Saltus Edgar

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# Содержание

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## I

The murder of Monty Paliser, headlined that morning in the papers, shook the metropolis at breakfast, buttered the toast, improved the taste of the coffee.

Murdered! It seemed too bad to be false. Moreover, there was his picture, the portrait of a young man obviously high-bred and insolently good-looking. In addition to war news and the financial page, what more could you decently ask for a penny? Nothing, perhaps, except the address of the murderer. But that detail, which the morning papers omitted, extras shortly supplied. Meanwhile in the minds of imaginative New Yorkers, visions of the infernal feminine surged. The murdered man's name was evocative.

His father, Montagu Paliser, generally known as M. P., had lived in that extensive manner in which New York formerly took an indignant delight. Behind him, extending back to the remotest past when Bowling Green was the centre of fashion, always there had been a Paliser, precisely as there has always been a Livingston. These people and a dozen others formed the landed gentry – a gentry otherwise landed since. But not the Paliser

clan. The original Paliser was very wealthy. All told he had a thousand dollars. Montagu Paliser, the murdered man's father, had stated casually, as though offering unimportant information, that, by Gad, sir, you can't live like a gentleman on less than a thousand dollars a day. That was years and years ago. Afterward he doubled his estimate. Subsequently, he quadrupled it. It made no hole in him either. In spite of his yacht, his racing stable, his town house, his country residences and formerly in the great days, or rather in the great nights, his ladies of the ballet, in spite of these incidentals his wealth increased. No end to it, is about the way in which he was currently quoted.

All New Yorkers knew him, at any rate by repute, precisely as the least among us knows Mr. Carnegie, though perhaps more intimately. The tales of his orgies, of his ladies, of that divorce case and of the yacht scandal which burst like a starball, tales Victorian and now legendary, have, in their mere recital, made many an old reprobate's mouth champagne. But latterly, during the present generation that is, the ineffable Paliser – M. P. for short – who, with claret liveries and a yard of brass behind him had tooled his four-in-hand, or else, in his superb white yacht, gave you something to talk about, well, from living very extensively he had renounced the romps and banalities of this life.

Old reprobates could chuckle all they liked over the uproar he had raised in the small and early family party that social New York used to be. But in club windows there were no new tales of

him to tell. Like a potentate outwearied with the circumstance of State, he had chucked it, definitely for himself, and recently in favour of his son, Monty, who, in the month of March, 1917, arrived from Havana at the family residence, which in successive migrations had moved, as the heart of Manhattan has moved, from the neighbourhood of the Battery to that of the Plaza.

In these migrations the Palisers had not derogated from their high estate. Originally, one of the first families here, the centuries, few but plural, had increased what is happily known as their prestige. Monty Paliser was conscious of that, but not unwholesomely. The enamellings that his father had added gave him no concern whatever. On the contrary. He knew that trade would sack the Plaza, as long since it had razed the former citadels of fashion, and he foresaw the day when the family residence, ousted from upper Fifth Avenue, would be perched on a peak of Washington Heights, where the Palisers would still be among the first people in New York – to those coming in town that way.

That result it was for him to insure. Apart from second cousins, to whom he had never said a word and never proposed to address, apart from them, apart too from his father and himself, there was only his sister, Sally Balaguine, who, one night, had gone to bed in Petersburg and, on the morrow, had awakened in Petrograd. Though, in addition to this much surprised lady, before whose eyes Petrograd subsequently dissolved into Retrograd and afterward into delirium, there was her son, a boy

of three. Mme. Balaguine's prince did not count, or rather had ceased to. As lieutenant of the guards he had gone to the front where a portion of him had been buried, the rest having been minutely dispersed.

To perpetuate the clan in its elder branch, there was therefore but this young man, a circumstance which, on his return from Havana, his father advanced.

They were then at luncheon. For the father there was biscuit and milk. For the son there was an egg cooked in a potato. Yet, in the kitchen, or, if not there, somewhere about, were three chefs. Moreover on the walls were Beauvais. The ceiling was the spoil of a Venetian palace. The luncheon however simple was not therefore disagreeable.

With an uplift of the chin, the elder man flicked a crumb and sat back. The action was a signal. Three servants filed out.

Formerly his manner had been cited and imitated. To many a woman it had been myrrh and cassia. It had been deadly nightshade as well. After a fashion of long ago, he wore a cavalry moustache which, once black, now was white. He was tall, bald, very thin. But that air of his, the air of one accustomed to immediate obedience, yet which could be very urbane and equally insolent, that air endured.

In sitting back he looked at his son for whom he had no affection. For no human being had he ever had any affection, except for himself, and latterly even that unique love had waned.

The chefs, originally retained on shifts of eight hours each,

in order that this man might breakfast or sup whenever he so desired, that he might breakfast, as a gentleman may, at four in the afternoon, or sup at seven in the morning, these chefs were useless. His wife, who had died, not as one might suppose of a broken heart but of fatty degeneration, had succumbed to their delicately toxic surprises with groans but also with thanksgiving.

That is ancient history. At present her widower supped on powdered charcoal and breakfasted on bismuth. The cooks he still retained, not to prepare these triumphs, but for the benefit of his heir, for whom he had no affection but whom he respected as the next incumbent and treated accordingly, that is to say, as one gentleman treats another.

On this high noon, when the servants had gone, the father sat back and looked at his son, who, it then occurred to him, astonishingly resembled his mother. He had the same eyes, too big, too blue; the same lashes, too long, too dark; the same ears, too small and a trifle too far forward. In addition he had the same full upper-lip, the same cleft in the chin, the same features refined almost to the point of degeneracy. But the ensemble was charming – too charming, as was his voice, which he had acquired at Oxford where, at the House, he had studied, though what, except voice culture, one may surmise and never know. Men generally disliked him and accounted the way he spoke, or the way he looked, the reason. But what repelled them was probably his aura of which, though unaware, they were not perhaps unconscious.

His father motioned: "Thank God, you are here. At any moment now we may be in it and you will have to go. You are not a divinity student and you cannot be a slacker."

The old man paused and added: "Meanwhile you will have to marry. If anything should happen to you, there would be but Sally and the Balaguine brat and I shouldn't like that. God knows why I care, but I do. There has always been a Paliser here and it is your turn now – which reminds me. I have made over some property to you. You would have had it any way, but the transfer will put you on your feet, besides saving the inheritance tax."

"Thank you. What is it?"

"The Place, the Wall Street and lower Broadway property, that damned hotel and the opera-box. Jeroloman wrote you about it. Didn't you get his letter?"

"I may have. I don't know that I read it."

"When you have a moment look in on him. He will tell you where you are."

"And where is that?"

The old man summarised it. Even with the increased cost of matrimony, it was enough for a Mormon, for a tribe of them. But the young man omitted to say so. He said nothing.

His father nodded at him. "You think marriage a nuisance. So it is. So is everything. By Gad, sir, I wish I were well out of it. I go nowhere – not even to church. I have grown thin through the sheer nuisance of things. But if nothing happens over there and you don't make a mess of it, the next twenty years of your life

ought not to be profoundly disagreeable. Now I dislike to be a nuisance myself, but in view of the war, it is necessary that there should be another Paliser, if not here, at least en route."

"I will think it over," said this charming young man, who had no intention of doing anything of the kind.

"The quicker the better then, and while you are at it select a girl with good health and no brains. They wear best. I did think of Margaret Austen for you, but she has become engaged. Lennox his name is. Her mother told me. Told me too she hated it. Said you must come to dinner and she'd have a girl or two for you to look at. Oblige me by going. Plenty of others though. Girls here are getting healthier and stupider and uglier every year. By Gad, sir, I remember – "

The old man rambled on. He was back in the days when social New York foamed with beauty, when it held more loveliness to the square inch than any other spot on earth. He was back in the days when Fifth Avenue was an avenue and not a ghetto.

With an air of interest the young man listened. The air was not feigned. Yet what interested him was not the outworn tale but the pathological fact that the reminiscences of the aged are symptomatic of hardening of the arteries.

Mentally he weighed his father, gave him a year, eighteen months, and that, not because he was anxious for his shoes, but out of sheer dilettantism.

The idea that his father would survive him, that it was he who was doomed, that already behind the curtains of life destiny

was staging his death – and what a death! – he could no more foresee than he foresaw the Paliser Case, which, to the parties subsequently involved, was then unimaginable, yet which, at that very hour, a court of last resort was deciding.

He looked over at his father. "Palmerston asked everybody, particularly when he didn't know them from Adam, 'How's the old complaint?' How is yours?"

With that air that had won so many hearts, and broken them too, the old man smiled.

"When I don't eat anything and sit perfectly still, it is extraordinary how well I feel."

How he felt otherwise, he omitted to state. A gentleman never talks of disagreeable matters.

# II

In the shouted extras that succeeded the initial news of the murder, Margaret Austen was mentioned, not as the criminal, no one less criminal than the girl could be imagined, but as being associated with the parties involved.

That was her misfortune and a very grievous misfortune, though, however grievous, it was as nothing to other circumstances for which she subsequently blamed herself, after having previously attributed them to fate, or rather, as fate is more modernly known, to karma.

Any belief may console. A belief in karma not only consoles, it explains. As such it is not suited to those who accept things on faith, which is a very good way to accept to them. It may be credulous to believe that Jehovah dictated the ten commandments. But the commandments are sound. Moreover it is perhaps better to be wrong in one's belief's than not to have any.

Margaret Austen believed in karma and in many related and wonderful things. Her face showed it. It showed other things; appreciation, sympathy, unworldliness, good-breeding and that minor charm that beauty is. It showed a girl good to look at, good through and through; a girl tall, very fair, who smiled readily, rarely laughed and never complained.

It is true that at the time this drama begins it would have been

captious of her to have complained of anything were it not that life is so ordered that it has sorrow for shadow. The shadow on this human rose was her mother.

Mrs. Austen had seen worse days and never proposed to see them again. Among the chief assets of her dear departed was a block of New Haven. The stock, before collapsing, shook. Then it tripped, fell and kept at it. Through what financial clairvoyance the dear departed's trustee got her out, just in time, and, quite illegally but profitably, landed her in Standard Oil is not a part of this drama. But meanwhile she had shuddered. Like many another widow, to whom New Haven was as good as Governments, she might have been in the street. Pointing at her had been that spectre – Want!

It was just that which she never proposed to see again. The spectre in pointing had put a mark on this woman who was arrogant, ambitious and horribly shrewd.

A tall woman with a quick tongue, a false front, an air of great affability and, when on parade, admirably sent out, she ruled her daughter, or thought she did, which is not quite the same thing.

Margaret Austen was ruled by her conscience and her beautiful beliefs. These were her masters. This human rose was their lovely slave. But latterly a god had enthralled her. It was with wonder and thanksgiving that she recognised the overlordship of that brat of a divinity, whom poets call Eros, and thinkers the Genius of the Species.

Mrs. Austen, who had danced many a time before his shrine,

had no objection whatever to the godlet, except only when he neglected to appear Olympianly, as divinity should, with a nimbus of rentrolls and gold.

In view of the fact that he had come to Margaret in déshabille, that is to say without any discernible nimbus, he affronted Mrs. Austen's ambitious eyes.

Of that she said nothing to Margaret. But at dinner one evening she summarised it to Peter Verelst who sat at her right.

The room, which was furnished with tolerable taste, gave on Park Avenue where she resided. At her left was Monty Paliser. Farther down were Margaret, Lennox and Kate Schermerhorn. Coffee had been served. Paliser was talking to Miss Schermerhorn; Lennox to Margaret.

"I don't like it," Mrs. Austen said evenly to Peter Verelst. "But what can I do?"

Peter Verelst was an old New Yorker and an old beau. Mrs. Austen had known him when she was in shorter frocks than those then in vogue. Even as a child she had been ahead of the fashion.

"Do?" Verelst repeated. "Do nothing."

"I am a snob," she resumed, expecting him to contradict her. "I did hope that Margaret, with her looks, would marry brilliantly."

Peter Verelst bent over his coffee. "The young man next door?"

Out of the corner of an eye Mrs. Austen glanced at Paliser and then back at Verelst. "Well, something of the kind."

Verelst raised his cup. He had known Lennox' father. He knew

and liked the son. For Margaret he had an affection that was almost – and which might have been – paternal. But, noting the barometer, he steered into the open.

"Have Lennox here morning, noon and night. See to it that Margaret has every opportunity to get sick to death of him. Whereas if you interfere – "

Mrs. Austen, as though invoking the saints, lifted her eyes. "Ah, I know! If I had not been interfered with I would not have taken Austen. Much good it did me!"

Verelst, his hand on the tiller, nodded. "There you are! That locksmith business is very sound. Love revels in it. But give him his head and good-bye. Sooner or later he is bound to take to his heels, but, the more he is welcomed, the sooner he goes. The history of love is a history of farewells."

Paliser, who had caught the last phrase, felt like laughing and consequently looked very serious. The spectacle of two antiques discussing love seemed to him as hilarious as two paupers discussing wealth. He patted his tie.

"Very interesting topic, Mrs. Austen."

The woman smiled at him. "Love? Yes. How would you define it?"

Paliser returned her smile. "A mutual misunderstanding."

Mrs. Austen's smile deepened. "Would you like to have one?"

"With your daughter, yes."

Et moi donc! thought this lady, who, like others of our aristocracy, occasionally lapsed into French. But she said: "Why

not enter the lists?"

"I thought they were closed."

"Are they ever?"

But now Verelst addressed the too charming young man. "How is your father?"

"In his usual poor health, thank you."

"What does he say about the war?"

"Nothing very original – that the Kaiser ought to be sent to Devil's Island. But that I told him would be an insult to Dreyfus, who was insulted enough. The proper place for the beast is the zoo. At the same time, the fellow is only a pawn. The blame rests on Rome – rests on her seven hills."

Verelst drew back. In the great days, or more exactly in the great nights, he had been a pal of M. P. That palship he had no intention of extending to M. P.'s son, and it was indifferently that he asked: "In what way?"

Kate Schermerhorn, who had been talking to Margaret and to Lennox, turned. Lennox also had turned. Paliser had the floor, or rather the table. He made short work of it.

"It was Cæsar's policy to create a solitude and call it peace. That policy Rome abandoned. Otherwise, that is if she had continued to turn the barbarians into so many dead flies, their legs in the air, there would be no barbarian now on the throne of Prussia. There would be no Prussia, no throne, no war."

You ought to write for the comic papers, thought Verelst, who said: "Well, there is one comfort. It can't last forever."

With feigned sympathy Mrs. Austen took it up. "Ah, yes, but meanwhile there is that poor Belgium!"

"By the way," Paliser threw in. "I have a box or two for the Relief Fund at the Splendor to-night. Would anybody care to go?"

Kate Schermerhorn, who looked like a wayward angel, exclaimed at it: "Oh, do let's. There's to be a duck of a medium and I am just dying to have my fortune told."

Verelst showed his handsome false teeth. "No need of a medium for that, my dear. Your path is one of destruction. You will bowl men over as you go."

Kate laughed at him. "You seem very upright."

Mrs. Austen turned to Margaret. "If you care to go, we might get our wraps."

A moment later, when the women had left the room and the men were reseated, Verelst stretched a hand to Lennox. "Again I congratulate you and with all my heart."

Keith Lennox grasped that hand, shook it, smiled. The smile illuminated a face which, sombre in repose, then was radiant. Tall and straight, hard as nails, he had the romantic figure. In a costume other than evening clothes, he might have walked out of a tapestry.

With ambiguous amiability, Paliser smiled also. Already Margaret's beauty had stirred him. Already it had occurred to him that Lennox was very invitingly in the way.

# III

The ballrooms of the Splendor, peopled, as Mrs. Austen indulgently noted, with Goodness knows who from Heaven knows where, received her and her guests.

Not all of them, however. At the entrance, Verelst, pretexting a pretext, sagely dropped out. Within, a young man with ginger hair and laughing eyes, sprang from nowhere, pounced at Kate, floated her away.

Mrs. Austen, Margaret, Lennox and Paliser moved on.

In one room there was dancing; in another, a stage. It was in the first room that Kate was abducted. On the stage in the room beyond, a fat woman, dressed in green and gauze, was singing faded idiocies. Beyond, at the other end of the room was a booth above which was a sign – The Veiled Lady of Yucatan. Beneath the sign was a notice: All ye that enter here leave five dollars at the door.

The booth, hung with black velvet, was additionally supplied with hierograms in burnished steel. What they meant was not for the profane, or even for the initiate. Champollion could not have deciphered them. Fronting the door stood a young woman with a dark skin, a solemn look and a costume which, at a pinch, might have been Maya.

In those accents which the Plaza shares with Mayfair, she hailed Margaret. "Hello, dear! Your turn next."

For a moment, the dark skin, the solemn look, the costume puzzled Margaret. Then at once she exclaimed: "Why, Poppet!" She paused and added: "This is Mr. Paliser – Miss Bleecker. You know Mr. Lennox."

But now, from the booth, a large woman with high colour, grey hair and a jewelled lorgnette rushed out and fastened herself on the sultry girl.

"Gimme back my money. Your veiled lady is a horror! Said I'd marry again!"

She raised her glasses. "Mary Austen, as I'm a sinner! Go in and have your misfortunes told. How do do Margaret? Marry again indeed! Oughtn't I to have my money back?"

"Poppet ought to make you pay twice," Mrs. Austen heartlessly retorted at this woman, the relict of Nicholas Amsterdam, concerning whom a story had come out and who had died, his friends said, of exposure.

Mrs. Amsterdam turned on Paliser whom she had never seen before. "What do you say?"

"I am appalled," he answered.

She turned again. "There, Poppet, you hear that? Gimme back my money."

But Miss Bleecker occupied herself with Lennox, who was paying for Margaret.

Margaret entered the booth where a little old woman, very plainly dressed, sat at a small deal table. From above hung a light. Beside her was a vacant chair.

"Sit there, please," the medium, in a low voice, told the girl. "And now, if you please, your hand."

Margaret, seating herself, removed a glove. The hand in which she then put hers was soft and warm and she feared that it might perspire. She looked at the woman who looked at her, sighed, closed her eyes and appeared to go to sleep. Then, presently, her lips parted and in a voice totally different from that in which she had just spoken, a voice that was thin and shrill, words came leapingly.

"You are engaged to be married. Your engagement will be broken. You will be very unhappy. Later, you will be thankful. Later you will realise that sorrow is sent to make us nobler than we were."

With an intake of the breath, the medium started, straightened, opened her eyes.

At the shock of it Margaret had started also. "But – "

The medium, in her former voice, low and gentle, interrupted.

"I can tell you nothing else. I do not know what was said. But I am sorry if you have had bad news."

Margaret stood up, replacing her glove. She knew, as we all know, that certain gifted organisms hear combinations of sound to which the rest of us are deaf. She knew, as many of us also know, that there are other organisms that can foresee events to which the rest of us are blind. But she knew too that in the same measure that the auditions of composers are not always notable, the visions of clairvoyants are not always exact. The knowledge

steadied and partially comforted, but partially only.

At the entrance, Lennox stood with Miss Bleecker. A little beyond were Paliser and her mother. Mrs. Amsterdam, minus her money, must have rushed away.

Poppet Bleecker laughed and questioned: "No horrors?"

Lennox questioned also, but with his eyes.

Margaret hesitated. Then she got it. Taking the girl's hand she patted it and to Lennox said, and lightly enough: "Do go in. I want to see if what the medium says to you conforms with what she said to me."

Yet, however lightly she spoke, behind her girdle was that sensation which only the tormented know.

Beyond on the stage, the fat woman, now at the piano, was accompanying a girl who was singing a brindisi. The girl was young, good-looking, unembarrassed, very much at home. Her dress, a black chiffon, became her.

Then, in a moment, as Lennox entered the booth, Margaret joined her mother and looked at the girl.

"What is she singing?"

Paliser covered her with his eyes. "Verdi's *Segreto per esser felice*– the secret of happiness. Such a simple secret too."

"Yes?" Margaret absently returned. She was looking now at the booth. Quite as vaguely she added: "In what does it consist?"

"In getting what we do not deserve."

There was nothing in that to offend. But the man's eyes, of which already she had been conscious, did offend. They seemed

to disrobe her. Annoyedly she turned.

Paliser turned with her. "Verdi's bric-à-brac is very banal. Perhaps you prefer Strauss. His dissonances are more harmonic than they sound."

Now though there was applause. With a roulade the brindisi had ceased and the singer as though pleased, not with herself but with the audience, bowed. The fat woman twisting on her bench, was also smiling. She looked cheerful and evil.

"I do believe that's the Tamburini," Mrs. Austen remarked. "I heard her at the Academy, ages ago." The usual touch followed. "How she has gone off!"

The fat woman stood up, and, preceded by the girl, descended into the audience.

Margaret looked again at the booth. Lennox was coming out. He said a word to Miss Bleecker and glanced about the room.

Margaret motioned. He did not notice. The girl who had been singing was bearing down on him, a hand outstretched and, in her face, an expression which Margaret could not interpret. But she saw Lennox smile, take her hand and say – what? Margaret could not tell, but it was something to which the girl was volubly replying.

"Who's his little friend?" Mrs. Austen in her even voice inquired. "Mr. Paliser," she added. "Would you mind telling – er – my daughter's young man that we are waiting."

Margaret winced. She had turned from Paliser and she turned then from her mother.

Paliser, whom the phrase "my daughter's young man" amused, sauntered away. He strolled on to where Lennox stood with the girl. The fat woman joined them.

Lennox must have introduced Paliser, for Margaret could see them all talking at once. Then Lennox again looked about, saw Margaret and her mother, and came over.

"Who's your friend?" Mrs. Austen asked.

Lennox' eyes caressed Margaret. Then he turned to her mother. "She is a Miss Cara. Cassy Cara her name is. I know her father. He is a violinist."

And my daughter is second fiddle, thought Mrs. Austen, who said: "How interesting!"

With his sombre air, Lennox summarised it. "She is studying for the opera. The woman with her, Madame Tamburini, is her coach. You may have heard of her."

"A fallen star," Mrs. Austen very pleasantly remarked. Quite as pleasantly she added: "The proper companion for a soiled dove."

The charm of that was lost. Margaret, who had not previously seen this girl but who had heard of her from Lennox, was speaking to him.

"It was her father, was it?" Then, dismissing it, she asked anxiously: "But do tell me, Keith, what did the medium say?"

"That I would be up for murder."

Margaret's eyes widened. But, judging it ridiculous, she exclaimed: "Was that all?"

"All!" Lennox grimly repeated. "What more would you have?" Abruptly he laughed. "I don't wonder Mrs. Amsterdam wanted her money back."

On the stage, from jungles of underwear, legs were tossing. The orchestra had become frankly canaille. Moreover the crowd of Goodness knows who had increased. A person had the temerity to elbow Mrs. Austen and the audacity to smile at her. It was the finishing touch.

She poked at Margaret. "Come."

As they moved on, a man smiled at Lennox, who, without stopping, gave him a hand.

He was an inkbeast. But there was nothing commercial in his appearance. Ordinarily, he looked like a somnambulist. When he was talking, he resembled a comedian. In greeting Lennox he seemed to be in a pleasant dream. The crowd swallowed him.

"Who was that?" Mrs. Austen enquired.

"Ten Eyck Jones."

"The writer?" asked this lady, who liked novels, but who preferred to live them.

Meanwhile Paliser was talking to Cassy Cara and the Tamburini. The latter listened idly, with her evil smile. Yet Paliser's name was very evocative. The syllables had fallen richly on her ears.

Cassy Cara had not heard them and they would have conveyed nothing to her if she had. She was a slim girl, with a lot of auburn hair which was docked. The careless-minded thought her pretty.

She was what is far rarer; she was handsome. Her features had the surety of an intaglio. Therewith was an air and a look that were not worldly or even superior, but which, when necessary as she sometimes found it, could reduce a man, and for that matter a woman, to proportions really imperceptible.

A little beauty and a little devil, thought Paliser, who was an expert. But leisurely, in his Oxford voice, he outlined for her a picture less defined. "You remind me of something."

With entire brevity and equal insolence, she returned it. "I dare say."

"Yes. Of supper."

"An ogre, are you?"

Paliser, ruminating the possibilities of her slim beauty served Régence, smiled at this girl who did not smile back. "Not Nebuchadnezzar at any rate. Vegetarianism is not my forte. Won't you and Madame Tamburini take potluck with me? There must be a restaurant somewhere."

The fallen star moistened her painted lips. "Yes, why not?"

Born in California, of foreign parents, she had neither morals or accent and spoke in a deep voice. She spoke American and English. She spoke the easy French of the boulevards, the easier Italian of the operatic stage. She never spoke of Tamburini. She left him to be imagined, which perhaps he had been.

From the room they went on into a wide, crowded hall, beyond which was another room, enclosed in glass, where there were tables and palms.

As they entered, a captain approached. There was a smell of pineapple, the odour of fruit and flowers. From a gallery came the tinkle of mandolins. Mainly the tables were occupied. But the captain, waving the way, piloted them to a corner, got them seated and stood, pad in hand.

Paliser looked at Cassy Cara. She was hungry as a wolf, but she said indifferently: "A swallow of anything."

"One swallow does not make a supper," Paliser retorted and looked at the Tamburini who appeared less indifferent.

"Ham and eggs."

Without a quiver, the captain booked it.

"Also," Paliser told him, "caviare, woodcock, Ruinart." From the man he turned to the girl. "It was very decent of Lennox to introduce me to you."

Cassy put her elbows on the table. "He could not be anything else than decent. Don't you know him well?"

Paliser shrugged. "Our intimacy is not oppressive."

"He saved her father's life," the Tamburini put in. "Her father is a musician – and authentically marquis," she added, as though that explained everything.

"We are Portuguese," said Cassy, "or at least my father is. He used to play at the Metro. But he threw it up and one night, when he was coming home from a private house where he had been giving a concert, he was attacked. There were two of them. They knocked him down – "

"Before he had time to draw his sword-cane," the fat woman

interrupted.

"Yes," Cassy resumed, "and just then Mr. Lennox came along and knocked them down and saved his violin which was what they were after."

"It's a Cremona," said the Tamburini who liked details.

"But that is not all of it," the girl continued. "My father's arm was broken. He has not been able to play since. Mr. Lennox brought him home and sent for his own physician. He's a dear."

"Who is?" Paliser asked. "The physician?"

But now a waiter was upon them with a bottle which he produced with a pop! Dishes followed to which Cassy permitted the man to help her. Her swallow of anything became large spoonfuls of rich blackness and the tenderness of savorous flesh. She was not carnal, but she was hungry and at her home latterly the food had been vile.

The Tamburini, with enigmatic ideas in the back of her head, ate her horrible dish very delicately, her little finger crooked. But she drank nobly.

Paliser too had ideas which, however, were not enigmatic in the least and not in the back of his head either. They concerned two young women, one of whom was patently engaged to Lennox and the other probably in love with him. The situation appealed to this too charming young man to whom easy conquests were negligible.

He had been looking at Cassy. On the table was a vase in which there were flowers. He took two of them and looked again

at the girl.

"Sunday is always hateful. Couldn't you both dine with me here?"

The former prima donna wiped her loose mouth. She could, she would, and she said so.

Paliser put the flowers before Cassy.

"Le parlate d'amor," the ex-diva began and, slightly for a moment, her deep voice mounted.

Cassy turned on her. "You're an imbecile."

With an uplift of the chin – a family habit – Paliser summoned the waiter. While he was paying him, Cassy protested. She had nothing to wear.

She had other objections which she kept to herself. If it had been Lennox she would have had none at all. But it was not Lennox. It was a man whom she had never seen before and who was entirely too free with his eyes.

"Come as you are," said the Tamburini, who massively stood up.

Paliser also was rising. "Let me put you in a cab and on Sunday – "

Cassy gave him a little unsugared look. "You take a great deal for granted."

Behind the girl's back the Tamburini gave him another look. Cheerful and evil and plainer than words it said: "Leave it to me."

Cassy, her perfect nose in the air, announced that she must get her things.

Through the emptying restaurant Paliser saw them to the entrance. There, as he waited, the captain hurried to him.

"Everything satisfactory, sir?"

"I want a private dining-room on Sunday."

"Yes, sir. For how many?"

"Two."

"Sorry, sir. It's against the rules."

Paliser surveyed him. "Whom does this hotel belong to? You?"

The captain smiled and caressed his chin. "No, sir, the hotel does not belong to me. It is owned by Mr. Paliser."

"Thank you. So I thought. I am Mr. Paliser. A private dining-room on Sunday for two."

But now Cassy and the Tamburini, hatted and cloaked, were returning. The chastened waiter moved aside. Through the still crowded halls, Paliser accompanied them to the street where, a doorkeeper assiduously assisting, he got them into a taxi, asked the addresses, paid the mechanician, saw them off.

Manfully, as the cab veered, the Tamburini swore.

"You damn fool, that man is rich as all outdoors."

# IV

The house in which Cassy lived was what is agreeably known as a walk-up. There was no lift, merely the stairs, flight after flight, which constituted the walk-up, one that ascended to the roof, where you had a fine view of your neighbours' laundry. Such things are not for everybody. Cassy hated them.

On this night when the taxi, after reaching Harlem, landed her there and, the walk-up achieved, she let herself into a flat on the fifth floor, a "You're late!" filtered out at her.

It was her father, who, other things being equal, you might have mistaken for Zuloaga's "Uncle." The lank hair, the sad eyes, the wan face, the dressing-gown, there he sat. Only the palette was absent. Instead was an arm in a sling. There was another difference. Beyond, in lieu of capricious manolas, was a piano and, above it, a portrait with which Zuloaga had nothing to do. The portrait represented a man who looked very fierce and who displayed a costume rich and unusual. Beneath the portrait was a violin. Beside the piano was a sword-cane. Otherwise, barring a rose-wood table, the room contained nothing to boast of.

"You're late," he repeated.

His name was Angelo Cara. When too young to remember it, he had come to New York from Lisbon. With him had come the swashbuckler in oil. He grew up in New York, developed artistic tastes, lost the oil man, acquired a wife, lost her also, but not

until she had given him a daughter who was named Bianca, a name which, after elongating into Casabianca, shortened itself into Cassy.

Meanwhile, on Madison Avenue, then unpolluted, there was a brown-stone front, a landau, other accessories, the flower of circumstances not opulent but easy, the rents and increments of the swashbuckler's estate, which by no means had come from Lisbon but which, the rich and unusual costume boxed in camphor, had been acquired in the import and sale of wine.

The fortune that the swashbuckler made descended to his son, who went to Wall Street with it. There the usual cropper wiped him out, affected his health, drove him, and not in a landau either, from Madison Avenue, left him the portrait, the violin, the table and nothing else.

But that is an exaggeration. To have debts is to have something. They stir you. They stirred him. Besides there was Cassy. To provide for both was the violin which in his hands played itself. For years it sufficed. Then, with extreme good sense, he fought with the Union, fought with Toscanini, disassociated himself from both. Now, latterly, with his arm in a sling, the wolf was not merely at the door, it was in the living-room of this Harlem flat which Cassy had just entered.

It was then that he repeated it. "You're late!"

For the past hour he had sat staring at things which the room did not contain – a great, glowing house; an orchestra demoniacally led by a conductor whom he strangely resembled;

a stage on which, gracile in the violet and silver of doublet and hose, the last of the Caras bowed to the vivas.

Then abruptly the curtain had fallen, the lights had gone out, the vision faded, banished by the quick click of her key.

But not entirely. More or less the dream was always with him. When to-day is colourless, where can one live except in the future? To-day is packed with commonplaces which, could we see them correctly, are probably false for in the future only beautiful things are true. It is stupid not to live among them, particularly if you have the ability, and what artist lacks it? In the future, there is fame for the painter, there is posterity for the poet and much good may it do them. But for the musician, particularly for the song-bird, there is the vertigo of instant applause. In days like these, days that witness the fall of empires, the future holds for the donna, for the prima donna, for the prima donna assoluta, the grandest of earthly careers.

That career, Angelo Cara foresaw for his daughter, foresaw it at least in the hypnogogic visions which the artist always has within beck and call. In the falsifying commonplaces of broad daylight he was not so sure. Her upper register had in it a parterre of flowers, but elsewhere it lacked volume, lacked line, lacked colour, and occasionally he wondered whether her voice would not prove to be a voix de salon and not the royal organ that fills a house. Yet in the strawberry of her throat, the orifice was wide, the larynx properly abnormal. In addition the Tamburini was prophetically comforting.

But did the woman know her trade? He did not believe it. He believed though that she had no morals, never had had any, even as a child. It was the same way with Rachel and the fact left him cold. He was artistically indifferent to what the putana did or omitted, to what anybody omitted or did. But anybody by no means included his daughter. At the thought of anything amiss with her, presto! his sad eyes flamed. Very needlessly too. Cassy was as indifferent to other people's conceptions of decorum as he was himself. The matter did not touch her. Clear-eyed, clean-minded, she was straight as a string.

"How did it go?" he asked.

Cassy laughed. She had had a glass of champagne. She had too, what is far headier, the wine of youth.

"Well, I didn't see any showmen tumbling over each other. Mr. Lennox was there. He asked after you, and introduced a man who had us out to supper. It was very good. I did so wish for you, poor dear."

"What man? What is his name?"

"Paliser, I think. Something of the kind. Ma Tamby told me."

"Not old M. P.?"

"Perhaps, I don't know. He has hair like a looking-glass. He did not seem old; he seemed very impudent. Ma Tamby says he's rich as all outdoors."

"That's the son then. Don't have anything to do with him. They're a bad lot."

"As if I cared! Ma Tamby said he could get me an

engagement."

"Ha! In vaudeville with acrobats and funny men and little suppers to follow."

"Why not big ones?"

"Big what?"

"Big goose!" replied Cassy, who removed her gloves, took off her hat, ran a pin through it, put it down.

Her father stared. Behind the girl stood a blonde brute whom the supper had evoked. He wore a scowl and a bloody apron. In his hand was a bill. Behind him was the baker, the candlestickmaker. Behind these was the agent, punctual and pertinacious, who had come for the rent. Though but visions, they were real. Moreover, though they evaporated at once, solidly they would return. He had been staring at her, and through her, at them. In staring his eyes filled. Immediately they leaked.

Cassy bit her lip. The tumbril and the guillotine would not have made her weep. Dry-eyed she would have gone from one to the other. Besides, what on earth was he wowing about? But immediately it occurred to her that he might be experiencing one of the attacks to which he was subject. She leaned over him. "You poor dear, is it your heart?"

He brushed his eyes. Dimly they lighted. With artistic mobility his face creased in a smile. "No, farther down."

Cassy moved back. "What in the world – "

But now his face clouded again. "I am glad you had supper. To-morrow we'll starve."

The exaggeration annoyed her, she exclaimed at it and then stopped short. Already she had envisaged the situation. But it was idle, she thought, to excite him additionally.

"Well?" he almost whinnied.

But as he would have to know, she out with it. "There's the portrait, there's the violin. Either would tide us over."

In speaking she had approached him again. He shoved her aside. With a jerk he got to his feet, struck an attitude, tapped himself on the breast.

"I, Marquis de Casa-Evora, sell my father's picture! I, Angelo Cara, sell my violin! And you, my daughter, suggest such a thing! But are you my daughter? Are you – oh!"

It trailed away. The noble anger, real or assumed, fell from him. No longer the outraged father, he was but a human being in pain.

Cassy hurried to the mantel where, in provision of these attacks, were glass tubes with amyl in them. She took and broke one and had him inhale it.

Then, though presently the spasm passed, the wolf remained. But the beast had no terrors for Cassy. Buoyant, as youth ever is, his fangs amused her. They might close on her, but they would not hurt, at any rate very much, or, in any case, very long. Meanwhile she had had supper and for the morrow she had a plan. That night she dreamed of it. From the dream she passed into another. She dreamed she was going about giving money away. The dream of a dream, it was very beautiful, and

sometimes, to exceptional beings, beautiful dreams come true, not in the future merely, but in a walk-up.

# V

In Park Avenue that night there was no dramatic father in waiting. There were no bills, no scenes, no thought of secret errands; merely a drawing-room in which a fire was burning and where, presently, Margaret and Lennox were alone.

"I have letters to write," Mrs. Austen told them.

She had no letters to write, but she did have a thing or two to consider. What the wolf was to Cassy's father, Lennox was to her.

At dinner, Peter Verelst's advice to do nothing had seemed strategic. At the Splendor, it had seemed stupid. The spectacle of that girl hobnobbing with Lennox had interested her enormously. If a spectacle can drip, that had dripped and with possibilities which, if dim as yet, were none the less providential, particularly when viewed spaciously, in the light of other possibilities which Paliser exhaled. Mrs. Austen was a woman of distinction. You had only to look at her to be aware of it. Yet, at the possible possibilities, she licked her chops.

Meanwhile, with the seriousness of those to whom love is not the sentiment that it once was, or the sensation that it has become, but the dense incarnate mystery that it ever should be, Margaret and Lennox were also occupied with the future.

In connection with it, Lennox asked: "Can you come to-morrow?"

As he spoke, Margaret released her hand. Her mother was

entering and he stood up.

"Mrs. Austen," he resumed, "won't you and Margaret have tea at my apartment to-morrow?"

He would have reseated himself but the lady saw to it that he did not.

"You have such pleasant programmes, Mr. Lennox. You are not going though, are you? Well, if you must, good-night."

It was boreal, yet, however arctic, it was smiling, debonair. As such, Lennox had no recourse but to accept it. He bent over Margaret's hand, touched two of Mrs. Austen's fingers. In a moment, he had gone.

Mrs. Austen, smiling still, sat down.

"Nice young man. Very nice. Nice hats, nice ties, nice coats. Then also he is a theosophist, I suppose, or, if not, then by way of becoming one. What more could the heart desire? Would you mind putting out one of those lights? Not that one – the other."

Gowned in grey which in spite of its hue contrived to be brilliant, Mrs. Austen rustled ever so slightly. Always a handsome woman and well aware of it, she was of two minds about her daughter's looks. They far surpassed her own and she did not like that. On the other hand they were an asset on which she counted.

She rustled, quite as slightly again.

"And such a taking way with him! That little singing-girl whom we saw to-night, quite a pretty child, didn't you think? She seemed quite smitten. Then there are others, one may suppose. Yes, certainly, a very nice young man."

"Mother!"

"Well, what? Young men will be young men. Only a theosophist could imagine that they would be young girls. I make every allowance from him – as doubtless he does for others. This is quite as it should be. I have no patience with model young men. Model young men delight their mothers' hearts and ruin their wives' temper. They remodel themselves after marriage. Whereas a young man who is not model at all, one who has had his fling beforehand, settles down and becomes quite fat. You have chosen very wisely, my dear. If you had waited you might have had Paliser and I should not have liked that. He is too good."

Margaret stretched a hand to the fire. She was not cold and the movement was mechanical. But she made no reply. In Matthew we are told that for every idle word we utter we shall answer at the day of judgment. That passage she had longly meditated. She did not believe that Matthew wrote it and she did not believe in a day of judgment. Matthew was a peasant who spoke Syro-Chaldaic. It was not supposable that he could write in Greek. It was not supposable that there can be a specific day of judgment, since every moment of our days is judged. But through Margaret had her tolerant doubts, she knew that the message itself was sound. It did not condemn evil and vulgar words, for they condemn themselves. What it condemned was idle words and she regretted that her mother employed them. But theosophy is, primarily, a school of good manners. The Gospel condemns idle words, theosophy forbids disagreeable ones.

To her mother's remarks, she made therefore no reply. Instead, she changed the subject.

"Will you care to go with me to his rooms to-morrow?"

With a mimic of surprise and of gentle remonstrance that was admirably assumed, Mrs. Austen lifted a hand.

"But, my dear! Were you thinking of going alone?"

The remonstrance, however gentle, was absurd and she knew it. Margaret could go where she liked. It would all be chaste as a piano-recital. But the flea that she had been trying to put in the girl's ear seemed very ineffective. She is just as I was at her age, thought this lady, who, in so thinking, flattered herself extraordinarily.

She shook her head. "For if you were, it would not do. Such things may pass in London, they don't here. But to-morrow is Saturday, isn't it? Yes, to-morrow is Saturday. At three I have an appointment with the dentist. I'll telephone though. That always pains them and, where a dentist is concerned, I do think turn about is fair play."

It was pleasantly said. To make it pleasanter, she stood up and added: "Are you to sit here and read? There is a French book lying around somewhere that belonged to your dear father. I don't remember who wrote it and I have forgotten the title, but you are sure to like it. There! I have it. It is called: 'L'art de tromper les femmes.'"

Mrs. Austen moved to the door and looked back.

"But if you don't find it readily, let it go for to-night. Your

young man is sure to have a copy. No nice young man is without one."

# VI

Lennox was a broker, a vocation which he practised in Wall Street. Early on the following afternoon, while returning from there, he sat wedged between a gunman and a Hun. He was unconscious of either. The uncertain market; the slump, momentarily undiscernible, but mathematically inevitable; customers, credulous or sceptical, but always avid; the pulse of the feverish street which the ticker indifferently registered; the atmosphere of tobacco and greed; the trailing announcements; "Steel, three-fourths; Pennsy, a half," these things were forgotten. The train crashed on. Of that too he was unconscious.

Before him a panorama had unrolled – the day he first saw her, the hour he first loved her, the moment he first thought she might care for him – the usual panorama that unfolds before any one fortunate enough to love and to be loved in return.

"Grand Central!"

The gunman disappeared, the Hun had gone, the car emptied itself on a platform from which it was at once refilled. Lennox ascended the stair, reached the street, boarded a taxi, drove to his home.

The latter, situated on the ground floor of an apartment house a step from Park Avenue, was entirely commonplace, fitted with furniture large and ugly, yet minutely relieved by a photograph

which showed the almost perfect oval of Margaret's almost perfect face.

The photograph stood on a table in the sitting-room beyond which extended other rooms that, in addition to being ugly, were dark. But Lennox had no degrading manias for comfort. Pending the great day he camped in these rooms, above which, on an upper storey was a duplex apartment which, if Margaret liked, he proposed to take.

It was for her opinion regarding it that he had asked her to come. In the forenoon she had telephoned that she and her mother would both be with him. He had instructed his servant accordingly and now a silver tea-service that had belonged to his grandmother and which, being Victorian, was hideous, gleamed at him as he entered the rooms.

Something else gleamed also. On a rug, a puddle of sunlight had spilled.

Above, on the embossed platter, were petits fours, watercress sandwiches, a sack of sweetmeats, a bunch of violets, a scatter of cups. Beneath was the puddle.

Lennox looked. It seemed all right.

Harris, his servant, a little man, thin as an umbrella, sidled silently by. The vestibule took him. From it came the sound of a voice, limpid, clear, which Lennox knew and knew too was not Margaret's.

"A lady to see you, sir," Harris, reappearing and effacing himself, announced.

The doorway framed her. There, with her shock of auburn hair, her cameo face, her slim figure and her costume which, though simple, was not the ruinous simplicity that Fifth Avenue achieves, Cassy presented a picture very different from that on the table, a picture otherwise differentiated by a bundle that was big as a baby.

Lennox did not know but that it might contain a baby and the possibility alarmed this man who was afraid of nobody.

"Hello!" he exclaimed.

In exclaiming, he stared. He liked the girl. But at the moment she was in the way. Moreover, why she had come to these rooms of his, where she had not been invited, and where she had not ventured before, was a mystery.

"How's your father?" he added.

There are people, as there are animals, that cannot be awkward and are never ridiculous. Cassy was one of them. None the less she stood on one foot. The tea-table had become very talkative. It told her that it was expecting somebody; that watercress sandwiches were not for her; no, nor Victorian horrors either.

"Be off!" it shouted.

"Sit down," said Lennox.

Cassy, hugging the bundle, remained in the doorway. It was not the tea-table merely, but something else, the indefinable something which one may feel and not describe that was telling her to hurry. Afterward, with that regret which multiplies tears

and subtracts nothing, she wished she had hurried, wished rather that she had not come, wished that she had defied the wolf, outfaced the butcher, done anything except enter these rooms.

She shifted the bundle. "I have been gadding about in Wall Street. I never was there before, but it is so nice and windy I may go there again. This is just a good-day and good-bye."

As she spoke she turned, and as she turned Lennox' heart smote him. He hurried to her.

"See here! You can't go like this. Have a cup of tea."

Cassy gave him the rare seduction of her smile. "Thank you. I am out on business and I never drink in business hours."

But now Lennox had got himself between her and the vestibule.

"Business!" he repeated. "What is it? Anything in my line? Let's transact it here. Wall Street is no place" – for a pretty girl he was about to say but, desisting, he substituted – "for you."

"But you are expecting people."

"How in the world did you know? Anyway, they are not here yet and if they were they would be glad to meet you."

"I wonder!" said Cassy, whose wonder concerned not their pleasure but her own, and concerned it because she hated snobs, among whom she knew that Lennox moved.

"Now, tell me," he resumed.

Cassy, realising that it must be then or never, looked up at him.

"You remember father's violin?"

"I should say I did."

"Well, my business in Wall Street was to offer it as – what do you call it? – as collateral."

Lennox indicated the bundle. "Is that it?"

Cassy nodded. "I had to hide it and smuggle it out without his knowing it. He thinks it stolen. If he knew, he would kill me. As it is, he has gone crazy. To quiet him, I said I would go to the police."

Lennox laughed. "And I am the police!"

"Yes, you're the police."

"All right then. The police have recovered it. Take it back to him. How much do you need? Will a hundred do?"

That was not Cassy's idea. She shook her docked head at it. "You're the police but I am a business man. If you make the loan, you must keep the collateral."

"You are a little Jew, that's what you are," Lennox, affecting annoyance, replied.

Cassy smiled, "I like your jeu d'esprit. But not well enough to accept money as a gift."

"Good Lord!" Lennox protested. "Look here! I am not giving money away. I don't mean it as a gift. Pay me back whenever you like. Until then, what do you expect me to do with that thing? Give serenades? No, take it back to your father. I know just how he feels about it. He told me."

Cassy shifted the bundle. "Good-bye then." But as he still blocked the way, she added: "Will you let me pass?"

Moralists maintain that a man should never argue with a

woman, particularly when she is young and good-looking. He should yield, they assert. Cassy's youth and beauty said nothing audible to Lennox. They said nothing of which he was then aware. In addition he was not a moralist. But there are influences, as there are bacilli, which unconsciously we absorb. For some time he had been absorbing a few. He did not realise it then. When he did, he was in prison. That though was later. At the moment he threw up his hands.

"I surrender. Will you mind putting it down somewhere?"

Cassy turned. Beyond was a table and near it a chair to which she went. There she dumped the violin. In so doing she saw Margaret's picture.

"What a lovely girl!"

Lennox, who had followed, nodded. "That is Miss Austen to whom I am engaged."

"Oh!" said Cassy. She did not know that Lennox was engaged. But suddenly the room had become uncomfortably warm and she blurted it: "How happy she must be!"

At the slip, for he thought it one, Lennox laughed.

"You mean how happy I must be," exclaimed this rare individual to whom the verb to be happy had a present tense, yet one which even then it was losing.

He had been fumbling in a pocket. From it he drew a wad of bills, fives and tens, and made another wad. "Here you are. I will mail you a receipt for the collateral."

Cassy, taking the money in one hand, extended the other.

"May I say something?"

"Why, of course."

Cassy could talk and very fluently. But at the moment she choked. What is worse, she flushed. Conscious of which and annoyed at it, she withdrew her hand and said: "It's so hot here!"

Lennox looked about, then at her. "Is it? Was that what you wanted to say?"

Cassy shook herself. "No, and it was very rude of me. I wanted to thank you. Good-bye, Mr. Policeman."

"Good-bye," he threw after the girl, who, in leaving the room, must have taken the sunlight with her. As she passed over the rug, the puddle passed too. It followed her out like a dog.

That phenomenon, to which Lennox then attached no significance, he afterward recalled. For the moment he busied himself with pen and ink. Presently he touched a button.

From regions beyond the little old man appeared.

Lennox motioned at the bundle. "Take that to this address. Ask for Mr. Cara and say it comes from the police. From the police, don't forget, Harris."

"I'll not forget, sir."

"And go now. When the ladies come, I'll open the door."

As it happened, only shadows came. The shadows lengthened. They lapped the floor, devoured the silver, turned the rug into a pit, the room into darkness. Apart from shadows, no one came, no one rang. But, though Lennox was unaware of it, two people did come, and of the two one would have rung, had not the other

prevented.

Lennox did not know that. On the inaccessible planes where events are marshalled, it was perhaps prearranged that he should not.

# VII

Margaret, on her way to Lennox that afternoon, wondered whether it might not be possible for them to live elsewhere.

Born and bred in the sordid hell with a blue sky that New York was before the war, latterly the sky itself had darkened. The world in which she moved, distressed her. Its parure of gaiety shocked. Those who peopled it were not sordid, they were not even blue. Europe agonised and they dined and danced, displayed themselves at the opera, summarised the war as dreadful, dismissed it, gossiped and laughed. It was that attitude which distressed this girl who, had she been capable of wishing ill to any one, might have wished them treated as were the élegantes of Brussels.

Margaret had no such evil wish. But she did hope that when married, she might reside elsewhere.

"There goes that Mrs. Tomlinson," said her mother. "Last night at the Bazaar – what do you suppose? She asked me to dinner. She actually did! The woman must be mad."

Margaret made no reply. Park Avenue was very bright. To her also for the moment the scientific savagery of the Huns was remote. The brightness of the April day was about her.

"I am in rags," continued Mrs. Austen, who was admirably dressed. "On Monday I must really look in on Marguerite. She is an utter liar, but then you feel so safe with her. Where is it that

your young man lives? Somebody said that lies whiten the teeth. It must be there, isn't it? Or is it here? These places all look alike, none of them seems to have any numbers and that makes it so convenient."

They had reached a chalk cliff, on the face of which were windows, balconies and, at the base, two low steps. On the upper step, in large black letters, was the cliff's name.

Through glasses, which she did not need, Mrs. Austen surveyed it. "The Sandringham! Why not The Throne?"

Margaret went on and up. Mrs. Austen followed. At once they were in a large, marble-flagged hall. Beyond, from a lift, a boy in green and gilt, peered greedily. At the left was a door with a brass plate that said: "Dr. Winship." Opposite was another door with another plate on which was "Lennox."

That, also, Mrs. Austen surveyed. "I did not know your young man was an earl, but perhaps he is merely a duke. Shall we send that boy or do we ring? In bachelor quarters one hardly knows what to do – or what goes on in them either," she immediately and suggestively added.

The door at the right had opened. Cassy was coming out. The flush was still on her face and in her hand was the money. Mechanically she thumbed it. She had looked down at the roll of bills and through them at the butcher, the baker, the candlestickmaker. She looked up and saw Margaret whose photograph she had seen a moment before. Instantly she recognised her. Instantly she realised that it was for her the violets

and the sack of bonbons were waiting. As quickly she understood why the teapot had shouted: "Be off!"

From Margaret she glanced at Mrs. Austen, who was well worth it. In and about her eyes and mouth there was an expression of such lofty aloofness, an air of such aristocratic disdain, that though she stood without motion, movement, or gesture; though, too, there was no draught, the skirt of her admirable frock seemed to lift and avert itself. It was the triumph of civilised life. Yet that triumph she contrived to heighten. Raising the glasses which she did not need, she levelled them at Cassy.

Cassy, who had but glanced at her, arrested the glance and, for a second, held it on her, but with an unconcern so obliterating that it had the effect of blotting-paper. Mrs. Austen felt herself disappearing. It was as though Cassy had looked at her and had seen nothing whatever.

And that to Mrs. Austen! The lady squirmed but she rallied, the more readily perhaps since now Cassy had gone, and she said and pleasantly enough: "What a charming vestal! Such an engaging manner! Seemed, too, so at home! Let me see? It was she, was it not, who was singing last night? Rather a coincidence, don't you think?"

Margaret made no reply. The incident, though long in the telling, had barely outlasted a moment, and crossing the hall, she was approaching Lennox' door.

Without haste, Mrs. Austen circumvented her. "Not to-day, my dear. As it is, it is fortunate we came on foot. Otherwise,

it would have been awkward and that is always so distressing. Another day."

Quietly, easily she had got herself in front of Margaret who, without shoving, could not reach the bell.

With candid eyes she looked at her mother. "You seem to be suggesting – "

"Perish the thought!" Mrs. Austen sweetly and quickly cut in. "I would not even suggest that one and two make three, for perhaps they don't. No, my dear, I suggest nothing. I merely insist. To-day we must postpone our little visit and to-night, when he comes, you can have it out with him. A lover's quarrel! What more could you wish? But here now is the lift-boy. We must dissemble. It's quite like a play.

"No," she interrupted herself to remark at the approaching, greedy and enquiring youth, "I want nothing whatever except not to be engaged in conversation."

"Whachyer mean?" asked the boy, who, however, promptly blighted by her level stare, omitted to pursue it.

She turned again to Margaret. "We will find a taxi at the corner. These first spring days are so enervating."

Margaret faced her. "I am going in."

The sight of Cassy issuing from Lennox' rooms had surprised her, as the unexpected will surprise. But in saying that she was going in, it was not at all for explanations. Explanations are for strangers. Love understands – or should understand, and Margaret divined that Cassy had come on some errand from her

father, of whose waylaying and rescue Lennox had long since told her.

"Will you please move a little?" she added.

Mrs. Austen, after routing the boy, had lowered her glasses. She raised them again. "Look there!"

At the entrance were two women with a child between them. On the stair was a man. The door marked "Dr. Winship" had opened. The wide hall was suddenly full of people.

Mrs. Austen lowered her lorgnette. "Don't make a scene, my dear. At least, don't make one over my dead body."

Resistance was easy, but to what end? Margaret felt that she could persist, insist, ring and go in, but now only to be accompanied by her mother's mocking and stilted sneers. The consciousness of that subtracted the brightness from the day, the pleasure from the visit. Then, too, that evening he would come. Then they would be alone.

She turned. A moment more and both were in the street, where Mrs. Austen forgot about the taxi. Other matters occupied the good woman and occupied her very agreeably. She had been playing a game, and a rare game it is, with destiny. The stakes were extravagant, but her cards were poor. Then abruptly, in one of the prodigious shuffles that fate contrives, a hand, issuing from nowhere, had dealt her a flush. She purred at it, at the avenue, at the world, at her daughter.

"I am so glad we are not going anywhere to-night." A car flew by, a gloved hand waved and the purr continued. "Wasn't that

Sarah Amsterdam? By the way, what did the medium tell you? Anything about a dark man crossing your path? If not, it was very careless of her. But what was I talking about? Oh, yes, I am so glad we are to be at home. You can have a nice, quiet evening with your young man. Only, do you know, I wouldn't say anything about that little vestal. He might not like it. Men are so queer. They hate to be misunderstood and to be understood makes them furious. No, I wouldn't mention it. But now isn't he as full of surprises as a grab-bag? I thought him a model of the most perfect propriety, and that only shows how wrong it is to judge by appearances. Model young men always remind me of floor-walkers. Who was that that just bowed? Dear me, so it was, and he looked so down in the mouth he might have been a dentist. On Monday I really must go to my dentist. He does hurt terribly and that is so reassuring. You feel that you are getting your money's worth. Don't your teeth need attending to? Ah, here we are at last! God bless our home!"

Entering the hall, she looked at a little room to the right in which the manager awed prospecting tenants. Usually it was empty. It was empty then. Mrs. Austen looked, passed on and, preceding Margaret, entered a lift that floated them to the home on which she had asked a blessing.

# VIII

The Italians have a proverb about waiting for some one who does not come. They call it deadly. Among the lapping shadows Lennox felt the force of it. But concluding that visitors had detained his guests, he dressed and went around a corner or two to the Athenæum Club where usually he dined.

In the main room which gives on Fifth Avenue, he found Ten Eyck Jones talking war. Jones was a novelist, but he did not look like one. There was nothing commercial in his appearance, which was that of a man half-asleep, except when he talked and then he seemed very much awake. He was not fat and though an inkbeast, he dressed after the manner of those who put themselves in the best hands and then forget all about it. But for Lennox he had a superior quality, he was a friend. With him was Harry Cantillon, who, the night before, had danced away with Kate Schermerhorn. Straddling an arm of Cantillon's chair was Fred Ogston, a young man of a type that, even before the war, was vanishing and which was known as about town. Adjacently sat Peter Verelst. Servants brought little decanters and removed others. In a corner an old man glared with envious venom at the liquors of which he had consumed too many and of which, at the price of his eyesight, he could consume no more.

Jones waved at Lennox. "I have been telling these chaps that before they are much older they will be in khaki."

"Houp!" cried Cantillon. He sprang up, ran to the arched entrance, where, lightly, without effort, he turned a somersault and was gone.

The old man in the corner raised himself, shuffled to a table, sat down and wrote to the house committee. Such conduct could not be tolerated! Having said it, he raised himself again and shuffled over with the letter to Dunwoodie, a lawyer with the battered face of a bulldog and a ruffian's rumpled clothes.

Dunwoodie, instead of taking the letter, gave the old man a look, one look, his famous look, the look with which – it was said – he reversed the Bench. Angrily the old man turned tail, collided with Paliser, apologised furiously, damning him beneath his breath, damning Dunwoodie, damning the house committee, damning the club.

"Are you to dine here?" Jones asked Ogston, who swore gently, declaring that, worse luck, he was due at his aunt's.

"But you are," Jones told Lennox. "Come on and I'll make your hair stand on end." He turned: "And yours, too."

Peter Verelst smoothed the back of his head. "Thank you, Ten Eyck. But such hair as I have I prefer should remain as it is."

The two men went on and up into another room, spacious, high-ceiled, set with tables, where a captain got them seated, took their orders, carefully transmitted them to a careful waiter, an omnibus meanwhile producing ice-water which Jones had promptly removed.

He smiled at Lennox. "Who was the jeunesse you and Paliser

were talking to last night? She had been singing."

Lennox unfolded a napkin. "I thought you were to make my hair stand on end."

"Well," said the novelist, who spoke better than he knew, "she may make Paliser's. There's a young man with plenty of perspective. I saw him in London just before the deluge. He was then en route for the Marquesas. I envied him that. I envied him the vanilla-scented nights; the skies, a solid crust of stars, and also, and particularly, the tattooed ghosts. But I am forgetting your hair. Were you ever in Berlin?"

Lennox scowled. "Yes. Once."

"And once is too often. The last time I was there, I looked down the Wilhelmstrasse and it got up and threatened me. Barring the possibilities of future avatars, I shall not promenade there again. But I would give a red pippin, I would give two of them, to have been in Potsdam on that night, that cloudless night, the night in July, when in a room, gorgeous as only vulgarity could made it, there was sounded the crack of doom."

Jones gestured and a waiter hurried to him. He motioned him away.

"You can picture it, Lennox, or, if not, who am I to refuse my aid? At the doors were lackeys; at the gates were guards. Without and beyond, to the four points of the compass, an unsuspecting world slept, toiled, feasted, fasted, occupied with its soap-bubble hates and loves. But, in that room, saurians, with titles as long as your arm, were contriving a cataclysm that was to exceed the

deluge. Since then, and though it be but through the headlines, you and I stand witness to events that no mortal ever saw before. That night, in that room they were concocted. By comparison, what are the mythical exploits of Homer's warriors, the fabulous achievements of Charlemagne's paladins, the fading memories of Napoleon's campaigns? What are they all by comparison to a world in flames? Hugo, with his usual sobriety, said that Napoleon inconvenienced God. Napoleon wanted Europe. These gunmen want the earth. They won't get it. Hell is their portion. But, while they were planning the crib-cracking, I would give a red pippin to have been in their joint that night. A little more trout?"

Jones turned to the waiter. "Take it away and fetch the roast."

He was about to give other orders, yet these Lennox interrupted.

"But look here. You spoke of an unsuspecting world. The Kaiser had been rattling the sabre for years. Everybody knew that."

"So he had," said Jones, who contradicted no one. "But England did not take him seriously, nor did this country either. Consequently, when the war began it was regarded as but another robber-raid which shortly would be over. That was an idea that everybody shared, even to the Kaiser, who afterward said that he had not wanted this war. Incredible as it may seem he spoke the truth. He did not want a war in which he would be tripped on the Marne, blocked on the Yser and foiled at Verdun. He

wanted a war in which France would be felled, Russia rolled back, a war in which, over Serbia's ravaged corpse, his legions could pour down across the Turkish carpet into the realm where Sardanapalus throned, beyond to that of Haroun-al-Raschid, on from thence to Ormus and the Ind, and, with the resulting thralls and treasure, overwhelm England, gut the United States, destroy civilisation and, on the ruins, set Deutschland über Alles!"

"Hear! Hear!" said Lennox from between bites.

Jones, after a momentary interlude with a fork, got back at it. "That is what he wanted! But to get it, he lacked one thing, one thing only. He had everything else, he had everything that forethought, ingenuity and science could provide. The arsenals were stocked. The granaries were packed, the war-chests replete. Grey-green uniforms were piled endlessly in heaps. Kiel – previously stolen from Denmark, but then reconstructed and raised to the war degree – at last was open. The navy was ready. The army was ready. Against any possible combination of European forces, the oiled machine was prepared. In addition, clairvoyance had supplied the pretext and stupidity the chance. Petersburg was then in the throes of a general strike – which the Wilhelmstrasse had engineered. In Paris, the slipshod condition of the army had been publicly denounced. England and Ireland were nearly at each other's throats. Yet, had they been in each other's arms, the Kaiser was convinced that England would not interfere. Moreover in France, mobilisation required weeks; in Russia, months; and even then the Russian army, otherwise

unequipped, the Tsarina had supplied with two hundred Teuton generals. That woman used to exclaim at her resemblance to Marie Antoinette. She flattered herself. It is Bazaine whom she resembled. But where was I? Oh, yes. The opportunity was so obvious and everything so neatly prepared that, for good measure, the pretext was added. An archduke, sinister when living and still more sinister dead, was, by the Kaiser's orders, bombed to bits and the bombing fastened on Serbia. Allied stupidity provided the opportunity, imperial forethought supplied the rest. Since highwayry began, never was there such a chance. On the last gaiter was the last button. The Kaiser lacked but one thing."

Lennox shoved at his plate. "So you have said."

Jones, abandoning his fork, repeated it. "One thing! In Potsdam, on that cloudless July night, when the world, on which he proposed to batten, slept, toiled, feasted, fasted, occupied with its futile loves and hates, that thing must have occurred to him."

"Yes, but confound it, what was it?"

Jones lit a cigar. "Bernstorff said, or is said to have said – I do not count him among my acquaintances – that on that night this supercanaille showed symptoms of what I think I have seen described as vacillation. That is quite on the cards. It bears out my theory. In any event the fellow had his ambitions. He wanted to descend into the red halls of history disguised. He might have succeeded. History is very careless and to-day barely recalls that at five o'clock on the morning succeeding his marriage to

a dowdy fat girl, he treated his regiment to a drill. The fact is uninteresting and would be equally unimportant were it not for the note that it struck. Subsequently, when he leaped on the throne, he shouted that those who opposed him he would smash. "There is no other law than mine"; he later announced – a fine phrase and yet but a modern variant of Domitian's: "Your god and master orders it." Incidentally, in addition to the Garter, an honorific which the Duke of Cambridge admirably summarised as "having, sir, none of the damned nonsense of merit about it," he had other distinctions. He had – and has – uranomania, that is to say, a flight of fancy in which the patient believes himself associated with God. He had also defilirium tremens, which manifested itself in those man[oe]uvres that are war's image and in which the troops defile. Yet, when it came to the real thing, it may be that this paradomaniac lacked the stomach. Apart from the Kruger incident, and one or two other indecencies, his observance of international etiquette was relatively correct. The lackeys of history might therefore have deodorised him. With a sow's ear a lot may be done. Have a cigar?"

Lennox laughed. "I would prefer the point."

"Now, how greedy you are. Well then, here it is. On that fatidic night in July, this fellow was fifty-five."

"What of it?"

"Everything. At his age Alexander had been dead twenty years."

As Jones spoke he raised his hands. "Spirit of the Great

Sinner, forgive me! This scrofulous dwarf has no kinship with thee!"

"No," Jones, dropping his hands, resumed. "None. His kin are Herod, Caracalla, Attila, Genghis Khan, and Cloacus, Lord of Sewers. Those are his kin. To the shade of the Lampsacene, whom the world had forgotten; to that of Cloacus, whom civilisation had ignored, subsequently he devoted the army. For the troops he invoked them. But that night the ghosts of the others gave him pause. At his age, Caracalla, Attila, Genghis, were dead. They had died hideous, monstrous – but young. Herod alone may have seemed a promising saint to swear by, though, in the obscurities of Syrian chronology, even of him he could not be sure. The one kindred hyena who, at fifty-five, had defied the world was Tsi An, the Chinese Empress, and he had helped to squelch her. Do you see it now? To burglarise the world, this thug had every advantage. The police were asleep. The coast was clear. The jimmies and the dynamite sticks were ready. Even the dark lantern was packed. The kit was complete. He had everything. He lacked nothing, except the one essential – Youth! The eyes of youth are clear. His were too dimmed to foresee that the allies – "

Lennox was rising.

Amiably Jones switched on and off again. "Hold on a minute. You have not given me the "Who's Who" of that young woman."

In Lennox' brain, instantly cells latent, alert, and of which he was entirely unconscious, functioned actively. Before him Cassy stood. Beside her was another. This other, very lovely, was a

saint. Yet, prompted still by the cells and equally unaware of it, it occurred to him that a lovely saint may resemble a vase that is exquisite, but unresilient and perhaps even empty. Whereas a siren, like Cassy —

Abruptly he caught himself up. The unawaited disloyalty into which he had floundered, surprised and annoyed him. He could not account for the delicate infidelity and perplexedly he looked at Jones who still was at it.

"The diva I mean. The diva in duodecimo who sang at the Bazaar."

Lennox shook himself and sat down again. Modestly then the thrice-told tale was repeated – Angelo Cara, a violin in one hand, a sword-cane in the other, trudging home. The attack, the rout, the rescue, the acquaintance with Cassy that ensued.

Jones, absorbing the story, pigeonholed his memory with the details which, sometime, for copy purposes, might be of use.

"They are Portuguese," Lennox, rising again, concluded.

Jones peered about. The great room was filled with members, eating, drinking, laughing, talking – talking mainly of nothing whatever. He motioned. "Isn't that Cantillon over there with – of all people! – Dunwoodie?"

Lennox looked and nodded. "Cantillon is in Dunwoodie's office. He asked me to give him my law business." Indifferently, with the air of one considering the improbable, Lennox added: "Some day I may. Good-night."

But in the night into which he then went, already that day was

breaking.

# IX

That same evening, as Lennox was leaving the club, Mrs. Austen, rising from the dinner-table, preceded Margaret into the drawing-room and looked at the clock, a prostrate nymph, balancing a dial on the soles of her feet. At the figures on the dial, the nymph pointed a finger.

From the clock Mrs. Austen turned and exclaimed at the windows which she had already examined. "The jardinières have not yet been attended to! It is inconceivable!"

Margaret, who had seated herself, said: "You might send for the manager."

"He would only keep me waiting and then expect me to tell him what I wanted. He ought to know. Besides, I might have forgotten. It is very tiresome."

Margaret stood up. "I will tell him."

With a click, Mrs. Austen unfurled a fan and, with another click, refurled it. "No. I will see him myself. I am quite in the humour."

Margaret looked after her mother, who was leaving the room. The sudden tempest in a flowerpot surprised her. But the outer door closed. Margaret reseated herself. Presently he would come and together they would make those plans that lovers make – and then unmake, unless, elsewhere, they have been made for them.

Meanwhile she waited. The incident at the Sandringham, the

sight of Cassy, her mother's facile insinuations, these things had distressed her, because, and only because, they had prevented her from enjoying the innocent pleasure of the innocent visit to the rooms of her betrothed, whom she loved with a love that was too pure and too profound, to harbour doubt and suspicion and that evil child of theirs which jealousy is. Her faith was perfect. That faith showed in her face and heightened her beauty with a candour that should have disarmed her mother, who, in the hall below, was, at that moment, instructing a man and not about flower-boxes either.

"Mr. Lennox, you may know him, by sight I mean, will be coming here shortly. Please have him shown into that room there."

Mrs. Austen passed on. The little room at which she had glanced that afternoon received her – a hospitality in which a mirror joined. The latter welcomed her with a glimpse of herself. It was like meeting an old friend. But no; a friend certainly, yet not an old one. Age had not touched this lady, not impudently at least, though where it may have had the impertinence to lay a finger, art had applied another, a moving finger that had written a parody of youth on her face which was then turning to some one behind her whom the mirror disclosed.

In turning, she smiled.

"It is so good of you, Mr. Lennox, to look in on me. The door-man told you about Margaret, did he not? No? How careless of him. The dear child has a headache and has gone to bed."

"Has she?" said Lennox. He found but that. But at least he understood why Margaret had not come to his rooms. The headache had prevented her.

"It is nothing." Mrs. Austen was telling him. "To-morrow she will be herself again. Nice weather we are having."

"Very," Lennox answered.

As he would have said the same thing if Mrs. Austen had declared that the weather was beastly, the reply did not matter. It did not matter to her; it did not matter to him. She was thinking of something else and he was also. He was thinking of Margaret, wondering whether he might not go to her. Were it not for the strait-jacket that conventionality is and which pinions the sturdiest, he would have gone. He was a little afraid of Mrs. Austen, as an intelligent man sometimes is afraid of an imbecile woman. But his fear of her fainted beside the idea that if, disregarding the bagatelles of the door, he made his way to Margaret, she herself might not like it. That alone restrained him. Afterward he wished he had let nothing prevent him. Afterward he regretted it. It is the misery of life – and sometimes its reward – that regret should be futile.

But, at the moment, grim and virile, a hat in one hand, a stick in the other, his white tie just showing between the lapels of his overcoat, already he was consoling himself. He had not seen Margaret in the afternoon, and he was not to see her this evening. No matter. The morrow would repay – that morrow which is falser than the former day.

Pleasantly at him and at his thoughts, Mrs. Austen played the flute. "Won't you sit down?" In speaking, she sank on a sofa which she occupied amply.

Lennox, shifting his stick, took a chair. Later, in one of those evil moods that come to the best, as well as to the worst, he wished he had brained her with it.

With the magic flute, Mrs. Austen continued: "To-morrow is Sunday, is it not? You must be sure to come. Dear me! I can remember when everybody went to church on Sunday and then walked up and down Fifth Avenue. Fifth Avenue had trees then instead of shops and on the trees were such funny little worms. They used to hang down and crawl on you. The houses, too, were so nice. They all had piazzas and on the piazzas were honeysuckles. But I fear I am boasting. I don't really remember all that. It was my father who told me. Those must have been the good old days!"

Lennox again shifted his stick. "To-day I had hoped that you would look in on me."

The flute caressed the strain. "Yes. It was too bad! We had quite counted on it. Bachelor quarters must be so exciting."

"Well, not mine at any rate. They are rather dark."

"But that must make them all the more exciting! Blindman's buff! Hide and go seek! What fun you must have with your friends romping about!"

"My friends are too busy for that. Though to-day – "

"Yes?"

Lennox hesitated. He knew that this woman took no interest in him whatever, but he had intended to tell Margaret about Cassy.

Pleasantly Mrs. Austen prodded him. "Yes?"

"Nothing of any moment. This afternoon, Miss Cara, the girl who sang last night, came to see me. You may remember I told you I knew her father."

"It seems to me I do."

"Things have not gone well there and I advanced her a trifle for him."

Mrs. Austen unfurled her fan. It was all Honest Injun. She had not a doubt of it and never had. But if she had thought it a Sioux and Comanche story, it would have been the same to her.

"I am sorry you did not meet her," Lennox continued. "You might have lent her a hand."

"Professionally, you mean?"

"Yes."

"I might have her sing here," replied Mrs. Austen, who would have seen Cassy hanged first.

Lennox considered the picture: Mrs. Austen in the rôle of shepherdess, herding for Cassy's benefit the flock of sheep that society is. But the picture did not detain him. He stood up.

"That would be very good of you. Please tell Margaret I am sorry she has a headache and that I will look in on her to-morrow."

No you won't, thought Mrs. Austen, who said: "Yes, do."

In a moment, when he had gone, she looked again in the

mirror. It showed her a woman who would not steal, unless she could do so undetectably; a woman who would not forge, because she did not know how. Crimes ridiculous or merely terrific she was too shrewd to commit. But there are crimes that the law cannot reach. There are cards, too, that fate may deal.

After looking at the woman, she looked at the cards. They were dreamlike. Even so, they needed stacking. Mrs. Austen arranged them carefully, ran them up her sleeve and floated to the room where Margaret waited.

As she entered, Margaret turned to her. Her face had that disquieting loveliness which Spanish art gave to the Madonna, the loveliness of flesh eclipsed certainly by the loveliness of the soul, but still flesh, still lovely.

At sight of it Mrs. Austen experienced the admiration tinctured with the vitriol of jealousy that some mothers inject. Mrs. Austen had been a belle in the nights when there were belles but her belledom, this girl, who was not a belle, outshone. Yet the glow of it while necessarily physical had in it that which was moral. Unfortunately the radiance of moral beauty only those who are morally beautiful can perceive. Mrs. Austen was blind to it. It was her daughter's physical beauty that she always saw and which, though she was jealous of it, had, she knew, a value, precisely as beauty had a value in Circassia where, before the war, it fetched as much as a hundred Turkish pounds. In New York, where amateurs are keener and beauty is more rare, it may run into millions.

Commercially conscious of that, Mrs. Austen felt for the cards and carelessly produced one.

"Do you know, I believe we are to have a shower. Your young man got off just in time."

Margaret, who had glanced at the prostrate nymph, looked at her upright mother. "Do you mean that Keith has come – and gone?"

Mrs. Austen sat down and extracted another card. "My dear, when I went below he was coming in. We – "

Margaret, with her usual directness, interrupted. "But he is coming back?"

"That depends on you."

"On me? How? What do you mean?"

"That you must do as you like, of course. But if you elect to see him, for goodness' sake don't refer to it."

"Refer to it!" Margaret exclaimed. "Refer to what?"

"The vestal whom we saw this afternoon."

"I don't understand."

Indulgently Mrs. Austen motioned. "It is hardly proper that you should."

Margaret winced and coloured. "Your insinuation is horrible."

Cheerfully Mrs. Austen smiled. Margaret's start, her heightened colour, her visible annoyance, these things comforted her. A grandee of Spain warmed his hands at the auto-da-fé. There are people just like him. There are people that take comfort in another's distress. Mrs. Austen did not know that she

resembled them. She had nothing but Margaret's welfare in view. Nothing but that and her own. Her own though came first.

She raised the fan. "My dear, you misjudge me. I always said that he is a good young man and I stick to it. He is good, far too good, too good to be true." With that, lowering the fan, she produced a trump. "Downstairs, a moment ago, he told me so."

Margaret gasped. "He told you – he told you – "

"Precisely. That is just what he did tell me."

Margaret straightened. "I don't believe it."

Mrs. Austen waved at her. "Oh, I don't mean that he has deceived you. He has done nothing of the kind. It is you who have deceived yourself. That was to be expected. At your age I deceived myself quite as thoroughly. I thought your father a conquering hero and he was merely a bore. But he pointed a moral, though he adorned no tale. He married to settle down. That is this young man's idea and I must give him credit for the fact that while he has not deceived you, he did deceive me. I thought him a tedious person; whereas, not a bit of it. He is exceedingly lively. If he keeps it up, his wife will be blessed among women. But that is just it. He won't keep it up. He swore he would not and I believe him. He has turned over a new leaf. I can't cry over it, but it is really too bad."

Margaret, who had straightened, stiffened. "If I believed a word of what you tell me, I would forgive him entirely."

Mrs. Austen, unprepared for that, leaned forward. "My dear, I had no idea you were so sensible."

"I would forgive entirely," Margaret continued. "But I would never see him again."

How good that tasted! Mrs. Austen swallowed it contentedly. "Of course you will see him. You are not going blind, I suppose. But when you do see him, it will be only decent of you to ignore the matter which is not a fit subject for you to discuss."

Margaret, who had straightened and stiffened, now was rigid. "I certainly shall ignore it. It is not worth talking about."

Mrs. Austen leaned back. "Ah, my dear, how right you are. He could not tell you that he had loved wisely, it would not be very flattering. He could not say he had loved too well, for that would be embarrassing. What a pretty frock you have on. Did Marguerite make it? Of course he could not. It would not be nice at all. But to me he made a soiled breast of it. Don't you think the skirt a bit too long? Stand up a minute."

Margaret coloured again. She coloured with a flush that put two red spots on her. She did not believe it. She could not and would not. Yet credence, like the wind, bloweth where it listeth.

Mrs. Austen, noting the spots, knew that the card had been well played and leisurely selected another.

"Perhaps it is the way you are sitting. Yes, altogether it is quite ducky. I really must go to Marguerite on Monday. Don't let me forget about it or the dentist either. I shall have my hands full and my mouth also. The proper caper, too, apparently. That little dollymop, whom we saw this afternoon, had her hands full. Did you notice the roll of bills that she was counting?

Such an enjoyable occupation! But it won't last. You need not worry on that score. He had been paying her off. He assured me of that and so unnecessarily. Why, I saw the whole thing at a glance. Anybody but you would have seen it too. But you are so theosophically nearsighted. It was for that reason I took you away. Now, though, he is going to begin on a clean slate. Those were his very words, and you, I suppose, are the clean slate. He has such original expressions, hasn't he? But there! I forgot. He did not mean me to tell you. In fact, he begged me not to."

From Margaret's face the flush retreating left it white with that whiteness which dismay creates. A bucket of mud had drenched her. It did more, it dazed her. The idea that the bucket was imaginary, the mud non-existent, that every word she had heard was a lie, did not occur to this girl who, if a Psyche, was not psychic. In her heart was the mud; in her mother's hand was the bucket. But the mire itself, he had put there. The evidence of her own eyes she might have questioned. But he had admitted it and the fact that he had induced in her the purely animal feeling to get away, to be alone and to suffer unseen.

She left the room, went to her own, closed the door and at a prie-Dieu fell on her knees, not to pray – she knew that the Lords of Karma are not to be propitiated or coerced – but in humiliation.

In humiliation there may be self-pity and that is always degrading. With uncertain hands she tried to transform that pity into sorrow, not for herself, but for him. The burnt offering

seared her. In the secret chambers of her being her young soul tripped and fell. For support she clutched at her creed. Ordinarily it would have sustained her. Ordinarily it would have told her that her suffering was the penalty for suffering which she had caused, a penalty that the gods of the doors that close behind our birth were measuring to her. Ordinarily she would have realised that in some anterior, enigmatic and forgotten life, she, too, had debased herself and that this cross was the punishment for that debasement. Ordinarily the creed would have sustained her. But as she clutched at it, it receded. Only the cross remained and that was too heavy.

In the drawing-room an indifferent nymph pointed a finger at hours, all of which wound and of which the last one kills.

In that room Mrs. Austen was writing a note. Addressed to Montagu Paliser, jr., esqre., it asked him to dinner.

# X

In the subway, the following evening, Cassy saw a man eyeing her. She turned and saw another man who also was eyeing her. On the seat opposite two women were discussing her clothes.

The clothes, her own manufacture, were not of the fashion, not behind it, or ahead of it, but above it. A mode, or a mood of her own, they consisted in a blue silk smock and a yellow cloth skirt. On the sleeves and about the neck of the smock there was also yellow, touches of it, with which the skirt married. Therewith she was hatless, rebellious and handsome.

Accustomed to the inquisitiveness of appraising eyes, she ignored the women as, already, she had ignored the men. With obliterating unconcern, she reduced them to the fluidity of the inchoate. Other matters occupied her, and, primarily, a trick, an extremely shabby one, from which she had not yet recovered.

The day before, after paying the butcher, the baker, and the punctual and pertinacious agent, she had scaled the walk-up where she found her father with the violin, on which, an hour earlier, Lennox had loaned her the money.

The spectacle flabbergasted her. Then, realising what Lennox had done, his iniquity struck her as hateful. At once, in an effort to account, however imaginatively, for the apparent sorcery of it all, she tried to invent a fairy-tale. But the tale would not come. Nor was it needed. Her father dispensed with any. Impatient of

detail, as the artist usually is, he required none. The extraordinary perspicacity of the police who had nailed and returned the violin instanter, this wizardry that would have thrown any one else into stupors of bewilderment, interested him not at all. He had the violin. That sufficed. The rest did not matter.

It mattered though and monumentally to Cassy. To owe the butcher, the baker, the candlestickmaker, and to have them look slantingly at you, that was disgusting. But to be beholden for a gift, which you had refused to accept, and which then, behind your back, was dumped in on you, that was degrading. Consequently, while conjecturing new versions of Perrault, versions which it relieved her to find were not wanted, she gnashed her milk-white teeth at Lennox, felt that she hated him, yet felt, too, and the feeling was maddening, that the hatred was very tender.

All this was irritating enough and the Tamburini had contrived to add to the irritation. It had been arranged that the fallen star was to come to the walk-up and accompany Cassy to the Splendor. Instead of which, at the last moment, the ex-diva had telephoned that she would join her at the hotel, and Cassy foresaw a tedious sitting about in the lobby, for Ma Tamby was always late. But when have misfortunes come singly? Cassy foresaw, too, that the tedium would not be attenuated by Paliser's conversation.

It was not for that, or for him, that she was then in the subway, but for dinner. Young, healthy and consequently carnal, though

not otherwise carnal than hunger can make you, she liked food, on condition that she had not prepared it, and – in particular, and why not? – she liked the savorously truffled menus that walk-ups lack. She had another reason for being in the subway, one that Ma Tamby had lodged, like a flea, in her ear.

But now, near the heart of Manhattan, the train had stopped. Cassy got out, looked at her white gloves, wondered if they smelled of benzine, decided that they did, took them off and went on to the Splendor where Paliser was waiting.

Other people appeared to be similarly occupied. In the high, wide hall were groups of careful men and careless women, the latter very scrumptious in their imported frocks. The sight of these Parisianisms abashed Cassy no more than her appearance abashed Paliser. Etiquette, Formality, the Proper Thing, the great inane gods of the ante-bellum heavens, he had never acknowledged and now, though locally their altars remained and their worship persisted, he knew they were forever dead, blown into the dust-bin of the things that were, tossed there in derision by that atheist, the War.

The careless women looked at Cassy and carefully looked away. The careful men looked at her and carelessly looked again. In the severity of the wide, high hall, the girl with her rebellious beauty and harlequin gown, struck a note which it lacked, struck two of them, the go-and-be-hanged-to-you and originality.

In evening clothes that said Savile Row, Paliser approached. "You are punctual as a comet and equally luminous."

Cassy, ignoring the remark, ignoring, too, the hand that accompanied it, cut him short. "Haven't seen Madame Tamburini, have you?"

Paliser's hair had the effect of a mirror. He smoothed the back of it. The ex-diva he had certainly seen and not later than just before she telephoned to Cassy. But it is injudicious, and also tiresome, to tell everything. With the wave of a cheque, the complicity of the former first-lady had been assured, and assured moreover without a qualm on her part. Ma Tamby did not know what it is to have a qualm – which she could not have spelled if she had known. She was differently and superiorly educated. In the university that life is, she had acquired encyclopedias of recondite learning. She knew that ice is not all that it is cracked up to be: that a finger in the pie is better than two in the fire, and that angels have been observed elsewhere than at Mons – learning which, as you may see, is surprising.

Over the ham and eggs of an earlier evening, the syllables of Paliser's name had awakened echoes of old Academy nights and Mapleson's "grand revivals" of the Trovatore, echoes thin and quavering, yet still repeating hymns in glory of the man's angelic papa. On the way from ham and eggs to Harlem, she had, in consequence, conjured, for Cassy's benefit, with performing fleas. But when, on this afternoon, M. P. jr., had come and waved cheques at her, she had felt that her worst hopes were realised, that her finger was really in the pie, and she had agreed to everything, which, however, for the moment, was nothing at all,

merely to abandon Cassy that evening; merely also to collaborate later in the evocation of a myth, and meanwhile to keep at it with the fleas.

Now, in the hall of the Splendor, as Paliser patted the back of his head, he was enjoying Cassy's open-air appearance that needed only a tennis-racket to be complete.

Cassy glanced about. She had a penny or two more than her carfare and yet, if she had owned the shop, she could not have appeared more at ease in this smartest of smart inns, a part of which, destiny, in its capriciousness, was to offer her.

"No," he answered. "But I have a private room somewhere. She can find her way there, unless you prefer palms and an orchestra."

"I do," said Cassy, to whom a room with this man said only boredom and who liked to see what was going on.

Then when, presently, they were seated at a table, to which the chastened captain of the ham-and-egg night had piloted the way, Cassy beheld what she had never beheld before, and what few mortals ever do behold, a cradled bottle of Clos de Vougeot. But to her, the royal crû was very much like the private room. It said nothing. A neighbouring table was more eloquent.

Among the people seated there was an imperial woman with an imperial manner, whom Cassy instantly recognised. She was prima donna, prima donna assoluta, and though Cassy did not know it – nor would it have interested her if she had known – dissoluta also.

To be in her shoes!

In that seven-leagued dream, she forgot Paliser, the delinquent Tamburini, the trick that Lennox had played. In a golden gloom, on a wide stage, to a house packed to the roof, Cassy was bowing. Her final roulade had just floated on and beyond, lost now in cyclonic bravas.

"It was the Duc d'Aumale," Paliser was saying.

"Eh?" Abruptly Cassy awoke.

"Or, if not, some other chap who, recognising it, ordered his regiment to halt and present arms."

"To whom?"

"To the vineyard where the grape in that bottle was grown."

Cassy shook out a napkin. "You talk just like my janitress. I never understand a word she says."

But now a waiter was bringing delicacies other than those obtainable in Harlem; in particular, a dish that had the merit of pleasing Cassy.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Muskrat."

"What!"

"Muskrat with terrapin for a pseudonym. The pseudonym shows imagination. Let us be thankful for that. Gastronomy is bankrupt. Formerly it was worshipped. Formerly gastronomy was a goddess. To-day the sole tributes consist in bills-of-fare that are just like the Sahara minus the oases. It is the oases we want and it is muskrat we get. That is all wrong. The degree

of culture that any nation may claim is shown in its cookery and if there is anything viler than what we get here it must be served in Berlin. It must have been Solon who said: 'Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are.' He added, or should have, that animals feed, man dines and, when permitted, dines devoutly. There are dishes, as there are wines, to which one should rise and bow. But hereabouts it is only by special dispensation that one gets them. In a hotel such as this there is an outward show of reverence, but it is sheer hypocrisy; of real piety there is none, a sham attempt to observe the sacred rites without knowing how. I admit I don't know either. From me the divine afflatus has been withheld. But elsewhere I have been conscious of the presence. Once or twice I was blessed. Here, though, in default of shrines there should be chairs. Harvard, Yale, Columbia, should establish a few. When I was in college I was taught everything that it is easiest to forget. If the youth of the land were instructed in gastronomy we would all be wiser and better. Chairs on gastronomy, that is what we need!"

Cassy laughed. "Why not tables?"

Paliser laughed with her. The laughter was a bond. It joined them however tenuously. It was what he had been driving at. Accustomed to easy successes, Cassy's atmosphere, with its flavour of standoffishness and indifference, appealed to this man, who had supped on the facile and who wanted the difficult. Cassy, he could have sworn, would supply it and, if he had, he would have sworn very truly.

Meanwhile the muskrat had gone. Dishes less false but equally fair had followed. Now, with the air of a conjurer, the waiter just showed them an entremets which he hastened to serve. It was a soufflée.

At it, Cassy, just showing the point of her strawberry tongue, exclaimed without rancour: "Ma Tamby has thrown us over."

Paliser lit a cigarette. "She may be singing in the private room."

Cassy laughed again. "Yes. 'Una voce poco fa!' That would be just the thing – wouldn't it? – to sing privately in private."

Paliser answered, though what, she did not hear. The orchestra drowned it and for a moment she considered him, conscious that he was less objectionable than he had seemed, yet entirely unconscious that such objection as she had experienced was due to his extreme good-looks, which in a man are always objectionable to a woman when she herself is handsome, for they make him resemble her and, in so doing, constitute an encroachment on her prerogatives, which, in itself, is an affront.

Cassy, ignorant of the psychology of it, equally unaware that familiarity which may breed contempt can also dissolve dislike, and feeling merely a lessening of her instinctive hostility, told herself that he was perhaps not as cocky as he looked and drank of the glass before her.

The Clos de Vougeot which, to the educated palate, is art, literature and song combined, meant nothing more to her than if it had been Médoc. She drank it because it was there at her hand,

as she would have drunk water, without savouring it, without any realisation of the enormity of the crime. Yet though it meant nothing, nothing at least of which she was aware, the royal crû was affecting her. It modified and mollified, admonishing her that this man was an inoffensive insect who, circumstances favouring, might, as Ma Tamby when inserting the flea had told her, put her father on his feet.

In just what the favouring circumstances could consist, the fallen star had not bothered to indicate, and she had not bothered because they were too obvious and also because she was sure that Cassy was not insane.

Paliser abandoned his cigarette. "If you like, we might look in at the Metropolitan. I believe I have a box."

Apart from down-stage and the centre of it, apart, too, from the flys and the dressing-rooms, Cassy's imagination had not as yet conceived anything more beckoning than a box at the opera, even though, as on this occasion, the opera happened to be a concert. "Why, yes. Only – " Pausing, she looked about. The imperial lady had gone.

"Only what?" Paliser very needlessly asked for he knew.

"I fear I am a bit overdressed."

"Not for Sunday. The house will be full and nobody in it. Besides, what do you care?"

Cassy shrugged. "Personally, not a rap. It was of you I was thinking."

Paliser, who had been signing the check and feeing the waiter,

looked at her. "I did not know that you were so considerate."

Cassy, in surprise not at him, but at herself, laughed. "Nor did I."

Paliser stood up and drew back her chair. "Be careful. You might become cynical. It is in thinking of others that cynicism begins."

The platitude slipped from him absently. He had no wish for the concert, no wish to hear Berlinese trulls and bubonic bassi bleat. But, for the tolerably delicate enterprise that he had in hand, there were the preliminary steps which could only be hastened slowly and anything slower than the Metropolitan on a Sunday night, it was beyond him to conjecture.

But though on that evening a basso did bleat, it may be that he was not bubonic. Moreover he was followed by a soprano who, whether trullish or not, at any rate was not Berlinese and whose voice had the lusciousness of a Hawaiian pineapple. But the selections, which were derived from old Italian cupboards, displeased Paliser, who called them painted mush.

But not twice! Cassy turned her back on him. The painted mush shook stars in her ears, opened vistas on the beyond. Save for him she would have been quite happy. But his remark annoyed her. It caused her to revise her opinion. Instead of an inoffensive insect he was an offensive fool. None the less, as the concert progressed, she revised it again. On entering the box she had seen his name on the door. The memory of that, filtering through the tinted polenta from the ancient cupboards, softened

her. A man so gifted could express all the imbecilities he liked. Elle s'enfichait.

As a result, before it was over, in lieu of her back, she gave him the seduction of her smile, and, later when, in his car, on the way to the walk-up, he spoke of future dinners, fresher songs, she had so far forgotten the painted mush insult, that momentarily she foresaw but one objection. She had nothing to wear and frankly, with entire unconcern, she out with it.

For that he had a solution which he kept to himself. The promptly obliterating stare with which she would have reduced him to non-existence, he dodged in advance.

Apparently changing the subject, he said: "You know – or know of – Mrs. Beamish, don't you?"

"Never heard of her," said Cassy, entirely unaware that no one else ever had either.

"She was at the Bazaar the other night and admired your singing."

"Very good of her I am sure," replied Cassy, who, a born anarchist and by the same token a born autocrat, loathed condescension.

Paliser corrected it. "No, not good – appreciative. She wants you to sing at her house. If you are willing, could she arrange about it through Madame Tamburini?"

"If she tried very hard, I suppose she might," Cassy, with the same loftiness, answered.

But the loftiness was as unreal as Mrs. Beamish. Inwardly

she jubilated, wondering how much she would get. A hundred? In that case she could repay Lennox at once. At the thought of it, again she revised her opinion. Paliser was young and in her judgment all young men were insects. On the other hand he was serviceable. Moreover, though he looked cocky, he did not presume. He talked rot, but he did not argue. Then, too, his car was a relief.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.