GALSWORTHY JOHN

FRATERNITY

John Galsworthy

Fraternity

Galsworthy J.

Fraternity / J. Galsworthy — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

John Galsworthy
Fraternity

CHAPTER I
THE SHADOW

In the afternoon of the last day of April, 190-, a billowy sea of little broken clouds crowned the thin air above High Street, Kensington. This soft tumult of vapours, covering nearly all the firmament, was in onslaught round a patch of blue sky, shaped somewhat like a star, which still gleamed – a single gentian flower amongst innumerable grass. Each of these small clouds seemed fitted with a pair of unseen wings, and, as insects flight on their too constant journeys, they were setting forth all ways round this starry blossom which burned so clear with the colour of its far fixity. On one side they were massed in fleecy congeries, so crowding each other that no edge or outline was preserved; on the other, higher, stronger, emergent from their fellow-clouds, they seemed leading the attack on that surviving gleam of the ineffable. Infinite was the variety of those million separate vapours, infinite the unchanging unity of that fixed blue star.

Down in the street beneath this eternal warring of the various soft-winged clouds on the unmisted ether, men, women, children, and their familiars – horses, dogs, and cats – were pursuing their occupations with the sweet zest of the Spring. They streamed along, and the noise of their frequenting rose in an unbroken roar: "I, I – I, I!"

The crowd was perhaps thickest outside the premises of Messrs. Rose and Thorn. Every kind of being, from the highest to the lowest, passed in front of the hundred doors of this establishment; and before the costume window a rather tall, slight, graceful woman stood thinking: "It really is gentian blue! But I don't know whether I ought to buy it, with all this distress about!"

Her eyes, which were greenish-grey, and often ironical lest they should reveal her soul, seemed probing a blue gown displayed in that window, to the very heart of its desirability.

"And suppose Stephen doesn't like me in it!" This doubt set her gloved fingers pleating the bosom of her frock. Into that little pleat she folded the essence of herself, the wish to have and the fear of having, the wish to be and the fear of being, and her veil, falling from the edge of her hat, three inches from her face, shrouded with its tissue her half-decided little features, her rather too high cheek-bones, her cheeks which were slightly hollowed, as though Time had kissed them just too much.

The old man, with a long face, eyes rimmed like a parrot's, and discoloured nose, who, so long as he did not sit down, was permitted to frequent the pavement just there and sell the 'Westminster Gazette', marked her, and took his empty pipe out of his mouth.

It was his business to know all the passers-by, and his pleasure too; his mind was thus distracted from the condition of his feet. He knew this particular lady with the delicate face, and found her puzzling; she sometimes bought the paper which Fate condemned him, against his politics, to sell. The Tory journals were undoubtedly those which her class of person ought to purchase. He knew a lady when he saw one. In fact, before Life threw him into the streets, by giving him a disease in curing which his savings had disappeared, he had been a butler, and for the gentry had a respect as incurable as was his distrust of "all that class of people" who bought their things at "these 'ere large establishments," and attended "these 'ere subscription dances at the Town 'All over there." He watched her with special interest, not, indeed, attempting to attract attention, though conscious in every fibre that he had only sold five copies of his early issues. And he was sorry and surprised when she passed from his sight through one of the hundred doors.

The thought which spurred her into Messrs. Rose and Thorn's was this: "I am thirty-eight; I have a daughter of seventeen. I cannot afford to lose my husband's admiration. The time is on me when I really must make myself look nice!"

Before a long mirror, in whose bright pool there yearly bathed hundreds of women's bodies, divested of skirts and bodices, whose unruffled surface reflected daily a dozen women's souls divested of everything, her eyes became as bright as steel; but having ascertained the need of taking two inches off the chest of the gentian frock, one off its waist, three off its hips, and of adding one to its skirt, they clouded again with doubt, as though prepared to fly from the decision she had come to. Resuming her bodice, she asked:

"When could you let me have it?"

"At the end of the week, madam."

"Not till then?"

"We are very pressed, madam."

"Oh, but you must let me have it by Thursday at the latest, please."

The fitter sighed: "I will do my best."

"I shall rely on you. Mrs. Stephen Dallison, 76, The Old Square."

Going downstairs she thought: "That poor girl looked very tired; it's a shame they give them such long hours!" and she passed into the street.

A voice said timidly behind her: "Westminister, marm?"

"That's the poor old creature," thought Cecilia Dallison, "whose nose is so unpleasant. I don't really think I – " and she felt for a penny in her little bag. Standing beside the "poor old creature" was a woman clothed in worn but neat black clothes, and an ancient toque which had once known a better head. The wan remains of a little bit of fur lay round her throat. She had a thin face, not without refinement, mild, very clear brown eyes, and a twist of smooth black hair. Beside her was a skimpy little boy, and in her arms a baby. Mrs. Dallison held out two-pence for the paper, but it was at the woman that she looked.

"Oh, Mrs. Hughs," she said, "we've been expecting you to hem the curtains!"

The woman slightly pressed the baby.

"I am very sorry, ma'am. I knew I was expected, but I've had such trouble."

Cecilia winced. "Oh, really?"

"Yes, m'm; it's my husband."

"Oh, dear!" Cecilia murmured. "But why didn't you come to us?"

"I didn't feel up to it, ma'am; I didn't really – "

A tear ran down her cheek, and was caught in a furrow near the mouth.

Mrs. Dallison said hurriedly: "Yes, yes; I'm very sorry."

"This old gentleman, Mr. Creed, lives in the same house with us, and he is going to speak to my husband."

The old man wagged his head on its lean stalk of neck.

"He ought to know better than be'ave 'imself so disrespectable," he said.

Cecilia looked at him, and murmured: "I hope he won't turn on you!"

The old man shuffled his feet.

"I likes to live at peace with everybody. I shall have the police to 'im if he misdemeans hisself with me!.. Westminister, sir?" And, screening his mouth from Mrs. Dallison, he added in a loud whisper: "Execution of the Shoreditch murderer!"

Cecilia felt suddenly as though the world were listening to her conversation with these two rather seedy persons.

"I don't really know what I can do for you, Mrs. Hughs. I'll speak to Mr. Dallison, and to Mr. Hilary too."

"Yes, ma'am; thank you, ma'am."

With a smile which seemed to deprecate its own appearance, Cecilia grasped her skirts and crossed the road. “I hope I wasn’t unsympathetic,” she thought, looking back at the three figures on the edge of the pavement – the old man with his papers, and his discoloured nose thrust upwards under iron-rimmed spectacles; the seamstress in her black dress; the skimpy little boy. Neither speaking nor moving, they were looking out before them at the traffic; and something in Cecilia revolted at this sight. It was lifeless, hopeless, unaesthetic.

“What can one do,” she thought, “for women like Mrs. Hughs, who always look like that? And that poor old man! I suppose I oughtn’t to have bought that dress, but Stephen is tired of this.”

She turned out of the main street into a road preserved from commoner forms of traffic, and stopped at a long low house half hidden behind the trees of its front garden.

It was the residence of Hilary Dallison, her husband’s brother, and himself the husband of Bianca, her own sister.

The queer conceit came to Cecilia that it resembled Hilary. Its look was kindly and uncertain; its colour a palish tan; the eyebrows of its windows rather straight than arched, and those deep-set eyes, the windows, twinkled hospitably; it had, as it were, a sparse moustache and beard of creepers, and dark marks here and there, like the lines and shadows on the faces of those who think too much. Beside it, and apart, though connected by a passage, a studio stood, and about that studio – of white rough-cast, with a black oak door, and peacock-blue paint – was something a little hard and fugitive, well suited to Bianca, who used it, indeed, to paint in. It seemed to stand, with its eyes on the house, shrinking defiantly from too close company, as though it could not entirely give itself to anything. Cecilia, who often worried over the relations between her sister and her brother-in-law, suddenly felt how fitting and symbolical this was.

But, mistrusting inspirations, which, experience told her, committed one too much, she walked quickly up the stone-flagged pathway to the door. Lying in the porch was a little moonlight-coloured lady bulldog, of toy breed, who gazed up with eyes like agates, delicately waving her bell-rope tail, as it was her habit to do towards everyone, for she had been handed down clearer and paler with each generation, till she had at last lost all the peculiar virtues of dogs that bait the bull.

Speaking the word “Miranda!” Mrs. Stephen Dallison tried to pat this daughter of the house. The little bulldog withdrew from her caress, being also unaccustomed to commit herself…

Mondays were Blanca’s “days,” and Cecilia made her way towards the studio. It was a large high room, full of people.

Motionless, by himself, close to the door, stood an old man, very thin and rather bent, with silvery hair, and a thin silvery beard grasped in his transparent fingers. He was dressed in a suit of smoke-grey cottage tweed, which smelt of peat, and an Oxford shirt, whose collar, ceasing prematurely, exposed a lean brown neck; his trousers, too, ended very soon, and showed light socks. In his attitude there was something suggestive of the patience and determination of a mule. At Cecilia’s approach he raised his eyes. It was at once apparent why, in so full a room, he was standing alone. Those blue eyes looked as if he were about to utter a prophetic statement.

“They have been speaking to me of an execution,” he said.

Cecilia made a nervous movement.

“Yes, Father?”

“To take life,” went on the old man in a voice which, though charged with strong emotion, seemed to be speaking to itself, “was the chief mark of the insensate barbarism still prevailing in those days. It sprang from that most irreligious fetish, the belief in the permanence of the individual ego after death. From the worship of that fetish had come all the sorrows of the human race.”

Cecilia, with an involuntary quiver of her little bag, said:

“Father, how can you?”

"They did not stop to love each other in this life; they were so sure they had all eternity to do it in. The doctrine was an invention to enable men to act like dogs with clear consciences. Love could never come to full fruition till it was destroyed."

Cecilia looked hastily round; no one had heard. She moved a little sideways, and became merged in another group. Her father's lips continued moving. He had resumed the patient attitude which so slightly suggested mules. A voice behind her said: "I do think your father is such an interesting man, Mrs. Dallison."

Cecilia turned and saw a woman of middle height, with her hair done in the early Italian fashion, and very small, dark, lively eyes, which looked as though her love of living would keep her busy each minute of her day and all the minutes that she could occupy of everybody else's days.

"Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace? Oh! how do you do? I've been meaning to come and see you for quite a long time, but I know you're always so busy."

With doubting eyes, half friendly and half defensive, as though chaffing to prevent herself from being chaffed, Cecilia looked at Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace, whom she had met several times at Bianca's house. The widow of a somewhat famous connoisseur, she was now secretary of the League for Educating Orphans who have Lost both Parents, vice-president of the Forlorn Hope for Maids in Peril, and treasurer to Thursday Hops for Working Girls. She seemed to know every man and woman who was worth knowing, and some besides; to see all picture-shows; to hear every new musician; and attend the opening performance of every play. With regard to literature, she would say that authors bored her; but she was always doing them good turns, inviting them to meet their critics or editors, and sometimes – though this was not generally known – pulling them out of the holes they were prone to get into, by lending them a sum of money – after which, as she would plaintively remark; she rarely saw them more.

She had a peculiar spiritual significance to Mrs. Stephen Dallison, being just on the borderline between those of Bianca's friends whom Cecilia did not wish and those whom she did wish to come to her own house, for Stephen, a barrister in an official position, had a keen sense of the ridiculous. Since Hilary wrote books and was a poet, and Bianca painted, their friends would naturally be either interesting or queer; and though for Stephen's sake it was important to establish which was which, they were so very often both. Such people stimulated, taken in small doses, but neither on her husband's account nor on her daughter's did Cecilia desire that they should come to her in swarms. Her attitude of mind towards them was, in fact, similar-a sort of pleasurable dread-to that in which she purchased the Westminster Gazette to feel the pulse of social progress.

Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace's dark little eyes twinkled.

"I hear that Mr. Stone – that is your father's name, I think – is writing a book which will create quite a sensation when it comes out."

Cecilia bit her lips. "I hope it never will come out," she was on the point of saying.

"What will it be called?" asked Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace. "I gather that it's a book of Universal Brotherhood. That's so nice!"

Cecilia made a movement of annoyance. "Who told you?"

"Ah!" said Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace, "I do think your sister gets such attractive people at her At Homes. They all take such interest in things."

A little surprised at herself, Cecilia answered "Too much for me!"

Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace smiled. "I mean in art and social questions. Surely one can't be too interested in them?"

Cecilia said rather hastily:

"Oh no, of course not." And both ladies looked around them. A buzz of conversation fell on Cecilia's ears.

"Have you seen the 'Aftermath'? It's really quite wonderful!"

"Poor old chap! he's so rococo…"

"There's a new man.

"She's very sympathetic.

"But the condition of the poor…

"Is that Mr. Balladyce? Oh, really.

"It gives you such a feeling of life.

"Bourgeois!.."

The voice of Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace broke through: "But do please tell me who is that young girl with the young man looking at the picture over there. She's quite charming!"

Cecilia's cheeks went a very pretty pink.

"Oh, that's my little daughter."

"Really! Have you a daughter as big as that? Why, she must be seventeen!"

"Nearly eighteen!"

"What is her name?"

"Thyme," said Cecilia, with a little smile. She felt that Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace was about to say: 'How charming!'

Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace saw her smile and paused. "Who is the young man with her?"

"My nephew, Martin Stone."

"The son of your brother who was killed with his wife in that dreadful Alpine accident? He looks a very decided sort of young man. He's got that new look. What is he?"

"He's very nearly a doctor. I never know whether he's quite finished or not."

"I thought perhaps he might have something to do with Art."

"Oh no, he despises Art."

"And does your daughter despise it, too?"

"No; she's studying it."

"Oh, really! How interesting! I do think the rising generation amusing, don't you? They're so independent."

Cecilia looked uneasily at the rising generation. They were standing side by side before the picture, curiously observant and detached, exchanging short remarks and glances. They seemed to watch all these circling, chatting, bending, smiling people with a sort of youthful, matter-of-fact, half-hostile curiosity. The young man had a pale face, clean-shaven, with a strong jaw, a long, straight nose, a rather bumpy forehead which did not recede, and clear grey eyes. His sarcastic lips were firm and quick, and he looked at people with disconcerting straightness. The young girl wore a blue-green frock. Her face was charming, with eager, hazel-grey eyes, a bright colour, and fluffy hair the colour of ripe nuts.

"That's your sister's picture, 'The Shadow,' they're looking at, isn't it?" asked Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace. "I remember seeing it on Christmas Day, and the little model who was sitting for it – an attractive type! Your brother-in-law told me how interested you all were in her. Quite a romantic story, wasn't it, about her fainting from want of food when she first came to sit?"

Cecilia murmured something. Her hands were moving nervously; she looked ill at ease.

These signs passed unperceived by Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace, whose eyes were busy.

"In the F.H.M.P., of course, I see a lot of young girls placed in delicate positions, just on the borders, don't you know? You should really join the F.H.M.P., Mrs. Dallison. It's a first-rate thing – most absorbing work."

The doubting deepened in Cecilia's eyes.

"Oh, it must be!" she said. "I've so little time."

Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace went on at once.

"Don't you think that we live in the most interesting days? There are such a lot of movements going on. It's quite exciting. We all feel that we can't shut our eyes any longer to social questions. I mean the condition of the people alone is enough to give one nightmare!"

"Yes, yes," said Cecilia; "it is dreadful, of course.

"Politicians and officials are so hopeless, one can't look for anything from them."

Cecilia drew herself up. "Oh, do you think so?" she said.

"I was just talking to Mr. Balladyce. He says that Art and Literature must be put on a new basis altogether."

"Yes," said Cecilia; "really? Is he that funny little man?"

"I think he's so monstrously clever."

Cecilia answered quickly: "I know – I know. Of course, something must be done."

"Yes," said Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace absently, "I think we all feel that. Oh, do tell me! I've been talking to such a delightful person – just the type you see when you go into the City – thousands of them, all in such good black coats. It's so unusual to really meet one nowadays; and they're so refreshing, they have such nice simple views. There he is, standing just behind your sister."

Cecilia by a nervous gesture indicated that she recognized the personality alluded to. "Oh, yes," she said; "Mr. Purcey. I don't know why he comes to see us."

"I think he's so delicious!" said Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace dreamily. Her little dark eyes, like bees, had flown to sip honey from the flower in question – a man of broad build and medium height, dressed. with accuracy, who seemed just a little out of his proper bed. His mustachioed mouth wore a set smile; his cheerful face was rather red, with a forehead of no extravagant height or breadth, and a conspicuous jaw; his hair was thick and light in colour, and his eyes were small, grey, and shrewd. He was looking at a picture.

"He's so delightfully unconscious," murmured Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace. "He didn't even seem to know that there was a problem of the lower classes."

"Did he tell you that he had a picture?" asked Cecilia gloomily.

"Oh yes, by Harpignies, with the accent on the 'pig.' It's worth three times what he gave for it. It's so nice to be made to feel that there is still all that mass of people just simply measuring everything by what they gave for it."

"And did he tell you my grandfather Carfax's dictum in the Banstock case?" muttered Cecilia.

"Oh yes: 'The man who does not know his own mind should be made an Irishman by Act of Parliament.' He said it was so awfully good."

"He would," replied Cecilia.

"He seems to depress you, rather!"

"Oh no; I believe he's quite a nice sort of person. One can't be rude to him; he really did what he thought a very kind thing to my father. That's how we came to know him. Only it's rather trying when he will come to call regularly. He gets a little on one's nerves."

"Ah, that's just what I feel is so jolly about him; no one would ever get on his nerves. I do think we've got too many nerves, don't you? Here's your brother-in-law. He's such an uncommon-looking man; I want to have a talk with him about that little model. A country girl, wasn't she?"

She had turned her head towards a tall man with a very slight stoop and a brown, thin, bearded face, who was approaching from the door. She did not see that Cecilia had flushed, and was looking at her almost angrily. The tall thin man put his hand on Cecilia's arm, saying gently: "Hallo Cis! Stephen here yet?"

Cecilia shook her head.

"You know Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace, Hilary?"

The tall man bowed. His hazel-coloured eyes were shy, gentle, and deep-set; his eyebrows, hardly ever still, gave him a look of austere whimsicality. His dark brown hair was very lightly touched with grey, and a frequent kindly smile played on his lips. His unmannerised manner was quiet to the point of extinction. He had long, thin, brown hands, and nothing peculiar about his dress.

"I'll leave you to talk to Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace," Cecilia said.

A knot of people round Mr. Balladyce prevented her from moving far, however, and the voice of Mrs. Smallpeace travelled to her ears.

"I was talking about that little model. It was so good of you to take such interest in the girl. I wondered whether we could do anything for her."

Cecilia's hearing was too excellent to miss the tone of Hilary's reply:

"Oh, thank you; I don't think so."

"I fancied perhaps you might feel that our Society – hers is an unsatisfactory profession for young girls!"

Cecilia saw the back of Hilary's neck grow red. She turned her head away.

"Of course, there are many very nice models indeed," said the voice of Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace. "I don't mean that they are necessarily at all – if they're girls of strong character; and especially if they don't sit for the – the altogether."

Hilary's dry, staccato answer came to Cecilia's ears: "Thank you; it's very kind of you."

"Oh, of course, if it's not necessary. Your wife's picture was so clever, Mr. Dallison – such an interesting type."

Without intention Cecilia found herself before that picture. It stood with its face a little turned towards the wall, as though somewhat in disgrace, portraying the full-length figure of a girl standing in deep shadow, with her arms half outstretched, as if asking for something. Her eyes were fixed on Cecilia, and through her parted lips breath almost seemed to come. The only colour in the picture was the pale blue of those eyes, the pallid red of those parted lips, the still paler brown of the hair; the rest was shadow. In the foreground light was falling as though from a street-lamp.

Cecilia thought: "That girl's eyes and mouth haunt me. Whatever made Blanca choose such a subject? It is clever, of course – for her."

CHAPTER II
A FAMILY DISCUSSION

The marriage of Sylvanus Stone, Professor of the Natural Sciences, to Anne, daughter of Mr. Justice Carfax, of the well-known county family – the Carfaxes of Spring Deans, Hants – was recorded in the sixties. The baptisms of Martin, Cecilia, and Bianca, son and daughters of Sylvanus and Anne Stone, were to be discovered registered in Kensington in the three consecutive years following, as though some single-minded person had been connected with their births. After this the baptisms of no more offspring were to be found anywhere, as if that single mind had encountered opposition. But in the eighties there was noted in the register of the same church the burial of "Anne, nee Carfax, wife of Sylvanus Stone." In that "nee Carfax" there was, to those who knew, something more than met the eye. It summed up the mother of Cecilia and Bianca, and, in more subtle fashion, Cecilia and Bianca, too. It summed up that fugitive, barricading look in their bright eyes, which, though spoken of in the family as "the Carfax eyes," were in reality far from coming from old Mr. Justice Carfax. They had been his wife's in turn, and had much annoyed a man of his decided character. He himself had always known his mind, and had let others know it, too; reminding his wife that she was an impracticable woman, who knew not her own mind; and devoting his lawful gains to securing the future of his progeny. It would have disturbed him if he had lived to see his grand-daughters and their times. Like so many able men of his generation, far-seeing enough in practical affairs, he had never considered the possibility that the descendants of those who, like himself, had laid up treasure for their children's children might acquire the quality of taking time, balancing pros and cons, looking ahead, and not putting one foot down before picking the other up. He had not foreseen, in deed, that to wobble might become an art, in order that, before anything was done, people might know the full necessity for doing some thing, and how impossible it would be to do indeed, foolish to attempt to do – that which would fully meet the case. He, who had been a man of action all his life, had not perceived how it would grow to be matter of common instinct that to act was to commit oneself, and that, while what one had was not precisely what one wanted, what one had not (if one had it) would be as bad. He had never been self-conscious – it was not the custom of his generation – and, having but little imagination, had never suspected that he was laying up that quality for his descendants, together with a competence which secured them a comfortable leisure.

Of all the persons in his grand-daughter's studio that afternoon, that stray sheep Mr. Purcey would have been, perhaps, the only one whose judgments he would have considered sound. No one had laid up a competence for Mr. Purcey, who had been in business from the age of twenty.

It is uncertain whether the mere fact that he was not in his own fold kept this visitor lingering in the studio when all other guests were gone; or whether it was simply the feeling that the longer he stayed in contact with really artistic people the more distinguished he was becoming. Probably the latter, for the possession of that Harpignies, a good specimen, which he had bought by accident, and subsequently by accident discovered to have a peculiar value, had become a factor in his life, marking him out from all his friends, who went in more for a neat type of Royal Academy landscape, together with reproductions of young ladies in eighteenth-century costumes seated on horseback, or in Scotch gardens. A junior partner in a banking-house of some importance, he lived at Wimbledon, whence he passed up and down daily in his car. To this he owed his acquaintance with the family of Dallison. For one day, after telling his chauffeur to meet him at the Albert Gate, he had set out to stroll down Rotten Row, as he often did on the way home, designing to nod to anybody that he knew. It had turned out a somewhat barren expedition. No one of any consequence had met his eye; and it was with a certain almost fretful longing for distraction that in Kensington Gardens he came on an

old man feeding birds out of a paper bag. The birds having flown away on seeing him, he approached the feeder to apologize.

"I'm afraid I frightened your birds, sir," he began.

This old man, who was dressed in smoke-grey tweeds which exhaled a poignant scent of peat, looked at him without answering.

"I'm afraid your birds saw me coming," Mr. Purcey said again.

"In those days," said the aged stranger, "birds were afraid of men."

Mr. Purcey's shrewd grey eyes perceived at once that he had a character to deal with.

"Ah, yes!" he said; "I see – you allude to the present time. That's very nice. Ha, ha!"

The old man answered: "The emotion of fear is inseparably connected with a primitive state of fratricidal rivalry."

This sentence put Mr. Purcey on his guard.

'The old chap,' he thought, 'is touched. He evidently oughtn't to be out here by himself.' He debated, therefore, whether he should hasten away toward his car, or stand by in case his assistance should be needed. Being a kind-hearted man, who believed in his capacity for putting things to rights, and noticing a certain delicacy – a "sort of something rather distinguished," as he phrased it afterwards – in the old fellow's face and figure, he decided to see if he could be of any service. They walked along together, Mr. Purcey watching his new friend askance, and directing the march to where he had ordered his chauffeur to await him.

"You are very fond of birds, I suppose," he said cautiously.

"The birds are our brothers."

The answer was of a nature to determine Mr. Purcey in his diagnosis of the case.

"I've got my car here," he said. "Let me give you a lift home."

This new but aged acquaintance did not seem to hear; his lips moved as though he were following out some thought.

"In those days," Mr. Purcey heard him say, "the congeries of men were known as rookeries. The expression was hardly just towards that handsome bird."

Mr. Purcey touched him hastily on the arm.

"I've got my car here, sir," he said. "Do let me put you down!"

Telling the story afterwards, he had spoken thus:

"The old chap knew where he lived right enough; but dash me if I believe he noticed that I was taking him there in my car – I had the A.i. Damyer out. That's how I came to make the acquaintance of these Dallisons. He's the writer, you know, and she paints – rather the new school – she admires Harpignies. Well, when I got there in the car I found Dallison in the garden. Of course I was careful not to put my foot into it. I told him: 'I found this old gentleman wandering about. I've just brought him back in my car.' Who should the old chap turn out to be but her father! They were awfully obliged to me. Charmin' people, but very what d'you call it 'fin de siecle' – like all these professors, these artistic pigs – seem to know rather a queer set, advanced people, and all that sort of cuckoo, always talkin' about the poor, and societies, and new religions, and that kind of thing."

Though he had since been to see them several times, the Dallisons had never robbed him of the virtuous feeling of that good action – they had never let him know that he had brought home, not, as he imagined, a lunatic, but merely a philosopher.

It had been somewhat of a quiet shock to him to find Mr. Stone close to the doorway when he entered Bianca's studio that afternoon; for though he had seen him since the encounter in Kensington Gardens, and knew that he was writing a book, he still felt that he was not quite the sort of old man that one ought to meet about. He had at once begun to tell him of the hanging of the Shoreditch murderer, as recorded in the evening papers. Mr. Stone's reception of that news had still further confirmed his original views. When all the guests were gone – with the exception of Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Dallison and Miss Dallison, "that awfully pretty girl," and the young man "who was always hangin' about her"

– he had approached his hostess for some quiet talk. She stood listening to him, very well bred, with just that habitual spice of mockery in her smile, which to Mr. Purcey's eyes made her "a very strikin'-lookin' woman, but rather – " There he would stop, for it required a greater psychologist than he to describe a secret disharmony which a little marred her beauty. Due to some too violent cross of blood, to an environment too unsuited, to what not – it was branded on her. Those who knew Bianca Dallison better than Mr. Purcey were but too well aware of this fugitive, proud spirit permeating one whose beauty would otherwise have passed unquestioned.

She was a little taller than Cecilia, her figure rather fuller and more graceful, her hair darker, her eyes, too, darker and more deeply set, her cheek-bones higher, her colouring richer. That spirit of the age, Disharmony, must have presided when a child so vivid and dark-coloured was christened Bianca.

Mr. Purcey, however, was not a man who allowed the finest shades of feeling to interfere with his enjoyments. She was a "strikin'-lookin' woman," and there was, thanks to Harpignies, a link between them.

"Your father and I, Mrs. Dallison, can't quite understand each other," he began. "Our views of life don't seem to hit it off exactly."

"Really," murmured Bianca; "I should have thought that you'd have got on so well."

"He's a little bit too – er – scriptural for me, perhaps," said Mr. Purcey, with some delicacy.

"Did we never tell you," Bianca answered softly, "that my father was a rather well – known man of science before his illness?"

"Ah!" replied Mr. Purcey, a little puzzled; "that, of course. D'you know, of all your pictures, Mrs. Dallison, I think that one you call 'The Shadow' is the most rippin'. There's a something about it that gets hold of you. That was the original, wasn't it, at your Christmas party – attractive girl – it's an awf'ly good likeness."

Bianca's face had changed, but Mr. Purcey was not a man to notice a little thing like that.

"If ever you want to part with it," he said, "I hope you'll give me a chance. I mean it'd be a pleasure to me to have it. I think it'll be worth a lot of money some day."

Bianca did not answer, and Mr. Purcey, feeling suddenly a little awkward, said: "I've got my car waiting. I must be off – really." Shaking hands with all of them, he went away.

When the door had closed behind his back, a universal sigh went up. It was followed by a silence, which Hilary broke.

"We'll smoke, Stevie, if Cis doesn't mind."

Stephen Dallison placed a cigarette between his moustacheless lips, always rather screwed up, and ready to nip with a smile anything that might make him feel ridiculous.

"Phew!" he said. "Our friend Purcey becomes a little tedious. He seems to take the whole of Philistia about with him."

"He's a very decent fellow," murmured Hilary.

"A bit heavy, surely!" Stephen Dallison's face, though also long and narrow, was not much like his brother's. His eyes, though not unkind, were far more scrutinising, inquisitive, and practical; his hair darker, smoother.

Letting a puff of smoke escape, he added:

"Now, that's the sort of man to give you a good sound opinion. You should have asked him, Cis."

Cecilia answered with a frown:

"Don't chaff, Stephen; I'm perfectly serious about Mrs. Hughs."

"Well, I don't see what I can do for the good woman, my dear. One can't interfere in these domestic matters."

"But it seems dreadful that we who employ her should be able to do nothing for her. Don't you think so, B.?"

"I suppose we could do something for her if we wanted to badly enough."

Bianca's voice, which had the self-distrustful ring of modern music, suited her personality.

A glance passed between Stephen and his wife.

"That's B. all over!" it seemed to say…

"Hound Street, where they live, is a horrid place."

It was Thyme who spoke, and everybody looked round at her.

"How do you know that?" asked Cecilia.

"I went to see."

"With whom?"

"Martin."

The lips of the young man whose name she mentioned curled sarcastically.

Hilary asked gently:

"Well, my dear, what did you see?"

"Most of the doors are open – "

Bianca murmured: "That doesn't tell us much."

"On the contrary," said Martin suddenly, in a deep bass voice, "it tells you everything. Go on."

"The Hughs live on the top floor at No. 1. It's the best house in the street. On the ground-floor are some people called Budgen; he's a labourer, and she's lame. They've got one son. The Hughs have let off the first-floor front-room to an old man named Creed – "

"Yes, I know," Cecilia muttered.

"He makes about one and tenpence a day by selling papers. The back-room on that floor they let, of course, to your little model, Aunt B."

"She is not my model now."

There was a silence such as falls when no one knows how far the matter mentioned is safe to, touch on. Thyme proceeded with her report.

"Her room's much the best in the house; it's airy, and it looks out over someone's garden. I suppose she stays there because it's so cheap. The Hughs' rooms are – " She stopped, wrinkling her straight nose.

"So that's the household," said Hilary. "Two married couples, one young man, one young girl" – his eyes travelled from one to another of the two married couples, the young man, and the young girl, collected in this room – "and one old man," he added softly.

"Not quite the sort of place for you to go poking about in, Thyme," Stephen said ironically. "Do you think so, Martin?"

"Why not?"

Stephen raised his brows, and glanced towards his wife. Her face was dubious, a little scared. There was a silence. Then Bianca spoke:

"Well?" That word, like nearly all her speeches, seemed rather to disconcert her hearers.

"So Hughs ill-treats her?" said Hilary.

"She says so," replied Cecilia – "at least, that's what I understood. Of course, I don't know any details."

"She had better get rid of him, I should think," Bianca murmured.

Out of the silence that followed Thyme's clear voice was heard saying:

"She can't get a divorce; she could get a separation."

Cecilia rose uneasily. These words concreted suddenly a wealth of half-acknowledged doubts about her little daughter. This came of letting her hear people talk, and go about with Martin! She might even have been listening to her grandfather – such a thought was most disturbing. And, afraid, on the one hand, of gainsaying the liberty of speech, and, on the other, of seeming to approve her daughter's knowledge of the world, she looked at her husband.

But Stephen did not speak, feeling, no doubt, that to pursue the subject would be either to court an ethical, even an abstract, disquisition, and this one did not do in anybody's presence, much

less one's wife's or daughter's; or to touch on sordid facts of doubtful character, which was equally distasteful in the circumstances. He, too, however, was uneasy that Thyme should know so much.

The dusk was gathering outside; the fire threw a flickering light, fitfully outlining their figures, making those faces, so familiar to each other, a little mysterious.

At last Stephen broke the silence. "Of course, I'm very sorry for her, but you'd better let it alone – you can't tell with that sort of people; you never can make out what they want – it's safer not to meddle. At all events, it's a matter for a Society to look into first!"

Cecilia answered: "But she's, on my conscience, Stephen."

"They're all on my conscience," muttered Hilary.

Bianca looked at him for the first time; then, turning to her nephew, said: "What do you say, Martin?"

The young man, whose face was stained by the firelight the colour of pale cheese, made no answer.

But suddenly through the stillness came a voice:

"I have thought of something."

Everyone turned round. Mr. Stone was seen emerging from behind "The Shadow"; his frail figure, in its grey tweeds, his silvery hair and beard, were outlined sharply against the wall.

"Why, Father," Cecilia said, "we didn't know that you were here!"

Mr. Stone looked round bewildered; it seemed as if he, too, had been ignorant of that fact.

"What is it that you've thought of?"

The firelight leaped suddenly on to Mr. Stone's thin yellow hand.

"Each of us," he said, "has a shadow in those places – in those streets."

There was a vague rustling, as of people not taking a remark too seriously, and the sound of a closing door.

CHAPTER III
HILARY'S BROWN STUDY

"What do you really think, Uncle Hilary?"

Turning at his writing-table to look at the face of his young niece, Hilary Dallison answered:

"My dear, we have had the same state of affairs since the beginning of the world. There is no chemical process; so far as my knowledge goes, that does not make waste products. What your grandfather calls our 'shadows' are the waste products of the social process. That there is a submerged tenth is as certain as that there is an emerged fiftieth like ourselves; exactly who they are and how they come, whether they can ever be improved away, is, I think, as uncertain as anything can be."

The figure of the girl seated in the big armchair did not stir. Her lips pouted contemptuously, a frown wrinkled her forehead.

"Martin says that a thing is only impossible when we think it so."

"Faith and the mountain, I'm afraid."

Thyme's foot shot forth; it nearly came into contact with Miranda, the little bulldog.

"Oh, duckie!"

But the little moonlight bulldog backed away.

"I hate these slums, uncle; they're so disgusting!"

Hilary leaned his face on his thin hand; it was his characteristic attitude.

"They are hateful, disgusting, and heartrending. That does not make the problem any the less difficult, does it?"

"I believe we simply make the difficulties ourselves by seeing them."

Hilary smiled. "Does Martin say that too?"

"Of course he does."

"Speaking broadly," murmured Hilary, "I see only one difficulty – human nature."

Thyme rose. "I think it horrible to have a low opinion of human nature."

"My dear," said Hilary, "don't you think perhaps that people who have what is called a low opinion of human nature are really more tolerant of it, more in love with it, in fact, than those who, looking to what human nature might be, are bound to hate what human nature is."

The look which Thyme directed at her uncle's amiable, attractive face, with its pointed beard, high forehead, and special little smile, seemed to alarm Hilary.

"I don't want you to have an unnecessarily low opinion of me, my dear. I'm not one of those people who tell you that everything's all right because the rich have their troubles as well as the poor. A certain modicum of decency and comfort is obviously necessary to man before we can begin to do anything but pity him; but that doesn't make it any easier to know how you're going to insure him that modicum of decency and comfort, does it?"

"We've got to do it," said Thyme; "it won't wait any longer."

"My dear," said Hilary, "think of Mr. Purcey! What proportion of the upper classes do you imagine is even conscious of that necessity? We, who have got what I call the social conscience, rise from the platform of Mr. Purcey; we're just a gang of a few thousands to Mr. Purcey's tens of thousands, and how many even of us are prepared, or, for the matter of that, fitted, to act on our consciousness? In spite of your grandfather's ideas, I'm afraid we're all too much divided into classes; man acts, and always has acted, in classes."

"Oh – classes!" answered Thyme – "that's the old superstition, uncle."

"Is it? I thought one's class, perhaps, was only oneself exaggerated – not to be shaken off. For instance, what are you and I, with our particular prejudices, going to do?"

Thyme gave him the cruel look of youth, which seemed to say: 'You are my very good uncle, and a dear; but you are more than twice my age. That, I think, is conclusive!'

"Has something been settled about Mrs. Hughs?" she asked abruptly.

"What does your father say this morning?"

Thyme picked up her portfolio of drawings, and moved towards the door.

"Father's hopeless. He hasn't an idea beyond referring her to the S.P.B."

She was gone; and Hilary, with a sigh, took his pen up, but he wrote nothing down …

Hilary and Stephen Dallison were grandsons of that Canon Dallison, well known as friend, and sometime adviser, of a certain Victorian novelist. The Canon, who came of an old Oxfordshire family, which for three hundred years at least had served the Church or State, was himself the author of two volumes of "Socratic Dialogues." He had bequeathed to his son – a permanent official in the Foreign Office – if not his literary talent, the tradition at all events of culture. This tradition had in turn been handed on to Hilary and Stephen.

Educated at a public school and Cambridge, blessed with competent, though not large, independent incomes, and brought up never to allude to money if it could possibly be helped, the two young men had been turned out of the mint with something of the same outward stamp on them. Both were kindly, both fond of open-air pursuits, and neither of them lazy. Both, too, were very civilised, with that bone-deep decency, that dislike of violence, nowhere so prevalent as in the upper classes of a country whose settled institutions are as old as its roads, or the walls which insulate its parks. But as time went on, the one great quality which heredity and education, environment and means, had bred in both of them – self-consciousness – acted in these two brothers very differently. To Stephen it was preservative, keeping him, as it were, in ice throughout hot-weather seasons, enabling him to know exactly when he was in danger of decomposition, so that he might nip the process in the bud; it was with him a healthy, perhaps slightly chemical, ingredient, binding his component parts, causing them to work together safely, homogeneously. In Hilary the effect seemed to have been otherwise; like some slow and subtle poison, this great quality, self-consciousness, had soaked his system through and through; permeated every cranny of his spirit, so that to think a definite thought, or do a definite deed, was obviously becoming difficult to him. It took in the main the form of a sort of gentle desiccating humour.

"It's a remarkable thing," he had one day said to Stephen, "that by the process of assimilating little bits of chopped-up cattle one should be able to form the speculation of how remarkable a thing it is."

Stephen had paused a second before answering – they were lunching off roast beef in the Law Courts – he had then said:

"You're surely not going to eschew the higher mammals, like our respected father-in-law?"

"On the contrary," said Hilary, "to chew them; but it is remarkable, for all that; you missed my point."

It was clear that a man who could see anything remarkable in such a thing was far gone, and Stephen had murmured:

"My dear old chap, you're getting too introspective."

Hilary, having given his brother the special retiring smile, which seemed not only to say; "Don't let me bore you," but also, "Well, perhaps you had better wait outside," the conversation closed.

That smile of Hilary's, which jibbed away from things, though disconcerting and apt to put an end to intercourse, was natural enough. A sensitive man, who had passed his life amongst cultivated people in the making of books, guarded from real wants by modest, not vulgar, affluence, had not reached the age of forty-two without finding his delicacy sharpened to the point of fastidiousness. Even his dog could see the sort of man he was. She knew that he would take no liberties, either with her ears or with her tail. She knew that he would never hold her mouth ajar, and watch her teeth, as some men do; that when she was lying on her back he would gently rub her chest without giving

her the feeling that she was doing wrong, as women will; and if she sat, as she was sitting now, with her eyes fixed on his study fire, he would never, she knew, even from afar, prevent her thinking of the nothing she loved to think on.

In his study, which smelt of a particular mild tobacco warranted to suit the nerves of any literary man, there was a bust of Socrates, which always seemed to have a strange attraction for its owner. He had once described to a fellow-writer the impression produced on him by that plaster face, so capaciously ugly, as though comprehending the whole of human life, sharing all man's gluttony and lust, his violence and rapacity, but sharing also his strivings toward love and reason and serenity.

"He's telling us," said Hilary, "to drink deep, to dive down and live with mermaids, to lie out on the hills under the sun, to sweat with helots, to know all things and all men. No seat, he says, among the Wise, unless we've been through it all before we climb! That's how he strikes me – not too cheering for people of our sort!"

Under the shadow of this bust Hilary rested his forehead on his hand. In front of him were three open books and a pile of manuscript, and pushed to one side a little sheaf of pieces of green-white paper, press-cuttings of his latest book.

The exact position occupied by his work in the life of such a man is not too easy to define. He earned an income by it, but he was not dependent on that income. As poet, critic, writer of essays, he had made himself a certain name – not a great name, but enough to swear by. Whether his fastidiousness could have stood the conditions of literary existence without private means was now and then debated by his friends; it could probably have done so better than was supposed, for he sometimes startled those who set him down as a dilettante by a horny way of retiring into his shell for the finish of a piece of work.

Try as he would that morning to keep his thoughts concentrated on his literary labour, they wandered to his conversation with his niece and to the discussion on Mrs. Hughs; the family seamstress, in his wife's studio the day before. Stephen had lingered behind Cecilia and Thyme when they went away after dinner, to deliver a last counsel to his brother at the garden gate.

"Never meddle between man and wife – you know what the lower classes are!"

And across the dark garden he had looked back towards the house. One room on the ground-floor alone was lighted. Through its open window the head and shoulders of Mr. Stone could be seen close to a small green reading-lamp. Stephen shook his head, murmuring:

"But, I say, our old friend, eh? 'In those places – in those streets!' It's worse than simple crankiness – the poor old chap is getting almost – "

And, touching his forehead lightly with two fingers, he had hurried off with the ever-springy step of one whose regularity habitually controls his imagination.

Pausing a minute amongst the bushes, Hilary too had looked at the lighted window which broke the dark front of his house, and his little moonlight bulldog, peering round his legs, had gazed up also. Mr. Stone was still standing, pen in hand, presumably deep in thought. His silvered head and beard moved slightly to the efforts of his brain. He came over to the window, and, evidently not seeing his son-in-law, faced out into the night.

In that darkness were all the shapes and lights and shadows of a London night in spring: the trees in dark bloom; the wan yellow of the gas-lamps, pale emblems of the self-consciousness of towns; the clustered shades of the tiny leaves, spilled, purple, on the surface of the road, like bunches of black grapes squeezed down into the earth by the feet of the passers-by. There, too, were shapes of men and women hurrying home, and the great blocked shapes of the houses where they lived. A halo hovered above the City – a high haze of yellow light, dimming the stars. The black, slow figure of a policeman moved noiselessly along the railings opposite.

From then till eleven o'clock, when he would make himself some cocoa on a little spirit-lamp, the writer of the "Book of Universal Brotherhood" would alternate between his bent posture above his manuscript and his blank consideration of the night…

With a jerk, Hilary came back to his reflections beneath the bust of Socrates.

"Each of us has a shadow in those places – in those streets!"

There certainly was a virus in that notion. One must either take it as a jest, like Stephen; or, what must one do? How far was it one's business to identify oneself with other people, especially the helpless – how far to preserve oneself intact – 'integer vita'? Hilary was no young person, like his niece or Martin, to whom everything seemed simple; nor was he an old person like their grandfather, for whom life had lost its complications.

And, very conscious of his natural disabilities for a decision on a like, or indeed on any, subject except, perhaps, a point of literary technique, he got up from his writing-table, and, taking his little bulldog, went out. His intention was to visit Mrs. Hughs in Hound Street, and see with his own eyes the state of things. But he had another reason, too, for wishing to go there …

CHAPTER IV
THE LITTLE MODEL

When in the preceding autumn Bianca began her picture called “The Shadow,” nobody was more surprised than Hilary that she asked him to find her a model for the figure. Not knowing the nature of the picture, nor having been for many years – perhaps never – admitted into the workings of his wife’s spirit, he said:

“Why don’t you ask Thyme to sit for you?”

Blanca answered: “She’s not the type at all – too matter-of-fact. Besides, I don’t want a lady; the figure’s to be half draped.”

Hilary smiled.

Blanca knew quite well that he was smiling at this distinction between ladies and other women, and understood that he was smiling, not so much at her, but at himself, for secretly agreeing with the distinction she had made.

And suddenly she smiled too.

There was the whole history of their married life in those two smiles. They meant so much: so many thousand hours of suppressed irritation, so many baffled longings and earnest efforts to bring their natures together. They were the supreme, quiet evidence of the divergence of two lives – that slow divergence which had been far from being wilful, and was the more hopeless in that it had been so gradual and so gentle. They had never really had a quarrel, having enlightened views of marriage; but they had smiled. They had smiled so often through so many years that no two people in the world could very well be further from each other. Their smiles had banned the revelation even to themselves of the tragedy of their wedded state. It is certain that neither could help those smiles, which were not intended to wound, but came on their faces as naturally as moonlight falls on water, out of their inimically constituted souls.

Hilary spent two afternoons among his artist friends, trying, by means of the indications he had gathered, to find a model for “The Shadow.” He had found one at last. Her name, Barton, and address had been given him by a painter of still life, called French.

“She’s never sat to me,” he said; “my sister discovered her in the West Country somewhere. She’s got a story of some sort. I don’t know what. She came up about three months ago, I think.”

“She’s not sitting to your sister now?” Hilary asked.

“No,” said the painter of still life; “my sister’s married and gone out to India. I don’t know whether she’d sit for the half-draped, but I should think so. She’ll have to, sooner or later; she may as well begin, especially to a woman. There’s a something about her that’s attractive – you might try her!” And with these words he resumed the painting of still life which he had broken off to talk to Hilary.

Hilary had written to this girl to come and see him. She had come just before dinner the same day.

He found her standing in the middle of his study, not daring, as it seemed, to go near the furniture, and as there was very little light, he could hardly see her face. She was resting a foot, very patient, very still, in an old brown skirt, an ill-shaped blouse, and a blue-green tam-o’-shanter cap. Hilary turned up the light. He saw a round little face with broad cheekbones, flower-blue eyes, short lamp-black lashes, and slightly parted lips. It was difficult to judge of her figure in those old clothes, but she was neither short nor tall; her neck was white and well set on, her hair pale brown and abundant. Hilary noted that her chin, though not receding, was too soft and small; but what he noted chiefly was her look of patient expectancy, as though beyond the present she were seeing something, not necessarily pleasant, which had to come. If he had not known from the painter of still life that she was from the country, he would have thought her a town-bred girl, she looked so

pale. Her appearance, at all events, was not "too matter-of-fact." Her speech, however, with its slight West-Country burr, was matter-of-fact enough, concerned entirely with how long she would have to sit, and the pay she was to get for it. In the middle of their conversation she sank down on the floor, and Hilary was driven to restore her with biscuits and liqueur, which in his haste he took for brandy. It seemed she had not eaten since her breakfast the day before, which had consisted of a cup of tea. In answer to his remonstrance, she made this matter-of-fact remark:

"If you haven't money, you can't buy things… There's no one I can ask up here; I'm a stranger."

"Then you haven't been getting work?"

"No," the little model answered sullenly; "I don't want to sit as most of them want me to till I'm obliged." The blood rushed up in her face with startling vividness, then left it white again.

'Ah!' thought Hilary, 'she has had experience already.'

Both he and his wife were accessible to cases of distress, but the nature of their charity was different. Hilary was constitutionally unable to refuse his aid to anything that held out a hand for it. Bianca (whose sociology was sounder), while affirming that charity was wrong, since in a properly constituted State no one should need help, referred her cases, like Stephen, to the "Society for the Prevention of Begging," which took much time and many pains to ascertain the worst.

But in this case what was of importance was that the poor girl should have a meal, and after that to find out if she were living in a decent house; and since she appeared not to be, to recommend her somewhere better. And as in charity it is always well to kill two birds with one expenditure of force, it was found that Mrs. Hughs, the seamstress, had a single room to let unfurnished, and would be more than glad of four shillings, or even three and six, a week for it. Furniture was also found for her: a bed that creaked, a washstand, table, and chest of drawers; a carpet, two chairs, and certain things to cook with; some of those old photographs and prints that hide in cupboards, and a peculiar little clock, which frequently forgot the time of day. All these and some elementary articles of dress were sent round in a little van, with three ferns whose time had nearly come, and a piece of the plant called "honesty." Soon after this she came to "sit." She was a very quiet and passive little model, and was not required to pose half-draped, Bianca having decided that, after all, "The Shadow" was better represented fully clothed; for, though she discussed the nude, and looked on it with freedom, when it came to painting unclothed people, she felt a sort of physical aversion.

Hilary, who was curious, as a man naturally would be, about anyone who had fainted from hunger at his feet, came every now and then to see, and would sit watching this little half-starved girl with kindly and screwed-up eyes. About his personality there was all the evidence of that saying current among those who knew him: "Hilary would walk a mile sooner than tread on an ant." The little model, from the moment when he poured liqueur between her teeth, seemed to feel he had a claim on her, for she reserved her small, matter-of-fact confessions for his ears. She made them in the garden, coming in or going out; or outside, and, now and then, inside his study, like a child who comes and shows you a sore finger. Thus, quite suddenly:

"I've four shillings left over this week, Mr. Dallison," or, "Old Mr. Creed's gone to the hospital to-day, Mr. Dallison."

Her face soon became less bloodless than on that first evening, but it was still pale, inclined to colour in wrong places on cold days, with little blue veins about the temples and shadows under the eyes. The lips were still always a trifle parted, and she still seemed to be looking out for what was coming, like a little Madonna, or Venus, in a Botticelli picture. This look of hers, coupled with the matter-of-factness of her speech, gave its flavour to her personality…

On Christmas Day the picture was on view to Mr. Purcey, who had chanced to "give his car a run," and to other connoisseurs. Bianca had invited her model to be present at this function, intending to get her work. But, slipping at once into a corner, the girl had stood as far as possible behind a canvas. People, seeing her standing there, and noting her likeness to the picture, looked at her with curiosity, and passed on, murmuring that she was an interesting type. They did not talk to her, either

because they were afraid she could not talk of the things they could talk of, or that they could not talk of the things she could talk of, or because they were anxious not to seem to patronize her. She talked to one, therefore. This occasioned Hilary some distress. He kept coming up and smiling at her, or making tentative remarks or jests, to which she would reply, “Yes, Mr. Dallison,” or “No, Mr. Dallison,” as the case might be.

Seeing him return from one of these little visits, an Art Critic standing before the picture had smiled, and his round, clean-shaven, sensual face had assumed a greenish tint in eyes and cheeks, as of the fat in turtle soup.

The only two other people who had noticed her particularly were those old acquaintances, Mr. Purcey and Mr. Stone. Mr. Purcey had thought, ‘Rather a good-lookin’ girl,’ and his eyes strayed somewhat continually in her direction. There was something piquant and, as it were, unlawfully enticing to him in the fact that she was a real artist’s model.

Mr. Stone’s way of noticing her had been different. He had approached in his slightly inconvenient way, as though seeing but one thing in the whole world.

“You are living by yourself?” he had said. “I shall come and see you.”

Made by the Art Critic or by Mr. Purcey, that somewhat strange remark would have had one meaning; made by Mr. Stone it obviously had another. Having finished what he had to say, the author of the book of “Universal Brotherhood” had bowed and turned to go. Perceiving that he saw before him the door and nothing else, everybody made way for him at once. The remarks that usually arose behind his back began to be heard – “Extraordinary old man!” “You know, he bathes in the Serpentine all the year round?” “And he cooks his food himself, and does his own room, they say; and all the rest of his time he writes a book!” “A perfect crank!”

CHAPTER V
THE COMEDY BEGINS

The Art Critic who had smiled was – like all men – a subject for pity rather than for blame. An Irishman of real ability, he had started life with high ideals and a belief that he could live with them. He had hoped to serve Art, to keep his service pure; but, having one day let his acid temperament out of hand to revel in an orgy of personal retaliation, he had since never known when she would slip her chain and come home smothered in mire. Moreover, he no longer chastised her when she came. His ideals had left him, one by one; he now lived alone, immune from dignity and shame, soothing himself with whisky. A man of rancour, meet for pity, and, in his cups, contented. He had lunched freely before coming to Blanca's Christmas function, but by four o'clock, the gases which had made him feel the world a pleasant place had nearly all evaporated, and he was suffering from a wish to drink again. Or it may have been that this girl, with her soft look, gave him the feeling that she ought to have belonged to him; and as she did not, he felt, perhaps, a natural irritation that she belonged, or might belong, to somebody else. Or, again, it was possibly his natural male distaste for the works of women painters which induced an awkward frame of mind.

Two days later in a daily paper over no signature, appeared this little paragraph: "We learn that 'The Shadow,' painted by Bianca Stone, who is not generally known to be the wife of the writer, Mr. Hilary Dallison, will soon be exhibited at the Bencox Gallery. This very 'fin-de-siecle' creation, with its unpleasant subject, representing a woman (presumably of the streets) standing beneath a gas-lamp, is a somewhat anaemic piece of painting. If Mr. Dallison, who finds the type an interesting one, embodies her in one of his very charming poems, we trust the result will be less bloodless."

The little piece of green-white paper containing this information was handed to Hilary by his wife at breakfast. The blood mounted slowly in his cheeks. Bianca's eyes fastened themselves on that flush. Whether or no – as philosophers say – little things are all big with the past, of whose chain they are the latest links, they frequently produce what apparently are great results.

The marital relations of Hilary and his wife, which till then had been those of, at all events, formal conjugality, changed from that moment. After ten o'clock at night their lives became as separate as though they lived in different houses. And this change came about without expostulations, reproach, or explanation, just by the turning of a key; and even this was the merest symbol, employed once only, to save the ungracefulness of words. Such a hint was quite enough for a man like Hilary, whose delicacy, sense of the ridiculous, and peculiar faculty of starting back and retiring into himself, put the need of anything further out of the question. Both must have felt, too, that there was nothing that could be explained. An anonymous double entendre was not precisely evidence on which to found a rupture of the marital tie. The trouble was so much deeper than that – the throbbing of a woman's wounded self-esteem, of the feeling that she was no longer loved, which had long cried out for revenge.

One morning in the middle of the week after this incident the innocent author of it presented herself in Hilary's study, and, standing in her peculiar patient attitude, made her little statements. As usual, they were very little ones; as usual, she seemed helpless, and suggested a child with a sore finger. She had no other work; she owed the week's rent; she did not know what would happen to her; Mrs. Dallison did not want her any more; she could not tell what she had done! The picture was finished, she knew, but Mrs. Dallison had said she was going to paint her again in another picture…

Hilary did not reply.

"…That old gentleman, Mr. – Mr. Stone, had been to see her. He wanted her to come and copy out his book for two hours a day, from four to six, at a shilling an hour. Ought she to come, please? He said his book would take him years."

Before answering her Hilary stood for a full minute staring at the fire. The little model stole a look at him. He suddenly turned and faced her. His glance was evidently disconcerting to the girl. It was, indeed, a critical and dubious look, such as he might have bent on a folio of doubtful origin.

"Don't you think," he said at last, "that it would be much better for you to go back into the country?"

The little model shook her head vehemently.

"Oh no!"

"Well, but why not? This is a most unsatisfactory sort of life."

The girl stole another look at him, then said sullenly:

"I can't go back there."

"What is it? Aren't your people nice to you?"

She grew red.

"No; and I don't want to go"; then, evidently seeing from Hilary's face that his delicacy forbade his questioning her further, she brightened up, and murmured: "The old gentleman said it would make me independent."

"Well," replied Hilary, with a shrug, "you'd better take his offer."

She kept turning her face back as she went down the path, as though to show her gratitude. And presently, looking up from his manuscript, he saw her face still at the railings, peering through a lilac bush. Suddenly she skipped, like a child let out of school. Hilary got up, perturbed. The sight of that skipping was like the rays of a lantern turned on the dark street of another human being's life. It revealed, as in a flash, the loneliness of this child, without money and without friends, in the midst of this great town.

The months of January, February, March passed, and the little model came daily to copy the "Book of Universal Brotherhood."

Mr. Stone's room, for which he insisted on paying rent, was never entered by a servant. It was on the ground-floor, and anyone passing the door between the hours of four and six could hear him dictating slowly, pausing now and then to spell a word. In these two hours it appeared to be his custom to read out, for fair copying, the labours of the other seven.

At five o'clock there was invariably a sound of plates and cups, and out of it the little model's voice would rise, matter-of-fact, soft, monotoned, making little statements; and in turn Mr. Stone's, also making statements which clearly lacked cohesion with those of his young friend. On one occasion, the door being open, Hilary heard distinctly the following conversation:

The LITTLE MODEL: "Mr. Creed says he was a butler. He's got an ugly nose." (A pause.)

Mr. STONE: "In those days men were absorbed in thinking of their individualities. Their occupations seemed to them important – "

The LITTLE MODEL: "Mr. Creed says his savings were all swallowed up by illness."

Mr. STONE: " – it was not so."

The LITTLE MODEL: "Mr. Creed says he was always brought up to go to church."

Mr. STONE (suddenly): "There has been no church worth going to since A. D. 700."

The LITTLE MODEL: "But he doesn't go."

And with a flying glance through the just open door Hilary saw her holding bread-and-butter with inky fingers, her lips a little parted, expecting the next bite, and her eyes fixed curiously on Mr. Stone, whose transparent hand held a teacup, and whose eyes were immovably fixed on distance.

It was one day in April that Mr. Stone, heralded by the scent of Harris tweed and baked potatoes which habitually encircled him, appeared at five o'clock in Hilary's study doorway.

"She has not come," he said.

Hilary laid down his pen. It was the first real Spring day.

"Will you come for a walk with me, sir, instead?" he asked.

"Yes," said Mr. Stone.

They walked out into Kensington Gardens, Hilary with his head rather bent towards the ground, and Mr. Stone, with eyes fixed on his far thoughts, slightly poking forward his silver beard.

In their favourite firmaments the stars of crocuses and daffodils were shining. Almost every tree had its pigeon cooing, every bush its blackbird in full song. And on the paths were babies in perambulators. These were their happy hunting-grounds, and here they came each day to watch from a safe distance the little dirty girls sitting on the grass nursing little dirty boys, to listen to the ceaseless chatter of these common urchins, and learn to deal with the great problem of the lowest classes. And babies sat in their perambulators, thinking and sucking india-rubber tubes. Dogs went before them, and nursemaids followed after.

The spirit of colour was flying in the distant trees, swathing them with brownish-purple haze; the sky was saffroned by dying sunlight. It was such a day as brings a longing to the heart, like that which the moon brings to the hearts of children.

Mr. Stone and Hilary sat down in the Broad Walk.

"Elm-trees!" said Mr. Stone. "It is not known when they assumed their present shape. They have one universal soul. It is the same with man." He ceased, and Hilary looked round uneasily. They were alone on the bench.

Mr. Stone's voice rose again. "Their form and balance is their single soul; they have preserved it from century to century. This is all they live for. In those days" – his voice sank; he had plainly forgotten that he was not alone – "when men had no universal conceptions, they would have done well to look at the trees. Instead of fostering a number of little souls on the pabulum of varying theories of future life, they should have been concerned to improve their present shapes, and thus to dignify man's single soul."

"Elms were always considered dangerous trees, I believe," said Hilary.

Mr. Stone turned, and, seeing his son-in-law beside him, asked:

"You spoke to me, I think?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Stone said wistfully:

"Shall we walk?"

They rose from the bench and walked on…

The explanation of the little model's absence was thus stated by herself to Hilary: "I had an appointment."

"More work?"

"A friend of Mr. French."

"Yes – who?"

"Mr. Lennard. He's a sculptor; he's got a studio in Chelsea. He wants me to pose to him."

"Ah!"

She stole a glance at Hilary, and hung her head.

Hilary turned to the window. "You know what posing to a sculptor means, of course?"

The little model's voice sounded behind him, matter-of-fact as ever: "He said I was just the figure he was looking for."

Hilary continued to stare through the window. "I thought you didn't mean to begin standing for the nude."

"I don't want to stay poor always."

Hilary turned round at the strange tone of these unexpected words.

The girl was in a streak of sunlight; her pale cheeks flushed; her pale, half-opened lips red; her eyes, in their setting of short black lashes, wide and mutinous; her young round bosom heaving as if she had been running.

"I don't want to go on copying books all my life."

"Oh, very well."

"Mr. Dallison! I didn't mean that – I didn't really! I want to do what you tell me to do – I do!"

Hilary stood contemplating her with the dubious, critical look, as though asking: "What is there behind you? Are you really a genuine edition, or what?" which had so disconcerted her before. At last he said: "You must do just as you like. I never advise anybody."

"But you don't want me to – I know you don't. Of course, if you don't want me to, then it'll be a pleasure not to!"

Hilary smiled.

"Don't you like copying for Mr. Stone?"

The little model made a face. "I like Mr. Stone – he's such a funny old gentleman."

"That is the general opinion," answered Hilary. "But Mr. Stone, you know, thinks that we are funny."

The little model smiled faintly, too; the streak of sunlight had slanted past her, and, standing there behind its glamour and million floating specks of gold-dust, she looked for the moment like the young Shade of Spring, watching with expectancy for what the year would bring her.

With the words "I am ready," spoken from the doorway, Mr. Stone interrupted further colloquy…

But though the girl's position in the household had, to all seeming, become established, now and then some little incident – straws blowing down the wind – showed feelings at work beneath the family's apparent friendliness, beneath that tentative and almost apologetic manner towards the poor or helpless, which marks out those who own what Hilary had called the "social conscience." Only three days, indeed, before he sat in his brown study, meditating beneath the bust of Socrates, Cecilia, coming to lunch, had let fall this remark:

"Of course, I know nobody can read his handwriting; but I can't think why father doesn't dictate to a typist, instead of to that little girl. She could go twice the pace!"

Blanca's answer, deferred for a few seconds, was:

"Hilary perhaps knows."

"Do you dislike her coming here?" asked Hilary.

"Not particularly. Why?"

"I thought from your tone you did."

"I don't dislike her coming here for that purpose."

"Does she come for any other?"

Cecilia, dropping her quick glance to her fork, said just a little hastily: "Father is extraordinary, of course."

But the next three days Hilary was out in the afternoon when the little model came.

This, then, was the other reason, on the morning of the first of May, which made him not averse to go and visit Mrs. Hughs in Hound Street, Kensington.

CHAPTER VI
FIRST PILGRIMAGE TO HOUND STREET

Hilary and his little bulldog entered Hound Street from its eastern end. It was a grey street of three-storied houses, all in one style of architecture. Nearly all their doors were open, and on the doorsteps babes and children were enjoying Easter holidays. They sat in apathy, varied by sudden little slaps and bursts of noise. Nearly all were dirty; some had whole boots, some half boots, and two or three had none. In the gutters more children were at play; their shrill tongues and febrile movements gave Hilary the feeling that their "caste" exacted of them a profession of this faith: "To-day we live; to-morrow – if there be one – will be like to-day."

He had unconsciously chosen the very centre of the street to walk in, and Miranda, who had never in her life demeaned herself to this extent, ran at his heels, turning up her eyes, as though to say: 'One thing I make a point of – no dog must speak to me!'

Fortunately, there were no dogs; but there were many cats, and these cats were thin.

Through the upper windows of the houses Hilary had glimpses of women in poor habiliments doing various kinds of work, but stopping now and then to gaze into the street. He walked to the end, where a wall stopped him, and, still in the centre of the road, he walked the whole length back. The children stared at his tall figure with indifference; they evidently felt that he was not of those who, like themselves, had no to-morrow.

No. 1, Hound Street, abutting on the garden of a house of better class, was distinctly the show building of the street. The door, however, was not closed, and pulling the remnant of a bell, Hilary walked in.

The first thing that he noticed was a smell; it was not precisely bad, but it might have been better. It was a smell of walls and washing, varied rather vaguely by red herrings. The second thing he noticed was his moonlight bulldog, who stood on the doorstep eyeing a tiny sandy cat. This very little cat, whose back was arched with fury, he was obliged to chase away before his bulldog would come in. The third thing he noticed was a lame woman of short stature, standing in the doorway of a room. Her face, with big cheek-bones, and wide-open, light grey, dark-lashed eyes, was broad and patient; she rested her lame leg by holding to the handle of the door.

"I dunno if you'll find anyone upstairs. I'd go and ask, but my leg's lame."

"So I see," said Hilary; "I'm sorry."

The woman sighed: "Been like that these five years"; and turned back into her room.

"Is there nothing to be done for it?"

"Well, I did think so once," replied the woman, "but they say the bone's diseased; I neglected it at the start."

"Oh dear!"

"We hadn't the time to give to it," the woman said defensively, retiring into a room so full of china cups, photographs, coloured prints, waxwork fruits, and other ornaments, that there seemed no room for the enormous bed.

Wishing her good-morning, Hilary began to mount the stairs. On the first floor he paused. Here, in the back room, the little model lived.

He looked around him. The paper on the passage walls was of a dingy orange colour, the blind of the window torn, and still pursuing him, pervading everything, was the scent of walls and washing and red herrings. There came on him a sickness, a sort of spiritual revolt. To live here, to pass up these stairs, between these dingy, bilious walls, on this dirty carpet, with this – ugh! every day; twice, four times, six times, who knew how many times a day! And that sense, the first to be attracted or revolted, the first to become fastidious with the culture of the body, the last to be expelled from the temple of

the pure-spirit; that sense to whose refinement all breeding and all education is devoted; that sense which, ever an inch at least in front of man, is able to retard the development of nations, and paralyse all social schemes – this Sense of Smell awakened within him the centuries of his gentility, the ghosts of all those Dallisons who, for three hundred years and more, had served Church or State. It revived the souls of scents he was accustomed to, and with them, subtly mingled, the whole live fabric of aestheticism, woven in fresh air and laid in lavender. It roused the simple, non-extravagant demand of perfect cleanliness. And though he knew that chemists would have certified the composition of his blood to be the same as that of the dwellers in this house, and that this smell, composed of walls and washing and red herrings, was really rather healthy, he stood frowning fixedly at the girl's door, and the memory of his young niece's delicately wrinkled nose as she described the house rose before him. He went on upstairs, followed by his moonlight bulldog.

Hilary's tall thin figure appearing in the open doorway of the top-floor front, his kind and worried face, and the pale agate eyes of the little bulldog peeping through his legs, were witnessed by nothing but a baby, who was sitting in a wooden box in the centre of the room. This baby, who was very like a piece of putty to which Nature had by some accident fitted two movable black eyes, was clothed in a woman's knitted undervest, spreading beyond his feet and hands, so that nothing but his head was visible. This vest divided him from the wooden shavings on which he sat, and, since he had not yet attained the art of rising to his feet, the box divided him from contacts of all other kinds. As completely isolated from his kingdom as a Czar of all the Russias, he was doing nothing. In this realm there was a dingy bed, two chairs, and a washstand, with one lame leg, supported by an aged footstool. Clothes and garments were hanging on nails, pans lay about the hearth, a sewing-machine stood on a bare deal table. Over the bed was hung an oleograph, from a Christmas supplement, of the birth of Jesus, and above it a bayonet, under which was printed in an illiterate hand on a rough scroll of paper: "Gave three of em what for at Elandslaagte. S. Hughs." Some photographs adorned the walls, and two drooping ferns stood on the window-ledge. The room withal had a sort of desperate tidiness; in a large cupboard, slightly open, could be seen stowed all that must not see the light of day. The window of the baby's kingdom was tightly closed; the scent was the scent of walls and washing and red herrings, and – of other things.

Hilary looked at the baby, and the baby looked at him. The eyes of that tiny scrap of grey humanity seemed saying:

'You are not my mother, I believe?'

He stooped down and touched its cheek. The baby blinked its black eyes once.

'No,' it seemed, to say again, 'you are not my mother.'

A lump rose in Hilary's throat; he turned and went downstairs. Pausing outside the little model's door, he knocked, and, receiving no answer, turned the handle. The little square room was empty; it was neat and clean enough, with a pink-flowered paper of comparatively modern date. Through its open window could be seen a pear-tree in full bloom. Hilary shut the door again with care, ashamed of having opened it.

On the half-landing, staring up at him with black eyes like the baby's, was a man of medium height and active build, whose short face, with broad cheekbones, cropped dark hair, straight nose, and little black moustache, was burnt a dark dun colour. He was dressed in the uniform of those who sweep the streets – a loose blue blouse, and trousers tucked into boots reaching half-way up his calves; he held a peaked cap in his hand.

After some seconds of mutual admiration, Hilary said:

"Mr. Hughs, I believe?" Yes.

"I've been up to see your wife."

"Have you?"

"You know me, I suppose?"

"Yes, I know you."

"Unfortunately, there's only your baby at home."

Hughs motioned with his cap towards the little model's room. "I thought perhaps you'd been to see her," he said. His black eyes smouldered; there was more than class resentment in the expression of his face.

Flushing slightly and giving him a keen look, Hilary passed down the stairs without replying. But Miranda had not followed. She stood, with one paw delicately held up above the topmost step.

'I don't know this man,' she seemed to say, 'and I don't like his looks.'

Hughs grinned. "I never hurt a dumb animal," he said; "come on, tykie!"

Stimulated by a word she had never thought to hear, Miranda descended rapidly.

'He meant that for impudence,' thought Hilary as he walked away.

"Westminister, sir? Oh dear!"

A skinny trembling hand was offering him a greenish newspaper.

"Terrible cold wind for the time o' year!"

A very aged man in black-rimmed spectacles, with a distended nose and long upper lip and chin, was tentatively fumbling out change for sixpence.

"I seem to know your face," said Hilary.

"Oh dear, yes. You deals with this 'ere shop – the tobacco department. I've often seen you when you've a-been agoin' in. Sometimes you has the Pell Mell off o' this man here." He jerked his head a trifle to the left, where a younger man was standing armed with a sheaf of whiter papers. In that gesture were years of envy, heart-burning, and sense of wrong. 'That's my paper,' it seemed to say, 'by all the rights of man; and that low-class fellow sellin' it, takin' away my profits!'

"I sells this 'ere Westminister. I reads it on Sundays – it's a gentleman's paper, 'igh-class paper – notwithstandin' of its politics. But, Lor', sir, with this 'ere man a-sellin' the Pell Mell" – lowering his voice, he invited Hilary to confidence – "so many o' the gentry takes that; an' there ain't too many o' the gentry about 'ere – I mean, not o' the real gentry – that I can afford to 'ave 'em took away from me."

Hilary, who had stopped to listen out of delicacy, had a flash of recollection. "You live in Hound Street?"

The old man answered eagerly: "Oh dear! Yes, sir – No. 1, name of Creed. You're the gentleman where the young person goes for to copy of a book!"

"It's not my book she copies."

"Oh no; it's an old gentleman; I know 'im. He come an' see me once. He come in one Sunday morning. 'Here's a pound o' tobacca for you!' 'e says. 'You was a butler,' 'e says. 'Butlers!' 'e says, 'there'll be no butlers in fifty years.' An' out 'e goes. Not quite" – he put a shaky hand up to his head – "not quite – oh dear!"

"Some people called Hughs live in your house, I think?"

"I rents my room off o' them. A lady was a-speakin' to me yesterday about 'em; that's not your lady, I suppose, sir?"

His eyes seemed to apostrophise Hilary's hat, which was of soft felt: 'Yes, yes – I've seen your sort a-stayin' about in the best houses. They has you down because of your learnin'; and quite the manners of a gentleman you've got.'

"My wife's sister, I expect."

"Oh dear! She often has a paper off o' me. A real lady – not one o' these" – again he invited Hilary to confidence – "you know what I mean, sir – that buys their things a' ready-made at these 'ere large establishments. Oh, I know her well."

"The old gentleman who visited you is her father."

"Is he? Oh dear!" The old butler was silent, evidently puzzled.

Hilary's eyebrows began to execute those intricate manoeuvres which always indicated that he was about to tax his delicacy.

"How-how does Hughs treat the little girl who lives in the next room to you?"

The old butler replied in a rather gloomy tone:

"She takes my advice, and don't 'ave nothin' to say to 'im. Dreadful foreign-lookin' man 'e is. Wherever 'e was brought up I can't think!"

"A soldier, wasn't he?"

"So he says. He's one o' these that works for the Vestry; an' then 'e'll go an' get upon the drink, an' when that sets 'im off, it seems as if there wasn't no respect for nothing in 'im; he goes on against the gentry, and the Church, and every sort of institution. I never met no soldiers like him. Dreadful foreign – Welsh, they tell me."

"What do you think of the street you're living in?"

"I keeps myself to myself; low class o' street it is; dreadful low class o' person there – no self-respect about 'em."

"Ah!" said Hilary.

"These little 'ouses, they get into the hands o' little men, and they don't care so long as they makes their rent out o' them. They can't help themselves – low class o' man like that; 'e's got to do the best 'e can for 'imself. They say there's thousands o' these 'ouses all over London. There's some that's for pullin' of 'em down, but that's talkin' rubbish; where are you goin' to get the money for to do it? These 'ere little men, they can't afford not even to put a paper on the walls, and the big ground landlords-you can't expect them to know what's happenin' behind their backs. There's some ignorant fellers like this Hughs talks a lot o' wild nonsense about the duty o' ground landlords; but you can't expect the real gentry to look into these sort o' things. They've got their estates down in the country. I've lived with them, and of course I know."

The little bulldog, incommoded by the passers-by, now took the opportunity of beating with her tail against the old butler's legs.

"Oh dear! what's this? He don't bite, do 'e? Good Sambo!"

Miranda sought her master's eye at once. 'You see what happens to her if a lady loiters in the streets,' she seemed to say.

"It must be hard standing about here all day, after the life you've led," said Hilary.

"I mustn't complain; it's been the salvation o' me."

"Do you get shelter?"

Again the old butler seemed to take him into confidence.

"Sometimes of a wet night they lets me stand up in the archway there; they know I'm respectable. 'T wouldn't never do for that man" – he nodded at his rival – "or any of them boys to get standin' there, obstructin' of the traffic."

"I wanted to ask you, Mr. Creed, is there anything to be done for Mrs. Hughs?"

The frail old body quivered with the vindictive force of his answer.

"Accordin' to what she says, if I'm a-to believe 'er, I'd have him up before the magistrate, sure as my name's Creed, an' get a separation, an' I wouldn't never live with 'im again: that's what she ought to do. An' if he come to go for her after that, I'd have 'im in prison, if 'e killed me first! I've no patience with a low class o' man like that! He insulted of me this morning."

"Prison's a dreadful remedy," murmured Hilary.

The old butler answered stoutly: "There ain't but one way o' treatin' them low fellers – ketch hold o' them until they holler!"

Hilary was about to reply when he found himself alone. At the edge of the pavement some yards away, Creed, his face upraised to heaven, was embracing with all his force the second edition of the Westminster Gazette, which had been thrown him from a cart.

'Well,' thought Hilary, walking on, 'you know your own mind, anyway!'

And trotting by his side, with her jaw set very firm, his little bulldog looked up above her eyes, and seemed to say: 'It was time we left that man of action!'

CHAPTER VII
CECILIA'S SCATTERED THOUGHTS

In her morning room Mrs. Stephen Dallison sat at an old oak bureau collecting her scattered thoughts. They lay about on pieces of stamped notepaper, beginning "Dear Cecilia," or "Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace requests," or on bits of pasteboard headed by the names of theatres, galleries, or concert-halls; or, again, on paper of not quite so good a quality, commencing, "Dear Friend," and ending with a single well-known name like "Wessex," so that no suspicion should attach to the appeal contained between the two. She had before her also sheets of her own writing-paper, headed "76, The Old Square, Kensington," and two little books. One of these was bound in marbleised paper, and on it written: "Please keep this book in safety"; across the other, cased in the skin of some small animal deceased, was inscribed the solitary word "Engagements."

Cecilia had on a Persian-green silk blouse with sleeves that would have hidden her slim hands, but for silver buttons made in the likeness of little roses at her wrists; on her brow was a faint frown, as though she were wondering what her thoughts were all about. She sat there every morning catching those thoughts, and placing them in one or other of her little books. Only by thus working hard could she keep herself, her husband, and daughter, in due touch with all the different movements going on. And that the touch might be as due as possible, she had a little headache nearly every day. For the dread of letting slip one movement, or of being too much taken with another, was very real to her; there were so many people who were interesting, so many sympathies of hers and Stephen's which she desired to cultivate, that it was a matter of the utmost import not to cultivate any single one too much. Then, too, the duty of remaining feminine with all this going forward taxed her constitution. She sometimes thought enviously of the splendid isolation now enjoyed by Blanca, of which some subtle instinct, rather than definite knowledge, had informed her; but not often, for she was a loyal little person, to whom Stephen and his comforts were of the first moment. And though she worried somewhat because her thoughts WOULD come by every post, she did not worry very much – hardly more than the Persian kitten on her lap, who also sat for hours trying to catch her tail, with a line between her eyes, and two small hollows in her cheeks.

When she had at last decided what concerts she would be obliged to miss, paid her subscription to the League for the Suppression of Tinned Milk, and accepted an invitation to watch a man fall from a balloon, she paused. Then, dipping her pen in ink, she wrote as follows:

"Mrs. Stephen Dallison would be glad to have the blue dress ordered by her yesterday sent home at once without alteration. – Messrs. Rose and Thorn, High Street, Kensington."

Ringing the bell, she thought: 'It will be a job for Mrs. Hughs, poor thing. I believe she'll do it quite as well as Rose and Thorn.' – "Would you please ask Mrs. Hughs to come to me? – Oh, is that you, Mrs. Hughs? Come in."

The seamstress, who had advanced into the middle of the room, stood with her worn hands against her sides, and no sign of life but the liquid patience in her large brown eyes. She was an enigmatic figure. Her presence always roused a sort of irritation in Cecilia, as if she had been suddenly confronted with what might possibly have been herself if certain little accidents had omitted to occur. She was so conscious that she ought to sympathise, so anxious to show that there was no barrier between them, so eager to be all she ought to be, that her voice almost purred.

"Are you Getting on with the curtains, Mrs. Hughs?"

"Yes, m'm, thank you, m'm."

"I shall have another job for you to-morrow – altering a dress. Can you come?"

"Yes, m'm, thank you, m'm."

"Is the baby well?"

"Yes, m'm, thank you, m'm."

There was a silence.

'It's no good talking of her domestic matters,' thought Cecilia; 'not that I don't care!' But the silence getting on her nerves, she said quickly: "Is your husband behaving himself better?"

There was no answer; Cecilia saw a tear trickle slowly down the woman's cheek.

'Oh dear, oh dear,' she thought; 'poor thing! I'm in for it!'

Mrs. Hughs' whispering voice began: "He's behaving himself dreadful, m'm. I was going to speak to you. It's ever since that young girl" – her face hardened – "come to live down in my room there; he seem to – he seem to – just do nothing but neglect me."

Cecilia's heart gave the little pleasurable flutter which the heart must feel at the love dramas of other people, however painful.

"You mean the little model?" she said.

The seamstress answered in an agitated voice: "I don't want to speak against her, but she's put a spell on him, that's what she has; he don't seem able to do nothing but talk of her, and hang about her room. It was that troubling me when I saw you the other day. And ever since yesterday midday, when Mr. Hilary came – he's been talking that wild – and he pushed me – and – and – " Her lips ceased to form articulate words, but, since it was not etiquette to cry before her superiors, she used them to swallow down her tears, and something in her lean throat moved up and down.

At the mention of Hilary's name the pleasurable sensation in Cecilia had undergone a change. She felt curiosity, fear, offence.

"I don't quite understand you," she said.

The seamstress plaited at her frock. "Of course, I can't help the way he talks, m'm. I'm sure I don't like to repeat the wicked things he says about Mr. Hilary. It seems as if he were out of his mind when he gets talkin' about that young girl."

The tone of those last three words was almost fierce.

Cecilia was on the point of saying: 'That will do, please; I want to hear no more.' But her curiosity and queer subtle fear forced her instead to repeat: "I don't understand. Do you mean he insinuates that Mr. Hilary has anything to do with – with this girl, or what?" And she thought: 'I'll stop that, at any rate.'

The seamstress's face was distorted by her efforts to control her voice.

"I tell him he's wicked to say such things, m'm, and Mr. Hilary such a kind gentleman. And what business is it of his, I say, that's got a wife and children of his own? I've seen him in the street, I've watched him hanging about Mrs. Hilary's house when I've been working there waiting for that girl, and following her – home – " Again her lips refused to do service, except in the swallowing of her tears.

Cecilia thought: 'I must tell Stephen at once. That man is dangerous.' A spasm gripped her heart, usually so warm and snug; vague feelings she had already entertained presented themselves now with startling force; she seemed to see the face of sordid life staring at the family of Dallison. Mrs. Hughs' voice, which did not dare to break, resumed:

"I've said to him: 'Whatever are you thinking of? And after Mrs. Hilary's been so kind to me! But he's like a madman when he's in liquor, and he says he'll go to Mrs. Hilary – "

"Go to my sister? What about? The ruffian!"

At hearing her husband called a ruffian by another woman the shadow of resentment passed across Mrs. Hughs' face, leaving it quivering and red. The conversation had already made a strange difference in the manner of these two women to each other. It was as though each now knew exactly how much sympathy and confidence could be expected of the other, as though life had suddenly sucked up the mist, and shown them standing one on either side of a deep trench. In Mrs. Hughs' eyes there was the look of those who have long discovered that they must not answer back for fear of losing what little ground they have to stand on; and Cecilia's eyes were cold and watchful. 'I sympathise,'

they seemed to say, 'I sympathise; but you must please understand that you cannot expect sympathy if your affairs compromise the members of my family.' Her, chief thought now was to be relieved of the company of this woman, who had been betrayed into showing what lay beneath her dumb, stubborn patience. It was not callousness, but the natural result of being fluttered. Her heart was like a bird agitated in its gilt-wire cage by the contemplation of a distant cat. She did not, however, lose her sense of what was practical, but said calmly: "Your husband was wounded in South Africa, you told me? It looks as if he wasn't quite… I think you should have a doctor!"

The seamstress's answer, slow and matter-of-fact, was worse than her emotion.

"No, m'm, he isn't mad."

Crossing to the hearth-whose Persian-blue tiling had taken her so long to find – Cecilia stood beneath a reproduction of Botticelli's "Primavera," and looked doubtfully at Mrs. Hughs. The Persian kitten, sleepy and disturbed on the bosom of her blouse, gazed up into her face. 'Consider me,' it seemed to say; 'I am worth consideration; I am of a piece with you, and everything round you. We are both elegant and rather slender; we both love warmth and kittens; we both dislike interference with our fur. You took a long time to buy me, so as to get me perfect. You see that woman over there! I sat on her lap this morning while she was sewing your curtains. She has no right in here; she's not what she seems; she can bite and scratch, I know; her lap is skinny; she drops water from her eyes. She made me wet all down my back. Be careful what you're doing, or she'll make you wet down yours!'

All that was like the little Persian kitten within Cecilia – cosiness and love of pretty things, attachment to her own abode with its high-art lining, love for her mate and her own kitten, Thyme, dread of disturbance – all made her long to push this woman from the room; this woman with the skimpy figure, and eyes that, for all their patience, had in them something virago-like; this woman who carried about with her an atmosphere of sordid grief, of squalid menaces, and scandal. She longed all the more because it could well be seen from the seamstress's helpless attitude that she too would have liked an easy life. To dwell on things like this was to feel more than thirty-eight!

Cecilia had no pocket, Providence having removed it now for some time past, but from her little bag she drew forth the two essentials of gentility. Taking her nose, which she feared was shining, gently within one, she fumbled in the other. And again she looked doubtfully at Mrs. Hughs. Her heart said: 'Give the poor woman half a sovereign; it might comfort her!' But her brain said: 'I owe her four-and-six; after what she's just been saying about her husband and that girl and Hilary, it mayn't be safe to give her more.' She held out two half-crowns, and had an inspiration: "I shall mention to my sister what you've said; you can tell your husband that!"

No sooner had she said this, however, than she saw, from a little smile devoid of merriment and quickly extinguished, that Mrs. Hughs did not believe she would do anything of the kind; from which she concluded that the seamstress was convinced of Hilary's interest in the little model. She said hastily:

"You can go now, Mrs. Hughs."

Mrs. Hughs went, making no noise or sign of any sort.

Cecilia returned to her scattered thoughts. They lay there still, with a gleam of sun from the low window smearing their importance; she felt somehow that it did not now matter very much whether she and Stephen, in the interests of science, saw that man fall from his balloon, or, in the interests of art, heard Herr von Kraaffe sing his Polish songs; she experienced, too, almost a revulsion in favour of tinned milk. After meditatively tearing up her note to Messrs. Rose and Thorn, she lowered the bureau lid and left the room.

Mounting the stairs, whose old oak banisters on either side were a real joy, she felt she was stupid to let vague, sordid rumours, which, after all, affected her but indirectly, disturb her morning's work. And entering Stephen's dressing-room she stood looking at his boots.

Inside each one of them was a wooden soul; none had any creases, none had any holes. The moment they wore out, their wooden souls were taken from them and their bodies given to the poor,

whilst – in accordance with that theory, to hear a course of lectures on which a scattered thought was even now inviting her – the wooden souls migrated instantly to other leathern bodies.

Looking at that polished row of boots, Cecilia felt lonely and unsatisfied. Stephen worked in the Law Courts, Thyme worked at Art; both were doing something definite. She alone, it seemed, had to wait at home, and order dinner, answer letters, shop, pay calls, and do a dozen things that failed to stop her thoughts from dwelling on that woman's tale. She was not often conscious of the nature of her life, so like the lives of many hundred women in this London, which she said she could not stand, but which she stood very well. As a rule, with practical good sense, she kept her doubting eyes fixed friendlily on every little phase in turn, enjoying well enough fitting the Chinese puzzle of her scattered thoughts, setting out on each small adventure with a certain cautious zest, and taking Stephen with her as far as he allowed. This last year or so, now that Thyme was a grown girl, she had felt at once a loss of purpose and a gain of liberty. She hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry. It freed her for the tasting of more things, more people, and more Stephen; but it left a little void in her heart, a little soreness round it. What would Thyme think if she heard this story about her uncle? The thought started a whole train of doubts that had of late beset her. Was her little daughter going to turn out like herself? If not, why not? Stephen joked about his daughter's skirts, her hockey, her friendship with young men. He joked about the way Thyme refused to let him joke about her art or about her interest in "the people." His joking was a source of irritation to Cecilia. For, by woman's instinct rather than by any reasoning process, she was conscious of a disconcerting change. Amongst the people she knew, young men were not now attracted by girls as they had been in her young days. There was a kind of cool and friendly matter-of-factness in the way they treated them, a sort of almost scientific playfulness. And Cecilia felt uneasy as to how far this was to go. She seemed left behind. If young people were really becoming serious, if youths no longer cared about the colour of Thyme's eyes, or dress, or hair, what would there be left to care for – that is, up to the point of definite relationship? Not that she wanted her daughter to be married. It would be time enough to think of that when she was twenty-five. But her own experiences had been so different. She had spent so many youthful hours in wondering about men, had seen so many men cast furtive looks at her; and now there did not seem in men or girls anything left worth the other's while to wonder or look furtive about. She was not of a philosophic turn of mind, and had attached no deep meaning to Stephen's jest – "If young people will reveal their ankles, they'll soon have no ankles to reveal."

To Cecilia the extinction of the race seemed threatened; in reality her species of the race alone was vanishing, which to her, of course, was very much the same disaster. With her eyes on Stephen's boots she thought: 'How shall I prevent what I've heard from coming to Bianca's ears? I know how she would take it! How shall I prevent Thyme's hearing? I'm sure I don't know what the effect would be on her! I must speak to Stephen. He's so fond of Hilary.'

And, turning away from Stephen's boots, she mused: 'Of course it's nonsense. Hilary's much too – too nice, too fastidious, to be more than just interested; but he's so kind he might easily put himself in a false position. And – it's ugly nonsense! B. can be so disagreeable; even now she's not – on terms with him!' And suddenly the thought of Mr. Purcey leaped into her mind – Mr. Purcey, who, as Mrs. Tallents Smallpeace had declared, was not even conscious that there was a problem of the poor. To think of him seemed somehow at that moment comforting, like rolling oneself in a blanket against a draught. Passing into her room, she opened her wardrobe door.

'Bother the woman!' she thought. 'I do want that gentian dress got ready, but now I simply can't give it to her to do.'

CHAPTER VIII
THE SINGLE MIND OF MR. STONE

Since in the flutter of her spirit caused by the words of Mrs. Hughs, Cecilia felt she must do something, she decided to change her dress.

The furniture of the pretty room she shared with Stephen had not been hastily assembled. Conscious, even fifteen years ago, when they moved into this house, of the grave Philistinism of the upper classes, she and Stephen had ever kept their duty to aestheticism green; and, in the matter of their bed, had lain for two years on two little white affairs, comfortable, but purely temporary, that they might give themselves a chance. The chance had come at last – a bed in real keeping with the period they had settled on, and going for twelve pounds. They had not let it go, and now slept in it – not quite so comfortable, perhaps, but comfortable enough, and conscious of duty done.

For fifteen years Cecilia had been furnishing her house; the process approached completion. The only things remaining on her mind – apart, that is, from Thyme's development and the condition of the people – were: item, a copper lantern that would allow some light to pass its framework; item, an old oak washstand not going back to Cromwell's time. And now this third anxiety had come!

She was rather touching, as she stood before the wardrobe glass divested of her bodice, with dimples of exertion in her thin white arms while she hooked her skirt behind, and her greenish eyes troubled, so anxious to do their best for everyone, and save risk of any sort. Having put on a bramble-coloured frock, which laced across her breast with silver lattice-work, and a hat (without feathers, so as to encourage birds) fastened to her head with pins (bought to aid a novel school of metal-work), she went to see what sort of day it was.

The window looked out at the back over some dreary streets, where the wind was flinging light drifts of smoke athwart the sunlight. They had chosen this room, not indeed for its view over the condition of the people, but because of the sky effects at sunset, which were extremely fine. For the first time, perhaps, Cecilia was conscious that a sample of the class she was so interested in was exposed to view beneath her nose. 'The Hughs live somewhere there,' she thought. 'After all I think B. ought to know about that man. She might speak to father, and get him to give up having the girl to copy for him – the whole thing's so worrying.'

In pursuance of this thought, she lunched hastily, and went out, making her way to Hilary's. With every step she became more uncertain. The fear of meddling too much, of not meddling enough, of seeming meddlesome; timidity at touching anything so awkward; distrust, even ignorance, of her sister's character, which was like, yet so very unlike, her own; a real itch to get the matter settled, so that nothing whatever should come of it – all this she felt. She hurried, dawdled, finished the adventure almost at a run, then told the servant not to announce her. The vision of Bianca's eyes, while she listened to this tale, was suddenly too much for Cecilia. She decided to pay a visit to her father first.

Mr. Stone was writing, attired in his working dress – a thick brown woollen gown, revealing his thin neck above the line of a blue shirt, and tightly gathered round the waist with tasselled cord; the lower portions of grey trousers were visible above woollen-slippered feet. His hair straggled over his thin long ears. The window, wide open, admitted an east wind; there was no fire. Cecilia shivered.

"Come in quickly," said Mr. Stone. Turning to a big high desk of stained deal which occupied the middle of one wall, he began methodically to place the inkstand, a heavy paper-knife, a book, and stones of several sizes, on his guttering sheets of manuscript.

Cecilia looked about her; she had not been inside her father's room for several months. There was nothing in it but that desk, a camp bed in the far corner (with blankets, but no sheets), a folding washstand, and a narrow bookcase, the books in which Cecilia unconsciously told off on the fingers of her memory. They never varied. On the top shelf the Bible and the works of Plautus and

Diderot; on the second from the top the plays of Shakespeare in a blue edition; on the third from the bottom Don Quixote, in four volumes, covered with brown paper; a green Milton; the "Comedies of Aristophanes"; a leather book, partially burned, comparing the philosophy of Epicurus with the philosophy of Spinoza; and in a yellow binding Mark Twain's "Huckleberry Finn." On the second from the bottom was lighter literature: "The Iliad"; a "Life of Francis of Assisi"; Speke's "Discovery of the Sources of the Nile"; the "Pickwick Papers"; "Mr. Midshipman Easy"; The Verses of Theocritus, in a very old translation; Renan's "Life of Christ"; and the "Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini." The bottom shelf of all was full of books on natural science.

The walls were whitewashed, and, as Cecilia knew, came off on anybody who leaned against them. The floor was stained, and had no carpet. There was a little gas cooking-stove, with cooking things ranged on it; a small bare table; and one large cupboard. No draperies, no pictures, no ornaments of any kind; but by the window an ancient golden leather chair. Cecilia could never bear to sit in that oasis; its colour in this wilderness was too precious to her spirit.

"It's an east wind, father; aren't you terribly cold without a fire?"

Mr. Stone came from his writing-desk, and stood so that light might fall on a sheet of paper in his hand. Cecilia noted the scent that went about with him of peat and baked potatoes. He spoke:

"Listen to this: 'In the condition of society, dignified in those days with the name of civilisation, the only source of hope was the persistence of the quality called courage. Amongst a thousand nerve-destroying habits, amongst the dramshops, patent medicines, the undigested chaos of inventions and discoveries, while hundreds were prating in their pulpits of things believed in by a negligible fraction of the population, and thousands writing down today what nobody would want to read in two days' time; while men shut animals in cages, and made bears jig to please their children, and all were striving one against the other; while, in a word, like gnats above a stagnant pool on a summer's evening, man danced up and down without the faintest notion why – in this condition of affairs the quality of courage was alive. It was the only fire within that gloomy valley.'" He stopped, though evidently anxious to go on, because he had read the last word on that sheet of paper. He moved towards the writing-desk. Cecilia said hastily:

"Do you mind if I shut the window, father?"

Mr. Stone made a movement of his head, and Cecilia saw that he held a second sheet of paper in his hand. She rose, and, going towards him, said:

"I want to talk to you, Dad!" Taking up the cord of his dressing-gown, she pulled it by its tassel.

"Don't!" said Mr. Stone; "it secures my trousers."

Cecilia dropped the cord. 'Father is really terrible!' she thought.

Mr. Stone, lifting the second sheet of paper, began again:

"'The reason, however, was not far to seek – "

Cecilia said desperately:

"It's about that girl who comes to copy for you."

Mr. Stone lowered the sheet of paper, and stood, slightly curved from head to foot; his ears moved as though he were about to lay them back; his blue eyes, with little white spots of light alongside the tiny black pupils, stared at his daughter.

Cecilia thought: 'He's listening now.'

She made haste. "Must you have her here? Can't you do without her?"

"Without whom?" said Mr. Stone.

"Without the girl who comes to copy for you."

"Why?"

"For this very good reason – "

Mr. Stone dropped his eyes, and Cecilia saw that he had moved the sheet of paper up as far as his waist.

"Does she copy better than any other girl could?" she asked hastily.

"No," said Mr. Stone.

"Then, Father, I do wish, to please me, you'd get someone else. I know what I'm talking about, and I – " Cecilia stopped; her father's lips and eyes were moving; he was obviously reading to himself.

'I've no patience with him,' she thought; 'he thinks of nothing but his wretched book.'

Aware of his daughter's silence, Mr. Stone let the sheet of paper sink, and waited patiently again.

"What do you want, my dear?" he said.

"Oh, Father, do listen just a minute!"

"Yes, Yes."

"It's about that girl who comes to copy for you. Is there any reason why she should come instead of any other girl?"

"Yes," said Mr. Stone.

"What reason?"

"Because she has no friends."

So awkward a reply was not expected by Cecilia; she looked at the floor, forced to search within her soul. Silence lasted several seconds; then Mr. Stone's voice rose above a whisper:

"'The reason was not far to seek. Man, differentiated from the other apes by his desire to know, was from the first obliged to steel himself against the penalties of knowledge. Like animals subjected to the rigours of an Arctic climate, and putting forth more fur with each reduction in the temperature, man's hide of courage thickened automatically to resist the spear-thrusts dealt him by his own insatiate curiosity. In those days of which we speak, when undigested knowledge, in a great invading horde, had swarmed all his defences, man, suffering from a foul dyspepsia, with a nervous system in the latest stages of exhaustion, and a reeling brain, survived by reason of his power to go on making courage. Little heroic as (in the then general state of petty competition) his deeds appeared to be, there never had yet been a time when man in bulk was more courageous, for there never had yet been a time when he had more need to be. Signs were not wanting that this desperate state of things had caught the eyes of the community. A little sect – '" Mr. Stone stopped; his eyes had again tumbled over the bottom edge; he moved hurriedly towards the desk. Just as his hand removed a stone and took up a third sheet, Cecilia cried out:

"Father!"

Mr. Stone stopped, and turned towards her. His daughter saw that he had gone quite pink; her annoyance vanished.

"Father! About that girl – "

Mr. Stone seemed to reflect. "Yes, yes," he said.

"I don't think Bianca likes her coming here."

Mr. Stone passed his hand across his brow.

"Forgive me for reading to you, my dear," he said; "it's a great relief to me at times."

Cecilia went close to him, and refrained with difficulty from taking up the tasselled cord.

"Of course, dear," she said: "I quite understand that."

Mr. Stone looked full in her face, and before a gaze which seemed to go through her and see things the other side, Cecilia dropped her eyes.

"It is strange," he said, "how you came to be my daughter!"

To Cecilia, too, this had often seemed a problem.

"There is a great deal in atavism," said Mr. Stone, "that we know nothing of at present."

Cecilia cried with heat, "I do wish you would attend a minute, Father; it's really an important matter," and she turned towards the window, tears being very near her eyes.

The voice of Mr. Stone said humbly: "I will try, my dear."

But Cecilia thought: 'I must give him a good lesson. He really is too self-absorbed'; and she did not move, conveying by the posture of her shoulders how gravely she was vexed.

She could see nursemaids wheeling babies towards the Gardens, and noted their faces gazing, not at the babies, but, uppishly, at other nursemaids, or, with a sort of cautious longing, at men who passed. How selfish they looked! She felt a little glow of satisfaction that she was making this thin and bent old man behind her conscious of his egoism.

'He will know better another time,' she thought. Suddenly she heard a whistling, squeaking sound – it was Mr. Stone whispering the third page of his manuscript:

"' – animated by some admirable sentiments, but whose doctrines – riddled by the fact that life is but the change of form to form – were too constricted for the evils they designed to remedy; this little sect, who had as yet to learn the meaning of universal love, were making the most strenuous efforts, in advance of the community at large, to understand themselves. The necessary, movement which they voiced – reaction against the high-tide of the fratricidal system then prevailing – was young, and had the freshness and honesty of youth…'"

Without a word Cecilia turned round and hurried to the door. She saw her father drop the sheet of paper; she saw his face, all pink and silver, stooping after it; and remorse visited her anger.

In the corridor outside she was arrested by a noise. The uncertain light of London halls fell there; on close inspection the sufferer was seen to be Miranda, who, unable to decide whether she wanted to be in the garden or the house, was seated beneath the hatrack snuffling to herself. On seeing Cecilia she came out.

"What do you want, you little beast?"

Peering at her over the tops of her eyes, Miranda vaguely lifted a white foot. 'Why ask me that?' she seemed to say. 'How am I to know? Are we not all like this?'

Her conduct, coming at that moment, over-tried Cecilia's nerves. She threw open Hilary's study-door, saying sharply: "Go in and find your master!"

Miranda did not move, but Hilary came out instead. He had been correcting proofs to catch the post, and wore the look of a man abstracted, faintly contemptuous of other forms of life.

Cecilia, once more saved from the necessity of approaching her sister, the mistress of the house, so fugitive, haunting, and unseen, yet so much the centre of this situation, said:

"Can I speak to you a minute, Hilary?"

They went into his study, and Miranda came creeping in behind.

To Cecilia her brother-in-law always seemed an amiable and more or less pathetic figure. In his literary preoccupations he allowed people to impose on him. He looked unsubstantial beside the bust of Socrates, which moved Cecilia strangely – it was so very massive and so very ugly! She decided not to beat about the bush.

"I've been hearing some odd things from Mrs. Hughs about that little model, Hilary."

Hilary's smile faded from his eyes, but remained clinging to his lips.

"Indeed!"

Cecilia went on nervously: "Mrs. Hughs says it's because of her that Hughs behaves so badly. I don't want to say anything against the girl, but she seems – she seems to have – "

"Yes?" said Hilary.

"To have cast a spell on Hughs, as the woman puts it."

"On Hughs!" repeated Hilary.

Cecilia found her eyes resting on the bust of Socrates, and hastily proceeded:

"She says he follows her about, and comes down here to lie in wait for her. It's a most strange business altogether. You went to see them, didn't you?"

Hilary nodded.

"I've been speaking to Father," Cecilia murmured; "but he's hopeless – I, couldn't get him to pay the least attention."

Hilary seemed thinking deeply.

"I wanted him," she went on, "to get some other girl instead to come and copy for him."

"Why?"

Under the seeming impossibility of ever getting any farther, without saying what she had come to say, Cecilia blurted out:

"Mrs. Hughs says that Hughs has threatened you."

Hilary's face became ironical.

"Really!" he said. "That's good of him! What for?"

The frightful indelicacy of her situation at this moment, the feeling of unfairness that she should be placed in it, almost overwhelmed Cecilia. "Goodness knows I don't want to meddle. I never meddle in anything-it's horrible!"

Hilary took her hand.

"My dear Cis," he said, "of course! But we'd better have this out!"

Grateful for the pressure of his hand, she gave it a convulsive squeeze.

"It's so sordid, Hilary!"

"Sordid! H'm! Let's get it over, then."

Cecilia had grown crimson. "Do you want me to tell you everything?"

"Certainly."

"Well, Hughs evidently thinks you're interested in the girl. You can't keep anything from servants and people who work about your house; they always think the worst of everything – and, of course, they know that you and B. don't – aren't – "

Hilary nodded.

"Mrs. Hughs actually said the man meant to go to B.!"

Again the vision of her sister seemed to float into the room, and she went on desperately: "And, Hilary, I can see Mrs. Hughs really thinks you are interested. Of course, she wants to, for if you were, it would mean that a man like her husband could have no chance."

Astonished at this flash of cynical inspiration, and ashamed of such plain speaking, she checked herself. Hilary had turned away.

Cecilia touched his arm. "Hilary, dear," she said, "isn't there any chance of you and B – "

Hilary's lips twitched. "I should say not."

Cecilia looked sadly at the floor. Not since Stephen was bad with pleurisy had she felt so worried. The sight of Hilary's face brought back her doubts with all their force. It might, of course, be only anger at the man's impudence, but it might be – she hardly liked to frame her thought – a more personal feeling.

"Don't you think," she said, "that, anyway, she had better not come here again?"

Hilary paced the room.

"It's her only safe and certain piece of work; it keeps her independent. It's much more satisfactory than this sitting. I can't have any hand in taking it away from her."

Cecilia had never seen him moved like this. Was it possible that he was not incorrigibly gentle, but had in him some of that animality which she, in a sense, admired? This uncertainty terribly increased the difficulties of the situation.

"But, Hilary," she said at last, "are you satisfied about the girl – I mean, are you satisfied that she really is worth helping?"

"I don't understand."

"I mean," murmured Cecilia, "that we don't know anything about her past." And, seeing from the movement of his eyebrows that she was touching on what had evidently been a doubt with him, she went on with great courage: "Where are her friends and relations? I mean, she may have had a – adventures."

Hilary withdrew into himself.

"You can hardly expect me," he said, "to go into that with her."

His reply made Cecilia feel ridiculous.

"Well," she said in a hard little voice, "if this is what comes of helping the poor, I don't see the use of it."

The outburst evoked no reply from Hilary; she felt more tremulous than ever. The whole thing was so confused, so unnatural. What with the dark, malignant Hughs and that haunting vision of Bianca, the matter seemed almost Italian. That a man of Hughs' class might be affected by the passion of love had somehow never come into her head. She thought of the back streets she had looked out on from her bedroom window. Could anything like passion spring up in those dismal alleys? The people who lived there, poor downtrodden things, had enough to do to keep themselves alive. She knew all about them; they were in the air; their condition was deplorable! Could a person whose condition was deplorable find time or strength for any sort of lurid exhibition such as this? It was incredible.

She became aware that Hilary was speaking.

"I daresay the man is dangerous!"

Hearing her fears confirmed, and in accordance with the secret vein of hardness which kept her living, amid all her sympathies and hesitations, Cecilia felt suddenly that she had gone as far as it was in her to go.

"I shall have no more to do with them," she said; "I've tried my best for Mrs. Hughs. I know quite as good a needlewoman, who'll be only too glad to come instead. Any other girl will do as well to copy father's book. If you take my advice, Hilary, you'll give up trying to help them too."

Hilary's smile puzzled and annoyed her. If she had known, this was the smile that stood between him and her sister.

"You may be right," he said, and shrugged his shoulders:

"Very well," said Cecilia, "I've done all I can. I must go now. Good-bye."

During her progress to the door she gave one look behind. Hilary was standing by the bust of Socrates. Her heart smote her to leave him thus embarrassed. But again the vision of Bianca – fugitive in her own house, and with something tragic in her mocking immobility – came to her, and she hastened away.

A voice said: "How are you, Mrs. Dallison? Your sister at home?"

Cecilia saw before her Mr. Purcey, rising and falling a little with the oscillation of his A.i. Damyer.

A sense as of having just left a house visited by sickness or misfortune made Cecilia murmur:

"I'm afraid she's not."

"Bad luck!" said Mr. Purcey. His face fell as far as so red and square a face could fall. "I was hoping perhaps I might be allowed to take them for a run. She's wanting exercise." Mr. Purcey laid his hand on the flank of his palpitating car. "Know these A.i. Damyers, Mrs. Dallison? Best value you can get, simply rippin' little cars. Wish you'd try her."

The A.i. Damyer, diffusing an aroma of the finest petrol, leaped and trembled, as though conscious of her master's praise. Cecilia looked at her.

"Yes," she said, "she's very sweet."

"Now do!" said Mr. Purcey. "Let me give you a run – Just to please me, I mean. I'm sure you'll like her."

A little compunction, a little curiosity, a sudden revolt against all the discomfiture and sordid doubts she had been suffering from, made Cecilia glance softly at Mr. Purcey's figure; almost before she knew it, she was seated in the A.i. Damyer. It trembled, emitted two small sounds, one large scent, and glided forward. Mr. Purcey said:

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.