Invisible Foe

A Story Adapted from the Play by Walter Hackett

Louise Jordan Miln
1918

Title: The Invisible Foe
A Story Adapted from the Play by Walter Hackett

Author: Louise Jordan Miln

Release Date: October 12, 2015 [EBook #50188]

Language: English

Produced by Mardi Desjardins & Alex White and the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team (http://www.pgdpcanada.net) from page images generously made available by HathiTrust Digital Library (https://www.hathitrust.org/digital_library) and Google Books

---

THE

INVISIBLE FOE

A STORY ADAPTED FROM THE PLAY BY WALTER HACKETT

BY

LOUISE JORDAN MILN
(MRS. GEORGE CRICHTON MILN)

NEW YORK
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

"*Blind, blind, blind*"

CONTENTS

Transcriber's Notes can be found at the end of this eBook.

BOOK I

THE CHILDREN

CHAPTER I

Stephen lay on his stomach, one sharp elbow comfortable in a velvet bed of moss, his chin cupped in his palm, his beautifully shaped head thrown back, his alert face lifted to the sky, his eager eyes following hungrily the flight of a bird.

Hugh, crunched up against the big oak tree, was making a chain of blossoms, and making it awkwardly enough, with many a restless boy-sigh, many a destruction of delicate spring wild flower.

Helen was playing by herself.

Nothing could have been more characteristic of the three children than their occupations of the moment.

Stephen usually was watching birds fly, when he was out of doors, and birds were to be seen. And the only time his uncle Richard had ever laid a hand (except in rare caress or in approbation) on the orphan boy, had been when Stephen, three months after his arrival at Deep Dale, had opened its cage, and lost Helen her pet canary—all because he "wanted to see just how he flies."

"And I did see, too," he had told Hugh an hour after his stoically endured caning. "It was worth more than a few smacks. Bet I can fly too, some day. You wait."

Hugh had said nothing. He was used to Stephen and Stephen's vivid ambitions. And he was stolid.

Stephen had suffered his slight chastisement proudly—if not quite gladly—but with each faltering fall of his uncle's cane a seed of bitterness had entered the child's soul. He never had felt the same to "Uncle Dick" since—which was no small pity, for the orphan boy was love-hungry, and Richard Bransby his best friend.

The small punishment bred deceit but worked no cure. The men in the fowl-yard could have told sad tales of staid hens aggravated to indignant, fluttering flight, and the old gardener of peacocks goaded to rise from their self-glorified strutting and preening to fly stiff and screaming the few spaces which were their farthest. But neither the farm hands nor the gardener told. Why—it is not easy to say. They did not particularly like Stephen—few people did. But they feared him. He mastered their wills. A solitary child, not half so happy as childhood has every right to be, the boy met few he did not influence sharply. His was a masterful nature. Little altogether escaped his subtle dominance.

Stephen was not essentially cruel. His cruelty was corollary and accessory to his passion—a passion for power and for the secrets of aerial skill. He bore the

birds no ill-will. He simply was obsessed to see their flight, and to study it, garnering up in his odd, isolated, accretive child's mind—and heart—every vibrant curve and beat of their wings, every angle and bend of their bodies.

Stephen usually was watching the flight of a bird, or scheming some mechanical imitation of it.

Hugh usually was doing something for wee Helen, doing it with perspiring and sighful awkwardness and for scant thanks—or for none.

Helen usually was playing by herself, and pretending, as now, to be sharing the sport of some playfellow, perfectly tangible to her, but invisible, non-existent to the boys—a form of persistent "make believe" which greatly amused Hugh and as greatly irritated Stephen.

"Don't pretend like that; it's a simpleton way of going on," the older boy called to her now, without moving his head or his eyes.

"It's nothing of the kind," the girl replied scornfully. "You're blind, that's what's the matter—blinder'n a bat, both of you." And she continued to laugh and chat with her "make-believe" playmates.

An elfin child herself, the children of her own delicate myth did seem the more suitable fellows for her dainty frolic than either queer Stephen or stolid, clumsy Hugh.

The little girl was very pretty, a queenly little head heavy with vivid waves of gold-red hair, curved red lips eloquent of the history of centuries of womanhood, wide blue eyes, and the prettiest hands and arms that even feminine babyhood (and English babyhood, Celtic-dashed at that) had ever yet achieved; every pink-tipped finger a miracle, and each soft, beautifully molded elbow, dimpled and dented with witching chinks that simply clamored for kisses—and often got them; a sunny, docile child, yielding but unafraid, quiet and reserved, but hiding under its rose and snow robe of provocatively pretty flesh, a will that never swerved: the strongest will at Deep Dale—and that says everything of it—for both Stephen Pryde, fourteen years old, and his uncle, nearing fifty, had stronger wills than often fall to us weak mortals of drift and vacillation. These two masculine strengths of will lay rough and prominent on the surface and also sank soul-deep. The uncle's never abated. Circumstances and youth curbed the boy's, at times—but neither chilled nor softened it. Helen's will lay deep and still. Her pretty, smiling surface never showed it by so much as a gentle ripple. She kept it as a sort of spiritual "Sunday best" laid away in the lavender and tissue of her secret self. As yet only her old Scotch nurse even suspected its existence and of all her little, subservient world, only that old Scotch nurse neither laughed at Helen's dream friends—nor scoffed. In her sweet six years of life her father's will and hers had never clashed. That, when the almost inevitable clash of child

and parent, old and young, cautious experience and adventurous inexperience, came, Helen's should prove the stronger will, and hers the victory, would have seemed absurd and incredible to all who knew them—to every one except the nurse.

Stephen and Hugh, in their different boyish ways, loved the girl-child, and wooed her.

She tolerated them both, patronized, tyrannized, and cared little for either.

Hugh was thick-set and had sweaty hands. Often he bored her.

Stephen's odd face, already at fourteen corrugated by thought, ambition and strident personality painfully concealed, repelled her—even frightened her a little, a very little; for her cherished life and serene soul gave her little gift of fear.

Their wills clashed daily—but almost always over things about which she cared little or less than little, and did not trouble to be insistent. She yielded over such trifles—out of indifference and almost contemptuous good-nature sheerly. And the boy, "blind" here at least, misread it. But on one point Stephen never could prevail against her. She would neither renounce her invisible playmates nor even concede him that they were indeed "make-believe."

Her will and Hugh's never clashed. How could they? He had no will but hers.

Hugh was her slave.

Stephen, loving her as strongly and as hotly, sought to be her master. No conscious presumption this: it was his nature.

Deep Dale was all simmering blue and green to-day—with softening shadows and tones of gray; blue sky, green grass, trees green-leafed, gray-trunked—green paths, gray and green-walled, blue roofed, the early spring flowers (growing among the grasses but sparsely as yet, and being woven, too often broken-necked, into Hugh's devoted jewelering) too tiny of modest bud and timid bloom to speck but most minutely the picture with lemon, violet or rose. The little girl's wealth of red hair made the glory and the only emphatic color of the picture. Hugh's hair was ash brown and dull—Stephen's darker, growing to black—but as dull. Even the clothes of these three children painted in perfectly with the blue and green of this early May-day, Nature's spring-song. The lads, not long out of mourning, were dressed in sober gray. Helen's frocks came from Hanover Square, when they did not come from the *Rue de Rivoli*, and to-day her little frock of turquoise cashmere was embroidered and sashed with green as soft and tender as the pussy willows and their new baby leafage.

But the sun—a pale gray sun at best all day—was slipping down the sky's blue skirt. Helen, tiring of her elvish play, or wholesomely hungry for "cambric"

tea and buns, slid off the tree trunk, smiled back and waved her hand—to nothing, and turned towards the house. Hugh trotted after her, not sorry to suspend his trying toil, not sorry to approach cake and jam, but carrying his stickily woven tribute with him. But Stephen, enthralled, almost entranced, lay still, his fine chin cupped in his strong hand, his eyes—and his soul—watching a flock of birds flying nestward towards the night.

CHAPTER II

Richard Bransby had few friends because he tolerated few. Unloving towards most, rather than unlovable, his life and his personality cut deep, but in narrow channels. To him pictures were—canvas and paint, and a considerable item of expense; for he was too shrewd a business man to buy anything cheap or inferior. Knowing his own limitations as few men have the self-searching gift to do, he took no risks with his strenuously earned sovereigns, lavishly as he spent them. He spent magnificently, but he never misspent. He had too much respect to do that—respect for his money and for himself and for the honest, relentless industry with which that self had amassed that same money. He never selected the pictures for which he paid, nor even their frames. Latham did all that for him. Horace knew almost as much about pictures and music as he did about nerves, and could chat with as much suave authority about Tintoretto and Liszt, *motif* and *chiaro-oscuro* as he could about diphtheria or Bell's palsy, and was as much at his old friend's service in matters of art as in matters of cerebellum and aorta. Bransby cared nothing for horses, and liked dogs just "well enough"—out of doors. He was a book-worm—with one author, scarcely more. He was indifferent to his dinner, and he cared nothing at all for flowers. This last seems strange and contradictory, for the women he had loved had each been peculiarly flowerlike. But who shall attempt to gauge or plumb the contradictorinesses of human nature, or be newly surprised at them?

Richard Bransby had loved three women passionately, and had lost them all. He was no skeptic, but he was rebel. He could not, or he would not, forgive God their death, and he grudged the Heaven, to which he doubted not they had gone, their presence. Nothing could reconcile or console him—although two strong affections (and beside which he had no other) remained to him; and with them—and his books—he patched his life and kept his heart just alive.

He loved the great ship-building business he had created, and steered through many a financial tempest, around rocks of strikes and quicksands of competition, into an impregnably fortified harbor of millionairedom, with skill as devoted and as magnificent as the skill of a Drake or the devotion of a Scott, steering and nursing some great ship or tiny bark through the desperate straits of battle or the torture perils of polar ice floes.

And he loved Helen whom he had begotten—loved her tenderly for her own sweet, lovable sake, loved her more many times, and more quickly, for the sake of her mother.

He cared nothing for flowers, but he had recognized clearly how markedly the three women he had adored (for it had amounted to that) had resembled each a blossom. His mother had been like a “red, red rose that blooms in June”—a Jacqueminot or a Xavier Olibo. And it was from her he had inherited the vivid personality of his youth. She had died suddenly—when he had been in the City, chained even then to the great business he was creating—boy of twenty-three though he was—and his hot young heart was almost broken; but not quite, for Alice, his wife, had crept into it then, a graceful tea-rose-like creature, white, pink-flushed, head-heavy with perfume. Violet, his only sister, had been a pale, pretty thing, modest and sweet as the flower of her name. Helen he thought was like some rare orchid, with her elusive piquant features, her copper-red hair, her snow face, her curved crimson lips, her intangible, indescribable charm—irregular, baffling.

Alice had died at Helen’s birth, but he blamed God and turned from Him, blamed not or turned from the small plaintive destroyer who laughed and wailed in its unmothered cradle. The young wife’s death had unnerved, and had hardened him too. It injured him soul-side and body: and the hurt to his physical self threatened to be as lasting and the more baneful. A slight cardiac miscarriage caught young Dr. Latham’s trained eye on the very day of Alice Bransby’s death—and the disturbance it caused, controlled for six silent years by the one man’s will and the other man’s skill, had not disappeared or abated. Very slowly it grimly gained slight ground, and presaged to them both the possibility of worse to come.

Only yesterday Richard Bransby had taken little Helen on his knee, and holding her sunny head close to his heart had talked to her of her mother. He often held the child so—but he rarely spoke to her of the mother—and of that mother to no one else did he ever speak. Only his own angry heart and the long hungry nights knew what she had been to him—only they and his God. God! who must be divine in pity and forgiveness towards the rebel rage of husbands so sore and so faithful.

Yesterday, too, he had told the child of how like a flower his Alice, her mother, had been, and seeing how she caught at the fancy (odd in so prosaic a man) and liked it, he had gone on to speak of his own mother, her “granny,” for all the world like a deep, very red rose, and of Violet, her aunt.

Helen wriggled her glowing head from the tender prison of his hands, looked up into his sharp, tired face, clapped her own petal-like little palms, and said with a gurgling laugh and a dancing wink of her fearless blue eyes, “And you—Daddy—are just like a flower, too!”

He shook her and called her “Miss Impudence.”

“Oh! but yes, you are. I’ll tell you, you are that tall ugly cactus that Simmons says came from Mexicur—all big prickles and one poor little lonely flower ’way up at the top by itself, grown out of the ugly leaves and the ugly thorns, and not pretty either.”

Bransby sighed, and caught her quickly closer to him again—one poor insignificant attempt of a blossom lonely, alone; solitary but for thorns, and only desirable in comparison with them, and because it was the flowering—such as it was—of a plant exotic and costly: a magenta rag of a flower that stood for much money, and for nothing else!

The baby went on with the parable—pretty as he had made it, grotesqued now by her. “An’ Aunt Carline’s anover flower, too. She’s a daleeah.”

Bransby laughed. Caroline Leavitt was rather like a dahlia; neat, geometrically regular, handsome, cut and built by rule, fashionable, prim but gorgeous, as far from poetry and sentiment as anything a flower could be.

Mrs. Leavitt was his widowed cousin and housekeeper—called “Aunt” by the children. Richard and Violet had been the only children of John and Cora Bransby.

Violet, several years younger than Richard, had married six years earlier—married a human oddity, half-genius, half-adventurer, impecunious, improvident, vain. He had misused and broken her. His death was literally the only kindness he had ever done her—and it had killed her—for weak-womanlike she had loved him to the end. Perhaps such weakness is a finer, truer strength—weighed in God’s scales—than man-called strength.

Violet Pryde, dying five years after Alice’s death, left two children; the boys playing with six-year-old Helen under the oak trees. Bransby had been blind to his sister’s needs while Pryde had lived; but indeed she had hidden them with the silence, the dignity and the deft, quiet subterfuge of such natures—but at her husband’s death Bransby had hastened to ask, as gently as he could (and to the women he loved he could be gentleness itself), “How are you off? What do you need? What would you like best? What may I do?” pressing himself to her as suitor rather than almoner. But she had refused all but friendship, indeed almost had refused it, since it had never been given her dead. Her loyalty survived Pryde’s disloyal life, and even dwarfed and stunted her mother-instinct to do her utmost for her boys: her boys and Pryde’s. But her own death had followed close upon her husband’s, and then Richard Branbsy had asserted himself. He had gathered up into his own capable hands the shabby threads of her affairs—mismanaged for years, but—even so—too scant to be tangled, and the charge of her two orphaned boys.

He had brought Stephen and Hugh at once to Deep Dale and had established

them there on an almost perfect parity with Helen—a parity impinged by little else than her advantage of sex and charm and presumable heirship.

Such was—in brief—the home and the home folk of Deep Dale, the millionaire shipbuilder's toy estate a mile or two from Oxshott.

And Helen ruled it—and them.

Caroline Leavitt housekept, but small Helen reigned. Her reign was no ephemeral sovereignty—not even a constitutional queenship; it was autocracy gracious and sunshiny, but all of autocracy for all that. Helen ruled.

CHAPTER III

Richard Bransby had amassed a fortune and perfected a fad, but he had amassed no friends. In the thirty-five years in which he had gathered and nursed his fortune (for he began at fifteen) he had made but the one friend—Latham. And even this sole friendship was largely professional and in small degree quick or vibrant.

Helen might have had twenty playmates, but she greatly cared for none but her dear "make believes," and tolerated no others but her cavalierly treated cousins.

Mrs. Leavitt gave tea to the well-to-do of the neighborhood, and took it of them. Very occasionally she and Richard dined with them alternately as hosts and guests. But none of it ran to friendship, or shaped towards intimacy. She was too fussy a woman for friendship, he too embittered and too arrogant a man.

The vicinity of Claygate and Oxshott teemed with the stucco and ornate wood "residences" of rich stockbrokers and successful business men—living elaborately in the lovely countryside—but not of it: of London still, train-catching, market-watching, silk-hatted, bridge-playing.

Bransby rarely hatted in silk, and he preferred Dickens to bridge. He nodded to his rich fellow-villagers, but he clasped them no hand-clasp.

He, too, was in the country but not of it, he too was Londoner to the core; but both in a sense quite different from them.

Deep Dale was a beautiful excrescence—but an excrescence—an elaborate florescence of his wealth, but he had never felt it "home," except because Alice had rather liked it, and never would feel it "home" again except as Helen and his books might grow to make it so.

There was a flat, too, in Curzon Street Alice had liked it rather more than she had Deep Dale, and while she lived he had too; except that they had been more alone, and in that much more together, at Oxshott, and for that he had always been grateful to Deep Dale, and held it, for that, in some tenderness still. And Helen had been born there.

But to him "Home" meant a dingy house in Marylebone, in which he had been born and his mother died. He avoided seeing it now (an undertaker tenanted the basement and the first floor, a dressmaker, whose *clientèle* was chiefly of the slenderly-pursed *demimonde*, the other two floors), but he still held it in his stubborn heart for "home."

In business Bransby was hard, cold and implastic. He had great talent in the

conduct of his affairs, indefatigable industry, undeviating devotion. Small wonder—or rather none—that he grew rich and steadily richer. But had he had the genius to rule kindlier, to be friend as well as master, to win, accept and use the friendship of the men he employed (and now sometimes a little crushed of their best possibility of service by the ruthlessness of his rule and by the unsympathy of his touch), his might well have grown one of the gigantic, wizard fortunes.

Even as things were, Morton Grant, head and trusted clerk, probably attained nearer to friendship with Richard Bransby than did any one else but Latham.

For Grant nothing was relaxed. He was dealt with as crisply and treated as drastically as any office boy of the unconsidered and driven all. Bransby's to order; Grant's to obey. But, for all that, the employer felt some hidden, embryonic kindliness for the employee. And the clerk was devoted to the master: accepted the latter's tyranny almost cordially, and resented it not even at heart or unconsciously.

The two men had been born within a few doors of each other on the same long, dull street. That was a link.

Grant cherished and doted on the business of which he was but a servant as much as Bransby did—not more, because more was an impossibility. He rose for it in the morning. He lay down for it at night. He rested—so far as he did rest—on the Sabbath and on perforced holidays for it. He ate for it. He dressed for it. He went to Margate once a year, second class, for it. That was a link.

Unless it involves some form of rivalry—as cricket, competitive business, acting, popular letters, desire for the same woman, two men cannot live for the selfsame thing without it in some measure breeding in them some tinge of mutual liking.

And these two reserved, uncommunicative men *had* loved the same woman, and contrary to rule, that too was a link—perhaps the strongest of the three—though Bransby had never even remotely suspected it.

Morton Grant could not remember when he had not loved Violet Bransby. He had yearned for her when they both wore curls and very short dresses. He had loved her when, short-sighted and round-shouldered then as now, he had been in her class at dancing school and in the adjacent class at the Sunday School, in which the pupils, aged from four to fourteen, had been decently and discreetly segregated of sex. He had loved her on her wedding-day, and wept the hard scant tears of manhood defeated, denied and at bay, until his dull, weak eyes had been bleared and red-rimmed, and his ugly little button of a nose (he had almost none) had flamed gin-scarlet. And for that one day the beloved business had been to him nothing. He had loved her when she lay shrouded in her coffin—and now, a

year after, he loved her dust in its grave—and all so silently that even she had never sensed it. For the old saying is untrue: a woman does not *always* know.

This poor love of his was indeed a link between the man and his master—and all the stronger because Richard had been as suspicionless as Violet herself. For Bransby would have resented it haughtily, but less and less hotly than he had resented her marriage with that “mountebank” (the term is Bransby’s and not altogether just)—but of the two he would greatly have preferred Grant as a brother-in-law.

Under Helen’s sway, Grant had never come. She was not Violet’s child. He would rather even that Bransby were childless and his fortune in entire keeping for Violet’s boys. For herself he neither liked nor disliked the little girl. But he was grateful to her for being a girl. That left the business undividedly open for Stephen and Hugh—for their future participation and ultimate management at least. And he hoped that of so large a fortune an uncle so generous to them, and so fond of Violet, would allot the brothers some considerable share.

Unlike Mr. Dombey and many other self-made millionaires, Richard Bransby had never wished for a son. Not for treble his millions would he have changed her of sex: Helen satisfied him—quite.

And perhaps unconsciously he was some trifle relieved that no son, growing up to man’s assertion, could rival or question his sole headship of “Bransby’s.”

CHAPTER IV

As Helen and Hugh came singing up the path, Bransby was driving Grant from the door. It was no friendliness that had led him to speed his visitor so far, but a desire to see if Helen were not coming. The sun was setting, and the father thought it high time she came indoors.

Grant was in disgrace. He had come unbidden, forbidden, in fact—and so unwelcome.

Advised by Latham (still a youthful, but daily growing famous physician) and enforced by his own judgment, Bransby was taking a short holiday. Thorough in all things, the merchant had abandoned his business affairs and their conduct entirely—for the moment. Grant had been ordered to manage and decide everything unaided until the master's return, and by no means to intrude by so much as a letter or a telegram.

He had disobeyed.

That it was the first turpitude of thirty years of implicit, almost craven, fealty in no way tempered its enormity. "Preposterous!" had been Bransby's greeting. "Preposterous," was his good-by.

Something had gone wrong at the office, or threatened to go wrong, so important that the faithful old dog had felt obliged to come for his master's personal and immediate decision. But he had come trembling. For his pains he had had abuse and reprimand. But he had gained his point. He had got his message through, and learned Bransby's will. And he was going away—back to his loved drudgery, not trembling, but alert and reassured.

And though Bransby abused, secretly he approved. The link was strengthened.

Bransby was angry—but also he was flattered. He was not, concerning his business at least, and a few other things, altogether above flattery. Who is? Are you?

In his quaint way he had some interior warm liking for his commonplace factotum. He trusted him unreservedly; and trust begets liking more surely and more quickly than pity begets love. After Horace Latham, Morton Grant stood to Bransby for all of human friendship and of living comradeship.

Bransby had adopted Violet's boys, out of love for her and out of a nepotism that was conscience rather than instinct—and, too, it was pride.

They had been with him nearly a year now, and because he counted them as one of his assets, possible appanages of his great business—and because of their

daily companionship with Helen—he watched them keenly. He did not suspect it, as yet, but both little fellows were creeping slowly into a corner of the heart that still beat true enough and human under his surface of granite and steel. And Stephen began to interest him much. Indisputably Stephen Pryde was interesting. He had personality beyond Nature's average dole to each individual of that priceless though dangerous quality. And the personality of the boy, in its young way, had no slight resemblance to that of the uncle. Stephen was an eccentric in-the-making, Richard an eccentric made and polished. Each hid his eccentricity under intense reserve and a steely suavity of bearing. That this should be so in the experienced man of fifty, disciplined by time, by experience and by personal intention, was natural, and not unusual in such types. That it was so in the small boy untried and untutored was extraordinary—it spoke much of force and presaged of his future large things good or bad, whichever might eventuate, and one probably as apt to eventuate as the other, and, whichever came, to come in no small degree. And truly the lad had force even now: perhaps it was his most salient quality, and stood to him for that useful gift—magnetism—which he somewhat lacked.

As Grant went out the two children came in. Helen took her father's hand, and led him back to the room he had just left—and Hugh followed her doglike. The word is used in no abject sense, but in its noblest.

"Ring the bell," Richard said to the boy, sitting down in the big chair to which his tiny mistress had propelled him. She climbed into her father's lap and snuggled her radiant head against his arm.

"Light the fire," Bransby ordered the maid who answered the bell almost as it rang. Bells always were answered promptly in Richard Bransby's house. In some ways Deep Dale was more of the office or counting-house type than of the home-type, and had been so, at least, since Alice Bransby's death.

But it was a pleasant place for all that, if somewhat a stiff, formal casket for so dainty a jewel as the red-headed child who reigned there, and life ran smoothly rather than harshly in its walls and its gates.

Certainly this was a pleasant room; and it was the master's own room.

The fire took but an instant to catch. It was well and truly laid, and scientifically nice in its proportions and arrangement of paper, anthracite and ship's-logs.

If the novels of Charles Dickens had pride of place as Bransby's one fad, as they certainly had pride of place on his room's book-full shelves, open fires came near to being a minor fad. He was inclined to be cold.

But the late afternoon was growing chilly, and little Helen watched the red and orange flames approvingly as they licked and leapt through the chinks of the

fuel.

Hugh, a stocky, tweed-clad boy, as apt to be too warm as was his uncle to be too cold, lay down on the floor at a discreet distance from the hearth, but not unsociably far from the armchair.

He did not move when Mrs. Leavitt came in, but he smiled at her confidently, and she smiled back at him.

Stephen, had he been there, would have risen and moved her chair, or brought her a footstool, and she would have thanked him with a smile a little less affectionate than the one she had just given negligent Hugh.

As she sat down she glanced about the large room anxiously. Then she sighed happily and fell to crocheting contentedly. Really the room was quite tidy. One book lay open—face down—on a table, but nothing else was awry, and that she would put in its place presently, when Richard carried Helen up to the nursery, as at bedtime he always did. Two dolls, one very smart, one very shabby, lay in shockingly latitudinarian attitudes on the chesterfield. But those she could not touch: it was forbidden.

Caroline Leavitt was a notable housewife, but sadly fussy. But she curbed her own fussiness considerably in Richard's presence, and what of it she could not curb he endured with a good humor not commonly characteristic of him, for he appreciated its results of order and comfort. He was an orderly man himself, and it was only by his books that they often annoyed each other. He rarely left anything else about or out of place.

She very much wished that he strewed those on chair and window-seat less often, and he very much wished that she would leave them alone. But they managed this one small discord really quite admirably and amicably. To do him justice he never was reading more than one volume at a time. To do her justice she never moved that one except to put it primly where it belonged on the shelves. And he knew the exact dwelling-spot of every book he owned—and so did she. They were many, but not too many—and he read them all—his favorites again and again. She never opened one of them, but she kept their covers burnished and pleasant to touch and to hold. There were five editions of Dickens, and Bransby was reading for the tenth time his favorite author from the great-hearted wizard-of-pathos-and-humor's Alpha of "Boz" to his unfinished Omega of "Edwin Drood"—Bransby's book of the moment was "David Copperfield." He had been reading a passage that appealed to him particularly when he had been interrupted by Grant's intrusion. That had not served to soften the acerbity of the employer's "Preposterous!"

"And what have you been doing?" Richard asked the dainty bundle on his knee.

“Playing.”

“With your cousins?”

She shook an emphatic head, and her curls glowed redder, more golden in the red and gold of the fire’s reflection. “Wiv Gertrude.”

Mrs. Leavitt stirred uncomfortably. But the father laughed tolerantly. He regarded all his daughter’s vagaries (she had several) as part of the fun of the fair, and quite charming. She rarely could be led to speak of her “make-believe” playmates, but he knew that they all had names and individualities, and that “Gertrude” was first favorite. And he knew that many children played so with mates of their own spirit’s finding. Gertrude seemed a virtuous, well-behaved young person, quite a suitable acquaintance for his fastidious daughter.

Servants carried high-tea in just then, and Stephen slipped into the room with it.

Caroline Leavitt rolled up her crocheting disapprovingly. She detested having food carried all over the house and devoured in inappropriate places, and she disliked high-tea. Crumbs got on the Persian carpet and cream on the carved chairs, and once, when the hybrid refection had been served in the drawing-room, jam had encrusted the piano. Caroline had gained a prize for “piano proficiency” in her girlhood’s long-ago. Every day at four-fifteen it was her habit to commemorate that old victory by playing at least a few bars of the Moonlight Sonata. For some time after the episode of the jam, whenever she touched the instrument’s ivory, small bubbles of thickly boiled blackberry and apple billowed up on to her manicured nails and her rings. No—she did not approve of “high-tea”—and *such* high-tea “all over the house.” But this was the children’s hour at Deep Dale, and the children’s feast—and wherever Helen chanced to be at that hour, there that meal was served. Helen willed it so. Richard Bransby willed it so. Against such an adamant combine of power and of will-force determined and arrogant, Caroline knew herself a mere nothing, and she wisely withheld a protest she realized hopeless.

So now, she laid her lace-work carefully away, and addressed herself to the silver tea-pot. And she did it in a cheerful manner. She was not a profound woman, but she was a wise one. The unprofound are often very wise. And this is especially true of women.

CHAPTER V

It was not a boisterous meal. There was not a naturally noisy person there. Bransby was too cold, Stephen too sensitive, Hugh too heavy, to be given to the creation of noise. Mrs. Leavitt thought it bad form, and she was just lowly enough of birth to be tormentedly anxious about good form. And she was inclined to be fat. Helen was ebullient at times, but never noisily so; her voice and her motions, her mirth and her reprovings, were all silvery.

It was a homely hour, and they were all in homely and friendly mood. But it was Stephen who made himself useful. It was Stephen who remembered that Aunt Caroline preferred buttered toast to cream sandwiches, and he carried her the plate on which the toast looked hottest and crispest. And it was Stephen who checked her hand unobtrusively when she came near to putting sugar in Bransby's tea.

Helen had slipped from her father's knee—she was a hearty little thing—and motioned Hugh to put one of a nest of tables before the chair she had selected, and dragged close to Richard's.

"And what have you been doing all afternoon?" he asked Stephen, as the boy brought him the cake.

"Thinking."

"Story," Helen said promptly, through a mouthful of cream and cocoanut "You wus just watching the birds."

"Yes, so I was," the boy said gently, "and thinking about them."

"What?" demanded Bransby.

"Thinking how stupid it was to be beaten by birds."

"Beaten?"

"They fly. We can't."

"I see. So you'd like to fly."

"I'm not sure. I think I might. But I'd jolly well like to be *able* to."

The man followed the theme up with the boy. In his stern heart Hugh had already found a warmer place than Stephen had, and Bransby's kindliness to the brothers was as nothing compared to his love of Helen. But it was—of the three—to Stephen that he talked most often and longest, and with a seriousness he rarely felt or showed in talk with the others. Stephen Pryde interested his uncle keenly. Bransby did not think Hugh interesting, and Helen not especially so—charming (he felt her charm, and knew that others did who lacked a father's prejudiced predisposition), but not notably interesting as a mentality or even as a

character.

She was not an over-talkative child. Bransby suspected that also she was not over-thoughtful. And he was quite right. She felt a great deal: she thought very little. And her small thinkings were neither accurate, searching nor synthetic.

But Stephen thought much and keenly, and the boy talked well, but not too well. Stephen Pryde made few mistakes. When he did he would probably make bad ones. He was not given to small blunders. And such few mistakes as he did make he was gifted with agility to cover up and retrieve finely. Richard enjoyed talking with Stephen.

Helen was not interested in the flight of birds, and still less in its possible application to affairs of mercantile profit, or of national power. She interrupted them at a tense and interesting turn, and neither the man nor the boy resented it.

"What have you been doing?" she demanded of her father.

"Reading 'David Copperfield' until Grant came."

"Is it a nice book?"

"Yes—very."

"Is it a story book?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll let you read me some, and see if I like it."

Bransby pointed to the volume, and Stephen brought it to him, still open at the passage he had been reading when his clerk had interrupted him.

"Shall I begin at the beginning?"

"No—I mayn't like it. Do a bit just where you wus. Wait, till I get back," and she climbed daintily on to his knee.

And Bransby read, smiling:—"'"We are young and inexperienced, aunt, I know," I replied, "and I dare say we say and think a good deal that is rather foolish. But we love one another truly, I am sure. If I thought Dora could ever love anybody else, or cease to love me; or that I could ever love anybody else, or cease to love her; I don't know what I should do—go out of my mind, I think?" "Ah, Trot!" said my aunt, shaking her head, and smiling gravely, "blind, blind, blind!" "Some one that I know, Trot," my aunt pursued, after a pause, "though of a very pliant disposition, has an earnestness of affection in him that reminds me of poor Baby. Earnestness is what that Somebody must look for, to sustain him and improve him, Trot. Deep, downright, faithful earnestness." "If you only knew the earnestness of Dora, aunt!" I cried. "Oh, Trot!" she said again; "blind, blind!" and without knowing why, I felt a vague unhappy loss or want of something overshadow me like a cloud.'"

"Silly man!" exclaimed Helen. She was bored. "No one shouldn't be blind. I'm not blind—not a bit. I see."

“You! you’ve eyes in the back of your head,” Hugh said, speaking for the first time in half an hour. In those early days he had a talent for silence. It was by way of being a family gift.

It seems a pity to feel obliged to record it of the one remark of a person who so infrequently made even that much conversational contribution, but Hugh was wrong. Helen was not a particularly observing child. She felt, she dreamed; but she was as lax of observation as she was indolent of thought. Perhaps she realized or sensed this, for she said promptly, “I have not. I see with my front.”

“What do you see now?” her father asked idly.

She pointed to the glowing fire, and sighed dreamily: “I see things, in there. I see Gertrude. Her face is in there all smiley. And she looks sleepy.”

Bransby smiled indulgently and cuddled the pretty head nestling in the crook of his arm.

“David Copperfield” slid to the floor. The opportunity was too good to be neglected—too inviting. The volume was bound in calf, full limp calf, and had all the Cruikshank’s illustrations finely reproduced. Caroline got up very carefully and took up the book. Bransby saw her, but he only smiled indulgently, and she seized the license of his humor, and carried volume xi. to its own space on the shelves.

Encouraged craftily by her amused father, Helen chatted on to her friend Gertrude, and of her. Mrs. Leavitt was shocked, but did not dare show it, and what would have been the use? Nothing! she knew. But she did so disapprove of Richard’s encouraging the child in the habit of telling “stories”—to name very mildly such baseless and brazen fabrications.

Hugh was puzzled, but not unsympathetically so, and less puzzled than might have been expected of so stolid a boy, and at so self-absorbed an age.

Stephen was uneasy and angry. *He* thrilled somewhat to Helen’s fancy, but he disliked both her claim and his own emotion to it.

All three of these children (for why beat longer about our bush?) in ways totally, almost antagonistically different, were somewhat “psychic.”

No one suspected it, much less knew it—and they themselves least of all. Hugh could not. Stephen would not. Helen was too young.

Psychic science or revelation had not, in those days, had much of a look in socially. And in Oxshott it had barely been heard of—merely heard of enough to give Ignorance a meaningless laugh. Spiritual planes and delicate soul-processes would seem to have little vibration with that environment of mundane interests and financial aggrandizement. But the souls of the other plane peep in through odd nooks, and work in seemingly strange ways. And, too, this one group of people, for all their wealth and their luxuries, lived rather “apart”—they were in

the social swim—to an extent, and in the commercial ether up to their necks, but even so, in it, they were in another, and perhaps a more real and significant, way "cloistered" in it: apart.

"Gertrude is sleepy. I am sleepy too. Gertrude says: 'Good-night, Helen.' Good-night, Gertrude."

Bransby swung her up to his shoulder and carried her off to bed. And Hugh, at a gesture of an imperious little hand, gathered up the two dolls, and followed after with them carefully. Helen was a motherly little thing—intermittently, and had her children to sleep with her—sometimes. The chain of flowers lay dying and forgotten.

CHAPTER VI

Stephen was not happy. He was loving but not lovable—on the surface at least. He was sensitive to a fault, brooding, secretive. He had loved his mother dearly, and Hugh had been her favorite. But that had soured and twisted him less than had the marriage-misery of her last years. He had seen and understood most of it; and it had aged and lined his young face almost from his perambulator days. His two earliest memories were of her face blistered with tears, and a tea-table on which there had been no jam, and not too much bread. Secure at Deep Dale, he had jam, and all such plenties, to spare. And he intended to command jam of his very own—and cut-glass dishes to serve it in—before he was much older, and as long as he lived. His days of jam-shortage were past. And they had left but little scar—if only he could forget that she had shared and hated it. But the tear-scars on her face, and on her heart, could never be erased—or from his—or forgotten.

Small boy as he was, all the future lines of his character were clearly drawn, and Time had but to give them light and shade—and color: there was nothing more to be done—the outline and the proportions were complete and unalterable. And at fourteen and a few months he was the victim of two gnawing wants: heart-hunger and ambition. Few boys of fourteen are definitely and greatly ambitious, or, if they are, greatly disturbed as to the feasibility and the details of its fulfillment. Fourteen is not an age of masculine self-distrust. Masculine self-depreciation and under-apprisement come slowly, and fairly late in life. There are rare, notable men to whom they never come. Such men carry on them a visible and easily-to-be-recognized hall-mark. Their vocabulary may be scant or Milton-much, but invariably its every seventh word is “I” or “me” or “my” or “mine.”

Stephen Pryde had no doubt of his own ability to earn success. But his mind was wide-eyed and clear-eyed, and he doubted if circumstances would not thwart, much less abet him. Already he saw that he could gain a great deal through his uncle and in his uncle’s way. The man had said as much. But Stephen was no disciple, and he was ill-content to win even success itself in subordination to any other, or in imitation of others or of their methods. He longed to carve and to climb unaided and alone. He wished to cleave uncharted skies—as the birds did. Ah! yes, there he was meek to imitate—to follow and imitate the birds, but not any other man.

Partly was this ingrained; firm-rooted independence, egoism, partly it came

from the poor opinion he had already formed of his own sex. He thought none too well of men: his own father had done that to him. Towards all women he had a sort of pitying, tender chivalry. That his mother had done to him. He did not over-rate female intellect or character (like the uncle, whom he resembled so much, intellect in womenkind did not attract him, and he prized them most when their virtues were passive and not too diverse), but he bore them one and all good-will, and the constant small attentions he paid Mrs. Leavitt, and even the maid-servants, were almost as much a native tenderness as a calculated diplomacy. Mrs. Leavitt and the maids were not ungrateful. Women of all sorts and of all conditions are easiest purchased, and held, with small coins. A husband may break all the commandments, and break them over his wife's very back roughly, and be more probably forgiven than for failing to raise his hat when he meets her on the street. Stephen was very careful about his hat, indoors and out. He had seen his father wear his in his mother's sitting-room, and by her very bedside. The lesson had sunk, and it stuck.

But his love of his mother, and its jealous observance of her, had trained him to feel for women rather than to respect them. He had seen her sicken and shiver under the storm, and bow down and endure it patiently, when he would have had her breast and quell it. He had not heard Life's emphatic telling—he was too young to catch it—that strength is strongest when it seems weak and meek, that great loyalty is the strongest of all strength as well as the highest of all virtues, and that often Loyalty for ermine must wear a yoke,—and always must it bear uncomplainingly a "friend's infirmities."

The boy was a unique, and a blend of his father and his "Uncle Dick." He was wonderfully like each. From his mother he had inherited nothing but a possibility, an aptitude, a predisposition even, towards great loyalty, which in her had crystallized and perfected into everlasting and invincible self-sacrifice. In her son it was young yet, plastic and undeveloped. In maturity it might match, or even exceed, her own; or, on the other hand, experiences sufficiently rasping and deforming might wrench and transmute it, under the black alchemy of sufficient tragedy, even into treachery itself.

If few boys of fourteen are tormented by ambition, very many such youngsters suffer from genuine heart-hunger. We never see or suspect or care. They scarcely suspect themselves, and never understand. But the canker is there, terribly often, and it eats and eats. The heart-ache of a little child is a hideous tragedy, and when it is untold and unsoothed it twists and poisons all after life and character. Angels *may* rise above such spiritual catastrophe—men don't.

Even more than Stephen longed to succeed, he longed to be loved. And in a hurt, dumb boy-way he realized that he did not, as a rule, attract love.

“Man’s love is of man’s life a thing apart; ’tis woman’s whole existence.” Hum? There are men *and* men. (There are even women and women.) Stephen longed to be very rich, and planned to do it. He longed to contrive strange, wonderful things that would cleave the air as birds clove it, revolutionize both Commerce and her servant and master Transport, make travel a dance and a melody, redraw the map of the world, carry armies across the hemispheres with a breath, hurl kings from their thrones, annihilate peoples in an hour—and he planned to do it: planned as he lay on the grass and watched the birds, planned as he sat in the firelight, planned as he lay in bed. But more than all this he longed to be loved: longed but could not plan it. The child knew his own limitations; and that he did was at once his ability and inability: it was equipment and drag-chain.

He ached for love. He longed to feel his uncle’s hand in caress on his shoulder. Once in the twilight he cuddled Helen’s doll to him, in fierce longing and loneliness of heart. And night after night he prayed that in his dreams he might hear his mother’s voice. And sometimes he did. Science asserts that we never *hear* in our sleep. Science still has some things to learn.

Stephen loved Hugh, and this affection was returned. But Stephen wanted more than that; Hugh loved every one. Their mutual fondness was placid and moderate. And it lacked novelty.

If Hugh loved every one, every one loved Hugh—unless Helen did not. And Helen was merely a baby, and cared for no one but her father—unless it was “Gertrude,” whom Stephen hated.

Even Richard Bransby himself, hard and impassive, began to warm to the younger boy, and Stephen sensed it. He was keen to such things, and read his uncle the more readily because they resembled each other in so much.

But, much as he desired to be loved, Stephen was not jealous of Hugh. Jealousy had as yet no hand in his hopes, his fears or his plans: Jealousy, sometimes Love’s horrid bastard-twin, sometimes Love’s flaming-sworded angel.

Possibly Stephen’s as-yet escape from jealousy and all its torments he owed in no small part to Helen’s indifference to Hugh, and to the fact that Hugh’s fondness of every one made Hugh’s fondness of Helen somewhat inconspicuous.

For odd Stephen loved wee Helen with a great love—greater than the love he had given his mother.

The day the boys had first come to Deep Dale Helen, running at play, had lost a tiny blue shoe in the grounds. Stephen had found and had kept it.

Helen liked her “pretty blue shoes,” and Mrs. Leavitt was sensibly frugal. The grounds had been searched until they had been almost dug up, and the entire

servant-staff had been angrily wearied of blue kid shoes and of ferns and geraniums. But Stephen had kept it. He had it still. And he would have fought any man-force, or the foul fiend himself, before he would have yielded that bit of sky-blue treasure.

No one understood Stephen, not even the uncle he so resembled. He was alone and unhappy, only fourteen years old—a quivering personality concealed beneath a suave mask of ice, and young armor of steel.

Stephen had a tutor.

Helen and Hugh shared a governess.

Both instructors were “daily,” one coming by train from Guildford, the other by train from London.

Stephen was going to public school in a year or two, Hugh then falling heir to the tutor.

How long the governess would retain her present position had never been considered. Probably she would do so for some time. Helen liked her.

BOOK II

THE DARK

CHAPTER VII

The years sped.

In the autumn of 1916 Helen was twenty.

The governess had left three years ago. Helen had found her a curate, and had given her her silver abundant.

Already that curate had had preferment. Richard Bransby had contrived that, but Helen had instigated.

Stephen and Hugh had gone, in due course, from the tutor to Harrow, from Harrow to Oxford.

Stephen would have preferred education more technical, and Hugh would have preferred none.

Hugh was not lazy, but he had little thirst for learning and none for tables, declensions or isms.

Stephen, might he have followed his own bent, would have studied only those things which promised to coach him toward aviation in all its branches and corollaries. But Richard was not to be handled, and to the school and the ’varsity he chose the boys went.

Being there, Stephen worked splendidly—took honors and contrived to gain no little of the very things he desired. He had carpentry at Harrow—and excelled in it. And at Magdalen he bent physics and chemistry to his particular needs. At both places his conduct and his industry were exemplary.

Hugh barely passed into Harrow, and barely stayed there. He ran and he boxed, and at that glorified form of leap-frog which public schools dignify as “hurdles” he excelled. But he was lax and mischievous, and twice he only just escaped expulsion. His stay at Oxford was brief and curtailed. The authorities more than hinted to Bransby that his younger nephew was not calculated to receive or to give much benefit at Oxford.

Hence the brothers began on the same day a severe novitiate at the great shipbuilding and shipping offices.

Strangely enough they both did well. Hugh had a happy knack of jumping to the right conclusions, and he got his first big step up from dreaming in his sleep the correct solution of a commercial tangle that was vexing his uncle greatly.

That Hugh’s mind had worked so in his sleep, accomplishing what it had failed to finish when normally awake, as human minds do now and then, proved that at core he was interested in the business his careless manner had sometimes seemed to indicate that he took too lightly. And this pleased and gratified

Richard Bransby even more than the elucidation of a business difficulty did. As an evidence of the peculiar psychological workings of human intelligence it interested Bransby not at all.

Stephen worked hard and brilliantly. From the first he had dreams of inducing his uncle to add the building of aircraft to their already enormous building of ships. He nursed his dream and it nursed his patience and fed his industry. Morton Grant watched over both young men impartially and devotedly. All his experience was sorted and furbished for them. All his care and solicitude were shared between them and the business.

At the first beat of Kitchener's drum Hugh begged to follow the flag. And when Bransby at last realized that the war would not "be over by Christmas" he withdrew his opposition, and Hugh was allowed to join the army. He had not done ill in the O. T. C. at Harrow. He applied for a commission and got it. But it was understood that at the end of the war he would return to the firm. Richard Bransby would tolerate nothing else.

There had been no talk—no thought even—of soldiering for Stephen. He was nearly thirty, and seemed older. Never ill, he was not too robust. He was essential now to his uncle's great business concern. And "Bransby's" was vitally essential to the Government and to the prosecution of the war: no firm in Britain more so. Stephen was no coward, but soldiering did not attract him. He had no wish to join the contemptible little army, destined saviors of England. Had he wished to do so, the Government itself and the great soldier-dictator would have forbidden it. Emphatically Hugh belonged in the army. As emphatically Stephen did not; but did, even more emphatically, belong in the great shiphouse.

Time and its passing had changed and developed the persons with whom this history is concerned—as time usually does—along the lines of least resistance.

Helen had "grown up" and, no longer interested, even intermittently, in dolls —"Gertrude" and her band quite forgotten—introduced a dozen new interests, a score of new friends into the home-circle. Guests came and went. Helen flitted from function to function, and took her cousins with her, and sometimes even Bransby himself. Aunt Caroline was a sociable creature for all her Martha-like qualities. She was immensely proud of the ultra-nice gowns Helen ordered and made her wear, and quite enjoyed the dinners and small dances they occasionally gave in return for the constant hospitalities pressed upon the girl and her cousins.

Helen was as flower-like as ever. She loved her father more than all the rest of the world put together, or had until recently—but after him her keenest interest, until recently, was in her own wonderful frocks. She had a genius for clothes, and journeyed far and wide in quest of new and unusual talent in the needlework line. But above all, her personality was sweet and womanly. In no

one way particularly gifted, she had the great general, sweeping gift of charm. And her tender, passionate devotion to her father set her apart, lifted her above the average of nice girlhood—perfumed her, added to her charm of prettiness and gracefulness, a something of spiritual charm not to be worded, but always felt and delightful to feel.

Between the girl and the father was one of the rare, beautiful intimacies, unstrained and perfect, that do link now and then just such soft, gay girl-natures to fathers just so rigid and still. And, as it usually is with such comrades, in this intimate and partisan comradeship Helen the gentle was the dominant and stronger ruling, with a gay tyranny, that sometimes swung to a sweet insolence and a caressing defiance that were love-tribute and flattery, the man of granite and quiet arrogance.

Wax to Helen, Richard Bransby was granite and steel to others. Grant, still his man Friday and, even more than indispensable Stephen, his good right-hand, trusted but ruled, still stood, as he always had and always would, in considerable awe of him. But the years had sweetened Bransby—the Helen-ruled years. He had always striven to be a just man—in justice to himself—but his just-dealing was easier now and kindlier, and he strove to be just to others for their sakes rather than for his own. It was less a duty and more an enjoyment than it had been: almost even a species of stern self-indulgence. Once it had been a penance. It was penance no longer. With good men penances conscientiously practised tend to grow easy and even agreeable. The devout penitent and the zealot need to find new substitutes periodically for old scourges smooth-worn.

Caroline’s fussinesses amused Richard more than they irritated him. And Helen no longer was sole in his love. He loved the boys—both of them. Stephen he loved with pride and some reservation. Their wills clashed not infrequently, and on one matter always. Hugh, who often compelled his disapproval, he loved almost as an own son.

Latham found him a more tractable patient than of old. Horace Latham had reached no slight professional importance now; owned his place on Harley Street, made no daily rounds, studied more than he practised, had an eloquent bank account, and “consulted” more often than he directly practised.

Helen’s little coterie of friends and acquaintances found him an amiable, if not a demonstrative, host. Even Angela Hilary he suffered suavely, if not eagerly.

A Mrs. Hilary had bought a bijou place near theirs a few years ago, and cordial, if not intimate, relations had been established quickly between Helen Bransby and the rich, volatile American widow in accordance with the time-honored rule that opposites attract. But some things they had in common, if only things of no higher moment than chiffons and a pretty taste in hospitality. Both

danced through life—rather. But theirs was dancing with all the difference. Helen never romped. Her dancing, both actual and figurative, was seemly and slow as the dance on a Watteau fan—thistle-down dignified—minuet. Angela's, fine of its sort, was less art and more impulse, and yet more studied, less natural. It almost partook of the order of skirt-dancing. Both dancings were pretty to watch, Helen's the prettier to remember. For the matter of that both dancers were pretty to watch. Helen Bransby at twenty was full as lovely as her childhood had promised. She had been exquisitely loved, and love feeds beauty and adds to it. Angela Hilary had the composite comeliness so characteristic of the well-circumstanced American woman: Irish eyes, a little shrewder, a little harder, than the real thing, hands and feet Irish-small, skin Saxon-fair, soft, wayward hair Spanish-dark, French *chic*, a thin form Slavic-svelt and Paris-clad, the wide red mouth of an English great-grandmother, and a self-confidence and a social assurance to which no man ever has attained, or ever will, and no woman either not born and bred between Sandy Hook and the Golden Gate—a daring woman, never grotesque; daring in manner, more daring in speech, most daring of all in dress; but never too daring—for her; fantastic, never odious—least of all gross. Each of her vagaries suited her, and the most surprising of all her unexpected gowns became and adorned her: an artificial, hot-house creature, she was the perfectly natural product of civilization at once extravagant, well-meaning and cosmopolitan, if insular too, and she had a heart of gold. A great many people laughed at Mrs. Hilary, especially English people, and never suspected how much more she laughed at them, or how much more shrewdly and with how much more cause—some few liked her greatly, and every one else liked her at least a little; every one except Horace Latham. Latham was afraid of her.

CHAPTER VIII

One evening, early in the autumn of 1916, Morton Grant passed nervously by the lodge of Deep Dale, and along the carriage drive that twisted and curled to the house.

He had cause enough to be nervous. For the second time in thirty years he was disobeying his chief grossly; and the cause of his present turpitude could scarcely have been more unpleasant or less reassuring.

Under one arm he carried a large book carefully wrapped in brown paper. He carried it as if he feared and disliked it, and yet it and its fellows had been the vessels of his temple and his own dedication for years.

Grant barely came to Deep Dale. Richard Bransby dealt with his subordinates not meanly. A turkey at Christmas, a suitable sum of money on boxing-day, leniency at illness, and a coffin when requisite, were always forthcoming—but an invitation to dinner was unheard and unthought of, and even Grant, in spite of the responsibility and implicit trustedness of his position, and of the intimacy of their boyhood, scarcely once had tasted a brew of his master's tea.

A nervous little maid, palpably a war-substitute either for the spruce man-servant or the sprucer parlor-maid, one of whom had always admitted him heretofore, answered his ring, and showed him awkwardly into the library. She collided with him as they went in, and collided with the door itself as she went out to announce his presence.

"Tell Mr. Bransby I should be most grateful if he would see me when he is disengaged, and—er—you might add that the matter is—er—urgent—er—that is, as soon as they have quite finished dinner. Just don't mention my being here until he has left the dining-room—er—in fact, not until he is disengaged—er—alone."

Left by himself Grant placed his top hat on a table and laid his parcel beside it. He unfastened the string, and partly unwrapped the ledger. Walking to the fireplace, he rolled up the string very neatly and put it carefully in his waistcoat pocket; ready to his hand should he carry the ledger back to London with him; ready to some other service for "Bransby and Co."—if the ledger remained with his chief.

The clerk glanced about the room—and possibly saw it—but he never turned his back on the big buff book, or his eyes from it long.

It was a fine old-fashioned room, paneled in dark oak. Not in the least

gloomy, yet even when, as now, brilliantly lit, fire on the hearth, the electric lamps and wall-lights turned up, it seemed invested with shadows, shadows lending it an impalpable suggestion of mystery. The room was not greatly changed since the spring evening thirteen years ago when Helen had sat on her father's knee here and grown sleepy at his reading of Dickens. The curtains were new, and two of the pictures. The valuable carpet was the same and most of the furniture. The flowers might have been the same—Helen's favorite heliotrope and carnations. The dolls were gone. But the banjo on the chesterfield and the box of chocolates on the window-seat scarcely spoke of Bransby, unless they told of a subjugation that had outlasted the dollies.

In the old days the room had been rather exclusively its master's "den," more than library, and into which others were not apt to come very freely uninvited. Helen had changed all that, and so had the years' slow mellowing of Bransby himself. "Daddy's room" had become the heart of the house, and the gathering-place of the family. But it was *his* room still, and in his absence, as his presence, it seemed to breathe of his personality.

Grant had waited some minutes, but he still stood nervously, when the employer came in. He eyed Grant rather sourly. Grant stood confused and tongue-tied.

The master let the man wait long enough to grow still more uncomfortable, and then said crisply, "Good-evening, Grant."

The clerk moved then—one eye in awe on Bransby, one in dread on the ledger. He took a few steps towards Bransby, and began apologetically, "Good—er—ahem—good-evening, Mr. Bransby. I—er—I trust I am not disturbing you, but——"

Bransby interrupted sharply, just a glint of wicked humor in his eye, "Just come from town, eh?"

"Yes, sir—er—quite right——"

"Come straight here from the office, I dare say?" Bransby spoke with a harshness that was a little insolent to so old, and so tried, a servant.

Morton Grant's pitiful uneasiness was growing. "Well—er—yes, sir, as a matter of fact, I did."

"I knew it," Bransby said in cold triumph. It was one of the ineradicable defects of his nature that he enjoyed small and cheap triumphs, and irrespective of what they cost others.

Grant winced. His uneasiness was making him ridiculous, and it threatened to overmaster him. "Er—ahem—" he stammered, "the matter on which I have come is so serious——"

"Grant," Bransby's tone was smooth, and so cold that its controlled sneer

pricked, “when my health forced me to take a holiday, what instructions did I give you?”

“Why, sir—er—you said that you must not be bothered with business affairs upon any account—not until you instructed me otherwise.”

“And have I instructed you otherwise?” The tone was absolutely sweet, but it made poor Morton Grant’s veins curdle.

“Well, sir,” he said wretchedly—“er—no, sir, you haven’t.”

Bransby looked at his watch. Almost the tyrant was smiling. “There’s a train leaving for town in about forty-five minutes—you will just have time to catch it.” He turned on his heel—he had not sat down—and went towards the door.

Grant began to feel more like jelly than like flesh and bone, but he pulled himself together, remembering what was at stake, and spoke more firmly than he had yet done—more firmly than his employer had often heard him speak. “I beg your pardon,”—he took a step towards Bransby—“sir”—there was entreaty in his voice, and command too—“but you must not send me away like this.”

His tone caught Bransby’s attention. It could not well have failed to do so. The shipbuilder turned and looked at the other keenly. “Why not?” he snapped.

“The thing that brought me here is most important.”

“So important that you feel justified in setting my instructions aside?”

“Yes, sir!” holding his ground now.

Bransby eyed him for a long moment.

Grant did not flinch.

“Sit down.”

Grant did so, and with a sigh of relief—the tension a little eased. What he had before him was hard enough, Heaven knew—but the first point was gained: Bransby would hear him.

“I always thought,” moving towards his own chair beside the writing-table, “that obeying orders was the most sacred thing in your life, Grant. I am anxious to know what could have deprived you of that idea.”

Anxious to know! And when he did know!—Morton Grant began to tremble again, and was speechless.

Bransby studied him thoughtfully. “Well?” he spoke a shade more kindly.

“The matter I—I—I——”

“Yes—yes?” impatience and some sympathy for the other’s distress were struggling.

Well—it had to be told. He had come here to tell it—and to tell it had braved and breasted Bransby’s displeasure as he had never done before. But he could not say it with his eyes on the other’s. He hung his head, ashamed and broken. But he spoke—and without stammer or break: “We’ve been robbed of a large

sum of money, sir.”

CHAPTER IX

Bransby watched Grant under beetling brows, his thin lips set, stiff and angry. He valued his money. He had earned it hard, and to be robbed of a farthing had always enraged him. But more than any money—much more, he valued the prestige of his business and the triumphant working of his own business methods. Its success was the justification of his arbitrariness and his egoism.

He was angry now, in hot earnest—very angry. “Robbed?” he said at last quietly. It was an ominous quietude. When he was angriest, invariably he was quietest.

“Ten thousand pounds, sir,” Grant said wearily.

“Ten thousand pounds. Have you reported it to the police?”

“No, sir.”

“Why do you come to me instead of them?”

“Well, sir, you see it only came to light this afternoon. You know the war has disturbed all our arrangements—made us very backward.”

Richard Bransby knew nothing of the sort. His business prevision and his business arrangements were far too masterly to be greatly disarranged by a mere war, had Heaven granted him subordinates with half his own grit and devise. But he let that pass.

And Grant continued. “The accountants have been unable to make their yearly audit of our books until this week. It was during their work to-day that they discovered the theft. So I thought before taking any action I had best come straight to you.”

“Who stole it?”

Morton Grant’s terrible moment had come—his ordeal excruciating and testing. He looked piteously toward his hat. He felt that it might help him to hold on to it. But the hat was too far to reach, and alone, without prop, he braced himself for his supreme moment of loyalty.

“Who stole it?” Bransby’s patience was wearing thin. The fumbling man prayed for grit to take the plunge clean and straight. But the deep was too cold for his nerve. He shivered and slacked.

“Why—er—the fact of the matter is—we are not quite sure.”

“Yes, you are—who stole it?”

“Mr. Bransby, I—” the dry old lips refused their office.

Even in his own impatience, tinged with anxiety now (it disturbed him to

have trusted and employed untrustworthy servants), Bransby was sorry for the other's painful embarrassment. And for that he said all the more roughly, "Come, come, man. Out with it."

"Well, sir," Grant's voice was nervously timid, almost craven—and not once had he looked at Richard Bransby—"all the evidence goes to prove that only one man could have done it."

"And who is that man?" demanded the quick, hard voice.

With a supreme effort of courage, which a brave man never knows—it is reserved for the cowards—Grant lifted his eyes square to the other, and answered in a voice so low that Bransby scarcely could have heard the words had they not rung clear with desperation and resolve, "Your—your nephew, Mr. Hugh Pryde."

For a moment Richard Bransby yielded himself up to amazement, over-sweeping and numb. Then his face flushed and he half rose. For that one instant Morton Grant was in danger of his employer's fingers fiercely strangling at his throat—and he knew it. His eyes filled with tears—not for himself, pity for Bransby.

Then Bransby laughed. It was a natural laugh—he was genuinely amused—but full of contempt. "My nephew Hugh?" he said good-humoredly.

"Yes, sir." The low words were emphatic. Grant was past flinching now.

"Grant, you must be out of your senses——"

"It's the truth, sir; I am sorry, but it's the truth."

Bransby disputed him roughly. "It can't be. He is my own flesh and blood. I love the boy. Why, he's just received his commission, Grant. And you come sneaking to me accusing him like this—" He threw his head up angrily and his eyes encountered Helen's eyes in the portrait of her that hung over the fireplace: a breathing, beautiful thing, well worth the great price he had paid for it. As he looked at it his words died on his lips, and then rushed on anew in fresh and uncontrolled fury—"How dare you say he's a thief—how dare you?"

Grant rose too. He was standing his ground resolutely now. The worst was over for him: the worst for Richard Bransby was just to come. Pity made the clerk brave and direct. "I've only told you the truth, sir," he said very quietly.

Grant's calmness checked Bransby's rage. For a moment or two he wavered and then, reseating himself quietly, he said in a voice quiet and restrained, "What evidence do you base this extraordinary charge on?" As he spoke he picked up from the table a little jade paper-weight and fingered it idly. He had had it for years and often handled it so. No one else ever touched it—not even Helen. He dusted it himself, with a silk handkerchief kept for that purpose in a drawer to his hand. It was worth its weight in pure gold, a moon-faced, green Chinese god

squatted on a pink lotus flower.

Grant answered him immediately. “The shortage occurred in the African trading account.”

“Well?”

“That was entirely in charge of Mr. Hugh; except for him,” Grant continued, with the kind relentlessness of a surgeon, “no one has access to those accounts but his brother, Mr. Stephen, and myself. I do not think that you will believe that either Mr. Stephen Pryde or myself tampered——”

Bransby brushed that aside with a light sharpness that was something of an apology, and completely a vote of credit. “Of course not. Go on.”

“Those accounts have been tampered with.”

“But Hugh has not been at the office for months,” Bransby said eagerly, the hopefulness of his voice betraying how sharp his fear had been in spite of himself. Acute masters do not easily doubt the conviction of the word of this world’s rare Morton Grants—“not for months. He’s been training.”

“The theft occurred before he left us.”

“Oh!” trying to conceal his disappointment, but succeeding not too well.

“Drafts made payable to us are not entered in the books. The accounts were juggled with so that the shortage would escape our notice.”

Bransby’s teeth closed on his lip. “Is that the entire case against Hugh?” he demanded sharply, clutching at any hope.

Grant stood up beside the ledger, and opened it remorselessly. What the remorse at his old heart was only the spirit of a dead woman knew—*if* the dead know. “The alterations in the books are in his handwriting,” he said.

“I don’t believe it.”

“I brought the ledger down so that you might see for yourself, sir.” He placed the volume on the table before Bransby, took a memorandum from his waistcoat pocket, and consulted it. “The irregularities occur on pages forty-three——”

Bransby put on his glasses and opened the book scornfully. He believed in Hugh, and now his belief would be vindicated. Grant was faithful, no question of that, but a doddering old blunderer. Well, he must not be too hard on Grant, and he would not, for really he had been half afraid—from the so-far evidence—himself for a breath or two.

“Page forty-three—yes.” He looked at it. “Yes.” His face was puzzled—his voice lacked triumph.

“Fifty-nine,” Grant prompted.

Bransby turned to it. “Fifty-nine—yes.”

“Eighty-eight.”

“Eighty-eight.” He looked at it steadily. Slowly belief in Hugh was sickened

into suspicion. Bransby put down the jade toy held till now idly, and took up a magnifying glass. Suspicion was changing to conviction. “Yes,” he said grimly. Just the one word—but the one word was defeat. He was convinced, convinced with the terrible conviction of love betrayed and outraged—loyalty befouled by disloyalty. Violet seemed to stand before him—Violet as a child. A lump sobbed in his throat.

“One hundred and two.”

Staring straight before him, “What number?” he said.

“One hundred and two,” Grant repeated.

“One hundred and two—yes.” But he did not look at the page, he was still staring straight before him, looking through the long years at the sister he had loved—Violet in her wedding dress. “Yes.” Still it was Violet he saw—he had no sight for the page of damnation and treachery. Violet as he had seen her last, cold in her shroud. Slowly he closed the book—slowly and gently. He needed it no more. He had nothing more to fear from it, nothing more to hope. He was convinced of his nephew’s guilt. “My God.” It was a cry to his Maker for sympathy—and rebuke rather than prayer.

“The alterations are unmistakably in Mr. Hugh’s handwriting, sir,” Grant said sorrowfully.

“But why,” Richard Bransby cried with sudden passion, “why should he steal from me, Grant? Answer me that. Why should he steal from me?”

“Some time ago, sir—after Mr. Hugh had joined the army—it came to my ears—quite by accident, as a matter of fact—through an anonymous letter——”

Bransby uttered a syllable of contempt.

Grant acquiesced, “Yes, sir, of course—*but*—I—er—verified its statements that while Mr. Hugh was still with us—he had been gambling rather heavily and for a time was in the hands of the money-lenders.”

“Certain of this?”

“Quite.”

“And I trusted that boy, Grant. I would have trusted him with anything”—his eyes turned to the pictured face over the fireplace—“anything”—and his hand playing with the jade paper-weight trembled.

“I know.” And Grant did know. Had not he trusted him too—and loved him—and for the same woman’s sake?

The hand on the little jade god grew steady and still. The man gripped it calmly; he had regained his grip of self. “Except yourself, who has any knowledge of this affair?”

“Only the accountants, sir. Mr. Stephen Pryde has not been at the office for the past few days.”

“I know. He is staying here with me.” Then the mention of Stephen’s name suggested to him a pretext and a vent to give relief to his choking feelings, and he added in querulous irritation, “He’s down here to worry me again about that cracked-brain scheme of his for controlling the world’s output of aeroplane engines. He’s as mad as the Kaiser, and about as ambitious and pig-headed. I’ve told him that Bransby and Co. built ships and sailed ’em, and that was enough. But not for him. He’s the first man I’ve ever met who thinks he knows how to conduct my business better than I do—the business I built up myself. Of course I know he has brains—but he should have ’em—he’s my nephew—that’s why I left him the management of my business at my death—fortunate, fortunate——”

“Yes, sir. But about Mr. Hugh?”

“Ah!” In his irritation over Stephen—an old irritation—the thought of Hugh had for a moment escaped their uncle. It returned to him now, and his face fell from anger to brooding sorrow, “Yes, yes, about Hugh.” He stared in front of him in deep thought, his face working a little.

“I think that, perhaps——” the clerk began timidly.

But Bransby silenced him with an impatient gesture. “The accountants? Can you trust them?”

“Absolutely.”

“They won’t talk?”

“Not one word.”

“I know there is no need to caution you.”

“Thank you.”

“I must think this over for a day or two—I must think what is best to be done. Go back to town and have everything go on as if nothing had happened. Go back on the next train. And, Grant, you’d best leave the house at once. Hugh is staying here with me, too. I don’t want him to know you’ve been here.”

“Very good, Mr. Bransby,” Grant said, picking up his hat, and turning to the ledger.

But Bransby stayed him. “I’ll keep the ledger here with me. I shall want to look over it again.”

Grant took the memorandum slip from the pocket to which he had restored it when Bransby shut the book, and held it towards his employer in silence. In silence Bransby took it.

“I am—er—I am very sorry, sir,” Grant faltered, half afraid to voice the sympathy that would not be stifled.

“Yes, yes, Grant, I know,” Richard Bransby returned gently. They looked in each other’s eyes, two old men stricken by a common trouble, a common disappointment, and for the moment, as they had not been before, in a mutual

sympathy. “You shall hear from me in a day or two.”

“Very good, sir.”

“And, Grant——”

Grant turned back, nearly at the door, “Yes, sir?”

With a glint of humor, a touch of affection, and a touch of pathos, Bransby said, “You were quite justified in setting aside my orders.”

CHAPTER X

The two stricken men parted then, one going down the road with slouched shoulders and aimless gait, feeling more than such a type of such years and so circumstanced often has to feel, but devising nothing, suffering but not fighting. There was no fight in him—none left—his interview with Bransby had used it all up—to the last atom.

Richard Bransby sat alone with his trouble, cut, angry, at bay—already devising, weighing, fighting, twisting and turning the bit of jade in his nervous fingers. He rose and pulled open a drawer of his table and laid the ledger in it with a quiet that was pathetic. For a moment he stood looking at the book sadly.

How much that book had meant to this man only just such men could gauge. It was his *libra d'ora*, his high commission in the world's great financial army, and his certificate of success in its far-flung battle front. It was his horoscope, predicted and cast in his own keen boy's heart and head, fulfilled in his graying old age. It was the record of over forty years of fierce fight, always waged fairly, of a business career as stiff and sometimes as desperate and as venturesome as Napoleon's or Philip's, but never once smirched or touched with dishonor—no, not with so much as one shadow of shame. He had fought—ah! how he had fought, from instinct, for Alice, for Helen—and, by God! yes, lately for Violet's boys too—he had fought, and always he had fought on and on to success: bulldog and British in tenacity, he had been Celtic-skillful, and many a terrible corner had he turned with a deft fling of wrist and a glow in his eye that might have been envied—and certainly would have been applauded and loved—on Wall Street, or that fleeter, less scrupulous street of high-finance—La Salle. It was his escutcheon—all the blazon he had ever craved—and now——He closed the drawer swiftly and softly. Many a coffin lid has been closed with pain less profound.

Then his quiet broke, and for a moment the frozen tears melted down his trembling face, and the terrible sobs of manhood and age thwarted and hurt to the quick shook his gaunt body. A cry broke from him—a cry of torture and love. "Hugh—Hugh!"

For a few moments he let the storm have its will of him; he had to. Then his will took its turn, asserted itself and he commanded himself again.

Bransby turned quietly away with a sigh. For a space he stood in deep thought. Quite suddenly a pain and a faintness shot through him, bullet-quick, nerve-racking. He forgot everything else—everything: which is perhaps the one

pleasant thing that can be said of such physical pain; it banishes all other aches, and shows heart and head who is their master.

White to his lips, pure fright in his eyes, Bransby contrived to reach a chair by a side-table on which a tantalus stood unobtrusively. It always was there. There was one like it in his bedroom, and another in his private room at the office. And Richard Bransby was an abstemious man, caring little for his meat, nothing at all for his drink. Tobacco he had liked once, but Latham had stinted him of tobacco. With the greatest difficulty he managed to pour out some brandy —and to gulp it. For a short space he sat motionless with closed eyes. But some one was coming.

With a tremendous effort he pulled himself together. He got out of the chair, tell-tale near that tantalus, and with the criminal-like secretiveness of a very sick man, pushed his glass behind the decanter. He had sauntered to another seat, moving with a lame show of nonchalance, and taking up his old plaything, when the footsteps he had heard came through the door.

It was Horace Latham. “Alone?”

“Oh! is that you, doctor? Come in—come in. Have a cigar?”

The physician stood behind his host, smiling, debonair, groomed to a fault, suspiciously easy of manner, lynx-eyes apparently unobservant, he himself palpably unconcerned. “Thanks,” he said—“I find a subtle joy in indulging myself in luxuries which my duties compel me to deny to others.” He chose a cigar—very carefully—from the box Bransby had indicated. But he diagnosed those Havanas with his touch-talented finger-tips. His microscope eyes were on Bransby.

Bransby knew this, or at least feared it, though Latham stood behind him.

Still fighting desperately against his weakness (he had much to do just now; Latham must not get in his way), he said, doing it as well as he could, “Oh, I—I don’t mind—next to smoking myself—I like to watch some one else enjoying a good cigar.”

Latham’s face did not change in the least, nor did his eyes shift. He came carelessly around the table, facing his host now, never relaxing a covert scrutiny, as bland as it was keen. “In order,” he said, “to give you as much pleasure as possible I shall enjoy this one thoroughly. Can you give me a match?”

“Of course. Stupid of me.” Bransby caught up a match-stand with an effort and offered it. Latham pretended not to see it. Bransby was forced to light a match. He contrived to, and held it towards Latham, in a hand that would shake. The physician threw his cigar aside with a quick movement, and caught his friend’s wrist, seized the flaming match and blew it out.

“I knew it,” Latham said sternly. “Bransby, you are not playing fair with me.

You've just had another of those heart attacks."

"Nonsense," the other replied with uneasy impatience.

"Then why are you all of a tremble? Why is your hand shaking? Why is your pulse jumping?"

"I had a slight dizziness," Bransby admitted wearily.

"What caused it?" Latham asked sharply.

"Grant brought me some bad news from the office."

"Well—what of it? The air is full of bad news now. You can afford to lose an odd million now and then. But what business had Grant here? What business had you to see him? You promised me that you would not even think of business, much less discuss it with any one, until I gave you leave."

"This was exceptional."

The physician sat down, his eyes still on his patient, and said, his voice changed to a sudden deep kindness, "Bransby, I am going to be frank with you—brutally frank. You're an ill man—a very ill man indeed. A severe attack of this—'dizziness' as you call it—will—well, it might prove fatal. Your heart's beat shown by the last photograph we had taken by the electric cardigraph was bad—very bad."

"I've heard all this before."

"And have paid no heed to it. Bransby, unless you give me your word to obey my instructions absolutely, I will wash my hands of your case."

"Don't say that." In spite of himself Bransby's voice shook.

"I mean it." Latham's voice came near shaking too, but professional training and instinct saved it. "Well?"

"This—this news I have just had—I must make a decision concerning it. It can't cause me any further shock. As soon as I have dismissed it, and I will very soon, I give you my word, I'll do precisely as you say."

CHAPTER XI

“Here you are! I thought you were coming back to the billiard room, Daddy.”

As Helen Bransby came gayly in, her father threw Latham an appealing look, and shifted a little from the light.

Latham stepped between them. “So he was, Miss Bransby. Forgive me, I kept him.”

“Our side won, Daddy,” said the glad young voice.

“Did we, dear? Then old Hugh owes me a bob.” As the words left his lips, a sudden spasm of memory caught him. Helen saw nothing, but Latham took a quick half-step towards him.

“Are you and Dr. Latham having a confidential chat, Daddy?”

The father contrived to answer her lightly, more lightly than Latham could have done at the moment. That physician was growing more and more anxious.

“What on earth do you think Latham and I could be having a confidential chat about?”

Helen laughed. She had the prettiest laugh in the world. And her flower-like face brimmed over with mischief. “I thought perhaps he was asking your advice about matrimony.”

“Latham?” exclaimed Bransby, so surprised that he almost dropped his precious jade god with which he was still toying.

Latham was distinctly worried—Latham the cool, imperturbable man of the world. “Now, really, Miss Bransby,” he began, and then halted lamely.

“You don’t mean to say that he is contemplating marrying? Latham the adamant bachelor of Harley Street?”

Helen wagged her pretty head impishly. “I can’t say whether he is contemplating it or not, but I know he is face to face with it.”

“Well, upon my word!” Bransby was really interested now.

Latham was intensely uncomfortable. “I am afraid,” he began again, “Miss Bransby exaggerates the danger——”

“Danger?” the girl mocked at him. “That’s not very gallant, is it?”

“And who is the happy woman?” demanded Bransby.

“Angela Hilary.”

Bransby laughed unaffectedly. “Mrs. Hilary? Our American friend, eh? Glad to see you are helping on Anglo-American friendship, my dear fellow. That’s exactly what we need now. I congratulate you, Latham.”

“Please don’t.”

“Oh! he hasn’t proposed *yet*, Daddy,” said the pretty persistent.

“He has not!” assented Latham briskly.

“But it’s coming!” taunted Helen wickedly.

“It is not!” Latham exclaimed hotly. “I haven’t the slightest intention of proposing to Mrs. Hilary.”

“But what if she should propose to you?” demanded his tormentor.

“I should refuse,” insisted Latham, beside himself with embarrassment.

“And if she won’t take ‘No’ for an answer?”

“You don’t really think it will come to that?” He was really considerably alarmed.

Helen was delighted. “I think it may.”

“Good heavens!”

“I had no idea, Latham,” joined in Bransby, playing up to Helen (he always did play up to Helen), “that you were so attractive to the opposite sex.”

Latham groaned.

“Oh!” Helen said with almost judicial gravity, “I don’t know that it is entirely due to Dr. Latham’s charm that the present crisis has come about. I think Angela’s sense of duty is equally to blame.”

“Mrs. Hilary’s sense of duty!” Latham muttered.

“Really?” quizzed Bransby.

“Yes, Daddy, she feels that bachelorhood is an unfit state for a physician; and because she has a high regard for Dr. Latham she has nobly resolved to cure him of it.”

“But I don’t wish to be cured.”

“Nonsense!” Bransby rebuked him, adding dryly, “what would you say to a patient of yours who talked like that?”

Latham turned to Helen desperately. “I say, Miss Bransby, does she know I am staying with you?”

“No—I think not. I think she’s still in town.”

“That’s a relief.”

“But she’ll find out,” Helen assured him, nodding sagely her naughty red head.

But respite was at hand. “Can we come in?” asked a voice at which Richard Bransby winced again.

“Yes, Hugh, come along,” Helen said cheerfully. “Dr. Latham will be glad to see you; he has finished his delicate confidences.”

“It’s all right, Stephen, we won’t be in the way,” Hugh called over his shoulder as he strolled through the doorway, a boyish, soldierly young figure, sunny-faced, frank-eyed. He wore the khaki of a second lieutenant. He went up

to his uncle. Bransby's fingers tightened at the throat of the green god, and imperiled the delicately cut pink lotus leaves.

"I suppose Helen told you that she beat us," the young fellow said, laying a coin near Bransby's hand. "There's the shilling I owe you, sir—the last of an ill-spent fortune."

"Thanks," Bransby spoke with difficulty. But the boy noticed nothing. He already was moving to the back of the room where Helen was sitting.

"Have you told him?" Hugh said in a low voice as he sat down beside her.

"No, not yet."

Stephen Pryde threw one quick glance to where they sat as he came quickly in, but only one, and he went at once to his uncle. "I hope Grant didn't bring you any bad news, sir?" he said.

Bransby was sharply annoyed. He answered quickly, with a swift furtive look at his nephew. "How did you know Grant was here?"

"Barker told me. I hope there is nothing wrong, sir?"

"Wrong? What could be wrong?" The impatience of Bransby's tone brooked no further questioning.

Latham had joined Helen, and Hugh had left her then and had been strolling about the room unconcernedly. He came up to his uncle chuckling.

"Old Grant is a funny old josser," he said. "He is like a hen with one chick around the office. Why, if one is ten minutes late in the morning, he treats it as if it was a national calamity."

Bransby lifted his head a little and looked Hugh straight in the face. It was the first time their eyes had met—since Grant's visit. "Grant has always had great faith in you, Hugh," the uncle said gravely.

Hugh responded cheerfully. "He's been jolly kind to me, too. He is a good old sport, when you get beneath all the fuss and feathers." And he strolled back to Helen, Richard's eyes following him sadly. Latham gave way to Hugh and wandered over to a bookcase and began examining its treasures.

Stephen Pryde turned to his uncle again. "The business that brought him—Grant—can I attend to it for you, Uncle Dick?"

"No, thank you, Stephen, it—it is purely a personal matter."

Pryde helped himself to a cigarette, saying, "Did he say whether he had heard from Jepson?" and trying to speak carelessly.

Bransby answered him impatiently. "No; I was glad to find out, however, that Grant agrees with me that your scheme for controlling the output of aeroplane engines is an impossible one for us."

Pryde's face stiffened. "Then he is wrong," he said curtly.

Bransby angered. "He is not wrong. Haven't I just said he agreed with me?"

“If you gave the matter serious attention, instead of opposing it blindly, simply because it came from me——”

But this was too much. Bransby stopped him hotly, “I don’t oppose it because it comes from you. I am against it because it isn’t sound. If it were, I would have thought of it.”

“You don’t realize the possibilities.” Stephen spoke as hotly as the elder had, but there was pleading in his voice.

Latham was watching them now—closely.

“There are no possibilities, I tell you,” Bransby continued roughly, “and that should be sufficient—it always has been for every one in my establishment but you”—he turned to Latham: “Stephen is trying to induce me to give up shipbuilding for aeroplane engines—and not only that, he wants to spend our surplus in buying every plant we are able that can be turned to that use.”

“Yes,” Stephen urged, “because after the war the future of the world will be in the air.”

“I don’t believe it.”

“And no one believed in steel ships.”

“That has nothing to do with this.” Bransby was growing testy, and always his troubled eyes would turn to Hugh—to Hugh and Helen.

“It has,” Stephen insisted, “for it shows how the problem of transportation has evolved. The men of the future are the men who realize the chance the conquest of the air has given them.”

“Well, let who wishes go in for it. I am quite satisfied with our business as it is, and at my time of life I am not going to embark on ambitious schemes. We make money enough.”

“Money!” Pryde said with bitter scorn. “It isn’t the money that makes me keen. It’s the power to be gained—the power to build and to destroy.” The tense face was fierce and transfigured. The typical face of a seer, Latham thought, watching him curiously. “I tell you, sir, that from now on the men who rule the air are the men who will rule the world.” The voice changed, imperiousness cast away, it was tender, caressingly pleading—“Uncle Dick——”

But Bransby’s irritation was now beyond all control. The day, and its revelation and pain, had tortured him enough; his nerves had no resistance left with which to meet petty annoyance largely. “And I tell you,” he said heatedly, getting on to his feet, “that I have heard all about the matter I care to hear, now or ever. I’ve said ‘No,’ and that ends it. Once I make a decision I never change it, and—I—I—I——”

Latham laid a hand on his wrist. “Tut, tut, Bransby, you *must not* excite yourself.”

Bransby sank back wearily into his chair—putting the paper-weight down with an impatient gesture; it made a small clatter.

Stephen Pryde shrugged his shoulders and turned away drearily with a half-muttered apology, “I’m sorry, I forgot,” and an oath unspoken but black. There was despair on his face, misery in his eyes.

CHAPTER XII

The same group was gathered in the same room just twenty-three hours later. But Mrs. Leavitt, detained last night on one of her many domestic cares (she never had learned to wear her domestic cares lightly, and probably would have enjoyed them less if she had) was here also to-night: an upright, satin-clad figure very busy with an elaborate piece of needlework. She made no contributions to the chat—the new stitch was difficult—but constantly her eye glanced from her needle, here, there and everywhere—searching for dust.

Richard Bransby had not yet readied his decision, and the self-suspense was punishing him badly. Latham was anxious. His keen eyes saw a dozen signs he disliked.

Stephen sat apart smoking moodily, but watchful—a dark, well-groomed man, with but one beauty: his agile hands. They looked gifted, deft and powerful. They were all three.

Again Helen and Hugh were together at a far end of the big room, chatting softly. Bransby watched them uneasily. (Stephen was glad to notice that.)

Bransby stood it a little longer, and then he called, “Helen!”

She rose and came to him at once, “Yes, Daddy?”

Bransby fumbled rather—at a loss what to say—what excuse to make for having called her. He even stammered a little. “Why—why—” then glancing by accident towards the book-shelves, a ruse occurred to him that would answer, that would keep her from Hugh, as his voice had called her from him. “I don’t think,” he said, “that Latham has seen that new edition of Dickens of mine. Show it to him. Show him the illustrations especially.”

Latham raised a hand in mock horror. “*Another* edition!”

But even a better diversion was to hand. Barker stood palpitating in the door with which she had just collided, her agitation in no way soothed by the fact that Hugh winked at her encouragingly. “Mrs. Hilary,” she announced, crimsoning. The girl could scarcely have blushed redder if she had been obliged to read her own banns.

Angela Hilary came in with almost a run; seeing Helen, she rushed on her and embraced her dramatically with a little cry. She was almost hysterical—but prettily so, quite altogether prettily so. She wore the unkempt emotion as perfectly as she did her ravishing frock—you couldn’t help thinking it suited her—not the frock—though indeed that did, too, to a miracle.

“Helen! Oh, my dear!” Seeing Bransby, she released the smiling Helen, and

dashed at him, seizing his hand. “Mr. Bransby, oh—I am so glad! Dear Mrs. Leavitt, too: I am so relieved”—which was rather more than Caroline could have said. She disliked being hugged, especially just after dinner, and she had lost count, and dropped her fine crochet-hook.

Mrs. Hilary turned to Stephen and wrung his hand warmly, half sobbing, “It is Mr. Pryde?”

“Yes,” he told her gravely, “I have not changed my name since last week.”

But Angela paid no attention to what he said. She rarely did pay much attention to what other people said. “Dear Mr. Pryde,” she bubbled on at him, “oh! and you are quite all right.” Hugh came strolling down the room. Angela Hilary was a great favorite of his. She rushed to him and caught him by the shoulder, “Lieutenant Hugh. Oh, how do you do?” Then she caught sight of Latham. She pounced on him. He edged away, a little embarrassed. She followed the closer—“Dr. Latham! Now my cup *is* full. Oh! this is wonderful.”

“Yes, isn’t it!” he stammered, greatly embarrassed. Through the back of his head he could see Helen watching him. What a nuisance the woman was, and how fiendishly pretty! Really, American women ought to be locked up when they invaded London, at least if they were half as lovely and a quarter as incalculable as this teasing specimen. Interning Huns seemed fatuous to him, when such disturbers of Britain’s placidity as this were permitted abroad. Positively he was afraid of this bizarre creature. What would she say next? What do?

What she did was to seize him by his beautifully tailored arm. Latham hated being hugged, and at any time, far more than Mrs. Leavitt did. Indeed he could not recall that he ever had been hugged. He was conscious of no desire to be initiated into that close procedure—and, of all places to suffer it, this was about as undesirable as he could imagine. And this woman respected neither places nor persons. She had hugged poor Mrs. Leavitt unmistakably. What if——He flushed and tried to extricate his coat sleeve.

Angela held him the tighter and looked tenderly into his eyes with her great Creole eyes, surely inherited from some southern foremother. He thought he heard Helen giggle softly. “My *dear* Dr. Latham! Oh!”—then, with a sudden change of manner, that was one of her most bewildering traits, an instant change this time from the hysterical to the commonplace—“You will have lunch with me to-morrow—half-past one.” It was not a question, but simply an announcement.

“I’m afraid I can’t,” Latham began. “I am returning to town on an early train.” Yes, he *did* hear Helen smother a laugh?—hang the girl! and that was Hugh’s chuckle.

“Pouf!” Angela Hilary blew his words aside as if they had been a wisp of thistledown. “Then you’ll have to change your plans and take a later one.”

“But really I——”

“We’ll consider it settled. You men here all need reforming,” she added severely to Hugh, catching his eye. “In America we women bring up our men perfectly: they do us great credit.”

“But this is not America,” Stephen Pryde interposed indolently.

Angela Hilary drew herself up to all her lovely, graceful height. “But I am American—an American woman.” She said it very quietly. No English woman living could have said it more quietly or more coldly. It was all she said. But it was quite enough. Horace Latham took out his engagement-book, an entirely unnecessary bit of social by-play on his part, and he knew it. He knew in his startled bachelor heart that he would not forget that engagement, or arrive late at the tryst. But he was not going to marry any one, much less be laughed into it by Helen Bransby, or witched into it by bewildering personality and composite loveliness. And as for marrying an American wife—he, Horace Latham, M.D., F.R.C.P.—the shades of all his ancestors forbid! But what was the tormenting thing doing now?

Suddenly remembering the object of her visit, she pushed an easy-chair into the center of the room (claiming and taking the stage as it were) and sank into it hysterically.

Mrs. Leavitt looked up uneasily; she hated the furniture moved about.

“Oh! thank Heaven,” cried Angela, “you are all here.”

“Why shouldn’t we be all here?” laughed Helen.

“I’ve seen all my friends in the neighborhood now,” Angela answered, relaxing and lying back in relief, “and every one is all right.”

Even Bransby was amused. “Why shouldn’t they be all right?” he asked, laughing, and motioning Latham towards the cigars.

“Don’t jest, Mr. Bransby,” she implored him. “I have had a very solemn communication this afternoon.”

“Good gracious!” Hugh said.

“Communication?” Helen queried.

They all gathered about her now—with their eyes—in amused bewilderment. Even Aunt Caroline looked up from her lace-making.

Angela nodded gravely. “Yes.”

“A—er—communication from whom?” Stephen asked lazily.

“From Wah-No-Tee.”

“Who in the world is Wah-No-Tee?” Pryde demanded.

“Why, my medium’s Indian control.”

Hugh chuckled—his laugh always was a nice boyish chuckle. Mrs. Leavitt looked shocked—Stephen winked at his cigarette as he lit it. Latham laid down the cigar he had selected but not yet lit.

"Indian control?" Bransby said—quite at a loss.

Helen explained. "Mrs. Hilary is interested in spiritualism, Daddy."

"Oh!" Bransby was frankly disgusted. Either Angela did not notice this, or was perfectly indifferent.

Stephen was greatly amused. A charming smile lit his sharp face. "Is it permitted to ask what Wah-No-Tee's communication was, Mrs. Hilary?" he said—almost caressingly.

"She told me——"

"Oh—" interjected Stephen—"Wah-No-Tee is a lady?"

"Oh! Quite. She told me this morning that one of my dearest friends was just 'passing over.' I was so worried. I hurried back from town as quickly as I could, and ever since dinner I have been rushing about calling on every dear friend I have"—she gave Latham a soft look. "And, as I said—they are all quite all right. Silly mistake!"

Bransby gave a short grunt. "Surely, Mrs. Hilary," he said irritably, "you're not serious."

"I am always serious," she told him emphatically. "I love being serious."

Bransby picked up the paper-weight and shook it irritably, god, lotus and all. "But you can't believe in such rubbish."

Helen caught his hand warningly. "Daddy! you'll break poor old Joss!" For a moment his hand and her young hand closed together over the costly toy, and then she made him put it down, prying under his heavy fingers with her soft ones.

"Of course, I believe in it," Angela said superiorly. "Why, there have been quite a number of books written about it lately."

"Foolish books," snapped Bransby.

Mrs. Hilary answered him most impressively. "There are more what-you-may-call-'ems in Heaven and Earth, Horatio——" she said earnestly.

Bransby interrupted her, absently in his irritation taking up "Joss" again. "But, my dear lady——"

"Even men of science believe." Angela Hilary could interrupt as well as the next.

"Now-a-days men of science believe anything—even such stuff as this." Again Helen gently rescued the bit of jade.

"'Stuff!' Mr. Bransby; it is not 'stuff'!"

"But your own words prove that it is," Bransby continued the duel.

“My own words?”

“You’ve just admitted your—‘communication’ I think you called it—was a silly mistake.”

For one time in her life she was completely non-plused. There had not been many such times.

“Well—well——” she began, but she could find no useful words. Her annoyance was so keen that Helen feared she was going to cry. She could cry, too—Helen had seen her do it. Helen caught up a box of cigarettes and carried them to Angela, hoping to divert her.

“Do have a cigarette,” she urged.

Mrs. Hilary shook her head violently, but sadly. Helen threw Hugh a look of despair.

That warrior was no diplomatist, but a beautifully obedient lover. He hurried to Mrs. Hilary and bent over her almost tenderly, and said, “Ripping weather—what?”

Mrs. Hilary gave him a baleful look—almost a glare—and turned her shoulder on him. Hugh shrugged his shoulders helplessly, throwing Helen an apologetic look.

Helen, in despair, nodded imploringly at Stephen. He smiled, lowered his cigarette, and addressed their volatile guest. “What a charming frock that is, Mrs. Hilary.”

The delightful comedienne threw him a sharp look—and melted. “Do you think so really?”

“It’s most becoming,” he said enthusiastically.

A smile creamed sunnily over the petulant, delicate face. “I think it does suit me,” she said joyfully.

They all gave a sigh of relief.

“Who made it for you, Angela?” Helen asked hurriedly.

“Clarice—you know, in Albemarle Street.” The cure was complete.

But Helen repeated the dose. “She does make adorable things. I am going to try her. You know Mrs. Montague goes to her, and she says——”

But what Mrs. Montague said was never told, for at the Verona-like name Angela Hilary sprang to her feet with a scream of “Good Heavens!”

“Why, what’s up?” Hugh exclaimed.

“I forgot to call on the Montagues—and poor dear Mr. Montague has such dreadful gout. How could I be so heartless as to forget the Montagues? Such perfectly dreadful gout. Oh, well, one never knows—one never knows. Good-night, everybody. I am sure you won’t mind my rushing off like this”—both Bransby and Caroline looked resigned—“but I am so worried. Good-night—

good-night.” She paused in the door, “Don’t forget, Dr. Latham, to-morrow at half-past one sharp.” She threw him a sweet, imperative look, and was gone—as she had come—in a silken whirl and a jangle of jewels and chains.

CHAPTER XIII

Richard Bransby looked after her sourly.

"Humph," he said. "What a foolish woman."

"Yes, silly," Stephen agreed.

"So foolish she dares to believe—in things," Horace Latham said slowly.

They all looked at him in amazement. "Latham!" Bransby exclaimed.

The physician turned and met his gaze. "Yes?"

"You don't mean to tell me that you believe in all this hopeless drivel of 'mediums' and 'control' and spirit communications."

"I don't know," Latham said musingly.

"Well, upon my word!"

"Of course," Latham continued, "some of it—much of it—sounds incredible—beyond belief—and yet—well, some years ago wireless telegraphy, the telephone, a hundred other things that we have seen proved, would have seemed quite as incredible. With those things in mind, how can we absolutely deny this thing? How can we be sure that these people—foolish as some of them certainly appear—are not upon the threshold of a great truth?"

The hand that held the paper-weight tightened angrily. "And you, a sensible man, tell me that you believe that the spirits of those who have gone before us come back to earth, and spend their time knocking on walls, rocking tables, whirling banjos, and giving silly women silly answers to silly questions!"

"No—not that exactly." Latham was smiling. "But my profession—it brings me very close to death—I've seen so much suffering lately. Well—if one believes in God—how can we believe that death is the end? I know I don't."

Helen's hand lay on the table, she was standing near her father. He laid his palm on hers—and sat musing.

"No," he said after a pause, "neither do I."

"I'm sure it isn't!" the girl said.

"This is getting a bit over my head," Stephen Pryde said with a shrug, rising. "If you don't mind, I'll take a stroll."

Latham looked at him with a smile of apprisement, "I take it you don't share our belief, Pryde?"

Stephen smiled in return, and a little contemptuously.

"I am afraid I am what you would call a rank materialist. To me death is the end—complete annihilation. That's why I mean to get everything I can out of life."

“Oh, Stephen—no!” his cousin cried. “You mustn’t believe that! You can’t! Think! What becomes of the mind, the heart, the soul, the thing that makes us think, and love and hate and eat and move, quite aside from muscles and bones and veins? The thing that is we, and drives us, the very life of us?”

“Just what becomes of an aeroplane when it flies foul, or is *killed*, and comes crashing down to earth: done, killed, I tell you, just as much as a dead man is killed—and no more. Last week, near Hendon, I saw a biplane, a single seater, fighter, die. Something went wrong when she was high, going beautifully, she side-slipped abruptly to port, and trembled on her wing-tip just as I’ve seen a bird do a thousand times, and she sickened and staggered down to her doom, faint, torn and bleeding, twisted and moaned on the grass, gave a last convulsive groan, a last shudder, and then lay still, a huddled mass of oil, broken struts, smashed propeller, petrol dripping slowly from her shattered engine, her sectional veins bleeding, her rudder gone, her ailerons useless, forever, her landing-gear ruined: killed—dead—a corpse—for the rubbish heap.”

“Oh! Stephen,” whispered Helen, “and the pilot?”

“The pilot?” Pryde said indifferently. “Oh! he was dead too, of course.”

He picked up a fresh cigarette and sauntered from the room.

Of the injured and destroyed machine he had spoken with more emotion than any one of them had ever heard in his voice before. And there was a long pause before Bransby, turning again to Latham, said:

“I’m afraid I don’t quite follow your argument, Doctor. Surely one can believe in immortality without believing in spiritualism?”

“I don’t know that that is my argument. But lately one has thought a great deal over such things. The war has brought them very close to all of us.”

“Yes,” Bransby concurred thoughtfully. And Caroline Leavitt laid down her work a moment and echoed sadly, “Yes.”

And Latham continued: “Those lives that were given out there—so unselfishly—surely that cannot be the end—and, if we don’t really die, how can we be certain that the spiritual power—the *driving* force, that continues to exist, cannot come back and make its existence felt? Oh! I don’t mean in rocking tables, or ringing bells, or showing lights, or in ghostly manifestations at séances.”

“What do you mean, then?” Bransby was half fascinated, half annoyed.

“They might make an impression upon the consciousness of the living.”

But Bransby was unimpressed by that.

“A sort of supernatural telepathy, eh?”

Latham pondered a moment. “I dare say I can explain best by giving you an example.”

“Well?”

“Suppose a man—a man whose every instinct was just and generous—had done another man a great wrong and found it out too late. If his consciousness remained, isn’t it possible—isn’t it probable, that he would try to right that wrong and, since he had cast away all material things, he couldn’t communicate in the old way—yet he’d try—surely he would try——”

“You believe that?” Bransby exclaimed.

“I believe,” Latham said very slowly, “that he’d try—but whether he’d succeed or not—I don’t know.”

“Oh!” Helen cried with a rapt, glowing face, laying a pleading hand on the hand holding the jade, “it must be so—it’s beautiful to believe it is so.”

“And if,” Latham continued, “one would try for the sake of justice, can’t you think that others would try, because of the love they had for the living they had left behind—who still needed them? I dare say that every one of us has at one time or another been conscious of some impalpable thing near us—some of us have believed it was a spirit guarding us.”

“Yes,” Helen whispered.

“If we knew,” Latham went on, “the way, we might understand what they wanted to tell us—if only we knew the way——”

Again there was a pause. Bransby shifted impatiently, and put his toy down with a slight clatter, but kept his hand on it still.

Latham spoke, his manner completely changed. He got up, and he spoke, almost abruptly. “Well, I am afraid I have bored you people sufficiently for to-night, and I have some rather important letters to write—if you will excuse me.”

“Of course,” Helen said, as he moved to the door, “but oh! you haven’t bored us, Dr. Latham.”

Latham smiled at her. “Thanks. I’ll take my cigar,” he added, picking it up.

“I shan’t be able to enjoy seeing you enjoy it,” Bransby protested.

“Try telepathy,” was the smiling rejoinder. “Good-night.”

CHAPTER XIV

Mrs. Leavitt had not noticed the physician go. She had not been listening for some time, the turn of her pattern had been at its most difficult point. But she had managed it, and now sat counting contentedly. Helen was gazing into the fire, her face all tender and tense. Bransby had watched the door close, a queer purse on his lips. Presently he said grimly—half in jest, half in earnest—

"Well, he's a queer kind of a doctor. I shall have to consult some one else."

Mrs. Leavitt rose with a startled cry. Glancing up from the endless pattern, at an easy stage now, the dust-searching eye had discovered much small prey. She gathered up her work carefully and bustled about the room.

"If that dreadful Barker didn't forget to straighten out this room while we were at dinner. Dr. Latham and Mrs. Hilary will think I am the most careless housekeeper. I do hope, Helen, that you explain to our friends how the war has taken all our servants. You should tell everybody that before it began Barker was only a tweeny, and now she is all we have in the shape of a butler and parlor-maid and three-quarters of our staff. And she is so careless and clumsy." She went from cushion to vase, from fireplace to table, straightening out the room somewhat to her satisfaction: the father and the daughter watching her with resigned amusement.

A book lay open, face down on the writing-table. She pounced on the volume. Bransby's amusement vanished. "Careful there, Caroline, I am reading that book."

"Not now, you're not—and books belong in book-cases." She closed it with a snap.

"Now you've lost my place!"

"Well, the book's in its proper place," she said, thrusting it into its shelf. "There, that's better. Now I wonder how the drawing-room is. I must see. Dear me, this war has been a great inconvenience," she sighed as she went from the room—taking Hugh, none too willing, with her.

Caroline Leavitt was not an unpatriotic woman. Simply, to her home and house were country and universe too—her horizon enclosed nothing beyond them. She loved England, because her home and her housekeeping, this house and her vocation, were in it; and not her home, as some do, because it was in England. England was a frame, a background. Her emotions began at Deep Dale's front door, and ended in its kitchen garden. There are many such women in the world.

“Your aunt is a martinet, Helen,” Bransby grumbled smilingly. “She never lets me have my books about as I like them—and she is always losing my place.”

Helen laughed.

“Do you know,” her father continued, “I have found rare good sport in my books? Some of those chaps there—and Dickens especially—now—he *was* a card. Did you ever read ‘David Copperfield,’ Helen?”

“Yes, Daddy.”

“Well, when I’m a bit low in my mind, I like to read it—more than any other book, I think—I find it sort of comforting. A man is never really lonely when he has books about him. Ah! I remember my place now—where Copperfield passes the blind beggar. It goes—let me see—yes: ‘He made me start by muttering as if he were an echo of the morning—“Blind—blind—blind.”’”

“I’m glad you find your books good company, Daddy.”

“Are you? Why?”

“Well—well—if—if we were ever parted, it would make me happy to think you had friends near you.”

Bransby laid his paper-weight down quickly and looked at his girl anxiously. “If we were ever parted? What do you mean, Helen?”

She turned from him a little as she replied softly, “Haven’t you—haven’t you ever looked forward to a time when we might be?”

“No—of course not!”

“Sure?” she whispered.

“Oh!”—her father’s breath came quickly—“You mean that some day you might marry?”

“Well—you want me to marry—some day—don’t you, Daddy?”

“Why—why, yes. Yes, of course I do. It would be a wrench, a bad wrench, but—I should feel safer, if I knew there was some good man to take care of you.”

The girl came to him then, and he reached and took her hand and held it to his cheek.

“There is a good man who wants to—now.” She spoke very low—only just said it. But Richard Bransby heard every word; and every word cut him.

“Who is he?” There was fear in his voice and fear on his face. He dropped her hand.

“Can’t you guess?”

“Not—not Hugh?”

“Yes, Daddy.”

He turned and walked as if groping his way towards the window.

Helen watched him, surprised and disappointed. “Why—why—Daddy!”

“Helen,” he said, still turned from her, “suppose—suppose I didn’t approve of your marrying Hugh—what would you do?”

The girl pouted a little. “Daddy dear,” she rebuked him, “do be serious.”

“I am serious.” He turned and faced her, sadly and gravely, far the more troubled of the two.

And she took a step towards him, and spoke clearly. “But why suppose such a thing? You would never refuse your consent to my marrying Hugh. You have loved him better than any one else in the world—except me—always since they came. Why, it has been almost as if he were your very own son.”

Her words affected him keenly. It was with a stern effort that he kept traces of his emotion from his voice. “But, if I didn’t approve?” he insisted.

Helen looked at him with startled eyes, realizing for the first time that he was serious. “You mean—you mean—you don’t!”

“Yes,” he told her.

“Why?” she cried.

The question was very, very difficult for him, so difficult that for a moment he could find no answer. At last he said slowly, “I don’t believe Hugh is the man to make you happy.”

“Don’t you think I am the best judge of that?” Helen said gently—quickly.

His answer was quicker: “No.”

The girl lost something of her self-control then, and there was a pitiful note in the young voice saying: “Daddy, this isn’t all a silly joke? You aren’t trying to tease me?”

“I’m not joking, Helen.” There were tears in his voice.

“Then,” she cried, “why have you suddenly changed towards Hugh? Our house has always been his home—all these years. I can only just remember when he came: I can’t remember when he was not here. You have purposely thrown us together.” There was accusation in her tone, but no anger.

She had pricked him, and he answered sharply: “I never said that it was my wish that you should marry him.”

“Not in words—no—but in a hundred other ways. Why have you changed? Why?”

“I don’t want to answer that question.”

“I have the right to know.”

Richard Bransby was suffering terribly—and physically too. He yearned over her, and he ached to get it over and done. But he could not bring himself to denounce the boy he had loved so—so loved still.

But Helen, at bay too, would give him no respite: how could she? “You

haven’t answered me—yet,” she said, more coldly. Her tone was still gentle; but her fixed determination was quite evident—unmistakable.

“Very well, then, I will,” and he gathered himself for the ordeal, his—and hers. Then again he hesitated. “Helen,” he pleaded, “won’t you accept my decision? You—you know a little—just a little—what you are to me—how all the world—ah! my Helen—you wouldn’t break my old heart, would you? Say that you could not—would not—say it——”

“Daddy! My daddy,” she whispered.

“Say it,” he cried.

“Daddy,” her tears had come now—near; but she held them—“I mean to marry Hugh,” she said very quietly—even in his distressed agitation he recognized and honored her grit—the wonderful grit of such delicate creatures—“with your approval, I hope—but, in any case, I mean to marry him.”

“Think how I’ve loved you, child,” the father cried, catching her wrists in his hands, “you wouldn’t set my wishes aside?”

“Yes, Daddy.”

“Helen.” It was a sob in his throat.

“Just think for a moment,” she said, “he has given up everything to join the army. Any day, now, he may go—out there. He loves me, Daddy—and I love him.”

“He is not worthy of you—” Bransby was commanding himself—at what cost only he knew—and Horace Latham might partly have guessed.

After a pause—painful to him—she was too indignant to suffer much now—at last she spoke—sternly. “Why do you say that?”

“Don’t press the question,” he pleaded, “you know how much I care for you—how dear you are to me. Surely you must know that I would not come between you and your happiness if I hadn’t a good reason.”

“But I must know that reason.”

“You won’t give him up—for me?”

Pity for his evident distress welled over her, and she answered him tenderly: “I can’t, dear.”

She waited. He waited too. He could count his heart thump, and almost she might have counted it too.

At last he nerved himself desperately, went to his desk and pulled the ledger from the drawer. He put it down ready to his hand, if he had to show it to her at last; then turned and laid his hands on her shoulders.

When he could command himself—it was not at once—he said, speaking more gently than in all his long, gentle loving of her he had ever spoken to her before, “Helen, Hugh is a thief.”

There was silence between them; a silence neither could ever forget. It punctuated their mutual life.

She broke it. For a while she stood rigid and dazed—and then she laughed.

No lash in his face—even from her hand—could have hurt him so.

Again she waited: haughty and outraged now.

“He has stolen ten thousand pounds from me.”

She neither spoke nor stirred.

“That is why Grant came here last night—to tell me.”

The girl made a gesture of infinite scorn, of unspeakable rebuke.

“My dear, I would have spared you this—if I could.”

She answered him then, contempt in her voice, no faintest shadow of fear in her brave young eyes. “I don’t believe it.”

“I didn’t believe it—at first. But the proof,”—he went to the desk and laid one hand sorrowfully on the big buff book—“well, it’s too strong to be denied. You shall see it yourself.”

“I will not look. I would not believe it if Hugh told me himself.” She turned quietly and left him, and he dared not stay her.

But he heard her sob as she passed along the hall.

At the sound his white face quivered and he crouched down in a chair and laid his tired face on the table. He sat so for a long time—perfectly still. Presently a wet bead of something salt lay in the heart of the rose lotus flower.

CHAPTER XV

"What a fashion plate!" Angela Hilary exclaimed as she came across her ornate little morning room to greet her guest.

Latham smiled amiably. No one dressed more carefully than he, and he had no mock shyness about having it noted.

"You don't look especially dowdy yourself," he returned, as he took in his hand one of her proffered hands and eleven of her rings.

The visit was an unqualified success, and more than once Horace Latham thought ruefully what an ass he had been to fight shy of so delightful a morning.

He was the only guest: it goes without saying, and Latham himself had hoped for nothing else. That he foreknew that it would be a function strictly for two had both assuaged and augmented his maiden nervousness. If this dominant and seductively pretty young widow was determined to press her suit (and quite aside from Helen Bransby's tormenting prompting he had an odd, fluttering feeling that it was a suit, and not to be side-tracked easily), her opportunities to do so would be tenfolded under her own roof—and they alone. On the other hand, he thought that he could manage himself better, and far more smoothly, safe from the disconcerting flicker of Helen's mocking eyes, and the not improbable comments, aside and otherwise, of her impish tongue. And, if it came to such stress of issue between them (himself and the widow) that he had no strategical escape left short of brutality, he felt that he would find the exercise of such brutal harshness somewhat less abominable and repugnant when no third one was present to witness Angela's discomfiture.

But he had misjudged his lady—and soon he sensed it.

Under all her flare for willfulness, and her disconcerting blend of dainty atrocities and personal aplomb, Mrs. Hilary had sound instincts and inherited good taste. She fluttered her skirts with some rumpus of silken *frou-frou* (to speak in metaphor), but she never lifted them above her ankles. Her home was her temple, she, its goddess, was chaste as erratic, and to her half-southern blood a guest was very sacred.

She gave him an exquisite meal and a thoroughly good time, but she never once made love to him or even gave him a provocative opening to make love to her. And with admirable masculine consistency almost he felt that had she done either or both he might have borne it—yes—cheerfully.

But she did not. She was grave. She was gay. She showed him her *cloisonné* and her ivories, her etchings and her Sargent, she played to him, and she sang a

little. She flattered him, and she gave him some rare dole of subtle petting, but she did no wooing, and seemed inclined to brook none.

What a woman! She set him to thinking. And he thought.

Next to his profession, in which he was deeply absorbed—but not narrowly so, for this dapper, good-looking man was a great physician, and not in-the-making—Horace Latham cared more for music, and needed it more, than he did for anything else—even pictures. All that was most personal to him, all that was strongest and finest in him, quivered and glowed quickest, surest, longest, at the side of a dissecting table, and to the sound of music, violin-sweetness, harp-magic, the song of a piano, the invocation of an organ, the lyric lure of a voice.

But it had to be good music. Helen played prettily, and bored him. Hugh was everlastingly discoursing rag-time with his two first fingers, and Latham itched to chloroform him.

He had never heard Mrs. Hilary attempt music. And when, after lunch, uninvited she sat down at her piano he winced.

She played wonderfully. What a surprising woman! She played Greig to him and Chopin, and then she sang just twice: “Oft in the Stilly Night”—his mother had sung that to him in the dear long-ago, and then a quaint pathetic darky melody that he had never heard before.

“Oh! please,” he begged as she rose.

“No more—to-day,” she told him, “enough is better than too much feast.”

“And what a feast!” he said sincerely.

“Do you like Stephen Pryde?” she demanded abruptly, closing the piano.

“I’ve known him since he was a child.”

She accepted the evasion, or rather, to be more exact, spared him putting its admission into cruder wording.

“Well—you’re wrong. You’re all wrong. I like him. No one else does, except Hugh, and Hugh doesn’t count. But I do: and I like Stephen Pryde immensely.”

“You certainly do count, very much,” Latham told her emphatically. And she did not contradict him by so much as a gesture of her ring-covered hands or a lift of the straight black eyebrows. “Why doesn’t Hugh count?” he asked.

“Because he likes every one. The people who like every one never do count. It is silly. It’s too silly. Now, Stephen Pryde does no such thing.”

“No,” agreed Latham, “he does not; and certainly ‘silly’ is the last word I should employ to describe him.”

“Silly!” Angela said with high scorn. “There isn’t a silly hair on his head. He’s a genius—and he’s hungry—oh! so hungry.”

“Geniuses usually are,” Latham interrupted.

Angela ignored this as it deserved, and he himself thought it feeble and

regretted it as soon as he had perpetrated it.

“He’s a genius—and his uncle throttles it. Now, I want you to make Richard Bransby behave—you and Helen. You can, you two; together you can do anything with him.”

“Oh, Mrs. Hilary, please listen to me,” the physician was genuinely alarmed, “on no account must Mr. Bransby be bothered or irritated—positively *on none*.”

She studied him for a moment. “So,” she said slowly—“as ill as that—poor Helen.”

She did not say, “Poor Mr. Bransby,” and Latham liked her for the nice justice of her differentiation.

“And that’s why you stay here so much.”

Latham made no reply—and she seemed to expect none. She had affirmed; she had asked no question. Really she had some very satisfactory points—most satisfactory!

Then she gave a surprising little cry. “Oh! I am so sorry—so sorry for Helen.”

“I hope,” the doctor began, but she paid no attention to him whatever.

“Don’t you remember?—Wah-No-Tee told me. How wonderful! How stupid of me not to have understood! Oh! I must ’phone for another appointment to-morrow. I mustn’t forget,” and she made a dash for her engagement book, and began to scribble something in it. As she wrote she said to him over her shoulder, “Won’t Helen look just too lovely in mourning?”

What a woman! He gazed at her speechless. What would the incalculable creature say next—what do?

What she did was to move a stool near to his chair, and seat herself. What she said was, “Well—then—of course—that makes a difference. Let me see—yes—I have it—I’ll lend Stephen the money—lots of money; I can, you know, just as easy as not.”

“Lend Stephen the money!” Latham said dumb-foundedly.

“Oh—of course,” Angela added impatiently; “Stephen Pryde wouldn’t borrow money of me—of course not. That’s where you come in.”

“Oh! where I come in——”

“Yes, of course, don’t you see——”

“No, I certainly do not.”

“How stupid! It’s perfectly simple. I think a blind man would see it—if he was fair-to-middling smart. You are to lend him the money.”

“I!”

“Yes, stupid—*you*: my money.”

“Oh!”

“Listen—don’t sit there staring and just say, ‘I! Oh! Ah!’ as if you were trying to sing: ‘Do—re—mi—fa—sol—la.’ You are to manage Stephen.”

“Instead of handling Bransby,” Latham said with light sarcasm.

But Mrs. Hilary beamed on him approvingly. “Exactly.”

“It occurs to me,” Latham remarked softly, “that you intend me to renounce medicine for diplomacy.”

“They’re much the same thing—but—oh! I’ll manage it all really.”

“Yes—I inferred that. Now, please, the details. To begin at the beginning, you wish to endow Pryde with your fortune.”

“I wish to do nothing of the sort,” she said severely. “I am going to lend him part of it; or rather invest it in him. I shall get it all back a thousand times.”

“Good interest!”

“Oh—be quiet——”

Latham sat in smiling silence.

“You will do it? You must!”

“I begin to see. I am to lend Pryde a slice—shall we say?—of your fortune. Now, just that I may act intelligently, may I enquire how much?”

“That’s what you are to find out.”

“Oh! that’s what I am to find out——”

“Of course.”

“May I—dare I ask, what he wishes it for—or needs it—or is to have it?”

“To build aircraft. You ought to know that. I think you are dense to-day, Dr. Latham.”

“I think you are very charming—to-day, Mrs. Hilary.”

“*And* you will help me? Say you will. Say it now!”

“I am thinking——”

“Don’t think. Just promise.”

Latham was minded to tell her, “Some one must think,” but he refrained, and said instead, “We’ll talk it over at least, several times, if we may. Yes, I’ll come soon again and talk it over, if you’ll let me.”

She seemed quite satisfied at that. Probably she foresaw several *tête-à-tête* luncheons. Perhaps Latham did also.

He would have stayed to tea, but Angela did not ask him; and at last he got up slowly. Even then she might ask him, he thought, but she did not.

But she gave him a deep red rose—at his request.

Just as he was going he turned back to say, “I do know, of course, that Pryde is obsessed about aviation, and that Bransby will have none of it—and, between you and me, I think that Bransby is wrong—but why do you care? Are you interested in the air?”

“Good gracious, no. I love the earth—and indoors for choice. Give me a good rocking-chair. I’d rather have that than the best horse that ever was driven or ridden, though I like horses too. I’m just sheer sorry for Stephen Pryde. I like him. And I’d just love to help him. He’ll succeed too, I think; but that’s not the point. I want him to have his own way. He never has—in anything. Only think, how horrid, never to have your own way.”

“Much you know about it.”

She ignored that. Angela was terribly in earnest. “He is very intense. He is strong too. And with all his strength he has desired two things intensely. Hugh, his own brother, has thwarted him in one; Richard Bransby in the other. One we can’t give him. The other we can. And we are going to—you and I.” She held out her hand in “good-by,” but Latham knew she meant it even more in compact.

He was thoughtful all his way back to Deep Dale, and silent at dinner.

Undressing for sleep—if sleep came—he looked at his red rose with an odd rueful smile, and put it carefully in water.

At that moment Angela Hilary laughed softly as she let her dark hair fall free to the white hem of her nightgown. Then she threw a kiss to herself in the mirror.

The first thing Latham saw the next morning when he woke was a deep crimson rose. He lay very still for a long time watching it.

CHAPTER XVI

Morton Grant had delivered his sorry news on Monday. Dr. Latham had lunched with Mrs. Hilary on Wednesday.

Thursday was bleak and cold, and a slow chilly rain fell all day.

Helen and her father were alone in the library when the brothers joined them. She felt that her father meant to “have it out” then, and she was glad. For him and for her the tension was already too cruel. And it was Hugh’s due to know, and to know without longer delay. Once or twice she had felt that she herself must tell him. But the girlish lips he had kissed refused the words and the office; and she had an added instinct of reticence, part a reluctance to tale-bear, part a hurt, angry determination to leave her father to do his own “dirty work.”

“Stephen says you want to have a chat with me, Uncle Dick.”

So—her father had sent for Hugh; had sent Stephen.

“Yes, Hugh,” Bransby said gently.

“Righto,” the boy replied. In several senses he was not “sensitive,” and nothing of his uncle’s strain, or of Helen’s, had reached him.

Bransby turned to his daughter. “Helen, will you leave us for a little while?”

“I’d rather stay, Daddy.”

“I’d rather you didn’t.”

Helen met his gaze quietly, and sat down. She had been standing near the fire when her cousins came in.

Bransby sighed. But he saw it was useless to command her. She would not go.

Stephen had been looking at the books in the case. He turned sharply now and eyed them all intently. He was “sensitive,” and keenly so where Helen was concerned.

Hugh turned to Helen, smiling and happy: “I say, have you told him, then, Helen?”

“Yes—Tuesday night.”

Hugh turned to Bransby with a boyish laugh, a very slight flush of embarrassment on his young face, love, pride and victory in his eyes. “I suppose I am in for a wigging, eh?”

“Hugh,” Helen broke in, “Daddy has refused his consent.”

Hugh took a sharp step forward and threw up his head. “Refused his consent? Why?”

She gestured towards her father. *She* could not say it.

“Why, sir?”

Bransby answered him sadly: “Don’t you know, Hugh?”

“No, sir. Of course I know I am not good enough for her—who could be? But you know I love her very dearly.”

“Hugh,” Bransby said more sorrowfully and sternly, “didn’t you realize that some day you were certain to be found out?”

Stephen Pryde started, but controlled himself instantly.

Hugh gazed at his uncle blankly. “Found out? What in the world—I don’t know what you mean, sir.”

“Can’t you think why Grant came here on Monday?”

“No. How could I?”

“Why did he come, sir?” Stephen interposed.

“A shortage has been discovered in the accounts at the office.”

“A shortage in our accounts?” Stephen spoke incredulously. “Impossible.”

“I’m most awfully sorry, sir,” Hugh said sympathetically, taking a step nearer his uncle.

“Some one has stolen ten thousand pounds.”

“Who?” Stephen asked quickly.

“The money was taken from the African trading account.”

“From the African trading account?” Stephen echoed. “But that’s impossible—Hugh has always had charge of that.”

“I know,” Bransby said dully.

“Uncle Dick,” Hugh cried, suddenly realizing that he was being accused—“Uncle Dick, you don’t mean that you think that I——” The passionate voice choked and almost broke.

Stephen stopped him. “Quiet, Hugh; of course he can’t mean anything so absurd as that. Besides, you’ve not been at the office for months.”

Helen threw toward Stephen a look full of gratefulness.

But her father said despairingly, “The money was taken while he was still at the office.”

“How do you know that, sir?” Stephen spoke almost sternly to his uncle.

But the older man did not resent that. “Certain alterations were made in the ledger during the time he had charge of it,” he explained drearily.

Hugh broke in hotly, “I know nothing of them.”

“Of course not,” his brother said cordially. “You see, sir——” turning to Bransby.

“The alterations are in Hugh’s handwriting.”

“Impossible,” Hugh cried indignantly—contemptuously too.

Stephen said very quietly, “I don’t believe it.”

“I can convince you.” Their uncle opened the ledger, one hand on its pages, the other on the jade weight.

Helen sat proudly apart, but the brothers hurried to him. Hugh threw himself in a chair at the table where the book lay, Stephen stood behind his brother, his hand on his shoulder.

There was a significant pause.

Stephen shook his head. “It is very like,” he said slowly.

Bransby turned to another page. “And this?”

“Oh, yes, it is. It is very like too.” Stephen’s reluctance was apparent and deep. And a hint of conviction escaped him.

“There is no need to go further,” Bransby said wearily. “These were made when the money was taken.”

Hugh sat gazing at the open ledger in bewilderment. “It—it,” he stammered —“it seems to be my handwriting—but”—he was not stammering now—“I swear I never wrote it.”

“I believe you, Hugh,” Stephen said simply.

Bransby said sternly—but not altogether without a subcurrent of hope in his tired voice, “Besides you, only Stephen and Grant had access to that ledger. Will you accuse either of them of making these alterations?”

Hugh laughed. “Of course not. Old Stephen and Grant—why, you know, sir, that that’s absurd. But what have I ever done that you should think me capable of being a thief?”

The old man shook his head. But Stephen answered, his hand on Hugh’s shoulder, “Nothing, Hugh, nothing! You’ve known my brother always, sir”—turning to their uncle, speaking with passionate earnestness. “You *know* he’s not a thief. If he has been a bit wild—it was only the wildness of youth.” There was anxious entreaty in face and in voice, and the face was very white and drawn. Of the four Stephen Pryde unmistakably was not suffering the least.

But Bransby was despairingly relentless now. “While he was at the office he was gambling—he borrowed from money-lenders.”

“It isn’t true,” cried Stephen hotly.

Bransby swung to his younger nephew. “Is it true?”

“Yes.”

“Hugh!” the elder brother said in quick horror.

“But I won enough to clear myself, and that’s why I——”

“Hugh,” Stephen’s voice broke, “I wouldn’t have believed it.”

Hugh turned on his brother in dismay: “Stephen! you don’t mean that *you* think——”

“Why didn’t you tell me you were in trouble?” Pryde said sorrowfully. “I

would have helped you, if I could."

"But I wasn't in trouble," the boy protested impatiently. "I tell you I'm innocent."

With a gesture of infinite sadness and his face quivering Stephen Pryde laid his hand on Hugh's shoulder. "Hugh," he said, and now his voice broke as a mother's might have broken, "Hugh, I am your brother—I love you—can't you trust me?" he pleaded. "Even now we may find a way out of this, if you will only tell the truth."

"But I have told the truth," Hugh asserted helplessly. His voice broke, too, as he said it.

Stephen Pryde turned to his uncle and they exchanged a slow look—a look of mutual sorrow and despair. Hugh saw the look, shrugged his shoulders and crossed to Helen's chair.

"Helen, you don't believe this, do you?"

Stephen turned and watched them intently.

The girl smiled. "No, Hugh."

"Thank you, dear." And he smiled back at her.

"I would give a great deal not to believe it, Hugh"—there was entreaty in Bransby's voice, if not in his words, almost too a slight something of apology —"but the evidence is all against you."

Hugh had grown angry a few moments ago, but at Helen's smile all his anger had died, and even the very possibility of anger. And he answered Bransby as sadly and as gently as the older man himself had spoken, "I realize that, sir; but there must be some way to prove my innocence—and I'll find it."

"And in the meantime?" Bransby demanded.

"In the meantime," his nephew echoed—"oh—yes—what do you want me to do?"

"The right thing."

Helen sprang to her feet—but quietly, and even yet she said nothing. Of them all she was the least disturbed. But perhaps she was also the most intent. Hers was a watching brief. She held it splendidly.

"The right thing?" Hugh asked, puzzled but fearful.

"You must tell Helen that no marriage can take place between you—unless—until you have cleared yourself of this—this suspicion."

Stephen protested. "But, sir—" He was watching and listening almost as sharply as the girl was; but for the life of him he could not tell whether or not his uncle had indeed given up all hope. At the elder's last words he had winced—for some reason.

Helen looked only at Hugh now. "No, Hugh, no," she cried proudly—and

then at the look on his face, “No—no,” she pled.

Hugh Pryde’s face was the grimmest there now. But he answered her tenderly. “He’s right, dear. It can’t take place until I have cleared myself. Oh, don’t look startled like that. Of course it can’t. But I’ll do that. Helen, listen, somehow I’ll do that.”

“Oh!” she almost sobbed, both hands groping for his—and finding them —“but, my dear——”

Bransby broke in, and, to hide his own rising and threatening emotion, more harshly than he felt: “And until then you must not see each other.”

For a moment Hugh held her hands to his face—and then he put them away from him and said, smiling sadly but confidently, and speaking to her and not to her father, answering the cry in her eyes, the rebellion in the poise of her head, “No—until then we must not see each other.”

She drew herself up, almost to his own height, and laid her arms about his neck, folding and holding him. “I can’t let you go from me like this, Hugh, I can’t let you.”

Stephen Pryde watched them grimly—torture in his eyes; but Bransby turned his eyes away, and saw nothing, unless he saw the green and rose bauble he held and handled nervously.

Very gently Hugh Pryde took her arms from his neck, and half led, half pushed her to the door. “You must.”

She turned back to him with outstretched arms. “Oh, Hugh, Hugh,” she begged.

Still he smiled at her, and shook his head.

For a moment longer she pleaded with him—mutely; then, with a little hurt cry, she ran from the room.

Hugh stood looking after her sadly until Stephen spoke. “Hugh, my boy, be frank with me. Let me help you.”

At that the younger grew petulant, and answered shortly, “There’s nothing to be frank about.” Then his irritation passed as quickly as it had come. “Oh! why won’t you believe that I never did this thing?”

Stephen hung his head sadly. But Bransby was wavering. “Hugh,” he said, “if you can prove yourself innocent, no one will be happier than I—but until you do——”

“I understand, sir. But—oh—I say—what about—what about my—commission?” His face twitched, and he could scarcely control himself to utter the last word with some show of calmness. He was very young—and very driven.

“You will have to relinquish that,” Bransby replied pityingly. “You can leave

the matter in my hands—my boy. I will arrange it."

Hugh could hardly speak. But he managed. "Very good, sir. Then I—may go?"

Bransby could not look at him. "You will leave here to-night?"

"At once."

"That would be best."

"Good-by," Hugh said abruptly.

Stephen held out his hand, and after an instant Hugh clasped it. He turned to his uncle.

Bransby rose stiffly from his chair. He was trembling. Neither seemed able to speak. For a bad moment neither moved. Then Richard Bransby held out—both hands. Hugh flushed, then paled, and took the proffered hands in his. There was pride as well as regret in his gesture, affection even more than protest. Then without a word—a thick sound in his throat was not a syllable—with no other look—he went.

Bransby caught at the back of his chair. He motioned Stephen to follow Hugh. "See that he has money—enough," he said hoarsely.

Stephen nodded and left him.

Richard Bransby looked about the silent room helplessly. "My poor Helen," he said presently—"Violet! Violet!"—but he pulled himself together and moved towards the bookcase. Perhaps he could find distraction there.

He sat down again, the volume he had selected on his knee, and opened it at random, turning the pages idly—one hand on the jade joss, that as it lay on the table; seemed to blink in the firelight.

The printed words evaded him. To focus his troubled mind he began to read aloud softly:—

"'There was a beggar in the street, when I went down; and as I turned my head towards the window, thinking of her calm seraphic eyes, he made me start by muttering, as if he were an echo of the morning: "Blind! Blind! Blind!"'"

CHAPTER XVII

Richard Bransby was breaking. He could not bear much more, and he knew it. He had felt very faint at lunch. Latham would have driven him to his bed, but Latham had been again lunching at Mrs. Hilary's.

Now he was alone in the library. The room seemed to his tired, tortured mind haunted by Hugh and by trouble.

He looked up at the clock. The boy had been gone just twenty-four hours. Where had he gone? What was he doing? Violet's boy!

The sick man felt alone and deserted. Helen had scarcely spoken to him all day. Indeed she had stayed in her room until nearly dinner-time, and at dinner she and Latham had almost confined their chat to each other.

He picked up "David Copperfield," opened it at random—then shook his head and laid it down, still open. He'd read presently; he could not now.

A step at the door was welcome. It was Stephen.

Bransby began abruptly: "Last night, when you saw him off—he protested his innocence to the last?"

"Yes, sir. Oh! yes."

"Oh! why didn't he tell me the truth. If he had confessed, I could have found it in my heart to forgive him."

Stephen sighed, and sat down near his uncle. "I told him that. I begged him to throw himself on your mercy. But he wouldn't even listen."

Bransby's face changed suddenly. "You told him that—that you were sure I'd forgive it, let it pass even, and he still persisted that he was innocent."

"Yes. Absolutely."

"Stephen," Bransby said anxiously, rising in his agitation and looking down on the other almost beseechingly, "have you thought—thought that we may be mistaken?"

"Mistaken? In what way?"

"About Hugh, of course. When he was here, even though everything was against him, his attitude was that of an innocent man. Then his refusal to you to confess even when mercy—forgiveness—were promised—that, too, is the action of an innocent man." Bransby spoke more in entreaty for confirmation than in his usual tone of conviction and personal decision.

Stephen responded musingly, "Yes—it is. And I believe he is innocent. I can't quite believe that he isn't, at least—only——"

"Only what?"

Pryde hesitated—and then reluctantly, “It was such a shock to have discovered that he deceived us about his gambling. I had never thought Hugh deceitful. He always seemed so frank—so open—as he seemed last night in this room.”

“Yes,” Bransby groaned. “Yes—he did deceive us about his gambling—and he knew it was contrary to my orders—how I hated it.”

“But that doesn’t *prove*,” the nephew said promptly, “that he did this other thing” (his uncle looked up quickly, gratefully). “Of course, it’s true that gambling sometimes tempts men to steal.”

“It always does.” Bransby lapsed back into despair, and shrank back into his chair.

“But Hugh seemed so innocent,” Stephen added reflectively.

“He seemed innocent, too, when he was gambling,” the other retorted.

“Yes—that’s true.”

“And I loved him—I trusted him—I—he was always my favorite. Even now, I’m not treating you fairly. You must be suffering horribly—my poor Stephen.”

“I am suffering, sir. On your account, on my own, on poor misguided Hugh’s, I loved him too, I always shall love him; but I am suffering more, a thousand times more, for—Helen.”

Bransby gave him a startled look. He had spoken her name in a tone unmistakable. “Yes, Uncle Dick, it’s just that. It has always been that. It will never be anything else, any other way than that with me.”

In his surprise Bransby picked up his joss and put it down again several times, beating with it a nervous tattoo on the table. “Does she know?”

“Helen? No. It would only have hurt her to know. It has always been Hugh with her. But now——”

Bransby checked him—not unkindly—he sensed something of what it must have cost him, this unanswered affection; he knew Stephen’s nature ran deep and keen—but he spoke decidedly, feeling, too, that there was something callous, almost something of treachery, in a brother who could hint at hope so quick on a brother’s ruin, and Helen’s heart newly hurt and raw. “Put it out of your mind, Stephen. Helen will never change; least of all now. The women of our family are constant forever. Now we must act—you and I. We must arrange that there shall be no scandal about Hugh’s disappearance. We must protect his name—on Helen’s account—and the firm’s. About his commission—almost I regret saying he must throw it up. It might—it might have been the way out. Have you any idea where he is?”

“None.”

“Well—then—we must act at once. Already I’ve let a day slip—I—I’m not

well—I said I'd attend to it. We'll attend to it now. I don't think there'll be any trouble about that. Oh! he ought to have written his resignation, though, before he went. My fault—my fault. However, I'll do it now. No! I can't." He held out the hand with the Chinese curio in it. The hand was trembling so that the jade thing winked and rainbowed in the light of the fire. "You must write it. That will do. Sit there and do it now. Make it brief and formal as possible. I'll go to town to-morrow and see his Colonel myself, if necessary—Latham willing or no."

Stephen crossed to the writing-table thoughtfully. He began to write—Bransby walking about still carrying the paper-weight absent-mindedly—and thinking aloud as he moved. "His leave isn't up for another three days. Yes—I think that gives us time. Yes—we'll get into touch with his Colonel to-morrow and find out just how to proceed. I hope I shan't have to tell the real reason."

"Will this do?" Pryde had finished, and passed his uncle the sheet.

Bransby glanced at it carelessly at first. "Yes, yes." He held it towards Pryde—then something prompted—a strong impulse—he drew it back, looked at it, then he fell to studying it. A terrible change passed over his face. He gazed at the paper in amazement, then looked in horror from it to the man who had written it—then back at the note, crimson flooding his neck, a gray shadow darkening his rigid face. He raised his haggard eyes and stared at Stephen thunderstruck.

Stephen felt the fierce eyes, and looked up. "Why—why—what is it, sir?"

But even as he spoke Stephen Pryde knew—as Bransby himself had learned in a flash—one of those terrible forked flashes of illumination that come to most of us once in life.

Bransby answered slowly, coldly, carefully. "You have signed Hugh's name to this, and it is Hugh's handwriting. If I didn't *know* otherwise, I would have sworn he wrote it himself."

Stephen lost his head. His hand shook, and his tongue. "That's odd," he stammered with a sick laugh, "I—I didn't realize." He put his hand out for the letter—Bransby drew it back, looking him relentlessly in the eyes. The brain that had made and controlled one of the greatest businesses ever launched, and complicated in its immense ramifications, was working now at lightning speed, rapier-sharp, sledge hammer in force, quick, clear and sure.

"It was no accident. You can't patch it up that way—or in any—I *see*. You have practiced his handwriting. You have done this before."

Stephen gathered himself together feebly. "Of what do you accuse me?" he fumbled.

"Tell me the truth—I must know the truth."

Then Stephen added blunder to blunder. He pointed to the ledger. "I know nothing of it—nothing."

“You’re lying.”

“Uncle Dick!”

“You are lying, Stephen Pryde—it’s as plain on your face as the truth was on Hugh’s—and, God forgive me, I wouldn’t believe him.”

“I didn’t do it, I tell you!” Stephen was blustering fiercely now.

“You had access to that ledger as well as Hugh. You can’t deny the damnable evidence of this you’ve just written before my eyes. Oh! how blind I’ve been—blind—blind! Stephen,” he panted in his fury, “unless you tell me the truth now, by the mother that bore you, I’ll show you no mercy—none.”

For a space Stephen stared at him, fascinated—caught. All at once his courage quite went, and he sagged down in his chair, crumpled and beaten. “I did it,” he said hoarsely. “I had to.”

“You made the alteration in the ledger after Hugh left?”

“Yes.”

“My God! and you wrote the anonymous letter to Grant, too! Why?”

“I wanted power—dominion—they are all that make life worth living. You drove me to it. You never cared for me—not as you did for Hugh—you thwarted me always. I wanted power, I tell you. I would have given it to you—such power as you never dreamed of—such power as few men ever have had. But you always stood in my way. You kept me a subordinate—and I hated it. You threw Helen and Hugh together, and I could have killed you. When the war broke out I saw my chance. I meant to take for myself the place I could have won for you—and would have won—for you—and for her—but I needed money—so—I speculated—and lost.”

“And then you put the crime on your brother’s shoulder. You would have ruined his life—destroyed his happiness.”

“What does the life and happiness of any one matter, if they stand in the way? Hugh! Hugh meant nothing to the world—Hugh’s a fool. I could have done great things—I could have given England the Air—The Air.”

“Yes,” Bransby said piteously. “Yes, I believed in you. I have left the control of my business to you—after my death. Thank God for to-morrow—to alter that, to——”

Stephen shrugged an insolent shoulder, and said coldly—he was cool enough now, “Well, what are you going to do—with me?”

The answer was ready. “Take up that pen again—write—and see to it that the handwriting’s your own.”

Pryde glowered at Bransby with rebel eyes, and then—almost as if hypnotized—did as he was told—writing mechanically, his face twitching, but his hand moving slowly, to Richard Bransby’s slow dictation.

The dictation was relentless: “I confess that I stole”—the quivering face of the younger man looked up for an instant, but Bransby did not meet the look (perhaps he, too, was suffering), his eyes were on space, his fingers lifting and falling on his carved toy. Stephen looked up, but his pen moved mechanically on —“ten thousand pounds from my uncle, Richard Bransby—and I forged my brother Hugh’s handwriting in the ledger.” Pryde laid down the pen.

“Sign it.”—He did.

“Date it.”—He did.

“Give it to me.” The hand that took the paper shook more than the hand that had written it.

“Do you know where your brother has gone? Have a care that you tell me the truth from this on—it’s your only chance. Do you know where he has gone?”

“No!”

“Go find him—if you hope for mercy. Bring him back here by to-morrow.”

Stephen rose with a shrug. For an evil moment Richard Bransby’s life was in peril. Stephen stood behind him, murder hot in his heart, insane in his eyes, and clenched in his fist: all the hurt and the thwart of years joined with the rage and dilemma of the moment, ready to spring, to avenge and to kill. Bransby saw nothing—not even the jade he still fingered. Then with a gesture of scorn he tore into bits the note of resignation he had made Stephen write. “I’ll see the Colonel myself. That will be best,” he said.

At that instant, Bransby’s head bowed, Pryde’s hand still raised, Mrs. Leavitt’s voice rose in the hall, fussed and querulous, “Who left this here? Barker!” Bransby did not hear her, but Pryde did. His arm fell to his side, he forced a mask of calm to his face, and then without a word he went. He did not even look towards his uncle again; but at the door he turned and looked bitterly, hungrily, at the picture over the fireplace. Poor Stephen!

In the hall Caroline Leavitt hailed him. “Not going out, Stephen?”

“Yes; I’ve to run up to London for Uncle Dick,” he told her lightly. She exclaimed at the hour, followed him with sundry advice about a rug and a warmer coat, and he answered her cordially. Perhaps he was not ungrateful for so much creature kindliness, such small dole of mothering—just then.

Presently the front door slammed. “Dear me, that’s not like Stephen,” she said aloud.

Richard Bransby heard nothing. For a little he sat lost in his own bitter thoughts. Then he read Stephen’s confession over with scrupulous care. “Blind —Blind—Blind,” he murmured as he folded it. Ah! that terrible faintness was coming on again. He dropped the paper; it fell on the still open pages of “David Copperfield.” For once the book astray had escaped Caroline’s eye. This was

torture. Could he get to the brandy? Where was Latham? Helen—he wanted Helen. He thought he was very ill. Helen must know the truth—about Hugh—and they must put the proof in safe keeping before—before anything happened to him. Helen's happiness—yes, he must secure that—and Hugh—Hugh whom he had so wronged—he must atone to Hugh.

In his effort to conquer his spasm he caught hold of the volume of Dickens, and it closed in his convulsive fingers. Helen—he must get to Helen. He staggered to his feet, the book forgotten on the table, the paper-weight forgotten too, but still gripped close in one unconscious hand. For a space he stood swaying—then he contrived to turn, and staggered to the door, calling, "Helen—Helen!"

His voice rang through the house with the far-carrying of fright and despair.

Barker reached him first, and began to cry and moan hysterically.

Caroline Leavitt pushed her aside. "He has fainted. Call Dr. Latham."

But Latham had heard Bransby's cry, and so, too, had Helen. They came together from the billiard room hurriedly. The girl threw herself down by her father, all the bitterness gone, only the old love and gratitude left. Latham knelt by him, too, and after a touch of Bransby's hand, a look at his face, said, "Mrs. Leavitt—you and Miss Bransby wait in the library."

"No, I want to stay here," Helen insisted.

"You must do as I say."

"Come, dear," and Caroline led her away, and put her into her father's chair.

"Poor Daddy—poor Daddy."

“He will be all right in a few moments,” the older woman said feebly. But Helen was not attending to her. Caroline stood looking pitifully at the shaken girl, and then turned away sadly. The disorder of the table caught her eye. Not thinking, not caring now, but obeying the habit of her lifetime, she took up the volume of “David Copperfield,” and carried it to the bookcase. As she replaced it on its shelf Latham came in. He went to Helen and laid his hand on her shoulder.

“Daddy?”

The physician met her eyes pityingly. He had no healing—for her.

With a shudder the girl rose and turned to the hall.

“Helen,” Mrs. Leavitt pled.

“He would want me near him,” the girl said quite calmly. And the physician neither stayed nor followed her; and he motioned Mrs. Leavitt to do neither.

CHAPTER XVIII

Three days later they laid him down by his wife.

Until then Helen scarcely left him. And not once did her pitiful young calm break or waver.

Stephen came from London. Latham's telephone message had reached Pont Street before Pryde had.

No word came of Hugh, no word or sign from him.

They laid him in his coffin almost as they found him. Helen insisted that it be so. Much that when dead we usually owe to strange hands, to professional kindliness, the girl, who had not seen death before, did for this dead.

The blackdraped trestle, the casket on it, was placed in the room where the tragedy that had killed him had fallen.

He lay as if he slept, all the pain and doubt gone from his still face. Only one flower was with him—just one in his hand. And in the other hand he still held the odd Chinese carving. Helen had intended the costly trifle he had so affected—so often handled—it seemed almost a part of him—to remain with him. But, at last, something, some new vagary of Grief's many piteous, puzzling vagaries, impelled her to take it from him.

She scarcely left him all the hours he lay in his favorite room and took there his last homekeeping, there where he had lived so much of his life, done so much of his thinking, welcomed such few friends as he valued, read again and again the books he liked.

He rested with Helen's picture, radiant, gay-clad, smiling down on him serene and immovable, and Helen black-clad, pallid, almost as quiet,—moving only to do him some new little service, to give him still one more caress.

It was their last tryst—kept tenderly in the old room where they had kept so many. Such trysts are not for chronicling.

At the last—alone for the "good-by" that must be given—but never to be quite ended or done, live she as long as she may—Helen unclenched the cold—oh! so cold—fingers, and drew away the bit of jade.

Sobbing—she had scarcely cried until now—she carried it to the writing-table, and put it just where it had always stood.

"I want it, Daddy," she said, smiling down wet-eyed on the still face. "You don't know how much you handled it. I seem always to have seen it in your hand. No one shall touch it again but me—just yours and mine, Daddy—our little jade doll, in a pink cradle. Stay there!" she told the joss, and then sobbing,

but pressing back her tears, and wiping them away when they *would* come, that her sight might be clear for its last loving of that dear, dead face, she bent over the coffin, spending their last hour together, saying—good-by.

"Oh, Daddy—my Daddy——" The sobs came then, long and louder. Latham, watching in the hall, heard them, but he did not go to the girl; nor let any one else do so.

BOOK III

THE QUEST

CHAPTER XIX

The spring waxed into radiant molten summer, mocking with its lush of flower-life, its trill of bird-voice, its downpouring of sunshine, the agony of the nations, and the pitiful grief in one English girl's inconsolable heart.

Other girls lost their lovers. Never a home in England but held some bereavement now, never a heart in Christendom but nursed some ache. But most of the sorrow and suffering was ennobled and blazoned. Other girls walked proud with their memories—*his* D.S.O. pinned in their black, the ribbon of *his* Military Cross worn on their heart, tiny wings of tinsel, of gold, or of diamonds rising and falling with their breath, a regimental badge pinning their lace, a sailor's button warm at a soft white throat—telling of a "boy" sleeping cold, unafraid in the North Sea, or (proudest of all these) a new wedding-ring under a little black glove—and, perhaps——

Other girls packed weekly boxes for Ruhleben, or walked the London streets and the Sussex lanes with the man on whose arm they had used to lean leaning on theirs, blinded, a leg gone, or trembling still from shell-shock, a face mutilated, broken and scarred in body, nerve-wrecked, but *hers*, hers to have and to hold, to love and to mother, to lean on her love, to respond to her shy wooing, to beget her children; to show the world, and God, how English women love.

But she—Helen—was alone. No field-card for her—no last kiss at Victoria, no trophy, no hope.

Hugh had been posted as a deserter. It was some hideous mistake, Helen knew that, but the world did not know. Hugh! Hugh dishonored, despised. She knew that he had not deserted. But what had happened? Had he been killed? Had his mind broken? That he had not taken his own life—at least not knowingly—that she knew. But what, what, then, had happened? He had disappeared from her, as from every one else—no trace—not a clue. Where was he? How was he? Did he live? Not a word came—not a whisper—not a hint. And his name was branded. *Her* name—the name she had dreamed to wear in bridal white and in motherhood. "Mrs. Hugh Pryde"—"Helen Pryde"—how often she had written those, alone in her room—as girls will. "Mrs. Hugh Pryde," she had liked it the better of the two, and sometimes she had held it to her dimpling, flushed face before she had burned it.

For what the world thought, for what the world said, she held her young head but the higher, and went among men but the more proudly. But under her pride and her scorn her heart ached until she felt old and palsied—and some days she

looked it.

She put pictures of Hugh about her rooms conspicuously. Caroline Leavitt and Stephen both wished she had not, but neither commented on it; neither dared. Angela Hilary loved her for it as she had not done before. And for it Horace Latham formed a far higher estimate of her than he had in her happier girl-days.

Spring grew to summer, summer sickened to winter. Still Hugh did not come, or send even a word. The wind whined and sneered in the leafless trees, rattling their naked branches. The snow lay cold on the ground.

A few days after her father's funeral, Helen left Deep Dale—forever, she thought. But such servants as the war had left them there, she retained there, and there she established her "Aunt Caroline."

Mrs. Leavitt had been well enough pleased to stay as vicereine at Deep Dale. She would have preferred to come and go with Helen; Curzon Street had its points, but Helen preferred to be alone and said so simply, brooking no dispute. If the girl had been willful before, she was adamant now. Even Stephen found it not easy to suggest or to argue, and never once when he did carried his point.

She locked up the library herself, and forbade that any should enter it in her absence. She pocketed her father's keys, and scarcely troubled to reply to the suggestion that they might be needed by her cousin.

She had lived alone—except for her servants—in Curzon Street. At that Caroline Leavitt had protested—"so young a girl without even a figure head of a chaperon will be misunderstood"—and as much more along the same lines of social rectitude and prudence as Helen would tolerate.

Helen's toleration was brief. "My mourning is chaperon enough," she said curtly, "and if it isn't, it is all I shall ever have. I wish to be alone. I intend to be."

"No one to be with you at all—to take care of you," Stephen had contributed once to Mrs. Leavitt's urgency.

"No one at all, until Hugh comes home to take care of me."

Pryde bit his lip angrily, and said no more.

Helen was her own mistress absolutely.

A will disposing of so large a fortune had not often been briefer than Richard Bransby's, and no will had ever been clearer.

There were a few minor bequests. Caroline Leavitt was provided for handsomely, and so also were Stephen and Hugh. (The will had been signed in 1911.) To Stephen had been left the management of the vast business. Everything else—and it was more than nine-tenths of the immense estate—was Helen's, absolutely, without condition or control. And even Stephen's management was subject to her veto, even the legacies to others subject to her

approval. She had approved, of course, at once, and the legacies were now irrevocable. But Stephen's dictatorship she could terminate a year from the day she expressed and recorded her desire to do so, and in the meantime she could greatly curtail it. Bransby had left her heir to an autocracy. And already, in several small ways, her rule had been autocratic. Always willful, her sorrow had hardened her, and Stephen knew that when their wills clashed, hers would be maintained, no matter at what cost to him. Where she was indifferent, he could have his way absolutely. Where she was interested, he could have no part of it, unless it luckily chanced to be identical with hers. He understood, and he chafed. But also he was very careful.

He lived still in Pont Street, in the bachelor rooms he and Hugh had had since their 'Varsity days; for Bransby had liked to have Helen to himself often.

Stephen spent as much time with his cousin as she would let him, and he had from the day of his uncle's death. And he "looked after" her as much as she would brook.

Vast as the Bransby fortune had been, even in this short time of his stewardship he had increased it by leaps and bounds. A great fortune a year ago, now it was one of the largest, if not the largest, of the war-fortunes. They still built ships and sailed them. He had suggested nothing less to Helen—he had not dared. But they dealt in aircraft too. Stephen had suggested that at a favorable moment, and she had conceded it listlessly.

Air was still his element, and its conquest his desire. His own room at Pont Street was now, as it had been all along, and as every nook of his very own when a boy had been, an ordered-litter of aeroplane models, aerodrome plans, "parts," schemes, dreams sketched out, estimates, schedules, inventions tried and untried, lame and perfected. They knew him at the Patent Office, and at least one of his own contrivances was known and flown in both hemispheres.

For Helen's love he still waited, hungry and denied. But his dreams of the air were fast coming true.

Helen had no comrades in these drear days, and scarcely kept up an acquaintance. Angela Hilary had refused to be "shunted," as she termed it, and she and Horace Latham gained Helen's odd half-hours oftener than any one else did. The girl had always "enjoyed" Angela, and when sorrow came, gifting her with some of its own wonderful clairvoyance, she had quickly sensed the worth and the tenderness of the persistent woman. And Dr. Latham was secure in her interest and liking, because she associated him closely with her father, and remembered warmly his tact and kindness in the first hours of her bereavement. And, sorry as her own plight was, and dreary as her daily life, she could not be altogether dull to the pretty contrivances and the nice management of the older

girl’s love-affair. Grief itself could but find some amusement and take some warmth from Angela’s brilliant, deft handling of that difficult matter. It would have made a colder onlooker than Helen tingle—and sometimes gasp. It certainly made Latham tingle, and not infrequently gasp.

CHAPTER XX

Begun half in fun, the pretty widow's advance towards the physician had grown a little out of her own entire control, and she found herself in some danger of being hoist by her own petard. Easy enough she found it to handle the man—she had handled men from her cradle—but she found her own wild heart not quite so manageable.

Helen half expected Angela to make the proposal which Latham, the girl felt sure, never would. She was sure that Angela was in deadly earnest now, and she was confident that in love, as in frolic, Angela would stick at nothing.

And Angela was in deadly earnest now—the deadliest. But she had no intention of proposing to Horace. She knew a trick worth ten of that.

Wah-No-Tee still stood to Mrs. Hilary for friend, philosopher and guide, but, believed in as staunchly as ever, she was sought rather less frequently, and on the affair-Latham the disembodied spirit, who was also "quite a lady," was consulted not at all. For the subjugation of the physician Angela Hilary besought no sibyl, bought no love-philter.

She lived, when in London, in a tiny private hotel, just off Bond Street, and as expensive as it was small. In her sitting-room there Latham and she were lounging close to the log-heaped fire one dark December day, exploiting an afternoon tea transatlantically heterogeneous.

"You know, I don't approve of this at all," the medico said, shaking his head at hot muffins heavy with butter and whipped cream, his hand hovering undecidedly over toasted marshmallows and a saline liaison of popcorn and peanuts. "We deserve to be very ill, both of us—and my country is at war, and the *Morning Post* says——"

"Food-shortage! Eat less bread!" Angela gurgled, burying her white teeth in a very red peach. "Well, there's no bread here, not a crust. And the children in the East End and badly wounded Tommies might not thrive on this fare of mine."

"They might not," the physician said cordially. "Yes, please, I will have two lumps and cream: my constitution requires it."

As she poured his tea, all her rings flashing in the fire-flicker, her face, usually so white, just flushed with rose from the flecks of the flames, he fell to watching her silently.

"Talk!" she commanded.

He smiled, and said nothing.

“Oh, a penny, then, for your thoughts, Mr. Man, if you want to be bribed.”

“I wonder if I dare.”

“Be bribed? What nonsense.”

“It takes a great deal of courage sometimes. But that was not what I meant.”

“What did you mean?—if you meant anything.”

“Oh! yes—I meant.”

“What? Hurry up!”

“I meant that I wondered if I dared tell you my thoughts—what I was thinking just then.”

“H’m,” was all the help she vouchsafed him.

“Will you be angry?”

“Very like—how can I tell?”

“Shall I plunge, and find out?”

“As you like. But I don’t mind making it six-pence.”

“The fee nerves me. I was wishing I knew, and could ask without impertinence, something about your first marriage.”

“My first marriage indeed!” she cried indignantly. “How often are you pleased to imagine I have been married? I’ve only been married once, I’d have you know.”

Latham flushed hotly, and she tilted back in her chair and laughed at him openly. Then the dimpling face—her dimples were delightful—sobered, and she leaned towards the fire—brooding—her hands clasped on her knees, her foot on the fender. “I’ll tell you, then, as well as I can—why not? John was quite unlike any man you’ve known. You don’t grow such men in England. It isn’t the type. He was big, and blond and reckless—‘all wool and a yard wide.’ I loved my husband very dearly. We American women usually do. We can, you know, for we don’t often marry for any other reason. Why should we? Mr. Hilary was a lawyer—a great criminal pleader. He saved more murderers than any other one man at the Illinois bar. He was a Westerner—every bit of him. His crying was wonderful, and oh! how he bullied his juries. He made them obey him. He made every one obey him.”

“You?” Latham interjected.

“Me! Good gracious, man, American women don’t obey. Me! I wouldn’t obey Georgie Washington come to life and richer than Rothschild. Obey!” Only an American voice could express such contempt, and no British pen convey it. “But the juries obeyed him all right—as a rule! Those were good days in Chicago. There’s no place like Chicago.”

“So I’ve heard,” Latham admitted.

“But they didn’t last long. An uncle of John’s died out in California, and left

us ever so many millions."

"I say—that was sporting!"

"What was?"

"Leaving his money to you as well as to his nephew."

"Land's sake, but you English are funny! Of course Ira Hilary did nothing of the sort. I don't suppose he'd ever heard of me—though he might if he read the Chicago papers; a dress or two of mine were usually in on Sunday—or something I'd done. But I dare say he didn't even know if John had a wife. He'd gone to the Pacific coast when he was a boy, before John was born—and he'd never been back East, or even written, till he wrote he was dead. It's like that in America. *Our* men are busy."

"I see," Latham asserted.

"No, you don't. No one could who hadn't lived there. Throw another log on."

Latham did, and she continued, half chatting to him, half musing: "My! how it all comes back, talking about it. Well, he left us all that money, left it to me as much as if he'd said so, and very much more than he left it to John. That's another way we have in America that you couldn't understand if you tried; so I wouldn't try, if I were you."

"I won't," her guest said meekly. "Go on, please. I am interested."

"Well, Uncle Ira died, and I made John retire."

"Retire?"

"Give up the bar. And we traveled. I love to travel, I always have. And now we could afford to go anywhere and do everything. Of course I'd always had money, heaps and heaps. Papa was rich, and he left me everything. Oh! Richard Bransby wasn't the only pebble on that beach. Gracious! we run to such fathers in America. But, of course, we'd had to live on John's money."

"Why?"

"Why?" she blazed at him. "Why? Why, because my money wasn't his. He hadn't earned it. John Hilary never had so much as a cigar out of my money. He dressed shockingly. I had to burn half the ties he bought. And his hats! But he supported me, I didn't support him. American men don't sponge on their wives. They wouldn't do it. And if they would, we wouldn't let them—not we American women. I say, Dr. Latham, you've a lot to learn about America—all Englishmen have."

"Go on. Teach me some more. I like learning."

"There's not much more to tell. We were not together long, John and I. It was like a story my father used to tease me with, when he was tired and I teased him to tell me stories. 'I'll tell you a story about Jack A'Manory, and now my story's

begun. I'll tell you another about Jack and his brother, and now my story's done.' I was eighteen, nearly, when I was married. It was four years after that that John said good-by to his murderers and absconders. Just a year after he died in Hong Kong—cholera. That teased me some." The pretty lips were quivering and Latham saw a tear pearl on the long lashes.

After a pause he said gently, "Will you ever give any one else his place, do you think?"

"John's place? Never. No one could." She did not add that there were other places that a man—the right man—might make in her heart, and that she was lonely. But the thought was clear in her mind, and it glanced through Latham's.

"How long is it—since you were in Hong Kong?" he ventured presently.

Angela Hilary dimpled and laughed. "I'll be twenty-eight next week."

"And I was forty-seven last week." And then he added earnestly, "Thank you for telling me."

"Oh, I was glad to." Neither referred to her confidence about her age, or thought that the other did.

At that moment "Mr. Pryde" was announced. Angela welcomed him effusively, brewed him fresh tea and plied him with molasses candy and hot ginger-bread.

Latham watched her; it was always pleasant to watch this woman, especially when plying some womanly craft, as now, but he spoke to Stephen. "I am glad to have this chance of offering you my congratulations, Pryde."

Stephen raised a puzzled eyebrow. "Your congratulations?"

"I hear that since you have become the head of the house of Bransby you have done great things."

"Oh," Stephen said non-committally.

"They tell me that you are the big man in the Aeroplane World, and that you are going to grow bigger. Perhaps success means nothing to you, but——"

"Success means everything to me, to every man worth his salt. The people who say it doesn't are liars."

"So, after all, you were right and Bransby was wrong."

"Yes, I was right, and Uncle Dick was wrong. But as for my rising to great heights—well—after all, it is the house of Bransby that will reap the benefit. It was very trusting of Uncle Dick to leave me the management of the business, but Helen is the house of Bransby."

"But surely she won't interfere with your management," said Latham.

And Angela cried, "Oh no, she must never do that."

"No—she must never do that," Pryde said, more to himself than to them, stirring his tea musingly and gazing wistfully, stubbornly into the fire. He looked

up and caught Mrs. Hilary's eye, and spoke to them both, and more lightly. "I dare say I shall find a way to persuade her to let me go on as I have."

Their hostess sprang up with a cry. Latham just saved her cup, and an almonded eclair tumbled into the fire—past all saving. "Oh! it is lovely, perfectly lovely!"

"What?" the men both asked.

"To fly like a bird. I used to dream I was flying when I was a child. It was perfectly sweet. I used to dream it, too, sometimes when I first came out and went to Germans (cotillions, you call 'em) and things every night—oh!"

"Perhaps that came from your dancing," Pryde said gallantly. Angela danced well.

"More probably it was the midnight supper she'd eaten," laughed Latham, pointing a rueful professional finger at the tea-table.

"Perhaps it was both," the hostess said cheerfully. "And my, it was beautiful. But oh, we never had supper at midnight. No fear! Two or three was nearer the hour. But such good suppers. You don't know how to eat over here," she added sadly. "For one thing, you simply don't know how to cook a lobster—not one of you."

"How should a lobster be cooked?" Pryde said lazily.

"Hot—hot—hot. Or it's good in a mayonnaise. But who ever saw a mayonnaise in London? No one."

"I am not greatly surprised that you dreamed at some height, if you regularly supped off lobster, Mrs. Hilary, at three in the morning, either frappé or sizzling hot," Latham told her.

"And champagne with it," Stephen ventured.

"Never! I detest champagne with shellfish."

"Stout?" Pryde quizzed.

Angela made a face.

"What, then, was the beverage? If one is permitted to ask," Stephen persisted meekly.

"Cream—when I could get it. I do love cream."

The physician groaned. "I wonder," he said severely, "that instead of dreaming of flying you did not in reality fly."

She giggled, and helped herself to a macaroon, still standing on the hearthrug, facing them. "Oh, I knew a lovely poem once—we all had to learn it by heart at school—probably you did too?"

"I think it highly improbable," Latham protested.

"I am positive I did not," Pryde asserted.

"Not learn to recite 'Darius Green and His Flying Machine'! My, you do

neglect your children in this country. You poor things! I wonder if I can remember it and say it to you."

She clasped her hands behind her back and faced them with dancing eyes. "'Darius Green and His Flying Machine,'" she declaimed solemnly. And very solemnly, but with now and then a punctuation point of giggle, she recited in its entirety the absurd classic which has played no inconspicuous part in the transatlantic curriculum. Her beautiful Creole voice, now pathetic and velvet, now lifted as the wing of a bird in flight, her face dimpling till even Stephen was bewitched, and Latham could have kissed it, and might have been tempted to essay the enterprise had only they been alone. Richard Bransby, whose fond fancy had compared the women of his love each to some distinct flower, might have thought her like some rich magnolia of her own South as she swayed and postured in the gleaming firelight. But perhaps all beautiful women are rather flower-like.

She ended the performance with a shiver and sigh of elation. "Oh, isn't it a love of a poem? Have some more tea."

Stephen came to see Mrs. Hilary not infrequently. She liked him genuinely, and her liking soothed and helped him. He was terribly restless often. Never once had he repented. He had loved Hugh, and loved him still. He would have given a great deal to have known where he was, and to have helped him. He would have given far more to know that the brother would never come back—come back to thwart him of Helen—perhaps to expose him of crime. He loved Hugh and he mourned him; but two things to him were paramount: to make Helen his wife, and to be an "Air-King." One goal was in sight, the other he could not, and would not, relinquish. And to gain these two great desires, soul-desires both, he would hesitate at nothing, regret nothing, and least of all their cost to any other, no matter how dear to him that other, no matter how terrible that cost.

Latham left a few moments after the tragic descent of Darius into the barnyard mud. Angela Hilary went to the door to speed her parting guest, and gave him her hand, her right hand, of course. Latham dropped it rather abruptly and took her left hand in his. "How many rings do you own?" he demanded.

"Dozens. I've not counted them for years. There's a list somewhere."

"You need two more," he said softly—and went.

CHAPTER XXI

The jade Joss had the room to himself. There was little enough light and no fire. Gray shadows hung thick in the place, palpable and dreary. The blinds were down and the curtains all drawn. It was late afternoon in January—a cold, forbidding day; and the room itself, once the heart of the house, was even colder, more ghoul-like. Only one or two thin shafts of sickly light crept in, penetrating the gloom—but not lifting it, intensifying it rather.

Joss looked cold, neglected and alien. The rose-colored lotus looked pinched, gray and frozen—poor exiled pair, and here and so they had been since a few days after Richard Bransby's death, when Helen had left the room, locking it behind her, and pronounced it taboo to all others.

But now a key turned in the door, creaking and stiffly, as if long unused to its office.

In the hall, Mrs. Leavitt drew back with a shiver and motioned imperatively to Stephen to precede her. "How dark it is," she said, and not very bravely, following him in not ungingerly.

"Yes," he answered crisply. He had not come there to talk. And, like her, he was intensely nervous; but from a very different cause. Dead men, and the places of their last earthly resting, meant nothing to him.

"And cold. Stephen, light the fire while I draw the curtains. Have you matches?"

"Of course." He knelt at the fireplace and set a match to the gas logs. Mrs. Leavitt drew the curtain aside and raised the blinds. The winter sunlight came streaming through the windows, a chilled unfriendly sunshine, but it flooded the room. Pryde looked about quickly, and the woman did too.

She was much affected. "Oh, Stephen, how this room does bring it all back to me! It seems as if it were only yesterday that Richard was here—poor Richard." Then her eyes caught their old prey—dust—and dust—dust everywhere. She pulled open a drawer under the bookshelves and caught up a little feather duster that had always been kept there.

But Stephen checked her abruptly. "Don't touch that table—don't touch anything on any of the tables," he said sharply.

"Well, I'm sure——"

"No—you must not. I—I promised Helen——"

"Promised Helen?"

"That no one should lay hand on even one thing, no one but myself, and that

I would touch as little as possible—just to find the papers."

"Well, I'm sure——"

His eye fell upon the bit of jade and he pointed to it, laughing nervously. "Especially, I had to promise her that I'd not lay a finger on that. You remember how Uncle Dick used absent-mindedly to play with it. And Helen declares that no one shall ever touch it again but herself, and she only to dust it."

"Well, it needs dusting now, right enough," Mrs. Leavitt remarked resentfully.

"Are you quite sure that everything here is exactly as Uncle Dick left it?" In spite of himself he could not keep his hideous anxiety out of his voice.

But Mrs. Leavitt did not notice. She was looking furtively about the unkempt room with disapproving eyes. She answered mechanically, "Oh—yes—everything. The day Richard's coffin was carried out of it, Helen locked it up herself, just as it was. It has never been opened since."

"She didn't disturb any of the papers on this table?"

"No."

"And no one has been here since, you are sure?"

"Of course I'm sure," she replied acidly. "If I refused you, my own nephew, admission twenty times at least, I wouldn't allow any one else in, would I? Helen said, before she went up to town to live because she couldn't bear to stay here, poor child—it's very lonely without her—well, she said that she did not want any one to come in here until she returned. Naturally I respected her wishes—orders, you might call them, since this is her house now—not that I grudge that. Well, now you come with this letter from her, saying that you are to do what you like in the library, and are to have her father's keys—so of course I opened it for you—and glad enough to get it opened at last—and here are the keys; it's only recently I've had them. Helen kept them herself for a long time."

Stephen took them from her quickly—almost too quickly, had she been a woman observant of anything but dust and disorder. "I persuaded her to write it," he said. "It is time her father's papers were looked over, and it would be too heavy a task for her—too sad."

"Stephen, is she still grieving over Hugh's disappearance?"

Pryde shrugged his shoulders. "H'm, yes."

"Poor child—poor child! It seems as if everything were taken from her at once. And to think that a nephew of mine—well, nearly a nephew—should desert from the army, and in war time, too—that there should be a warrant out for his arrest! Just do look at that dust!"

Stephen's patience was wearing thin. "If you'll excuse me now, Aunt Caroline——"

“Of course—you have a great deal to do, and I have too; the servants get worse and worse. Servants! They’re not servants; war impostures, I call them. Well, I’ll leave you now.” But at the door she turned again. “Stephen!”

“Yes.” He tried not to say it too impatiently.

“There isn’t anything of great value in this room, is there?”

“Why, no,” he said nervously.

“That’s odd.”

“Why—odd?” His voice was tense, and he did not look at her.

“Three times since Richard died, burglars have tried to force their way through the windows in this room.”

“Oh!” Pryde managed to say, and it was all he could manage to say.

“Always the same windows, you understand. Each time, fortunately, we frightened them away.”

“You have reported the matter to the police?” The anxiety made his voice husky.

“Yes, but all they ever did was to make notes.”

“You have no idea who the burglar was? Burglars, I mean,” correcting himself awkwardly. “You never caught sight of him—them?”

“No—not a glimpse.”

“No—oh, just some tramp, I dare say.”

He was easier now, but his voice was a little unsteady from strain and with relief. “And now please——”

“Yes, I’ll hurry away now. Barker is dusting the best dinner service—if I’m not there to watch, she’s sure to break something. Call me, if you want me.”

“I shan’t want you, Aunt Caroline.”

CHAPTER XXII

As the fussy, bustling footsteps died away Stephen sank into an easy-chair—Richard's own, as it chanced—and laid his head on a table. He was worn out with tension and uncertainty.

The tall clock in the corner had run down. The gas fire made no sound. No room could have been stiller.

The day was mending toward its close, and the late level sun flooded in from the windows, as if to make up for lost time and eight months of exclusion. The light of the fire lit up the room's other side, and between the two riots of light and of warmth the man sat dejected, distraught and shivering—alone with his self-knowledge, his fear and his gruesome task.

Where was the damnatory sheet of paper? In this room in all human probability. Its ink had scarcely dried when Bransby had died, and it had not been found on the body; Stephen Pryde had made sure of that.

For eight terrible months he had schemed and tortured to get here and find it—even playing housebreaker in his desperation. Yet now here at long last he shrank inexplicably from beginning the search. Why? That he knew not in the least. But, for one thing, he was hideously cold, almost cramped with chill. The arms of the chair felt like ice. Little billows of cold seemed to buffet against his face. The room had been shut up and fireless for so long. His feet ached with cold, almost they felt paralyzed. His legs were quivering, and so cold! And his hands were blueing.

At last he forced his numb frame from the seat.

He looked about with frightened, agonized eyes.

No paper lay on any one of the tables apparently. The wastepaper basket! He seized it with a hand that shook as if palsied. Oh—a crumpled whiteness lay on the bottom of the basket. Pray Heaven—he thrust in a fumbling hand—and gave a cry of disappointment. This was not paper, but some bit of soft cloth. He jerked it out impatiently, and then, when he saw what it was, dropped it on the table with a sharp sigh; a handkerchief—Helen's.

From table to table he went, examining each article on them, searching every crevice. Each drawer he searched again and again. He looked in every possible place, and, as the anxious searchers for lost things have from time immemorial, in many impossible places. He overlooked nothing—he was sure of that. Again and again he searched the tables and then researched them.

With a puzzled frown he rose and stared about the room. Then he moved

about it slowly and carefully, looking for some possible hidden cupboard. He sounded the wainscoting. He scrutinized the ceiling, he pulled at the seats of the chairs.

Finally he halted before the bookcase and stood staring at it a long time. He drew out one or two volumes. Could the thin sheet be behind one? But the dust came out thickly, and he put them back. Something seemed to pull him away, and drive him back to the table. Why, of course, it must be there. Where else would the dead man have hidden it? Nowhere, of course. Why waste time looking anywhere else? Again he began the weary business all over. Again and again his cold, trembling hands felt and searched, and his eyes, wild now and baffled, peered and studied. Almost he prayed. His breath came in gasps. Sweat stood on his forehead and around his clenched lips.

Nothing! Nowhere! He sank back in his seat, convinced and defeated. The confession was not here; or, if it was, he could not find it. And it *might* be somewhere else. Probably it had been destroyed, intentionally or accidentally, by some one else. But it *might* be in existence. And some day it might be found to damn and to ruin.

How tired he was—and how cold! Why couldn't he get warmer? And where did those icy drifts of wind come from, goose-fleshing his face and his hands and making his spine creep?

He crouched over the fire, and held out his blue hands to its heat. No use! He was growing colder and colder.

Then he began in his groping misery to think of birds flying. That was always his vision in moments of over-tension or of great aspiration—birds in full flight. To watch such flight had been the purest joy of his boyhood. To contrive and to achieve its emulation had been the fight and the triumph of his manhood.

He lifted the morsel of cambric to his face, saluting it, and wiping away with it the cold moisture on his cheek and his lips. Who should say his extraordinary ambition, extraordinarily pursued, extraordinarily fulfilled, ignoble? No one quite justly. Certainly he had wanted success, power, prestige and great wealth for himself. But, as much as he had desired them for himself, no less had he desired them for Helen—to lay at her feet, to keep in her hands.

And, too, he had dreamed to make England mightier yet by his air fleets and their victories. Patriotism is a virtue enhanced and embellished by all other virtues, even as it enhances and embellishes all other virtues. But it is a virtue sole and apart, and not impossible to hearts and to lives in all else besotted and ignoble. Only yesterday Stephen himself had seen an example of this. Waiting at Victoria, he had watched some hundreds of German prisoners detrained and retrained. As they sat waiting and guarded, a bunch of English convicts,

manacled and pallid, had slouched on to the platform—"old timers" of the worst type, from their looks, with heads ill-shaped and shapeless, more appropriate to an asylum for idiots than a prison for miscreants, and with countenances that would have disgraced and branded the lowest form of quadruped brute life—"men" compared with whom, unless their appearance grossly libeled them, Bill Sykes must have been quite the gentleman and no little of an Adonis. But not one of them all, bestial, hardened and deficient, but slunk or weakly brazened as they shuffled along, ashamed and unnerved, abashed of God's daylight and of the glance of their unincarcerated fellows. Among them was chained one boy (he was scarcely older than that) with a fine head and a gifted face—a boy, not unlike what Stephen remembered himself in his unscorched days. It was a spiritual face even now, as Stephen's own was. Probably the boy's crime had been some sin of passion. Murderers often are of the spiritual type, but very rarely housebreakers or thugs. Perhaps he had murdered a brother, loved by the girl he himself craved. Perhaps he had killed some enemy or friend who well deserved such slaughter. Or had his guilt been more sordid, begotten in some schoolboy escapade, growing and nourished fœtuslike in the fructive womb of youth's temptations and young manhood's cowardice: money misused, trust betrayed, sex tarnished? Whatever his crime it had left no scar on his face, no record except of suffering. And of them all, this young convict's plight was the most pitiful, his chagrin the most woeful, of all that sorry gang. At a word from a warder, they turned their poor cropped heads and saw the Hun prisoners. The cravened faces cleared, the handcuffed figures straightened, the haggard, clouded eyes brightened, the broken gait mended; criminals, exhibited in their hideous livery of shame, for the moment they were men once more—Englishmen, belligerent, proud and rejoiced—of the race of the victors, lifted out and above the slime of their personal defeat—all of them, the oldest and most beast-like, and the boy with the finely chiseled face and the heart-broken eyes.

Stephen Pryde's own eyes, as he sat brooding between the fire and the sunshine, were as haggard as any of those cinnamon-clad miserables had been. He was ill—with the inexplicable chill, the grave-smell of the room, and the nausea of disappointment and of his dilemma. He was at bay indeed now.

But the face that hung over the fire was a spiritual face. He had betrayed a trust. He had stolen. He had borne false witness. In this very room he had knotted his fist to do murder—and against the man who had given him home, affection, position and luxury; and against his own brother, whose mother and his had placed their hands palm in palm when death already had muted her lips—his kiddy brother!—he had sinned with a sin and a dastardy, compared to which Cain's was venial and kind. Why? And having so sinned, why was his

face still fine, the hallmark of the spiritual type still stamped there, clear and unblurred?

Ah, who shall say? The riddle is dense.

Perhaps ’twas because his vice was indeed “but virtue misapplied,” because circumstances had betrayed him. Mary Magdalene in her common days probably had some foretelling of saintship on her lureful face, and might more easily have nursed babes on her breast than lured men to her lair, been mother more gladly than wanton.

However it was, however it came, there was a high something, a fineness, on Stephen Pryde’s face that no one else of his milieu had—not even Helen, certainly not Hugh; but his, for all time, to descend with him into the grave, to go with him wherever he went, Heavenward or Hellward—his gift and his birthright. Few indeed ever sensed this. Spirituality was almost the last trait friends or relatives would have attributed to him. But one acquaintance had espied it—the American woman, whom he had held in some sneering tolerance in the days of their first meeting. “He has the face of a saint—a sour saint—but a saint, a soul apart,” Angela had said of him the day he had been introduced to her. And he had said of her after the same occasion, “What a preposterous rattle of a woman! She rushes from whim to absurdity, back and forth and getting nowhere—‘cluck, cluck, cluck’—like a hen in front of a motor-car.” And this of the woman who had understood him at a glance, as his own people had not in a lifetime. Why? Another riddle. Perhaps it was because, underneath her cap and bells, Angela Hilary, too, wore the hallmark, smaller, lighter cut—but there, and the same. There is no greater mistake—and none made more often—than to think that those who laugh and dance through life are earthbound. Heaven is full of little children, clustered at her knee, playing with Our Lady’s beads.

After Stephen, dreamer and sinner, Angela Hilary had the most spiritual of all the personalities with which this tale is concerned; and, after her, the self-contained, conventional, well-groomed doctor of Harley Street.

Mrs. Leavitt’s step came along the hall, and her voice, upbraiding some domestic delinquency, ordering tea and toast.

With a shivering effort, Pryde rose from his seat, put the handkerchief away carefully—in his pocket, and strolled nonchalantly into the hall, closing the door behind him.

The jade Joss had the room to himself.

CHAPTER XXIII

About noon the next day Helen motored from London and took them all by surprise.

Mrs. Leavitt was delighted. It was lonely at Deep Dale—very lonely sometimes. For the first time in his life Stephen was sorry to see his cousin. Her visit, he felt, foreboded no good to his momentary enterprise, and her presence could but be something of an entanglement. He was manager—dictator almost—at Cockspur Street, at the Poultry and at Weybridge, and could carry it off with some show of authority, and with some reality of it too. But here he was nothing, nobody. Helen was everything here. No one else counted. Her rule was gentle, but not Bransby's own had been more autocratic or less to be swayed except by her own fancy or whim.

Only too well he knew how this home-coming would move her. What might she not order and countermand? Her permission to him to search and to docket had been scant and reluctant enough in London. Here, any instant she might rescind it. Above all he dreaded her presence in the library—both for its interference with his further searching (of course he had determined to search the already much-searched room again) and for the effect of the room and its associations upon her.

She had little to say to him, and almost he seemed to avoid her. But he ventured to follow her to the library the afternoon of her arrival—and he did it for her sake almost as much as for his own.

She was standing quietly looking about the well-loved room; and he could see that she was holding back her tears with difficulty. Almost he wished that she would not restrain them—though he liked to see a woman's weeping as little as most men do—so drawn and set was her face.

"Who is it?" she asked presently.

"It's I, Helen."

She turned to him wearily—then turned to the table; he put out his hand to restrain her, but she did not see, or she ignored it, and took up the green and pink jade and wiped it carefully with her handkerchief. A strange rapt look grew in her face, as she pressed the cambric into the difficult crannies of the intricate, delicate carving. She sighed when she had finished, and put the little fetish down—very carefully, just where it had stood before.

"Is—is anything wrong, Helen?"

"No."

“Then why are you here? You said you couldn’t come.”

“I know, but at the last minute I had to.”

“You had to?”

“Yes,” she answered wearily, seating herself on the broad window-seat. “Have you looked over Daddy’s papers?”

“Yes.”

“Have you found anything—anything—about Hugh?” The listless voice was keen and eager enough now.

“No—nothing,” he told her.

“Are you sure, Stephen?”

“Quite,” he said sadly. “Why, dear, what makes you think——”

“I don’t know—only—something told me——” She rose and came towards the writing-table. Stephen moved too, getting between her and it—“I felt—that we should find something here that would help us prove his innocence—that would bring him back to me.”

The man who loved her as neither Hugh nor Richard Bransby had, winced at the love and longing in the girl’s voice. But he answered her gently, “There is nothing here.” For a space he stood staring at the table, puzzled, thinking hard. “Helen.”

“Well?” she was back at the window now, looking idly out at the leafless, snow-crusted trees.

“Had Uncle Dick any secret cupboard or safe where he kept important papers?”

“No—you know he hadn’t. He always kept his important things at the office—you know that.”

“Then, if there was anything about Hugh here it would be on this table.”

“Yes.” But even at Hugh’s name she did not turn from the window, but still stood looking drearily out at the dreary day.

Perplexed and still more perplexed, Stephen stood motionless, gazing down on the writing-table. Suddenly a thought struck him. His face lit a little. The thought had possessed him now: a welcome thought. Surely the paper, the hideous paper, had fallen from the table on which his uncle had left it, fallen into the fire, and been burnt. He measured the distance with a kindling eye. Yes! Yes! It might have been that. Surely it had been that. It must be; it should be. Fascinated, he stood estimating the chances—again and again. Helen sighed and turned and came towards him slowly. He neither saw nor heard her. “That’s it. Yes, that’s it!” he exclaimed excitedly—triumphant, speaking to himself, not to Helen.

And, if Helen heard, she did not heed. After a little she came close to him

and said beseechingly, “You don’t think there is any hope, do you, Stephen?”

He pulled himself together with a sharp effort—so sharp that it paled a little his face which had flushed slightly with his own relief of a moment ago. He took her hand gently. “I am sure there is not,” he told her sadly.

She left her hand in his for a moment—glad of the sympathy in his touch, then turned dejectedly away. “Poor Hugh!” she said as she moved. “Poor Hugh,” she repeated, slipping down on to the big couch.

Stephen Pryde followed her. “Helen,” he begged, “you mustn’t grieve like this—you must not torture yourself so by hoping to see Hugh again. You must put him out of your mind.” Her mother could not have said it more gently. He moved a light chair nearer the couch and sat down.

“I can’t,” she said simply.

He left his chair and sat down quietly beside her “Why won’t you let me help you? Why won’t you——”

The girl shrank back into her corner. “Don’t, Stephen—please. We’ve gone all through this before. It’s impossible.”

“But Hugh is unworthy of you. Oh!”—at a quick gesture from her—“don’t misunderstand me. I love Hugh—love him still—always shall——” There was the ring of sincerity in his voice, and indeed, so far, he had said but the truth. “Day in and day out I go over it all in my mind, and at night, and try to find some possible loophole for hope, hope of his innocence. But there is none. And then the deserting! But I’d do anything for Hugh—anything. And I’d give all I have, or ever hope to have, to clear him. I shall always stick to him, if ever he comes back, and in my heart at least, if he doesn’t. But you—oh! Helen—to waste all your young years, spill all your thought and all your caring—I can’t endure that—for your own sake—if my love and my longing are nothing to you—I implore you—he has proved himself unworthy—acknowledged it even——”

“Daddy loved him—even when the trouble came—and I know he would want me to help him—if I could.”

“Helen,” Stephen said after a short pause, speaking in a low even voice (really he was managing himself splendidly—heroically), “you want to do everything that your father wished, don’t you?”

“Of course I do. You know that.”

“After Hugh left that night, Uncle Dick told me that it would make him happy to think that—some day—you and I would be married——”

The last words were almost a whisper, so gently he said them. But, for all his care, they stabbed her.

“Stephen!——” It was a cry and a protest.

The smooth voice went on, “He knew that I had always cared for you, and

that you would be safe with me. He would have told you had he lived. He meant to——”

Never was wooing quieter. But the room pulsed about him, perhaps she felt it throb too, so intense and so true was his passion, so crying his longing.

“You have never told me this—before——” she began, not unmoved.

“No, dear, I didn’t want to worry you. And I—I wanted it to come from you—the gift—of yourself. I wanted to teach you to love me—unaided. But I couldn’t—so I turned to him—to Uncle Dick to help me—as I always turned to him for everything from the day mother died. Oh, Helen, can’t you, won’t you, don’t you see how I love you? I have always loved you.”

“Please—not now——” Her face was very white. “I can’t talk to you now. I must have time—to think—we—we can talk—another time.” She got up unsteadily and moved to the door.

He opened it simply, and made not even a gesture to delay her.

Alone—he breathed a long sigh of mingled feelings. There was satisfaction in it—and other things, satisfaction that she was no longer here in this danger zone of his where the confession *might* be after all, and might be found at any moment to confront and undo him. And there was satisfaction too that he had come a little nearer prosperity in his hard wooing than he had ever come before. She had not repulsed him—not at least as she had done before. Perhaps—perhaps—he would win her yet—and—if he did—if he did!

Standing by the table he rested his hand there, and it just brushed the piece of jade. He drew his hand back quickly. Helen had desired that no one but she herself should ever touch it again. Not for much would he have disobeyed her in this small thing. Her every wish was law to Stephen Pryde, except only when some wish of hers threatened his two great passions.

The paper—the cursed paper—must have gone to cinder. Surely it had been so. He searched a drawer and found notepaper—and made a sheet to the size—as he remembered it—of the missing piece. He laid it on the table, brushed it off with a convulsive motion of his arm. Brief as his instant of waiting was, it trembled his lip with suspense. Thank God! Thank God! The paper had fallen on to the glowing asbestos. It caught. It burned. It was gone—absolutely obliterated—destroyed as if it had never been.

He sank down into Richard Bransby’s chair, and began to laugh. Long and softly the hysterical laughter of his relief—sadder than any sobbing—crept and shivered through the room.

The green Joss blinked and winked in the flickering of the high-turned fire. The pink jade lotus grew redder in the crimson laving of the setting sun.

CHAPTER XXIV

Of course any feeling of security built upon so slight foundation, and concerning a matter of such paramount and vital moment, could but be transient. With the next daylight, dread and anxiety reasserted themselves. And Pryde was again the victim of restlessness and uncertainty.

Helen's presence, her nearness to the library all the time, and her actual occupation of it whenever she chose, disconcerted him. He hoped that she would go back to Curzon Street almost at once. Anxious as he was to go over his feverish searching again and still again, he would eagerly have turned the key in the library door, and taken her back to London, deferring for a few days what he again believed and hoped would be the result and the reward of yet one more hunt. It had been great relief to feel that the deadly document was already destroyed. It would be a thousandfold more comfort to see it burn—and ten thousand times more satisfactory. He should *know* then. He could *never* know else. He should be free and unafraid then. In no other way could he ever attain unalloyed freedom, in no other way escape the rough clutch of fear.

But Helen had come to Oxshott to stay—for the present. And on the second day Pryde learned to his annoyance that she was expecting Dr. Latham by an afternoon train.

Well, what would be would be, more especially if Helen had decreed it, and he accepted the physician's appearance with a patient shrug—as patient a shrug as he could muster.

It naturally fell to him to act host to this man guest of Helen's, and he liked Latham more than he liked most men, and resented his intrusion as little as he could any one's, unless Angela Hilary might have come in the doctor's stead. Angela would have played the better into his hands, by the shrill claim she would have made upon Helen with a chatter of frocks and a running hither and thither. And, too, he had come to enjoy Mrs. Hilary quite apart from any usefulness to be wrung from the vibrant personality. He enjoyed the breeze of it, and often turned into her hotel as other overworked and brain-fagged men run down to Brighton or Folkestone for a day of relaxation, and the tonic sea-air. He had come to find positive refreshment in occasional whiffs of her saline sparkle, and no little diversion in speculating as to what she would say next, and about what. And this of the woman of whom he had once said that she and her inconsequent chatter of kaleidoscope nonsenses reminded him of nothing but the wild fluttings and distraught flutterings of a hen in front of a motor! Truly with

him she was an acquired taste. But as truly he had acquired it. He had come more nearly to know her—her as she was, as well as her as she seemed. Many people acquired that taste—when they came to more know the blithe alien—and not a few felt it instinctively at the first of acquaintance.

But Angela Hilary was not here, and Horace Latham was—and Pryde did his best to make the latter's visit pleasant, but without the slightest effort or wish to prolong it.

"Do you know, Pryde," Latham said musingly, as they smoked together after dinner—alone for the moment in the library—"it always puzzled me——"

"Puzzled you?"

"I have so often wondered about it—it came so suddenly—Bransby's death. As a physician I could not just understand it then, and I have never been quite able to understand it since. And as a physician—I'd like to. It's been rather like losing track of the end of a case you've been at particular pains to diagnose. It's unsatisfactory."

"I don't quite see——"

"It must have been a shock that killed him—a great shock." Latham's voice and manner were the manner and voice of his consulting-room. He was probing—kindly and easily—but probing skillfully. Pryde felt it distinctly. "Did he, by any chance, know that your brother intended to desert?"

"No—I don't think so." Stephen was well on his guard. "But he knew that Hugh was in some trouble at the office. That was why Grant came here that night."

"Oh, yes," Latham nodded. "I remember. No, it wasn't that. His interview with Grant disturbed him, I know—but it was something bigger that killed him!"

"Why, how—how do you mean?" Stephen spoke as naturally as he could.

"You were the last person who saw him alive, were you not?" Latham questioned for question.

"Yes."

"How was he when you left him—when you said good-night?"

"He was all right," Pryde spoke reflectingly.

"If my memory serves me," the physician continued, "you had gone from the house."

"When he died? Yes—some time before he died. I was on my way to London. There was something Uncle Dick wanted me to do for him in town—er it was nothing important."

"Then," Latham added musingly, "it was after you left that this shock occurred to him. It must have come from something in this room."

"Something in this room?" Strive as he might, and he strove his utmost,

Stephen could not keep the sharp agitation he felt out of his voice.

But Latham did not notice it—or did not appear to. “Yes,” he said in his same level voice, “a letter—some papers. Was anything of importance found on his table?”

“Nothing.”

“Curious!”

Pryde, fascinated by his own device and his hope, the device born of the hope, was lost in thought, and sat looking from table to fire, measuring again with his trained eyes distance and angles. And, seeing the other’s absorption, Latham was watching him openly now, with eyes also well trained, and, because less anxious, probably shrewder. The physician was diagnosing.

Stephen spoke first. Latham had intended that he should. “Latham?”

“Yes?”

“If you were right,” rising in his tense interest,—“if there had been some papers that caused the shock that killed him—isn’t it possible”—returning to his chair as suddenly as he had quit it—“isn’t it probable that while he had it in his hand, sitting just here perhaps, he tried to rise, he was faint and tried to reach the bell, and the paper fell from his hand, fell into the fire and was destroyed?” As he spoke he enacted, rising, turning ineffectually, convulsively toward the bell, let an imaginary paper drift from his hand. Then he caught the significance of his own excitement, ruled himself, and sauntered to the fireplace.

But the diagnosis was completed. “I dare say that might have happened,” Latham said consideringly.

“It’s the only way I can explain it,” Pryde’s voice vibrated with his infinite relief.

“Explain what, Pryde?” Latham asked in his Harley Street voice. To the insinuation of that deft tone many a patient had yielded a secret unconsciously.

But Stephen recalled himself, and was on his guard again. “Why—why—this sudden death.” A slight smile just flicked the physician’s serene face. Pryde rose once more and stood again gazing, half hypnotized by his own suggestion. “It was a great blow to me, Latham, a great blow”—a sigh, so sharp that it seemed to shake him, ended his sentence. “I torture myself trying to picture just what happened after I left this room.”

Latham made no reply. Presently Pryde spoke again, repeating his own words rather wildly. “Torture myself trying to picture just what happened after I left this room.”

Still Latham said nothing. He was considering.

CHAPTER XXV

In a little room high up in the house, her very own sitting-room, heaped with roses and heliotrope and carnations, its windows looking out to the Surrey hills and a gurgling brook—blue as steel in the winter cold, its snow-white banks edged with irregular shrubberies icicle-hung, Helen and Latham sat in close conference.

A glorious fire flamed on the broad hearth in the corner. Helen had inherited her father's love of fires. When the war came, crippling their servant staff both at Curzon Street and at Deep Dale, and making the replenishing of coal cellars arduous, and posters on every hoarding admonished patriotism to economize fuel, Richard Bransby had installed a gas-fire in his library. Helen had opposed this, she had so loved the great mixed fire of logs and of coal before which so many of her childhood's gloamings had been spent, so many of her acute young dreams dreamed, but for once the father had not yielded to her. In one particular the gas-fire had appealed to him—it minimized the intrusions of servants when he best liked to have his "den" to himself. Humbly born, but with none of the excrescent caddishness of smaller-souled *nouveaux riches*, he had no liking for the visible presence of his domestic retinue, and when servants were ill-trained and imperfectly unobtrusive, little irritated him more than to have them about, and, except by Helen, he was a man easily irritated. So gas had replaced wood and anthracite in his room. But not so in Helen's. She meant well by her country, but the logs piled high on her hearth. The patriotisms of youth are apt to be thoughtless, in every country. Often Youth makes the great sacrifice—England needs no telling of that—but Age makes the ten thousand daily burnt-offerings that in their infinite aggregate heap high in the scale of a people's devotion; and, perhaps, win as tender approval from the Angel that records.

The morning sun streamed in riotously. A room could not be prettier or more cozy. It made a brilliant background to the slender, black-clad girl-figure, and the handsome, middle-aged man, dressed as carefully as she—in a gray morning suit—and almost as slender. Dr. Latham took every care of his figure.

"I hope you are not going to be angry with me," Helen said, looking at him a little ruefully.

"My dear child!"

"Because, you see, I have brought you here under false pretenses."

"False pretenses!" her old friend laughed contentedly, "that's actionable."

"I'm not ill. It isn't about my health I want to see you."

“Then I’ve lost a very attractive patient,” he mocked at her in affectionate retort.

“Don’t joke—please. It is very serious.”

“So you wrote.”

“And I didn’t say I was ill. But, of course, that would be what you thought, when I begged you to come for a few days, and knowing how busy you always are, and asking you to say nothing to Aunt Caroline or any one, but just seem to be on an ordinary visit.”

“I was delighted to come,” he assured her gravely. “And, as it happens, I did not think you were ill.”

“No?”

“No.”

“How was that, Dr. Latham?”

“Can’t say in the least; but I didn’t. And—now—well—tell me.”

“It’s about something you once said.”

He wondered if it were something he had said about Angela Hilary. He hoped not. He had said some very foolish things—but that was long ago—before he really knew that radiant woman. “Something I once said?” he echoed a little anxiously.

Helen nodded.

“I am afraid I don’t remember. What was it?”

“That night that——” But she choked at the words. For a moment she could not speak. Latham gave her time. He was used to giving people time—and especially women. Presently she went on, finding another way to put it—“That last night—when you spoke of the dead coming back. You said that if two people loved each other very dearly, and one was left behind and needed the one who had gone, he would come back.”

“I said he might try,” Latham corrected her gently.

“You were right.”

“What do you mean?” The man was half amused, half startled, but the physician was anxious.

“Daddy—Daddy is trying to come back to me,” she said very simply.

“Miss Bransby!” For a moment he wondered if Angela had been taking this overwrought child to materializing circles or trumpet mediums or some other such bosh. But no, Angela wouldn’t. She did the wildest things—small things—but in the important things she had the greatest good sense: he had proved it.

“Oh,” Helen assured him, “I am sure of it—I am sure of it. There’s something he wants me to do, but I can’t understand what it is. That is why I asked you to come here—I thought you might help me.”

Latham was moved, and perturbed. “My dear child,” he began lamely.

But Helen could brook no interruption now. Her words came fast enough, now she had started. “For weeks,” she insisted breathlessly, “I’ve had this feeling—for weeks I’ve known that he was doing his utmost to tell me something. At first I tried to put it aside. I thought it was my grief or my longing for him that deceived me into thinking this—but I couldn’t. It always came back stronger than ever—until to-day when I suddenly realized—I can’t tell you just how—there is something he wants *me* to do *in the library*.”

“My dear, my dear, my idle remarks have put these ideas in your head.” The doctor was thoroughly alarmed for her now, though still he could detect no hint of illness or disorder. “You are overwrought.”

“No, no!” the girl cried. “It isn’t that. It’s the strain of not being able to understand—it’s almost more than I can bear. Oh, Dr. Latham, can’t you help me to find out what it is that Daddy wants me to do?”

He studied her gravely—puzzled, troubled, strange thoughts surging in his mind. She seemed perfectly normal. And he knew that while love, religious mania, money troubles, filled insane asylums almost to bursting, that the percentage of patients so incarcerated as the result of spiritualism was almost *nil*, and quite negligible—general rumor notwithstanding. (Rumor’s a libelous jade.) He felt less sure of a right course than he often did. And he said sadly, but with little conviction, “I’m afraid I can’t help you, Miss Bransby.”

“But surely——” She rose and stood before him, her eyes flushed with entreaty, her clasped hands stretched toward him in pleading.

He rose too and laid a grave arm about her slight shoulder, saying tenderly, “What I said that night—it was no more than an idle speculation—I had no ground for it. And, naturally, your great grief coming so soon afterwards impressed my words upon your mind.”

“Oh, no——” Helen said, her tears gathering.

“Come! come!” Latham coaxed her. “You’re imagining things.”

She pulled from his arm, and moved to the window, answering him almost violently, “No, no! *It’s too vivid—it’s too real!*”

“But surely,” he urged, “if your father could bring you to this house, direct you to the library—you said the library?”—she nodded her head emphatically—“he could tell you what he wanted you to do there. You have had to bear a great sorrow—it has unsettled you and given you this delusion—a delusion that comes to so many people who have lost what you have lost; you must conquer it!”

Perhaps he might have convinced and influenced her more, had he been more convinced himself, had she convinced and influenced him less. She

persisted with him, wearily. “But—don’t you see? I thought you would see. Oh, please try to see. If I lose this—I lose—everything. I was so sure it was about Hugh—I was so sure Daddy was going to bring him back to me.” She sat down by the fire crying piteously now.

Latham’s own eyes felt odd. He knelt down on the hearthrug, and gathered her hands into his. “Poor child!” It was all he could say. What else was there to say?

She looked at him desperately. “Then you don’t believe?”

“I’m afraid I don’t,” he admitted—very softly.

He saw her mouth quiver, and then the sobs came thick and fast, and she hid her face on his shoulder.

CHAPTER XXVI

She seemed quite herself at luncheon, and Latham was the life and the jest of the table. Women are bred so; and such is the craft of his trade.

Even Stephen watching jealously—he had known of the *tête-à-tête* of the morning—learned nothing. And Caroline Leavitt rejoiced and was grateful to see the girl so much more nearly herself.

But still Stephen watched—and waited.

At twilight he found Helen alone in the library. He joined her almost timidly, fearing she might drive him away. He sensed well enough that she wished to be alone. But she neither welcomed nor dismissed him.

"I didn't know you were ill, Helen," he said, seating himself where he could see her face well.

"I am not ill," she replied, a little impatiently, rising and crossing the room, and standing at the window, facing it, not him.

"But you sent for Latham."

Helen made no answer.

Stephen persisted, "And you carried him off to your room after breakfast, and said plainly enough, that you wished to be undisturbed there."

"Yes, and I meant it. But it was to talk to him of something quite different from my health."

"May I know what it was?" Pryde asked, going to the window, looking at her searchingly with his keen, speculative eyes.

"You, Stephen? No." She could scarcely have spoken more coldly. And again she crossed the room, and stood looking down into the fire this time, her face once more out of the range of his eyes.

Pryde bit his lip, but he made no further bid for her confidence. He knew it would be useless—and worse. Neither spoke again for some time. Only the tick-tick of the grandfather's clock, rewound and set now, touched the absolute silence. At last he said, "Helen."

"Yes." She turned and faced him, but both her voice and her face were cold and discouraging. He was risking too much, he was rasping his cousin; and he knew it. But for the life of him he could not desist. Such moments come to men sometimes, and against the impulse the firmest will is helpless.

"Do you remember losing a little blue shoe, years ago?" he began.

"I? No."

"You did—the day we first came here. I found it. And I kept it. I have it still.

I've always had it. I had it at Oxford."

Helen sat down wearily, looking bored.

"I loved that little blue shoe, even the day I found and kept it—because it was yours. I have treasured it all these years—because it was yours. I shall keep it always."

The girl shrugged her shoulders a little unkindly. "Well," she said indifferently, "I don't suppose it would fit me now."

Her irresponsiveness stung him. He crossed to her quickly and laid a masterful hand on her chair. "Have you thought over what I told you?—about what I feel—about what Uncle Dick wished?"

She answered him then, and anything but indifferently. "Not now, Stephen," she said impatiently, "I can't talk of that now."

"But you must."

"Must?"

Her voice should have warned him. There was anger in it, contempt even, indignation, no quarter. And it was final. Not so do coquettes parry and fence and invite. Not so do women who love, or are learning to love, postpone the hour they half fear, the joy they hesitate to reveal or confess. Perfectly, too, Stephen caught the portents of her tone, but he was past warning. Love and impatience goaded him. He had reached his Rubicon, and he must cross it, or go down in it, engulfed and defeated. A vainer man would have taken alarm and retreated definitely from sure discomfiture and chagrin. A man who loved less would have spared the girl and himself. A wiser man, more self-contained, would have waited. Stephen Pryde plunged on, and plunged badly—every word an offense, every tone provocation.

"Can't you see how vital this is to me?" he demanded roughly, his voice as impatient as hers had been, and altogether lacking her calm. "I must know what you are going to do, I must know." He could not even deny himself the dire word the most obnoxious a man can use to a woman. A blow from his hand, if she loves him enough, a woman may forgive, in time half forget—some women (the weakest type and the strongest)—but "must" never.

Helen Bransby smiled, and looked up at Pryde squarely, with a sigh of resignation—and of something else too. "Oh! if you must know now, if I 'must' tell you, I must." Then the longing in his face smote her, and the thought of her father quickened her gentleness, as it always did, and she stayed her sting. "Are you certain," she concluded earnestly, almost kindly, "that it was Daddy's wish that we should be married—you and I?"

"Quite certain," Pryde answered in a firm voice. But his hands were trembling.

“I want to do everything he wanted,” Helen said wistfully.

The man turned away, even took a few steps from her, to grapple a moment with his own mad emotion. He felt victory in his grasp—victory hot on his craven fear, victory after despair, victory after hunger and thirst. He swung round and came back reaching towards her—his face transfigured, his voice clarion sweet, his eyes flashing, *and* brimming. “Helen——”

She motioned him back. “Oh, don’t misunderstand me. I can’t do this. I told Daddy, when he was here, that it was Hugh or no one for me. Even to please him then I couldn’t change. I can’t change now.”

“And Hugh—that’s the only reason?” Pryde persisted doggedly. But he spoke breathlessly now, for a fear had chilled in on his ardor: did she suspect him? had she found anything? What had she and Latham said to each other? “Is that the only reason, Helen?” he besought her again.

“Yes,” she replied, considering him gravely.

“Then perhaps in time,” he begged.

She rose impatiently and crossed to another seat, speaking as she went. His nearness annoyed her.

“No, Stephen, never.”

He blanched, but again he would have spoken, but Helen gave him no time. “Now, please,” she said very clearly, “leave me here for a little while—I want to be alone *here*.”

“No,” he exclaimed peremptorily, with sudden fear. “No, I can’t leave you here—not in this room, anywhere else, but not here. This room is bad for you. Come.”

“You are to go,” she told him quietly, “and now, please.”

“Why—why do you want to be alone—here?” he pleaded.

She answered him gently. “Just to think of Daddy. You know I haven’t been here since——”

His love, his tenderness reasserted his manhood then. “Of course—forgive me—I understand—I did not mean to speak sharply—but I hate to see you grieve so.” For a moment he stood looking down on her bowed head. Then he just touched her hand—it lay on the back of her chair—lingeringly, reverently, and said again as he went from the room, “I hate to see you grieve so.”

The girl sat bowed and brooding. After a time she rose and moved about the familiar place, touching old trifles, recalling old scenes. She stood a long time by the bookcase gazing at the volumes he had loved and handled, peering with brimming eyes at their well-known titles. She did not touch the jade Joss, but she lingered at it longest, choking, trembling. Then her face cleared—transfigured. A rapt look came over it—a look of love, longing, great expectation. Men have

turned such looks to the bride of an hour. Mothers have bent such looks on the babe first, and new come, at their breast. She reached out her young arms in acceptance, obedience, greeting, entreaty—and said to the air—to the room —“I’m here, Daddy. I’m here.”

CHAPTER XXVII

But no father came to her call, no companion from the void to her tryst. She waited, feeling, or thinking that she felt, the air touch her hair, brush her face, cool but kindly, and once cross her lips. She waited, but only the light air, or her fancy of it, came.

She knelt down by the old chair in which she had seen him last until she had seen him in his majesty, on the floor, in the hall. She laid her head on the seat that had been his, and wept there softly, disappointed, overwrought.

Some one was coming; some one very much of this world. High heels clattered on the inlaid hall floor, silk sounded crisply, and an expensive Persian perfume—attar probably—came in as a hand turned the knob on the other side and pushed the door open, and with the perfume the silken frou-frou, a jumble of several furs, lace and pearls, and Angela in a very big hat and a chinchilla coat. She closed the door behind her—an odd thing for an unexpected, uninvited guest to do, and she closed it quietly, for her very quietly. She tip-toed across the room stealthily, caught sight of Helen and screamed.

At the sound of some one coming Helen had risen to her feet and pulled herself together with the quick pluck of her sex. But she was still too overwrought to grasp entirely the strangeness of her friend's behavior. Mrs. Hilary was dumfounded. She had thought Helen in London. She had crept into the house through a side door, come through the halls secretly and as silently as such shoes and so much silk and many draperies could, meeting no one and hoping neither to be seen nor heard. Her errand was particularly private. She had not been surprised to find the library door unlocked, for she had not been deeper in the house than the drawing-room since Mr. Bransby's death. She and Mrs. Leavitt were far from intimate. And Mrs. Hilary had not heard of the taboo Helen had placed on the father's room. She was dumfounded to find Helen here, and bitterly disappointed. But she noticed little amiss with the girl. Each was too agitated to realize the agitation of the other.

Helen pulled herself together and waited, Angela pulled herself together and gushed; each with the woman's shrewd instinct to appear natural and much as usual.

Angela supplemented her cry of dismay with an even shriller cry of enthusiastic delight.

"My dearest Helen! How perfectly lovely!"

"This is a surprise," Helen said more quietly. Of the two she was the less

surprised and far the more pleased.

"Yes—isn't it—a surprise?"

"You didn't expect to see me?" What had brought Angela rushing into this room, then?

Mrs. Hilary saw her blunder as soon as she made it, even while she was making it almost. She was greatly confused—a thing that did not often befall Angela Hilary. She and embarrassment rarely met.

"No," she stammered. "No—I—uh—yes, yes, I came over to——" She was utterly at a loss now. "Well," she went on desperately, "I happened to be passing ——" She broke off suddenly, looking anxiously at the window, and then looked away from it pointedly, and hurried on with, "I came to see if, by any chance, it was you Margaret McIntyre caught a glimpse of in the grounds yesterday. But—I—I didn't see you when I came in here. It's so dark here, after the hall. When did you come? Are you going to stay long?"

"I came suddenly—on an impulse—to find something. I may stay. I may go back to-morrow. I don't know. But I haven't unpacked much."

Mrs. Hilary seized on the pretext this offered to get rid of Helen. She had been searching her excited mind for one wildly for some moments. "Then," she said sharply, "you must see at once that your things are properly unpacked. Nothing spoils things like being crushed in trunks. And, as for chiffons! Go at once."

"But," Helen began.

"At once. I insist. You must not let me keep you. I shall be all right here, and when you have finished——" She was pushing Helen towards the door.

"Don't be absurd, Angela," the girl laughed—freeing herself, "my things can wait—I may not unpack them at all."

"Are you sure—sure they can wait?" Mrs. Hilary said lamely.

"Of course I am sure, you absurdity. Besides, tea must be ready in the drawing-room. Angela, Dr. Latham is here."

Angela dimpled and flushed. "Oh! is he—is he really?"

Helen nodded.

Angela sat down and opened her vanity bag. She propped the mirror up on the table, shook out her powder puff, tried it on one cheek, refilled and applied it liberally, thinking, thinking, as she beautified. How could she get rid of Helen? She wanted to see Horace Latham, of course, but she had something much more important to attend to first. Latham could wait—for once in a way. As she piled on powder, and flicked it off, another idea came to her. She seized it. "You go along now, dear, and I'll follow you."

Helen shook her head. "You will stop prinking and come with me, now."

“Very well,” Mrs. Hilary said reluctantly, letting Helen take her arm and lead her to the door. At the door she cried, “Oh! Oh!” pressed her hand to her side and staggered back to a chair. She did it beautifully. It scarcely could have been done better.

“What is it, Angela?” Helen was thoroughly alarmed.

“Oh! the whole room is swimming.”

“My dear——”

“You must think I am awfully silly.” She could only just speak.

“You poor thing—of course I don’t. Perhaps a glass of water——”

Mrs. Hilary shook her head violently—far too violently for so ill a woman.

“I’ll get Dr. Latham.”

“Please don’t,” the invalid said sharply, and then, “I’m not well enough to see a doctor,” she wailed.

“But I’m worried about you, Angela.”

“There’s nothing to worry about. It’s only the pain, the pain and the faintness, the horrid faintness. If only I had some smelling salts,” she moaned.

“There are some in my dressing-case,” Helen said quickly. “I’ll ring.”

“Oh no, no, you mustn’t!” Mrs. Hilary cried. “I—I—can’t let Barker see me like this. No, no! Don’t do that. Couldn’t you get them yourself, dear? Couldn’t you? Do you mind?”

“Why, no—of course not.” Helen was puzzled—and a little amused. How absurd Angela was—even when ill.

“How long will it take you?” Mrs. Hilary asked faintly.

“About two minutes.”

“That will do nicely,” the sick woman said with sudden cheerfulness. “Helen,” she cried fretfully as the other turned to go, “don’t hurry. You are not to hurry. Promise me you won’t hurry. It drives me crazy to have people hurry.”

Helen studied her friend for a moment, shook a puzzled and a now somewhat suspicious head, and went slowly out.

As the door closed the fainting one bounced up, searched the room rapidly with her sharp American eyes, rushed to the window, threw it open, and leaned out far over the sill.

“It’s all right, thank goodness, at last! Come in!” she called in a shrill whisper.

A brown hand clasped the sill in a moment. In another a khaki-clad man swung up into the room. Hugh had come home.

Not the spick and span serviceless subaltern of eight months ago, but a sergeant, battered and brown—his uniform worn and faded, his face thin and alert. Hugh Pryde’s face had never been that before.

“My, but I’ve had a time,” Angela Hilary told him.

Once in the familiar room he looked about it quickly, heaved a great sigh of relief, threw his cap on the table, and laid his hands on the back of a chair affectionately, as if greeting an old friend.

Mrs. Hilary shut the window carefully. “Did any one see you come through the garden?” she asked.

“No.”

“Sure?”

“Quite.”

“Well, thank Heaven for that much.”

“Helen?” he begged. “No danger of her seeing me?” he added.

“No—no—of course not,” Angela replied promptly. “I told you she was in town.”

Hugh sighed. “I want to see her—but I mustn’t.”

“Of course you mustn’t.” Mrs. Hilary was plainly shocked at the very idea. “Of course not—but I’m sure she’d want to see you, if she knew—and, if she hadn’t been in town, she might help you. Do you know? I almost wish she’d come in by accident, and find you.”

Hugh drew a sharp breath. “No, no!” he said quickly, “I promised not to see her until I could show that I was innocent.”

“Well, now that you *are* in this room, I hope you can prove it quickly. This atmosphere of conspirator is wearing me to a frazzle. I’m so jumpy my powder won’t half stick on, and that’s awful. And every time I see a policeman the cold chills run up and down my spine, and I speckle all over with goose-flesh. This morning one of them came to see me about a dog license and I was so terrified I went wobbly and almost fainted away in his arms. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll go and have some tea.” She turned to go, elated and dimpling—like the child that she was.

“Mrs. Hilary!” Hugh delayed her. She turned back to him. “You’ve been a dear.”

“I always am.”

He caught her hands. “I’ve a lot to thank you for. You know I can’t say things—I never could. But I want you to know how I appreciate it.”

“Oh! that’s nothing,” she said gayly. “You mustn’t thank me. It wasn’t kindness. It’s just sheer creature weakness; it’s simply that I don’t seem able to resist a uniform, I never could. There was a German band in ’Frisco——” But she heard a light step in the hall. “Good gracious! I’m forgetting Dr. Latham. Good luck!” she cried hysterically and sped from the room, as Helen stood in the door.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Angela Hilary was half crying, half laughing, when she danced into the drawing-room. The tea still stood on the low table, steam still hissed from the kettle. But only Latham was there, alone, on the hearthrug. She swept him a low curtsey, caught him by the shoulders and swung him into the center of the room, whistling a ravishing melody in three-four time. He put his arm about her gravely, and they waltzed on and on until Barker cried, “Oh lor!” in the doorway.

“It’s all right,” Angela told her. “It’s callisthenics. Dr. Latham R-Xed for my health. I’ve a touch of gout, Barker.” But Barker had fled giggling.

“You’ve more than a touch of the devil,” the physician corrected her severely. Angela giggled too at that, a sweeter, more seductive giggle than Barker’s.

“Mein kleiner Herr Doktor!” she began sweetly. They were still standing where they had been when Barker arrested their waltzing. Latham caught her and shook her. “Bitte erlauben Sie! ich bin nicht eine Ihrer armen Kranken und verbitte mir Auftreten. Jetzt sind Sie erzürnt, über nichts, wahrhaftig nichts. Ach! die Männer, wie sind Sie dumm!” She poured out at him. It irritated the Englishman to be chattered to in intimate German, and Angela Hilary delighted in doing it. She had done it to him many times more than once, and the more he squirmed the more eloquent, the swifter grew her German. She had spoken to him in the hated language all through an otherwise dull dinner-party, a dour Bishop on her other side, an indignant and very bony suffragette just across the table. She had done it at Church Parade, and at Harrods (she had dragged him out shopping twice), in the Abbey and in the packed stalls of the Garrick.

“Hush, or I’ll make you,” he warned her now. He intended her to say, “How?” And she knew it and smiled. But she said nothing of the sort—but, almost gravely, “Oh! but I’m happy!”

“You look it.”

“So happy. So glad.”

“It suits you,” he said. “Do you know, I rather intend to try it myself.”

“It?”

“Happiness.”

Angela flushed. “Shall we dance some more?” she said quickly.

Latham picked her up and put her into a chair. “Barker’s face was enough. I prefer to avoid Mrs. Leavitt’s.”

Mrs. Hilary looked up at him wickedly. “Please, must I stay-put?”

“Must you what?”

“Insular Englishman, ‘stay-put’ is graphic American. By the way, why do you dislike Americans so?”

“I should like you even better as a British subject,” he admitted.

Angela Hilary turned to the fire and spoke into it. “Oh, this war—this wretched war! But, do you know, Dr. Latham,” swinging back to him—she could not keep turned from him long—“do you know, I’ve been thinking.” Latham smiled indulgently. “Oh! I think a great deal, a very great deal.”

“When?”

“Well—for one thing—I think most all night—every night.”

He let the enormity pass. “And this last cogitation, of which you were about to speak——”

“When you interrupted me rudely.”

“When I interrupted you with flaming interest. It was about our present war, I apprehend.”

“I was thinking what a lot of good people were getting out of it—different people such different good. I don’t suppose there’s any one who hasn’t reaped some real benefit from it, if they’d stop and think.”

Horace Latham shook his head slowly. “I wonder.”

“Oh, I don’t; I’m sure.”

He studied the fire flames gravely for a time. Then he sighed, shook off the mood her words had called forth, and turned to her lightly.

“And what benefit has Mrs. Hilary reaped from the war?”

She knitted her brows, and sat very still. Suddenly her face kindled and her lips quivered mutinously.

“I know. I’ve learned how to spell sugar.”

Latham laughed. This woman who spoke three other tongues as fluently and probably as erratically as she did English, and whose music was such as few amateurs and not all professionals could approach, was an atrocious speller, and every one knew it who had ever been favored with a letter from her. Latham had been favored with many. He had waste-paper-basketed them at first—but of late he did not.

“I can!!” she insisted. “S-U-G-A-R. There! Sugar, color, collar, their, reign, oh! what I’ve suffered over those words! I spent a whole day once at school hunting for ‘sword’ in the dictionary (I do think of all the silly books dictionaries are the silliest), and then I never found it. Think of shoving a *w* into sword. Who wants it? I don’t. Nobody needs it. Silly language.”

“Which language can your high wisdomship spell the least incorrectly?” he asked pleasantly.

“Mein werter Herr Doktor, das Buchstabiren ist mir Nebensache. Ich sprache vier Sprachen flissend—Sie kaum im Stande sind nur eine zu stammeln doch glauben Sie dass eine Frau ohne Fehler sei wenn sie richtig Englisch schreibt und nur an die drei k’s denkt—wir man in Deutschland zu sagen pflegt—Kirche, Kinder und Küche,” she said in a torrent.

“You are ill,” he said, “I am going to prescribe for you.”

“What?” She made a wry face. “What?”

“This,” he gathered her into his arms and kissed her swiftly—and then again—more than once.

At last she pushed him away. “It took some doing,” she told herself in the glass that night. But to him she said gravely, “To be taken only three times a day—after meals.”

“No fear!” Her physician cried, “To be taken again and again!” And it was.

The chatterbox was silent and shy. But Horace Latham had a great deal to tell her. He had only begun to say it, haltingly at first, then swifter and swifter, man dominating and wooing his woman, when Angela cried imploringly, “Hush!”

He thought that she heard some one coming. But it was not that. Angela Hilary was planning her wedding-dress. He hushed at her cry, and sat studying her face. Presently she fell to knotting and unknotting his long fingers.

“Silk has most distinction,” she said to the fire, “and satin has its points. Oh, yes, satin has points, but I think velvet, yes—velvet and white fox.”

“What are you talking about?” demanded her lover.

Angela giggled.

CHAPTER XXIX

For a long time neither spoke, or moved. Then Hugh held out his arms, and Helen came into them. And still neither spoke. The old clock ticked the moments, and the beat of their hearts throbbed tremblingly.

At last they spoke, each at the same instant.

“Helen”—“Hugh.”

She lifted her hand from his shoulder, and fondled his face.

Of course, she spoke first, when either could speak beyond that first syllable.

“Oh, my dear, my dear!” she said. “I thought you were never coming back to me.”

He caught her hands and held them against his heart.

“I couldn’t come, Helen. You know that—not until I had made things right.”

The glad blood rushed to her face. “Oh! Hugh,” she cried, “then you have made things right, you have found out? I am so glad, so glad!”

“Why no, dear,” he faltered, “not yet. But that’s why I’ve come.”

She paled a little, but her voice and her eyes were brave. “It doesn’t matter—nothing matters, now that you have come back to me. Oh, I’m so glad—I’ve missed you so, Hugh—I’ve missed you so”—the bravery had died in a little girlish wail.

“My dear”—it was all he could say.

“Where have you been all these months?” she asked, pushing him to a chair, and kneeling beside him, her arms on his knee.

“When I left here that night”—he laid a hand on her hair—“and had to give up my commission, I went straight to a recruiting office—and joined up as a private, under another name.”

“And now,” she said with a soft laugh, laying her cheek against the stripes on his sleeve, “you’re a sergeant. You have been to the front?” The young voice was very proud as she said it. Her man had given battle.

“I went almost at once.”

“And I never knew.” How much she had missed!

“It wasn’t until a few weeks ago I learned of Uncle Dick’s death,” Hugh said gently.

“He died that night, Hugh,” Helen whispered—“just there—in the hall.”

“Yes—I know,” he nodded, his arm on her shoulder. Neither said more for a space. Presently he told her, “I’ve had luck out there. I have been recommended for a commission.”

“I think I like this best,” the girl said, stroking his sleeve. “But it’s splendid that you’ve won through the ranks. That’s the kind of commission worth having—the only kind.”

“But I can’t accept it until I can tell them who I am. That’s why I got leave—to come back and try and clear myself. I didn’t know until I reached England that I had been published as a deserter—that there was a warrant for my arrest.”

“You didn’t know that?” Helen said, in her surprise rising to her feet.

“No—Uncle Dick promised to arrange matters—he must have died before he had the chance—of course he did—but I never thought of that. So now I’ve got to clear my name—of two pretty black things—or give myself up,” he said, rising and standing beside her, face to face.

She shuddered a little, and she could not keep all her anxiety out of her voice.

“And you think you can clear yourself? You have some plan?”

“Not a plan exactly,” he shook his head gropingly, “only a vague sort of—I don’t know what to call it.”

Helen was bitterly disappointed. “Why, what do you mean?” she asked wistfully.

“Helen,” he said awkwardly, diffidently. “You mustn’t think me quite mad—but I don’t know that I can make you understand—only—well—all these months out there—I have been haunted by an idea—oh! Helen, strange things have come to many of us out there—at night—in the trenches—lying by our guns waiting—in the thick of the fight even—things that will never be believed by those who didn’t see them—never forgotten, or doubted again, by those who did. I don’t know how it came to me—or when exactly—but somehow I came to believe that, yes, to *know* it, that, if I could come back to this room, I would find something to prove my innocence. I don’t know how, I didn’t know how, but the thing was so strong I couldn’t resist it.”

Helen Bransby’s heart stood still. Something fanned on her face. She stood before Hugh almost transfixed. Slowly, reluctantly even, her eyes left his face, and moved mechanically until they halted and rested on a green-and-pink toy blinking in the sunset. Sunset was fast turning to twilight. The room was flooded and curtained with shadows.

“I always felt,” Hugh continued, “that when I got to this room something would come to me.” Then his manner changed abruptly, the scorn of the modern man mocking and scoffing the embryo seer, and he said bitterly, “I dare say I’ve been a fool—but it all seemed so real—so vivid—so real.” His last words were plaintive with human longing and uncertainty.

“I know,” she smiled a little, but her voice was deeply earnest.

Hugh regarded her in amazement. “You know?” he said breathlessly, catching her hand.

“Yes.” She seemed to find the rest difficult to say. He waited tensely, and with a long intaking of breath she went on, “Hugh, did you ever think where this feeling might come from?”

“Well—no,” he replied lamely, “how could I? It was an impression, I dare say, just because this room was so much in my thoughts.”

“No, it wasn’t that,” Helen said staunchly. “Hugh, I have had this feeling too.”

“You, Helen!”

“Yes. *I have it now*—strongly. For a long time I’ve felt that there was something that I could do—something I must do—something that would make things right for you.”

“But, my dear”—Hugh was frightened, anxious for her.

“That’s why I came down here a few days ago. Why I came to this room an hour ago——” she hurried on—“all at once, in London, I knew that there was something in this room that would clear you.”

Hugh was baffled—and strangely impressed. “That is curious,” he said very slowly.

“Hugh,” she whispered clearly, “don’t you realize where this feeling—that we both have—comes from?”

He shook his head slowly—puzzled—quite in the dark.

“Think!”

Again a slow shake of the head.

“Daddy—Daddy is trying to help us!”

CHAPTER XXX

Too amazed to speak, too stunned to think, Hugh Pryde stood rigid—dumfounded. Helen was breathing rapidly, her breast rising and falling in great heaves, waves of alternate shadow and sunset veiling and lighting her face, her eyes far off and set, her hands reaching out to——

"Helen, my dear——" he said, brought to himself by her strangeness.

"Oh!" she cried fiercely, great longing fluting her voice—she was more intensely nervous than her companion had ever seen any one before, and he had seen hundreds of untried boys on the eve of battle—"Oh! it must be so. Why should the same thought come to us both—you at the front—I in London—come—so—vividly? And without any reason!—I am sure it's Daddy."

At the sight of her exaltation all his cocksure masculinity reasserted itself. He laid a patronizing, affectionate hand on her arm. "Don't distress yourself with this, dear," he said soothingly, "I can't let you. Our both having the same feeling must have been only a coincidence."

She shook off his hand with gentle impatience, the sex impatience of quick woman with man's dullness, a delicate rage as old as the Garden of Eden. "No, no," she said chidingly. "It wasn't only that—it wasn't only that."

Her earnestness shook him a little—and perhaps his wish did too: any port in a storm, even a supernatural one!

"But if Uncle Dick could bring us to this room," he asked slowly, "why doesn't he show us what to do?"

"He will," she said—almost sternly—"he will—now that he has brought us here—why, that proves it! Don't you see? I see!—now that he has brought us here—*He will come to us.*" She sank down into a low chair near the writing-table, her eyes rapt, riveted on space.

Again masculine superiority reasserted itself, and something creature-love, and chivalry too—jostling aside the "almost I am persuaded" that the moment before had cried in his soul, and Hugh put a pitying hand on her shoulder, saying,

"I don't want to make you unhappy, Helen, but that's impossible." Thought-transference, spiritual-wireless—um—well, perhaps—but *ghosts*!—perish the folly!

Helen looked up, and, at something in her face, he took his hand from her shoulder. The girl shivered. And in another moment the khaki-clad man shivered too—rather violently. "How cold it is here," he said, and repeated somewhat

dreamily—“How cold!”

“Yes,” Helen echoed in an unnatural voice, “cold.”

“I must have left the window open,” Hugh said with an effort. He went to the casement. “No,” he said with a puzzled frown. “I did close it—tight.” He crossed to Helen again and stood looking down on her—worried and at sea. She sighed and looked up—almost he could see her mood of exaltation, or emotion, or whatever it was, pass. She spoke to him in a clear, natural voice. “What are we going to do, Hugh? We must do something.”

“I don’t know,” he said hopelessly—and began moving restlessly about the room.

Suddenly Helen sat upright and gave a swift half-frightened look over her shoulder.

“Hugh!”

He came to her at once. “Yes.”

“Don’t think me hysterical—but we don’t *know* that Daddy couldn’t come back—we *can’t be sure*. What if he were here, in this room now, trying to tell us something, and we couldn’t understand?”

“Helen, my dearest,” Hugh deprecated.

“Wait,” she whispered, rising slowly. “Wait!” For an instant she stood erect, her slim height carved by the last of the sunshine out of the shadows—trance-like, rigid. But at that sybil-moment Stephen Pryde opened the door softly and came through it. The girl’s taut figure quivered, relaxed, and with a moan—“No—no—I—no—no——” she sank down again and buried her face in her hands.

Richard Bransby come from the dead could scarcely have confounded Stephen more than the sight of Hugh did. For a moment of distraught dismay the elder brother stood supine and irresolute on the threshold. Then forcing himself to face dilemma, and to deal with it, if possible, as such natures do at terribly crucial moments—until they reach their breaking point—he called his brother by name.

Hugh swung round with a glad exclamation of surprise, and held out his hand. Stephen gripped it; and, when he could trust his voice, he said,

“I had no idea you were here.”

Helen rose and went to them eagerly. “He has come back to us, Stephen, he has been to France—he has been offered a commission—he has proved himself,” she poured out in one exultant breath.

“I am glad to see you, Hugh, very glad——” Stephen said gravely, “but you shouldn’t have come.”

“Why not?” the girl demanded.

Stephen turned to her then; he had paid no attention to her before, scarcely

had known of her presence.

“The warrant,” he said to her sadly. “Hugh,” at once turning again to him, “didn’t you know that there was a warrant out for your arrest?”

“I only heard of it a day or two ago.”

“Then you must realize what a risk you run in coming here. Why did you take such a chance?”

“He came to clear himself,” Helen interposed.

“What?” Stephen cried, his dismay undisguised, but the others were too overwrought to catch it. “What?” Stephen repeated huskily.

“He believes—and so do I——” Helen answered—“that there is something in this room that will prove his innocence.”

“In this room?” Stephen Pryde’s voice trembled with fear; fear so obvious that only the intensest absorption could have missed it.

“Yes,” Helen said firmly.

Stephen controlled himself with a great effort—it was masterly—“What—what is it?” he forced himself to ask, turning directly to Hugh and looking searchingly into his eyes.

“I don’t know—yet,” Hugh said regretfully. Stephen gave a breath of relief, and sat down; his legs were aching from his mental anxiety and tension. “But,” Hugh went on, “I am certain I can find something that will clear me, if Helen will allow me to search this room.”

Hugh search this room! At that suggestion, panic, such as even yet he had not known, in all these hideous months of hidden panic, caught Stephen Pryde and shook him, man as he was and man-built, as if palsy-stricken. Neither Helen nor Hugh could possibly have overlooked a state so pitiful and so abject, if either had looked at him at that moment. But neither did.

“Allow!” the girl said scornfully, both hands on Hugh’s shoulders. “Allow! Me allow you! You are master here,” she added proudly.

Once more Stephen Pryde commanded himself. It was bravely done. Hugh’s head was bent over Helen—the woman Stephen loved—Hugh’s lips were lingering on her hair. Stephen commanded himself, and spoke with quiet emphasis—

“No—no! You must not do that.”

“Why not?” Helen said sharply, turning a little in Hugh’s arm.

“Don’t you see?” Stephen answered smoothly, his eyes very kind, his voice affectionate and solicitous. “Every moment you stay here, Hugh, you run a great risk. You must get away, at once, to some safe place, and then—I’ll make the search for you. Indeed I intended doing so.”

“No—no—that wouldn’t be right,” Hugh said impulsively, not in the least

knowing why he said it. “I don’t know why,” he added slowly, “but that wouldn’t be right.” As he spoke he turned his head and looked over his shoulder almost as if listening to some one from whose prompting he spoke. The movement of his head was unusual and somehow suggested apprehension. And he spoke hesitatingly, automatically, as if some one else threw him the word.

“What are you looking at?” Stephen said uneasily.

Hugh turned back with an awkward laugh. “Ah—um—nothing,” he said lamely.

CHAPTER XXXI

Often life seems one long series of interruptions; and, more often than not, interruptions are petty and annoying. That it is our inconsequential acquaintances who interrupt us most frequently is easily enough understood—far more easily understood than accepted. But it is much more difficult to understand how often some crisis is transmuted or decided by some very minor personality, and a personality in no way concerned in the crucial thing it decides or alters.

Stephen was determined that Hugh should go—and go now.

Hugh was determined to stay, at all cost, until he had searched, and exhausted search of, this room to which both he and Helen had been so stupendously impressed.

Helen wished him to stay, but feared his staying. Her will in the matter swung an unhappy pendulum to and fro between the two wills of the brothers.

Hugh, Helen, and Stephen, and of all the world they alone, were vitally interested in the pending decision and in its consequences. How that decision would have gone, left to them, can never be known.

Barker the inept, and old Morton Grant fated an intruder at Deep Dale, interrupted, and, so to speak, decided the issue.

"Nothing," Hugh had replied evasively to his brother's "What are you looking at?" and had gone to the window, as if to avoid further question. Stephen, unsatisfied, was following him persistently when Barker opened the door and announced, "Mr. Grant." Helen started to check her, but Stephen with a quick gesture, stayed her, and before she could speak speech was too late. Barker blundered out, and Grant came timidly in.

The old clerk had aged and broken sadly in eight months. Very evidently he was more in awe of Stephen Pryde than at the worst of times he had been of Richard Bransby. He stood awkwardly just inside the room, and fumbled with his hat, and fumbled for words.

"Good—er—good-afternoon, Mr. Pryde. How do you do, Miss Bransby? I trust——"

Stephen interrupted him sharply. "Well, Grant?"

"Er—I—I—am very sorry to intrude on you like this——"

"Yes, yes; but what do you want?" Stephen snapped.

"It's—it's about Mr. Hugh, sir."

Stephen and Helen exchanged a quick look, she all apprehension, he trying

to hide his elation, trying to look anxious too. Hugh turned at his name and came toward the others.

"About me? Well, here I am. What about me, Grant?"

The old man was amazed and moved. "Mr. Hugh," he stammered, letting his inseparable hat fall into a chair. "God bless me—it *is* Mr. Hugh."

"Accurate as ever, Grant, eh?" Hugh chaffed him, smiling with boyish friendliness.

Morton Grant went to him eagerly, almost as if about to verify his own eyesight by touch.

"You are all right, sir? You are well?"

"Never better."

"I am glad, sir. I'm very glad indeed," the old man said brokenly.

Stephen Pryde had had enough of this. "Yes, yes, yes," he interrupted testily; "but why are you here, Grant? You said it was about Hugh."

"It is, sir," the clerk answered quickly, recalled to his errand; "the—the authorities came to the office to-day, searching for him."

"Well, that's cheerful," Hugh commented.

Helen gave a little sob.

"It appears," Grant continued, "that he has been seen and recognized lately. They thought we might have news of him."

Stephen turned to Hugh curtly, but still trying to hide his triumph.

"You see the risks you are running."

"What did you tell them, Grant?" Hugh asked.

"I said we knew nothing of your whereabouts, sir. Then I came directly here."

"Were you followed?" Stephen asked sharply.

The question and the idea took Grant aback. "I—I don't think so, sir!" he said feebly. "It never occurred to me that such a thing was possible. I've never had any experience with the police," he apologized sadly.

"Your common sense should have told you not to come," Stephen said brutally.

"I dare say, sir," Grant admitted piteously; "but it seemed to me to be the only thing I could do."

"You must go back at once," Stephen ordered.

"Very good, sir," Grant agreed meekly.

"And if you are questioned again——"

For the first time in his life, Morton Grant interrupted an employer. And he did it brusquely and with determined self-assertion.

"I shall say that I have seen nothing of Mr. Hugh—absolutely nothing."

Hugh went to him with outstretched hand; but Helen was there first.

“Oh yes, that’s fine—fine,” Stephen said briskly.

Helen caught Grant’s arm in her hands, and thanked him without a word—with swimming eyes. But Hugh spoke.

“Thank you, Grant.”

Grant paid no attention to Stephen Pryde, and Helen he gave but an embarrassed scant look. Hugh’s hand he took in his. He was much affected, and the old voice shook.

“Mr. Hugh—I want you to know—I’ve always wanted you to know—that telling Mr. Bransby about the—about the shortage—was the hardest thing I ever did. But I had to do it.”

Hugh pressed the hand he held. “I know, Grant,” he said cordially. “And you were quite right to tell him.”

“God bless you, Mr. Hugh.” Morton Grant felt for his handkerchief. He thought he was filling up for a cold.

“God bless you, Grant,” the young fellow said, still holding the old clerk’s hand.

Stephen Pryde intervened sharply. “Come, come, Grant, you mustn’t waste time like this.”

“Very good, sir, I’ll—I’ll go at once.” But at the door he turned and lingered a moment to say to Hugh,

“I hope—I trust that everything will be all right for you, sir.”

“That ought to convince you that I am right,” Stephen said imperatively to his brother, as the door closed behind Grant. “You *must* get away from here now—the quicker the better.”

“But I can’t go now, Stephen,” the younger man pled; “I simply can’t go until—not yet——”

“They are certain to come here for you,” Stephen insisted; “they are certain to do that.”

“But before they can come I will have searched.”

But Stephen interrupted again, more sharply.

“Besides, Latham is in the house. He may come into this room at any minute—we couldn’t ask him to be a party to this. By Jove! no; he mustn’t see you; now I think of it, he suspects something already; he was questioning me shrewdly yesterday. I didn’t like it then, I like it very much less now. The coast’s quite clear,” he said, looking through the door. “Go up to my room—you will be safe there. Go! Go now. I’ll come to you presently, and we can talk things over—arrange everything.”

Hugh Pryde hesitated. It seemed to him that some strong impulse forbade

him to leave the room. He looked at Helen, but she seemed as hesitating as he, and at last he muttered something about, “Another word to old Grant, the old brick,” and went reluctantly into the hall.

CHAPTER XXXII

Neither followed him, and Stephen did not even call after him “not to linger in the hall, running the risk of being seen,” but turned at once to Helen, who sat brooding and puzzled.

“Helen,” Pryde said earnestly, “you must help me persuade him to go at once.”

“I can’t do that, Stephen,” the girl replied slowly.

“But it’s madness for him to stay here.”

“I’m not so sure of that,” Helen said, shaking her head. “I have the same feeling that he has—exactly the same feeling.”

“Helen, be sensible!” he begged roughly. “Look things in the face! What evidence could there be here that would help you?”

“I can’t answer that,” she replied musingly, “at least not yet. All I know is that this is our one chance.”

“Our one chance?”

“Yes—Hugh’s and mine.”

Stephen Pryde winced. Hers and Hugh’s! They two linked by her, and always. “Yours and Hugh’s,” he said acidly. “Yes, but, Helen, aren’t you forgetting?”

“Forgetting what?”

“Your father’s wishes.”

“Oh,” she returned impatiently, “that was when he believed Hugh guilty; if he proves his innocence——”

“He hasn’t proved it yet,” Stephen broke in viciously.

“But he will,” she said firmly. “Stephen, I am sure he will. You—you wouldn’t wish to stand between us then?”

“Don’t you understand, Helen,” Pryde retorted, “that this is just what your father wanted to save you from? He realized that, if you ever came under Hugh’s influence again, he would make you believe in him.”

“Then you don’t believe in him?” She spoke coldly, and she was fully alert now.

“God knows I wish I could.”

“Stephen!” she cried, rising indignantly, recoiling from him in amazement.

“But I can’t,” Pryde added doggedly. He was furious now.

“Well, I can and do,” the girl said icily. “And I am going to stand by him, no matter what happens. I know he is innocent. But if he were guilty, a thousand

times guilty, it would make no difference to me, none at all in my love. I'd only care for him the more, stand by him the more, and for ever and ever."

The fierce color rushed to Pryde's face, and his hands knotted together in pain.

"Helen," he pled, "you are making things very difficult for me."

"I am sorry, Stephen," she said a little perfunctorily; "but I love Hugh," she added proudly. "He is all I have in the world."

"You don't understand," he retorted sternly. "I promised your father to take care of you. I mean to keep that promise."

"No, I do not understand," Helen said haughtily. She, too, was infuriated now.

"You must send Hugh away at once," Stephen told her abruptly.

"Must? Do you think to force me to do as you wish?"

"Yes."

She had spoken insolently, and he was white to his lips. He loved her, all his life he had loved her; and she knew it. An older woman would have spared him a little, because of that love, because of his pain. Helen hit him again. She went a step nearer, and laughed in his face—a taunting laugh of scorn and dislike.

There was a bitter pause, and then Stephen spoke more carefully, groping to retrieve somewhat the ground his passion had lost.

"You don't seem to realize that Hugh is in a very dangerous position. If—if some one should inform the authorities of his whereabouts——"

"Inform the authorities?" she repeated his words wonderingly. He had not meant to say them, and already regretted them. He bit his lip. Suddenly their meaning dawned on her.

"Stephen," her voice was stiff with horror, horror of him, not fear for Hugh. "You wouldn't do that?"

"I!" he said thickly. "I—no—no—no."

"I'd hate you, if you did that," Helen said quietly. Pryde realized how much too far he had gone. He owed his place in the world to this girl's favor, his hope, still ardent, to fulfill the dreams he had dreamt as a boy, watching the birds; he could not afford to incur her enmity. If love was lost, ambition remained. Fool, fool that he was to imperil that too. He changed his tone, and said shiftily—

"No—no—you misunderstand me—of course I wouldn't."

"It would disgrace Hugh," she persisted hotly; "ruin his whole life, just when he has fought his way up again."

"But don't you see," Stephen urged eagerly, taking quick advantage of the opening her words gave, "that is just what I am trying to prevent? If he is caught, he is certain to be disgraced. The whole truth about the theft would have to come

out. That is why I want him to go from here quickly. It's for his sake—to save him. I'm thinking of him, only of him."

At the word "theft," Helen threw her head up haughtily. But Stephen Pryde was almost past picking his words now. On the whole, though, he was playing his part well, his cards shrewdly. His last words rang true, whatever they in fact were; and Helen was not unimpressed. Incredible as it may seem, Pryde's affection for his brother was not dead, and at sight of Hugh, for all the dilemma with which Hugh's reappearance threatened him, that old-time affection had leapt in the older man's guilt-heavy heart. And it was that, probably, that had given some warmth of truth to his last words, some semblance of conviction to Helen.

But she stood her ground. "He can't go—until he has made his search," she said with quiet finality. "His only chance of proving his innocence is through that."

"But that's absurd," Pryde disputed impatiently. "What evidence could he find here?"

"I don't know yet," Helen admitted. "But I am sure there is something."

"Sure? Why are you so sure?" He spoke eagerly, all his uneasiness rekindled at her confident words, the poor thief in him fearing each syllable an officer.

His cousin thought a little, and then she answered him, and more kindly.

"Stephen, I haven't been quite frank with you, because I know you don't believe what I believe, but I must tell you the truth now."

"Well?" he said breathlessly.

"Hugh and I have both had a message from Daddy, telling us that the proof that would clear him is in this room."

"A message—a message from your father?" His agitation was increasing, but he did his utmost to conquer it.

"Yes," Helen replied gravely.

"He left you—he left you letters?" Pryde's voice was thick with terror. Few as his words were, he spoke them with difficulty.

"No!" Helen shook her head.

"Then how"—his voice trembled and so did his hands—"how did the message come?"

"It only came lately—from the other side."

"From the other side?" Stephen asked blankly.

Helen nodded. For a moment he looked at her in utter perplexity, and then a light broke faintly.

"Oh!" he said incredulously. "You—you mean the messages came from a dead man?"

“Yes,” Helen said assuredly.

Pryde’s relief was so great that he could scarcely control it or himself. He felt faint and sick with elation, and presently he broke into hysterical laughter. It was the second time he had laughed so in this room.

Helen regarded him offendedly. Indeed, feeling as she felt, and at stake what she had at stake, his mirth was offensive. But the boisterous merriment was his safety-valve.

When he was able to check himself, and he did as soon as he could, he said, more affectionately than superiorly,

“Helen, surely you can’t be serious?”

“I am,” she answered curtly. She was indignant.

“But,” Stephen persisted, “you can’t believe such preposterous nonsense. A message from the dead! It’s too absurd!”

“You will see that it is not,” the girl told him coldly.

“I shall have to wait a long time for that, I am afraid,” he returned patronizingly. He was quite himself now. He rose carelessly and strolled to the writing-table. But as he went the menace that still threatened him reasserted itself in his mind. He turned again to Helen. “And this message from the dead, as you call it, is your only reason for believing that there was some evidence in this room that would clear Hugh?”

“Yes.” She vouchsafed the word inimically.

Pryde drew a long breath of relief, and turned from her vexed face. As he turned, his eye fell again on the writing-table and traveled, as before, from it to the fireplace. He stood musing, and presently, scarcely conscious of what he was saying, said—

“And for a time you quite impressed me. I thought you had found out about ——” He broke off abruptly, realizing with a frightened start that he had been on the verge of a damning admission. His great relief had weakened his masterly defense—made him careless.

Helen regarded him curiously. “About what?” she said.

“Why, about—about this evidence,” he replied, laughing lightly. He was well on his guard again.

“Don’t make fun of me, Stephen,” she said, rising. “You hurt me.”

“I’m sorry,” he said earnestly. “I didn’t mean to do that. Where are you going?” he added, as she reached the door.

“I am going to Hugh,” she said quietly, without halting or looking toward him. And he neither dared stay her nor follow her.

Alone in the fateful room, Stephen Pryde moved about it restlessly.

He lit a cigarette, but after a few whiffs he tossed it to the fire. Suddenly he

looked apprehensively over his shoulder. He was shivering with cold. He walked about uncomfortably. “A message from the dead,” he said aloud, contempt, amusement, and dread blended in his voice. “A message from the dead.” He went hurriedly to the side table where the decanters stood and mixed himself a drink. He carried his glass to the fireplace, as if for warmth, and drank, looking down at the flames. Suddenly he swung round with a cry of horror. “Uncle Dick!” The thin glass fell and shivered into a dozen fragments on the hearth. “Who’s there?” he cried, twitching convulsively. “Who’s there?” And with a distraught moan, he sank cowering into the chair from which Richard Bransby had risen to die.

BOOK IV

THE LIGHT

CHAPTER XXXIII

The wretched man sat helpless in the grip of his terror. Cold puffs of air buffeted his trembling face. A hand of ice lay on his forehead. Afraid of what he almost saw dimly, and clearly sensed now, he hid his face in his hands and waited, unable to move, except as his own abject fear shook him, unable to call for help. And he would have welcomed any human help now—any human companionship.

But such wills as Stephen Pryde's are neither conquered nor broken by one defeat. Presently he took down his hands, and the uncovered face was again the face of a man.

He was calmer now, and with his wonderful will and the habits of thought of a lifetime he was overcoming his fear. He looked about the big room quickly, shrugged his shoulders, and laughed slightly—a rather mirthless laugh of self-contempt. He got up in another moment, and moved about steadily, turning on the electric lights. Again he laughed as he stood warming his hands before the glow of the gas fire. Clearly he was ashamed of himself for having permitted his nerves to get the better of him and of his commonsense. Yet the quick, stealthy glances he could not refrain from throwing over his shoulder now and then, and an odd apprehensiveness in his bearing, proved that there was still some doubt in his mind—a doubt and a fear of which he could not rid himself—absolutely.

He was still wandering aimlessly about the room when his tired eyes fell on the writing-table. It suggested the missing paper to him again, of course: it always would, whenever he saw it. He went close to the table, dragged there, as it were, and, as they had done before again and again, his eyes traveled to the fire. A thought flashed to his troubled mind. He went eagerly to the fireplace, and kneeling down searched feverishly for some charred fragments of the paper that so threatened him. Nothing could have shown more clearly how unhinged he was. A paper burnt eight months ago would scarcely be traceable, by even one atom, near a fire that had been burning constantly since Helen's return some days ago, or in a fireplace, or on a hearthrug, that Caroline Leavitt most certainly had had thoroughly cleaned each day since the partial removal of Helen's taboo had made such cleanly housewifery possible. It had been a crazed thought, bred in an overwrought mind. Often acute mania discloses itself in just some such small irregularity of conduct.

Of course, he found nothing where there could be nothing to find. But it unsettled him again greatly. He rose from his knees and stood a long time deeply

troubled, staring vacantly into space.

Presently he looked quickly behind him, but not this time with the nervous tremor of the ghost-ridden, but rather with the trained, skilled investigation of the steel-nerved housebreaker, the quick movement of one who wishes to make sure he is unobserved.

"Afraid of a dead man!" He laughed at the very thought. But the living—ah, that was very much another matter. He was afraid of the living, deadly afraid of his own brother—of poor hunted Hugh—of a slip of a girl, and of every breathing creature that might find, through search or by accident, and disclose, the incriminating document. For it, murder had been in his heart, in the hour he had written it. And because of it, something akin to murder throbbed and sickened in him now.

He looked about the room again and again for some possible hiding-place. Then all at once he looked at the door through which Hugh had gone, and his face grew livid and terrible. Hugh *must* go. He must not, he should not, search this room and its hideous possibilities again. He must go: he should. If only the boy'd go and go into safety! How gladly he, Stephen, would aid him, and provide for him too. But, if Hugh would not go in that way, why, then he should go in another. Pryde had taken his resolve. He would not waver now.

He rang the bell, and moved to the table, and stood looking down on the notepaper there.

"You rung, sir?" Barker asked.

"Yes. There's a camp near here, I believe?"

"Just over the hill, sir."

"Simmons the gardener still lives in the cottage?"

"Yes, sir." The girl glowed, and was almost inarticulate with eagerness. "But, sir, if you want some one to go over to the camp, sir——"

"That will do," Pryde told her curtly.

"Very—very good, sir," she almost sobbed it, and slunk out, disappointed and abashed.

Stephen watched her go impatiently, and then turned back to the table, his face tense and set. He picked up a piece of paper, sat down, dipped a pen in the ink—and then laid the pen down, remembering what had, in all probability, been last written at that table, with ink from this well—perhaps with this penholder! The nib was new, and careful "Aunt Caroline" had had the inkstand cleaned and filled. Stephen sighed and took up the pen. Then he frowned—at the embossed address at the head of the sheet. He tore it off, looked at the waste-paper basket, then at the fire, but neither seemed quite safe enough to share this latest secret of his penmanship. He put the torn-off engraved bit of paper carefully in his pocket,

and began to write very slowly, with wonderful care.

The writing was not his own. Versatility in hand-writings had always been the greatest deftness of his versatile hands. “Hugh Pryde, wanted for desertion, is in hiding at Deep Dale. A Friend.” He wrote it relentlessly, his lip curving in scorn at the threadbare pseudonym. Then he gave a long look up at Helen’s portrait still radiant over the mantel. Then a thought of Hugh, and of the boyhood days they had shared, came to him chokingly. He propped his head in his hands, and sat and gazed ruefully at the treachery he had just written. So absorbed was he in his sorry scrutiny that he did not hear a step in the hall, and he jumped a little, woman-like, when his cousin closed the door behind her. With a quick, stealthy movement he folded the sheet of paper and thrust it into his coat “Oh, Helen, it’s you!” he said rather jerkily.

“Hugh is growing very impatient, Stephen,” she said, coming nearer; “will you go to him now?”

“Yes—yes—of course. I was just going. There’s no time to lose; none. I hope he has grown more reasonable.”

“How do you mean?” Helen spoke sharply.

“About leaving here, of course.” His voice was as sharp.

“We both know that he can’t do that yet,” she returned decidedly—“not until ——”

Stephen came to her imperiously. “Helen, it’s folly for him to stay.”

“No,” she retorted hotly. “For I am sure, quite sure, we are going to find the proofs we want—and it is only here we can look for them.”

“But if you don’t find them?” he reminded her.

“We will.”

“You haven’t yet,” Stephen told her impatiently.

“In just a little while the way will come to us,” the girl said. “I am sure it will.”

“Yes, I’m sure it will,” her cousin said mendaciously. “But in the meantime the men are searching for Hugh. And, if he doesn’t leave at once, I feel certain they will come here and arrest him. I’m going to him now, to try to persuade him once more to be reasonable.” And he went from the library, his anonymous note in his pocket. Helen made no attempt to dissuade him. His words had troubled her deeply. Ought Hugh indeed to go? She couldn’t say. She could scarcely think.

CHAPTER XXXIV

She looked in the fire. She counted the clock's ticking. She gazed at the Joss. What should she do? She asked them all that. What ought Hugh to do? They gave her no answer, no help. She rang the bell, and sank dejectedly into her father's chair. "Do you know where Dr. Latham is?" she asked Barker when the girl came.

"No, Miss."

"Find him. Tell him I want him—here, at once."

It seemed an unconscionable time to her that she waited. But it was not long, as the clock told it. Barker had been quick for once.

"Dr. Latham, you must help me, you must help me now," Helen cried excitedly as he came in.

At the sight of her face Latham turned back and closed the door carefully. Then he came to her.

"Help you—something has happened?"

"Yes. And that feeling I spoke of—that sense of nearness—has come back to me."

The physician drew a chair close to hers. "You must put this out of your mind," he told her pityingly.

She turned to him imploringly. "How can I? Daddy is speaking to me, he is trying to help me; and isn't it terrible I can't hear?—I can't hear."

"My dear child——"

"Oh, I know, you think I am nervous, overwrought—well, perhaps I am," she said, rising and going to him, laying her hand on his chair's high back, "but don't you see the only way I can get any relief is to find out what Daddy wants to tell me?—Think how he must be suffering when he is trying so hard to speak to me, and I can't hear—I can't hear." Latham made a gesture of sympathy and disbelief mingled, and laid his hand on hers, rising. "Oh, if you knew the circumstances you would help me, I know you would."

Her voice was wild, but her eyes were clear and sane, and something in their steady light gave him pause—almost touched him with conviction. He was skilled at distinguishing truth from untruth, sanity from hallucination: that was no small part of his fine professional equipment. He studied her steadily, and then said gravely—

"What are the circumstances?"

"I know I can trust you."

Latham smiled. “Of course.”

“Hugh has come back.”

“No?” Great physicians are rarely surprised. Horace Latham was very much surprised.

“He came this afternoon. Dr. Latham, he didn’t desert. Daddy told him he must give up his commission—he promised Hugh that he would arrange it; he must have died before he had the chance, but Hugh never knew. He enlisted under another name.”

Angela had always said that Hugh Pryde had done nothing shabby. She knew that. There was some explanation. Latham remembered it. Clever woman!

“But,” he said, “why did your father——”

“He thought Hugh had taken some money from the office,” Helen rushed on breathlessly. “The evidence was all against him; but he was innocent, Dr. Latham.” Latham’s face was non-committal, but he bowed his head gravely. “I know he was innocent,” the girl insisted, “and Daddy knows it now. Oh, Dr. Latham, can’t you help me?” She laid her little hands on his arm, and her tearful eyes pled with him eloquently.

Latham was moved. “My dear, how can I?” he said very gently.

“You don’t realize how vital this is,” she urged, “The authorities suspect Hugh’s whereabouts; they were at the office to-day, looking for him. If they find him before he can clear himself——”

“Yes——” Latham saw clearly the gravity of that. But *what* could he do? “Yes?”

“Don’t you see now that I must find out what Daddy wants to tell me?”

Latham was badly troubled. Hugh *might* be innocent, but the chances were the other way. Angela was the most charming creature in all the universe. Helen was very charming. But their added convictions were no evidence in a court of law, and not much before the tribunal of his own masculine judgment.

“Miss Bransby,” he told the trembling girl sadly, “if I could help you to understand, I would; but I—I—don’t know the way.”

“But you believe there is a way?” Helen said, eagerly. Even that much from his lips would be something. Every one knew Dr. Latham was wise and thoughtful and careful. “You do believe there is a way?” she repeated wistfully.

“Perhaps.” He spoke almost as wistfully as she had. “If one could only find it; but so many unhappy people have tried to stretch a hand across that gulf, and so few have succeeded—and even when they have—most of the messages that have come to them have been either frivolous or beyond our understanding.”

“But we shall find the way—we shall find it,” Helen told him positively.

“Well,” Latham said, begging the psychic question—putting it aside for the

more material quandary, “somehow we will find a way to get Hugh out of this difficulty. Where is he now?”

“With Stephen,” Helen told him.

“Stephen—Stephen’s the very man to help us,” Latham said cheerfully.

Helen felt perfectly sure that Stephen might be bettered for the work in hand, but she had no time to say so, even if she would, for at that moment Mrs. Hilary ran through the door, opening it abruptly, and closing it with a clatter.

“Oh! Helen,” she cried—and then she saw Latham, and paused disconcerted.

“He knows all about Hugh, Angela,” Helen said.

“Thank goodness! Now perhaps we shan’t be long! Something dreadful has happened. My chauffeur has just brought me a note. The detectives have found out that Hugh has been at my house. Two detectives are waiting there now to question me. They may be here any moment. Thank goodness Palmer had the sense to send me word. But, what shall we do? They may be here any moment, I tell you.”

“Yes,” Latham said, “unless they have been here already.” He went to the bell and rang it. Why he rang he did not say. And neither of the women asked him, only too content, as all but the silliest women, or the bitterest, are, to throw the responsibility of immediate practical action in such dilemmas on to a man they trusted. The three waited in silence until Barker said—

“You rang, miss?”

“I rang, Barker,” Latham answered. “Has any one been here lately asking for Mr. Hugh?”

“Yes, sir. This afternoon, sir.”

“This afternoon!” Helen cried in dismay.

“Yes, miss, about an hour ago, two men come—came.”

“What did you tell them?” Latham asked quickly. “I told them the truth, sir, of course, as I ’adn’t never been told to tell them anything else, that he has never been here, not once since the master died.”

“Quite right,” Latham said cordially. “And, Barker, if they should happen to come back, let me know at once, and I’ll speak to them.”

“Very good, sir.”

“And—Barker, did they see any one but you?”

“No, sir.”

“You are sure?”

“Oh yes, sir. I stood at the hall window and watched them until the road turned, and I couldn’t see them no more.”

“They will come back,” Helen almost sobbed as the door closed behind Barker.

“When they come back Hugh will not be here,” Latham told her confidently.

“Then you are going to help us?”

“Of course.” Latham smiled at her. In all his years of conventional rectitude, he had never defied the law of his land; and he fully realized the heinousness of aiding a deserter soldier to escape arrest—and in war time too—and its possible consequences. But he was staunch in friendship, he was greatly sorry for Helen, be the merits of Hugh’s case what they might, and he knew that Angela’s eye was on him. And this thing he could do. To raise the dead to the girl’s aid he had no necromancy, but to smuggle Hugh away he might easily compass, if no more time were lost. “Of course,” he repeated. “I must. Go and tell Hugh to come here as quickly as he can.”

“Yes,” Helen said eagerly. “Oh, thank you, Doctor.”

“That’s all right,” he said cheerfully.

Helen hurried away. Latham held out his hand, and Angela came to him and put hers in it. She asked him no question, and for a space he stood thinking.

“Now, dear,” he said in a moment.

“Yes,” she said eagerly.

“You must go at once.”

“I know—but where can I go?”

“Home.”

“Home!” She echoed his word in consternation.

“Yes, go back as if nothing had happened.” He put his arm about her and led her towards the door.

“As if nothing had happened?” she said feebly.

“Keep those men there until we have a chance to get Hugh safely away.”

“Oh——” she cried in a panic. “Oh—I couldn’t.”

“You must.” If “must” is the one word no woman forgives any man ordinarily, it can on the other hand be the sweetest she ever hears—at the right moment, from the right man. Angela accepted it meekly, and proudly too. “But what can I say to them?” she begged.

“Oh, say—anything, anything.”

“But, Horace, what does one say to detectives?”

“You can say whatever comes into your head,” he replied, smiling into her eyes. “After all they are only men.”

Angela dimpled. “Yes—so they are—just men. I dare say I can manage.”

“I dare say you can,” Horace Latham retorted dryly.

CHAPTER XXXV

"Hugh will be down directly," Helen told Latham as she came in, a moment after Mrs. Hilary had gone.

"Good. I will take him away in my car, and find some place where he can stay safely until we can get at the truth of this."

"Ah, that is good of you," Helen thanked him.

"Remember," Latham reminded her gravely, "sooner or later Hugh must give himself up."

"He knows that," Helen said bravely.

"I drive my own car now," the doctor said briskly, "so we can start at once. Be sure he's ready."

"Oh, yes," she said.

"Then I'll get the car and bring it round," he said over his shoulder as he went.

She scarcely heard his last words, or realized that he had gone. She stood very still, one hand on the table—one on her breast. There was something trance-like in the tense, slender figure. Her wide eyes glazed. Her breath came in slow, heavy beats. Presently she gave a great sigh, lifted her hand from her breast to her head, then moved slowly towards the bookcase, her hand stretched out in front of her now, as if leading and pointing. She moved mechanically, as sleep walkers move, and almost as if impelled from behind. Her face was still and mask-like.

She had almost reached the bookshelves, almost touched with her outheld hand "David Copperfield," when Stephen came into the room. Instantly something odd and uncanny in her manner arrested him. For one moment he stood riveted, spell-bound, then he shook off furiously the influence that held him, and exclaimed abruptly, peremptorily, "Helen! Helen!"

His voice broke the spell, and she turned to him blankly, like one who had but just awakened from heavy sleep. A moment she gazed at him unseeingly; then she moaned and tottered. She would have fallen, but Stephen caught her and held her. The spell, the faintness, whatever it was, passed or changed, and she moved slowly from his hold, greatly excited, but conscious, and more nearly normal; the rapt look on her face still, but penetrated more and more by her own personality, awake and normally sentient.

All at once she realized. In one flash of time, one great beat of emotion, *she saw*.

“Stephen!” she panted.

“What is it?” Pryde said, guiding her to a chair, and urging her into it gently.

“Stephen,” she repeated, both palms pressed on her forehead. “Oh!”

“What is the matter?” he asked hoarsely, dazed and perturbed.

“Just now—when you spoke”; her voice gathered tone as she continued, grew bell-clear, ringing, flute-fine, “the message was coming—it almost got through, it almost got through! Something was telling me what to do to save Hugh.”

Her eyes glowed like deep blue lamps, around her face a veil of transparent lambent whiteness clung, and transfigured it. The girl was in ecstasy.

Stephen Pryde was terribly shaken. He looked at Helen in fear and amazement. Then, unable to refrain, though he tried his strongest, he looked over his shoulder uneasily. When he could speak his voice was harsh and unnatural.

“Impossible,” he said roughly; “impossible.”

“No, no,” the girl whispered exultantly, clearly. “*I know*—I can’t tell you anything, but that I know, I know, I know.”

There was a power in the girl-voice that reached and subdued Stephen. He was impressed, almost convinced.

“You know,” he said slowly, wonderingly. “Did this message—did it indicate some paper—tell you where to look for it?” For his soul, for his life, for his whole future at stake, he could not keep the words back. They were forced from him, as the hand of the player plucks the melody from a harp—the melody, or the discord. Something stronger than he ever had been, or ever could be, commanded and he obeyed, bowed to the infinite; his own conscience turned traitor and linked against him, linked with some nameless mightiness he had scoffed at and denied and defied.

“Paper?” Helen said. “What paper do you mean?”

He rushed on, goaded and driven. “I don’t know—only if there were some evidence here that would clear Hugh, it would be in the shape of a paper that—that——” His tongue clove thick in his mouth, clotted and mumbled with nervousness. He could scarcely enunciate; he could not enunciate clearly—“that seems reasonable, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, of course,” Helen agreed. “No—nothing of that sort came to me—the whole thing was so vague—so indistinct. But I am sure now; it will come back to me—and help me—I am sure it will.” The glow on her face, the great light in her eyes, grew brighter and brighter.

Stephen Pryde was almost in the state he had been in when he had dropped his glass on the fender and cried, “Who’s there? Uncle Dick!” While Helen spoke he kept looking over his shoulder. He was tremblingly conscious of a

something in the room, a something that he felt was a some one—a presence. It almost overpowered him, the conviction, the chill, and the unprecedented sensation, but, summoning his iron will, he resolved to fight on; and with a flash of chicanery that was nothing short of genius, and nothing less than satanic, he determined even to take advantage of the dead man's message. For it had come to that with him now. That Richard Bransby was in the room, and trying "to communicate," he now no more doubted than Helen herself did. Well! let it be so. Let the dead man get the message through, if he could! He—he, Stephen—would take it, twist it, turn it, use it, seize it—*destroy* it, if need were. He had defied God and His angels, his own conscience, fate, the law of the land, and now he defied the soul and the consciousness and all the craft of one old man dead—dead and returned.

He turned to Helen impressively. "If—if it would only come to you now."

"What?" the girl said uncomprehendingly.

"If I could find whatever it is—if you would help me to find it," he insinuated earnestly.

"How can I?" she faltered.

"Try," he urged masterfully—"try and get that message again." His hands were so cold they ached. Sweat ran on his brow. But his voice was firm, his eyes imperative, compelling.

"I can't," Helen said piteously.

"You must, I tell you, you must." He stamped his foot in his insistence.

"Stephen, you frighten me," she said, shrinking.

"Try, Helen, try." He whispered it gently, soothingly.

Like some beautiful, breathing marionette, she rose slowly, very slowly, pressed one hand over her eyes—stood rigid, but swaying, poised for motion, tuned for revelation—for receiving and transmitting a message.

Stephen Pryde watched her with straining eyes. His gasping breath froze on his stiffening lips. He put out one daring hand, and just touched her sleeve. At that touch some negative current seemed to sweep and surge through her. She recoiled, she shuddered, and then she relaxed from all her intensity, and sank wearily down into the nearest chair, saying dully—

"I can't Stephen, I can't!"

The banished blood leapt back to his face, and laughed in his heart, danced through his veins. His whole attitude was changed in one flash of time; the attitude of his flesh, the attitude of his mind. Helen had failed. The thing she had hoped, he had feared and defied, could not be done. It was farce. It was fraud—fraud worked on them by their caitiff nerves, as "fortunes" forsooth were told for a "bob" by old crones, from tea leaves—on the Brixton Road. And almost he had

been persuaded, he, Stephen Pryde! Pshaw! Well, his fears were done for and past now once for all. The dead man could not reach her! The dead man; a handful of dust or of rot in a grave!

He turned to Helen in cold triumph. “I knew it—I knew it,” he exulted. “Don’t you see now, Helen, how you are deceiving yourself? If there was a message for you, why shouldn’t it come? I tried to help you—to put myself in sympathy—you saw how useless it was.”

But Helen had been too near the unseen, too far across the dread borderland. Doubt could not touch her again. She had stood in the edge of the light. She had felt. Almost she had heard and had seen. She knew. She shook her head, without troubling to answer him or look toward him. She shook her head and she smiled.

“Where’s Latham?” Pryde said in a brisk, matter-of-fact tone.

She answered him as crisply, and as commonplace in manner and word.

“He is going to take poor Hugh away in his car; he has gone to get it ready.”

“Oh!”

“He is going to take him to some place where he will be safe until we can find the evidence that will clear him.”

“But there isn’t any,” Pryde said with truculent brutality; and his eyes measured yet again, gloatingly, the distance and the angle from the writing-table to the fireplace.

“I know there is,” Helen said quietly.

“There can’t be,” Stephen stormed, almost losing grip of himself—very nearly had he reached his breaking-point. “I tell you, there can’t be.”

Helen sat and studied her cousin curiously. She was not a thoughtful girl, and the abnormal strains through which she had been passing for some time now had conspired to make thought peculiarly difficult; but there was much in Stephen’s manner, in what he said and in how he said it, in his face, his eyes, his gestures, his inconsistencies, to compel thought and arouse suspicion, even in a mind as tired and as little given to analysis as hers was.

She was on his track now, not in the least knowing or surmising what was hidden in his soul, but sensing that there was something, something that it behooved her, for Hugh’s sake, to fathom. Whether she might have fathomed it, as she sat watching him with troubled, doubting eyes, would be difficult to guess. And in a few moments her detective train of thought was broken by Hugh’s voice. He came in gravely but cheerfully, and said, as he stood smiling down on her tenderly—

“Here I am, Helen.”

She smiled back at him, little minded to show less courage than her man did in this climax moment of their ordeal.

“Doctor Latham will be here in a minute; he’s going to take you away in his car,” she said as cheerfully as Hugh himself had spoken, and rising and linking her arm in his.

“But I can’t go, Helen,” Hugh told her,—“not yet—it wouldn’t be right for me to go until I have searched this room—I—why, if I turn towards the door even, something *pushes* me back. I mustn’t go, dear; I must search first. It won’t take long—I can do it before they get here.”

Stephen came to his brother, and laid his hands on Hugh’s shoulders. As Stephen came towards them, Helen drew a little away.

“No,” Stephen said earnestly, “no; why not go with Latham now, and then, come back—when it is safe?”

Hugh wavered. This elder brother had always influenced him much. They had been orphans together, and in their early orphaned days, the elder had been something of father and mother too to Hugh Pryde. Stephen’s earliest recollection was of their mother; Hugh’s earliest was of Stephen, mending a broken toy for him, and comforting him with a silver threepence. A thousand times Stephen had befriended him. Stephen was proved wise, again and again, and kind and disinterested.

“That would give me more time,” the boy said, looking gratefully into the affectionate, brotherly eyes that were bent steadily on his—“that’s not a bad idea. If Latham took me as far as the Heath they’d never find me there—never—then late to-night I could come back.”

“No,” Stephen interrupted, “not the Heath—it must be some place where I can get to you; it may not be safe to come back to-night—they may leave some one here to watch.”

“Yes,” Hugh agreed, “they’re almost sure to do that. Where shall I wait, Stevie?”

Stephen Pryde winced at the old name of their playfellow days—Hugh had not used it for years. But he had put his foot upon the fratricidal plowshare of deceit and treachery, and it was beyond him to withdraw it now. At that bitter moment he would have spared his brother if he could—but it was too late. Suffering acutely (probably Cain suffered so once), he said emphatically, “Oakhill! The wood on the other side.”

“But if they find me there,” Hugh objected, “I wouldn’t have a chance to get away.”

Stephen’s hands were still on his brother’s shoulders and he leaned his weight upon them.

“They won’t find you, my boy, trust me.”

It was enough, and Hugh’s answer came instant and content.

“All right, Stephen!”

“Good-by,” the elder said hastily. “I’ll go hurry up Latham; the sooner you are away from here now the better.” He released Hugh, and turned to go. But Hugh held out both his hands, and for a long moment the brothers stood looking earnestly into each other’s eyes, hands gripped—Helen, apart, watching them, dissatisfied. Then Stephen turned on his heel and walked resolutely away, out of the room.

CHAPTER XXXVI

As Stephen's step died in the distance, all Hugh's uncertainty came back, and he turned to Helen disconcertedly.

"I hope this is the right thing I am doing."

"I am sure it is," the girl said. "Dr. Latham thinks so too."

"Are you? Still something keeps telling me I shouldn't go—I dare say it's my imagination."

"Why, yes," she reassured him, "what difference could it make, Hugh, whether you search this afternoon or this evening?"

"None, of course," he admitted; "the strain has lasted so long it's on my nerves. Oh," he broke out anew, "if I could only think where to look now. But I can't—I can't." He looked about the room distractedly.

Helen came to him, and put her hand on him. "It is going to be all right, Hugh—I'm certain it's going to be all right."

"Yes, I hope so," he said; "but, Helen, if it shouldn't?"

"If it shouldn't?" she said, startled, and touched too now by his discomfort, his vacillation.

"This would have to be good-by, Helen."

"No—no—no!" she said, choking.

"It would," Hugh insisted sadly. "Oh, I dare say my record at the front—would help me; no doubt the penalty wouldn't be very severe—but the whole story of the robbery would have to come out—the scandal would always cling to me—I couldn't let you share that."

"Do you think I'd mind?"

He took her face in his hands. "You don't realize what unhappiness it would bring you."

"It doesn't matter," she said proudly. "I *want* to share it with you."

"No, Helen—unless I clear myself I can never see you again." She caught his hands, and held, them to her heart. He whitened under and over his war-tan, but he added almost sternly, "I mean it."

"And what about me?" she cried passionately. "Have you thought about that?"

"It's you I am thinking of, believe that."

"Oh!" she cried, hurt, angry, rebellious, freeing herself from his touch; but he caught her back and held her fast. He kissed her again and again, and then—again.

“Hugh, my boy, my boy,” Mrs. Leavitt sobbed, bustling in upon them.

Helen moved away, and sat down wearily. Hugh bent to his aunt’s embrace. “There, there, Aunt Caroline, don’t cry,” he entreated, as soon as he could disentangle himself enough to be articulate.

“I can’t help it—I can’t help it,” Mrs. Leavitt wailed.

“Yes, but such big tears,” he coaxed, dabbing at them affectionately with his khaki-colored handkerchief; “there, there, dear.”

But the poor childless Niobe would not be comforted.

“Oh! Hugh,” she sobbed, “you won’t let them take you away—you are not going to let them take you away—promise me.”

“Why, of course not,” he said soothingly.

“I’m so frightened,” the woman moaned.

“There is no need to be frightened,” he told her briskly, “if you will only do your part, dear Aunt Caroline.”

“What is my part?” Caroline Leavitt asked falteringly.

“None of the servants know I have been here—not even Barker has seen me—get them away so they won’t see me leave.”

“Yes, dear,” his aunt said promptly, alert, business-like, Martha ready and practical again under the stimulant of something definite to do, some tangible service to render, some woman’s help to contribute.

“Go quickly, won’t you?” But he need not have said it, for already she was hurrying from the room, and only half pausing to say, “Yes, at once. You will come back, Hugh—you are sure to come back?”

“Yes,” he said confidently, “don’t worry, I’ll come back.”

“I’ll get them all in the kitchen and lock the door,” she said grimly, and went.

Hugh nodded and he smiled until the door closed. Then he turned sadly to Helen.

“Well, dear, I’d better go now.” She could not speak, but she nodded—as bravely as she could. “Yes—keep up your courage, dear,” he told her; “everything will turn out all right.”

But at that she broke down and threw her arms about him convulsively.

“I can’t let you go, Hugh, I can’t let you go.”

“I must go, dear, you know I must.” He kissed her—just once, and put her from him, and went resolutely to the door. But in the doorway Dr. Latham met him, and pushed him back into the room.

“I have bad news, Hugh,” the physician said.

“Bad news?” Helen cried.

Hugh said nothing. He knew.

“They have come for you—they know you are here,” Latham said quietly.

Hugh turned pityingly to Helen—his one thought of her, to comfort her. But Helen, womanlike, was all courage now. She held out both hands; a moment he pressed them, then turned and went, with a soldier's gait, toward the door.

"Scotland Yard men or a sergeant?" he asked Latham as he passed him.

"Soldiers," Latham said.

"It's tecs," Barker cried in a wrathful panic, bursting through the doorway. "Me not know tecs! That's likely. I knew it was tecs the 'stant I laid eyes on 'em—dressed up in a uneeform—but they's tecs." True to her type, she had sensed "police" even through tunics and khaki. The dullest servant, and the most inexperienced, have an unfailing flare for the "tec."

Latham pushed her gently from the room, but she ran down the hall crying, "It's tecs, I tell you; it's tecs!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

“Military police, I suppose, or a non-com. and two privates,” Hugh said as he and Latham went toward the morning room.

“Two outside the door,” Latham said, “a non-commissioned officer in the morning room—a decent chap—very.”

Hugh nodded. “Oh, yes—and he’ll behave very decently to me—they usually do in such cases—and a good deal is left to their discretion. Undoubtedly it’s a non-com. and a trusted one. Good-by, Latham, and, I say, thanks awfully.”

“I’m coming in with you.”

“No, go back to Helen, I’d rather.”

Latham wrung Hugh’s hand; and Hugh passed into the morning room and closed the door.

“Here I am,” he said briskly.

The soldier standing waiting stepped back with an oath.

“Tare an’ ’ounds,” he exclaimed violently, “don’t you bey after tellin’ me it’s you, Carter.”

“Yes, Kinsella, I’m Pryde, wanted for desertion, all right. But, I say, it’s hellish luck that they’ve sent you after me!”

“Sent and bey damned to thim. Oi’ll not bey after doin’ ut. The loikes uv you! Oi’ll toike the stroips from me coat and ate ’em forst. Oi’ve fought the Hoons for ’em, and Oi’ll bey after foighten uv ’em again, but sorra a fist or a harm’ll Oi putt on you, Tom Carter—or Mister Proid, sor, whichiver, whoiver, ye are.”

“I’m both,” Hugh told him. “Where’s your warrant?”

“Me warrent is it? It’s no warrent uv moin, my boy, ‘*sor*’ I’m after mainin’. It’s a dirthy scrap uv paiper, an’ that’s what it is, fut to spat at the Imperur uv the Hoons—cursed bey the doiy they giv’ it myself.”

“Where are we going?” Hugh asked.

“To Hell wid going! you’re stayin’.”

“That’ll mean shooting, if not hanging, for both of us, Kinsella.”

“Mother of God! is it axin’ me to bey toiking ye that ye are? Me, that ye carried on yer back and fed from yer cup fer all this woirld’s uf Oi’d been yer baby an’ you the own mither uv me! We’ve starved and we’ve shivered togither. We’ve stuck in the mud to our necks, glued there loike flies in th’ amber, we’ve shared our rum tot and our billy, we’ve gone over the top shoulder to shoulder—we’ve stood so close Oi’ve heard your heart bate, and you’ve heard moine, whin

we’ve been waitin’ for the wurd to come to dash into the curtain uv fire uv the barrage, and togither we’ve watched the flammin’ ruins uv Europe—and our pals dropping and writhing under the very feet uv us as if they’d been lice and Wilheim their Moses—Me arrest you! Oi’d sooner bey stealin’ the shillin’s off the eyelids uv a dead baby!” His own Irish eyes were brimful, and there was almost a sob in the lilt of the brogue on the tip of his tongue.

Hugh Pryde marched up to him with a laugh and pushed him down into a chair, then he swung himself onto a table and leaned over Kinsella, one hand gripped on his arm.

“Listen to reason,” he said. “We are soldiers——”

“Begorra thin Oi’m a man though, an’ whin Oi can’t bey the both, it’s man Oi’m choosin’ to bey, an’ not spalpeen.”

“We are soldiers,” Hugh said sternly; “you are here to arrest me, and you are going to do it.”

“And Oi’m not thin,” the other retorted. “Our Lady’d blush to own me, if ever Oi did such an Orangeman dirthy trick—an’ me a mimber of the Sodality meself win Oi was a boy. Oi’d sooner bey shootin’ me own brains into puddin’, an’ savin’ the Hoons the throuble uv it. Me shame the loikes uv yerself—Oi’d as soon say a wrongin’ wourd to the Saints in their shrines.”

“Listen,” Hugh told him again. “You want to help me?”

“Oi do that very same thing, thin.”

“Then do precisely as I tell you. I am going with you. I’d have had to give myself up in a day or two. I was going to—as soon as I’d done something I had to do here—something important. Now, I want you to stay here quietly, and let me go back for half an hour. Then I’ll come here, and we’ll go together and do what has to be done.”

“We will not thin.”

“You want to help me?”

“Sure it’s yourself as knows that.”

“Then you will do—as I say. It’s the only way, partner. I’ll be back.” At the door he turned to say, “By the way, Kin, I did not desert.”

“Glory bey to God, as if Oi didn’t know that.”

“But I seemed to have done so. It can be cleared up, and it shall; but the authorities are quite in the right—they thought I had.”

“An’ be damned to ’um—as blithering a set of auld wimin as iver wore petticoats. Authorities is ut? Meddlin’ and blunderin’ an’ playin’ the goat uv ut. That’s how they’ve been runnin’ this war from the furst day, and from the furst day Oi’ve said it. Oh!” he broke forth, “don’t ye bey after givin’ yerself up—and don’t ye bey after axin’ me to help ye do it. Oi’d—Oi’d—Oi’d rather turn Hoon

and lick-spitter their cur uv a Kaiser than hurt wan hair uv yer head. I luv ye, Tom Carter. Oi sensed ye were a gintleman the furst toime Oi saw ye—and Oi loiked ye in spoit uv ut."

"Will you wait for me for half an hour?"

"Toike yer toime," Kinsella said grimly.

In the hall Hugh found Barker, and gave her a startling order for a tray of refreshments to be taken to his "friend" in the morning room.

True to her word Mrs. Leavitt had packed the servants into the kitchen—and then locked it. But she had been unable to find Barker, and was still beating the house for her.

The larder was accessible, and Barker foraged nobly.

She carried a tray so heavy with good things that she only just could carry it, into the morning room, a delighted smile on her face and her best apron, hurriedly donned, very much askew.

But the morning room was empty.

The window was open, and down the path marched two surprised privates, hurried and cursed by Sergeant Patrick Kinsella.

"Uv all th' auld fools uv wimin," he muttered, "ut isn't the man wat's wanted at all at all, but anither entoirly. The bloak we're after wantin's been gonn two hours and more—halfway to London, and out ur th' counthry by this. Doouble-quick, now." And they double-quicked.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

When Latham returned to the library he found Helen sitting by the writing-table, one hand lying idly and resting on the jade paper weight. He spoke to her, and she looked up and smiled at him rather vacantly, but she said nothing. He gave her a sharp look, and then picked up a magazine and sat down, pretending to read.

She sat very still. She seemed resting—and though he watched her, he decided not to disturb her, to make no effort to arouse her.

And so they sat without a word until Hugh came back. Latham looked round in surprise, but Helen scarcely seemed to notice.

"An hour's reprieve," Hugh said lightly. "Awfully decent chap in there. Knew him at the front. He'll make it as comfortable for me as he can. I've told Barker to do him uncommonly well. And now, to search this room in earnest!"

Stephen followed his brother into the library. "Some one has given you away, Hugh," he said sorrowfully. "The soldiers knew you were here, when they came—the sergeant was so positive that all my denials were useless. Who could it have been?"

"Don't you know, Stephen?" Helen said softly, rising—the Joss in her hand, but not even glancing at Pryde.

"How on earth would Stephen know?" Hugh said, going to his brother.

Stephen put out his hand. "I—I can't tell you how sorry I am, Hugh."

Hugh smiled at the elder. "I know, old boy, I know. And I'm not worrying. It'll come all right."

Helen moved suddenly, sharply, as if some shock of electricity had currented through her. Then she spoke, and her voice was strange. "Blind—blind—blind!" It seemed as if she said it unconsciously. The three men watched her intensely, each moved and apprehensive in a different way, and from a different cause. She spoke again in the same queer, mechanical manner, but this time her voice was louder, clearer, more vibrant. "Blind—blind—blind!" To Hugh and to Latham the one word repeated again and again conveyed nothing, but suddenly Stephen Pryde remembered where he had heard it last, and he shuddered. She spoke on—"As if he were an echo of the morning—'Blind—blind—blind'!"

"Helen!" Hugh cried, alarmed for her.

"What is it?" Latham said to her insistently.

Stephen went to her quickly. "It's nothing," he said sharply. "Nothing—only the parting with Hugh. It's been a great strain on her." He turned to Hugh. "You

had better go now, quickly."

"No, no!" she said sharply, but looking at neither of them.

"Helen!" Hugh pled—distracted.

She heard him, and ran to him, brushing by Stephen.

"My dear," she began, and faltered.

He put his arms about her. "There—there—you're all right."

The voice she loved best recalled her. "Of course I am," she said brightly.

"But why did you say those words just now?" he said, impelled to ask it, though he understood a gesture of Latham's that forbade all simulation of her strange excitement.

"I don't know. And I didn't exactly seem to say them—they said themselves. I don't know what they mean, or where they come from; but they keep running through my head—I can't stop them somehow."

"That's odd," Latham remarked, his interest in what seemed to him a unique psychological case out-weighing his fear for the patient, "very odd. I seem to have heard them before too. But I can't think where. What's that you have in your hand?"

"Why—why, it's his paper-weight—Daddy's." She held it up and gazed at it intently, as an Indian seer gazes at his crystal. In a moment she spoke again, her voice once more quite changed. "Did you ever read 'David Copperfield,' Helen?"

"What?" Latham said, unprofessionally tremulous with surprise and with interest.

"Did you ever read 'David Copperfield,' Helen?" the mechanical voice repeated automatically. The girl's face was white and expressionless as a death mask.

"'David Copperfield'!" Stephen Pryde exclaimed hoarsely. And as he said it he knew. And Helen knew too. She had readied the light. At that moment Richard Bransby had got his message through. Stephen's eyes went to the table where the volume lay when he left the room the night his uncle died—then slowly they traveled to the bookcase. In that moment the whole thing was clear to him—as clear as if he had seen his confession shut in the volume, the volume by some one at sometime replaced on its shelf.

And Helen had grasped the meaning of the words she had uttered so oddly, and repeatedly. She shrined the jade god in her hands, and looked raptly at its green and rose surfaces and curves. Then she put it gently down on the table, reverently too, as some devout Catholic might handle and lay down a relic most holy—a relic miraculous and well proven. A dozen lights played and quivered in and out of its multiple indentations and intricate clefts; and the rose-hue petals

seemed to quiver and color in response, but the green face of the god was immovable, expressionless, mute. But Latham's eyes, scalpel-sharp, following Helen's hands, thought they saw a tiny eidolon star-shaped, yellow and ambient, slip from the deep of the odd little figure, and hover a moment above it significantly, before it broke with a bubble of fiercer light and dissolved in a scintillation of minute flame. And Stephen Pryde, watching only Helen, was sure that a rim of faint haze, impalpable, delicately tinted and living, bordered and framed her.

Richard Bransby had gotten his message through—recorded at the moment of his passing, and held safe ever since in the folds of the toy he had treasured and handled with years-long habit and almost with obsession—or flashed from his heart still living and potent to the soul of his child. Richard Bransby had gotten his message through. And each in their different way knew, received, and accepted it. The old room was strangely cold. But not one of the four waiting and asking felt the smallest sensation of fear—not even Stephen, defeated, convicted.

Helen spoke, and her voice rang clear and assured, the beautiful color creeping back to her face, a great light in her eyes. "Doctor—Hugh—Daddy asked me that very question just before he died."

"That's strange," Latham said musingly, pondering as in all his thoughtful years of reflection he had never pondered before.

Hugh was speechless. Stephen picked up a cigarette, and laid it down again, with a bitter smile—the hopeless smile of final defeat.

"Just before he died," Helen said.

"'David Copperfield,'" Latham exclaimed; "of course—I remember now. Those words you just said were a quotation from 'David Copperfield'—where he passes the blind beggar."

"I think you are wrong, Latham." Stephen Pryde made his last throw more in cynical indifference than in desperation. His long game was up: that was the special message that had come through to him. But he'd fight on, cool and callous now, and meet his defeat in the last ditch of all—not an inch sooner.

"No," Latham said sternly; "I am not wrong."

"Yes," Stephen smiled with slight contemptuousness as he said it; "I am sure you are."

"I'll show you," Latham retorted. He went to the bookcase and took down the 'David Copperfield' volume.

"Yes," Helen said quietly; "'David Copperfield' has a message for me—from Daddy."

"This is nonsense," Stephen said impatiently. "Latham, I appeal to you."

“I tell you the message is there,” Helen said imperiously.

“It’s impossible,” Pryde began with a shrug.

“Then prove it to me,” the girl said hotly; “prove it to me—that’s the only way you can convince me.”

“She’s right,” Hugh exclaimed; “of course, that’s the only way to help her.”

There was a brief, tense pause, and then Latham, assuming the judiciary and the dictatorship to which his being the one disinterested person there entitled him, said—

“Yes. Well. If there was a message, it would be in the words you just spoke—and their context.”

Helen nodded.

“I could find the place blindfold,” Latham continued. He sat down, the book still in his hand. He opened it, turned but a page or two, and said, “Yes, here it is.” The three listened with breathless eagerness, as he read, “‘There was a beggar in the street when I went down, and as I turned my head towards the window, thinking of her calm, seraphic eyes, he made me start by muttering, as if he were an echo of the morning, “Blind—Blind—Blind.”’” He closed the book and turned to Helen.

“You see,” Stephen remarked quietly, “there’s nothing in it.”

“No,” Latham concurred reluctantly, disappointed, in spite of himself, scientist as he was, skeptic as he once had thought himself; “no, your suddenly remembering those words—it could have been no more than a coincidence.”

“Yes, a coincidence,” Stephen echoed.

“That paper-weight,” the physician analyzed on, “was associated in your mind with your father. When you took it in your hand, unconsciously you went back to the last time you saw him alive.”

“That’s it,” Stephen said cordially. Really Latham could not have given better service if he had briefed him.

Helen looked from one to another, she was on the verge of a breakdown now—and just when she had been so sure. She held out her hands, and Hugh came and led her gently back to the chair by the writing-table. “Rest awhile,” he begged. “I’ll hunt in a moment.” He glanced anxiously up at the clock.

“Oh, Daddy, Daddy,” Helen sobbed; “why didn’t you help me? Why didn’t you help me?”

“Helen,” Stephen said gravely, bending over her chair, “that question is answered. Your father’s dead—the dead never return. All this belief of yours in immortality is a delusion. If you had listened to me, you would have understood. But you wouldn’t. I tried to spare you suffering, but you were so obstinate. You made me fight this dead man—” His voice, which at first had been bitter but

even, grew angry and discordant. His iron nerve was cracking and bleating under the hideous strain—“you tried to haunt me with some presence in this room—it’s been ghastly—ghastly”—he was so cold he could scarcely articulate, his tongue clicked icily against his stiffening cheek, and grew thicker and thicker—“but this invisible foe, I’ve conquered it—this obsession of yours, I’ve shown you how false, how hopeless it is—all this rubbish about this book of Copperfield—and now you must put it all away for the sake of others as well as yourself.” Helen rose very slowly, paying her cousin not the slightest attention. Suddenly she grew rigid again; Hugh and Latham, who had been regarding Stephen in amazement, looked only at her now. Stephen continued speaking to her peremptorily, haranguing her almost, “You understood that now, don’t you?”

Very slowly, again almost somnambulant, Helen turned, her hand outstretched as it was before, towards the bookcase.

“Well,” Stephen Pryde cried roughly, “why don’t you answer me? Why don’t you answer me? You heard what I said!” She moved slowly across the room. “For the future you must rely on me, on me,” Pryde pounded on. “Your father can’t help you now,” he added brutally. Still she paid no heed. Still she moved—so slowly that she scarcely seemed to move, across the room. All at once Pryde understood where she was going, what she was going to do. He was horror-struck, and made as if to pull her back roughly, but Latham moved in between them.

“Helen, what are you doing?” Stephen shrieked—“what are you doing?”

Still she paid no attention, but moved slowly, serenely on, until she reached the mahogany table on which Latham had placed “David Copperfield.” Not looking at it, her head held high, her eyes wide but sightless and glazed, she put out her hand and lifted up the volume, holding it by one cover only. An instant she stood with the book at arm’s length.

Stephen’s breath came in great noisy pants, audible both to Hugh and Latham.

Helen moved her arm gently, shaking the volume she held. Slowly, quietly, as if conscious of its own significance, a paper slipped from between the inverted pages, and fell to the floor.

“Oh, my God!” Stephen sobbed with a nasty choke. Then he swooped towards the paper. But Latham, who had been watching him again, and this time with a physician’s taut scrutiny, reached it first and secured it. Pryde fell back with a piteous laugh, maudlin, pathetic.

“Read it, I can’t,” Helen said, pointing to the paper. Latham and Hugh bent over it together.

Hugh read only the first few lines, and then hid his shamed face in his hands,

and sobbed like a child. But Latham read on till he had read it all.

Helen hurried to Hugh, but Latham held out the document to her with a gesture not to be disregarded, even for a moment. She went to him, and took the paper. For an instant she shook so that the writing danced and mocked her. Then she drew herself up, and read it through, slowly and carefully—from its first word to its last. Read, she refolded it, and with an earnest look handed it back to Latham.

Slowly, quietly she turned—not to Hugh, but to Stephen. He stood near the door, trembling and cringing, his eyes fixed and staring—at something—cringing as if some terrible hand clutched or menaced him. With a cry of pain and of terror, such as the sufferers in Purgatory may shriek, he rushed from the room, sobbing and gibbering,

"Don't touch me, Uncle Dick! Don't touch me!"

Helen, scorn, hatred on her face, and no atom of pity, was following him; but Latham stayed her.

"I'll go," he said; "there is mania in his eyes. Stay with Hugh, he needs you. I'll see to Pryde." He thrust the confession in his pocket-book, the pocket-book in his coat. "That paper," he told her, "will straighten out Hugh's trouble. He'll be free and clear to-morrow, believe me. But stay with him now; he needs you."

Helen yielded. She went and knelt down by Hugh and laid her hands on his knee. As Latham was leaving the room, she said to him, with a grave smile—

"You see, you were wrong, Doctor. Daddy did come to me."

"I wonder," was his reply. "I wonder. Finding the paper in that book may all have been coincidence—who knows?"

"Daddy and I know," Helen said; "Daddy and I know."

CHAPTER XXXIX

Stephen turned restlessly on his pillows, and Angela Latham bent down and cozied them deftly.

“You’re a wonderful nurse,” he told her gratefully.

“Not bad, am I?”

“I’ve made you a great deal of trouble.”

“You have,” Mrs. Latham returned cordially. “But you know what Mrs. Hemans says, or perhaps it’s Mark Twain, I always get them mixed, ‘the labor we delight in physics pain’—I’ve quite enjoyed the trouble—and Georgie Washington, but you begin to do me credit. You’re going to be a good boy now and do just as I say.”

“Am I?” Pryde said skeptically.

Angela held out her ring-heavy hand. “Put it there, pard,” she commanded. And after a moment the sick man lifted his thin, bloodless hand and laid it in hers. “Perhaps I’m going to be good—though it hadn’t occurred to me till you mentioned it—but I can scarcely be required to be a boy. I was quite a year or two old at your birth.”

“Never mind, I’ve been a mother to you.”

“Heavens, yes; you have,” Stephen replied.

He lay in his own bed in Pont Street, and nothing was much changed in his room from what it had been for years; a temple and workshop of flight. Pictures of birds, of bats and of butterflies and of man-made aircraft covered the walls. The skeleton of a flying fox shared the glass case of a flying fish. A long workmanlike table stretched the length of the room—a table stacked with orderly piles of plans and designs, groups of models, trays of “parts” and of tools. Every book in the room (and they were many) treated of the air and air navigation. “Not a novel in the whole show,” Angela had told her husband disgustedly. And on Stephen’s desk lay a half-finished manuscript positively bristling with small detail drawings of rotary and fixed engines, sketches of exhaust manifolds and working diagrams of many-bladed propellers, his pen beside it, as he had left it on the last day he had journeyed to Oxshott.

The woman bustled about the room and the man lay and watched her, a gentler look in his eyes than those poor anxious organs had shown for years.

“That’s a wonderful frock,” he said lazily.

“Great Scott, and I with no apron on! Why didn’t you tell me before?” she said excitedly, and dashed to the chest of drawers, opened one drawer, and shook

out a voluminous apron, all-covering as a hospital apron, but more decorative.

"It's a shame to cover it," Stephen objected.

"It's my going-away dress, the very first dress Angela M. Latham ever was hooked and laced into, and you needn't think I'm going to spill ox tail soup, Top Bronnen water, peaches and wine over it. The chinchilla it's trimmed with cost eighty guineas, and every inch of the lace cost half a crown—hand crocheted." She relentlessly tied the frilled and ribboned strings of the apron about her slim waist. "If you like this, I wonder what you'd have said to my wedding dress. I'm going to be painted in it—by one of the very biggest big-bugs. I want Poynter, because he's the president of the brush and paint boys, and the president seemed about the right thing to draw an American's picture, but Horace says Poynter doesn't do portraits. My wedding dress was—well, really it was—and I designed it two minutes after we were engaged. Quick work. It was velvet, just *not* white, the faintest, loveliest tinge of green you ever saw; there was white fox at the hem, not too much, that's half the art of dressing—narrow really in front, but it widened out as it went around till it measured over two feet at the very back. And my bonnet, not much bigger than a big butterfly, nothing but pearls and one ear of point lace, lined with green—emerald green to show it up—You're not listening."

"Look here," Stephen told her. "You are simply marking time. You have something to tell me, and you are nervous and afraid to say it. The sooner such things are said and done with the better. But first there are one or two things I want to know, that I must know and am going to know. So we'll have them now, please."

"I quite agree," Angela said, relieved at the prospect of the immediate passing of a tension. "Fire ahead. Question number one?"

"I want to know just what happened—when I was taken ill—what happened afterwards and all along. My mind's a bit blank. But first tell me about—Helen."

Angela busied herself desperately at the toilet-table, dusting already speckless silver with her absurd apron, sniffing interrogatively at toilet bottles with the contents of which she was perfectly familiar, moving brushes recklessly, but she answered briskly, and with merciful promptitude.

"They were married six weeks ago. No fuss, not even a cake, a gray dress plainer'n plain. A week knocking about in a motor-car, Heaven knows where. Hugh is doing some fool thing or other at the War Office. Temporary something or other. He goes back to the front next week. Now I'll go back to the beginning and tell you everything."

"Please don't," Stephen said grimly. "Just the important items briefly."

"Right-o," Mrs. Latham said amicably, perching herself on the foot of the

bed—“perfectly plain, no trimming, no colored lights, no slow music. Well! Helen found a paper that cleared Hugh. There were Tommies in the morning room, or somewhere, sent to arrest Hugh, but when he and Horace went in, nary a Tommy was there—and the silver was all right too—and not even the beer touched. Barker had got rid of them—charmed them away: awfully clever girl, Barker, only your aunt never could see it. Well, Hugh couldn’t be arrested because there was nobody there to arrest him, but he went up to Whitehall the next day with Horace and Sir Somebody Something who’s no end of a lawyer and a very big-wig, and after a few miles of your charming British red tape, well, that was O.K.! See? Forgiven. Forgotten. Commission restored.” She slid from the bed and strutted daintily about the room tooting the Anthem from an imaginary bugle, its mouthpiece her own sparkling hand. It was a pretty piece of burlesque—delicately done—and briefly.

Pryde waited quietly; it was simplest, easiest so, he thought, and far quickest. “Rule, Britannia,” followed the Anthem, “John Brown’s Body” followed “Rule, Britannia,” and then she discoursed “Deutschland, Deutschland über alles.” But Pryde was invulnerable, not to be teased as Horace Latham was; and she ceased as suddenly as she had begun and perched back on the bed. “By the way,” she said, “Hugh burned that—that—document thing Helen’d found in the Thackeray book—or perhaps it was Charlotte Brontë, or ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin.’ We Southerners don’t think any too much of ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin.’”

“Burned it?” Stephen said sharply. “Are you sure?”

“Quite.” Mrs. Latham nodded.

“Why?”

“You can search me. But far’s I remember, it was to get rid of it—and that seems a likely reason. I think Hugh said it wouldn’t be needed again. Helen is ‘Bransby’s’—no one else could make any trouble—and something had been fixed up—all hunky-dorey and everything.”

“Was—was she willing—willing it should be burned?”

“She was not. But Hugh had his way. Men do in this upside-down, inside-out old country. But I bet you a gooseberry to a guinea Horace Latham won’t—not so you’d notice it.”

“I decline the wager,” Pryde told her. “Go on.”

“Well, you—you were feverish, and fancied all sorts of things that time—when the paper was found. Thought you saw things.”

“I saw Uncle Dick, if that’s what you mean,” Stephen said quietly. “I know I’ve been very ill—had brain fever, and all that—but I did see Uncle Dick. It was no delusion.”

Angela nodded gravely. “Of course you did. *I’ve* never doubted it for a

moment. Isn't it perfectly wonderful—oh!—if they'd only let the Spiritualists run this war, we'd have the poor old Kaiser dished in a jiff. But they won't."

"No, probably not," Pryde concurred. "Go on."

"I am going on—as fast as I can. Well, you sailed out of the library, the night you fell ill, and went up to your room, and rammed some things in a bag—Horace followed you up and found you doing it. He saw you were queer, and he ordered you to bed, but you just ordered him out of your room and left the house. No one could stop you. I don't think Hugh or Horace really wanted to: anyway they couldn't and they didn't. You piled up here to London. Where you went here or what you did here, I can't tell you, for nobody knows. But two days after you left Oxshott, I was having tea in my sitting-room at my hotel—I'd come up to hustle my dressmakers—when in you walked. You were as mad as six March hares—and in about five minutes you fell down with a fit."

"Fit?" Stephen said it rather indignantly.

"Well—if it wasn't, it was a pretty good imitation one. I called it a fit. Horace called it something in Latin. And you began saying things you'd no business to say, so I wasn't going to call any one in. So I just got you into the next room, and on to the bed."

"You?"

"Me!"

"But you couldn't."

"No, of course I couldn't. But I did. You can't faze an American woman. We're not made that way. You're not so awfully heavy, and I just hauled and twisted until I'd done it. You never know till you try. I don't go in much for horses—I never did. But once I held a runaway team of Blue Grass Kentuckies for three miles on the Shell Road, outside 'Frisco. They pulled. But I held on. And I slowed them down all right in the end. I got you on to the bed and telephoned for Horace. No strangers wanted! You fussed about a bit—but I managed."

"Why did you bother?" he asked in a curious tone. Her answer was prompt. "Because I like you. I always have liked you—very much indeed."

The sick man's thin hand crept over the eiderdown and rested on hers.

"Horace came," she continued, "and we bundled you up in blankets and things and brought you around here. At first I said you shouldn't be moved. But Horace said you'd be better here than so near Bond Street, and, after all, he's a doctor. So—well, we just moved you."

"And you've nursed me ever since."

"I've done most of it," Angela said proudly. "I'm some nurse. I always was. And you did talk so. Talk about women! I simply couldn't let a stranger come

pothering. You were very ill, but you soon got better, and Mr. Grant helped me."

"Yes—I've known he was here." Stephen had thought Grant on guard for Helen and Hugh. He knew better now. He lay for a while very quiet, thinking it over.

"He stayed with you all the time the week we were married. It didn't take long—getting married doesn't take long, if you go about it the right way."

"It takes more than a lifetime sometimes," Stephen said bitterly.

Angela rubbed his thin hand against her face. "I know, dear," she said.

"You had a very short honeymoon. Was that on my account?"

"Four days. Yes, you poor child, I wasn't going to leave you too long."

Stephen said nothing. He couldn't—say anything.

"Are you happy?" he asked after a time.

"Me and Horace? Oh! so-so." But she dimpled and flushed eloquently. "So-so—but our troubles have begun already: servants. Horace's have all given us notice—the silly old frumps. They don't like me chattering German all over the house. You English haven't much sense of humor, and English servants have none. Noah—the butler, his name is Ryder, but I call him 'Noah,' he's been with Horace since the flood—Noah sulked whenever I spoke to him in German, and the housekeeper was rude. Well, I bundled her off lickety-click. Then I began to teach Horace German. He read it well enough, but his accent was awful. So I took him in hand. And last night—after dinner—he'd been singing to me—the sweetest love song ever made—in Germany—don't you think so? 'Du bist wie eine Blume, So hold, und schön und rein!'—The head parlor-maid and the cook—and the buttons and all the rest, flounced in and gave notice in a bunch. When this war's over, I shall send to a woman I know in Hong Kong to send me a boat-load of decent servants. I never had real-servant comfort but once in all my life—and that was in 'Frisco, where every maid we had was a Chinaman."

"I doubt if they'd fit in in Harley Street," Stephen said lazily. "I'd try 'em at Oxshott first, if I were you."

"They'll fit in anywhere; that's the beauty of them. I'll have them in both places—no fear! I'm not very sure that I like Harley Street—and there isn't a nook, or a twist or a turn in our entire house. But I'm going to have Horace stick a roof-garden on."

"Why don't you make him move?"

"He won't. I've told him to over and over. Oh! I can manage Horace easy enough—*except* where his profession comes in; he will have his own way there—and, after all, he is a doctor, you know."

Pryde smiled.

"Have you thought of what you'd do the next few years?" Angela asked

rather timidly when some silent moments had passed.

"A deuce of a lot!"

"Well—that's one of the two things *I* want to talk about, only it's hard to begin. But I've got it all planned—every bit—"

Stephen Pryde laughed.

"You've nothing at all to do, but agree—not a thing. First of all, guess who's coming?"

"Hugh?"

The woman nodded.

"I'd rather he didn't."

"I know," she said—"but please—"

Pryde shrugged his shoulder against the pillow. "Oh! all right. What does it matter? He coming here? When?"

Mrs. Latham glanced at the clock. "In about half an hour."

CHAPTER XL

Hugh was embarrassed and awkward when he came in; Stephen was neither. He lay comfortably on his plumped-up pillows and regarded his brother with a slight, cynical smile.

"Hello, Steve," the younger said.

Stephen said nothing.

"Jolly fine to see you getting on—Ripping—what—"

"Take it easy," Stephen said amusedly. "I don't worry: you needn't."

Mrs. Latham pushed a chair to the bed, and Hugh sat down awkwardly, and put down on the small table near Stephen's pillow a parcel. Stephen eyed it quizzically. "Grapes," Hugh remarked lamely.

"Why have you come?" the elder demanded.

"To see you, old fellow," his brother told him.

"What do you want?"

"Haven't you told him?" Hugh asked Angela, in a palpable panic. She shook her head. "Funked it?"

"Certainly not," she replied severely. "Merely I hadn't got to it yet."

"See here." Stephen spoke crisply. "We'll cut all the circumlocutions out. You needn't be so damned crumpled up, Hugh. If you've come here with any idea of letting me down easy, you've wasted your time."

He raised himself up on his pillows and faced his brother defiantly. Hugh blushed like a girl, and fumbled his cap—but sat speechless.

"When we were children you had all the best of it," Stephen continued. "You've had all the best of it all along. You've got the best of it now." Hugh dropped his eyes to his boots, a picture of guilt and discomfort. "We both cared—a good deal—for—Mother. You were her favorite. I was willing. You were the kid—and, believe it or not, I was willing. And I was good to you—for years."

"God—yes—very," Hugh said heartily, lifting his troubled eyes to Stephen's.

"We came to Deep Dale. My heart was sorer than yours. I'd known Mother longer; I missed her more than you did; I needed her more. Well—you had all the fat of it—at Oxshott: there was none of it I grudged you, none—but I was a boy too, and I wanted my share; and I didn't get it. I had clothes, and food, and servants, and saw a future open up before me, a future of wealth and power. But I wanted love too. I had more brains in my toe than you had in your carcass—and Uncle Dick saw it. He began to take interest in me, to talk to me, to draw me out, he took no end of pains over my education, and before long to plan my

future as his ultimate successor at ‘Bransby’s’—but he loved you. And I would have given my poor little hide to have had just half of that love. All my life—ever since I can remember—every day of it, I’ve wanted some one to love me—and no one ever has really—Mother—did half; since she died, no one.”

The fire hissed and flamed in the hearth, and Stephen lay watching it moodily. No one spoke for a long time. It seemed as if none of them could. Hugh was choking. Angela Latham was crying.

At last Stephen spoke, taking up again the sorry parable of his tragedy. “I waited on Aunt Caroline; she waited on you—and I—I wanted a little mothering so. I worked like a navvy, and won prizes at Harrow and Oxford. Uncle Dick said, ‘Creditable, Stephen, quite creditable,’ and gave me a fiver—and I—I wanted the feel of his hand on my shoulder. You played the silly goat at Harrow and at Magdalen, and Uncle Dick said, ‘Tut-tut,’ and bought you a hunter, and coddled you generally. I was driven in on myself, I tell you, at every point. I wanted human affection, and I was left alone to browse on my own canker. Well—I did—I lived alone. There wasn’t a beast on the place, or a servant either, that didn’t come at your whistle and fawn on you, and run from me, if it dared. I lived alone—and was lonely. I lay in the woods as a boy. I worked at that bench when I was older. I dreamed and I planned and I schemed to do a big thing, a damned fine thing too—a bigger thing than you ever could have understood. But Richard Bransby could have understood; he had brains. If you’d wanted to fly on a contrivance of dragon-flies to the moon, he’d have considered whether he couldn’t gratify you, and have turned you down in the end, kindly and generously—but me—it wasn’t the flying and the aircraft I cared about really in the first place; it was the dreaming, and something to take the place of people—the people I wanted and couldn’t have—” Mrs. Latham was sobbing. “Then, presently, I got caught in the charm of the wonderful thing—and went mad—dæmonized, as the old Greeks were—the men who did the great things, the greatest the world has ever had done. Birds were my prophets—my playfellows, the only ones I had, poor little devil. You played with Helen, I sat apart—and watched you—and then I got to watching the birds and the bats and the insects that flew instead—sometimes. I worked tremendously at drawing and maths and fifty other things that I might be able to invent aircraft and perfect it. But no—Uncle Dick would have none of it. But, by God, I’ll do it yet, I tell you—”

Angela slipped in between the bed and the table, and sat down on the coverlet.

“You must not talk too long,” she said gently.

“Won’t you try some grapes?” Hugh said huskily.

Stephen laughed mirthlessly. “No.” To Mrs. Latham he said, “I’m almost

done. There was something I wanted more than I wanted an aerial career," he went on, looking Hugh full in the face—"more than you ever wanted anything in your life—or could want anything—or many men could. It was not for me. And I might have won it, if it hadn't been for Uncle Dick. Oh! it wasn't you who thwarted me—you needn't think it was—it was he. Always he thwarted me. I did my best to thwart him in return. I wasn't glad to hurt you, Hugh, truly I wasn't —" For just an instant his voice softened and suspended. Then he went bitterly on, "You were in the way, and you had to go—that was all—but I'd very much rather it had been any one else. I owed Uncle Dick a good deal, and I tried to pay it. And I'd do it again."

Hugh held out his hand timidly; it was in apology too. Stephen ignored it, and bent his eyes to the fire.

"Now," he said, after a long, brooding pause, "you know the depth of my penitence. We'll talk about something else."

"We will," Angela said briskly, but her voice shook. "You say you are going to succeed at the aircraft thing yet. Do you know how you are going to do it?"

"No," Stephen said gruffly.

"Well, then, I do. We've planned it all—Hugh and I."

Stephen sat up in the bed, he shot her a glance, and then fixed his eyes on his brother. Hugh nodded and went horribly red.

"You are going to do it in South America. That's the place, where you won't be overlooked, and half your inventions and things stolen before you've perfected them. It's going to be an enormous thing, our firm—just we three partners. Your brains, your control, my money—and a little from Hugh, and your own too, of course—and all 'Bransby's,' influence and co-operation back of us. It will need a rare lot of capital. Well, it's ready."

Stephen paid no attention to her, but he said to his brother—

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes, Stevie—and jolly glad, and pleased—"

Stephen silenced him with a gesture. "Well, I don't. I'd die first."

"You'll die after," Mrs. Latham remarked.

She put her hand on his face. "You are going to do this for me. I've millions, and you are going to double them."

"I could."

"You are going to."

He looked at her then. "Why do you wish to do this—this big thing?"

"Because I like you. And when I like, I like. Never again dare say no one cares for you, Stephen. I care. I liked you cordially from the very first—and believed in you. I like you a thousand times more now. Next to Horace, there is

no one in all the world I care for half so much. Won't you do this for me—consent for my sake?"

A slow color crept into the sick, white face. "I'd like to," Pryde said gently—"but I can't. Don't—don't say any more about it—please."

Then Hugh Pryde did the one dramatic thing of his life. A calendar hung on the wall. Hugh pointed to it.

"Do you know what day this is, Stephen?"

Stephen nodded. "I never forget—" There was mist in his stubborn eyes. And in a flash of intuition, Angela understood: this was Violet Pryde's birthday.

"Won't you consent, for her sake?" Hugh said. "She would ask you to if she could."

"Perhaps she is asking you to?" Angela whispered.

Half a moment beat out in silence. Then Stephen said—

"Yes, Hugh, I'll do it—and thank you both—I'll do it for Mrs. Latham's sake—and for Mother's." He held out his thin hand—Hugh gripped it. But Angela bent swiftly over Stephen—and kissed him.

THE END

Transcriber's Notes:

Minor printer errors have been corrected without note. Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained. Other errors have been corrected as noted below:

On page 193 of the book, Paul Latham was used as a name for Dr. Latham.
In all other locations in the book, he was named Horace.
Paul has been replaced with Horace.

Paul Latham shook his head ==> Horace Latham shook his head

End of the Project Gutenberg EBook of The Invisible Foe, by Louise Jordan Miln

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE INVISIBLE FOE ***

***** This file should be named 50188-h.htm or 50188-h.zip *****
This and all associated files of various formats will be found in:
http://www.gutenberg.org/5/0/1/8/50188/

Produced by Mardi Desjardins & Alex White and the online
Distributed Proofreaders Canada team
(http://www.pgdpcanada.net) from page images generously
made available by HathiTrust Digital Library
(https://www.hathitrust.org/digital_library) and Google
Books

Updated editions will replace the previous one--the old editions will
be renamed.

person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. "Project Gutenberg" is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation ("the Foundation" or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg-tm mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg-tm works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg-tm name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg-tm License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg-tm work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country outside the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg-tm License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg-tm work (any work on which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" appears, or with which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

> This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this ebook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase "Project Gutenberg" associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply

any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

* You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from both the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and The Project Gutenberg Trademark LLC, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg-tm collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS', WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or

limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg-tm work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg-tm work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg-tm

Project Gutenberg-tm is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg-tm's goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg-tm collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg-tm and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's principal office is in Fairbanks, Alaska, with the mailing address: PO Box 750175, Fairbanks, AK 99775, but its volunteers and employees are scattered throughout numerous locations. Its business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's web site and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

For additional contact information:

    Dr. Gregory B. Newby
    Chief Executive and Director
    gbnewby@pglaf.org

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg-tm depends upon and cannot survive without wide spread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg Web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works.

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg-tm concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our Web site which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org

This Web site includes information about Project Gutenberg-tm, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.