

The Adventures of Miss Gregory: The Honest Man

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"Brussels," wrote Miss Gregory in her diary, "is a fine, sleek city; but, at present it seems to be inhabited chiefly by members of the Gould family."

It was to be her last halt before crossing to England, a lingering out of the flavor of travel before proceeding to the process of digestion; but, in the Goulds, it seemed as if England were thrusting forward to meet her. She had not finished inscribing her name in the hotel register before she heard that name pronounced behind her in accents of joy, and turned to encounter a demonstrative old gentleman with misty white whiskers, whom she recognized, after a moment of hesitation, as Gould senior.

"Of all people!" he was babbling. "But this is simply charming! The wanderer returned, eh? I was sure I recognized your back."

"Very good of you," said Miss Gregory, surprised. The Goulds for some years past had certainly seen more of her back than of her face; but they seemed to have made the best of it.

"And you are making a little stay here?" inquired the old gentleman. "Yes? How delightful! My wife will be so pleased to see you. Yes, she's here—we're all here, in fact. Ah, there's my daughter. Iris, come and welcome Miss Gregory. You remember Iris, Miss Gregory?"

"Oh, perfectly," said Miss Gregory. "How d'ye do?" She shook hands with the stout young woman whom Mr. Gould called Iris, mentally remarking how like her father she was. All the Goulds had that easy smile and the same shifty, humorless eyes—except one, who was no longer of their number.

"The others are somewhere about," said Mr. Gould zestfully. "Where did you leave them, Iris?"

"I shall see them later, no doubt," said Miss Gregory. "I'm going up to my room now."

She gave Iris a nod, and walked away to the elevator, where a porter was waiting

with her dressing-bag. She preferred to take the Goulds, if she had to take them at all, in small doses.

They were not people whom she had ever known well or much liked. The only one of them who had interested her had disappeared some years before. That was Lawrence, the third son, a dark youth with awkward, shy manners, who seemed to find himself rather lonely and oppressed in the company of his showy family. There had been a season when Miss Gregory saw him frequently and found him bearable. He had been a lawyer, and it was said that he had embezzled money and been allowed to vanish in time to escape arrest. Miss Gregory recalled the demeanor of the remaining Goulds at that time; her active dislike of them dated from then. There had been no loyalty to the dishonest boy, no contriving to cover up his shame. They had seen advantage for themselves in publicly disowning him, in adopting the airs of victims to his wrong-doing. Mrs. Gould had claimed sympathy from every woman she could rely on, and managed to snatch a shabby social profit from the affair; old Gould had talked about it in his clubs till men began to cut him. The others, Iris and the rest, had followed the lead of their elders. It had been a curious exhibition.

Their presence in Brussels was annoying and a little strange. If Miss Gregory had felt herself less capable than she was, it might have moved her to change her hotel. She had faith, however, in her power to keep them at a convenient distance.

“If necessary,” she reflected, as she changed her shoes in the solemn solitude of her bedroom, “I don’t mind walking to freedom over the body of a Gould or two.”

The Goulds, however, seemed anxious that she should regard their bodies as entirely at her disposal. When at length she descended from her room, trim, compact, and comely, they were all assembled to greet her with a joyous outcry—the whole smiling family of them, from Mrs. Gould, who was a stout invalid in a chair, to the dim, discouraged aunt who waited on her and was ill used by all the others. Their smiles made an illumination in the hall; people turned to look in astonishment; and Miss Gregory was overwhelmed and captured before she could strike a single blow. Mr. Gould, maintaining an appearance of almost light-headed gaiety, introduced her all round, and she found herself sitting at Mrs. Gould’s side and being served with tea and invited to dinner.

“We sha’n’t let you go, now we’ve got you, Miss Gregory,” declared Mrs. Gould, in the thin voice that went with her large proportions.

“No fear!” corroborated a male Gould hilariously. “You’ll have to get used to being lionized, Miss Gregory; better practice on us.”

“And you will tell us something about your wonderful, *wonderful* travels, won’t you, Miss Gregory?” besought Iris.

“Hush!” commanded Mr. Gould. “Miss Gregory can’t get in a word edgeways. You mustn’t mind them, Miss Gregory; but it *is* rather exciting to run across you like this.”

“Very good of you,” said Miss Gregory uneasily.

They were accommodating in everything: if she would talk, they would listen delightedly; if not, they would fill up the gap themselves. Impossible to be more obliging than the Goulds. Miss Gregory looked round on the smiling circle, and beheld each countenance radiant and prodigal of sunshine, and in each the same constrained and hungry eyes bent upon her as if in calculation. It made her wonder what a real raw Gould was like.

“They want something,” she concluded warily. “They’re not crawling like this and stroking my back for love. Presently they’ll come to it, and then we’ll see!”

“No, thank you,” she said aloud, in reply to their invitation. “I’m afraid I can’t dine. I’m going out.”

“To-morrow, then?” suggested Mr. Gould.

“It would be such a pleasure,” said Mrs. Gould, and the group of them seemed breathless for her answer.

It was embarrassing; and, besides, Miss Gregory wanted to know what was at the back of it all. It was on her lips, the cool reply that would clear the air of Goulds; but curiosity withheld it.

“That will be very nice,” she replied, smiling, and was resolute in getting away.

It was on the following night, after the dinner at which she had been the guest of

the Goulds, that she made the entry in her diary, concerning the population of Brussels, with which this record begins. Throughout the day they had seemed to pervade the bright little city like a doubtful odor. She met them in shops and on the street; she entered a restaurant for lunch, and, behold! two of them were already there, and quarreling; and she barely contrived to escape unseen. One or more was always in the hall of the hotel, either buying picture postcards or making inquiries in tangled French of the German porter, who spoke English faultlessly. At dinner they were all together, as cordial as ever, as lavish of smiles, acquiescing in and applauding each word that she uttered, with the same undertone of falsity and insincerity stultifying all their genial pretense. But of their purpose in all this no word had yet been spoken.

They unmasked their batteries on the following morning. Miss Gregory, descending toward the world and its inhabitants, would easily have spared a meeting with Mr. Gould, but he was in waiting for her. He affected white spats in the day-time, and these, in some queer way, made him seem lame and clumsy with his feet. Miss Gregory, with a bath and breakfast to reinforce her, saw him with distaste, and would have managed to appear in a hurry, but for the fact that he was without his customary smile. It made enough of a change in his effect to arrest her.

“I wonder if you could spare us a few minutes—my wife and me?” he requested, after greeting her.

“Certainly,” said Miss Gregory, with relief. She would know, now, what they wanted with their hospitality and their smiles.

“You are very kind,” he said, and led the way to the retired spot where Mrs. Gould was qualifying the dim aunt for a crown of martyrdom. Upon their arrival, this relative was dismissed abruptly.

“I’ve asked Miss Gregory to spare us a little time,” explained Mr. Gould.

The prosperous invalid rolled eloquent eyes.

“Ah, Miss Gregory,” she said, “a mother’s heart knows no peace.”

“Doesn’t it?” said Miss Gregory, accepting the chair Mr. Gould placed for her.

“No—I assure you,” replied Mrs. Gould. “I had hoped that at last we should

have had our poor, wrongly accused son back again. What with the suicide of Mr. Bishop and all—”

Miss Gregory’s expression of utter mystification brought the invalid to a stop, and Mr. Gould opened the matter in a comprehensible form:

“Of course you haven’t seen the English papers often of late, Miss Gregory? Naturally not. Well, a very strange and fortunate thing has happened. Lawrence has been cleared.”

“Lawrence!” exclaimed Miss Gregory.

“Yes. You remember my son Lawrence? He left us, you know. Perhaps you didn’t hear, but a very grave charge of—of malversion of funds had been brought against him, and the circumstances were such that no defense seemed possible.”

Perhaps she hadn’t heard! He was speaking seriously; possibly he had forgotten how he himself, and all his treacherous brood, had trumpeted the boy’s dishonor. His white whiskers and pink face were earnest and simple; the man was a moral quick-change actor.

“I did hear it,” said Miss Gregory. “I didn’t believe it, though. Well?”

“No one who really knew my son believed it,” he answered surprisingly. “But it *was* believed, and he fled. All these years he has remained in exile, bearing the burden of the crime he did not commit; and we have borne it, too.”

“It has been a heavy burden,” remarked Miss Gregory. “What was that about a suicide?”

“I am about to tell you,” replied Mr. Gould. “The senior partner of the firm in which my son was employed was a Mr. Bishop—Mr. Roger Burton Bishop. Some three weeks ago Mr. Bishop was discovered dead in a first-class carriage—he had shot himself. The affairs of the firm proved to be in a lamentable disorder; there had been the wildest juggling with trust funds; the accountants arrived at their conclusions only after much difficulty. But one thing was established beyond doubt—the *Times* had a paragraph about it, even: Lawrence was as innocent of the theft with which he was charged as—as I am.”

“Thank God for that,” said Miss Gregory emphatically. “Next to being honest, the best thing is to be proved honest. But what was it you wanted with me?”

“I will explain,” replied Mr. Gould. “Lawrence, when he fled, came here to Brussels. He secured employment, and has not been unsuccessful. But his exile has made a change in him. He has become embittered, distrustful of his own family; he received us, when we went to him, in the strangest manner; and he refused in the most positive manner to return to England.”

“Did he?” said Miss Gregory. “That’s queer.”

“It’s awful,” cried the invalid. “Think, dear Miss Gregory! If he doesn’t go back now, what will people say?”

“Oh, that doesn’t matter,” said Miss Gregory. “He’s sore and rather revengeful, no doubt; who wouldn’t be? You see, all the years of his punishment he’s known it was undeserved. Perhaps if you left him alone for a while he’d go back of his own accord. Lawrence wasn’t the kind of boy to take root in a place like this.”

Mr. Gould shook his white head.

“It would hardly serve to leave him to himself,” he said. “There is another question. Lawrence has entered into relations with some very curious people in this place, and there is an entanglement. He has engaged himself to marry a young woman whose name is sufficient to explain why his mother and I are so troubled. I have not seen her,—I refused to see her, but—”

“What *is* her name?” demanded Miss Gregory.

“Orline,” said Mr. Gould.

“Oh!” The name recalled to Miss Gregory’s mind a *cause célèbre* of some dozen years before, when a brilliant and notorious woman of society had fenced for two days with a cross-examiner and gone from the court to the outer darkness of lost and broken souls.

“Not *the* Mrs. Orline?” she cried incredulously.

“Her daughter!” said Mr. Gould. “You see now how it is, Miss Gregory. Nothing that we can do will move him; he treats us as strangers. But he always liked and

admired you. When I saw you here, I thought Providence must have sent you specially.”

“I see,” said Miss Gregory drily. She really couldn’t allow Mr. Gould to draw out his pious stop. “I suppose you want me to go and see him? Is that it?”

“Oh, if you would, Miss Gregory,” cried Mrs. Gould, “you would earn a mother’s blessing!”

“Thanks,” said Miss Gregory. “But where is he to be found?”

“The house is the Pension Blum,” replied Mr. Gould, and gave the address. “He is there in the evenings. I will escort you to the door myself; it is a queer neighborhood.”

“My good sir,” said Miss Gregory, with spirit, “I know neighborhoods in this city where *you* wouldn’t be safe unless *I* escorted you. I will go by myself or not at all.”

Mr. Gould made haste to recognize his mistake: “Of course, of course. I forgot I was speaking to a great traveler. Absurd of me!”

Their thanks, profuse and extravagant, pursued her as she left them. It had been worth while, after all; it was a queer twisted story, and it spoke well for Lawrence Gould. She was glad she had liked him; it is always profitable to like a man to whom life is capricious.

The evening of that day saw her set forth upon her mission. The Goulds almost managed to make it farcical by assembling in the doorway to see her go forth and offering to lend her umbrellas. They even had a cab waiting for her, which was really the reason why she elected to go on foot. If Lawrence had been anything like the others, she would have left him to his fate.

The *pension* of Madame Blum was in a street_ *so steep that before the door was reached it turned into stone steps and abandoned all pretense of being a thoroughfare. But the tall house had the massive, ornate quality with which the* _builders of old Brabant enhanced their architecture; the door that admitted to Madame Blum’s hospitality was ribbed and studded like the door of a church. In answer to Miss Gregory’s tattoo upon the great wrought-iron knocker, it was thrown open by an undersized man in the dress of a waiter, who stared at her in

shrewd appreciation of her quality.

“Mr. Lawrence Gould?” inquired Miss Gregory.

The stunted waiter smiled comprehendingly.

“Ah, Mr. Gould!” he said. “He is within—yes. If Madame will give herself the trouble to enter!”

Miss Gregory crossed the threshold, and the waiter scuttled before her to show the way along a black passage which was pervaded by vague smells of food. It ended in a door and an apartment whose window gave a view of clothes-lines and back yards, and here she was requested to wait. The waiter drew forward a chair for her and invited her to be seated. He paused at the door as he went out and gave her a confidential smile.

“It is not luxurious, this,” he remarked; “but so one sees life—_hein?_”

There was a cheap tawdriness about the little room which spoke more eloquently than an inventory of the manner of house to which it belonged. Everything that such a room should contain was present in it, and yet everything was bad, pretentious, and rather dirty. The tall gilt-framed mirror over the mantel had a flaw which distorted Miss Gregory’s face as she looked in it, and there was a stale cigar-end lying in the fender. What fashion of life was it that accomplished itself in such surroundings as these? wondered Miss Gregory. What became of them? How did they excuse themselves? And Madame Blum, who owned the showy, worthless stuff—what was her life?

She stopped in the middle of her reflections, as the door opened and Lawrence Gould entered the room. She looked at him with a quick curiosity to see what the years had done to him. For some moments he failed to recognize her, and stood in an awkward silence; he had preserved his unhandy manners, at any rate. He was a tallish young man, still dark and harsh of feature; but what had been the reserve of shyness in the youth Miss Gregory had known had turned to a rather bitter taciturnity. The best feature of him was a certain directness in his gaze; he had the manner of a man who could forgo preliminaries.

He frowned in an effort to seize her name as she rose, smiling. “Is it—” he hesitated. “Yes, it is—Miss Gregory!”

“I’m glad you haven’t quite forgotten me,” she responded. “I’ve thought about you many times. I would have written to you if I’d known where you were.”

“Yes,” he said. “I suppose you’ve been seeing my people, haven’t you?”

“I got your address from them,” replied Miss Gregory. “They told me the news, and I’m awfully glad to congratulate you. It’s a splendid thing.”

She threw an extra cordiality into her tone to combat his want of responsiveness. He gave her a dark, inquiring look.

“You mean—?” he suggested deliberately.

“The news?” Miss Gregory did not quite understand. “Why, the news about Bishop, of course; the news that you are cleared at last. What else could I mean?”

He nodded slowly. “Oh, that!” he said. “Yes. I thought perhaps you had heard also that I am to be married. Still, thank you very much, Miss Gregory.”

He spoke with a sour humor, as if he rather relished the situation and the difficulties for her. Miss Gregory paused and considered him.

“I *had* heard that, too,” she said quietly. “But—what do you expect me to say?”

He shrugged his shoulders indifferently, but did not answer. Miss Gregory leaned her elbow on the plaster mantel and went on:

“I’m here in the first place, of course, because I’ve seen your people and they begged me to come and talk to you. But I was glad to come on my own account, too, for the sake of the boy you used to be when I knew you in London. All I learned from your father was that you were still in some trouble and wouldn’t return to England. I hoped I could help you in some way. Does that offend you?”

“No!” He dropped his hands in his pockets and stood, considering, with one foot on the edge of the fender and a frown on his face. “No; why should it? But—I *am* going to be married, you know.”

“Well,” said Miss Gregory, “why not?”

“And I’m not going back to England!”

He looked up at her sharply, as if an idea had come to him.

“Look here, Miss Gregory,” he said. “I wish you’d meet Marcelle—that’s the girl I’m going to marry. You might understand, then. They’ve told you who she is, of course, and who her mother was?”

Miss Gregory nodded.

“Of course,” he continued. “Yes; they haven’t even seen her, but they told you that! And then they’re surprised that I won’t go back with them.”

“Is that why you won’t go?” asked Miss Gregory.

He met her eyes. “No,” he admitted; “it isn’t.”

From somewhere in the house a gong began to boom dully.

“That’s for dinner,” he said. “I say, I wish you’d stay and dine. You’d be able to see her then, and see all the rest of us, too. You used to be fond of experiences—do stay. And afterward I can tell you why I won’t go back.”

Miss Gregory hesitated. She had lived long enough in the world to take dinner seriously, and nothing she had seen in Madame Blum’s *pension* promised a meal worthy of her palate. But a touch of boyishness in Lawrence Gould’s manner, as he begged her to stay, had power to decide her.

”I’ll stay, with pleasure,” she said; “and I shall like to meet your Marcelle.”

He smiled almost bashfully, and Miss Gregory touched him on the arm with her gloved fingers. She was as little given to sentimentality as any woman of fifty in all Europe; but there was one thing she wished to know.

“Is she pretty, Lawrence?” she asked gently.

He flushed splendidly, and his face leaped to life. “Yes,” was all he said, but Miss Gregory had had her answer. Whatever queer tangle might complicate his affairs, here was a simple enough thing.

A sour-faced Flemish housemaid took her upstairs to remove her hat and gloves in the bedroom of Madame Blum, where Madame at that moment was making a toilet by putting on rings. Madame was revealed as a squat, middle-aged woman of unidentifiable nationality; she had moles on her face like a certain kind of Frenchwoman, but spoke only a rude French; she had abundant glossy black hair and a cast-iron self-possession. Her room was all curtains and tassels; it had the atmosphere of an upholsterer's store-room, and the wash-hand-basin was not much larger than a tea-cup.

"It is Mr. Gould whom you visit?" she inquired over her shoulder of Miss Gregory. "Ah, yes" and she smiled slowly. "He has many friends who visit him just now. But you are the first who stays to dine."

It had the sound of a compliment to Miss Gregory, or at the least of a reflection on Mr. Gould's other friends, who possibly had not treated the establishment in a manner to make themselves beloved by its proprietress.

Lawrence Gould was in waiting at the foot of the stairs to receive Miss Gregory and conduct her to the dining-room.

"I won't introduce you to anybody," he said in a low voice, pausing before opening the door.

"Why not?" inquired Miss Gregory.

"There are several well-known people here besides Marcelle's mama," he replied. "Some of them might want to carry the acquaintance further, you know,"

Miss Gregory laughed. "I don't mind," she said. "I've a large and mixed circle of acquaintances as it is. The more the merrier! Let's go in."

She had seen already, in a dozen countries, too much of the lee-side of life to look for a spectacular quality in the people who inhabit there; but she was unprepared for the quiet, domestic character of Madame Blum's dinner-table, when Gould opened the door and let her pass into the room. Madame, who had preceded her down the stairs, was in her place at the head and her guests were already seated; the hum of agreeable small talk, the tones of good humor and sociability, made an atmosphere about them. About a dozen men and five women made up their number at the long, narrow table, and their effect was one of gentle vivacity and ease. The pert small waiter darted forward to draw out two

vacant chairs, and Miss Gregory found herself seated with Gould on her left, and a thin, silvery, black-clad man, with pointed mustaches and an imperial, on her right.

The waiter laid soup before her, and Gould gave her a sidelong smile.

“You will find the food better than the company,” he told her in a murmur.

“I expect to enjoy both,” said Miss Gregory valiantly, and reached for her spoon.

The dinner certainly was an occasion for surprise. Somewhere in the recesses of Madame Blum’s being there dwelt a culinary conscience and the soul of a cook, which had survived the stress of a career that closed in the *pension* at Brussels. The meal was simple and excellent, as distinctive in its way as the people who ate it. The small man who was on Miss Gregory’s right needed but a glance to wake into smiles and an eager, polite volubility.

“Madame is not to remain here?” he inquired. “No, merely a visit? We are unfortunate, for one sees in Madame the intelligence and sympathy of a woman of the world. Possibly my name is not unknown to Madame: Miremont—Achille de Miremont.”

Miss Gregory looked at him with interest. He was a ghostlike creature, pale and thin, with a delicate face as pliant as a glove. Yet he seemed to have a core of tougher material, too.

“Yes,” she said; “I know that name. It isn’t the—er—the duelist?”

The steely wraith at her side lit up with smiles. Miss Gregory had heard his name as that of a dexterous assassin who had had a vogue in the time of Garibaldi.

“Ah!” he said. “It is a happiness to talk to a woman of the world. It is only from such as you, Madame, that greatness receives its due.”

Lawrence Gould smiled his sardonic smile at their conversation.

“You surely haven’t met an acquaintance?” he asked.

“I knew his name,” replied Miss Gregory. “Have you any more like him?”

“Take your choice,” he said. “They’re all here.”

It was easy to recognize Mrs. Orline, who sat near Madame Blum on the opposite side of the table. Tall, serious, composed, she preserved yet some of the quality that had been hers when she lived securely and notably, before her exposure and disgrace had snuffed her out like a candle. In that easy and familiar company of men and women she managed to be remote and aloof; something feminine and exquisite set her apart from them. Once she had been beautiful, and beauty and delicacy were still in the effect that she made. The men at each side of her treated her with a grave ceremoniousness; she had no share in the light freedom of intercourse that prevailed among her companions. “She’s entrenched,” thought Miss Gregory, watching her. “She’s had enough of being a woman: she means to be a lady.”

Mrs. Orline, turning her head, found Miss Gregory’s eyes upon her. Her own hesitated for not more than a second; her long penance had fortified her against such meetings as this. She bent her head in a gesture of recognition and greeting, without smiling. Miss Gregory made haste to acknowledge it, with as much cordiality as she could muster. A memory pressed itself upon her of Mrs. Orline as she used to be, brilliant, daring, fearless of fate, a woman like a firefly; and now, throughout the time that Miss Gregory had watched her, she had not smiled once.

Each of the other women who were present was interesting in her particular way. One, bloated and red, carried herself like an empress, and proved to be an especially disreputable actress; another had escaped from Siberia. The house seemed to be a gathering-point for the corsairs of civilization; it offered a roof and a refuge to damaged reputations of all varieties. The faces about the table would have furnished Hogarth with a year of material; each of them masked a sore and vengeful spirit. But the talk, the cheerful conversation that ran, with occasional sparkles, among them, was as innocuous as the gossip of school-girls. A large man with a leonine head conversed lengthily about a cure for colds in which he had strong faith. Gould saw Miss Gregory watching him, and touched her elbow.

“He has cured many worse diseases than colds, in his time,” he said.

“Indeed,” said Miss Gregory. “He’s not a doctor, though, is he?”

“No,” said Gould. “He says he was a soldier, but”—he smiled—“I have heard he was an executioner.”

“Really!” exclaimed Miss Gregory. “How exciting! Still, he might call himself a surgeon, mightn’t he?”

Gould nodded. “You haven’t asked me which is Marcelle,” he said.

“I don’t need to,” replied Miss Gregory placidly, going on to take mental notes of the “surgeon.” She would be able to find room for him in the book she was writing, the volume of travels which was to be the justification and memorial of her wanderings. A phrase came to her ready-made, and she stored it in her memory: “He looked like any other practitioner of the unnecessary trades.”

The girl whom it was not needful to point out to Miss Gregory had her seat only two places away from this practitioner. She might have been twenty years of age, a child in all but her possibilities. A child’s self-possession and a child’s deep reserve joined in her, and with them a fleeting hint of that beauty that had been her mother’s. She had smooth brown hair and dark eyebrows, and a gravity of expression which was somehow not unbecoming or cheerless. It suggested that she was not defenseless in the strange world to which she had been transplanted, since she looked on it without mirth and without fear. She had inspected Miss Gregory, as she entered the room, with candid, serious eyes, and then looked away calmly.

“But”—Gould was insistent—“aren’t you going to say anything about her?”

“Here?” questioned Miss Gregory.

“Why not? Our neighbors won’t understand if you speak English.”

“Well,” said Miss Gregory, after thinking of it, “your Marcelle is better than you led me to expect. You ought to take her back to England.”

“Oh, England!”

“Yes—England,” repeated Miss Gregory. “You owe it to her. She’s seen you under a cloud, with only your word to prove that you are an honest man and a gentleman. You must show her—_show _her, not merely tell her—the truth.”

Lawrence Gould looked at her with rather a startled eye.

“She knows the truth,” he said shortly.

“Yes; but—” began Miss Gregory, when he interrupted.

“She knows it, I tell you,” he said. “Knows it better than you do.”

“I never believed in your guilt, if that’s what you mean,” retorted Miss Gregory.

“That isn’t what I mean,” he said. “But I’ll tell you all that afterward. You do like Marcelle, though, don’t you?”

“Yes,” said Miss Gregory; “I do. A girl who looks like that after so many years in this place—of course I like her. And you really are going to be married, Lawrence?”

He smiled; it was a thing so certain that it was not necessary to be emphatic about it.

Dinner closed with coffee, Madame Blum’s own superlative coffee, which added to the meal the perfection of completeness. There was a little rush to open the door for her, as if her guests were eager to honor the artist of their appetite; the duelist won, and Madame strode out, with her enigmatical smile, and the others followed at her heels. Gould detained Miss Gregory with a whisper, and made a signal to the girl. He closed the door on the heels of the last to leave, and they were alone together in a privacy of soiled plates and disordered chairs.

“Well,” said Gould, and stood doubtfully looking from one to the other. “I must introduce you, though, first.”

The girl gave Miss Gregory a warm hand and murmured a greeting. Away from her chair, she turned out to be small of stature, a fragile, erect little creature.

“I hope you’ll get used to thinking of me as Lawrence’s friend,” said Miss Gregory, holding her hand still. “I’ve come to tell him that he must bring you to England.”

Gould made a movement, but said nothing. The girl did not try to draw her hand away.

“We are not going to England,” she said. Her voice had a faint foreign accent. “Lawrence has explained to me—and we are not going.”

“He hasn’t explained to me,” said Miss Gregory; “he said he was going to.”

She let the girl go; her passivity was so unresponsive to Miss Gregory’s impulses of friendship that that able lady was beginning to feel a little impatient.

“Yes,” said Gould. “If I’d told you at first you wouldn’t have stayed to see Marcelle. And I wanted some one to know what she was like—some one like you, Miss Gregory.”

He was propped up against the edge of the table, with both hands thrust deep into his pockets and his long legs stretched out. His dark, thin face had resumed its gloom, and he was frowning at the floor. The girl went nearer to him. The long, bare room, with the debris of dinner in the middle of it and the aroma of coffee still in the air, was suddenly still, as if in waiting for what Lawrence Gould had to tell. Miss Gregory felt that something was impending, something that should put a climax on the evening and the affair. She drew back a chair and sat down.

“I wouldn’t have stayed, you say,” she remarked. “Why not?”

“Because,” answered Gould, “you would have seen that it was no use—that I _couldn’t _go back to England.”

He gave her a brooding look, and paused.

“But why?” demanded Miss Gregory.

The girl touched him. “Shall *I* say why, Lawrence?” she asked. He nodded. She turned to Miss Gregory.

“It is simple,” she said. “It is because he is honest now. He has always been honest with me. When that man Bishop shot himself, the people who searched his papers found much they could not understand, and they—made mistakes.”

Miss Gregory stared. “They understood enough to clear Lawrence, at any rate,” she said.

Marcelle shook her head. “No,” she said. “For Lawrence and I knew that he was guilty.”

“Good Lord!” exclaimed Miss Gregory.

“It would be easy to take what they offer,” the girl went on. “Very easy! But Lawrence is an honest man. Before he asked me to marry him, he told me every thing. So now—we shall not go to England, and we shall never bother you again. We are going to America, to take another name and work for ourselves; there is perhaps a place for people who are honest and will work.”

She stood back, and slid an arm through that of her lover, and looked up to him with a smile. They had seen strange things and strange people in their time; they had tasted dire experience and bitter knowledge; but it was with them as with others—they loved each other and were glorified. It was a couple of minutes before Gould spoke again.

“I’m sorry, Miss Gregory,” he said. “I ought to have told you before asking you to dine. I’m very sorry.”

Miss Gregory was thoughtful.

“Ye-es,” she said. “And when do you propose to be married?”

“This day week,” he replied. “Why?”

“Because,” replied Miss Gregory, “I mean to be there. You’ll have to get used to me, Marcelle. I always believed Lawrence was honest, and now I know.”