, Nicholas, I used to remember the V.C., and then the feeling went off, but I was growing angrier and angrier with myself, because in spite of believing you only thought of me as one of them, I could not prevent myself from loving you. There is something about you that made one forget all about your leg and your eye!"

"Those cheques disgusted you!" and I kissed the little curl by her ear—she was clasped close to me now.—"That was the beginning of my determination to conquer you and have you for my own!"

She caressed my hair.

"I adore thick hair, Nicholas," she whispered, "but now you have had enough flattery! I am off to dress!"

She struggled and pretended she wanted to leave me, but I would not let her go.

"Only when I please and at a price! I want to show you that you have a husband who in spite of a wooden leg and a glass eye, is a powerful brute!"

"I love you,—strong like that," she cooed, her eyes soft with passion again. "I am not good really,—or austere,—or cold."

And I knew it was true as she paid the toll!

Presently I made her let me come and choose which frock she was to put on for dinner, and I insisted that I should stay and see her hair being brushed, and the maid, Henriette, with her French eye, beamed upon us understandingly!

While Burton almost blubbered with happiness when I told him His Ladyship and I were friends again.

"I knew it, Sir Nicholas, if you'd just made a fuss of her."

How right he was!

What a dinner we had, gay as two children, fond and foolish as sweethearts always are,—and then the afterwards!

"Let us go and see the streets," my little love implored, "I feel that we should shout our divine happiness with the crowd!"

But when we went out on the balcony to investigate, we saw that would be impossible, I am not yet steady enough on my feet to have faced that throng. So we stood there and sang and cheered with them, as they swept on towards the *Arc de Triomphe*, and gradually a delirious intoxication held us both, and I drew her back into the softly lighted room.

"Lover!" she whispered as she melted into my arms, and all I answered was, "Soul of Mine."

And now I know what the whole of those verses mean!

And so this Journal is done!

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