The Good Comrade eBook

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THE POLKINGTONS

The Polkingtons were of those people who do not dine. They lunched, though few besides Johnny Gillat, who did not count, had been invited to share that meal with them. They took tea, the daintiest, pleasantest, most charming of teas, as the *elite* of Marbridge knew; everybody—or, rather, a selection of everybody, had had tea with them one time or another. After that there was no record; the *elite*, who would as soon have thought of going without their heads as without their dinner, concluded they dined, because they were "one of us." But some humbler folk were of opinion that they only dined once a week, and that after morning service on Sundays; but even this idea was dispelled when the eldest Miss Polkington was heard to excuse her non-appearance at an organ recital because "lunch was always so late on Sunday."

Let it not be imagined from this that the Polkingtons were common people—they were not; they were extremely well connected; indeed, their connections were one of the two striking features about them, the other was their handicap, Captain Polkington, late of the ——th Bengal Lancers. He was well connected, though not quite so much so as his wife; still—well, but he was not very presentable. If only he had been dead he would have been a valuable asset, but living, he was decidedly rather a drawback; there are some relatives like this. Mrs. Polkington bore up under it valiantly; in fact, they all did so well that in time they, or at least she and two of her three daughters, came almost to believe some of the legends they told of the Captain.

The Polkingtons lived at No. 27 East Street, which, as all who know Marbridge are aware, is a very good street in which to live. The house was rather small, but the drawing-room was good, with two beautiful Queen Anne windows, and a white door with six panels. The rest of the house did not matter. On the whole the drawing-room did not so very much matter, because visitors seldom went into it when the Miss Polkingtons were not there; and when they were, no one but a jealous woman would have noticed that the furniture was rather slight, and there were no flowers except those in obvious places.

There was only one Miss Polkington in the drawing-room that wintry afternoon—Julia, the middle one of the three, the only one who could not fill even a larger room to the complete obliteration of furniture and fitments. Julia was not pretty, therefore she was seldom to be found in the drawing-room alone; she knew better than to attempt to occupy that stage by herself. But it was now almost seven o'clock, too late for any one to come; also, since there was no light but the fire, deficiencies were not noticeable. She felt secure of interruption, and stood with one foot on the fender, looking earnestly into the fire.

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That day had been an important one to the Polkingtons; Violet, the eldest of the sisters, had that afternoon accepted an offer of marriage from the Reverend Richard Frazer. The young man had not left the house an hour, and Mrs. Polkington was not yet returned from some afternoon engagement more than half, but already the matter had been in part discussed by the family. Julia, standing by the drawing-room fire, was in a position to review at least some points of the case dispassionately. Violet was two and twenty, tall, and of a fine presence, like her mother, but handsomer than the elder woman could ever have been. She had undoubted abilities, principally of a social order, but not a penny apiece to her dower. She had this afternoon accepted Richard Frazer, though he was only a curate—an aristocratic one certainly, with a small private income, and an uncle lately made bishop of one of the minor sees. Violet was fond of him; she was too nice a girl to accept a man she was not fond of, though too well brought up to become fond of one who was impossible. The engagement, though it probably did not fulfil all Mrs. Polkington's ambitions, was in Julia's opinion a good thing for several reasons.

There was a swish and rustle of silk by the door—Mrs. Polkington did not wear silk skirts, only a silk flounce somewhere, but she got more creak and rustle out of it than the average woman does out of two skirts. An imposing woman she was, with an eye that had once been described as "eagle," though, for that, it was a little inquiring and eager now, by reason of the look-out she had been obliged to keep for a good part of her life. She entered the room now, followed by her eldest and youngest daughters, Violet and Cherie.

"At twelve to-morrow?" she was saying as she came in. "Is that when he is coming to see your father?"

Violet said it was; then added, in a tone of some dissatisfaction, "I suppose he must see father about it? We couldn't arrange something?"

"Certainly not," Mrs. Polkington replied with decision; "it is not for me to give or refuse consent to your marriage. Of course, Mr. Frazer knows your father does not have good health, or trouble himself to mix much in society here—it is not likely that an old military man should, but in a case like this he would expect to be called upon; it would have shown a great lack of breeding on Mr. Frazer's part had he suggested anything different."

Violet agreed, though she did not seem exactly convinced, and Julia created a diversion by saying—

"Twelve is rather an awkward time. A quarter of an hour with father, five minutes—no, ten—with you, half an hour with Violet, altogether brings it very near lunch time."

“Mr. Frazer will, of course, lunch with us to-morrow,” Mrs. Polkington said, as if stray guests to lunch were the most usual and convenient thing in the world. The Polkingtons kept up a good many of their farces in private life; most of them found it easier, as well as pleasanter, to do so. “The cold beef,” Mrs. Polkington said, mentally reviewing her larder, “can be hashed; that and a small boned loin of mutton will do, he would naturally expect to be treated as one of the family; fortunately the apple tart has not been cut—-with a little cream—”

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“I thought we were to have the tart to-night,” Julia interrupted, thinking of Johnny Gillat, who was coming to spend the evening with her father.

Mrs. Polkington thought of him too, but she did not change her mind on this account. “We can’t, then,” she said, and turned to the discussion of other matters. She had carried these as far as the probable date of marriage, and the preferment the young man might easily expect, when the little servant came up to announce Mr. Gillat.

Mrs. Polkington did not express impatience. “Is he in the dining-room?” she said. “I hope you lighted the heater, Mary.”

Mary said she had, and Mrs. Polkington returned to her interesting subject, only pausing to remark, “How tiresome that your father is not back yet!”

For a little none of the three girls moved, then Julia rose.

“Are you going down to Mr. Gillat?” her mother asked. “There really is no necessity; he is perfectly happy with the paper.”

Perhaps he was, though the paper was a half-penny morning one; he did not make extravagant demands on fate, or anything else; nevertheless, Julia went down.

The Polkingtons’ house was furnished on an ascending scale, which found its zenith in the drawing-room, but deteriorated again very rapidly afterwards. The dining-room, being midway between the kitchen and the drawing-room, was only a middling-looking apartment. They did not often have a fire there; a paraffin lamp stove stood in the fire-place, leering with its red eye as if it took a wicked satisfaction in its own smell. Before the fire-place, re-reading the already-known newspaper by the light of one gas jet, sat Johnny Gillat. Poor old Johnny, with his round, pink face, whereon a grizzled little moustache looked as much out of place as on a twelve-year-old school-boy. There was something of the school-boy in his look and in his deprecating manner, especially to Mrs. Polkington; he had always been a little deprecating to her even when he had first known her, a bride, while he himself was the wealthy bachelor friend of her husband. He was still a bachelor, and still her husband’s friend, but the wealth had gone long ago. He had now only just enough to keep him, fortunately so secured that he could not touch the principal. It was a mercy he had it, for there was no known work at which he could have earned sixpence, unless perhaps it was road scraping under a not too exacting District Council. He was a harmless enough person, but when he took it into his head to leave his lodgings in town for others, equally cheap and nasty, at Marbridge, Mrs. Polkington felt fate was hard upon her. It was like having two Captain Polkingtons, of a different sort, but equally unsuitable for public use, in the place. In self defence she had been obliged to make definite rules for Mr. Gillat’s coming and going about the house, and still more definite rules as to the rooms in which he might be found. The dining-room was allowed him, and there he was when Julia came.

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He looked up as she entered, and smiled; he regarded her as almost as much his friend as her father; a composite creature, and a necessary connection between the superior and inferior halves of the household.

“Father not in, I hear,” he said.

“No,” Julia answered. “What a smell there is!”

Mr. Gillat allowed it. “There’s something gone wrong with Bouquet,” he said, thoughtfully regarding the stove.

The “Bouquet Heater” was the name under which it was patented; it did not seem quite honest to speak of it as a heater, so perhaps “Bouquet” was the better name.

Julia went to it. “I should think there is,” she said, and turned it up, and turn it down, and altered the wicks, until she had improved matters a little.

“I’m afraid your father’s having larks,” Johnny said, watching her.

“It’s rather a pity if he is,” Julia answered; “he has got to see some one on business to-morrow.”

“Who?”

“Mr. Frazer, a clergyman who wants to marry Violet.”

Mr. Gillat sat upright. “Dear, dear!” he exclaimed. “No? Really?” and when Julia had given him an outline of the circumstances, he added softly, “A wonderful woman! I always had a great respect for your mother.” From which it is clear he thought Mrs. Polkington was to be congratulated. “And when is it to be?” he asked.

“Violet says a year’s time; they could not afford to marry sooner and do it properly, but it will have to be sooner all the same.”

“A year is not a very long time,” Mr. Gillat observed; “they go fast, years; one almost loses count of them, they go so fast.”

“I dare say,” Julia answered, “but Violet will have to get married without waiting for the year to pass. We can’t afford a long engagement.”

Mr. Gillat looked mildly surprised and troubled; he always did when scarcity of money was brought home to him, but Julia regarded it quite calmly.

“The sooner Violet is married,” she said, “the sooner we can reduce some of the expenses; we are living beyond our income now—not a great deal, perhaps, still a bit;

Violet's going would save enough, I believe; we could catch up then. That is one reason, but the chief is that a long engagement is expensive; you see, we should have to have meals different, and fires different, and all manner of extras if Mr. Frazer came in and out constantly. We should have to live altogether in a more expensive style; we might manage it for three months, or six if we were driven to it, but for a year—it is out of the question."

"But," Mr. Gillat protested, "if they can't afford it? You said he could not; he is a curate."

"He must get a living, or a chaplaincy, or something; or rather, I expect we must get it for him. Oh, no, we have no Church influence, and we don't know any bishops; but one can always rake up influence, and get to know people, if one is not too particular how."

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Mr. Gillat looked at her uneasily; every now and then there flitted through his mind a suspicion that Julia was clever too, as clever perhaps as her mother, and though not, like her, a moral and social pillar standing in the high first estate from which he and the Captain had fallen. Julia had never been that, never aspired to it; she was no success at all; content to come and sit in the dining-room with him and Bouquet; she could not really be clever, or else she would have achieved something for herself, and scorned to consort with failures. He smiled benignly as he remembered this, observing, “I dare say something will be done—I hope it may; your mother’s a wonderful woman, a wonderful—”

He broke off to listen; Julia listened too, then she rose to her feet. “That’s father,” she said, and went to let him in.

Mr. Gillat followed her to the door. “Ah—h’m,” he said, as he saw the Captain coming in slowly, with a face of despairing melancholy and a drooping step.

“Come down-stairs, father,” Julia said. “Come along, Johnny.”

They followed her meekly to the basement, where there was a gloomy little room behind the kitchen reserved for the Captain’s special use. A paraffin stove stood in the fire-place also, own brother to the one in the dining-room; Julia stooped to light it, while her father sank into a chair.

“Gillat,” he said in a voice of hopelessness, “I am a ruined man.”

“No?” Mr. Gillat answered sympathetically, but without surprise. “Dear me!” He carefully put down the hat and stick he had brought with him, the one on the edge of the table, the other against it, both so badly balanced that they fell to the ground.

“You shouldn’t do it, you know,” he said, with mild reproof; “you really shouldn’t.”

“Do it!” the Captain cried. “Do what?”

Julia looked up from the floor where she knelt trimming the stove-lamp. “Have five whiskeys and sodas,” she said, examining her father judicially.

He did not deny the charge; Julia’s observation was not to be avoided.

“And what is five?” he demanded with dignity.

“Three too many for you,” she answered.

“Do you mean to insinuate that I am intoxicated?” he asked. “Johnny,” he turned pathetically to his friend, “my own daughter insinuates that I am intoxicated.”

“No,” Julia said, “I don’t; I say it does not agree with you, and it doesn’t—you know you ought not to take more than two glasses.”

“Is that your opinion, Gillat?” Captain Polkington asked. “Is that what you meant? That I—I should confine myself to two glasses of whiskey and water?”

“I wasn’t thinking of the whiskey,” Johnny said apologetically; “it was the gees.”

The Captain groaned, but what he said more Julia did not hear; she went out into the kitchen to get paraffin. But she had no doubt that he defended the attacked point to his own satisfaction, as he always had done—cards, races, and kindred pleasant, if expensive, things, ever since the days long ago before he sent in his papers.

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These same pleasant things had had a good deal to do with the sending in of the papers; not that they had led the Captain into anything disgraceful, the compulsion to resign his commission came solely from relatives, principally those of his wife. It was their opinion that he worked too little and played too much, and an expensive kind of play. That he drank too much was not said; of course, the Indian climate and life tempted to whiskey pegs, and nature had not fitted him for them in large quantities; still that was never cast up against him. Enough was, however, to bring things to an end; he resigned, relations helped to pay his debts, and he came home with the avowed intention of getting some gentlemanly employment. Of course he never got any, it wasn't likely, hardly possible; but he had something left to live upon—a very small private income, a clever wife, and some useful and conscientious relations.

Somehow the family lived, quite how in the early days no one knew; Mrs. Polkington never spoke of it at the time, and now, mercifully, she had forgotten part, but the struggle must have been bitter. Herself disillusioned, her daughters mere children, her position insecure, and her husband not yet reduced to submission, and always prone to slip back into his old ways. But she had won through somehow, and time had given her the compensations possible to her nature. She was, by her own untiring efforts, a social factor now, even a social success; her eldest daughter was engaged to a clergyman of sufficient, if small, means, and her youngest was almost a beauty. As to the Captain, he was still there; time had not taken him away, but it had reduced him; he gave little trouble now even when Johnny Gillat came; he kept so out of the way that she had almost come to regard him as a negligible factor—which was a mistake.

Both the Captain and his friend had a great respect for Mrs. Polkington, though both felt at times that she treated them a little hardly. The Captain especially felt this, but he put up with it; after all it is easier to acquiesce than to assert one's rights, and, as Johnny pointed out, it was on the whole more comfortable, in spite of horse-hair chairs, down in the basement than up in the drawing-room. There was no need to make polite conversation down here, and one might smoke, no matter how cheap the tobacco, and put one's feet up, and really Bouquet was almost as good as a fire when you once get used to it.

Johnny was of a contented mind, he even looked contented sitting by the empty stove when Julia came back with the paraffin; the Captain, on the other hand, appeared to be very gloomy and unhappy; he sat silent all the time his daughter was present. As she was leaving the room Johnny tried to rouse him. "We might have a game," he suggested, looking towards a pack of cards that stuck out of a half-opened drawer.

"I have nothing in the world that I can call my own," Captain Polkington answered, without moving.

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Mr. Gillat felt in his own lean pockets surreptitiously. “We might play for paper,” he said.

And as she went up-stairs Julia listened to hear their chairs scroop on the kamptulikon floor as they drew them to the table; she was surprised not to hear the sound, but she imagined the game must have been put off a little so that her father could talk over his troubles. Which, indeed, was the case, though the magnitude of those troubles she did not guess.

CHAPTER II

THE DEBT

Violet’s engagement was an accepted fact. Mr. Frazer came to see the Captain, who received him in the dining-room—the combined ingenuity of the family could not make the down-stairs room presentable. The interview was short, but satisfactory; so also was the one with Mrs. Polkington which followed; with Violet it was longer, but, no doubt, equally satisfactory. Lunch, too, was all that could be desired. Mrs. Polkington’s manners were always gracious, and to-day she had a charming air of taking Richard into the family—after having shut all the doors, actual and metaphorical, which led to anything real and personal. The Captain was rather twittery at lunch, at times inclined to talk too much, at times heavily silent and always obviously submissive to his wife. Yesterday’s excitement was not enough to account for this in Julia’s opinion. “He has been doing something,” she decided, and wondered what.

Mrs. Polkington and her daughters all went out that afternoon; Julia, however, returned at about dusk. As the others had no intention of coming back so soon, there was no drawing-room tea; a much simpler meal was spread in the dining-room. Julia and her father had only just sat down to it when they heard Johnny Gillat’s knock at the front door, followed a minute afterwards by Mr. Gillat himself; but when he saw that the Captain was not alone, he stopped on the threshold; Julia’s presence, contrary to custom, seemed to discompose him. He, then, was in her father’s secret, whatever it might be; she guessed as much when she saw his perturbed pink face. However, she did not say anything, only invited Mr. Gillat to have some tea.

Johnny sat down, and put a small and rather badly tied parcel beside him; next minute he picked it up again, and began surreptitiously to put it into first one pocket and then another. It was rather a tight fit, and in his efforts to do it unobtrusively, he made some disturbance, but no one remarked on it; Captain Polkington because he was too despondent, Julia because it did not seem worth while. Conversation languished; Julia did what she could, but her father answered in monosyllables, and Mr. Gillat said, “Very true,” or “Ah, yes, yes,” eating slice after slice of thick bread and butter, and filling his mouth very full as if to cork it up and so prevent his having to answer awkward questions.

At last Captain Polkington rose; “Gillat,” he said, “if you have finished, we may as well go down-stairs.”

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Johnny set down his half-finished cup of tea with alacrity, and with alacrity followed the Captain. But Julia followed too; Johnny turned uneasily as he heard her step behind him on the dark stairs; doubtless, so he told himself, she was going to the kitchen. She was not, however; on the contrary, she showed every sign of accompanying them to the little room behind.

“Do you want anything, Julia?” her father asked, turning about in the doorway; “I’m busy to-night—I wish you would go away.”

The sentence began with dignity, but ended with querulousness. But Julia was not affected; she came into the room. “I want to talk to you,” she said, closing the door. “You had much better tell me about it, you will be found out, you know; mother would have guessed there was something wrong to-day if she had not been so busy with Mr. Frazer.”

“Found out in what?” the Captain demanded; “I should like to know of what you accuse me—you, my own daughter—this is much, indeed.”

He paced the hearthrug with outraged dignity, but Julia only drew one of the horse-hair chairs to the table. “You would do better to tell me,” she said; “I might be able to help you—Johnny, won’t you sit down?”

Johnny took the cane deck-chair, sitting down nervously and so near the edge that the old chair creaked ominously. Captain Polkington paced the rug once or twice more, then he sat down opposite, giving up all pretence of dignity.

“It is money, of course,” Julia went on; “I suppose you lost at the races yesterday—how much?”

The Captain did not answer, he seemed overwhelmed by his troubles. “How much?” Julia repeated, turning to Mr. Gillat.

“It was rather much,” that gentleman answered apologetically.

Julia looked puzzled. “How could he have much to lose?” she asked. “You couldn’t, you know,” bending her brows as she looked at her father—“unless you borrowed—did you borrow?”

“Yes, yes,” he said, rather eagerly; “I borrowed—that was it; of course I was going to pay back—I am going to pay back.”

“From whom did you borrow?” Another pause, and the question again, then the Captain explained confusedly: “The cheque—it came a day early—I merely meant to make use of it for the day—”

“The cheque!” Julia repeated, with dawning comprehension. “The cheque from Slade & Slade that mother was speaking of this morning. Our cheque, the money we have to live on for the next three months?”

“My cheque,” her father said, with one last effort at dignity; “made out to me—my income that I have a perfect right to spend as I like; I used my own money for my own purposes.”

He forgot that a moment back he had excused the act as a borrowing; Julia did not remind him, she was too much concerned with the facts to trouble about mere turns of speech. They, like words and motives, had not heretofore entered much into her considerations; consequences were what was really important to her—how the bad might be averted, how the good drawn that way, and all used to the best advantage. This point of view, though it leaves a great deal to be desired, has one advantage—-those who take it waste no time in lamentation or reproof. For that reason they are perhaps some of the least unpleasant people to confess to.

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Julia wasted no words now; she sat for a brief minute, stunned by the magnitude of the calamity which had deprived them of the largest part of their income for the next three months; then she began to look round in her mind to see what might be done. Captain Polkington offered a few not very coherent explanations and excuses, to which she did not listen, and then relapsed into silence. Johnny sat opposite, rubbing his hands in nervous sympathy, and looking from father to daughter; he took the silence of the one to be as hopeless as that of the other.

“We thought,” he ventured at last, tugging at the parcel now firmly wedged in his pocket. “We hoped, that is, we thought perhaps we might raise a trifle, it wouldn’t be much help—”

But neither of the others were listening to him, and Captain Polkington interrupted with his own remedy, “We shall have to manage on credit,” he said; “we can get credit for this three months.”

“We can’t,” Julia assured him; “the greater part of that money was to have paid outstanding bills; we can’t live on credit, because we haven’t got any to live on.”

“That’s nonsense,” her father said; “it can be done with care and economy, and retrenchments.”

Julia did not answer, so Johnny took up the words. “Yes, yes,” he said, “one can always retrench; it is really marvellous how little one can do with, in fact one is better for it; I feel a different man for having to retrench. Your mother’s a wonderful woman”—he stopped, then added doubtfully as he thought of the lost apple tart—“I suppose, though, she would want to make a good appearance just now, with the engagement, Mr. Frazer in and out. It is very unfortunate, very.”

By this time he had untied his parcel, and flattening the paper on his knees began to put the contents on the table. There were some field-glasses, a breast pin, and a few other such things; when he had put them all out he felt in his waistcoat-pocket for his watch.

“They would fetch a trifle,” he said, regarding the row a little proudly.

“Those?” Julia asked, puzzled.

“Yes,” Mr. Gillat said; “not a great deal, of course, but it would be a help—it might pay the butcher’s bill. It’s a great thing to have the butcher’s bill paid; I’ve heard my landlady say so; it gives a standing with the other tradespeople, and that’s what you want—she often says so.”

“You mean you think of selling them for us?” Julia asked, fixing her keen eyes on Johnny, so that he felt very guilty, and as if he ought to excuse himself. But before he

could do it she had swept his belongings together. “You won’t do anything of the kind,” she said.

“Why not?”

“Because we won’t have it. Pack them up.”

“Oh, but,” Johnny protested, “it would be a little help, it would indeed; they would fetch something, the glasses are good ones, though a bit old-fashioned, and the watch—”

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“I don’t care, I won’t have it,” and Julia took the matter into her own hands, and began with a flushed face to re-pack the things herself.

“Is it that you think I can’t spare them?” Gillat asked, still bewildered. “I can—what an idea,” he laughed. “What do I want with field-glasses, now? And as to a watch, my time’s nothing to me!”

“No, I dare say not,” Julia said, but she tied the parcel firmly, then she gave it to him. “Take it away,” she said, “and don’t try to sell a thing.”

She opened the door as she spoke, and he, accepting it as a hint of dismissal, meekly followed her from the room. When they had reached the hall above he ventured on a last protest. “Why may I not sell anything?” he asked.

“Because we have not quite come to that,” she said, with a ring of bitterness in her voice: “We have come pretty low, I know, with our dodges and our shifts, but we haven’t quite come to depriving you. Johnny”—and she stretched out a hand to him, a thing which was rare, for no one thought it necessary to shake hands with Mr. Gillat—“it’s very good of you to offer; I’m grateful to you; I’m awfully glad you did it; you made me ashamed.”

Johnny looked at her perplexed; the note of bitterness in her voice had deepened to something more he was altogether at a loss to understand. But she gave him no opportunity for inquiry, for she opened the street door.

“Good-bye,” she said, her usual self again, “and don’t you let me catch you selling those things.”

“Oh, I say! But how will you manage?” he protested.

“Somehow; I have got several ideas already; I’m better at this sort of game than you are, you know.”

And she shut the door upon him; then she went back to Captain Polkington.

“Father,” he said, “would you mind telling me if you have borrowed any other money? It would be much simpler if we knew just how we stood.”

The Captain seemed to have a painfully clear idea of how he stood. “Your mother,” he remarked, with apparent irrelevance, “is such an unreasonable woman; if she were like you—if she saw things sensibly. But she won’t, she’ll make a fuss; she will entirely overlook the fact that it is my own money that I have lost.”

“I am afraid she will,” Julia agreed. “Will you tell me if you lost any one else’s money as well?”

“Oh, a trifle,” the Captain said; “nothing to speak of yesterday; I have borrowed a little now and again, at cards and so on; a trifling accommodation.”

“From whom?”

“Rawson-Clew.”

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Julia nodded; this was bad, but it might have been worse. Mr. Rawson-Clew was not a personal friend of the Polkingtons, and he was not a man in an inferior position who might presume upon his loan to the Captain to establish a friendly footing. On the contrary, he was in a superior position, so much so that for a moment Julia was at a loss to understand how he came to accommodate her father. Then she recalled his face—-he had been pointed out to her—he looked a good-natured fool; probably he had met the Captain somewhere and been sorry for him, or perhaps he did not like to say “no.” In any case he had lent the money and, so Julia fancied, would have to wait a very long time before he saw it again. She dismissed the young man from her mind and fell to working out plans to meet the more pressing difficulties.

The relations would have to help; not with money; they would not do that to a useful extent, but with invitations. Cherie was easily provided for; Aunt Louise had before offered to take her abroad for the winter; Cherie did not in the least want to go; it was likely to be nothing nicer than acting as unpaid companion to a fidgety old lady; but under the present circumstances she would have to go. For Violet it was not quite so easy; it would look rather odd for her to go visiting among obliging relatives, seeing that she was only just engaged—how things looked was a point the Polkingtons always considered. But it would have to be managed; Julia fancied something might be arranged at Bath, a place which was a cheap fare from Marbridge. Mrs. Polkington would probably go somewhere for part of the time, then there could be some real retrenchments not otherwise possible. Mary might be dismissed; Mr. Gillat even might come to board with them for a little; the outside world need not know he was a guest that paid.

Julia was not satisfied with these plans; they would barely meet the difficulty she knew, even with credit stretched to the uttermost and the household crippled for some time; but she could think of nothing better, and determined to suggest them to Mrs. Polkington. With these thoughts in her mind, she went up-stairs; as she passed the drawing-room, she noticed that the blinds had not been pulled down; she went to the window to remedy the omission, and so saw in the street below the young man who, with the debt owing to him, she had lately dismissed from her mind. There was a street lamp directly below the window, and she stood a moment by the curtain looking down. Mr. Rawson-Clew was riding past, but slowly; it was quite possible to see his face, which did not contradict her former opinion—good-natured but foolish, and possibly weak. He turned in his saddle just below the window to speak to his companion, and she noticed that it was a stranger with him, a man wearing a single eyeglass, ten years older than the other, and of a totally different stamp. Indeed, of a stamp differing from any she had seen at Marbridge, so much so that she wondered how he came to be here, and what he was doing. But this was rather a waste of time, for the next day she knew.

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The next day he came down the street again, but this time alone and on foot. He stopped at No. 27, and there asked for Captain Polkington. Julia, hearing the knock, and the visitor subsequently being ushered into the dining-room, guessed it must be Mr. Gillat, perhaps come with his parcel again; when she saw Mary she asked her.

“No, miss,” was the answer; “it’s another gentleman to see the master.”

“Who?” Julia’s mind was alert for fresh difficulties.

“Mr. Rawson-Clew.”

“I don’t know who he is,” Mary went on; “I’ve never set eyes on him before, but he’s a grand sort of gentleman; I hardly liked to put him in the dining-room, only missis’s orders was ’Mr. Gillat or any gentleman to see the master there.’”

Which was true enough, and might reasonably have been reckoned a safe order, for no one but Mr. Gillat ever did come to see the Captain.

“I hope I’ve done right,” Mary said.

“Quite right,” Julia answered, though she did not feel so sure of it. The name and the vague description of the visitor somehow suggested to her mind the stranger who had ridden past with young Mr. Rawson-Clew. She went up-stairs, uneasy as much from intuition as from experience. In the hall she stood a minute. The dining-room door did not shut too well, the lock was old and worn, and unless it was fastened carefully, it came open; the Captain never managed to fasten it, and now it stood ajar; Julia could hear something of what was said within almost as soon as she reached the top of the kitchen stairs. The visitor spoke quietly, his words were not audible, but the Captain’s voice was raised with excitement.

“The money, sir, the money that your cousin lent—accommodation between gentlemen—”

So Julia heard incompletely, and then another disjointed sentence.

“Do you take me for an adventurer, a sharper? I am a soldier, sir, a soldier and a gentleman—at least, I was—I mean I was a soldier, I am a gentleman—”

Julia came swiftly up the hall, the instinct of the female to spread frail wings and protect her helpless belongings (old equally as much as young) was strong upon her. The pushed open the dining-room door and walked in.

“Father,” she said, “is anything the matter?”

Both men turned, the stranger clearly surprised and annoyed by the interruption, the Captain for a moment thinking of pulling himself together and dismissing his daughter with a lie. But he did not do it; he was too shaken to think quickly, also there was a sense of reinforcement in her presence; this he did not realise; indeed, he realised nothing except that she spoke again before he had collected himself.

“Is it about the money Mr. Rawson-Clew lent you?” she asked.

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He nodded, and she turned to the other man, who had risen on her entrance, and now stood with his back to the evil-smelling stove which Mary had lighted as usual in honour of Captain Polkington's visitors. She measured him swiftly, and no detail escaped her; the well-bred impassive face, where the annoyance caused by her entrance showed only in the rather hard eyes; the straight figure, even the perfection of his tailoring and the style of his boots—she summed it all up with the rapidity of one who has had to depend on her wits before. And her wits were to be depended on, for, in spite of the warmth of her protective anger, she felt his superiority of person, position and ability, and, only too probably, of cause also. She could have laughed at the contrast he presented to her father and herself and the surroundings. It was perhaps for this reason that she asked him maliciously, "Have you come to collect the debt?"

The question went home. "Certainly not," he answered haughtily; "the money—"

But the Captain prevented whatever he was going to say. "He thinks I am an adventurer, a sharper," he bleated, now thoroughly throwing himself on his daughter's protection; "his intention seems to be a warning not to try to get anything more out of his cousin—something of that sort."

Julia paid little attention to her father. "You were going to say," she inquired serenely of Rawson-Clew, "something about the money, I think?"

"No," he answered, with cold politeness. "I only meant to suggest that this is perhaps rather an unpleasant subject for a lady."

He moved as if he would open the door for her, but she stood her ground. "It is unpleasant," she said; "for that reason had we not better get it over quickly? You have not come to collect the debt, you have come, then, for what?"

"To make one or two things plain to Captain Polkington. I believe I have succeeded; if so, he will no doubt tell you anything you wish to know. Good afternoon," and he moved to the door on his own account, whereupon Julia's calmness gave way.

"You do think my father an adventurer, then?" she said. "You think him a sharper and your cousin a gull, and you came to warn him that if he tried to get anything more in future it was you with whom he would have to deal. And the money—you were going to say the money was not what you came for because you never expected to see it again? But you are wrong there; you shall see it; it will be repaid, every penny of it."

Rawson-Clew paused till she had finished; then, "I am sorry for any misunderstanding there may have been," he said. "I trust you will trouble yourself no farther in the matter," and he opened the door.

It was not a denial; it was not, so Julia considered, even an apology; to her it seemed more like a polite request to mind her own business, and she went up to her room after he had gone almost unjustly angry, too angry for the time being to think about the rashness of her promise that the debt should be paid.

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“He thought us dirt,” she said, sitting on the end of her narrow iron bed. Then she smiled rather grimly. “And we are pretty much what he thought us! Father sponged the money, and I decided to myself that the repaying did not much matter. We are, as we looked to him, two grubby little people of doubtful honesty, in a grubby room with Bouquet,” and she laughed outright, although she was alone, and the faculty for seeing and deriding herself as others might, had a somewhat bitter flavour. Nevertheless, she was very angry and quite determined to pay the money somehow, so that at least it should appear to this man that he was mistaken.

An hour later she carried Captain Polkington’s tea down to him; when tea was in the drawing-room his was always sent to him thus. She found him not depressed at all, on the contrary quite cheerful, and even dignified. He was reading something when she came in, and seeing that she was alone, he handed it to her. It was from Mr. Rawson-Clew she found, a sort of recognition of the discharge of the debt, or at least a formal cancelling of it. It was carefully and conclusively worded, certainly not the unaided work of the young man who had ridden past last night. It was dictated by the other, she was sure of it; possibly even he had himself discharged the debt so as to end the matter. Her eyes blazed as she read; he would not even allow her the satisfaction of giving him the lie—and the misery of straining and pinching to do the impossible. From pride, or from pity, or from both, he had finished the thing there and then, or he thought he had. She tore the paper across and then across again.

“What are you doing?” Captain Polkington cried, seizing her hands as she would have torn it again. “Don’t you know it is valuable? I must keep it; he can’t go back on it if he wants to.” He took it from her, and began to piece it together. “I can look the world in the face again,” he said, admiring the fragments. “I am free, free and cleared; that debt would have hung like a millstone around my neck, but I am free of it; it is cancelled.”

“Free!” Julia said with scorn. There are disadvantages in reducing a man to a subordinate position and allowing him no use for his self-respect; it is a virtue that has a tendency to atrophy. Julia recognised this with something like personal shame. “Your debt is discharged,” she said gently, “but mine is not; it has been shifted, not cancelled; it lies with me and Mr. Rawson-Clew now, and it shall be paid somehow.”

Captain Polkington hardly heeded what she said; he was still smoothing the pieces of paper. “What?” he asked, as he put them away in an envelope, but he did not wait for her answer. “It was very heedless of you to tear it,” he said; “but fortunately there is no damage done; it is perfectly valid, all that can be required.”

CHAPTER III

NARCISSUS TRIANDRUS AZUREUM

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The *elite* called to congratulate Mrs. Polkington on her daughter's engagement. All manner of pleasant things were said by them and by Mrs. Polkington in an atmosphere of social sunshine. She thought it so nice of them to come so soon, she told them so severally; she knew that they—"you all," "you, at least," "you, my oldest friend," according to circumstances—would be pleased to hear about it. She gave sundry little hints of future plans and hopes, among other things mentioned that it really was hard for poor Violet to have to go and cheer an invalid cousin just now.

"And the worst of it is," so Mrs. Polkington said, "she may have to be away some time. There really seems no one else to go, and one could not leave the poor dear alone at this dull time of the year; and, after all, Bath is not very far off; some of Richard's people live there, too. I should not be surprised if the young people contrive to see a good deal of each other in spite of everything. Indeed, had I not thought so, I think I should have insisted on Cherie's going instead of Violet, although she would have had to give up her winter abroad."

Here the visitor usually made polite inquiries about this same winter abroad, and heard of a delightful prospect of several months to be spent in the south of France, unnecessary and unpleasant details all omitted.

"You do agree with me?" Mrs. Polkington would then ask rather anxiously, as if her hearer's opinion was the one that really mattered to her. "You do think it wrong to allow Cherie to refuse this invitation for Violet's sake? I am very glad you think so. I had quite a difficulty in persuading her; but, as I told her, it was not a chance she was likely to have again. So she is going, and Violet will have to spend her winter in Bath. Julia? Oh, Julia was not asked in either case; she will be staying at home with me."

From all of which it is clear that part of Julia's plan was to be adopted. The other part must have found favour, too, for soon it became known that the Polkingtons were without a servant. Mrs. Polkington made inquiries among her friends, but could not hear of any one suitable; she said it was very tiresome, especially as they had taken advantage of the girl's empty room to invite an old Anglo-Indian friend of her husband's to stay.

Thus was the difficulty tided over, and with so good a face that few in Marbridge had any idea that it existed. Certainly none knew of the pinching and screwing and retrenching which went on indoors at No. 27. One or two tradesmen could have told of long accounts unpaid, and some relations living at a distance were troubled by appeals for help, a form of begging which, at this date of their history did not hurt the Polkingtons' sensibility much.

Mrs. Polkington suffered in body, if not in mind, during this hard time, though fortunately she was able to be away a month. The Captain suffered a good deal more, which was perhaps only just; and Johnny Gillat suffered with him, which was not just, though that

did not seem to occur to him. As for Julia, she minded least of any one, though in some ways she had the most to put up with; but the plan was hers, and consequently she was too interested in its success to trouble about the inevitable discomforts of the working out.

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There was one matter which did trouble her, however—the debt to Rawson-Clew. She had no money, and no possibility of raising any; yet it must and should be paid, for her father's name could not otherwise be cleared. She turned over in her own mind how she could earn enough, but there was little hope of that; it seemed rather a large sum for a girl to earn, and any sum was impossible to her; she had no gifts to take to market, no ability for any of the arts, not enough education for teaching, no training for commerce. The only field open to her was that of a nursery-governess or companion; neither was likely to enable her to pay this debt of honour quickly. Once, nearly a year ago, she had had a sort of half-offer of the post of companion. It was while she was staying with a friend; during the visit there had come to the house an old Dutchman of the name of Van Heigen, a business acquaintance of her host. He had stayed nearly a week, and in that time taken a great fancy to her.

In those first bad days after the Captain's leaving the army, the Polkingtons had lived, or perhaps more accurately, drifted about, a good deal abroad. It was then that Julia picked up her only accomplishment, a working knowledge of several languages. She had also acquired one other thing, perhaps not an accomplishment, a rather unusual knowledge of divers men and divers ways. It may have been that these qualities made her more attractive to the old Dutchman than the purely English game-expert daughters of the house. Or it may have been her admirable cooking; the cook was ill during the greater part of her visit, and her offer to help was gladly accepted and duly appreciated. Something, at all events, pleased the old man, so that before he left he asked her, half in fun, if she would come and live with his wife. This lady, it seemed, had bad health, and no daughters; she always had a companion of some sort, and was never satisfied with the one she had. In Holland, as in England, it seemed posts were not easy to fill satisfactorily, for those often in want of employment were also constitutionally inefficient.

At the time Julia had laughingly refused the offer, now she recalled it, and thought seriously about it. It would not be very nice, a mixture of upper servant and lady help; the Van Heigens were bulb growers, old-fashioned people, the lady a thorough *huisvrouw*, nothing more probably. Still that did not matter; such things need not be considered if the end could be attained that way. But unfortunately it did not look very likely; the Van Heigens would pay less to a companion than English people would, not enough to buy clothes; there was practically nothing to be made out of it. Julia was obliged to admit the fact to herself, and reluctantly to dismiss the Dutchman and his offer from her thoughts.

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But curiously enough, they were brought to her mind again before long; not later, indeed, than that evening, when she went to a dance at a neighbour's house. At this dance she met a Mr. Alexander Cross. He was not a native of Marbridge, not at all like any of them; it is quite possible that they would have rather looked down upon him; Julia recognised that he barely came up to her mother's standard of a gentleman. He seemed to be a keen business man of the energetic new sort; he also seemed to deal in most things, flowers among them. He told Julia something about that part of his business, for he and it interested her so much that she asked him leading questions. He explained how the beautiful orchid he wore in his coat had decreased in value lately. A few years ago, when there had been but one specimen with just that marking in all the world, the plant had sold for L900; now that it had been multiplied it was worth only L25, nothing practically.

"It was a novelty then," he explained; "some novelties are worth a great deal. There's one I know of now I could do some good business with if I could get hold of it. But I can't; the old fool that's got it won't sell it for any price, and he can't half work it himself. It's a blue daffodil—Narcissus Triandrus Azureum he calls it; or rather, to give it its full title, Narcissus Triandrus Azureum Vrouw Van Heigen; so called, I believe, in honour of his wife, or his mother."

Julia wondered if the Van Heigen who owned the precious flower was the old Dutchman of her acquaintance. "Is he a bulb grower?" she asked, though without giving any reason for her question.

"Yes," Cross answered, "a Dutch bulb grower; that's why he won't make the profit he might; he comes of generations of growers, and they venerate their bulbs. He has cranky notions of how things ought to be done, and no other way will do for him."

"How did he get a blue daffodil? Do you think it is real? It seems very unusual."

"It is unusual; that's where the value comes in; but it's real fast enough, though I don't believe he grew the first, as he says, in his own garden. It's my opinion that one of his collectors sent him the first bulb; he has collectors all over the world, you know, looking for new things."

"What is he going to do with it?" Julia asked.

"He is multiplying it at present; at first he had only one, now, of course, he has a few more; when he has got enough he will hybridise. You don't know what that is. Cross-breed with it; use the blue with the old yellow daffodil as parents to new varieties. That's ticklish work; growers can't afford to do it till they have a fair number of the new sort; but, of course, they occasionally get something good that way."

Julia listened, much interested, though, to tell the truth, the money value of the thing fascinated her more than anything else.

“Will he never sell any of his blue bulbs?” she asked.

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“Oh, yes, in time,” Cross answered; “but not while they are worth anything much to the growers.”

“What are they worth? I mean, what would it be worth if there was only one?”

“I don’t know; I dare say I could get L400 for the single bulb.”

“But if there were more they would not be worth so much? If there were five, what would they be worth?”

“Pretty well as much, very likely L300 for one bulb. Van Heigen would give a written guarantee with it not to sell another bulb to another grower.”

“But he could keep the others himself?” Julia asked. “That would be eating his cake and having it too. Tell me,” she said, feeling she was imitating the Patriarch when he was pleading for Sodom and Gomorrah, “if there were ten bulbs, what could you get for one.”

Cross was amused by her interest. “A hundred pounds, I dare say,” he said; “but I shall never have the chance. The trade will never touch those blue daffodils while they are worth having. When the old man does begin to sell them—when they are worth very little to the growers—he will sell to collectors, cranky old connoisseurs, from choice. That’s what I mean when I say he doesn’t understand business as business; he would rather sell his precious blue daffodils where they were what he calls ‘appreciated.’ He would sooner they went for a moderate price to people who would worship them, than make an enormous profit out of them.”

“But the connoisseurs could sell them,” Julia objected. “If I were a connoisseur and bought one when they were for sale, I could sell it to you if I liked.”

“Yes, but you wouldn’t,” Cross said; “if you were a connoisseur you would not dream of parting with your bulb. You wouldn’t have the slightest wish to make a hundred per cent. on your purchase, or two or three hundred either. Also I shouldn’t buy.”

“Why not?”

“I couldn’t afford to have my name mixed up with the business.”

Julia looked at him critically. “You could afford that the business should be done without your name?” she suggested.

He laughed. “I could introduce the seller, did such an impossible person exist, to some one who could buy.”

It was Julia's turn to laugh, that soundless laugh of hers which gave the feeling of a joke only half shared. "For a consideration, of course," she said.

"Something would naturally stick to my fingers," Cross answered, amused rather than offended.

He was a good deal amused by his partner, finding her more interesting than most of the girls he met that evening; afterwards he forgot her, for two days later he left the place, and thought no more either about Miss Polkington or the talk he had had with her.

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As for her, it was not clear what she thought, but the next day she wrote to London for a second-hand Dutch dictionary, and then went to call at the house with the largest library that she knew. When she came away from there she carried with her a book she had borrowed, a Dutch version of *Gil Blas*, which she remembered to have once seen tucked away in a corner. Shortly afterwards, as soon as the dictionary came, she set to reading the edifying work, and found it easier than she expected. What one learns from necessity in childhood stays in the memory, and a good knowledge of German and a smallish one of Dutch will carry one through greater difficulties than *Gil Blas*.

Before her mother and sisters came back to Marbridge, Julia had written to the old Dutchman.

When Mrs. Polkington heard Julia wanted to go to Holland and live in a Dutch family she was surprised. This news was not given to her till the spring had fairly set in, for it was not till then that Julia had been able to get everything arranged. It is no use telling people your plans unless you are quite sure of carrying them out, and you are never sure of that long before starting; at least, that was Julia's opinion. It was also her opinion that it was quite unnecessary to tell all details. She said she was tired of being at Marbridge, and wanted a complete change; also that when there were three grown-up sisters at home it seemed rather desirable that one should go away, for a time at least. When Violet suggested that it was odd to have chosen Holland in preference to France or Germany, she replied truthfully that the one was possible to her, the others were not.

Mrs. Polkington, who quite approved of the plan, saw no objection to Holland, adding as a recommendation, "It is so much more original to go there." She did not fail to remark on the originality when she embroidered Julia's going to her friends and acquaintances.

Captain Polkington was the only member of the family who regretted this going. He had always regarded Julia as something between an ally and a tolerant go-between; and since she had wrung from him the confession of his difficulties, and helped in the arrangement of them, his feeling for her had leaned more and more towards the former. He had even come to feel a certain protectiveness in her presence, which made him really sorry she was going. Johnny Gillat was sorrier still.

Johnny had gone back to dismal lodgings in town now; he only heard of the plan by letter, and the Captain's letters were very prolix, and not informing. Mr. Gillat's own letters were even worse, for if they lacked the prolixity, they lacked the little information also. On receipt of the Captain's information he merely wrote to ask when Julia was going, and what time she would be in London, as he would like to give himself the pleasure of meeting her train.

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He did give himself that pleasure; he was at the station half an hour and ten minutes before the train, so as to be sure of being in time. He was on the platform when the train came in; Julia saw him, a rather ridiculous figure, his shabby coat tremendously brushed and tightly buttoned, a gay tie displayed to the uttermost to hide a ragged shirt front, his round, pink face, with its little grizzled moustache, wearing a look of melancholy which made it appear more than ordinarily foolish. He was standing where the part of the train which came from Marbridge could not possibly stop, much in the way of porters and trucks; Julia had to find him and find her luggage too, but he seemed to think he was of much service. Julia's hard young heart smote her when he gave twopence to her porter.

"Johnny," she said, as he took her ticket on the District Railway, "I am going to pay for my ticket."

It was only threepence, but there are people who have to consider the threepences; if Julia was one, she knew that Mr. Gillat was another, and she had allowed for this threepence, and he probably had not. He demurred, but she insisted. "Then I won't let you come with me;" and he gave way.

They were alone in a compartment, and he shouted above the rattle of the train something about her being missed at Marbridge.

"Oh, no," she said, "mother and the girls think it is a good thing I am going."

"Your father and I will miss you," Johnny told her.

"You?"

"Yes; I'll miss you very much—we both shall; we shall sit down-stairs, each side of the fire-place, and think how you used to come there sometimes. And when I wait in the dining-room when your father's not at home, I'll remember how you used to come down there and chat. We had many a chat, didn't we?—you and me, and Bouquet burning between us—there was nobody could trim Bouquet like you. But perhaps you'll be back before winter comes round again?"

"I don't know when I shall be back," was all Julia could find to say. The idea of being missed like this was new and strange to her; the Polkingtons' feelings were so much guided by what was advisable, or expedient, that there was not usually much room for simple emotions. She felt somehow grateful to Johnny for caring a little that she was going, though at the same time she was unpleasantly convinced that she did not deserve it.

"It won't be at all the same at No. 27," Mr. Gillat was saying. "Your mother—she's a wonderful woman, a wonderful woman, and Miss Violet's a fine girl, so's the other,

handsome both of them; but they're in the drawing-room, you know, and you—you used to come down-stairs."

It did not sound very explicit, but Julia understood what he meant. Just then the train stopped at a station, and other passengers got in, so they had little more talk.

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In time they reached Mark Lane, from whence it is no great walk to the Tower Stairs. There is a cheap way of going to Holland from there for those who do not mind spending twenty-four hours on the journey; Julia did not mind. When she and Johnny Gillat arrived at the Tower Stairs they saw the steamer lying in the river, a small Dutch boat, still taking in cargo from loaded lighters alongside. A waterman put them on board, or, rather, took them to the nearest waiting lighter, from whence they scrambled on board, Mr. Gillat very unhandily. A Dutch steward received them, and taking Johnny for a father come to see his daughter off, assured them in bad English that she would be quite safe, and well taken care of.

“She shall haf one cabin to herself, a bed clean. Yes, yes; there is no passenger but one, a Holland gentleman; he will not speak with the miss, he is friend of captain.”

Johnny nodded a great many times, though he did not quite follow what was said. Then Julia told him he had better go, and not keep the waterman any longer.

He agreed, and began fumbling in his pocket, from whence he pulled out one of his badly-tied parcels.

“A keepsake,” he said, putting it into her hand; then, without waiting to say good-bye, he scrambled over the side in such a hurry that he as nearly as possible fell into the river.

Julia ran to the side in some anxiety; some one shouted, “Look out,” and some one else, “Hold up,” and a third something less complimentary. Then a man laid hold of Mr. Gillat’s legs and guided him safely on to the bobbing lighter. There he turned and waved his hat to Julia before he got into the waiting boat.

“Good-bye,” he called.

“Good-bye,” she answered. “Oh, do be careful!”

He was not careful, but the waterman had him now, and took him ashore. She watched him, his round face was suffused with smiles; he waved his hat once more just as he reached the stairs. He slipped once getting up them, but he was up now, and turned to wave once before he started down the street.

It was not till then that Julia became aware of a small sound close at hand; there was a good deal of noise going on, shouting, the rattling of cranes, and the thud of shifting bales, with now and then the hoot of a steamer and the escape of steam, and under all, the restless lapping of the water. But through it all she now heard a much smaller sound quite close, a regular *tick*, *tick*. She glanced at the parcel she had forgotten, then in an instant, as a sudden idea occurred to her, she had the paper off. Yes, it was. It was Johnny’s great old-fashioned gold watch, with the fetter chain dangling at the end.

She stood quite still with the thing in her hand, her mouth set straight, and her eyes growing glitteringly bright. The round gilded face stared up at her, reminding her in some grotesque way of Johnny; poor, generous, honest, foolish old Johnny! She looked away quickly, a sudden desire not to go with this moon-faced companion took possession of her—a desire not to go at all, a horrible new-born doubt about it.

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But feelings for abstract right and wrong, like personal likes and dislikes, do not grow strongly where expediency and advisability and advantage have to rule; she was only going to do what she must in Holland; the debt must be paid, honour demanded no less; the blue daffodil was the only hope of paying it. She was not going to steal a bulb exactly; she was going to get it somehow, as a gift, perhaps, opportunity must show how; and when it was hers, she could do with it as she pleased, there was no wrong in that. She must go; she must do it; the thing was so necessary as to be unavoidable, and not open to question. She looked down, and her eye fell on the watch again; it stared up at her in the same vacant way as Johnny had done that day when he wanted to sell it and his other things to help them out of their justly earned, sordid difficulties. With shame she had prevented that, feeling the cause unworthy of the sacrifice. But this sacrifice, for a still more unworthy cause, she was too late to prevent. Johnny had gone. She looked earnestly to see if he was among those who loitered about the stairs, or those in the more distant street. But she could not see him, he was gone clean from sight; there was only the busy, unfamiliar life of the river around; yellow, sunlit water; the crowded craft, and the great stately wonder of the Tower Bridge silently raising and parting its solid roadway to let some boat go, as she would soon go down to the sea.

CHAPTER IV

THE OWNER OF THE BLUE DAFFODIL

Vrouw Snieder, the notary's wife, sat by her window at work on a long strip of red crochet lace. From her place she could see all who came up the street, and, there being a piece of looking-glass set outside, at right angles to the pane, also most who came down it. This, though doubtless very informing, did not help the progress of the lace; but that was of no consequence, Mevrouw always had some red lace in making, and it might as well be one piece as another. With her, were her two daughters, Denah and Anna, though Anna had no business there, being supposed just then to be preparing vegetables for dinner. She had only come into the room to fetch keys, but a remark from her mother brought her to the window.

"There goes Vrouw Van Heigen's English miss," the old lady said, and both her daughters looked at once.

"She has been marketing, I see; she seems a good housewife."

"She walks in the road," Denah observed critically; "It is so conspicuous, I could not do it; besides, one might be run over."

"The English always walk in the road," her sister answered; "they think everything will get out of their way, and they do not at all mind being conspicuous."

“The English miss should mind,” Denah said, “for she is not pretty; no one looks at her to admire; besides she is poor and has to work hard.”

“Yes, yes,” her mother agreed placidly; “she is a fine worker. Vrouw Van Heigen is full of her praises; such a cook—she has twenty new dishes, and everything is done quickly, one cannot tell how; it is like having a magician in the house, so she says. Ah, there is Herr Van de Greutz’s Marthe going into the apothecary’s. I wonder now—”

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But her daughters were not interested in Marthe; the English girl at the Van Heigens' interested them a great deal more. They continued to talk about her a great deal afterwards, Denah going back with her sister to the kitchen and the vegetables, so as to be able to do so undisturbed.

"I will help you with these," she said; "then we can go out."

She sat down and took up a knife. "It is strange how much Vrouw Van Heigen thinks of that girl," she said. "She has been there but one month and already there is no one like her. She does not keep her in her place very well; were she a daughter more could not be said. I wonder how Mijnheer likes it."

"It was Mijnheer who engaged her," Anna said. "It is not likely that he regrets. I hear that she has written some English letters for him since one of the clerks has been ill. My father says she can cook like a Frenchwoman, and that is something. As for Joost, it is surely of little importance to him, he is too quiet to say anything to her; she talks little; she must be shy."

Denah had nothing to say to this, although, seeing in which person her own interest in the Van Heigens lay, she possibly found some comfort in the assurance. After a little she remarked, "That girl has no accomplishments; she is as old-fashioned as our Aunt Barje, a *huisvrouw*, no more. It is strange, for the English women make fun of us for this, and pretend that they are educated and advanced above us; she is not, she can do nothing but speak a few languages; she cannot sing nor play, she has read no science, she cannot draw, nor model in wax, nor make paper flowers, nor do bead work; she could not even crochet till I showed her how. I wonder if she has made any progress with the pattern I gave her. Shall we go and see by and by? I might set her right if she is in a difficulty, and we could at the same time inquire after Mevrouw's throat; she had a weakness, I noticed, on Tuesday."

Anna agreed; she was a most obliging sister, and a while later they set out together for the Van Heigens' house. They did not walk in the wide, clean road, but were careful to keep to the path, pausing a moment to consult before starting for the other side when it was necessary to cross over.

The Van Heigens' house stood on the outskirts of the town, a long way back from the road. The bulb garden lay all round it, though immediately in front was a lawn so soft and green that no one ever walked on it. The house was of wood, painted white, and had a high-pitched roof of strange, dark-coloured tiles; a canal lay on two sides, which ought to have made it damp, but did not.

Vrouw Van Heigen was pleased to see the girls, and received them with an effusiveness which might have suggested that a longer time than four days had elapsed since they last met. She kissed them on both cheeks, and led them in by the hand; she asked

particularly how they were, and how their mother was, and how their father was, and if they were not very tired with their walk, and would they not have lemonade—yes, they must have lemonade. “Julia, Julia,” she called, “bring lemonade, bring glasses and the lemonade.”

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Julia came from a little room which led off the sitting-room, carrying the things required on a papier-mache tray. She wore a large, blue-print apron, for she had been shelling shrimps when she was called, and though she stayed to wash her hands, she did not think it necessary to remove her apron. She had observed it to be the custom hereabouts to wear an apron of some sort all day long, and she did not differentiate between the grades of aprons as Denah and Anna did. She set down the tray and shook hands ceremoniously with the sisters and made all the proper inquiries in the properest way; she had also observed that to be the custom of the place. Then she poured out the lemonade and handed it round, and was afterwards sent to fetch a glass for herself and a little round tray to set it on—every one had a little tray for fear of spoiling the crimson plush table-cover. Julia cannot be said to have been anxious for lemonade; Vrouw Van Heigen's growing affection for her often found expression in drinks at odd times, a good deal more often than she appreciated. On this occasion, since she was doing the pouring out herself, she was able to get off with half a glass.

They all sat round the table and talked; Julia talked a great deal the least, but that did not matter, the others had so much to say. She listened, admiring the way in which one little incident—a dog running on the tram line and being called off just in time by its owner—served them for a quarter of an hour. What economy of ideas it was, and how little strain to make conversation! Then came Mevrouw's throat, the little hoarseness Denah had noticed on Tuesday. It was nothing, the good lady declared, she had not felt it. Oh, if they insisted on noticing it, she would own to a weakness but no more than was usual to her when the dust was about, and truly the dust was terrible now, she could not remember when it had been so bad so early in June. And so on, and so on, until they somehow came round to crochet lace, when Julia was obliged to confess that she had not made much progress with the pattern. She exhibited a very small piece with several mistakes in it.

"Why," cried Denah, "I have done already almost half a metre of the piece I began at the same time. Is it difficult for you?"

Julia said it was, and Vrouw Van Heigen added by way of apology for her, that she had been busy making a cool morning dress.

"For yourself?" Anna asked. "Do you make your dresses?"

"This is for Mevrouw," Julia answered; "but I can make my own."

The Polkingtons had had to, and also to put an immense amount of thought and work into it, because they were bound to get a fine effect for a small expense, and that is not possible without a large outlay of time and consideration. Julia did not explain this to the present company, it would have been rather incomprehensible to them.

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Anna was at once fired with a desire to make herself a cool morning dress, and asked a dozen questions as to how, while Denah's busy fingers undid the faulty crochet work, and her tongue explained the mistakes. Mevrouw did not listen much to either, but noticing the glasses were empty, pressed the visitors in vain to have more lemonade. They refused, and finding them quite obdurate she toddled into the little room where Julia had been doing the shrimps, to come back again, bearing a large bladder-covered bottle of peach-brandy. The girls declined this very firmly, but Julia was sent for more glasses, and soon they were all sipping the rich flavoured liqueur without protestation.

It was over this that they planned an expedition to the wood. No one knew quite who suggested it; when people all talk at once it is not easy to say who originates an idea; anyhow, it was agreed that the weather was so dry and the trees so lovely and Mevrouw so seldom went out. She really felt—did she not?—that she would enjoy making a small excursion, she was so wonderfully well—for her. What did Anna think her mother would say? Perhaps they might join together for a drive?

Anna thought her mother would be delighted; indeed, she often spoke of the charms of a country excursion; Denah was called upon to corroborate, and did so volubly. Where should they go? Half-a-dozen different places were suggested; why not go here, or there, or to the wood? Yes, the wood, that would be lovely. They could take their tea out; if they were well wrapped up, of course, protected from the damp and the wind, might it not be possible?

So by degrees the plan was brought to the first stage. Denah and Anna were to talk it over with their mother, and if she thought favourably of it, then "we must see." By that time Denah had set the crochet work quite straight, and with kisses and hand-shakings the visitors departed. Julia went back to the little room where first she washed the glasses that had been used, afterwards she finished the shrimps and washed them and put them ready for supper in a china dish like a large soap dish on three feet. When that was done, it was necessary to lay the table for dinner and superintend the getting of that meal.

The Van Heigens dined at four. It had taken Julia all the month she had been with them to in any way get used to that time. Mijnheer and the only son, Joost, came in from the office for two hours then. The office joined the house and the great dim orderly bulb barns joined the office, so the father and son had not far to come in whichever place they might be. Julia and Mevrouw fetched the food from the kitchen and cleared the table, as well as getting their own meal; but that was nothing when you were used to it, any more than was the curious butter and nutmeg sauce that always seemed to play a part at dinner.

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Mijnheer had a good deal to say to Julia, principally about his business. The letters she had written for him during the illness of the clerk who usually did his English correspondence, had given her some little insight into it. This she had profited by, being in the first instance really interested, and, in the second, not slow to see that the old man, far from resenting it, had been pleased. He talked a good deal about his affairs now, giving her little bits of information and explaining rather proudly his method of doing business, and his father's and his grandfather's before him. Joost, as usual, said little or nothing; he must have been five or six and twenty, but he had hardly ever left the parental roof, and was usually so hard at work that he had little time or inclination for frivolity. He had earnest child-like blue eyes that Julia did not care to look at, any more than she did the round yellow face of Mr. Gillat's watch. This was rather a pity as she could not always avoid it, and certainly he looked at her a good deal, in fact whenever he thought he was not observed. Of course he always was observed, by her at least; that was a foregone conclusion; the observation gave her some uneasiness.

After dinner the father and son went to sit on the veranda, and Mevrouw helped Julia take the dishes into the white marble kitchen and the glasses into the little off-room. Later, Julia came to sit on the veranda, too—it was somewhat stuffy being all closed in with glass windows. There they drank pale tea, the pot kept simmering on a spirit-stove, and read the foreign papers which had just come. Mevrouw did not read, she made tea and did crochet work, a strip like Vrouw Snieder's, only yellow instead of red. Julia, it is to be feared, did not try to master the pattern so kindly set right by Denah; she could not resist the breath from the outside world which the papers brought.

At six o'clock Mijnheer and his son went back to the office, and Julia, having washed the tea-cups, joined Mevrouw in the sitting-room. It was never very light in that room, for the walls were covered with a crimson flock paper and the woodwork was black; while the windows, which looked on the canal, were always shaded till dark. They sat here at work on the morning gown, till supper time. Mijnheer sometimes came in an hour before supper, as early as half-past eight; Joost had usually too much to do to come in before half-past nine. After supper, when the things were cleared away, they had prayers; Mijnheer read a chapter from the Bible, and they sat round the table and listened, and afterwards he said, "Now we will pray," and they sat a while in silence. Julia sat, too, her keen, observing eyes cast down and a curious stillness about her. After that every one went to bed; Julia and the maidservant had two little rooms right up in the eaves of the house; the family slept on the floor below. Julia was glad of this, though it was possible to imagine

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her room would be very hot in summer and very cold in winter. But she was glad to be well above the sleeping house, and to be able to look from her window across the wide country, over the dark bulb gardens—laid out like a Chinese puzzle with their eight-foot hedges—to the lights of the town on the one hand, and, better still, to the dim curve of the Dunes on the other. It is to be feared she sometimes spent a longer time at her window than was wise, seeing the early hour at which she had to rise; but no one was troubled by it, for she was careful to take off her shoes first thing; the rooms were unceiled, and it was necessary to tread lightly if one would not disturb people below.

On the day after that of Anna and Denah's visit, Herr Van Heigen offered to show Julia the bulb barns. It was a Saturday, and so after dinner, the workmen having all gone home, there was no one about and she could ascend the steep barn ladders without any suffering in her modesty. At least that was what Mijnheer thought; Julia, her modesty being of a very serviceable order, may have given the matter less consideration, but she accepted the offer.

The barns were very large and high, many of them three storeys and each storey lofty. The light inside was dim, a sort of dun colour, and the air very dry and full of a strange, not unpleasant smell. Everything was as clean as clean could be; no litter, no dirt, the floor nicely swept, the shelves that ran all round and rose, tier upon tier, in an enormous stand that occupied the whole centre of the place, all perfectly orderly. On the shelves the bulbs lay, every one smooth and clean and dry, sorted according to kind and quality; Mijnheer knew them all; he could, like a book-lover with his books, put his hand upon any that he wished in the dark. It seemed to Julia that there were hundreds upon hundreds of different sorts. Not only hyacinths and tulips and such well-known ones in endless sizes and varieties, but little roots with six and seven syllable names she had never heard before, and big roots, too, and strange cornery roots, a never-ending quantity.

Mijnheer told her they were not yet all in; many were in the ground and had still to be lifted. This she knew, for she had seen the dead tops of some in the little enclosed squares where they grew; from her bedroom window, too, she saw others still in bloom—a patch, the size of a tennis-lawn squared, of scarlet ranunculous, little blood-red rosettes, sheltered by a high close-clipped hedge. And another patch of iris hispanica, fairy flowers of palest gold and lavender, quivering at the top of their grey-green stalks like tropical dragon-flies hovering over a field of growing oats. These it seemed, and many others, would be brought in by and by, then the great barns would be really full. Mijnheer took up a root here and there, telling her something of the history of each; explaining how the narcissus increased and the tulips grew; showing her hyacinth bulbs cut in half-breadthways with all the separate severed layers distended by reason of the growing and swelling of the seeds between.

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“Each little seed will be a bulb by and by,” he said, “but not yet. When we cut the root first, we set it in the ground and these begin to grow and become in time as you see them now. Afterwards they grow bigger and bigger till their parent can no longer contain them.”

“Does it take long for them to grow full size?” Julia asked.

“It takes five years to grow the finest hyacinth bulbs,” Mijnheer answered, “but inferior ones are more quick. And when the bulb is grown, there is one bloom—fine, magnificent, a truss of flowers—after that it deteriorates, it is, one may say, over. Ah, but it is magnificent while it is there! There is no flower like the hyacinth; had I my way, I would grow nothing else, but people will not have them now. They must have novelties. ‘Give us narcissus,’ they say; ’they are so graceful’—I do not see the grace—’Or iris’—well, some are fine, I allow, but they do not last in bloom as do hyacinths. The mourn iris of Persia is very beautiful; we have not one flowering yet, but we shall have by and by. I will show you then; you will think it very handsome. When it blooms I go to it in the morning and dust the sand from the petals. I feel that I can reverence that flower; it is most beautiful.”

“Is it very scarce?” Julia asked.

“Somewhat,” Mijnheer answered; “but we have things that are more so, we have many novelties so called. Ah, but we have one novelty that is a true one, it is a wonder, it has no price, it is priceless!” He drew a deep breath of almost awed pride. “It is the greatest rarity that has ever been reared in Holland, a miracle, in fact—a blue daffodil!”

Julia refrained from mentioning that she had heard of the rarity before; she leaned against the centre stand and listened while the old man grew eloquent, with the eloquence of the connoisseur, not the tradesman, over his treasure. There was no need for her to say much, only to put a question here and there, or make a sympathetic comment; with little or no effort she learned a good deal about the wonderful bulb. It seemed that it really had been grown in the Van Heigens’ gardens, and not imported from Asia, as Mr. Cross thought. There were six roots by this time; not so many as had been hoped and expected, it did not increase well, and was evidently going to be difficult to grow.

“Would you like to know the name which it will immortalise?” the old man asked at last. “It is called Narcissus Triandrus Azurem Vrouw Van Heigen.”

“You named it in honour of Mevrouw, I suppose?” Julia said.

“I did not; Joost did.”

“Mijnheer Joost?” she repeated.

"Yes," the father answered. "It is his, not mine; to him belongs the honour. It is he who has produced this marvel. How? That is a secret; perhaps even I could not tell you if I would; Nature is wonderful in her ways; we can only help her, we cannot create. Yes, yes, it is Joost who has done this. He seemed to you a retiring youth? Yet he is the most envied and most honoured man of our profession. I would sooner—there are many men in Holland who would sooner—have produced this flower than have a thousand pounds. And he is my son—you may well believe that I am proud."

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And Mijnheer beamed with satisfaction in his son and his blue daffodil. But Julia leaned against the stand in the dry twilight, saying nothing. Money, it appeared, was not then the measure of all things; neither intrinsically, as with Mr. Alexander Cross, nor for what it represented in comfort and position, as with her own family, did it rank with these bulb growers. They, these people whom her mother would have called market gardeners, tradespeople, it seemed, loved and reverenced their work; they thought about it and for it, were proud of it and valued distinction in it, and nothing else. The blue daffodil was no valuable commercial asset, it was an honour and glory, an unparalleled floral distinction—no wonder Cross could not buy or exploit it. In a jump Julia comprehended the situation more fully than that astute business man ever could; but at the same time she felt a little bitter amusement—it was this, this treasured wonder, that she thought to obtain.

The next day, Sunday, Julia went to church with Mijnheer and Joost; Mevrouw did not find herself well enough for church, but she insisted that Julia should not stay at home on her account. Accordingly the girl accompanied father and son to the Groote Kerk and listened to the rather dull service there. For the most part she sat with her eyes demurely cast down, though once or twice she looked round the old barn-like place, and wondered if there were any frescoes under the whitewash of the walls and whence came the faint, all pervading smell, like a phantom of incense long forgotten. When service was over and they came out into the sunny street, Mijnheer announced that he was going to see a friend. Julia, of course, must hurry home to set the table for the mid-day coffee drinking, and afterwards prepare for dinner. Joost was going back, likewise, and to her it was so natural a thing they should go together that she never thought about it. It did not, however, seem so to him, and after walking a few paces in embarrassment, he said—

“You would perhaps prefer I did not walk with you?”

“Oh, no,” she answered, in some surprise; “I shall be pleased, if you are going the same way, that is.”

He fidgeted, becoming more embarrassed. “You are sure you do not mind?” he said. “It is a little conspicuous for you.”

Then she understood, and looked up with twinkling eyes. “I am afraid I am conspicuous, anyhow,” she said.

This was true enough, for her clothes, fitting like an Englishwoman’s, and put on like a Frenchwoman’s (the Polkingtons all knew how to dress), were unlike any others in sight. Her face, too, dark and thin and keenly alert, was unlike, and her light, easy walk; and if this was not enough it must be added that she was now walking in the road because the pavement was so crowded.

Joost stepped off the path to make room for her and she saw by his face that his mind was not at ease.

“Pray, Mijnheer,” she said, in her softest tones, and her voice had many tones as her companion had not failed to notice, though he was not aware that the softest was also usually the most mischievous, “will you not walk the other side of the way? Then you will not be conspicuous at all.”

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“I do not mind it,” he said, blushing, and Julia decided that his father’s description of him as a retiring youth was really short of the mark. They walked along together down the quiet, bright streets; there were many people about, but nobody in a hurry, and all in Sunday clothes, bent on visiting or decorous pleasure-making. Everywhere was sunny and everything looked as if it had had its face washed; week days in the town always looked to Julia like Sundays, and Sundays, this Sunday in particular, looked like Easter.

In time they came to the trees that bordered the canal; there were old Spanish houses here, a beautiful purplish red in colour, and with carving above the doors. Julia looked up at her favourite doorpiece—a galleon in full sail, a veritable picture in relief, unspoiled by three hundred years of wind and weather.

“I think this is the most beautiful town I was ever in,” she said. Her companion looked surprised.

“Do you like it?” he asked. “It must be quite unlike what you are used to, all of it must be.”

“It is,” she answered, “all of it, as you say—the place, the ways, the people.”

“And you like it? You do not think it—you do not think us what you call slow, stupid?”

She was a little surprised, it had never occurred to her that he, any more than the others, would think about her point of view. “No,” she answered, “I admire it all very much, it is sincere, no one appears other than he is, or aims at being or seeming more. Your house is the same back and front, and you, none of you have a wrong side, the whole life is solid right through.”

Joost did not quite understand; had she not guessed that to be likely she would hardly have spoken so frankly. “I fear I do not understand you,” he said; “it is difficult when we do not know each other’s language perfectly.”

“We know it very well,” Julia answered; “as well as possible. If we were born in the same place, in the same house, we should not understand it better.”

He still looked puzzled; he was half afraid she was laughing at him. “You think I am stupid?” he said, gravely.

She denied it, and they walked on a little in silence. They were in the quieter part of the town now and could talk undisturbed; after a little he spoke again, musingly.

“Often I wonder what you think of, you have such great, shining eyes, they eat up everything; they see everything and through everything, I think. They sweep round the room, or the persons or the place, and gather all—may I say it?—like some fine net—to

me it seems they draw all things into your brain, and there you weave them and weave them into thoughts."

Julia swallowed a little exclamation, and by an effort contrived not to appear as surprised as she was by this too discerning remark. She was so young that she did not before know that children and child-like folk sometimes divine by instinct the same conclusions that very clever people arrive at by much reasoning and observation. She felt decidedly uncomfortable at this explanation of Joost's frequent contemplations of herself.

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“You seem to think me very clever,” she said.

“Of course,” he answered simply, “you are clever.”

“No, I am not,” she returned; “ask your mother; ask Denah Snieder; they do not think me clever. What can I do, except cook? Oh, yes, and speak a few foreign language as you can yourself? I cannot paint, or draw, or sing; I do not understand music; why, when you play Bach, I wish to go out of the room.”

“That is true,” he admitted; “I have felt it.”

Julia bit her lip; she had never before expressed her opinion of Bach, and she did not feel in the least gratified that he had found it out for himself.

“It is absurd to call me clever,” she said. “I have little learning and no accomplishments. I cannot even get on with the crochet work Denah showed me, and I do not know how to make flowers of paper.”

“But why should one make flowers of paper?” he asked, in his serious way. “They are not at all beautiful.”

“Denah makes them beautifully,” she answered.

The argument did not seem to carry weight, but Julia advanced no other; she thought silence the wisest course. They had almost reached home now; a little before they came to the gate, Joost opened the subject of herself again. “I think sometimes you must make fun of us; do you not sometimes in your heart laugh just a little bit?”

“I laugh at everything sometimes,” she said; “myself most of all. Do you never laugh at yourself? I expect not; you are very serious. I will tell you what it is like: a little goblin comes out of your head and stands in front of you; the goblin is you, a sort of you; the other part, the part people know, sits opposite, and the goblin laughs at it because it sees how ridiculous the other is, how grotesque and how futile. My goblin came out into my room last night and laughed and laughed; you would almost have heard him if you had been there.”

They had reached the gate now, and as Joost held it open for her to pass through, she saw that he had blushed to the ears at the lightly spoken words—if he had been in her room last night; the impropriety of them to him was evident. For a moment she blushed, too, then she recovered herself and grew impatient with one so artificial—and yet so simple, so self-conscious—and yet so unconscious, so desperately stupid—and yet so uncomfortably clear-sighted.

CHAPTER V

THE EXCURSION

The following Monday was fine and warm, and since the whole previous week had also been fine and warm, Mevrouw thought they might venture to make the talked-of excursion. Messages were accordingly sent to the Snieders, and from the Snieders back again, and after a wonderful amount of talk and arranging, everything was settled. Dinner was a little early that day, and a little hurried, though, since the carriage was not to come till after five o'clock, there was perhaps not much need for that. However, it is not every day in the week one makes an excursion, so naturally things cannot be expected to go quite as usual when such an event occurs.

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The carriage came, Mevrouw had been waiting ten minutes, and three times been to see why Julia was not waiting with her. At the sound of wheels Julia came out; she had just finished washing the glasses (which she had been told not to touch, as there was certainly no time). She was quite ready, but Mevrouw at that moment discovered that she had the wrong sunshade. Julia fetched the right one and carried it out for the old lady; also an umbrella with a bow on the handle, a mackintosh, a shawl, and a large basket. Mijnheer came from the office with his spectacles pushed up on his forehead, and a minute later Joost also came to say good-bye; even the maidservant came from the kitchen to see them start.

The carriage drew up; it was a strange-looking vehicle, in shape something between a hearse and an ark on wheels, but with the greater part of the sides open to the air. Vrouw Snieder and her two daughters were already within, with their bow-trimmed umbrellas, sunshades, mackintoshes, shawls and basket. There was necessarily a good deal of greeting; Mijnheer and Joost shook hands with all the three ladies, and inquired after Herr Snieder, and received polite inquiries in return. Then Denah insisted on getting out, so that Mevrouw should be better able to get in; also to show that she was athletic and agile, like an English girl, and thought nothing of getting in and out of a high carriage. Mevrouw kissed her husband and son, twice each, very loud, called a good-bye to the servant, and got in. Julia shook hands, said good-bye, and also got in. Denah watched her, and observed the shape of her feet and ankles jealously. She glanced sharply at Joost, but he was not guilty of such indecorum as even thinking about any girl's legs, so, having said her good-bye, she got in reassured. Finally they drove away amid wishes for a safe drive and a pleasant excursion.

Of course there was a little settling to do inside the carriage, the wraps and baskets to be disposed of, and each person to be assured that the others had enough room, and just the place they preferred to any other. By the time that was done they stopped again at the house of Mijnheer's head clerk; here they were to take up two children, girls of fourteen and fifteen, who had been invited to come with the party. The carriage was not kept waiting, the children were out before it had fairly stopped; they were flaxenly fair girls, wearing little blue earrings, Sunday hats, and cotton gloves of course—all the party wore cotton gloves; it was, Julia judged, part of the excursion outfit.

Now they were really off, driving out beyond the outskirts of the town; along flat roads where the wheels sank noiselessly into the soft sand, and the horses' feet clattered on the narrow brick track in the centre. For a time they followed the canal closely, but soon they left it, and saw in the distance nothing but its high green banks, with the brown sails of boats showing above, and looking as if they were a good

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deal higher than the carriage road. They passed small fields, subdivided into yet smaller patches, and all very highly cultivated. And small black and white houses, and small black and white cows, and black and white goats, and dogs, and even cats of the same combination of colour. Everything was rather small, but everywhere very tidy; nothing out of its place or wasted, and nobody hurrying or idling; all were busy, with a small bustling business, as unlike aggressive English idleness as it was unlike the deceptive, leisurely power of English work.

Denah and Anna looked out of either side of the carriage, and pointed out things to Julia and the two little girls. Here it was what they called a country seat, a sort of castellated variety of overgrown chalet, surrounded by a wonderful garden of blazing flower-beds and emerald lawns, all set round with rows and rows of plants in bright red pots. Or there it was a cemetery, where the peaceful aspect made Denah sentimental, and the beauty of the trees drew Anna's praise. The two elder ladies paid less attention to what they passed; they contented themselves with leaning back and saying how beautiful the air was, and how refreshing the country. The girls said that as well; they all agreed six times within the hour that it was a delightful expedition, and they enjoying it much.

In time they came to the wood. An unpaved road ran through it of soft, deep sand, which deadened every sound; on either hand the trees rose, pines and larch and beech principally, with a few large-leafed shivering poplars here and there. There was no undergrowth, and few bird songs, only the dim wood aisles stretching away, quiet and green. Suddenly it seemed to Julia that the world's horizon had been stretched, the little neatness, the clean, trim brightness, the bustling, industrious toy world was gone; in its place was the twilight of the trees, the silence, the repose, the haunting, indefinable sense of home which is only to be found in these cathedrals of Nature's making.

"Ah, the wood!" Denah said, with a profound sigh. "The beautiful wood! Miss Julia, do you not love it?"

Julia did not assent, but Denah went on quite satisfied, "You cannot love it as I do; I think I am a child of Nature, nothing would please me more than always to live here."

"You would have to go into the town sometimes," Julia said, "to buy gloves; the ones you have would not last for ever."

Denah looked a little puzzled by the difficulty; she had not apparently thought out the details of life in a natural state; but before she could come to any conclusion one of the little girls cried, "Music—I hear music!"

All the ladies said “Delicious!” together, and “How beautiful!” and Denah, content to ignore Nature, added rapturously, “Music in the wood! Ah, exquisite! two beauties together!”

Julia echoed the remark, though the music was that of a piano-organ. The horizon had drawn in again, and the prospect narrowed; the silence was full of noises now, voices and laughter, amidst which the organ notes did not seem out of place. And near at hand under the trees there were tables spread and people having tea, enjoying themselves in a simple-hearted, noisy fashion, in no way suggestive of cathedral twilight.

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The carriage was put up, the tea ordered, and in a little they, too, were sitting at one of the square tables. Each lady was provided with a high wooden chair, and a little wooden box footstool. A kettle on a hot potful of smouldering wood ashes was set on the table; cups and saucers and goats' milk were also supplied to them, and opaque beet-root sugar. The food they had brought in their baskets, big new *broodje* split in half, buttered and put together again with a slither of Dutch cheese between. These and, to wind up with, some thin sweet biscuits carried in a papier-mache box, and handed out singly by Vrouw Van Heigen, who had brought them as a surprise and a treat.

"Do they have such picnics as this in England?" Anna asked, as she gathered up the crumbs of her biscuit.

"I have never been to one," Julia answered, and inwardly she thought of her mother and Violet driving in a wheeled ark to the wood, there to sit at little wooden tables and stretch their mouths in the public eye.

"Ah!" said Vrouw Snieder; "then it is all the more of a pleasure and a novelty to you."

Julia said it was, and soon afterwards they rose from the table to walk in the wood. The two elder ladies did not get far, and before long came back to sit on their wooden chairs again. The girls went some little distance, all keeping together, and being careful not to wander out of sight and sound of the other picnic parties. Once when they came to the extreme limit of their walk, Julia half-hesitated. She looked into the quiet green distance. It would be easy to leave them, to give them the slip; she could walk at double their pace with half their exertion, she could lose herself among the trees while they were wondering why she had gone, and making up their minds to follow her; and, most important of all, when she came back she could explain everything quite easily, so that they would not think it in the least strange—an accident, a missing of the way, anything. Should she do it—should she? The wild creature that had lived half-smothered within her for all the twenty years of her life fluttered and stirred. It had stirred before, rebelling against the shams of the Marbridge life, as it rebelled against the restrictions of the present; it had never had scope or found vent; still, for all that it was not dead; possibly, even, it was growing stronger; it called her now to run away. But she did not do it; advisability, the Polkingtons' patron saint, suggested to her that one does not learn to shine in the caged life by allowing oneself the luxury of occasional escape.

She turned her back on the green distance. "Shall we not go back to where the music is playing?" she said.

They went, walking with their arms entwined as other girls were doing, Julia between the broad, white-skinned sisters, like a rapier between cushions. The two younger girls

ran on in front. “There is Mevrouw,” they cried. “She is calling us. The carriage is ready, too; oh, do you think it is already time to go?”

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It seemed as if it really was the case. Vrouw Snieder stood clapping her hands and beckoning to them, and the coachman appeared impatient to be off. With reluctance, and many times repeated regrets, they collected their wraps and baskets, and got into the carriage.

“Good-bye, beautiful wood, good-bye!” Denah said, leaning far out as they started. “Oh, if one could but remain here till the moon rose!”

“It would be very damp,” her mother observed. “The dew would fall.”

To which incontestable remark Denah made no reply.

The return journey was much like the drive there, with one exception; they passed one object of interest they had not seen before. It was when they were nearing the outskirts of the town that Anna exclaimed, “An Englishman! Look, look, Miss Julia, a compatriot of yours!”

The season was full early for tourists, and at no time did the place attract many. Englishmen who came now probably came on business which was unlikely to bring them out to these quiet, flat fields. But Anna and Denah, who joined her in a much more demonstrative look-out than Marbridge would have considered well-bred, were insistent on the nationality.

“He walks like an Englishman,” Anna said, “as if all the world belonged to him.”

“And looks like one,” Denah added; “he has no moustache, and wears a glass in his eye, look, Miss Julia.”

Julia looked, then drew back rather quickly. They were right, it was an Englishman; it was of all men Rawson-Clew.

What was he doing here? By what extraordinary chance he came to be in this unlikely place she could not think. She was very glad that Mevrouw felt the air chilly, and so had had the leather flaps pulled over part of the open sides of the carriage; this and the eager sisters screened her so well that it was unlikely he could see her.

“Is he not an Englishman?” Anna asked.

“Yes,” she answered; “one could not mistake him for anything else.”

“I wonder if he recognised you as a country-woman,” Anna speculated; and Julia said she did not consider herself typically English in appearance.

The sisters talked for the rest of the way of the Englishman; of his air and bearing, and the fact, of which they declared themselves convinced, that he was a person of distinction.

But it was not till the drive was over, and the party had separated, that Denah was able to say what was burning on her tongue. They had left the clerk's children at their house, said good-bye to Vrouw Van Heigen and Julia, and were within their own home at last; the girls went up to their bedroom, and Denah carefully fastened the door, then she said mysteriously, "Miss Julia knows that Englishman."

Anna jumped at the intelligence, and still more at the tone. "Did she tell you?" she asked.

"No," Denah replied with some scorn; "she would not tell any one, she wishes it concealed; she thinks it is so, but I saw it."

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The tone and manner suggested many things, but Anna was a terribly matter-of-fact person, to whom suggestions were nothing. “Why should she wish it concealed?” she inquired.

“I do not know why,” Denah answered; “that remains to be seen. As for how I know it, I saw it in her face; when she looked at him her lips became set, and her eyes—she looked—” She hesitated for a word, and dropped to the homely, “She looked as if she would bite with annoyance that he should be here. The expression was gone in a moment; she spoke with an ease and naturalness that was astonishing, even disgusting; but it had been there. I do not trust her.”

The last was said with great seriousness, and for a little Anna was impressed. But not for long, she could not accept such evidence as this; in her opinion it was “fancy.”

“You read too many romances,” she said; “your head is full of such things. I do not believe Miss Julia knew the Englishman, she would not have hidden from us her knowledge if she did; it is not so easy to hide one’s feelings in the flash of an eye, besides there was no reason. Also”—this as an afterthought—“he was a man of good family; you could see at a glance that he was of the aristocracy, while she is a paid companion to Vrouw Van Heigen; she could never before have met him.”

Denah, however, was not convinced; she only repeated darkly, “I mistrust her.”

Julia, in the meantime, was busy with her household duties, talking over the excursion the while with Mevrouw, and helping to detail it to Mijnheer. At last the table was ready for supper and the coffee made. Mevrouw sat with her crochet, and Mijnheer opposite her with his paper. It wanted more than a quarter of an hour to supper time, Julia had been too quick; still it did not matter, the coffee would not hurt standing on the spirit-stove; it stood there half the day. She had all this time to spare, but she did not fetch her crochet work; she went outside to the veranda.

It was almost dark by this time, as dark as it ever got on these nights; the air was still and warm. She opened the glass door and went out and sat down on the step. There was a smell of water in the air, not unpleasant, but quite un-English, and mixed with it a faint smell of flowers, the late blooming bulbs have little scent on the whole; it was more the heavy dew than the flowers themselves which one could smell. It was very quiet out here; the town, at no time noisy, was some distance away—so quiet that Julia could hear the ticking of Mr. Gillat’s large watch in her belt. She pushed it further down; she did not want to hear it.

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She propped her elbows on her knees, and her chin on her hands. She wished she had not seen Rawson-Clew that day; she wished she was not here, she wished there was no such thing as a blue daffodil; she was vaguely angry and dissatisfied, but not willing to face things. It was unlikely that the man had seen her, unlikely that she would see him again; but he was incongruous in this simple life, and he brought forcibly home the incongruity of herself and her errand. She had come for the blue daffodil, it was no good pretending she had not; she told herself angrily, as she had told herself when she had first looked at Johnny's yellow-faced watch, that she was going to get it in some way that was justifiable. Only it was not so easy to believe that now she knew more about it and the Van Heigens. But she must have it, that was the argument she fell back on, the necessity was so great that she was justified (the Polkingtons had always found necessity a justification for doing things that could be anyhow made to square with their position).

She wished she had not been for the excursion to-day, that she lived less really in their simple, sincere life. She wished from her heart that the Van Heigens had been different sort of people—almost any other sort, then she would not have had these tiresome feelings—Johnny and Johnny's watch, Joost Van Heigen—there was something about them all that was hatefully embarrassing. No self-respecting thief robbed a child; even the most apathetic conscience revolted at such an idea. No gentleman worthy of the name attacked an unarmed man, the preparedness of the parties made all the difference between murder and fair fight. Of course, in the abstract, stealing was stealing under all conditions, and killing killing, and both open to condemnation; but in the concrete, in fact, the equality of the two persons made all the difference, at least to honour.

Julia moved uneasily and looked, without seeing, across the dark garden. The monotonous sound of voices floated out indistinctly; the old pair in the sitting-room were talking in the lamplight, Mevrouw going over once again the little incidents of the day. Joost was in the drawing-room at the other end of the house; he had been playing some of his favourite composer; he had stopped now, and was doubtless sorting his music and putting it away, each piece four-square and absolutely neat. Day by day, and year by year, they lived this quiet life, with a drive for a rare holiday treat, and the discovery of a new flower as the goal of all hope and ambition. Things did not happen to them, bad things that needed doubtful remedies; they had never had to scratch for their living, and show one face outwards and another in. They, none of them, ever wanted to do things; they had not the courage. How much of virtue was lack of courage and a desire not to be remarkable?

Julia asked herself the question defiantly, and did not hear Joost come out of the house. He was carrying a lantern, and was going to make his nightly round of the barns. She did not hear his step, and so started when she saw the light swing across the ground at her feet.

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He was quite as startled to see her as she was to see him, but his greeting was a very usual question in Holland, “Will you not catch cold?”

She shook her head, and he asked, “What are you doing? Thinking? Weaving in your head all that you have seen and heard to-day?”

“No,” she answered; “I was thinking about courage.”

“Courage?” he repeated, puzzled.

“Yes, it is very different in different places; some people are afraid to tell the truth, so they lie; and some are afraid to be dishonest, so they are honest; I believe it depends partly on fashion.”

Joost set down the lantern in sheer surprise. “Such things cannot depend on fashion,” he said severely.

“I am not so sure,” Julia answered; “lots of things you would not expect depend on it. I know people who sometimes go without the food they want so that they can buy expensive cakes to show off when their acquaintances come to tea—that’s silly, isn’t it? Then I know other people who blush if a pair of breeches, or something equally inoffensive, are mentioned; that seems equally silly. One lot of people is ashamed to be seen eating bread-and-cheese suppers, another lot is ashamed to be seen walking off the side-walk, and with no gloves on. One would hardly expect in, yet I almost believe these silly little things somehow make a difference to what the people think right and wrong.”

Joost regarded her doubtfully, though he could only see the outline of her face. “Are you making fun?” he asked. “I do not know when you are making fun; I think you must be now. Are you speaking of us?”

“I never felt less like making fun in my life,” Julia answered ignoring the last question. Something in her tone struck Joost as sad, and he forgot his question in sympathy.

“I am sorry,” he said; “you are unhappy, and I have intruded upon you; will you forgive me? You are thinking of your home, no doubt; you have not had a letter from England for a long time.”

Julia wished he did not notice so many things. “I did not expect a letter,” she said; “my eldest sister was married last week, there would be no time to write to me till everything was over; most likely I shall hear to-morrow.”

“Is your sister married?” he asked; “and you were not able to be present?”

“It is too far to go home from here,” Julia said; then asked, “Were you going to the barns?”

“Yes,” he answered, suddenly reminded of the fact. Then seeing she did not resume her seat on the steps, he ventured diffidently, “Will you come too?”

She assented, and they started together in silence, Joost thinking her homesick, not knowing quite what to say. When they came to the first of the dark buildings they went in, and he swung the lantern round so that their shadows danced fantastically. Then he tried various doors, and glanced up the wall-ladder to the square opening which led to the floor above. There was no need to examine the place minutely, it was all quiet and dark; if there had been any one about they would certainly have heard, and if there had been anything smouldering—a danger more to be feared, seeing that the men smoked everywhere—it could have been smelt in the dry air.

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“I like these barns,” Julia said, looking round: “they are so big and quiet and orderly, somehow so respectable.”

“Respectable!” he repeated, as if he did not approve of the word. “Is that what you like? The respectable?”

“Yes, in its place; and its place is here.”

“You think us respectable?”

“Well, are you not? I think you are the most respectable people in the world.”

She led the way through to the next barn as she spoke. “You are going here, too, I suppose?” she said.

“I will just look round,” he answered.

They went on together until they came to the last barn of all; while they paused there a moment they heard a rustling and movement in the dark, far corner. Joost started violently, then he said, “It is a rat, you must not be afraid; it will not run this way.”

“I am not afraid,” Julia said with amusement. “Do you think I am afraid of rats?”

“Girls often are.”

“Well, I am not,” and it was clear from her manner that she spoke the truth.

“Would you be afraid to come out here alone?” he asked curiously.

“No,” she said; “any night that you like I will come here alone, go through the barns and fasten the doors.”

“I do not believe there are many girls who would do that,” he said; he was thinking of Denah and Anna.

Julia told him there were plenty who would. As they came back, stopping to fasten each door after them, he remarked, “I think girls are usually brought up with too much protection; I mean girls of our class, they are too much shielded; one has them for the house only; if they were flowers I would call them stove-plants.”

Julia laughed. “You believe in the emancipation of women then?” she said; “you would rather a woman could take care of herself, and not be afraid, than be womanly?”

“No,” he answered; “I would like them to be both, as you are.”

They had come outside now; she was standing in the misty moon-light, while he stayed to fasten the last door.

“I?” she said; “you seem to think me a paragon—clever, brave, womanly. Do you know what I really am? I am bad; by a long way the wickedest person you have known.”

But he did not believe her, which was perhaps not altogether surprising.

CHAPTER VI

DEBTOR AND CREDITOR

Violet Polkington was married, and, as a consequence, the financial affairs of the family were in a state that can only be described as wonderful. They were intricately involved, of course, and there was no chance of their being clear again for a year at least; but, also, there was no chance of them being found out, appearances were better than ever.

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Mr. Frazer had been given a small living, whether by the deserved kindness of fortune, or by reason of his own efforts, or the Polkingtons, is not known. Anyhow he had it, and he and Violet were married in June with all necessary *eclat*. Local papers described the event in glowing terms, appreciative friends said it was the prettiest wedding in years, and in due time Cherie wrote and told Julia about it. The Captain also wrote; his point of view was rather different, but his letter filled up gaps in Cherie's information, and Julia's own past experience filled up the remaining gaps in both.

The letters came on Tuesday, as Julia expected, a little before dinner time; she was still reading them when Mijnheer and his son came in from the office. Joost smiled sympathetically when he saw she had them, glad on her account; and she, almost unconsciously, crumpled together the sheets that lay on the table beside her, as if she were afraid they would betray their contents to him.

"You have good news from home?" said Mijnheer; "your parents are well?"

"Quite well, thank you," Julia answered. She had just come to the place in her father's letter where he regretted that such very light refreshments were the fashion at wedding receptions. "It is, of course, as your mother says, less expensive, but at such a time who would spare expense—if it were the fashion? I assure you I had literally nothing to eat at the time, or afterwards; your mother thinking it advisable as soon as we were alone, to put away the cakes for future visitors. At such a time, when a man's feelings are nearly touched, he needs support; I did not have it, and I cannot say that I have felt myself since."

Julia read to the end of the letter; Mijnheer had by this time taken up a paper, but Joost watched her as she folded the sheets. He did not speak, it seemed he would not intrude upon her; there was something dog-like in this sympathy with what was not understood. She felt vaguely uncomfortable by reason of it, and spoke to break the spell. "Everything went off very well," she said.

The words were for him alone, since Mijnheer was now reading, and also knew nothing of the subject. The smile brightened on his face. "Did it?" he answered. "I am very glad. They must have missed you much, and thought often of you."

Julia nodded. Cherie had said. "I must say I think it is a pity you were not here; it is important to have some one with a head in the background; mother and I had to be the fore, so of course we could not do it; if you had been here several things would have gone better, and some waste have been saved."

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This remark Julia did not communicate to Joost; she put the letter in her pocket, and went to fetch the dinner. After dinner she was to go on an errand for Mevrouw. It would take a long time, all the evening in fact, for it was to an old relative who lived in a village about three miles from the town. Walking was the only way of getting to the place, except twice a week when a little cargo boat went down the canal, and took some hours about it. This was neither the day nor the time for the boat, Julia would have to walk; but, as she assured Mevrouw, she much preferred it. Accordingly, as soon as dinner was finished, she was given a great many messages, mostly of a condoling nature, for the old lady was ill in bed, some strengthening soup, and a little bottle of the peach-brandy. With these things packed in a substantial marketing basket, she started.

Through the town she went with that easy step and indifference to the presence of other people that Denah so criticised, faster and faster her spirits rising. Once or twice she looked in at the low windows that stood open on the shady side of the street; there she saw the heads of families smoking their after-dinner pipes, while their wives and daughters sat crocheting and watching the passersby. There were chairs with crimson velvet seats in most of the rooms, and funny little cabinet, or side-board things of bright red mahogany, with modern Delft vases, very blue indeed, upon them. And always there was a certain snugness, perhaps even smugness, about the rooms. At least, so it seemed to her as she looked in, almost insolently pleased to be outside, to be free and alone.

In time she came to the outskirts of the town, the canal lay on her right, and on her left, flat green fields, cut up by innumerable ditches, and set with frequent windmills, all black and white, and mostly used for maintaining the water level. There were people busy in the fields, but to Julia they only gave the idea of ants, and did not intrude upon her mind in the least. It was all very quiet and green around, and quiet and blue above, except for the larks singing rapturously. Certainly it was very good to be away from the Van Heigens, away from the ceaseless little reiteration of Mevrouw's talk, from the minute, punctilious conventions, from Joost's quiet gaze, from the proximity of the hateful, necessary blue daffodil. With a violent rebound Julia shook off the feeling that had been growing on her of late, and was once more possibly reckless, but certainly free, and no longer under the spell of her surroundings. Her young blood coursed quickly, her eyes shone, the basket she carried grew light; she might have sung as she went had not Nature, in withholding the ability, also kindly withheld the inclination.

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Soon after leaving the town, a side road cut into the main one; a waggon was lumbering down it at no great pace, but just before the branch road joined the main one the driver cracked his whip loudly, so that his team of young horses started forward suddenly. Too suddenly for the comprehension of some children who were playing in the road; for a second or more they looked at the approaching waggon, then, when the necessity dawned upon them, they ran for safety, one one way, one another, and the third, a baby boy, like a chicken, half across the way to the right, then, after a scurry in the middle, back again to the left, under the horses' feet.

Julia shouted to him, but in the excitement of the moment she spoke English, and not Dutch, though it hardly mattered, for the little boy was far too frightened to understand anything. It certainly would have fared badly with him had she not followed up her cry by darting into the road, seizing him by the shoulder, and flinging him with considerable force against the green wayside bank. She was only just in time; as it was, the foremost horse struck her shoulder and sent her rolling into the dust.

For an instant she lay there, perilously near the big grinding wheels; an almost imperceptible space, yet somehow long enough for her to decide quite calmly that it was impossible to scramble to her feet in time, so she had better draw her legs up and trust to the wheels missing her. Then suddenly the wheels stopped, and some one who had seized the horses' heads addressed the waggoner with the English idiom that is perhaps most widely known.

Julia heard "damned fool" in quite unemotional English, and almost simultaneously the guttural shrieks of two peasant women who approached. She picked herself up, then moving two paces to the side, stopped to put her hat straight with a calmness she did not quite feel. There was a volley of exclamations from the peasant women, and "Are you hurt?" the man who had stopped the horses asked her, speaking now in Dutch, though with an English accent.

"No," she answered, winking back the water which had come into her eyes with the force of the blow, and she turned her back on him so that he should not see her do it.

"My good women," she said shortly to the peasants who, with upraised hands and many gestures, stared at her, "there is nothing the matter, there is no reason why you should stand there and look at me; I assure you no one has been hurt, and no one is going to be; you had much better go on your way, as I shall do. Good-afternoon."

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She walked a few paces down the road, not in the direction she intended to go certainly, but she was too shaken for the moment to notice which way she took, and was only actuated by a desire to get away and put an end to a scene. The movement and the words were not without effect; the two women, a good deal astonished, obeyed automatically, and, picking up the burdens they had set down, trudged on their way, not realising for some time how much offended they were at the curt behaviour of the "mad English." The children by this time had ceased staring and returned to their play; the waggoner, muttering some surly words, drove on. Julia sat on the bank by the roadside, and tried to brush the dust from her dress. The Englishman, after making some parting remarks to the waggoner, this time in Dutch, though still in the quiet, drawling voice which was much at variance with the language, had gone to pick up the basket. She wished she had thanked him for his timely assistance when she first scrambled to her feet, and gone on at once, then she could have done this necessary sitting down when he was out of sight, and come back for the stupid basket when she remembered it. But now she would have to thank him formally, and perhaps explain things, and say expressly that she was not hurt, and this while she was shaken and dusty. Mercifully he was English, and so would not expect much; she looked at his back with satisfaction. He was scarcely as tall as many Hollanders, but very differently built. To Julia, looking at him rather stupidly, his proportions, like his clothes, appeared very nearly perfect after those she had been used to seeing lately. When he turned and she saw for the first time his face, she was not very much surprised, though really it was surprising that Rawson-Clew should still be hereabouts.

Their eyes met in mutual recognition. Afterwards she wondered why she did not pretend to be Dutch, it ought to have been possible; he had only seen her once before, and her knowledge of the language was much better than his. And even if he had not been deceived, he would have been bound to acquiesce to her pretence, had she persisted in it. But she did not think of it before their mutual recognition had made it too late.

"I hope you are not hurt," he said, as he crossed the road with the basket.

"No," she answered, "thanks to you—"

But he, evidently sharing her dislike for a fuss, was even more anxious than she not to dwell on that, and dismissed the subject quickly. He began to wipe the bottom of the basket, from which soup was dripping, talking the while of the carelessness of continental drivers and the silliness of children of all nations, perhaps to give her time to recover.

She agreed with him, and then repeated her thanks.

He again set them aside. "It's nothing," he said; "I am glad to have had the opportunity, especially since it also gives me the opportunity of offering you some apology for an

unfortunate misunderstanding which arose when last I saw you. You must feel that it needs an apology."

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For a moment Julia's eyes showed her surprise; an apology was not what she expected, and, to tell the truth, it did not altogether please her. She knew that she and her father had no right to it while the money was unpaid.

"Please do not apologise," she said; "there is no need, I quite understand."

"I was labouring under a false impression," Rawson-Clew explained.

She nodded. "I know," she said, "but it is cleared up now; no one who spoke with my father could possibly imagine he lived by his wits."

Which ambiguous remark may have been meant to apply to the Captain's mental outfit more than his moral one. When Rawson-Clew knew Julia better he came to the conclusion it probably did, at the time he thought it wise not to answer it.

"Here is your basket," he said; "I think it is clean now."

She made a movement to take it, but her arm was numb and powerless from the blow she had received; it was the right shoulder which had been struck, and that hand was clearly useless for the time being; with a wince of pain, she stretched out the left.

But he drew the basket back. "You are hurt," he said.

"No, I'm not, nothing to speak of; it only hurts me when I move that arm; I will carry the basket with the other hand."

"How far have you to go?"

She told him to the village and back.

"You had better go straight home at once," he said.

"I can't do that," she answered. She did not explain that she did not want to, the pain in her shoulder not being bad enough to make her want to give up this first hour of freedom. "My shoulder does not hurt if I do not move it," she said; "I can carry the basket with the other hand."

"Perhaps you will allow me to carry it for you?" he suggested; "I am going the same way."

"No, thank you," she returned. "Thanks very much for the offer, but there isn't any need; I can manage quite well. I expect you will want to go faster than I do." She spoke decidedly, and turned about quickly; as she did so, she caught sight of the bottle of peach-brandy in the grass.

“Oh, there’s the brandy,” she exclaimed; “I mustn’t go without that.”

He fetched the fortunately unbroken bottle and put it in the basket, but he did not give it to her.

“I will carry this,” he said; “if our pace does not agree, if you would prefer to walk more slowly, I will wait for you at the beginning of the village.”

Julia rose to her feet, there was no choice left to her but to acquiesce; from her heart she wished he would leave the basket and go alone; she wished even that he would be rude to her, she felt that then he would have been nearer her level and her father’s. She resented alike his presence and his courtesy, and she could not show either feeling, only accept what he offered and walk by his side, just as if no money was owed, and no letter, condescendingly cancelling

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the debt, had been written. She grew hot as she thought of that carefully worded letter, and hot when she thought of her father's relief thereat. And here, here was the man who must have dictated the letter, and probably paid the debt, behaving just as if such things never existed. He was walking with her—she could not give him ten yards start and follow him into the village—and making polite conversations about the weather, and the road, and the quantity of soup that had been spilled.

She pulled herself together, and, feeling the situation to be beyond remedy, determined to bear herself bravely, and carry it off with what credit she could. She glanced at the more than half-empty soup can. "I am afraid you are right," she said; "there is a great deal of it gone; still, that is not without advantage—I shall be sent to take some more in a day or two."

"You wish that?" he inquired.

"Yes," she answered, "I find the exercise beneficial; I have had too much pudding lately."

He looked politely surprised, and she went on to explain.

"It is very wholesome," she said, "but a bit stodgy; I think it is too really good to be taken in such large quantities by any one like me. It is unbelievably good, it makes one perfectly ashamed of oneself; and unbelievably narrow, it makes one long for bed-time."

She broke off to smile at his more genuine surprise, and her smile, like that of some other people of little real beauty, was one of singular charm.

"Did you think I meant actual pudding?" she asked. "I didn't; I meant just the whole life here; if you knew the people well, the real middle class ones, you would understand."

"I think I can understand without knowing them well," he said; "I fancy there is a good deal of pudding about; in fact, I myself am feeling its rather oppressive influence."

"The town is paved with it," Julia declared. "I thought so this afternoon. I also thought, though it is Tuesday, it was just like a spring Sunday; every day is like that."

Rawson-Clew suggested that many people appreciated spring Sundays.

"So do I," Julia agreed, "but in moderation; you can't do your washing on Sunday, nor your harvesting in spring. An endless succession of spring Sundays is very awkward when you have got—well, week-day work to do, don't you think so?"

He wondered a little what week-day work she had in her mind, but he did not ask.

“Are you living with a Dutch family?” he inquired.

She nodded. “As companion,” she said; “sort of superior general servant.”

“Indeed? Then it must have been you I saw yesterday; I thought so at the time; you were driving with some Dutch ladies.”

Julia was surprised that he had seen and recognised her. “We went for an excursion yesterday,” she said; “they called it a picnic.”

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She told him about it, not omitting any of the points which had amused her. Could Joost have heard her, he would have felt that his suspicion that she sometimes laughed at them more than justified; but she did not give a thought to Joost, and probably would not have paused if she had. She wanted to pass the present time, and she was rather reckless how, so long as Rawson-Clew either talked himself, or seemed interested in what she said; also, it must be admitted, though it was to this man, it was something of a treat to talk freely again. So she gave him the best account she could, not only of the excursion, but of other things too. And if it was his attention she wanted, she should have been satisfied, for she apparently had it, at first only the interest of courtesy, afterwards something more; it even seemed, before the end, as if she puzzled him a little, in spite of his years and experience.

He found himself mentally contrasting the life at the Van Heigens', as she described it, with that which he had imagined her to have led at Marbridge, and, now that he talked to her, he could not find her exact place in either.

"You must find Dutch conventionality rather trying," he said at last.

"I am not used to it yet," she answered; "when I am it will be no worse than the conventionality at home."

He felt he was wrong in one of his surmises; clearly she was not really Bohemian. "Surely," he said, "you have not found these absurd rules and restrictions in England?"

"Not the same ones; we study appearances one way, and they do another; but it comes to the same thing, so far as I am concerned. One day I hope to be able to give it up and retire; when I do I shall wear corduroy breeches and if I happen to be in the kitchen eating onions when people come to see me, I shall call them in and offer them a share."

"Rather an uncomfortable ambition, isn't that?" he inquired. "I am afraid you will have to wait some time for its fulfilment, especially the corduroy. I doubt if you will achieve that this side the grave, though you might perhaps make a provision in your will to be buried in it."

Julia laughed a little. "You think my family would object? They would; but, you see, I should be retiring from them as well as from the world, the corduroy might be part of my bulwarks."

"I don't think you could afford it even for that; do you think women ever can afford that kind of disregard for appearances?"

"Plain ones can," she said; "it is the only compensation they have for being plain; not much, certainly, seeing what they lose, but they have it. When you can never look more than indifferent, it does not matter how much less you look."

“That is a rather unusual idea,” he remarked; “it appears sound in theory, but in practice __”

“Sounder still,” she answered him.

He laughed. “I’m afraid you won’t make many converts here,” he said, “where nearly every woman is plain, and according to your experience, every one, men and women too, think a great deal of looks; at all events, correct ones.”

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“They do do that,” she admitted; “they just worship propriety and the correct, and have the greatest notion of the importance of their neighbours’ eyes. It is a perfect treat to be out alone, and not have to regard them—this is the first time I have been out alone since I have been here.”

“Rather hard; I thought every one had—er—time off.”

“An evening out?” she suggested. “I believe the number of evenings out is regulated by the number of applications for the post when vacant; cooks could get more evenings than housemaids, and nursery governesses might naturally expect a minus number, if that were possible. There would be lots of applications for my post, so I can’t expect many evenings; however, I have thought of a plan by which I can get out again and again!”

“What will you do?” he inquired.

“I shall get Denah—she is one of the girls who went for the excursion—to come and teach Mevrouw a new crochet pattern after dinner of a day. It will take ages, Mevrouw learns very slowly, and Denah will know better than to hurry matters; she admires Mijnheer Joost, the Van Heigens’ son, and she will be only too delighted to have an excuse to come to the house.”

“And if she is there you will have a little leisure? Some one always has to be on duty? Is that it?”

Julia laughed softly. “If she is there,” she said, “she will want me out of the way, and I am not satisfactorily out of the way when I am anywhere on the premises. Not that Mijnheer Joost talks to me when I am there, or would talk to her if I were not; she just mistrusts every unmarried female by instinct.”

“A girl’s instinct in such matters is not always wrong,” Rawson-Clew observed.

But if he thought Julia had any mischievous propensities of that sort he was mistaken. “I should not think of interfering in such an affair,” she said; “why, it would be the most suitable thing in the world, as suitable as it is for my handsome and able sister to marry the ambitious and able nephew of a bishop; they are the two halves that make one whole. Denah and Joost would live a perfectly ideal pudding life; he with his flowers—-that is his work, you know; he cares for nothing besides, really—and she with her housekeeping. He with a little music for relaxation, she with her neighbours and accomplishments; it would be as neat and complete and suitable as anything could be.”

“And that commends it to you? I should have imagined that what was incongruous and odd pleased you better.”

“I like that too,” she was obliged to admit, “though best when the people concerned don’t see the incongruity; but I don’t really care either way, whether things are incongruous or suitable, I enjoy both, and should never interfere so long as they don’t upset my concerns and the end in view.”

He looked at her curiously; again it seemed he was at fault; she was not merely a wayward girl in revolt against convention, saying what she deemed daring for the sake of saying it, and in the effort to be original. She was not posing as a Bohemian any more than she was truly one.

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“Have you usually an end in view?” he asked.

“Have not you?” she answered, turning on him for a moment eyes that Joost had described as “eating up what they looked at.” “Of course,” she said, looking away again, “it is quite natural, and very possible, that you are here for no purpose, and I am here for no purpose too; you might quite well have come to this little town for amusement, and I have come for the money I might earn as a companion. Or you might have drifted here by accident, as I might, without any special reason—” She stopped as she spoke; they were fast approaching the first house of the village now, and she held out her hand for the basket. “I will take it,” she said; “I have a very short distance to go; thank you so much.”

“Let me carry it the rest of the way,” he insisted; “I am going through the village; we may as well go the rest of the way together, I want you to tell me—”

But Julia did not tell him anything, except that her way was by the footpath which turned off to the right. “I could not think of troubling you further,” she said. “Thank you.”

She put her hand on the basket, so that he was obliged to yield it; then, with another word of thanks, she said “good-evening,” and started by the path.

For a moment he looked after her, annoyed and interested against his will; of course, she meant nothing by her words about his purpose and her own, still it gave him food for reflection about her, and the apparent incongruity of her present surroundings. On the whole, he was glad he had met her, partly for the entertainment she had given, and partly for the opportunity he had had to apologise.

An apology was due to her for the affair of last winter, he felt it; though, at the same time, he could not hold himself much to blame in the matter. He had gone to Marbridge to see into his young cousin’s affairs at the request of the boy’s widowed mother. The affairs, as might have been expected, were in muddle enough, and the boy himself was incorrigibly silly and extravagant. The whole business needed tact and patience, and in the end had not been very satisfactorily arranged; during the process Captain Polkington’s name had been mentioned more than once; he figured, among other ways, of spending much and getting little in return. Somehow or other Rawson-Clew had got the impression that the Captain was—well, perhaps pretty much what he really had come to be; and if that was not quite what his wife had persuaded herself and half Marbridge to think him, surely no one was to blame. The mistake made was about the Captain’s wife and daughters and position in the town; Rawson-Clew, in the first instance, never gave them a thought; the Captain was a detached person in his mind, and, as such, a possible danger to his cousin’s loose cash. He went to No. 27 to talk plainly to the man, not to tell him he was a shark and an adventurer; it was the Captain himself who translated and exaggerated thus; not even

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to tell him what he thought, that he was a worthless old sponge, but to make it plain that things would not go on as they had been doing. The girl's interruption had been annoying, so ill-timed and out of place; she ought to have gone at once when he suggested it; she had placed him and herself, too, in an embarrassing position; yet, at the same time—he saw it now, though he did not earlier—there was something quaint in the way she had both metaphorically and actually stood between him and her miserable old father. He had dictated the subsequent letter to the Captain more on her account than anything else. He considered that by it he was making her the amend honourable for the unfortunate interview of the afternoon, as well as closing the incident. Of course, nothing real was forfeited by the letter, for under no circumstances would the money have been repaid; he never had any delusion about that. From which it appears that his opinion of the Captain had not changed.

As for his opinion of Julia, he had not one when he first saw her, except that she had no business to be there; now, however, he felt some little interest in her. There was very little that was interesting in this small Dutch town; it was a refreshing change, he admitted it to himself, to see a girl here who put her clothes on properly; something of a change to meet one anywhere who did not at once fall into one of the well-defined categories.

Much in this world has to be lain at the door of opportunity, and idleness in youth, and *ennui* and boredom in middle ages. Rawson-Clew was in the borderland between the two, and did not consider himself open to the temptations of either. He was not idle, he had things to do; and he was not bored, he had things to think about; but not enough of either to prevent him from having a wide margin.

When he met Julia again there was no reason for dropping the acquaintance renewed through necessity. But also there was no opportunity, on that occasion, for pushing it further, even if there had been inclination, for she was not alone.

It was on Saturday evening; she was walking down the same road, much about the same time, but there was with her a tall, fair young man, with a long face and loose limbs. He carried, of course, an umbrella—that was part of his full dress—and the basket—he walked between her and the cart track. She bowed sedately to Rawson-Clew, and the young man, becoming tardily aware of it, took off his hat, rather late, and with a sweeping foreign flourish. She wore a pair of cotton gloves, and lifted her dress a few inches, and glanced shyly up at her escort now and then as he talked. They were speaking Dutch, and she was behaving Dutch, as plain and demure a person as it was possible to imagine, until she looked back, then Rawson-Clew saw a very devil of mockery and mischief flash up in her eyes. Only for a second; the expression was gone before her head was turned again, and that was decorously soon. But it had been there; it was like the momentary parting of the clouds on a grey day; it illumined her

whole face—her mind, too, perhaps—as the eerie, tricky gleam, which is gone before a man knows it, lights up the level landscape, and transforms it to something new and strange.

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Rawson-Clew walked on ahead of the pair; he had to outpace them, since he was bound the same way, and could not walk with them. He was not sure that he was not rather sorry for Denah, the Dutch girl; one who can laugh at herself as well as another, and all alone, too, is he thought, rather apt to enjoy the incongruous more than the suitable.

CHAPTER VII

HOW JULIA DID NOT GET THE BLUE DAFFODIL

Vrouw Van Heigen was learning a new crochet pattern; one did it in thread of a Sevres blue shade; when several long strips were made, one sewed them together with pieces of black satin between each two, and there was an antimacassar of severe but rich beauty. Denah explained all this as she set Mevrouw to work on the pattern; it was very intricate, quite exciting, because it was so difficult; the more excited the old lady became the more mistakes she made, but it did not matter; Denah was patience itself, and did not seem to mind how much time she gave. She came every day after dinner (that is to say, about six o'clock), and when she came it was frequently found necessary that Julia should go to inquire after the invalid cousin. Denah thought herself the deepest and most diplomatic young woman in Holland; she even found it in her heart to pity Julia, the poor companion, who she used as a pawn in her romance. The which, since it was transparently obvious to the pawn, gave her vast, though private, delight.

So Julia went almost daily down the long flat road to the village, and very often Rawson-Clew had to go that way too; and when he did, his time of going being of necessity much the same time as hers, he was almost bound to walk with her. There was but one way to the place; they must either walk together in the middle of the road, or else separately, one side of it; and seeing that they were of the same nationality, in a foreign land, and had some previous acquaintance, it would have been nothing short of absurd to have done the latter. So as often as they met they walked together and talked of many things, and in the course of time Rawson-Clew came to find Julia's company a good deal more entertaining than his own; although she had read nothing she ought to have read, seen nothing she ought to have seen, and occasionally both thought and said things she certainly ought not, and was not even conventionally unconventional.

They usually parted at the footpath, which shortened her way a little, Rawson-Clew giving her the basket there, and going down the road alone; in consequence of this it was some time before she knew for certain where it was he went, although she had early guessed. But one damp evening she departed from her usual custom. It had been raining heavily all day, and although it had cleared now, a thick mist lay over the wet fields.

"I shall have to go round by the road," she said, as she looked at the track.

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Rawson-Clew agreed with her. “I am rather surprised that you came out at all this evening,” he remarked. “I should have thought your careful friends would have been afraid of colds and wet feet.”

“Vrouw Van Heigen was,” Julia answered, “but Denah and I were not. It is the last opportunity we shall have for a little while; Joost goes to Germany on business to-morrow.”

Rawson-Clew laughed. “Which means, I suppose,” he said, “that she will neglect the crochet work, and you will have to superintend it? Not very congenial to you, is it?”

“Good discipline,” she told him.

“And for that reason to be welcomed? Really you deserve to succeed in whatever it is you are attempting; you do not neglect details.”

“Details are often important,” she said; “stopping at home and doing crochet work while Joost is in Germany, for instance, may help me a good deal.”

The tone struck Rawson-Clew as implying more than the words said, but he did not ask for an interpretation, and before long she had put a question to him. They were nearing a large house that stood far back from the road on the left hand side. It was a big block of a place, greyish-white in colour, and with more than half of its windows bricked up, indescribably gloomy. A long, straight piece of water lay before it, stretching almost from the walls to the road, from which it was separated by a low fence. Tall, thick trees grew in a close row on either side, narrowing the prospect; a path ran up beside them on the one hand, the only way to the house, but in the steamy mist which lay thick over everything this evening one could hardly see it, and it looked as if the place were unapproachable from the front.

Julia glanced curiously towards the house; it was the only one of any size or possible interest in the village; the only one, she had decided some time ago, that Rawson-Clew could have any reason to visit.

As they approached the gate she ventured, “You go here, do you not?”

“Yes,” he answered; “to Herr Van de Greutz.”

“The cousin tells me he is a great chemist,” Julia said.

“He is,” Rawson-Clew agreed, “and one much absorbed in his work; it is impossible to see him even on business except in the evening.”

He paused by the gate as he spoke. “You have not much further to go, have you?” he said. “Will you excuse me carrying your basket further? I am afraid I am rather behind my time.”

Julia took the basket, assuring him she had no distance to carry it, but her eyes as she said it twinkled with amusement; it was not really late, and she knew it.

“You are afraid of what will be said next,” she thought as she looked back at the man, who was already vanishing among the mists by the lake. And the thought pleased her somewhat, for it suggested that Rawson-Clew had a respect for her acumen, and also that her private fancy—that the business which brought him here was not of a kind for public discussion—was correct.

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The cousin was better that evening; she even expressed hopes of living through the summer, a thing she had not done for more than three days. Julia cheered and encouraged her in this belief (which, indeed, there was every reason to think well founded) and gave her the messages and dainties she had brought. After that they talked of the weather, which was bad; and the neighbours, who, on the whole, were good. Julia knew most of them by name by this time—the kind old Padre and his wife; the captain of the little cargo-boat, who drank a little, and his generous wife, who talked a great deal; the fat woman who kept fowls, and the thin one who sometimes stole the eggs. Julia had heard all about them before, but she heard over again, and a little about the great chemist, Herr Van de Greutz, too.

This great man was naturally only a name to the invalid and her friends, but they had always plenty to say about him. He was so distinguished that all the village felt proud to have him live on their borders, and so disagreeable that they were decidedly in awe of him. Of his domestic arrangements there was always talk; he lived in his great gloomy house with an old housekeeper, whom Julia knew by sight, and a young cook, whom she did not; the former was a permanency, the latter very much the reverse, it being difficult to find a cook equal to his demands who would for any length of time endure the shortness of the housekeeper's temper, and the worse one of her master. The domestic affairs of the chemist were a favourite subject of gossip, but sometimes his attainments came in for mention too; they did to-night, the cousin being in a garrulous mood. According to her, the great man had done everything in science worth mentioning, and was not only the first chemist in Holland, but in all the world; he looked down on all others, she said, regarding two Germans only as anything approaching his peers, all the English and French being nothing to him. He had discovered a great many things, dyes, poisons, and explosives; of the last he had recently perfected one which was twenty-two times stronger than anything before known. Its nature was, of course, a secret, but it would eventually raise the little army of Holland far above those of all other nations.

Julia listened, but especially to the last piece of information, which struck her as being the one most likely to prove interesting. Soon after hearing it, however, she was obliged to go. She made her farewells, and received messages of affection for Mevrouw, condolence for Mijnheer—who had a cold—and good wishes for Joost's journey. Then she started homewards, with a light basket and a busy mind.

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It did not take her very long to decide that if there was any truth in this talk of Van de Greutz's achievements, it must be the last mentioned—the explosive—which brought Rawson-Clew here. Her judgment of men, for working purposes at least, was quick and fairly accurate, necessity and experience had helped Nature to make it so. There were one or two things in connection with Rawson-Clew which were very clear to her, he was not a scientist pure and simple; she had never met one, but she knew he was not one, and so was not likely to be interested in the great chemist for chemistry only. Nor was he a commercial man; neither his instincts nor his abilities lay in that direction; it was not a new process, not a trade secret which brought him here. Indeed, even though he might appreciate the value of such things, he would never dream of trying to possess himself of them.

Julia understood perfectly the scale in which such acts stood to men like Rawson-Clew. To attempt to master a man's discovery for one's own ends (as in a way she was doing) was impossible, rank dishonesty, never even contemplated; to do it for business purposes—well, he might admit it was sometimes necessary in business—commerce had its morality as law, and the army had theirs—but it was not a thing he would ever do himself, he would not feel it exactly honourable. But to attempt to gain a secret for national use was quite another thing, not only justifiable but right, more especially if, as was probably the case, the attempt was in fulfilment of a direct order. If after Herr Van de Greutz had a secret worth anything to England, it was that which had brought Rawson-Clew to the little town. She was as sure of it as she was that it was the blue daffodil which had brought her.

The hateful blue daffodil! Daily, to possess it grew more imperative. The intercourse with this man, the curious seeming equality that was being established between them, cried aloud for the paying of the debt, and the establishing of the reality of equality. She longed almost passionately to be able to regard herself, to know that the man had reason to regard her, as his equal. And yet to possess the thing seemed daily more difficult; more and more plainly did she see that bribery, persuasion, cajolery were alike useless. The precious bulb could be got in one way, and one only; it would never fall into her hands by skilful accident, or nicely stimulated generosity; she must take it, or she must do without it. She must get it for herself as deliberately as, in all probability, Rawson-Clew meant to get Herr Van de Greutz's secret.

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She raised her head and looked at the flat, wet landscape with unseeing eyes that were contemptuous. How different two not dissimilar acts could be made to look! If she took the daffodil—and she would have unique opportunity to try during the next two days—-Rawson-Clew would regard her as little better than a common thief; that is, if he happened to know about it. She winced a little as she thought of the faint expression of surprise the knowledge would call up in his impassive face and cold grey eyes. She could well imagine the slight difference in his manner to her afterwards, scarcely noticeable to the casual observer, impossible to be overlooked by her. She told herself she did not care what he thought; but she did. Pride was grasping at a desired, but impossible, equality with this man, and here, were the means used only known, was the nearest way to lose it. At times he had forgotten the gap of age and circumstances between them—really forgotten it, she knew, not only ignored it in his well-bred way. He had for a moment really regarded her as an equal; not, perhaps, as he might the women of his class, rather the men of like experience and attainments with himself. That was not what she wanted, but she recognised plainly that in grasping at a shadowy social feminine equality by paying the debt, she might well lose this small substance of masculine equality, for there is no gulf so unbridgeable between man and man as a different standard of honour.

But after all, she asked herself, what did it matter? He need not know; she would pay, fulfilling her word, and proving her father an honest man (which he was not); the debtor could not know how it was done. And if he did, what then? If she told him herself—he would know no other way—she would do it deliberately with the set purpose of tarring him with the same brush; she would show him how his attempt on Herr Van de Greutz might also be made to look. He would not be convinced, of course, but at bottom the two things were so related that it would be surprising if she did not get a few shafts home. He would not show the wounds then, but they would be there; they would rankle; there would be some humiliation for him, too. A curious light crept into her eyes at the thought; she was surer of being able to reduce him than of exalting herself, and it is good, when circumstances prevent one from mounting, to drag a superior to the level of one's humiliation. For a moment she understood something of the feelings of the brute mob that throws mud.

By this time she had reached the town, though almost without knowing it; so deep was she in her thoughts that she did not see Joost coming towards her. He had been to escort Denah, who had thoughtfully forgotten to provide herself with a cloak; he was now coming back, carrying the wrap his mother had lent her.

Julia started when she became aware of him just in front of her. She was not pleased to see him; she had no room for him in her mind just then; he seemed incongruous and out of place. She even looked at him a little suspiciously, as if she were afraid the fermenting thoughts in her brain might make themselves felt by him.

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He turned and walked beside her. “I have been to take home Miss Denah,” he explained. “I saw you a long way off, and thought perhaps I might escort you; but you are angry; I am sorry.”

Julia could not forbear smiling at him. “I am not angry,” she said, as she would to a child; “I was only thinking.”

“Of something unpleasant, then, that makes you angry?”

“No; of something that must have been enjoyable. I was thinking how, in the French Revolution, the women of the people must have enjoyed throwing mud at the women of the aristocrats; how they must have liked scratching the paint and the skin from their faces, and tearing their hair down, and their clothes off.”

Joost stared in amazement. “Do you call that not unpleasant?” he said. “It is the most grievous, the most pitiable thing in all the world.”

“For the aristocrats, yes,” Julia agreed; “but for the others? Can you not imagine how they must have revelled in it?”

Joost could not; he could not imagine anything violent or terrible, and Julia went on to ask him another question, which, however, she answered herself.

“Do you know why the women of the people did it? It was not only because the others had food and they had not; I think it was more because the aristocrats had a thousand other things that they had not, and could never have—feelings, instincts, pleasures, traditions—which they could not have had or enjoyed even if they had been put in palaces and dressed like queens. It was the fact that they could never, never rise to them, that helped to make them so furious to pull all down.”

There was a sincerity of conviction in her tone, but Joost only said, “You cannot enjoy to think of such things; it is horrible and pitiable to remember that human creatures became so like beasts.”

Julia’s mood altered. “Pitiable, yes; perhaps you are right. After all, we are pitiful creatures, and, under the thin veneer, like enough to the beasts.” Then she changed the subject abruptly, and began to talk of his flowers.

But he was not satisfied with the change; instinctively he felt she was talking to his level. “Why do you always speak to me of bulbs and plants?” he said. “Do you think I am interested in nothing else?”

“No,” she said; “I speak of them because I am interested. Do you not believe me? It is quite true; you yourself have said that I should make a good florist; already I have learnt a great deal, although I have not been here long, and knew nothing before I came.”

“That is so,” he admitted; “you are very clever. Nevertheless, I do not think, if you were alone now, you would be thinking of plants. You were not when I met you; it was the Revolution, or, perhaps, human nature—you called it the Revolution in a parable, as you often do when you speak your thoughts.”

“Why do you trouble about my thoughts?” Julia said, impatiently. “How do you know what I think?”

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“Perhaps I don’t,” he answered; “only sometimes it seems to me your voice tells me though your words do not.”

“My voice?”

“Yes; it is full of notes like a violin, and speaks more than words. I suppose all voices have many notes really, but people do not often use them; they use only a few. You use many; that is why I like to listen to you when you talk to my parents, or any one. It is like a master playing on an instrument; you make simple words mean much, more than I understand sometimes; you can caress and you can laugh with your voice; I have heard you do it when I have not been able to understand what you caress, or at what you laugh, any more than an ignorant person can understand what the violin says, although he may enjoy to hear it. To-night you do not caress or laugh; there is something black in your thoughts.”

“That is human nature, as you say,” Julia said shortly, ignoring the comment on her voice. “Human nature is a hateful, ugly thing; there is no use in thinking about it.”

“It has certainly fallen,” Joost allowed; “but I have sometimes thought perhaps, if it were not so, it would be a little—a very little—monotonous.”

“You would not find it dull,” Julia told him. “I believe you would not have got on very well in the Garden of Eden, except that, since all the herbs grew after their own kind, there would be no opportunity to hybridise them.”

But the mystery of production and generation, even in the vegetable world, was not a subject that modesty permitted Joost to discuss with a girl. His manner showed it, to her impatient annoyance, as he hastily introduced another aspect of man’s first estate. “If we were not fallen,” he added, “we should have no opportunity to rise. That, indeed, would be a loss; is it not the struggle which makes the grand and fine characters which we admire?”

“I don’t admire them,” Julia returned; “I admire the people who are born good, because they are a miracle.”

He stopped to unfasten the gate; it did not occur to him that she was thinking of himself.

“I cannot agree with you,” he said, as they went up the drive together. “Rather, I admire those who have fought temptation, who are strong, who know and understand and have conquered; they inspire me to try and follow. What inspiration is there in the other? Consider Miss Denah, for an example; she has perhaps never wanted to do more wrong than to take her mother’s prunes, but is there inspiration in her? She is as soft and as kind as a feather pillow, and as inspiring. But you—you told me once you were bad; I did not believe you; I did not understand, but now I know your meaning. You

have it in your power to be bad or to be good; you know which is which, for you have seen badness, and know it as men who live see it. You have fought with it and conquered; you have struggled, you do struggle, you have strength in you. That is why you are like a lantern that is sometimes bright and sometimes dim, but always a beacon."

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“I am nothing of the sort,” Julia said sharply. They were in the dense shadow of the trees, so he could not see her face, but her voice sounded strange to him. “You do not know what you are talking about,” she said; “hardly in my life have I asked myself if a thing is right or wrong—do you understand me? Right and wrong are not things I think about.”

“It is quite likely,” he said, serenely; “different persons have different names for the same things, as you have once said; one calls it ‘honourable’ and ‘dishonourable,’ and another ‘right’ and ‘wrong,’ and another ‘wise’ and ‘unwise.’ But it is always the same thing; it means to choose the more difficult path that leads to the greater end, and leave the other way to the lesser and smaller souls.”

Julia caught her breath with a little gasping choke. Joost turned and looked at her, puzzled at last; but though they had now reached the house, and the lamplight shone on her, he could make out nothing; she brushed past him and went in quickly.

The next day Joost started for Germany. It rained more or less all day, and Julia did not go out, except for half-an-hour during the morning, when she was obliged to go marketing. She met Denah bound on the same errand, and heard from her, what she knew already, that she would not be able to come and superintend the crochet that day. And being in a black and reckless mood, she had the effrontery to laugh a silent, comprehending little laugh in the face of the Dutch girl’s elaborate explanations. Denah was a good deal annoyed, and, though her self-esteem did not allow her to realise the full meaning of the offence, she did not forget it.

Julia went home with her purchases, and spent the rest of the day in the usual small occupations. It was an interminably long day she found. She contrived to hide her feelings, however, and behaved beautifully, giving the suitable attention and suitable answers to all Mevrouw’s little remarks about the weather, and Joost’s wet journey (though, since he was in the train, Julia could not see that the wet mattered to him), and about Mijnheer’s cold, which was very bad indeed.

The day wore on. Julia missed Joost’s presence at meals; they were not in the habit of talking much to each other at such times, it is true, but she always knew when she talked to his parents that he was listening, and putting another and fuller interpretation on her words. That was stimulating and pleasant too; it was a new form of intercourse, and she did not pretend she did not enjoy it for itself, as well as for the opportunity it gave her of probing his mind and trying different ideas on him.

At last dinner was over, and tea; the tea things were washed, and the long-neglected fancy work brought out. A clock in the passage struck the hour when, of late, after an exhilirating verbal skirmish with the anxious Denah, she had set out for the village and Rawson-Clew.

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She did not pretend to herself that she did not enjoy that too, she did immensely; there was a breath from the outside world in it; there was sometimes the inspiring clash of wits, of steel on steel, always the charm of educated intercourse and quick comprehension. To-night there was nothing; no exercise to stir the blood, no solitude to stimulate the imagination, no effort of talk or understanding to rouse the mind. Nothing but to sit at work, giving one-eighth of attention to talk with Mevrouw—more was not needed, and the rest to the blue daffodils that lay securely locked up in a place only too well known.

Evening darkened, grey and dripping, to-night, supper-getting time came, and the hour for locking up the barns. Mijnheer, snuffling and wheezing a good deal, put on a coat, a mackintosh, a comforter, a pair of boots and a pair of galoshes; took an umbrella, the lantern, a great bunch of keys, and went out. Julia watched him go, and said nothing; she had been the rounds a good many times with Joost now; the family had talked about it more than once, and about her bravery with regard to rats and robbers. Neither of the old people would have been surprised if she had volunteered to go in place of Mijnheer, even if his cold had not offered a reason for such a thing. But she did not do it; he went alone, and the blue daffodil bulbs lay snug in their locked place.

The next day it still rained, but a good deal harder. There was a sudden drop in the temperature, too, such as one often finds in an English summer. The Van Heigens did not have a fire on that account, their stoves always kept a four months' sabbath; the advent of a snow-storm in July would not have been allowed to break it. Mijnheer's cold was decidedly worse; towards evening it grew very bad. He came in early from the office, and sat and shivered in the sitting-room with Julia and his wife, who was continuing the crochet unaided, and so laying up much future work for Denah. At last it was considered dark enough for the lamp to be lighted. Julia got up and lit it, and drew the blind, shutting out the grey sheet of the canal and the slanting rain.

"Dear me," Mevrouw said once again, "how bad the rain must be for Joost!"

Julia agreed, but reminded her—also once again—that it was possibly not raining in Germany.

Mijnheer looked up from his paper to remark that the weather was very bad for the crops.

"It is bad for every one," his wife rejoined; "but worse of all for you. You should be in bed. Indeed, it is not fit that you should be up; the house is like a cellar this evening."

Mijnheer did not suggest the remedy of a fire; he, too, shared the belief that stoves should not be lighted before the appointed time; he only protested at the idea of bed. "Pooh!" he said. "Make myself an invalid with Joost away! Will you go and nurse my nose, and put plasters on my chest? Go to bed now, do you say? No, no, my dear, I

will sit here; I am comfortable enough; I read my paper, I smoke my cigar; by and by, I go out to see that my barns are all safe for the night."

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But at this Mevrouw gave an exclamation; the idea of his going out in such weather was terrible, she said, and she said it a good many times.

Julia bent over her work; she heard the swish of the rain on the window, the uneven sob of the fitful wind; she heard the old people talk, the husband persist, the wife protest. She did not look up; her eyes were fixed on her needle, but she hardly saw it; more plainly she saw the dark barns, the crowded shelves, the place where the blue daffodils were. She could find them with perfect ease; could choose one in the dark as easily as Mijnheer himself; she could substitute for it another, one of the common sort of the same shape and size; no one would be the wiser; even when it bloomed, with the simple yellow flower that has beautified spring woods so long, no one would know it was not a sport of nature, a throw back to the original parent. It was the simplest thing in all the world; the safest. Not that that recommended it; she would rather it had been difficult or dangerous, it would have savoured more of a fair fight and less of trickery. Besides, such safety was nothing; anything can be made safe with care and forethought.

She caught her own name in the talk now; husband and wife were speaking lower, evidently arguing as to the propriety of asking her to go the rounds; for a moment she pretended not to hear, then she raised her head, contempt for her own weakness in her mind. It is not opportunity that makes thieves of thinking folk, and she knew it; rather it is the thief that makes opportunity, if he is up to his work. Why should she be afraid to go to the barns? She would not take the daffodil the more for going; if she meant to do it, and, through cowardice, let this opportunity slip, she would soon find another. And if she did not mean to, the proximity of the thing would not make her take it.

She put down her work. “I will lock up for you, Mijnheer; give me the keys.”

He protested, and his wife protested, much more feebly, and thanked her for going the while. They gave her many directions, and told her she must put on this, that, and the other, and must be careful not to get her feet wet, and really need not to be too particular in examining all the doors. She answered them with impatient politeness, as one does who is waiting for the advent of a greater matter; she was not irritated by the trivial interruptions which came between her and the decision which was yet to be made; it was somehow so great to her that it seemed as if it could wait. At last she was off, Mijnheer’s galoshes wallowing about her feet, his black-caped mackintosh thrown round her shoulders. She had neither hat nor umbrella. Mevrouw literally wailed when she started; but it made no impression, she came of the nation most indifferent to getting wet, and most-susceptible to death by consumption of any in Europe.

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She slopped along in the great galoshes, her back to the lighted house now, her face to the dark barns. There they were, easily accessible, waiting for her. Was she to take one, or was she not? She did not give herself any excuse for taking it, or tell herself that one out of six was not much; or that Joost, could he know the case, would not have grudged her one of his precious bulbs. There was only one thing she admitted—it was there, and her need for it was great. With it she could pay a debt that was due, show her father an honourable man, and, seeing that the affair could always remain secret, raise herself nearer to Rawson-Clew's level. Without it she could not.

She had come to the first barn now, and, unbarring the door, went in. Almost oppressive came the dry smell of the bulbs to her; very familiar, too, as familiar as the distorted shadows that her lantern made. Together they brought vividly to her mind the first time she went the rounds with Joost—the night when she told him she was bad, the worst person he knew. Poor Joost, he had interpreted her words his own way; she remembered very plainly what he said but two nights ago—right and wrong, honourable and dishonourable, wise and unwise, they meant the same thing to different people, the choosing of the higher, the leaving of the lower—and he believed no less of her. That belief, surely, was a thing that fought on the side of the angels? And then there was that other man, able, well-bred, intellectual, her superior, who had treated her as an equal, and so tacitly demanded that she should conform to his code of honour. And there was Johnny Gillat, poor, old round-faced Johnny, who, under his silly, shabby exterior, had somewhere, quite understood, the same code, and standard of a gentleman, and never doubted but that she had it too—surely these two, also, were on the side of the angels?

But it was not a matter of angels, neither was it a matter of this man's thought, or that. At bottom, it seemed all questions could be brought to plain terms—What do I think? I, alone in the big, black, contradictory world. Julia realised it, and asked herself what it mattered if he, if they, if all the world called it wrong? What—pitiless, logical question—-was wrong? Why should to take in one case be so called, and in another not? By whose word, and by what law was a thing thus, and why was she to submit to it?

She faced the darkness, the lantern at her feet, her back against the shelves, and asked herself the world-old question; and, like many before her, found no answer, because logic, merciless solvent of faith and hope and law, never answers its own riddles. Only, as she stood there, there rose up before her mind's eye the face of Joost, with its simple gravity, its earnest, trusting blue eyes. She saw it, and she saw the humble dignity with which he had shown her his six bulbs. Not as a proud possessor shows a treasure, rather as an adept shares some secret

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of his faith or art; so had he placed them in her power, given her a chance to so use this trust. She almost groaned aloud as she recalled him, and recalled, sorely against her will, a horrible tale she had once read, of a Brahmin who murdered a little child for her worthless silver anklets. Joost was a veritable child to her, powerless before her ability, trusting in her good faith, a child indeed, even if he had not placed his secret in her grasp. And it was he—this child—that she, with her superior strength, was going to rob!

She shivered. Why was he not Rawson-Clew? Why could not he take better care of himself and his possessions? She could have done it with a light heart then; there would have been a semblance of fight in it; but now—now it could not be done. Logic, the pitiless solvent, has no action on those old long-transmitted instincts; it may argue with, but it cannot destroy, those vague yearnings of the natural man towards righteousness. Julia did not argue, she only obeyed; she did not know why.

She picked up the lantern, and moved to go; as she did so, the barn door, lightly fastened, blew open. A rush of rain and wind swept in, the smell of the wet earth, and the sight of the tossing trees, and massed clouds that fled across the sky. For a moment she stood and looked, hearing the wild night voices, the sob of the wet wind, the rustle and mutter of the trees—those primitive inarticulate things that do not lie. And in her heart she felt very weary of shams and pretences, very hungry for the rest of reality and truth. She turned away, and made the round of the barns systematically, and without haste; she did not hurry past the resting-place of the blue daffodils, they were safe from her now and always.

It was not till some weeks later that she saw, and not then without also seeing it was quite impossible to disprove the proposition, that there was something grimly absurd in the idea which had possessed her that night—the thought of stealing to prove a lie, and acting dishonourably to pay a debt of honour. At the time she did not think at all, she acted on instinct only. Thank God for those dumb instincts, making for righteousness, which, in spite of theologians, are implanted somewhere in the heart of man.

So she went the rounds, fastened the barns, and came out of the last one, locking the door after her. Outside, she stood a second, the rain falling upon her bare head, the wind blowing her cloak about her. And she did not feel triumphant or victorious, nor reluctant and contemptuous of her weakness; only somehow apart and alone, and very, very tired.

CHAPTER VIII

POOFERCHJES AND JEALOUSY

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The Polkingtons were launching out; not ostentatiously with expensive entertainments or anything striking, but in all small ways, scarcely noticeable except in general effect, but none the less expensive. They could not afford it; the past nine months had been very difficult, first the Captain's unfortunate misuse of the cheque, then Violet's engagement and the necessary entertainment that it involved, and then her wedding. Financially they were in a very bad way, but that did not prevent them spending—or owing—in a rather lordly fashion. Mrs. Polkington with one daughter married, and another safely out of the way, seemed determined to take the field well with the remaining one. Cherie was quite ready to second the effort, indeed, she was the instigator; she was not only the prettiest of the sisters, but also the most ease loving, and though ambitious, less clever than the others, and a great deal more short-sighted. She had for some time ceased to be content with the position at Marbridge and the society there; she wanted to be recognised by the "county." This desire had been growing of late, for there had been a very eligible and attractive bachelor addition to that charmed circle, and he had more than once looked admiration her way. She and her mother went to work well and spared neither time nor trouble; not much result could be expected during the summer months, little done then except get ready—an expensive proceeding. It was when September brought people home for the partridge shooting and October's pheasants kept them there till hunting began, that they expected their success and the return for their outlay, and they were quite content to wait for it.

Their plans and doings were naturally not confided to any one, not even Julia; she heard seldom from Marbridge; the family feelings were of a somewhat utilitarian order, based largely on mutual benefit. She wrote now and then; she happened to do so on the day after the one on which she did not take the blue daffodil; and she mentioned in this letter that it was possible she should be home again soon. Seeing that she had decided the daffodil was unobtainable she saw little reason for staying longer; this of course she did not mention when she wrote. Somewhat to her surprise she got an almost immediate reply to her letter.

It would not suit Mrs. Polkington and Cherie to have Julia back soon at all; it is always easier to swim socially with one daughter than two, especially if the second is not good-looking. Also, Julia, cautious, long-headed and capable, was certain to criticise their proceedings and do her best to interfere with them. She would be wrong in her judgments, of course, and they right; they were sure of that, but they did not want the trouble of attempting to convert her, and anyhow, they felt they could do much better without her, and Mrs. Polkington wrote and intimated as much politely. She gave several excellent reasons, all of which were perfectly transparent to Julia, though that did not matter, seeing that she was sufficiently hurt in her feelings, or her pride, to at once determine to fulfil her mother's wishes and do anything rather than go where she was not wanted.

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There was not much said of the plans and doings in Mrs. Polkington's letter, but a little crept in almost without the writer's knowledge, enough to rouse Julia's suspicions. Why, she asked herself, was her mother suddenly enamoured with the beauty of Chippendale furniture? How did she know that Sturt's (the tailor's) prices were lower for costumes this season? And in what way had she become aware what the Ashton's last parlour-maid thought, if she had not engaged that young woman for her own service? Julia was at once uneasy and disgusted; the last alike with the proceedings themselves and the attempt to deceive her about them. And another letter she received at the same time did not make her any more satisfied; it was from Johnny Gillat, about as silly and uninforming a letter as ever man wrote, but it contained one piece of information. Mr. Gillat was going to have a great excitement in the early autumn—Captain Polkington was coming to London, perhaps for as long as three months. Johnny did not know why; he thought perhaps to have some treatment for his rheumatism; Mrs. Polkington had arranged it. Julia did know why, and the short-sightedness of the policy roused her contempt. To thus put the family drawback out of the way, and leave him to his own devices and Mr. Gillat's care, seemed to her as unwise towards him as it was unkind to Johnny. She would have written that minute to expostulate with her mother if she had not just then been called away.

These two disturbing letters arrived on the day that Joost came home from Germany, after the English mail for the day had gone. Julia comforted herself with this last fact when she was called before she had time to write to her mother; she could write when she went to bed that night; the letter would go just as soon as if it was written now; so she went to answer Mevrouw's summons to admire the carved crochet hook her son had brought her as a present from Germany. Joost had brought several small presents besides the crochet hook, a pipe for his father, and two other trifles—a small vase and a photograph of a plant which was the pride of the Berlin gardens that year—an aloe, no yucca, but one of the true rare blooming sort, in full flower. Julia was asked to take her choice of these two; she chose the photograph because it seemed to her much more characteristic of the giver, and also because it was easier to put away. She had no idea of pleasing Joost by so doing; to tell the truth she hardly felt desirous of pleasing him, for though she had refrained from taking his blue daffodil and was in a way satisfied that she had done so, she did not feel exactly grateful to him for unconsciously standing between her and it, from which some may conclude that virtue was not an indigenous plant with Julia.

When Denah arrived after dinner she was given the vase. Before Joost went away she had expressed in his hearing a wish that she had something from Berlin; she had said it rather pronouncedly as one might express a desire for a bear from the Rocky Mountains, or a ruby from Burmah; she could hardly have received one of those with more enthusiasm than she did the vase. She admired it from every point of view and thanked Joost delightedly; the delight, however, was a little modified when Mijnheer let slip the fact that Julia also had a present from Berlin.

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“Have you?” she asked suspiciously. “What is it? Show me.”

Julia fetched the photograph and exhibited it with as little elation as possible. Denah did not admire it greatly, she said she much preferred her own present.

At this Joost smiled a little; it was only what he expected, and Julia began tactfully to talk about the beauties of the vase; but Denah was not to be put off her main point.

“Do you not prefer mine; really and truly, would you not rather it had been yours?” she asked.

Julia could have slipped out of the answer quite easily; the Polkingtons were all good at saying things to be interpreted according to taste; but Joost, with signal idiocy, stepped in and prevented.

“No,” he said, “she preferred the photograph; she chose it of the two.”

At this intelligence Denah’s face was a study; Julia could not but be amused by it although she was sorry. She did not want to make the girl jealous, it was absurd that she should be; but absurdity never prevents such things, and would not now, nor would it make her pleasanter if she were once fairly roused. Julia smoothed matters over as well as she could, which was very well considering, though she failed to entirely allay Denah’s suspicions.

As soon after as she could she set out for the village, leaving the field to the Dutch girl, and carrying with her enough unpleasant thoughts on other things to prevent her from giving any more consideration to the silly spasm of jealousy. She had thrust her two letters from England into her pocket, and as she went she kept turning and turning their news in her mind though without much result. There seemed very little she could do except prevent the banishing of her father to London. She would write to her mother about that, and, what might be rather more effective, to Mr. Gillat. She could tell him it must not happen, and instruct him how to place obstacles in the way; he would do his best to fulfil her requests, she was sure, even to going down to Marbridge and establishing himself there about the time of her father’s intended departure. But with regard to the rest of her mother’s plans, or Cherie’s, whichever it might be, there seemed nothing to be done. To write would be useless; to go home, even if she swallowed her pride and did so, very little better; of course she had not anything very definite to go upon, only a hint here and there, yet she guessed pretty well what they were doing, what spending, and what they thought to get by it. The old, long-headed Julia feared for the result; Mrs. Polkington, clever though she undoubtedly was, had never succeeded in big ventures; she had not the sort of mind for it; she had never made a wholly successful big stride; her real climbing had been done very slowly, so the old Julia feared for her. And the new one, who had grown up during the past months, revolted against the whole thing, finding it sordid, despicable, dishonourable even,

somehow all wrong. And perhaps because the old cautious Julia could do nothing to avert the consequences, the newer nature was in the ascendant that evening, and consequences were in time forgotten, and disgust and weariness and shame—which included self and all things connected with it—took possession of the girl.

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By and by she heard a step behind her—Rawson-Clew. She had forgotten his existence; she was almost sorry to be reminded of it; she felt so ashamed of herself and her people, so conscious of the gulf between them and him. So very conscious of this last that she suddenly felt disinclined for the effort of struggling to hide or bridge it.

He caught up with her. “How has the crochet progressed this week under your care?” he asked her lightly.

“It has not progressed,” she answered; “there are enough mistakes in it now to occupy Denah for a long time.”

He took her basket from her, and she looked at him thoughtfully. He was just the same as usual, quiet, drawling voice, eyeglass, everything—she wondered if he were ever different; how he would act, say, in her circumstances. If they could change bodies, now, and he be Julia Polkington, with her relations, needs and opportunities, what would he do? Would he still be impassive, deliberate, equal to all occasions? Would he find it easy to keep his inviolable laws of good-breeding and honour, and so forth?

“There is something I should like to ask you,” she said suddenly.

“Yes?” he inquired.

“Is it much trouble to you to be honest?”

He was a little surprised, though not so much as he would have been earlier in their acquaintance. “That,” he said, “I expect rather depends on what you mean by honest. I imagine you don’t refer to lying and stealing, and that sort of thing, since nobody finds it difficult to avoid them.”

“They are not gentlemanly?” she suggested.

“I don’t know that I ever looked at it in that way,” he said; “or, indeed, any way. One does not think about those sort of things; one does not do them, that’s all.”

She nodded. The careless change of pronoun, which in a way included her with himself, was not lost upon her.

“In the matter of half-truths,” she inquired; “how about them?”

“I don’t think I have given that subject consideration either,” he answered, rather amused; “there does not seem any need at my age. One does things, or one does not; abstractions don’t appeal to most men after thirty.”

Again Julia nodded. “It looks to me,” she said, “as if you take your morality, like your dinner, as a matter of course; it’s always there; you don’t have to bother after it; you don’t really know how it comes, or what it is worth.”

Now and then Rawson-Clew had observed in his acquaintance with Julia, she said things which had a way of lighting him up to himself; this was one of the occasions. “Possibly you are right,” he said, with faint amusement. “How do you take yours? Let us consider yours; I am sure it would be a great deal more interesting.”

“There would be more variety in it,” she said significantly.

“What is your opinion about half-truths?” he inquired, with grave mimicry of her.

> “’Half a truth, however small,
> Is better than no truth at all,’”

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she quoted. “That is so; it is better, safer to deal with—to explain away if it is found out, to deceive with if it is not. But it is not half so easy as the whole truth; that is the easiest thing in the world; it takes no ingenuity, no brains, no courage, no acting, no feeling the pulse of your people, no bolstering up or watching or remembering. If I wanted to teach the beauty of truth, I would set my pupils to do a little artistic white lying on their own account, to make things look four times as good as they really were, and not to forget to make them square together, that would teach them the advantage of truth.”

“Do you think so?” Rawson-Clew said. “It is not the usual opinion; fools and cowards are generally supposed to be the great dealers in deceit and subterfuge.”

“May be,” Julia allowed; “but I don’t happen to have come across that sort much; the other I have, and I am just about sick of it—I am sick of pretending and shamming and double-dealing, of saying one thing and implying another, and meaning another still—-you don’t know what it feels like, you have never had to do it; you wouldn’t, of course; very likely you couldn’t, even. I am weary of it; I am weary of the whole thing.”

Rawson-Clew screwed the glass into his eye carefully but did not look at her; he had an idea she would rather not. “What is it?” he asked kindly. “What has gone wrong to-night? Too much pudding again?”

“No,” she answered, with a quick, if partial, recovery; “too much humbug, too much self. I have seen a great deal of myself lately, and it’s hateful.”

“I cannot agree with you.”

“Do you like having a lot of yourself?”

“No; I like yourself.”

She laughed a little; in her heart she was pleased, but she only said, “I don’t; I know what it really is.”

“And I do not?”

“No,” she answered; then, with a sudden determination to tell him the worst, and to deal in this newly admired honesty, she said, “I will tell you, though. You remember my father? You may have politely forgotten him, or smoothed out your recollections of him—remember him now; he is just about what you thought him.”

“Indeed?” the tone was that one of polite interest, which she had come to know so well. “Your shoe is unfastened; may I tie it for you? The question is,” he went on, as he stooped to her shoe, “what did I think of your father? I’m sure I don’t know, and I hardly think you are in a position to, either.”

She moved impatiently, so that the shoelace slipped out of his hand, and he had to begin all over again. It was a very shabby shoe; at another time she might have minded about it, and even refused to have it fastened on that account; to-night she did not care, which was perhaps as well, for Rawson-Clew knew long ago all about the shabbiness —the only thing he did not know before was the good shape of the foot inside.

“I know perfectly well what you thought my father,” she said; “if you have forgotten, I will remind you. You did not think him an adventurer, I know; of course, you saw he had not brains enough.”

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But here the shoe tying was finished, and Rawson-Clew intimated politely that he was not anxious to be reminded of things he had forgotten. "You began by saying you would tell me about yourself," he said; "will you not go on?"

"I have more brains than my father," she said, "and no more principles."

"*Ergo*—you succeed where he falls short; in fact, you are an adventuress—is that it? My dear child, you neither are, nor ever could be; believe me, I really do know, though, as you have indicated, my morality is rather mechanical and my experience much as other men's. You see, I, too, have graduated in the study of humanity in the university of cosmopolis; I don't think my degree is as high as yours, and I certainly did not take it so young, but I believe I know an adventuress when I see one. You will never do in that walk of life; I don't mean to insinuate that you haven't brains enough, or that you would ever lose your head; it isn't that you would lose, it's your heart."

"I haven't;" Julia cried hotly. "I have not lost my heart; that has nothing to do with it."

"I did not say that you had," Rawson-Clew reminded her; "of course not, you have not lost it, and could not easily. I did not mean that; I only meant that it would interfere with your success as an adventuress."

"It would not," Julia persisted; "I don't care about people a bit; it isn't that, it is simply that I am sick of deception, that is why I am telling you the truth. And as for the other thing—the daffodil"—she forgot that he did not know about it—"I couldn't take it from any one so silly, so childish, so trusting."

"Of course not," Rawson-Clew said. "I don't know what the daffodil thing is, nor from whom you could not take it—please don't tell me; I never take the slightest interest in other people's business, it bores me. But, you see, you bear out what I say; you are of those strong who are merciful; you would make no success as an adventuress. Besides, your tastes are too simple; I have some recollections of your mentioning corduroy—er—trousers and a diet of onions as the height of your ambition."

Julia laughed in spite of herself. "That is only when I retire," she said. "I haven't retired yet; until I do I am—"

"The incarnation of the seven deadly sins?" Rawson-Clew finished for her, with a smile in his eyes. "No doubt of it; I expect that is what makes you good company."

So, after all, it came about that she did not get her confession made in full. But, then, there hardly seemed need for it; it appeared that Rawson-Clew already knew a great deal about her, and did not think the worse of her for it. Rather it seemed he thought better than she had even believed; he, himself, too, was rather different—there had

crept a note of warmth and personality into their acquaintance which had not been there before. Julia had pleasant thoughts for company on her homeward walk, in spite

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of the worry of the letters she carried with her; she even for a moment had an idea of putting the matter they contained before Rawson-Clew and asking his advice; that is, if the friendship which had begun to dawn on their acquaintance that evening grew yet further. It did grow, but she did not ask him, loyalty to her family prevented; there were, however, plenty of other things to talk about, and the friendship got on well until the end came.

The end came about the time of the annual fair. This fair was a great event in the little town; it only lasted three days, and only the middle one of the three was important, or in the least provocative of disorder; but—so Mijnheer said—it upset business very much. After inquiry as to how this came about, Julia learnt that it was found necessary to give the workmen a holiday on the principal day. They got so drunk the night before, that most of them were unfit for work, and a few even had the hardihood to stop away entirely, so as to devote the whole day to getting drunk again. Under these circumstances, Mijnheer made a virtue of necessity, and gave a whole holiday to the entire staff.

“Does the office have a holiday too?” Julia asked.

Mijnheer nodded. “These young fellows,” he said, “are all for holidays; they are not like their fathers. Now it is always ’I must ride on my wheel; I must row in my boat; I must play my piano; let us put the work away as soon as we can, and forget it.’ It was not so in my young days; then we worked, or we slept; playing was for children. There were some great men of business in those days.”

Julia was not in a position to contradict this; she only said, “It is a real holiday, then, like a bank holiday in England?”

“A real holiday, yes,” he answered her; “a holiday for you too, if you like. Would you like a real English bank holiday?” He called to his wife: “See here,” he said, “here is an English miss who would like an English holiday; when the workmen have theirs she shall have hers too, is it not so?”

Mevrouw nodded, laughing. “But what will you do with it?” she asked.

“I should go out,” Julia answered; “if it is fine I should go out all day.”

“To the fair?” Mijnheer asked. “You would not like that alone; it would be very rough.”

“I should go out into the country,” Julia said. “I should make an excursion all by myself.”

They seemed a good deal amused by her taste, but the idea suggested in fun was really determined upon; Julia, so Mijnheer promised, should have a holiday when every one else did, and do just what she pleased.

“You shall do as you like,” he said; “even though it is not to go to the fair and eat *pooferchjes*. It is only once in a year one can eat *pooferchjes*, or three times rather; they are to be had on each of the three days.”

“What are they?” Julia asked. “I have never heard of them.”

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“Never heard of them,” the old man exclaimed. “They do not have them, I suppose, on an English bank holiday? Then certainly you must have them here; we will go and eat them on the first day of the fair, when everything is nice and clean, and there are not too many people about. I will find a nice quiet place, and we will go and eat them together, after tea, before there are great crowds. Will you come with me? I shall be taking my young lady to the fair like a gay dog.”

He chuckled at the idea, and Julia readily agreed. “I shall be delighted,” she said.

When Denah came, a little later, it seemed she would be delighted too, although she was not specially asked. But when she heard of the plan, she announced that her father had promised to take Anna and herself, and what could be better than that the parties should join? Mijnheer quite approved of this, so did Julia; and she, on hearing Denah’s proposal, at once saw that Joost was included as he had not been before. Joost did not like fairs; he objected to noise, and glare, and crowds, and all such things; neither did he care for *pooferchjes*; they were too bilious for him. Nevertheless he agreed to join the party; Denah was quite sure it was entirely on her account.

On the morning of the first day of the fair, Julia went into the town to buy cakes to take with her on to-morrow’s excursion. She had not changed her mind about that; she was still fully determined to go and spend a long day in the Dunes. She had not told the Van Heigens of the place chosen; she and Mijnheer had much fun and mystery about it, he declaring she was going to the wood to ride donkeys with the head gardener’s fat wife. There was another thing she also had not told the Van Heigens—a slight alteration there had been in her plans; she was not, as she had first intended, going alone. It had somehow come about that Rawson-Clew was going with her; he had never seen the Dunes, and he had nothing to do that day, and he was not going to Herr Van de Greutz in the evening, it seemed rather a good idea that he should go for a holiday too; Julia saw no objection to it, but also she saw that it would not do to tell her Dutch employers. She had never mentioned Rawson Clew to them—there had not seemed any need; she never met him till she was clear of the town and the range of reporting tongues there, and she usually parted from him before she reached the village and the observers there, so nothing was known of the evening walks. Which was rather a pity, for, as Julia afterwards found out, it is often wisest to tell something of your doings, especially if you cannot tell all, and they are likely to come in for public notice.

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Julia bought her cakes, and went about the town feeling as holiday-like as the gayest peasant there, although she had no wonderful holiday head-dress of starched lace and gold plates. She did not see any one she knew, except old Marthe, Herr Van de Greutz's housekeeper. She had met the old woman several times when she was marketing, and was on speaking terms with her now, so she had to stop and listen to her troubles. They were only the same old tale; her newest young cook had left suddenly, and she had come to the town to see if she could get another from among the girls who had come in for the fair. She had no success at all, and was setting out for home, despondent, and not at all comforted to think that she would have to trudge in and try all over again the day after to-morrow. To-morrow, itself, the great day, it was no good trying; no girl would pay attention to business then.

In the evening Julia went again into the town, but this time with Mijnheer and Joost, and dressed in her best dress. It was not at all a new dress, nor at all a grand one, but it was well chosen, well made and well fitted, and certainly very well put on; the gloves and hat, too, accorded with it, and she herself was in a humour of gaiety that bordered on brilliancy. Was she not going to have a holiday to-morrow, and was she not going to spend it in company with a man she liked, and in despite of Dutch propriety, which would certainly have been thoroughly and outrageously shocked thereby? Denah knew nothing of the causes at work, but she was not slow to discern the result when she and her father and sister met the Van Heigen party that evening. She smoothed the bow at the neck of her best dress, and looked at her gloves discontentedly; she did not altogether admire Julia's clothes, they were not at all Dutch; but she had an intuitive idea that they came nearer to Paris, the sartorial ideal of the nations, than her own did. She looked suspiciously at the English girl, her eyes were shining and sparkling like stars; they were full of alert interest and half-suppressed mischief. She looked at everything, and overlooked nothing, though she was talking to Mijnheer in a soft, purring voice, that was full of fun and wickedness. Now she turned to Joost, and her voice took another tone; she was teasing him, making fun of him in a way that Denah decided was scandalous, although his father was there, aiding and abetting her. Joost did not seem to resent it a bit; he listened quite serenely, and even turned a look on her as one who has another and private interpretation of the words. Anna saw nothing of this; she only thought Julia very nice, and her dress pretty, and her talk gay. But Denah, though not always so acute, was in love, and she saw a good deal, and treasured it up for use when the occasion should offer.

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They ate *pooferchjes*, sitting in a funny little covered stall; at least, the top and three sides were covered, the fourth was open to the street. A long, narrow table, with clean white calico spread on it, ran down the centre of the place, and narrow forms stood on either side of it. It was lighted by a Chinese lantern hung from the roof, and also, and more especially, by a flare outside of the charcoal fire, where the *pooferchjes* were cooked. A powerful brown-armed peasant woman made them, beating the batter till it frothed, and dropping it by the spoonful into the little hollows in the great sheet of iron that glowed on the stove without. The glow of the fire was on her too, on her short skirt and her fine arms, and the flaring light, that flickered in the breeze, danced on her strong, brown face, with its resolute lines, and splendid gold-ringed head-dress. People kept passing to and fro all the time, or stopping sometimes to look in; solemnly-gay holiday people, enjoying themselves after their own fashion. The light flickered on them, too, and on the brick pavement, and on the trees, plentiful almost as canals in the town. Julia leaned forward and looked, and listened to the guttural Dutch voices, and the curious patois to be heard now and then, and the distant notes of music that blended with it. And the flickering lights and shadows danced across her mind, and the simple holiday feeling of it all got to her head.

Then the *pooferchjes* were done and brought in, little round, crisp things, smoking hot, and very greasy; something like tiny English pancakes—at least one might say so if one had not tasted them. And then more people came in and sat at the opposite side of the table, a gardener of another bulb grower, and his two daughters. He raised his hat to the Van Heigen party, and received a similar salutation in return, though he and they were careful to put their hats on again, a draught being a thing much feared. Mijnheer shook hands with the father, and they entered into conversation about the weather; the girls looked across at Denah and Anna, and more still at Julia, whose small, slim hands they evidently admired.

But at last the *pooferchjes* were all eaten and paid for. To do the latter the notary, Mijnheer and Joost all brought out large purses and counted out small coins with care, and the party came out, making way for new-comers. They did not go straight home again, as was first intended, Julia's interest and gaiety seemed to have infected the others—all except Denah, and they walked for a little while among the booths of toys, and sweets, and peepshows, and entertainments. And as they went, Denah grew more and more silent, watching Julia, who was walking with Joost; the arrangement was not of the English girl's seeking, but Denah took no account of that. The thing of which she did take account was that they two talked as they walked together, he as well as she, but both with the ease and quick comprehension of people who have talked together often.

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Mijnheer stopped to look at the merry-go-round; he admired the cheerful tune that it played. He was not a connoisseur of music; a barrel-organ was as good to him as the organ in the Groote Kerk. The others stopped too; Anna exclaimed on the life-like and clever appearance of the bobbing horses, whereupon her father suggested that perhaps the girls would like to try a ride on the machine, and then befel the crowning mischief of the evening. Julia and Anna accepted the proposal readily. Denah declined; she felt in no humour for it; also she thought a refusal showed a superior mind—one likely to appeal to a serious young man, who had no taste for the gaudy, gay, or fast, and who also had a tendency towards seasickness. But, alas, for the fickleness of man! While Denah stood with her father and Mijnheer, Julia rode round the centre of lighted mirrors on a prancing wooden horse, and Joost—the serious, the sometimes seasick—rode beside her on a dappled grey, to the familiar old English tune, “Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-a.”

CHAPTER IX

THE HOLIDAY

The Dunes lay some little distance from the town, a low, but suddenly-rising hill boundary, that shut in the basin of flat land. They were all of pure sand, though in many places so matted with vegetation that it was hardly recognisable as such. Trees grew in places, especially on the side that fronted towards the town; the way up lay through a dense young wood of beech and larch, and a short, broad-leafed variety of poplar. There was no undergrowth, but between the dead leaves one could see that a dark green, short-piled moss had managed to find a hold here and there, though so smooth was it that it looked more like old enamel than a natural growth. The trees had the appearance of high summer, deeply, intensely green, so that they seemed almost blackish in mass. There was no breeze among them; even the dapples of sunlight which found their way through the roof of leaves hardly stirred, but lay in light patches, like scattered gold upon the ground. Flies and gnats moved and shimmered, a busy life, whose small voices were the only sound to be heard; all else was very still, with the glorious reposeful stillness of full summer; not oppressive, without weariness or exhaustion, rather as if the whole creation paused at this zenith to look round on its works, and beheld and saw that they were all very good.

There were no clear paths, apparently few people went that way; certainly there was no one about when Julia and Rawson-Clew came. It is true they saw a kind of little beer-garden at the foot of the slope, but there was no one idling about it.

“We shall have to come back here for lunch,” Julia said.

And when he suggested that it was rather a pity to have to retrace their steps, she answered, “It doesn’t matter, we are not going anywhere particular; we may just as well wander one way as another. When we get to the top this time we will explore to the

right, and when we get there again after lunch, we will go to the left; don't you think that is the best way? This is to be a holiday, you know."

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“Is a real holiday like a dog’s wanderings?” Rawson-Clew inquired; “bounded by no purpose except dinner when hungry?”

Julia thought it must be something of the kind. “Though,” she said, “dogs always seem to have some end in view, or perhaps a dozen ends, for though they tear off after an imaginary interest as if there was nothing else in the world, they get tired of it, or else start another, and forget all about the first.”

“That must also be part of the essence of a holiday,” Rawson-Clew said; “at least, one would judge it to be so; boys and dogs, the only things in nature who really understand the art of holiday-making, chase wild geese, and otherwise do nothing of any account, with an inexhaustible energy, and a purposeful determination wonderful to behold. Also, they forget that there is such a thing as to-morrow, so that must be important too.”

“I can’t do that,” Julia said.

“You might try when you get to the top,” he suggested. “I will try then; I don’t think I could do anything requiring an effort just now.”

Julia agreed that she could not either, and they went on up straight before them. It is as easy to climb a sand-hill in one place as in another, provided you stick your feet in the right way, and do not mind getting a good deal of sand in your boots. So they went straight, and at last got clear of the taller trees, and were struggling in thickets of young poplars, and other sinewy things. The sand was firmer, but honeycombed with rabbit holes, and tangled with brambles, and the direction was still upwards, though the growth was so thick, and the ground so bad, that it was often necessary to go a long way round. But in time they were through this too, and really out on the top. Here there was nothing but the Dunes, wide, curving land, that stretched away and away, a tableland of little hollows and hills, like some sea whose waves have been consolidated; near at hand its colours were warm, if not vivid, but in the far distance it grew paler as the vegetation became less and less, till, far away, almost beyond sight, it failed to grey helm grass, and then altogether ceased, leaving the sand bare. Behind lay the trees through which they had come, sloping downwards in banks of cool shadows to the map-like land and the distant town below; away on right and left were other groups of trees, on sides of hills and in rounded hollows, looking small enough from here, but in reality woods of some size. Here there was nothing; but, above, a great blue sky, which seemed very close; and, underfoot, low-growing Dune roses and wild thyme which filled the warm, still air with its matchless scent; nothing but these, and space, and sunshine, and silence.

Julia stopped and looked round, drawing in her breath; she had found what she had come to see—what, perhaps, she had been vaguely wanting to find for a long time.

“Isn’t it good?” she said at last. “Did you know there was so much room—so much room anywhere?”

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Rawson-Clew looked in the direction she did; he had seen so much of the world, and she had seen so little of it—that is, of the part which is solitary and beautiful. Yet he felt something of her enthusiasm for this sunny, empty place—than which he had seen many finer things every year of his life.

Perhaps this thought occurred to her, for she turned to him rather wistfully: "I expect it does not seem very much to you," she said; "you have seen such a great deal."

"I do not remember to have seen anything quite like this," he answered; "and if I had, what then? One does not get tired of things."

Julia looked at him thoughtfully. "I wonder," she said, "if one would? If one would get weary of it, and want to go back to the other kind of life?"

She was not thinking of Dune country, rather of the simple life it represented to her just then. Rawson-Clew caught the note of seriousness in her tone and reminded her that thought for the past or future was no part of a holiday. "Remember," he said, "you are to-day to emulate dogs and boys."

She laughed. "How am I to begin?" she asked. "How will you?"

"I shall sit down," he said; "I feel I could be inconsequent much better if I sat down to it; that is no doubt because I am past my first youth."

"No," she said, sitting down and putting her hat beside her; "it is because your folly-muscles are stiff from want of use; you have played lots of things, I expect—it is part of your necessary equipment to be able to do so, but I doubt if you have ever played the fool systematically. I don't believe you have ever done, and certainly never enjoyed anything inconsequent or foolish in your life."

"If you were to ask me," he returned, "I should hardly say you excelled in that direction either. How many inconsequent and foolish things have you done in your life?"

"Some, and I should like to do some more. If I were alone now, do you know what I should do? You see that deep hollow of sparkling white sand? I should take off my clothes and lie there in the sun."

Rawson-Clew turned so that his back was that way. "Do not let me prevent you," he said.

Julia made use of the opportunity to empty the sand out of her boots.

He looked round as she was finishing fastening them. "But why put them on again?" he asked.

“Because I haven’t retired from the world, yet,” she answered, “and so I can’t do quite all I like.”

“When you do retire, will this ideal summer costume also be included in the programme? Your taste in dress grows simpler; quite ancient British, in fact.”

“The ancient Britons wore paint, and probably had fashions in it; I don’t think of imitating them. Tell me,” she said, turning now to gather the sweet-scented wild thyme, “did you ever really do anything foolish in your life? I should like to know.”

He answered her that he had, but without convincing her. Afterwards, he came to the conclusion that, whatever might have been the case before, he that day qualified to take rank with any one in the matter.

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All the same, it was a very pleasant day, and they both enjoyed it much; it is doubtful if any one in the town or its environs enjoyed that holiday more than these two, who, from different reasons, had probably never had so real a holiday before. They wandered over the great open tract of land, meeting no one; once they came near enough to the seaward edge to see the distant shimmer of water; once they found themselves in the part where there has been some little attempt at cultivation, and small patches of potatoes struggle for life, and a little railway crosses the sandhills. Twice they came upon the road along which, on working days, the peasant women bring their fish to market in the town. But chiefly they kept to the small, dense woods, where the sunlight only splashed the ground; or to the open solitary spaces where the bees hummed in the wild thyme, and the butterflies chased each other over the low rose bushes.

A good deal after mid-day, at a time dictated entirely by choice, and not custom, they made their way back to the beer garden. It was a very little place, scarcely worthy of the name; the smallest possible house, more like a barn than anything else, right in the shadow of the wood. The fare to be obtained was bad beer, excellent coffee, new bread, and old cheese; but it was enough, supplemented by the cakes bought yesterday in the town; Julia knew enough of the ways of the place to know one can bring one's own food to such places without giving offence. As in the morning, when they first passed it, there was no one about, every one had gone to the fair, except one taciturn old woman who brought the required things and then shut herself in the house. The meal was spread under the trees on a little green-painted table, with legs buried deep in sand; there were two high, straight chairs set up to the table, and a wooden footstool put by one for Julia, who, seeing it, said this was certainly a picnic, and it was really necessary to eat the *broodje* in the correct picnic way. Rawson-Clew tried, with much gravity, but she laughed till the taciturn old woman looked out of window, and wondered who they were, and how they came to be here.

When the meal was done, they went back again up the steep slope, and then away on the left. The country on this side was less open, and more hilly, deeper hollows and larger woods, still there was not much difficulty in finding the way. The latter part of the day was not so fine as the earlier, the sky clouded over, and, though there was still no wind, the air grew more chilly. They hardly noticed the change, being in a dense young wood where there was little light, but Julia lost something of the holiday spirit, and Rawson-Clew became grave, talking more seriously of serious things than had ever before happened in their curious acquaintanceship. They sat down to rest in a green hollow, and Julia began to arrange neatly the bunch of short-stemmed thyme flowers that she carried. They had been quiet

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for some little time, she thinking about their curious acquaintance, and wondering when it would end. Of course it would end—she knew that; it was a thing of mind only; there was very little feeling about it—a certain mutual interest and a liking that had grown of late, kindness on his part, gratitude on hers, nothing more. But of its sort it had grown to be intimate; she had told him things of her thoughts, and of herself, and her people too, that she had told to no one else; and he, which was perhaps more remarkable, had sometimes returned the compliment. And yet by and by—soon, perhaps—he would go away, and it would be as if they had never met; it was like people on a steamer together, she thought, for the space of the voyage they saw each other daily, saw more intimately into each other than many blood relations did, and then, when port was reached, they separated, the whole thing finished. She wondered when this would finish, and just then Rawson-Clew spoke, and unconsciously answered her thought.

“I am going back to England soon,” he said.

She looked up. “Is your work here finished?” she asked.

“It is at an end,” he answered; “that is the same thing.”

Then she, her intuition enlightened by a like experience suddenly knew that he, too, had failed. “You mean it cannot be done,” she said.

He opened his cigarette case, and selected a cigarette carefully. “May I smoke?” he asked; “there are a good many gnats and mosquitoes about here.” He felt for a match, and, when he had struck it, asked impersonally, “Do you believe things cannot be done?”

“Yes,” she answered; “I know that sometimes they cannot; I have proved it to myself.”

“You have not, then, much opinion of the people who do not know when they are beaten?”

“I don’t think I have,” she answered; “you cannot help knowing when you are beaten if you really are—that is, unless you are a fool. Of course, if you are only beaten in one round, or one effort, that is another thing; you can get up and try again. But if you are really and truly beaten, by yourself, or circumstances, or something—well, there’s an end; there is nothing but to get up and go on.”

“Just so; in that case, as you say, there is not much going to be done, except going home.”

Julia nodded. “But I can’t even do that,” she said. “I am beaten, but I have got to stay here all the same, having nowhere exactly to go.”

This was the first time she had spoken even indirectly of her own future movements. “But, perhaps,” he suggested, “if you stay, you may find a back way to your object after all.”

She shook her head. “It is the back way I tried. No, there is no way; it is blocked. I know, because it is myself that blocks it.”

“In that case,” he said, “I’m afraid I must agree with you; there is no way; oneself is about the most insurmountable block of all. I might have known that you were hardly likely to make any mistake as to whether you were really beaten or not.”

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“I should not think it was a mistake you were likely to make either,” she observed.

“You think not? Well, I had no chance this time; the fact has been made pretty obvious to me.”

She did not say she was sorry; in her opinion it was an impertinence to offer condolence to failure. “I suppose,” she said, after a pause, “there is not a back way—a door, or window, even, to your object?”

“Unfortunately, no. There are no windows at the back; and as to the door—like you, it was that which I tried, with the result that recently—yesterday, in fact—I was metaphorically shown out.”

Julia had learnt enough by this time, though she had not been told for certain, that her first suspicions were right; to be sure, it was the explosive which took Rawson-Clew to the little village evening after evening. She had gathered as much from various things which had been said, though she did not know at all how he was trying to get it, nor in what way he had introduced himself to Herr Van de Greutz. Whatever method he had tried it was now clear he had failed; no doubt been found out, for the chemist, unlike Joost Van Heigen, was the very reverse of unsuspecting, and thoroughly on the look-out for other nations who wanted to share his discovery. For a moment Julia wished she had been in Rawson-Clew’s place; of course she, too, might have failed—probably would; she had no reason to think she would succeed where he could not; but she certainly would not have failed in this for the reason she had failed with the blue daffodil. The attempt would have been so thoroughly well worth making; there would have been some sport in it, and a foe worthy of her steel. In spite of her desire for the simple life, she had too much real ability for this sort of intrigue, and too much past practice in subterfuge, not to experience lapses of inclination for it when she saw such work being done, and perhaps not done well. Of this, however, she naturally did not speak to Rawson-Clew; she rearranged her flowers in silence for a little while, at last she said—

“It is hateful to fail.”

“It is ignominious, certainly; one does not wish to blazon it from the housetops; still, doubtless like your crochet work, it is good discipline.”

“Maybe,” Julia allowed, but without conviction. “Yours seems a simple failure, mine is a compound one. If it is ignominious, as you say, to fail, it would have been equally ignominious in another way if I had succeeded. I could not have been satisfied either way.”

“That sounds very complicated,” Rawson-Clew said; “but then, I imagine you are a complicated young person.”

“And you are not.”

“Not young, certainly,” he said, lighting another cigarette.

“Nor complicated,” she insisted; “you are built on straight lines; there are given things you can do and can’t do, would do and would not do, and might do in an emergency. It is a fine kind of person to be, but it is not the kind which surprises itself.”

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Rawson-Clew blew a smoke-ring into the air; he was smiling a little.

“How old are you?” he said. “Twenty? Almost twenty-one, is it? And until you were sixteen you knocked about a bit? Sixteen is too young to come much across the natural man—not the artful dodging man, or the man of civilisation, but the natural, primitive man, own blood relation to Adam and the king of the Cannibal Islands. You may meet him by and by, and if you do he may surprise you; he is full of surprises—he rather surprises himself, that is, if his local habitat is ordinarily an educated, decent person.”

“You have not got a natural man,” Julia said shortly; she was annoyed, without quite knowing why, by his manner.

“Have I not? Quite likely; certainly, he has never bothered me, but I should not like to count on him. Since we have got to personalities, may I say that you have got a natural woman, and plenty of her; also a marked taste for the works of the machine, in preference to the face usually presented to the company?”

“The works are the only interesting part; I don’t care for the drawing-room side of things; they are cultivated, but they are too much on the skin. I would much rather be a stoker, or an engineer, than sit on deck all day and talk about Florentine art, and the Handel Festival, and Egyptology, and the gospel of Tolstoy, and play cricket and quoits, and dance a little, and sing a little, and flirt a little, ever so nicely. Oh, there are lots of girls who can do all those things, and do them equally well; I know a few who can, well off, well-bred girls—you must know a great many. They are clever to begin with, and they are taught that way; it is a perfect treat to meet them and watch them, but I never want to imitate them, even if I could—and there is no danger of that. I would rather be in the engine-room, with my coat off, a bit greasy and very profane, and doing something. There would be more flesh and blood there, even if it were a bit grubby; I believe I’m more at home with people who can do—well, what’s necessary, even if it is not exactly nice.”

Rawson-Clew knew exactly the kind of woman she had described for the deck—he met them often; charming creatures, far as the poles asunder from the girl who spoke of them; he liked them—in moderation, and in their place, much as his forebears of fifty years ago had liked theirs, the delicate, sensitive creatures of that era. He had never regarded Julia in that light; he found her certainly more entertaining as a companion, though also very far short of the standard as a woman and an ornament.

“The people in the engine-room,” he observed, “would certainly be more useful in an emergency; still, life is not made up entirely of emergencies.”

“No,” Julia answered; “and in between times such people are better not on show—I know that; that is why I do not care for the drawing-room side of things, I don’t know enough to shine in them.”

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“Do you think it is a matter of knowledge?” he asked, “or inclination? If it comes to knowledge I should say you had a rather remarkable stock of an unusual sort, and at first hand. That may not be what is required for a complete drawing-room success, though I am not sure that it is not more interesting—say for an excursion—than a flitting glance at the subjects you mention, and about eighteen or twenty more that you did not.”

Julia looked up, half pleased, doubtful as to whether or not to interpret this as a compliment; she never knew quite how much he meant of what he said; his manner was exactly the same, whether he was in fun or in earnest. But if she thought of asking him now she was prevented, for at that moment Mr. Gillat’s watch slipped out of her belt into her lap, and she saw the time.

“How late is it!” she exclaimed. “We ought to have started half-an-hour ago; it will take me two hours, and more, to get home from here, even if I go by the tram in the town.”

She rose as she spoke, and he rose more slowly.

“Shall I take your flowers for you?” he asked. “They seem rather inclined to tumble about; don’t you think they would be safer in my pocket? As you say you are going to dry them, it won’t matter crushing them.”

She gave them to him, and he put the sweet-smelling bunch into his pocket, then they started for the edge of the wood.

“It is much colder,” Julia said; “and the sun is all gone; I suppose the clouds have been coming gradually, but I did not notice before. If it is going to rain, we shall get decidedly wet before we get back.”

“I am afraid so,” he agreed; “you have no coat.”

She told him that did not matter, she did not mind getting wet, and she spoke with a cheerful buoyancy that carried conviction.

When they reached the outskirts of the wood, however, they saw there was not much chance of rain, but a much worse evil threatened. All the distance on the seaward side was blotted out, a fine white mist shut out the curving land in that direction. It was blowing up towards them, rolling down the little hills in billowy puffs, and lying filmy, yet dense, in the hollows, moved by a wind unfelt here.

“A sea fog,” Julia said; “I wonder how far it is coming.”

Rawson-Clew wondered too; he thought, as she did, that there was every chance of its coming far and fast, but it did not seem necessary to either of them to say anything so unpleasantly and obviously probable.

They set out homewards as fast as they could; it was a long way to the place where they had climbed up, unfortunately all across open country, entirely without roads or definite paths, and the drifting sea fog was coming up fast, bound, it would seem, the same way. Soon it was upon them; they felt its advance in the chill that, like cold fingers, laid hold on everything; it came quite silently up from behind, without noticeable wind, eerily creeping up and enfolding

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everything, putting a white winding-sheet not about the earth only, but the very air also. The cotton blouse that Julia wore became limp and wet as if it had been dipped in water; she could see the fog condensing in beads on her companion's coat almost like hoar frost; it lay on every low-growing rose bush and bramble that they stepped upon, a curious transformer of all near objects, a complete obliterator of all more distant ones.

They pushed on as quickly as might be, climbing little hills, descending into hollows; stumbling among rabbit holes, threading their way through thickets; apparently finding something amusing in the patriarchal colonies of rabbit burrows that tripped them up, and stopping to argue, though hardly in earnest, as to whether they had passed that way or not, when some white-barked tree, or other landmark, loomed suddenly out of the thickening mist. Once it seemed the fog was going to lift; Julia thought she saw the outline of a distant hill, but either it was closed in again directly, or else she mistook a thicker fold of cloud for a more solid object, for it was lost almost before she pointed it out.

For something over two hours they walked and stumbled, and went up small ascents and came down small declines; then suddenly they came upon the white-barked tree again. It was the same one that they had seen more than an hour and a half ago; Rawson-Clew recognised it by a peculiar warty growth where the branches forked; they had now approached it from the other side, but clearly it was the same one, and they had come round in a circle.

He stopped and pointed it out to her. "I am afraid," he said, "we had better do what is recommended when the clouds come down on the mountains."

"And that is?" Julia asked.

"Sit down and wait till they shift."

She could not but see the advisability of this, also she was very tired, the going for these two hours had not been easy, and it had come at the end of a long day. She would not admit, even to herself, that she was tired, but she was, so she agreed to the waiting; after all, it was impossible to pretend longer that they were going to get home easily, and were not really hopelessly astray.

"We will go a little way in among the trees," Rawson-Clew said; "it is more sheltered, and we shall be able to find the way quite as easily from one place as another when the fog lifts."

They found as sheltered a spot as they could, and sat down under a big tree; as they did so his hand came in contact with Julia's wet sleeve and cold arm. "How cold you are!" he said. "You have nothing on."

"Oh, yes, I have," she assured him. "I did not avail myself of your permission this morning."

He took off his coat and put it round her.

But she threw it off again. "That won't do at all," she said; "now you have nothing on, and that is much more improper; women may sit in their shirt sleeves, men may not."

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“Don’t be absurd!” he said authoritatively; “you are to keep that on,” and he wrapped it about her with a decision that brought home to her her youth and smallness.

“You are shutting all the damp in,” she protested, shifting her point of attack, “and that is very unwholesome. I shan’t get warm; I haven’t any warmth to start with; you are wasting what you have got to no purpose.”

But he did not waste it, for eventually it was arranged that they sat close together under the tree, with the coat put as far as it would go over both of them. Rawson-Clew was not given to thinking how things looked, he did what he thought necessary, or advisable, without taking any thought of that kind; so it did not occur to him how this arrangement might look to an unprejudiced observer, had there been any such. But Julia, with her faculty for seeing herself as others saw her, was much, though silently, amused as she thought of the Van Heigens. Poor, kind folks, they were doubtless already wondering what could have become of her; if they could only have seen her sitting thus, with an unknown man, what would their Dutch propriety have said?

“Do you suppose this fog will be in the town?” Rawson-Clew said, after a time.

“No,” she answered, “I should think not; from what I have heard, I think it is very unlikely.”

“Then the Van Heigens won’t know what has become of you?”

“Not a bit in the world; they don’t even know where I was going to-day. I did not tell them; I am afraid they will be rather uneasy about me, but perhaps not so very much, they know by this time I can take care of myself; besides, I shall be home before bed-time, if the fog lifts.”

Rawson-Clew agreed, and they talked of other things. Julia held the opinion that when an evil has to be endured, not cured, there is no good in discussing it over and over again; she had a considerable gift for making the best of other things besides opportunities.

But the fog did not lift soon; it did not grow denser, but it did not grow less; it just lay soft and chilly, casting a white pall of silence on all things, closing day before its time, and making it impossible to say when evening ended and night began. Gradually the two who waited for its lifting fell into silence, and Julia, tired out, at last dropped asleep, her head tilted back against the tree-trunk, her shoulder pressed close against Rawson-Clew under the shelter of his coat.

He did not move, he was afraid of waking her; he sat watching, waiting in the eerie white stillness, until at last the space before him altered, and gradually between the trees he saw the faint outline of a hill, dark against the dark sky. Slowly the white mist

rolled from it, a billowy, ghostly thing, that left a black, vague world, only dimly seen. He looked at the sleeping girl, then at the hill; the fog was clearing, there was no doubt about that; soon it would be quite gone, but it would be a very dark night,

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the stars would hardly show, and the moon was now long down. He was not at all sure of being able to find his way across this undulating country, so entirely devoid of prominent features, in a very dark night. Rather he was nearly sure that he could not do it; and though he had a by no means low opinion of Julia's abilities, he did not think that she could either. Also, with a sense of dramatic fitness equal to that of the girl's he thought their arrival in the town would be rather ill-timed if they started now. It would be wiser to wait till after it was light, though dawn was not so very early now, the summer being far advanced. So he decided, and Julia slept peacefully on, her head dropping lower and lower, till finally it reached his shoulder. But he did not move; he left it resting there, and waited, thinking of nothing perhaps, or anything; or perhaps of that unknown quantity, the natural man, which has a way of stirring sometimes even in the most civilised, at night time. So he sat and watched for the dawn.

CHAPTER X

TO-MORROW

It was a bright sunny morning, and, though the third and last day of the fair, people went to their business as usual. The Dutch are early risers, and set about their day's work in good time; but even had they been the reverse, the latest of them would have been about before Julia and Rawson-Clew reached the outskirts of the town. They had stopped for breakfast at the first village they came to after leaving the Dunes, this on the principle of being hung for a sheep rather than a lamb. It did not seem to matter being a little later considering the necessarily unreasonable hour of their return; also Julia, with the instinct of her family for detail; preferred to set herself to rights so as to present the best appearance possible when she arrived at the Van Heigens'. It was not natural, of course, that a person should appear too neat and orderly after a night of adventure, lost on the Dunes; but the reverse was not becoming. Julia hit the medium between the two with a nicety which might have cost one not a Polkington some thought, but to one of them was merely the natural thing.

Together Julia and Rawson-Clew walked to the outskirts of the town. Their ways parted there—his to the left, hers to the right; it was the port of which she had thought yesterday, the place of final separation. He had proposed to go with her to the Van Heigens, so as to bear testimony to what had befallen, and to assure them that she was quite safe; but she would not have this, she felt she could manage very much better without him, his presence would only require a good deal of extra explanation, none too easy to give. He guessed the reason of her refusal and saw the wisdom of it, although he felt annoyed that she had, as he now perceived she must, concealed their earlier acquaintance. It might have been advisable, seeing Dutch notions of propriety; but it placed the matter in a rather invidious light, and also began to bring home to him the

fact, which grew very much more evident before the day was over, that he had distinguished himself by an act of really remarkable folly.

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They had almost reached the town, in fact had passed some small houses, the dwelling-places of carriage proprietors and washerwomen, when a girl stepped out of a doorway some distance ahead of them. She glanced in their direction, then stared.

“There’s Denah,” Julia said; she did not speak with consternation though Denah was about the last person she wanted to see just then. Consternation is a waste of time and energy when you are found out, a bold face and immediate actions are usually best. Julia waved her hand in cheerful greeting to the Dutch girl.

But Denah did not return the greeting; instead, after her stare of astonished recognition, she turned and set off up the road towards where it joined a more important street with trams, which ran into the town.

“Hulloah?” Julia said softly, and quick as thought she turned too, and the hand that had waved to Denah was signaling to a carriage which at that moment drove out of a stable-yard near. A light had come into her eyes, a dancing light like the gleam on a sword-blade. There was a little wee smile about her lips, too, which somehow brought to Rawson-Clew’s mind a man he once knew who had sung softly to himself all the time he prepared for the brigands who were known to be about to rush his camp.

“She’ll take a tram,” Julia said gaily, looking towards the speeding figure; “she is too careful to waste her money even to spite any one of whom she is jealous.”

The cab drew up, and Julia, not failing to see Denah fulfil her words at the junction of the street, got in. Rawson-Clew followed her. She would have prevented him.

“Don’t come,” she said; “I don’t want you. Good-bye.”

But he insisted. “I certainly am coming,” he said, and ordered the man to drive on into the town, telling Julia to give the address.

She did so, weighing in her mind the while the chances of Rawson-Clew’s knowledge of Dutch being equal to following all that was said when three people spoke at once, all of them in a great state of excitement. She thought it was possible he would not master every detail, but at the same time she did not wish him to try; it would be insupportable to have him dragged into this, and in return for his kindness to her have a dozen vulgar and ridiculous things said and insinuated.

“Look here,” she said, “there is not any need for you to come, I can do better without you, I can indeed. I have got to explain things, of course, but, as I told you before, I have had some practice at dodging and explaining. I shall reach the Van Heigens’ before Denah, so I shall get the first hearing, that’s all I want, I can explain beautifully.”

“You cannot explain me away,” Rawson-Clew answered. “I know I was not to have figured in the original account, that is obvious, but it is equally obvious that I must figure in this one. I prefer to give it myself.”

“Oh, but that won’t do at all!” Julia said. “Please leave it to me, it would be nothing to me, I am used to tight places, and it would be an insufferable annoyance to you. I really don’t want you to suffer for your kindness to me—you have no idea what absurd and ridiculous things they will say.”

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Rawson-Clew had been polishing his eyeglass, he put it back in his eye before he spoke. “My dear child,” he said; “in spite of the sheltered life with which you credit me, I assure you I have a very clear idea of the kind of things they will say.”

“Then for goodness sake, leave it to me,” Julia said, losing her temper; “I can do it a great deal better than you can; I’m not honest, and you are, and that’s a handicap.”

“In these cases,” Rawson-Clew answered imperturbably, “honesty requires the consideration of the lady first and truth afterwards—a long way after. Let me know what you want told and I will tell it—with evidence—I suppose you are equal to evidence?”

Julia laughed, but without much mirth. “I do wish you would not come,” she said.

But he did, and they drove together through the town, past the bulb gardens, to the wooden house with the dark-tiled roof. There Rawson-Clew paid the coachman and dismissed the carriage while Julia rang the bell.

In time the servant came to the door. “Ach!” she cried at the sight of Julia, and, “G-r-r-r!” and other exclamations, uttered very gutturally and with upraised hands. She was a country girl from some remote district, and she spoke a very unintelligible patois; at least Rawson-Clew found it so, his companion, apparently, was used to it.

Julia listened to the exclamations, and apparently to congratulations on her safe return, said in a friendly manner that she had a terrible adventure, and then asked where Mevrouw was.

Mevrouw was out, and Mijnheer was out too; a torrent more information followed, but Julia did not pay much attention to it, she turned to Rawson-Clew with the smile on her lips with which she laughed at herself.

“Denah saved her money and won her move,” she said; “it serves me right. I under-rated her—this is what always comes of under-rating the enemy.”

“Do you mean she knew where these people are?” Rawson-Clew asked.

“That is about it, she knew and I did not.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Wait till they come back, there is nothing else.”

He moved as if he thought to follow her into the house, but she did not approve of that. “You cannot wait with me,” she said; “it is one thing to bring me home, quite another to wait with me here.”

He, however, thought differently, but he did not argue the point. “Thank you,” he said, “I prefer to wait; I consider I am conducting this now, not you.”

He was a little annoyed by her ridiculous persistence, but she looked at him with the dancing lights coming back in her eyes. “Oh, well, if you prefer to wait,” she said, “but I’m afraid you must do it alone.” And before he realised what she was doing, she had run off, down the path, across an empty flower-bed and among some brushes behind.

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In considerable anger he turned to follow her, but he pulled himself up; there was very little use in that and no need for it either; he was sure she was far too skilful a tactician to imperil an affair by unwise flight; this was a blind merely—unless, of course, she thought of setting out to find these Dutch people, wherever they might be. He asked the staring servant where her master and mistress were; it took time for him to make out her answers, but at last he did. Mijnheer was at a place (or house) with a name he had never before heard, and would have been puzzled to say now from this one hearing. It was a distant bulb farm, and Mijnheer had gone there on business; the fact that Julia had not returned home naturally did not keep the good man from his work. These details Rawson-Clew did not know; the name only was given to him, and that conveyed nothing. Joost, he was told, was somewhere in the bulb gardens, where, seemed unknown; Mevrouw was at the house of the notary. Who the notary was, and where he lived, and why she had gone there were alike as obscure to this inquirer as was Julia's probable destination. He felt that she might have set out to find any one of these three people, or she might be lying in wait, like a foolish child, till he had gone. He went down the drive; outside the gate he saw some idlers who had been there when he drove in a little while back; he asked them if any one answering to the girl's description had come out. They told him "ja," and they also told him which direction she had taken; it was the way that led to the market, not the residential part of the town.

He was no better off for this information; there seemed nothing to be done. It would have been little short of absurd, if, indeed, it had not been seriously compromising to Julia, for him to present himself at the house of the notary—when he could find it—and tell Vrouw Van Heigen he had brought Julia home and she was afraid to appear with him. Either he and she must act together and appear together, or else he must, as she desired and now made necessary, keep out of it altogether. Considerably annoyed with the girl, but at the same time uneasy about her, he went to his hotel.

As the morning wore on, the annoyance lessened and the uneasiness grew. After all he was not sure that Julia had thrown away much by refusing to have the support of his company; had they two been there waiting for the Van Heigens' return, or had they set out together to find them, he was not sure his presence would have been any help in the face of the jealous Dutch girl's accusations. A jealous woman, even an ordinarily foolish one, is a very dangerous thing when she is attacking a fancied rival with a chance of encompassing her overthrow. Denah would have got her tale told, her case proven, indignation aroused and sympathy with her before the Van Heigens even saw Julia. He wondered what she would do alone and wished he knew how she fared; he thought

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over the explanations possible and the various ways out that might suggest themselves to a fertile brain. They were not many, and they were not good; the simple truth would probably be best, and that would be so exceedingly compromising under the circumstances that the Van Heigens were hardly likely to find it palatable. Indeed, he began to see that, even if they two could have presented themselves, as they had first intended, to the anxious family before Denah arrived, it was very doubtful if the matter could have been satisfactorily cleared up to a suspicious and prudish Dutch mind. The girl was only a companion, a person of no importance, easy to replace; and, no matter how the fact might be explained, it still remained that she had been out all night with an unknown man; one, who, if he were known, would show to be of a position to make the proceeding more compromising still.

At this point Rawson-Clew got up and walked to the window. It was then that it struck him that he had, in these his mature years, committed an act of stupendous folly, the like of which his youth had never known.

But the girl, what would become of the girl? In England, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, she would have been dismissed; in Holland that one last hope did not exist. She would be dismissed with her character considerably damaged and her chance of getting another situation entirely gone. What would she do? She had told him yesterday she could not leave, but was obliged to stay on at the Van Heigens'; although she had failed in the first object of her coming, and so had no motive for remaining, she had nowhere else to go. Perhaps she had quarrelled with her relatives; perhaps they could not afford to keep her—they were poor enough he knew. She had once said her eldest sister had lately married the nephew of a bishop; he remembered that, and he also remembered that, after his unfortunate visit to Captain Polkington, he had heard they were people with some good connections. But that did not mean that they could afford to help this girl, or would be delighted to receive her home under the present conditions. Rather it indicated that their position was too precarious for them to be able to do it. They would be bitterly hard on her—these aspiring people of gentle birth and doubtful shifts, clinging to society by the skin of their teeth, were the hardest of all. The girl could not go back to them; she could not get anything to do in Holland, or elsewhere—in Heaven's name what could she do?

He asked himself the question with his hands in his pockets and his eyes on the street. But the answer did not seem forthcoming.

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There was no good blinking the matter; the fact was obvious; the girl was hopelessly and utterly compromised; and he, aided certainly by untoward circumstances—for the sardonic interference of which, in such circumstances, a man of sense usually allows—-he had done it. They had had their “holiday,” without taking thought for the morrow, in the way approved by boys and dogs and creatures without experience. And here was to-morrow, knocking at the door and demanding the price—as experience showed that it usually did. The question was, who was going to pay, he or she? She had taken it upon herself as a matter of course; it seemed natural to her that the burden should be the woman’s, but it did not seem so to him; among his people it was the man who was expected, and who himself expected, to pay. When he had grasped the situation fully and saw how she must inevitably stand he also saw at the same time and equally plainly, that he must marry her; nothing else was possible.

He walked away from the window and began to search for writing materials. He could not go and see her, it was out of the question under the circumstances; he would have to write, and, on the whole, perhaps, it was easier that way. He sat down to the table, but he did not at once begin, for between him and the paper there rose up the vision of a stately old Norfolk house. It was his; he had not lived there for years, but he supposed he would some day; all his people had; he remembered his grandfather there and his grandmother—a tall, stately woman, a woman of parts. He thought of her, and his mother, a graceful, gracious woman—he thought of her standing in the drawing-room between the long windows, receiving company. And then he thought of Julia.

He turned away from the vision abruptly, and dated his letter. But soon he had lain down his pen again. He was conservative, and Julia was not of the breed of the women he had recalled; she had no kinship with them or their modern prototypes, one of whom he vaguely supposed he should marry some day—when he went to live in the old Norfolk house. Hers was not a stately or a gracious or an all pervading feminine presence; she demanded no court, no care, no carpet for her way; she could come and go unnoticed and unattended; you could overlook her—though she never overlooked you or anything else. She had her points certainly, she was loyal to the core—she would be loyal to him, he was sure, in this scrape, with a silly wrong-headed loyalty, more like a man’s to a woman than a woman’s to a man. She was loyal to her none too reputable family—that family was a bitter thing to his pride of race. She was courageous, too, cheerfully enduring, laughing in the face of disaster, patient when action was impossible and when it was possible—he found himself smiling when he recalled her—surely there was never one more gay, more ready, more steady, more quietly alert than she when there was a struggle with men or matters in the wind. She had brains of

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a sort, there was no doubt of that; it was possible to imagine one would not grow tired of her undiluted company as one would of the other sort of woman. Only of course a man did not have the undiluted company of his wife—perhaps if he were a small shop-keeper or an itinerant organ-grinder—if night and day they lived together and worked together and looked out on the world together—if it was the simple life of which she dreamed—

Rawson-Clew picked up his pen and began to write; it was not a case of whether he would or would not, liked or disliked; he had simply to make a girl he had compromised the only restitution in his power.

In the meantime Julia had set out for the market-place as the idlers had said. But her business there did not take long and she was home again, as she intended, before Mevrouw got back from the Snieders. But she had not been in much more than five minutes before the old lady, supported by Vrouw Snieder and Denah, arrived. Mijnheer came home not long after, and, hearing news of the return of the truant, went to the house to join the others.

Julia waited to receive the attack in the dim sitting-room. She knew as well as Rawson-Clew, or better, that she had not a ghost of a chance of clearing herself; dismissal was inevitable; that was why she went to the market-place. She had not largely assisted her family in living by their wits without having those faculties in exceeding good working order; she had already seen and seized the only thing open to her when the end should come. But the fact that she knew how it would end did not prevent her from giving battle; the knowledge only made her change her tactics, and, as there was no use in defending her position (and companion) she was able to concentrate her forces in harassing the enemy.

In these circumstances it is not wonderful that Denah did not derive the satisfaction she expected from the affair. Julia, unrepentant and reckless because of her known fate, unhampered by Rawson-Clew's presence, and flatly declining to give any particulars about him, would have been an awkward antagonist for one cleverer than the Dutch girl. Poor Denah lost her temper, and lost her head, and lost control of her tongue and her tears. Julia did not lose anything, but again and again winged shafts that went unerringly home. She was genuinely sorry to have upset and disappointed Mevrouw, but for Denah she did not care in the least, and the old lady soon contrived to soften some of the regret, for she was far too angry and shocked at the impropriety to have any gentler feelings of sorrow or to believe what she was told. Vrouw Snieder acted principally as chorus of horror; she was shocked and angry too, on Mevrouw's account and on her own and her daughter's; she seemed to think they had all been outraged together.

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When Mijnheer came in they were all talking at once and Denah was weeping copiously. Julia's part in the conversation was small; she just shot a word in here and there, but apparently never without effect, for her utterances, like drops of water on hot metal, were always followed by fresh bursts of excitement. The good man tried in vain to make out what was the matter and what had happened. At last, after his fifth effort elsewhere, he turned to Julia, and she told him briefly. She told the truth, only suppressing Rawson-Clew's name and all details concerning him, saying merely that he was a man she had met before she left England. The two elder sisters gradually became silent to listen; Denah listened too, only sniffing occasionally.

"You pretended you did not know him the day we went the excursion," she said vindictively; "I saw you; I knew you were not to be trusted then. Why did you pretend, and how do you know him? He is a man of family; he has the air of it, very distinguished, and you are nothing at all, nobody—"

"Hush!" said Mijnheer; "that is not the point; it is of no importance who the man may be, he is a man, that is enough; and she was out with him—alone—a whole day and night; it is certainly very bad indeed; shocking, if it is true—is it true?"

He looked at Julia, and she answered, "Yes."

She was sorry, very sorry, but more on his account than her own; she could see how heinous he thought it, how she had fallen in his esteem, and she was sorry for it. But at the same time she knew her conduct really had been no more than indiscreet; and she did not repent; she regretted nothing but being found out, and that not so much as she ought now that the joy of battle was upon her. As for the women, they suspected far worse than Mijnheer believed; but even if they had not, if they had believed no more than the truth, that would have been enough for condemnation; her offence—the real one—was past forgiveness; she must go. She received the sentence meekly; she knew she deserved no less from these kind if narrow-minded people. Denah smiled triumphantly; Julia felt she deserved that too; moreover, Denah's nose was so pink and her face so swelled with tears, that the smile was more amusing than exasperating.

"I am sorry," she said; "I am sorry you should all have to think so ill of me, and that I should deserve it. You have been very kind to me while I have been here, and made my service easy; I am ashamed to have deceived you and behaved in such a way as you must condemn."

Unfortunately Vrouw Snieder snorted here; she did not believe in these protestations and she said so, inducing Vrouw Van Heigen to do the same. Mijnheer looked doubtfully at Julia for a moment, then he came to the conclusion that if she was not too abandoned a person to be really repentant, it would be as well to take advantage of her professed state of mind and drive home some moral lessons. Accordingly he and the two elder ladies drove them home, with the result that Julia's regret dwindled to nothing.

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“Mijnheer,” she said at last, quietly yet effectually breaking in upon his words; “Mijnheer, you are a very good man, Mevrouw is a virtuous woman, and Vrouw Snieder also, all of you. I have often admired your goodness; when you were least conscious of it it preached to me, making me ashamed of my wickedness. But now that you, in your goodness, have taken to preaching to me yourselves, I am no longer ashamed, for it is clear that your goodness dares to do a thing that no man’s wickedness would; it turns the foolish and indiscreet into sinners and sinners into devils; it makes the way of wrong-doing very easy. You are so good,” she went on, putting aside an interruption; “perhaps you do not know wickedness when you see it; you cannot distinguish between sin and sin; you are like those who would hang a man for stealing bread as soon as for killing a child. What! Are you indignant, Mevrouw, at such a charge? Are you not turning out, with no character and no chance—a good enough imitation of hanging—a girl who has been no more than foolish, just the same as if she had committed the greatest sin?”

Vrouw Heigen broke in angrily, and Vrouw Snieder and Denah, inexpressibly shocked; Mijnheer was also shocked, but he, and they too, were vaguely uneasy under the reproach. Julia was satisfied; more especially as her experience of them led her to expect they would, though never persuaded they had made a mistake, yet feel more uneasy by and by.

She rose from her chair. “Yes,” she said, “it is a shame to speak of such things, as you observe; do not let us speak of them any more. Perhaps Mijnheer you would like to pay me, then I can go.”

Mijnheer agreed rather hastily; then, realising the suddenness of the step, he paused with his purse in his hand. “But can you go now?” he asked. “Nothing is arranged; you had better wait a day or two.”

“No,” Julia answered, “I think not; it would be well to get the thing over and done with; you would rather and so would I.”

No one contradicting this, Mijnheer counted the money and gave it to Julia.

“Thank you,” she said; “now I will set the table for coffee drinking. You will stay, of course, Mevrouw,” she went on, turning to Vrouw Snieder—“and Miss Denah, that will be two extra—Mijnheer Joost will be in, Denah; you can tell him about it.”

Denah flushed indignantly, and Vrouw Snieder could only say “You—You—”

“Oh, I will not sit down with you, of course,” Julia answered sweetly; “I will take my coffee in the little room; is it not so, Mevrouw?”

Vrouw Van Heigen nodded; she did not know what else to do, and Julia went away, leaving them as awkward and at a loss for words as if they were the delinquents, not she. Denah felt this and resented it; the elders felt it too, and for a moment or two looked at one another ill at ease. However, in a little they recovered and began to talk over Julia and her wrong doings till they felt quite comfortable again.

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Denah did not join very much in the discussion; after she had once again, by request, repeated what she had seen and what deduced therefrom, she was left rather to herself. She went to the window and sat there looking out for Joost; he was certain to come in soon, and she found consolation in the thought. Joost, the model of modesty and decorous serious propriety, would know the English girl in her true colours now, and be justly disgusted and shocked to think that he had ever ridden beside her on a merry-go-round.

Just then Julia passed carrying a tray of cups. "Denah," she said, pitching her voice soft and low in the tone the Dutch girl hated most, "I will give you a piece of advice; take care how you tell Joost about my wickedness; you want to be ever so clever to abuse another girl to a man; it is one of the most difficult things in the world—and you are not very clever, you know, not even clever enough to take my advice."

Denah was not clever enough to take the advice nor in any humour to do so; she stared angrily at Julia, who unconcernedly put the cups on the table and vanished into the kitchen.

Joost came in for coffee drinking, and the whole party with one accord told him the tale; Julia heard them through the closed door as she sat sipping her coffee in the little room. She did not hear him say anything at all except just at first, "I won't believe it!" in a tone which roused again, and with added strength, the regret she had felt before for repaying belief and kindness by such disillusioning. Afterwards he seemed to say nothing more; presumably they had convinced him with overwhelming evidence. She wondered how he looked; she could picture his serious blue eyes uncomfortable well; poor Joost, who had such high opinions of her, who thought she, seeing the low, chose the high path always in the greatness of her knowledge and strength; who had called her a lantern, sometimes dimmed, but always a beacon! The lantern was obscured just now, very badly obscured. She rose and went up to her room; she would clear the table after Joost had gone back to work.

She did so, coming down when he and Mijnheer were safely in the office. When she had done she went to Mevrouw, who had betaken herself to her room worn out by the morning's excitement.

"Would you prefer that I went at once?" she inquired, "or that I waited till after dinner? I will stay till six if you wish it, or I will go now without waiting to attend to the dinner."

Vrouw Van Heigen preferred the waiting; it would be so very much better for the dinner, and really it hardly seemed as if propriety could suffer much; accordingly she said with what dignity she could that the girl had better stay till the evening.

Julia went down-stairs again and set to work preparing the dinner, and it was perhaps only natural that she took pains to make that dinner a memorably good one. It was while she was busy in the kitchen that a note was brought to her.

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“Put it on the table,” she said to the servant girl; her hands just then were too floury to take it, but she looked at it as it lay on the table beside her. She did not recognise the writing, though she saw at once that it was not that of a Dutchman. “Who brought it?” she asked, beginning to clean her hands.

The servant could not say, but from her description Julia gathered that it must have been a special messenger of some sort. On hearing this, she did not trouble to clean her hands any more, but opened the letter at once, making floury finger-prints upon it.

“DEAR MISS POLKINGTON, (it ran),

“There is one subject I did not mention to you yesterday; you might perhaps have thought it too serious for holiday consideration; nevertheless, it is a question that I feel I must ask before I leave Holland. Will you do me the honour of becoming my wife? I know there is rather a difference in years between us, but if you can overlook the discrepancy, and consent, you will give me the utmost satisfaction. I honestly believe it will make for the happiness of us both; I have a feeling that we were meant to continue our ‘excursion’ together.

“Very sincerely yours,

“H. F. RAWSON-CLEW.”

So Julia read, and sat down suddenly on the flour barrel. She turned to the beginning of the letter and read it through again, and when she looked up her eyes were shining with admiration. “I am glad!” she said aloud, but in English, “I am glad he has done it! It’s splendid, splendid! I never thought of it—but then I don’t believe I knew what a real gentleman was before!”

The maidservant started at her curiously; she could not understand a word, but she saw that the letter gave pleasure, for which she was glad; she liked Julia, and was very sorry she was going in disgrace; she herself had occasional lapses from rectitude and so consequently had a fellow feeling.

“You have a good letter?” she asked.

“Very good,” Julia said; “but we must get on with the cooking; I will answer it by and by.”

Julia put it in her pocket after another glance, purring to herself in English, “It is so well done, too,” she said; “never a word of to-day, only of yesterday—yesterday!” and she laughed softly.

There is no doubt about it, if Julia had got to receive a death sentence she would have liked it to be well given; it is quite possible, had she lived at the time, she would have

been one of those who objected to the indignity of riding in the tumbrils quite as much as to the guillotine at the end of the ride.

She finished the preparations for dinner, got her pots and pans all nicely simmering and her oven at the right heat; then, giving some necessary directions, she left the servant to watch the cooking and went up to her own room. There she at once proceeded to answer the letter—

“DEAR MR. RAWSON-CLEW, (she wrote),

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“I am as glad as anything that you have done it; I never for a moment thought of it myself, though I ought, for it is just like you; thank you ever so much.

“Please don’t bother about me, I am all right and have arranged capitally.”

Here she turned over his letter to see how he had signed himself and, seeing, signed in imitation—

“Yours very sincerely,

“JULIA POLKINGTON.”

“I wonder what his name is?” she speculated; “H. F.—H.—Henry, Horace—I shouldn’t think he had a name people called him by.”

She read her own letter through, and as she was folding it stopped; it occurred to her that he might think courtesy demanded a formal refusal of his proposal. It was, of course, quite unnecessary; the refusal went without saying; she would no more have dreamed of accepting his quixotic offer than he would have dreamed of avoiding the necessity of making it; the one was as much a *sine qua non* to her as the other was to him. From which it would appear that in some ways at least their notions of honour were not so many miles apart.

She flattened her letter again; perhaps he would think the definite word more polite, so she added a postscript—

> “Of course this means no. I am sorry we can’t go on with the excursion, but we can’t, you know. The holiday is over; this is ‘to-morrow,’ so good-bye.”

After that she fastened the envelope, and a while later went out to post it. As she went up the drive she caught sight of Joost some distance away in the gardens; his face was not towards her, and she congratulated herself that he had not seen her. However, the congratulations were premature; when she came back from the post she found him standing just inside the gate waiting for her, obviously waiting. At least it was obvious to her; she had caught people herself before now, and so recognised that she was caught too plainly to uselessly attempt getting away.

“Do you want to hear what happened yesterday?” she asked, with an effrontery she did not feel. “I expect Denah has told you all, perhaps a little more than all, still, enough of it was true.”

“I want to speak to you,” he said, and parted the high bushes that bordered the left of the drive.

Julia reluctantly enough, but feeling that she owed him what explanation was possible, went through. Behind the bushes there was a small enclosed space used for growing choice bulbs; it was empty now, the sandy soil quite bare and dry; but it was very retired, being surrounded by an eight foot hedge with only one opening besides the way by which they had come in through the looser-growing bushes. Julia made her way down to the opening; with her practical eye for such things, she recognised that it would be the best way of escape, just as the loose-growing bushes offered the likeliest point of attack. This, of course, did not matter to her, she being in the case of “he who is down,” but it might matter a good deal to Joost if his father looked through the bushes, and he would never know how to take care of himself.

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“Well?” she said, when she had taken up this discreet position. But as he did not seem ready she went on, “I really don’t think there is anything to say; I did wrong yesterday, not quite as much wrong as your mother and Denah think, still wrong—what my own people would have disapproved, at least if it were found out; that’s the biggest crime on their list—and what I knew your people would condemn utterly. I am afraid I have no excuse to offer; I knew what I was doing, and I did it with my eyes open. I did not see any harm in it myself but I knew other people would, so I meant to say nothing. I had deceived your parents before, and I meant to keep on doing it. You know I had walked with that man lots of times before yesterday; all the time your mother thought me so good to visit your cousin I really enjoyed doing it because I walked with him.”

“Do you love him?” The question was asked low and almost jerkily.

“Love him?” Julia said in surprise; “no, of course not. That is where the difference comes in, I believe; you all seem to think there is nothing but love and love-making and kissing and cuddling. I have just liked talking to him and I suppose he liked talking to me, as you might some friend, or Denah some girl she knew. We never thought about love and all that; we couldn’t, you know; he belongs to a different lot from what I do. Do you understand?”

“Yes, I understand,” he answered, and there was a vibrant note in his voice which was new to her. “I understand that it is you who are right and we who are wrong—you who know good and evil and can choose, we who suspect and think and hint, believing ill when there is none. Rather than send you away, we should ask your forgiveness!”

“You should do nothing of the kind,” Julia said decidedly, beginning to take alarm. “I may not have been wrong in quite the way your parents think, but I was wrong all the same. I am not good, believe me; I am not as you are. Look at me, I am bad inwardly, and really I am what you would condemn and despise.”

She was standing in the afternoon sunlight, dark, slim, alert, intensely alive, full of a twisty varied knowledge, a creature of another world. She felt that he must know and recognise the gulf between if only he would look fairly at her.

He did look fairly, but he recognised only what was in his own mind.

“You are to me a beacon—” he began.

But she, realising at last that Denah’s jealousy was not after all without foundations, cut him short.

“I am not a beacon,” she said, “before you take me for a guiding light you had better hear something about me. Do you know why I came here? I will tell you—it was to get your blue daffodil!”

He stared at her speechless, and she found it bad to see the surprise and almost uncomprehending pain which came into his face, as into the face of a child unjustly smitten. But she went on resolutely: "I heard of it in England, that it was worth a lot of money—and I wanted money—so I came here; I meant to get a bulb and sell it."

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“You meant to?” he said slowly; “but you haven’t—you couldn’t?”

“I could, six times over if I liked.”

“But you have not.”

“No. I was a fool, and you were—Oh, I can’t explain; you would never understand, and it does not matter. The thing that matters is that I came here to get your blue daffodil.”

“You must have needed money very greatly,” he said in a puzzled, pitying voice.

“I did, I wanted it desperately, but that does not matter either—I came here to steal; I go away because I am found out to have deceived and to have behaved improperly—I want you to understand that.”

“I do not understand,” he answered; “I understand nothing but that you are you, and—-and I love you.”

“You don’t!” she cried in sharp protest. “You do not, and you cannot! You think you love what you think I am. But I am not that; it is all quite different; when you, know, when you realise, you will see it.”

“I realise now,” he answered; “it is still the light, only sometimes dim.”

“Dim!” she repeated, “it has gone out!”

“And if it has, what then? If you are all you say you are, and all they say you are, and many worse things besides, what then? It makes no difference.”

He spoke with the curious quietness with which he always spoke of what he was quite sure. But she drew back against the hedge, clasping her hands together, her calmness all gone. “Oh, what have I done! What have I done!” she said, overcome with pity and remorse.

He drew a step nearer, misinterpreting the emotion. “I will take care of you,” he said. “Will you not let me take care of you?”

She looked up, and though her eyes were full of tears he might have read his answer there, in her recovered calmness, in the very gentleness of her manner. “You cannot,” she said sadly; “you couldn’t possibly do it. Don’t you see that it is impossible? Your parents, the people—”

“That is of no importance,” he answered; “my parents would very soon see you in your true light, and for the rest—what does it matter? If you will marry me I—”

“But Joost, I can’t! Don’t you feel yourself that I can’t? We are not only of two nations—that is nothing—but we are almost of two races; we are night and day, oil and water, black and white. It would never do; we should be on the outskirts of each other’s lives, you would never know mine, and though I might know yours, I could never really enter in.”

“That is nothing,” he said, “if you love.”

“It is everything,” she answered, “if two people do not talk the same language, soul language, I mean.”

“They will learn it if they love—but you do not? Is it that, tell me. Ah, yes, you do, a little, little bit! Only a little, so that you hardly know it, but it is enough—if you have the least to give that would do; I would do all the rest; I would love you; I would stand between you and the whole world; in time it would come, in time you would care!”

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He had come close to her now; in his eagerness he pressed against her, and, earnestness overcoming diffidence, he almost ventured to take her hand in his. She felt herself inwardly shrink from him with the repulsion that young wild animals feel at times for mere contact. But outwardly she did not betray it; pity for him kept nature under control.

“I cannot,” she said very gently; “I can never care.”

Then he knew that he had his answer, and there was no appeal; he drew back a pace, and because he never said one word of regret, or reproach, or pleading, her heart smote her.

“I am so sorry!” she said; “I am so sorry. Oh, why is everything so hard! Joost, dear Joost, you must not mind; I am not half good enough for you; I’m not, indeed. Please forget me and—let me go.”

And with that she turned and fled into the house.

The maidservant in the kitchen was minding the pots; it still wanted some while to dinner time; she did not expect the English miss would come yet, probably not till it was necessary to dish up. The letter, of course, would have occupied her some time; she had gone out probably to meet the writer—the maid never for a moment doubted him to be the sharer of yesterday’s escapade. She heard Julia come in, and judged the meeting to have been a pleasant one, as it had taken time. She had gone up-stairs now, doubtless to pack her things; that would occupy her till almost dinner time.

It did, for she did not begin directly, but sat on her bed instead, doing nothing for a time. But when she did begin, she went to work methodically, folding garments with care and packing them neatly; her heart ached for Joost and for the tangle things were in, but that did not prevent her attending to details when she once set to work. At last she had everything done, even her hat and coat ready to put on when dinner should be over. Then, after a final glance round to see that she had left nothing but the charred fragments of Rawson-Clew’s letter, she went down-stairs and got the dinner ready.

She did not take her meal with the family, but again had it in the little room. She brought the dishes to and fro from the kitchen, however, so she passed close to Joost once or twice and saw his grave face and serious blue eyes, as she had seen them every day since her first coming. And when she looked at him, and saw him, his appearance, his small mannerisms, himself in fact, a voice inside her cried down the aching pity, saying, “I could not do it, I could not do it!” But when she was alone in the little room with the door shut between, the pity grew strong again till it almost welled up in tears. Poor Joost! Poor humble, earnest, unselfish Joost! That he should care so, that he should have set his hopes on her, his star—a will-o’-wisp of devious ways! That he should

ache for this unworthy cause, and for it shut his eyes to the homely happiness which might have been his!

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She rose quickly and went up-stairs to get her hat and jacket. Soon after, the carriage, which she had extravagantly ordered, came, and she called the servant to help her down with her luggage. They got it down the narrow staircase between them and into the hall; Julia glanced back at the white marble kitchen for the last time, and at the dim little sitting-room. Vrouw Van Heigen was there, very much absorbed in crochet; but she had left the door ajar so that she might know when Julia went, and that must have occupied a prominent place in her mind, for she made a mistake at every other stitch.

“Good-bye, Mevrouw,” Julia said.

Vrouw Van Heigen grunted; she remembered what was due to herself and propriety.

“And, oh,” Julia looked back to say as she remembered it, “don’t forget that last lot of peach-brandy we made, it was not properly tied down; you ought to look at the covers some time this week.”

“Ah, yes,” said the old lady, forgetting propriety, “thank you, thank you, I’ll see to it; it will never do to have that go; such fine peaches too.”

Then Julia went out and got into the carriage. Mijnheer was in his office; he did not think it quite right to come to see her start either; all the same he came to the door to tell the driver to be careful not to go on the grass. Joost came also and looked over his father’s shoulder, and Julia, who had been amused at Vrouw Van Heigen, suddenly forgot this little amusement again.

Joost left his father. “I will tell the man,” he said. “I will go after him too and shut the gate; it grows late for it to be open.”

The carriage had already started, and he had to hurry after it; even then he did not catch it up till it was past the bend of the drive. Then the man saw him and pulled up, though it is doubtful if he got any order or, indeed, any word. Julia had been looking back, but from the other side; and because she had been looking back and remembering much happiness and simplicity here, she was so grieved for one at least who dwelt here that her eyes were full of tears.

Joost saw them when, on the stopping of the carriage, she turned. “Do not weep,” he said; “you must not weep for me.”

“I am so sorry,” she said; “so dreadfully sorry!”

“But you must not be,” he told her; “there is no need.”

“There is every need; you have been so kind to me, so good; you have almost taught me—though you don’t know it—some goodness too, and in return I have brought you nothing but sadness.”

“Ah, yes, sadness,” he said; “but gladness too, and the gladness is more than the sadness. Would you not sooner know the fine even though you cannot attain to it, than be content with the little all your life? I would, and it is that which you have given me. It is I who give nothing—”

He hesitated as if for a moment at a loss, and she had no words to fill in the pause.

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“Will you take this?” he said, half thrusting something forward. “It is, perhaps, not much to some, but I would like you to have it; it seems fitting; I think I owe it to you, and you to it.”

“Oh, yes, yes,” she murmured, hardly hearing and not grasping the last words; there was something choking in her throat; it was this strange, humble, disinterested love, so new to her, which brought it there and prevented her from understanding.

She stretched out her hands, and he put something into them; then he stepped back, and the carriage drove on. It was not till the gateway was passed that she realised what it was she held—a small bag made of the greyish-brown paper used on a bulb farm; inside, a single bulb; and outside, written, according to the invariable custom of growers—

“Narcissus Triandrus Azureum Vrouw Van Heigen.”

CHAPTER XI

A REPRIEVE

Rawson-Clew was reading a letter. It was breakfast time; the letter had missed the afternoon post yesterday, which was what the writer would have wished, and so was not delivered at the hotel till the morning. It was short, from the beginning—“I am so glad you have done it,” to the end of the postscript—“this is to-morrow, so good-bye.” There was not much to read; yet he looked at it for some time. Did ever man receive such a refusal to an offer of marriage? It was almost absurd, and perhaps hardly flattering, yet somehow characteristic of the writer; Rawson-Clew recognised that now, though it had surprised him none the less. What was to be done next? See the girl, he supposed, and hear what she proposed to do; she wrote that she had arranged “capitally,” but she did not say what. He was quite certain she was not going to remain with the Van Heigens; if by some extraordinary accident she had been able to bring that about, she would certainly have told him so triumphantly. He could not think of anything “capital” she could have arranged; he was persuaded, either that she only said it to reassure him, or else, if she believed it, it was in her ignorance of the extent of the damage done yesterday. He must go and see her, hear what she had planned, and what further trouble she was thinking to get herself into, and prevent it in the only way possible; and there was only one way, there was absolutely no other solution of the difficulty; she must marry him, and there was an end of it. He glanced at her refusal again, and liked it in spite of its absurdity; after all, perhaps it would have been better if he had been frank too; one could afford to dispense with the delicate conventions that he associated with women in dealing with this girl. He wished he had gone to her and spoken freely, as man to man, saying plainly that since they had together been indiscreet, they must

together take the consequence, and make the best of it—and really the best might be very good.

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Soon after he had finished breakfast he set out for the Van Heigens' house. But as yet, though he had some comprehension of Julia, he had not fully realised the promptness of action which necessity had taught her. When he reached the Van Heigens' she had been gone some sixteen hours.

It was Vrouw Van Heigen who told him; she was in the veranda when he arrived, and so, perforce, saw him and answered his inquiries. It was evident, at the outset, that neither his appearance nor name conveyed anything to her; she had not seen him the day of the excursion, and Denah's description, purposely complicated by a cross description of Julia's, had conveyed nothing, and his name had never transpired. He saw he was unknown, and recognised Julia's loyal screening of him, not with any satisfaction; evidently it was part of her creed to stand between a man (father or otherwise) and the consequence of his acts. That was an additional reason for finding her and explaining that he, unlike Captain Polkington, was not used to anything of the sort.

"She has gone?" he said, in answer to Vrouw Van Heigen's brief information. The old lady was decidedly nervous of the impressive Englishman who had come asking after her disgraced companion; she moved her fat hands uneasily even before he asked, "Where has she gone? Perhaps you would be kind enough to give me her address?"

"I cannot," she was obliged to say; "I have not it. I do not know where she is."

Rawson-Clew stared. "But surely," he said, "you are mistaken? She was here yesterday."

"Yes, yes; I know. But she is not here now; she went last night in haste. I will tell you about it. You are a friend? Come in."

Without waiting, she led him into the drawing-room, and there left him in some haste. The room struck him as familiar; he wondered why, until he remembered that it must have been Julia's description which made him so well acquainted with it. It was all just as she described; the thick, dark-coloured carpet, with the little carefully-bound strips of the same material laid over it to make paths to the piano, the stove, and other frequented spots. The highly-polished furniture, upholstered in black and yellow Utrecht velvet, the priceless Chinese porcelain brought home by old Dutch merchants, and handed down from mother to daughter for generations; the antimacassars of crochet work, the snuff-coloured wall-paper, the wonderful painted tiles framed in ebony that hung upon it. It was all just as she had said; the very light and smell seemed familiar, she must somehow have given him an idea of them too.

Just then Vrouw Van Heigen came back, and her husband with her; she had been to fetch him, not feeling equal to dealing with the visitor alone. Mijnheer, by her request,

had put on his best coat, but he still had his spectacles pushed upon his forehead, as they always were when he was disturbed in the office.

There was a formal greeting—one never dispensed with that in Holland, then Mijnheer said, “You are, I suppose, a friend of Miss Polkington’s father?”

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Rawson-Clew, remembering the winter day at Marbridge, answered, “I am acquainted with him.”

Mijnheer nodded. “Yes, yes,” he said; then, “it is very sad, and much to be regretted. I cannot but give to you, and through you to her father, very bad news of Miss Polkington. She is not what we thought her; she has disgraced—”

But here Rawson-Clew interrupted, but in the quiet, leisurely way which was so incomprehensible to the Hollanders. “My dear sir,” he said, “please spare yourself the trouble of these details; I am the man with whom Miss Polkington had the misfortune to be lost on the Dunes.”

Vrouw Van Heigen gasped; the gentle, drawling voice, the manner, the whole air of the speaker overwhelmed her, and shattered all her previous thoughts of the affair. With Mijnheer it was different; right was right, and wrong wrong to him, no matter who the persons concerned might be.

“Then, sir,” he said, growing somewhat red, “I am glad indeed that I cannot tell you where she is.”

Rawson-Clew looked up with faint admiration, righteous indignation, or at all events the open expression of it, was a discourtesy practically extinct with the people among whom he usually lived. He felt respect for the old bulb grower who would be guilty of it.

“I am sorry you should think so badly of me,” he said; “I can only assure you that it is without reason. You do not believe me? I suppose it is quite useless for me to say that my sole motive in seeking Miss Polkington is a desire to prevent her from coming to any harm?”

“She will, I should think, come to less harm without you than with you,” Mijnheer retorted; and Rawson-Clew, seeing as plainly as Julia had yesterday, the impossibility of making the position clear, did not attempt it.

“I hope you may be right,” he said, “but I am afraid she will be in difficulties. She had little money, and no friends in Holland, and was, I have reason to believe, on such terms with her family that it would not suit her to return to England.”

“Ah, but she must have gone to England!” Vrouw Van Heigen cried. “She went away in a carriage as one does when one goes to the station to start on a journey.”

“She received letters from her family,” Mijnheer said sturdily, “not frequently, but occasionally; there was not, I think, any quarrel or disagreement. She must certainly have set out to return home last night. If not, and if she had nowhere to go, why should she leave as she did yesterday? We did not say ‘go!’ we were content that she should remain several days, until her arrangements could be made.”

“She might not have cared for that,” Rawson-Clew suggested; “if you insinuated to her the sort of things you did to me; women do not like that, as a rule, you know.”

All the same, as he said this, he could not help thinking Mijnheer right; Julia must have had somewhere to go. Her dignity and feelings were not of the order to lose sight of essentials in details, or to demand unreasonable sacrifice of common sense. She must have had some destination in view when she left the Van Heigens yesterday, and, as far as he could see, there was no destination open to her but home.

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Mijnheer was firmly of this opinion, although, now that a question about it had been suggested to him, he wished he had made sure before the girl left. Of course, her plans and destination were no business of his—she might even have refused to give information about them on that account; he had dismissed her in disgrace, what she did next was not his concern. But in spite of her bad behaviour he had liked her; and though his notions of propriety, and consequent condemnation of her, had undergone no change, he was kind-heartedly anxious she should come to no harm. Her words about some good people making the merely indiscreet into sinners came back to him, but he would not apply them; Julia had gone home, he was sure of it, and a good thing too; the Englishman with the quiet voice and the grand manner could not follow her there to her detriment. Though, to be sure, it was strange that such a man as he should want to; he was not the kind of person Mijnheer had expected the partner in the escapade to be; truly the English were a strange people, very strange. His wife agreed with him on that point; they often said so afterwards—in fact, whenever they thought of the disgraced companion, who was such an excellent cook.

As for Rawson-Clew, he returned to England; there was nothing to keep him longer in Holland. But as he was still not sure how Julia's "capital arrangement" was going to be worked out, and was determined to bear his share of the burden, he decided to go to Marbridge on an early opportunity.

The opportunity did not occur quite so soon as he expected; several things intervened, so that he had been home more than a week before he was able to fulfil his intention. Marbridge lies in the west country, some considerable distance from London; Rawson-Clew did not reach it till the afternoon, at an hour devoted by the Polkingtons most exclusively to things social. It is to be feared, however, that he did not consider the Polkingtons collectively at all; it was Julia, and Julia alone, of whom he was thinking when he knocked at the door of No. 27 East Street.

The door was opened by a different sort of servant from the one who had opened it to him the last time he came; rather a smart-looking girl she was, with her answers quite ready.

"Miss Julia Polkington was not at home," she said, and, in answer to his inquiry when she was expected, informed him that she did not know.

"There is no talk of her coming home, sir," she said; "she is abroad, I think; she has been gone some time."

"Since when?"

The girl did not know. "In the spring, I think, sir," she said; "she has not been here all the summer."

Then, it seemed, his first suspicion was correct; Julia had not gone home; for some reason or another she was not able to return.

“Is Captain Polkington in?” he asked.

He was not; there was no one at home now; but Mrs. Polkington would be in in about an hour. The maid added the last, feeling sure her mistress would be sorry to let such a visitor slip.

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But Rawson-Clew did not want to see Mrs. Polkington; she, he was nearly sure, represented the aspiring side of the family, not the one to whom Julia would turn in straits. The improved look of the house and the servant suggested that the family was hard at work aspiring just now, and so less likely than ever to be ready to welcome the girl, or anxious to give true news of her if they had any to give. Captain Polkington, who no one could connect with the ascent of the social ladder, might possibly know something; at all events, there was a better chance of it, and he certainly could very easily be made to tell anything he did know.

“When do you expect Captain Polkington home?” he asked.

“Not for a month or more, I believe, sir,” was the answer; “he is in London just now.”

Rawson-Clew asked for his address; it occurred to him that Julia might have gone to her father; it really seemed very probable. He got the address in full, and went away, but without leaving any name to puzzle and tantalise Mrs. Polkington. Of course she was puzzled and tantalised when the maid told her of the visitor. From past experience, she expected something unpleasant of his coming, even though the description sounded favourable; but, as she heard no more of it, she forgot all about him in the course of time.

It was on the next afternoon that Rawson-Clew drove to 31 Berwick Street. There are several Berwick Streets in London, and, though the address given was full enough for the postal authorities, the cabman had some difficulty in finding it, and went wrong before he went right. It was a dingy street, and not very long; it had an unimportant, apologetic sort of air, as if it were quite used to being overlooked. The houses were oldish, and very narrow, so that a good many were packed into the short length; the pavement was narrow, too, and so were the windows; they, for the most part, were carefully draped with curtains of doubtful hue. Some were further guarded from prying eyes by sort of gridirons, politely called balconies, though, since the platform had been forgotten, and only the protecting railings were there hard up against the glass, the name was deceptive.

The hansom came slowly down the street, the driver scanning the frequent doors for 31. He overlooked it by reason of the fact that the number had been rubbed off, but finally located it by discovering most of the numbers above and below. Rawson-Clew got out and rang. In course of time—rather a long time—the door was opened to him by the landlady—that same landlady who had confided to Mr. Gillat the desirability of having a good standing with the butcher.

“Cap’ain Polkington?” she said, in answer to Rawson-Clew’s inquiry. “I don’t know whether he’s in or not; you’d better go up and see; one of ’em’s there, anyhow.”

She stood back against the wall, and Rawson-Clew came in.

“Up-stairs,” she said; “second door you come to.”

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With that she went down to the kitchen regions; she was no respecter of persons, and she thanked God she had plenty of her own business to mind, and never troubled herself poking into other people's. Consequently, though she might wonder what a man of Rawson-Clew's appearance should want with her lodgers, she did not let it interfere with her work, or take the edge off her tongue in the heated argument she held with the milkman, who came directly after.

Rawson-Clew found his way up the stairs; they were steep, and had rather the appearance of having been omitted in the original plan of the house, and squeezed in as an afterthought, when it was found really impossible to do without. There was no window to give light to them, or air either; hence, no doubt, the antiquity of the flavour of cabbage and fried bacon with hung about them. But Rawson-Clew, when he ascended, found the second door without trouble; there was not room to get lost. He knocked; he half expected to hear Julia's voice; it seemed to him probable that she was the person referred to as "one of them." But it was a man who bade him enter, and, unless his memory played him false, not Captain Polkington.

It was not the Captain, it was Johnny Gillat. He was reading the newspaper—Captain Polkington had it in the morning, he in the afternoon; he wore, or attempted to (they fell off rather often), very old slippers indeed, and a coat of surprising shabbiness which he reserved for home use. For a moment he stared at his visitor in astonishment, and Rawson-Clew apologised for his intrusion. "I was looking for Captain Polkington," he said. "I was told he was probably here."

"Ah!" Mr. Gillat exclaimed, his face lighting into a smile. "Of course, of course! Captain Polkington's out just now, but he'll be in soon. Come in, won't you; come in and wait for him."

He hospitably dragged forward the shabby easy-chair. "Try that, won't you?" he said. "It's really comfortable—not that one, that's a little weak in the legs; it ought to be put away; it's deceptive to people who don't know it."

He pushed the offending chair against the wall, his slippers flapping on his feet, so that he thought it less noticeable to surreptitiously kick them off. "My name's Gillat," he went on. "Captain Polkington is an old friend of mine."

"Mr. Gillat?" Rawson-Clew said. He remembered the name, and something Julia had said about the bearer of it. It was he who had given her the big gold watch she wore, and he of whom she had seemed fond, in a half-protecting, half-patient way, that was rather inexplicable—at least it was till he saw Mr. Gillat.

"Perhaps," Rawson-Clew said, "you can tell me what I want to know—it is about Miss Julia Polkington. I met her in Holland during the summer."

He may have thought of giving some idea of intimacy, or of explaining his interest; but, if so, he changed his mind; anything of the kind was perfectly unnecessary to Mr. Gillat, who did not dream of questioning his reason.

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“Ah, yes,” he said; “Julia is in Holland; she has been there a long time.”

“Is she there still?” Rawson-Clew asked. “Can you give me her address?”

“Well,” Johnny said regretfully, “not exactly. But she is abroad somewhere,” the last with an increase of cheerfulness, as if to indicate that this was something, at all events.

“You don’t know where she is?” Rawson-Clew inquired. “Does her father? I suppose he does—some one must.”

“No,” Johnny said. “No; I’m afraid not. Certainly her father does not, nor her mother—-none of us know; but, as you say, somebody must know—the people she is with, for instance.”

Rawson-Clew grew a little impatient. “Do you mean,” he said, “that her family are content to know nothing of her whereabouts? Have they taken no steps to find her?”

“Well, you see,” Johnny answered slowly, “there aren’t any steps to take. They don’t want to find her; she is quite well and happy, no doubt, and she will come back when she is ready. Mrs. Polkington—do you know Mrs. Polkington? A wonderful woman! She is very busy just now, she is shining. Miss Cherie is quite a belle. They really have not—have not accommodation for Julia; it is not, of course, that they don’t want her—-they have not exactly room for her.”

“But surely they want to know where she is?” Rawson-Clew persisted.

“No, they don’t,” Johnny told him. “They know she is all right; she told them so, and told them she did not want to be found. They are satisfied—” He broke off, feeling that the visitor was more astonished than admiring of such a state of affairs. “Family emotions and sentiments, you know,” he explained in defence of this family, “are not every one’s strong point; the social, or the religious, or—” (he waved his hand comprehendingly) “or the national may stand first, and why not?”

“Are you satisfied?” Rawson-Clew asked briefly.

“I’d sooner be able to see her,” Johnny admitted. “I’m fond of her; yes, she’s been very kind and good; I miss seeing her. But, of course, she has her way to make in the world.”

“But are you satisfied that she should make it thus? That she should leave the Dutch family she was with and disappear, leaving no address?”

“Sir,” Johnny said with dignity, “I am quite satisfied, and if any one says that he is not, I would be pleased to talk to him.”

But the dignity left Mr. Gillat's manner as quickly as it came; before Rawson-Clew could say anything, he was apologising. "You must forgive me," he said; "I am very fond of that little girl; and I thought—but I had no business to think; I'm an old fool, to think you meant—"

"I only meant," Rawson-Clew said, speaking with unconscious gentleness, "that I was afraid she might be in difficulties. She may be in trouble about money, or something."

"Oh, no," Johnny said cheerfully; "she has a fine head for money matters. I have sometimes thought, since she has been gone, that she has the best head in the family! She's all right—quite right; there's no need to be uneasy about her. I'll show you the letter she wrote me."

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He opened a shabby pocket-book, and took out a letter. “There, you read that,” he said.

Rawson-Clew read, and at the end was little wiser. Julia said she had left one situation (reason not even suggested), and had got another. That she did not wish to give her new address, or to hear from Mr. Gillat, or her family, at this new place, as it might spoil her arrangements. Rawson-Clew recognised the last word as a favourite of Julia’s; with her it was elastic, and could mean anything, from a piece of lace arranged to fill up the neck of a dress, to a complex and far-reaching scheme arranged to bring about some desired end. What it meant in the present instance was not indicated, but clearly she did not wish for interference, and, with some wisdom, took the surest way to prevent it by making it well-nigh impossible. She had left one means of communication, however, though apparently that was for Johnny only. “If you and father get into any very great muddle,” she wrote, “you must let me know. Put an advertisement—one word, ‘Johnny,’ will do—in a paper; I shall understand, and, if I can, I will try to do something.” A paper was suggested; it was a cheap weekly. Rawson-Clew remembered to have seen it once in the small Dutch town that summer, so it was to be got there. Unfortunately, as he also remembered, it was to be got in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, and Paris and Berlin too.

He folded the letter, and returned it to Mr. Gillat. “Thank you,” he said; “evidently, as you say, she does not wish to be found, and it would seem she has got some sort of employment, although I am afraid it cannot be of an easy or pleasant sort.”

He did not explain the reason he had for thinking so, and Mr. Gillat never thought of asking. Soon after he went away.

Clearly there was nothing to be done. Julia did not mean to have his help and protection; and, with a decision and completeness which, now he came to think of it, did not altogether surprise him, she has taken care to avoid them. That absurd refusal of hers was, after all, a reprieve, although until now he had not looked upon it in that light. No doubt it was a good thing affairs had turned out as they had; the marriage would have been in many ways disadvantageous. Yet he certainly would have insisted on it, and taken trouble to do so, if she had not put it altogether out of his power. All the same, he did not feel as gratified as he ought, perhaps because the arrogance of man is not pleased to have woman arbitrator of his fate, and the instinct of gentleman is not satisfied to have her bear his burden, perhaps for some other less clear reason. He really did not know himself, and did not try to think; there seemed little object in doing so, seeing that incident was closed.

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The next day he went north, and by accident travelled part of the way with a lady of his acquaintance. She was young, not more than five or six and twenty, nice looking too, and very well dressed. She had a lot of small impediments with her—a cloak, a dressing-bag, sunshade, umbrella, golf clubs—some one, no doubt, would come and clear her when the destination was reached; in the mean time, she and her belongings were an eminently feminine presence. She talked pleasantly of what had happened since they last met; she had been to Baireuth that summer, she told him, and spoke intelligently of the music, the technique and the beauty of it, and what it stood for. She was surprised to hear he had got no further than Holland, and more surprised still that he had not even seen Rembrandt's masterpiece while he was there. Her voice was smooth and even, a little loud, perhaps, from her spending much time out of doors, not in the least given to those subtle changes of tone which express what is not said; but as she never wanted to express any such things, that did not matter.

She did not bore him with too much conversation; she had papers with her—some three or four, and she glanced at them between whiles. Afterwards she commented on their contents—the political situation, the war (there is always a war somewhere), the cricket news, the new books; touching lightly, but intelligently, on each topic in turn.

Rawson-Clew listened and answered, polite and mildly interested. It was some time since he had heard this agreeable kind of conversation, and since he had come in contact with this agreeable kind of person. He ought to have appreciated it more, as men appreciate the charm of drawing-rooms who have long been banished from them. He came to the conclusion that he must be growing old, not to prefer the society of a pretty, agreeable and well-dressed woman to an empty railway carriage.

The girl had two fine carnations in her coat; the stalks were rather long, and so had got bruised. She regretted this, and Rawson-Clew offered to cut them for her. He began to feel for a knife in likely and unlikely pockets, and it was then that he first noticed a faint, sweet smell; dry, not strong at all, more a memory than a scent. He did not recognise what it was, nor from where it came, but it reminded him of something, he could not think what.

He puzzled over it as he cut the flower stalks, then all at once he laid hold on the edge of a recollection—a pair of dark eyes, in which mirthful, mocking lights flickered, as the sun splashes flicker on the ground under trees—a voice, many-noted as a violin, that grew softest when it was going to strike hardest, that expressed a hundred things unsaid.

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He looked across at the owner of the carnations, and wondered by what perversity of fate it was decreed that any one who could buy such good boots, should have such ill-shaped feet to put into them; and why, if fate so handicapped her, why she should exhibit them by crossing her knees. He also wondered what possessed her to wear that hat; every other well-dressed girl had a variation of the style that year, it was the correctest of the correct for fashion, but he did not take note of that. Men are rather blockheaded on the subject of fashion, and seldom see the charm in the innately unbecoming and unsuitable, no matter what decrees it.

He looked back to the empty opposite corner, and, though until that moment he had not really thought of Julia since he left Mr. Gillat yesterday, he put her there in imagination now. He did not want her there, he did not want her anywhere (there are some wines which a man does not want, that still rather spoil his taste for others). She would not have made the mistake of wearing such a hat; her clothes were not new, they were distinctly shabby sometimes, but they were well assorted. As to the boots—he remembered the day he tied her shoe—he could imagine the man she married, if he were very young and very foolish, of course, finding a certain pleasure in taking her arched foot, when it was pink and bare, in the hollow of his hand. If she were in that corner now, the quiet, twinkling smile would certainly be on her face as she listened to the talk of books, and men, and places, and things. He did not picture her joining even when they spoke of things she knew, and places she had been to—he remembered he had once heard her speak of a town which had been spoken of this afternoon. She had somehow grasped the whole life of the place, and laid it bare to him in a few words—the light-hearted gaiety and the sordid misery, the black superstition and the towering history which overhung it, and the cheerful commonplace which, like the street cries and the gutter streams, ran through it all—the whole flavour of the thing. The girl opposite had been to the place too; she told him of the historic spots she had visited; she knew a deal more about them than Julia did. She spoke of the quaint pottery to be bought there—it had not struck Julia as quaint, any more than it did its buyers and sellers. And she referred to the sayings and opinions of a great pose writer, who had expressed all he knew and felt and thought about it, and more besides. Julia, apparently, had not read him—what reading she had done seemed to be more in the direction of *Gil Blas*, and Dean Swift, and other kindred things in different languages.

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The owner of the carnations glanced out of window, and commented on the scenery, which was here rather fine—Julia would not have done that; all the same, she would have known just what sort of country they had passed through all the way, not only when it was fine; she would have noticed the lie of the land, the style of work done there, the kind of lives lived there, even, possibly, the likely difficulties in the way of railway-making and bridge building. She would certainly have taken account of the faces on the platforms at which they drew up, so that without effort she could have picked out the porter who would give the best service; the stranger in need of help, and he who would offer it; and the guard most likely to be useful if it were necessary to cheat the company—it was conceivable that cheating companies might sometimes be necessary in her scheme of things.

[Illustration: "Julia"]

He cut another piece off the carnation stalks, they were still too long. He did not wish Julia there; he fancied that it was likely she would not easily find her place among the people he would meet at his journey's end. But if there were no end—if he were going somewhere else, east or west, north or south—say a certain old oriental town, old and wicked as time itself, and full of the mystery and indefinable charm of age, and iniquity, and transcendent beauty—she would like that; she would grasp the whole, without attempting to express or judge it. Or a little far-off Tyrolean village, remote as the mountains from the life of the world—she would like that; the discomfort would be nothing to her, the primitiveness, the simplicity, everything. If he were going to some such place—why, then, there were worse things than having to take the companion of the holiday too.

He handed back the carnations, and then unthinkingly put his hand into his coat-pocket. His fingers came in contact with some dry rubbish, little more than stalks and dust, but still exhaling something of the fragrance which had been sun distilled on the Dunes. He recognised it now—Julia's flowers, put there in the wood, and forgotten until now.

"Thanks so much for cutting them," said the girl with the carnations, smelling them before she fastened them on again. "I really think they are my favourite flower; the scent is so delicious—quite the nicest flower of all, don't you think so?"

"I'm not sure," Rawson-Clew said thoughtfully, and when he spoke thoughtfully he drawled very much, "I'm not sure I don't sometimes prefer wild thyme."

CHAPTER XII

THE YOUNG COOK

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It was about ten o'clock on an October night; everything was intensely quiet in the big kitchen where Julia stood. It was not a cheerful place even in the day time, the windows looked north, and were very high up; the walls and floor were alike of grey stone, which gave it a prison-like aspect, and also took much scrubbing, as she had reason to know. It was far too large a place to be warmed by the small stove now used; Julia sometimes wondered if the big one that stood empty in its place would have been sufficient to warm it. She glanced at it now, but without interest; she was very tired, it was almost bed-time, and she had done, as she had every day since she first joined Herr Van de Greutz's household, a very good day's work. She had scarcely been outside the four walls since she first came there on the day after the holiday on the Dunes. This had been her own choice, for, unlike all the cooks who had been before her, she had asked for no evenings out. Marthe, the short-tempered housekeeper, had not troubled herself to wonder why, she had been only too pleased to accept the arrangement without comment. Apart from the self-chosen confinement, the life had been hard enough; the work was hard, the service hard and ill-paid, and both the other inmates of the house cross-grained, and difficult to please. These things, however, Julia did not mind; discomfort never mattered much to her when she had an end in view; in this case, too, the end should more than repay the worst of her two task-masters. Which was agreeable, and almost made his unpleasantness desirable, as providing her intended act with a justification.

She drew the coffee pot further on to the stove, and with a splinter of wood stirred the fire. She had the kitchen to herself, old Marthe had gone to bed; she liked going to bed early, with a glass of something hot, and she had soon found that the young cook could be trusted to finish the work down-stairs. It was her opinion that it is as well to be comfortable when you can, as blessings are fleeting and fickle, especially when they are cooks; so she indulged often both in bed and the glass, notably the glass. She had not been able to go to bed quite as early as she liked that day, for her master had a visitor, and there had been some trouble after the dinner. It was intended to be an hour later than usual to accommodate the visitor, but the chemist had not mentioned the fact—he seldom troubled about such trifles, expecting his household to divine his wishes instinctively, and resenting their failure to do so with indignation and some abuse. He did so to-day, and Marthe was consequently kept up later than she had intended, though it was Julia who came in for most of the reproof, and the trouble too; it was she who took away the dinner and kept it hot, and presented it afresh when the time came in as good condition as she could manage. There had to be a second omelet made; the first would not stand an hour, and so was wasted, to the indignation of Marthe. The chicken was a trifle dried by waiting, which called down the wrath of Herr Van de Greutz. Julia had listened to both of them with a meekness which was beautiful to see, albeit perhaps a little suspicious in one of her nature.

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She glanced up at the clock now, then rose and fetched two thick white coffee cups, and set them ready on a tray, and sat down again. She wondered drowsily how long Herr Van de Greutz's visitor would stay. He was a German, a very great scientist; the chemist looked upon him as a friend and an equal, a brother in arms; they talked together freely in the cryptic language of science, and in German, which is the tongue best fitted to help out the other. Julia heard them when she went to and from with the dishes at dinner time. She did not understand chemistry, a fact she much regretted; had she known even half as much as Rawson-Clew, the desired end would have been much sooner within reach. It is a very great disadvantage to have only a very vague idea what it is you want. But she did understand German very well, consequently part of the chemists' conversation was quite intelligible to her, though they did not know it. Herr Van de Greutz knew and cared nothing about her; he was not even aware that she was English, though, of course, old Marthe was.

If the conversation had touched on the famous explosive at dinner time, Julia would have known it; she was always on the watch for some such occurrence. Unfortunately it had not, although, as she saw plainly, the German was the sort of man with whom Van de Greutz would discuss such things. She had still another chance of hearing something; she would soon have to take the coffee into the laboratory; they might be speaking of it then. She remembered once before Van de Greutz had spoken of it to a scientific guest at such a time; she had then heard some unenlightening technical details, which might have been of some value to a chemist, but were of no use at all to her ignorance. It was hard to come thus near, and yet be as far off as ever, but such things are likely to occur when one is in pursuit of anything, Julia knew that; she was prepared to wait, by and by she would find out what it was she wanted, and then—

A bell rang peremptorily; she hastily poured the strong black coffee into the two cups, and put a bottle of Schiedam on the tray. As she did so she noticed that it was nearly empty, so she fetched another full one, and added that to the tray. The bell did not ring again, although getting the second bottle had hindered her, for by this time the chemists had forgotten they wanted coffee. When she entered the laboratory, Herr Van de Greutz had just taken a bottle from the lower part of a cupboard near the door. Second shelf from the floor, five bottles from the left-hand corner. Julia observed the place with self-trained accuracy as she passed Herr Van de Greutz with the tray, which she carried to the table far down the room.

"This is it," Van de Greutz said; "a small quantity only, you see, but the authorities have a ridiculous objection to one's keeping any large one of explosive. Of course, I have more, in a stone house in my garden; it is perhaps safer so, seeing its nature, and the fact that one is always liable to small accidents in a laboratory."

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Julia put down the tray, but upset some of the coffee. Seeing that excitement had not usually the effect of making her hand unsteady, it is possible accident had not much to do with it. However, it happened; she carefully wiped it up, and the two chemists, paying no more attention to her than if she had been a cat, went on speaking of the explosive. It was *the* explosive; their talk told her that before she had finished the wiping.

“The formula I would give for it?” Van de Greutz was saying; as she sopped up the last drops, he gave the formula.

She lifted the full bottle of Schiedam from the tray, and carried it away with her—in the hand farthest from the chemist’s, certainly, but with as little concealment as ostentation. Near the door she glanced at the German, or rather, at what he held, the sample of the explosive. It was a white powder in a wide-necked, stoppered bottle of the size Julia herself called “quarter pint.” The bottle was not more than two-thirds full, and had no mark on it at all, except a small piece of paper stuck to the side, and inscribed with the single letter “A.” This may have been done in accordance with some private system of Herr Van de Greutz’s, or it may have been for the sake of secrecy. The reason did not matter; the most accurate name would have been no more informing to Julia, but decidedly more inconvenient.

She went out and shut the door quietly; then she literally fled back to the kitchen with the Schiedam. Scarcely waiting to set it down, she seized a slip of kitchen paper, and scribbled on it the string of letters and figures that Herr Van de Greutz had given as the formula of his explosive. She did not know what a formula was, nor in what relation it stood to the chemical body, but from the talks she had heard between the chemist and his friends, she guessed it to be something important. Accordingly, when he said the formula, she was as careful to remember it accurately as she was to remember the place of the bottle on the shelf. Now she wrote it down just as he spoke it, and, though perhaps not exactly as he would have written it, still comprehensible. She pinned the piece of paper in the cuff of her dress; it would not be found there if, by ill luck, she was caught and searched later on. Next she went to the kitchen cupboard; there were several wide-necked stoppered bottles there, doubtless without the chemist’s knowledge, but Marthe found them convenient for holding spices, and ginger, and such things. She took the one nearest in shape and size to the one which she had seen in the German’s hand; emptied out the contents, dusted it and put in ground rice till it was two-thirds full. Then, with the lap-scissors, she trimmed a piece of paper to the right size, wrote “A” upon it, and stuck it to the side of the bottle with a dab of treacle—she had nothing else. She was hastily wiping off the surplus stickiness when the bell rang again. She finished what she was doing, and shrouded the bottle in a duster, so that there was another summons before she could set out. She took the Schiedam with her—of course it was that which was rung for, but also the bottle in the duster.

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She did not hurry. “I’ll give him time to put the explosive back,” she thought. It was just possible that it would be set on a bench, perhaps in an awkward place, but from her knowledge of Van de Greutz’s ways she guessed not. It was also, of course, possible that the cupboard where it was kept would be locked; in that case, nothing could be done just now—annoying, but not desperate; ground rice will keep, and, apparently, explosives too, so she reflected as she opened the laboratory door. But the cupboard was not locked, and the bottle was back in its place. Another from the shelf above had been taken out; the chemists were discussing that as they sat smoking cigars at the table far down the room, where the coffee cups stood.

“More Schiedam!” Herr Van de Greutz said, throwing the words at Julia over his shoulder. “Why did you bring an empty bottle?”

“I am sorry, Mijnheer,” Julia answered; “there was not much, I know; I have brought more.”

She pushed the door to with her foot as she spoke, and with the hand not carrying the spirit set down the duster and the bottle it held on a chair. The German had put his coat over the chair earlier; it stood in front of the cupboard, a little way from it. With the true rogue’s eye for cover, Julia noted the value of its position, and even improved it by moving it a little to the left as she knocked against it in passing.

She brought the Schiedam to the table. “Shall I take the cups, Mijnheer?” she asked.

“Yes,” Van de Greutz answered shortly, resenting the interruption, “and go to the devil. As I was saying, it is very unstable.”

This was to the German, and did not concern Julia; she took the tray of cups and went. But near the door there was an iron tripod lying on the floor; she caught her foot in it, stumbled and fell headlong, dropping tray and cups with a great clatter.

There was a general exclamation of annoyance and anger from Van de Greutz, of surprise and commiseration from the German, and of something that might have been fright or pain from Julia.

“You clumsy fool!” Van de Greutz cried. “Get out of here, and don’t let me see your face, or hear your trampling ass-hoofs again! Do you hear me, I won’t have you in here again!”

The German was more sympathetic. “Have you hurt yourself?” he asked.

“No, Mijnheer, nothing,” Julia answered; “only a little—my knees and elbows.” Had she been playing Othello, though she might not have blacked herself all over, it is certain she would have carried the black a long way below high water mark. This was no painless stage stumble, but one with real bruises and a real thud.

The German had half risen; perhaps he thought of coming to help pick up the pieces of broken cups that were scattered between the cupboard and the chair. But he did not do so, for Herr Van de Greutz went on to speak of his unstable compound.

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“I treated it with—” he said, and, seeing this was something very daring, the other’s attention was caught.

Julia picked up the pieces alone, and carried them out on the tray, and on the tray also she carried a bottle wrapped into a duster. It was a wide-necked stoppered bottle, two-thirds full of white powder; very much like the one she had brought in, but also very much like the one that stood five from the end on the second shelf of the cupboard.

Soon after that she went up to her room, and took the bottle with her. Then, when she had set it in a place of safety, and securely locked the door, she broke into a silent laugh of delighted amusement. She pictured to herself Herr Van de Greutz’s face when, in company with some other chemist, he found the ground rice, while his cook with the “ass-hoofs” carried the explosive to her native land.

“What a thief I should make,” was her own opinion of herself. “I believe I could do as well as Grimm’s ‘Master Thief,’ who stole the parson and clerk.” She took up the bottle and shook a little of the contents into her hand; she had not the least idea how it was set off, whether a blow, a fall, or heat would reveal its dangerous characteristics. For a little she looked at it with curiosity and satisfaction. But gradually the satisfaction faded; the excitement of the chase was over, and the prize, now it was won, did not seem a great thing. She set the bottle down rather distastefully, and turned away.

“He could not have got the stuff,” she told herself defiantly—“he” was Rawson-Clew—-but the next moment, with the justice she dealt herself, she admitted, “Because he would not get it this way; he is not rogue enough; while as for me—I am a born rogue.”

She pushed open the window and looked out, although it was quite dark, and the air pervaded with a cold, rank smell of wet vegetation. She was thinking of the other piece of roguery which she had meant to commit, and yet had not. She had the bulb, in spite of that; it was safe among her clothes—hers by a free gift, hers absolutely, yet as unable to be sold as the lock of a dead mother’s hair. The debt of honour could not be paid by that. From her heart she wished she had not got the daffodil; she put it in the same category with Mr. Gillat’s watch, as one of the things which made her ashamed of herself and of her life, even of this last act, and the very skill that had made it easy.

She took up the bottle again, and for a moment considered whether she should give it back to Herr Van de Greutz—not personally, that would hardly be safe; but she could post it from England after she left his service. But she did not do so; Rawson-Clew stood in the way; it was for him she had taken it, and her purpose in him still stood. He wanted the explosive, it would be to his credit and honour to have it; the government service to which he belonged would think highly of him if he had it—if he received

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it anonymously, so that he could not tell from whence it came, and they could not divide the credit of getting it between him and another. He wanted it, and he had been good to her. He had been kind when she was in trouble; he had not believed her when she had called herself dishonest; he had treated her as an equal, in spite of the affair at Marbridge, and he had asked her to marry him when he thought she was compromised by the holiday in the Dunes. For a moment her mind strayed from the point at issue, to that offer of marriage. She remembered the exact wording of the letter as if she had but just received it, and it pleased her afresh. She did not regret that she had refused him; nothing else had been possible. She did not want to marry him; albeit, when they had sat together under his coat, she had not shrunk from contact with him as she had shrunk from Joost when he had tried to take her hand—that was certainly strange. But she was quite sure she did not want to marry him; now she came to think about it, she could imagine that, were she a girl of his own class, with the looks, training and knowledge that belonged, she might have found him precisely the man she would have wanted to marry.

She went to a drawer and took out an old handkerchief. She was not a girl of that sort—deep down she felt inarticulately the old primitive consciousness of inferiority and superiority, at once jealous and contemptuous; marrying him and living always on his plane were alike impossible to her, but she could give him the explosive. There was not one girl among all those others who could have got it and given it to him!

She tore a piece from the handkerchief, and fastened it over the stopper of the bottle; then she got out a hat trimmed with bows of wide ribbon, and sewed the bottle into the centre bow. It presented rather a bulgy appearance, but by a little pulling of the other trimming it was hardly noticeable, and really nothing is too peculiar to be worn on the head. After that she went to bed.

* * * * *

There was trouble in Herr Van de Greutz's kitchen the next day; the young cook, who had behaved so admirably before, did what old Marthe called "showing the cloven hoof." She was impertinent, she was idle; she broke dishes, she wasted eggs, and she lighted a roaring fire in the big stove, in spite of the strict economy of fuel which was one of the first rules of the household. Finally she announced that she must have a day's holiday. Marthe refused point blank, whereupon the cook said she should take it, and a dispute ensued; Marthe called her several names, and reminded her of the fact that she had no character, and that she had confessed to being obliged to leave the Van Heigens in haste. Julia retorted that that fact was known to the housekeeper when she engaged her, and was the reason of the starvation wage offered. Marthe then inquired what enormity it was that she had committed at the Van Heigens',

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and intimated that it must be disgraceful indeed for a person, pretending to be a lady-help, to be thankful to accept the situation of cook. Julia's answer was scarcely polite, and very well calculated to rouse the old woman further, and, at the same time, she opened the door and skilfully worked herself and her antagonist into the passage, and some way up it, raising her voice so as to incite the other to raise hers. The result was that soon the noise reached Herr Van de Greutz.

Out he came in a great rage, ordering them about their business, and abusing them roundly. Marthe hurried back to the kitchen, effectually silenced, but Julia remained; she had not got her dismissal yet, and it was imperative she should get it, for there was no telling when the ground rice would be discovered. But she soon got what she wanted; after a very little more inciting, Herr Van de Greutz ordered her out of his house a great deal more peremptorily than she had been ordered out of the Van Heigens'. She was to go at once; she was to pack her things and go, and Marthe was to see that she took nothing but what was her own; she was the most untrustworthy and incompetent pig that the devil ever sent to spoil good food, and steal silver spoons.

To this Julia replied by asking for her wages. At first Van de Greutz refused; but Julia, with some effrontery, considering the circumstances, declined to go without them, so eventually he thought better of it and paid her. After that she and Marthe went up-stairs, and she packed and Marthe looked on, closely scrutinising everything. When all was done, and she herself dressed, she walked out of the house, with the formula fastened inside her cuff, and the explosive balanced on her head. And the old man who did the rough work about the place came with her, wheeling her luggage on a barrow as far as the gate. Here he shot it out, and left her to wait till she might hail some passing cart, and so get herself conveyed to the town.

CHAPTER XIII

THE HEIRESS

There was a fog on the river and while the tide was low no craft moved; but with its rising there came a stir of life, the mist that crept low on the brown water became articulate with syren voices and the thud of screws and the wash of water churned by belated boats. The steamers called eerily, out of the distance a heart-broken cry like no other thing on earth, suddenly near at hand a hoot terrific; but nothing was to be seen except rarely when out of the yellow impenetrableness a hull rose abruptly, a vague dark mass almost within touching distance. Julia stood on deck and listened while the little Dutch boat crept up; she found something fascinating in this strange, shrouded river, haunted, like a stream of the nether world, with lamentable bodiless voices. The

fog had delayed them, of course; the afternoon was now far advanced; they had been compelled to wait

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some long time while the tide was down, and even now that it was coming up, they could go but slowly. The last through train to Marbridge would have left Paddington before the Tower Stairs were reached; but Julia did not mind that; she would go to Mr. Gillat; she could get a room at the house where he lodged for one night; she was glad at the thought of seeing Johnny again. Johnny, who knew the worst and loved and trusted still.

Gradually the fog lifted, not clearing right away, but enough for the last of the sunset to show smoky, rose in a wonderful tawny sky. All the russet-brown water kindled, each ripple edge catching a gleam of yellow, except to the eastward, where, by some trick of light, the main stream looked like a pool of dull silver, all pale and cold and holy. The wharves and factories on the banks revealed themselves, heavy black outlines, pinnacled with chimneys like some far-off spired city. All the craft that filled the river became clear too, those that lay still waiting repairs or cargo or the flood of the incoming tide, and those that moved—the black Norwegian timber boats, the dirty tramp steamers from far-off seas, the smooth grey-hulled liners, the long strings of loaded barges, that followed one another up the great waterway like camels in a desert caravan. Julia stood on deck and watched it all, and to her there seemed a certain sombre beauty and a something that moved her, though she could not tell why, with a curious baseless pride of race. And while she watched, the twilight fell, and the colours turned to purple and grey, and the lights twinkled out in the shipping and along the shore—hundreds and hundreds of lights; and gradually, like the murmur of the sea in a shell, the roar of the city grew on the ear, till at last the little boat reached the Stairs, where the old grey fortress looks down on the new grey bridge, and the restless river below.

A waterman put Julia ashore, after courtesies from the Custom House officers, and a porter took her and her belongings to Mark Lane station, from whence it was not difficult to get approximately near Berwick Street.

Mr. Gillat was not expecting visitors; he had no reason to imagine any one would come to see him; he did not imagine that the rings at the front bell could concern him; even when he heard steps coming up-stairs he only thought it was another lodger. It was not till Julia opened the door of the back room he now occupied that he had the least idea any one had come to see him.

“Julia!” he exclaimed, when he saw her standing on the threshold. “Dear, dear, dear me!”

“Yes,” Julia said, “it really is I. I’m back again, you see;” and she came in and shut the door.

“Bless my soul!” Johnny said; “bless my soul! You’re home again!”

“On my way home; I can’t get to Marbridge to-night very comfortably, and I wanted to see you, so here I am. I have arranged with your landlady to let me have a room.”

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Mr. Gillat appeared quite overcome with joy and surprise, and it seemed to Julia, nervousness too. He led her to a chair; “Won’t you sit down?” he said, placing it so that it commanded a view of the window and nothing else.

Julia sat down; she did not need to look at the room; she had already mastered most of its details. When she first came in she had seen that it was small and poor—a back bedroom, nothing more; an iron bed, not too tidy, stood in one corner, a washstand, with dirty water in the basin, in another. There was a painted chest of drawers opposite the window; one leg was missing, its place being supplied by a pile of old school-books; the top was adorned with a piece of newspaper in lieu of a cover, and one of the drawers stood partly open; no human efforts could get it shut, so Mr. Gillat’s wardrobe was exposed to the public gaze—if the public happened to look that way. Julia did not; nor did she look towards the fire-place, where a very large towel-horse with a very small towel upon it acted as a stove ornament—plain proof that fires were unknown there. She looked across Mr. Gillat’s cheap lamp to the window and the vista of chimney pots, which were very well in view, for the blind refused to come down and only draped the upper half of the window in a drooping fashion.

Johnny stood against the chest of drawers, striving vainly to push the refractory drawer shut, although he knew by experience it was quite impossible. She could see him without turning her head; he was shabbier than ever; even his tie—his one extravagance used to be gay ties—was shabby, and his shoes would hardly keep on his feet. His round pink face was still round and pink; he did not look exactly older, though his grizzled little moustache was greyer, only somehow more puzzled and hurt by the ways of fate. Julia knew that that was the way he would age; experience would never teach him anything, although, as she suddenly realised, it had been trying lately.

She turned away from the window; “I have left my luggage at the station,” she said; “I got out what I wanted in the waiting-room and brought it along in a parcel. I think I’ll take it to my room now, if you don’t mind, and wash my face and get rid of my hat—it is very heavy. I shan’t be long.”

She rose as she spoke, and Johnny bustled to open the door for her, too much a gentleman, in spite of all, to show he was glad to have her go and give him a chance to clear up. At the door she paused.

“You need not order supper, Johnny,” she said; “I’ve seen about that.”

Johnny stopped, his face a shade pinker. “Oh, but,” he protested, “you shouldn’t do that; you mustn’t do that. I’ll tell Mrs. Horn we won’t have it; I’ll make it all right with her; I was just going out to get a—a pork pie for myself.”

It is to be feared this statement was no more veracious than Julia's, and certainly it was not nearly so well made; it would not have deceived a far less astute person than she, while hers would have deceived a far more astute person than he.

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“A pork pie?” Julia said. “You have no business to eat such things in the evening at your time of life. I tell you I have settled supper; we had much better have what I have got. I could not bring you a present home from Holland; I left in a hurry, so I have bought supper instead. It is my present to you—and myself—I have selected just what I thought I could eat best; one has fancies, you know, after one has been seasick.”

It would require an ingeniously bad sailor to be seasick while a Dutch cargo boat crept up the Thames in a fog, but Julia never spared the trimmings when she did do any lying. Johnny was quite satisfied and let her go to take off her hat—and the precious explosive which she still carried in it.

While she was gone he tidied the room to the best of his ability. He regretted that he had nowhere better to ask her; if he had the sitting-room he occupied when Rawson-Clew came in September, he would have felt quite grand. But that was a thing of the past, so he made the best of circumstances and went to the reckless extravagance of sixpenny worth of fire. When Julia came in, the towel-horse had been removed from the fender, and a fire was sputtering awkwardly in the grate, while Mr. Gillat, proud as a school-boy who has planned a surprise treat, was trying to coax the smoke up the damp chimney.

“Johnny!” Julia exclaimed, “what extravagance! It’s quite a warm night, too!”

Johnny smiled delightedly. “I thought you’d be cold after your journey; you look quite pale and pinched,” he said; “seasickness does leave one feeling chilly.”

Julia repented of that unnecessary trimming of hers. “It is nice to have a fire,” she said, striving not to cough at the choking smoke; “I don’t need it a bit, but I don’t know anything I should have enjoyed more; why, I haven’t seen a real fire since I left England!”

She broke off to take the tongs from Mr. Gillat, who, in his efforts to improve the draught, had managed to shut the register. She opened it again, and in a little had the fire burning nicely. Johnny looked on and admired, and at her suggestion opened the window to let out the smoke. After that she managed to persuade the blind down, and, what is more, mended it so that it would go up again; then Mr. Gillat cleared the dressing-table and pulled it out into the middle of the room, and by that time supper was ready—fried steak and onions and bottled beer, with jam puffs and strong black coffee to follow—not exactly the things for one lately suffering from seasickness, but Julia tried them all except the bottled beer and seemed none the worse for it. And as for Johnny, if you had searched London over you could have found nothing more to his taste. He was a little troubled at the thought of what Julia must have spent, but she assured him she had her wages, so he was content. Seldom was one happier than Mr. Gillat at that supper, or afterwards, when the table was cleared and they drew up to the fire. They sat one each side of the fender on cane-seated chairs, the coffee on the hob, and

Johnny smoking a Dutch cigar of Julia's providing. One can buy them at the railway stations in Holland, and she had scarcely more pleasure in giving them to Johnny than she had in smuggling home more than the permitted quantity.

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“Now tell me about things,” Julia said.

Johnny’s face fell a little. During supper they had talked about her affairs and experiences, none of the unpleasant ones; she was determined not to have the supper spoiled by anything. Now, however, she felt that the time had come to hear the other side of things.

“I suppose father has been to town?” she remarked; she knew only too well that nothing else could account for Mr. Gillat’s reduced circumstances. “When did he go?”

“He has not been gone much more than a week,” Johnny said; “think of that now! If he’d stayed only a fortnight more he’d have been here to-night; it is a pity!”

“I don’t think it is at all,” Julia said frankly; “the pity is he ever came.”

Johnny rubbed his hand along his chair. “Well, well,” he said, “your mother wished it; she knows what she is about; she is a wonderful woman, a wonderful woman. I did what you told me, I really did.”

Julia was sure of that, but she was also sure now that he had not been a match for her mother.

“I went down to Marbridge a week before your father was supposed to be coming to town; I warned him very likely I should have to go away, just as you said—and the very day I went to Marbridge he came to town, the very day—a week earlier than was talked of.”

Julia could not repress an inclination to smile, not only at the neat way in which her mother had checkmated her, but also at the thought of that lady’s face when Mr. Gillat presented himself at Marbridge, just as she was congratulating herself on being rid of the Captain.

“What happened?” she asked. “Did mother send you back to town again?”

“She did not send me,” Mr. Gillat answered; “but, of course, I had to go, as she said; there was your father all alone here; it would be very dull for him; I couldn’t leave him. Besides, he is not—not a strong man, it would be better—she would feel more easy if she thought he had his old friend with him, to see he didn’t get into—you know.”

“I know,” Julia answered; “mother told you all this, then she paid your fare back again.”

“Not paid my fare,” Mr. Gillat corrected; “a lady could not offer to do such a thing; do you think I would ever have allowed it? I couldn’t you know.”

Julia's lips set straight; she had something of a man's contempt for small meannesses, and it is possible her judgment on this economy of her mother's was harder than any she had for the unjustifiable extravagances at which she guessed. She did not say anything of it to Mr. Gillat, she was too ashamed; not that he saw it in that light; he didn't think he had been in any way badly used, he never did.

"Well," she said, "then you came back to town and looked after father to the best of your abilities? I suppose you could not do much good?"

Johnny rubbed his hand along his chair again for a little. "You see," he said hesitatingly, "it was very dull for him; of course he wanted amusement."

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“And of course he had it, though he could not afford it, and you paid?”

“Not to any great extent; oh, dear no, not to any great extent.”

“No, because you had not got ‘any great extent’ to spend; what you had, limited the amount, I suppose, nothing else.”

Mr. Gillat ignored this. “Your father,” he said, rather uneasily, looking at her and then away again, “your father never had a very strong head, he—you know—he—”

“Has taken to drink?” Julia asked baldly. “As well as gambling he drinks now?”

“Oh, no,” Johnny said quickly, “not exactly, that is—he does take more than he used, more than is good for him sometimes; not much is good for him, you know—he does take more, it is no good pretending he does not. But it was very dull for him; it did not suit him being here, I think; he used to get so low in spirits, what with his losses and feeling he was not wanted at home. He thinks a great deal of your mother, and he could not but feel that she does not think much of him to send him away like that; it hurt him, although, as he said to me more than once, no doubt he deserved it. It preyed on his mind; he seemed to want something to cheer him.”

Julia nodded; she could understand the effect well enough, though the causes at work might not be quite clear. To her young judgment it seemed a little strange that her father should have never realised what a cumberer of the ground he was to his wife until she banished him “for his health.” But so it evidently was, and after all she could believe it; like some others he had “made such a sinner of his conscience,” that he could believe, not only his own lie, but the legends woven about him. They had all pretended things, he and they also; his position, too, had come gradually, he had got to accept it without thinking before it was an established fact. But now the truth had been brought home to him—more or less—and he was miserable, and, according to the custom of his sort, set to making bad worse as soon as ever he discovered it.

“Why did he go home last week?” she aroused herself to ask.

“He thought it his duty,” was Johnny’s surprising answer. “No, Mrs. Polkington did not send for him, she did not know he was coming; he decided for himself, he felt it would be better.”

Mr. Gillat rambled on vaguely, but Julia was not slow to guess that the principal reason was to be found in the state of Johnny’s finances. She questioned him as to when he had moved into the back room, and, finding it to be not long before her father’s departure, guessed that discomfort, like the husks of the prodigal son, had awakened the thing dignified by the name of duty.

For a little she sat in silence, thinking matters over. Johnny smoked hard at the stump of his cigar, mended the fire and fidgeted, looking sideways at her.

“Don’t worry about it,” he ventured at last; “things’ll look up, they will; when he’s back at Marbridge with your mother he’ll be all right. She always had a great influence over him, she had, indeed.”

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Julia said “Yes.” But he did not feel there was much enthusiasm in the monosyllable, so he cast about in his mind for something to cheer her and thus remembered a very important matter.

“What an old fool I am!” he exclaimed. “There’s something I ought to have told you the moment you came in, and I’ve clean forgotten it until now; it’s good news, too! There is a lawyer wants to see you.”

“What about?” Julia asked; she did not seem to naturally associate a lawyer with good news.

“A legacy,” Johnny answered triumphantly.

Julia was much astonished; she could not imagine from whence it came, but before she asked she made the business-like inquiry, “How much?”

“Not a great deal, I’m afraid,” Mr. Gillat was obliged to say; “still, a little’s a help, you know; it may be a great help; you remember your father’s Aunt Jane?”

Julia did, or rather she remembered the name. Great-aunt Jane was one of the relations the Polkingtons did not use; she was not rich enough or obliging enough to give any help, nor grand enough for conversational purposes. She never figured in Mrs. Polkington’s talk except vaguely as “one of my husband’s people in Norfolk;” this when she was explaining that the Captain came of East Anglian stock on his mother’s side. Jane was only a step-aunt to the Captain; his mother had married above her family, her half-sister Jane had married a little beneath—a small farmer, in fact, whose farming had got smaller still before he died, which was long ago. Great-aunt Jane could not have much to leave any one, but, as Mr. Gillat said, anything was better than nothing; the real surprise was why it should have been left to Julia.

She asked Johnny about it, but he could not tell her much; he really knew very little except that there was something, and that the lawyer wanted her address and was annoyed when her relations could not give it. Indeed, even went so far as to think they would not, and that it would be his duty to take steps unless she was forthcoming soon.

“I had better go to his office to-morrow,” Julia said; “I suppose you know where it is?”

Mr. Gillat did, and they arranged how they would go to-morrow, Johnny, who was to wait outside, solely for the pleasure and excitement of the expedition. After that they talked about the legacy and its probable amount for some time.

“I suppose no other benefactor came inquiring for me while I was away?” Julia said, after she had, to please Johnny and not her practical self, built several air castles with the legacy.

“No,” Mr. Gillat said regretfully, “I’m afraid not; no one else asked for you. At least, some one did; a Mr. Rawson-Clew came here for your address.”

“Did he though?” Julia asked; “Did he, indeed? What did he want it for?”

“Well, I don’t know,” Johnny was obliged to say; “I don’t know that he gave any reason exactly; he said he had met you in Holland. I thought he was a friend of yours, he seemed to know a good deal about you.”

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“He was a friend,” Julia said; “that was quite right. And so he came for my address. When was this?”

Johnny gave the approximate date, and Julia asked: “Why did he come to you?”

Mr. Gillat did not quite know unless it was because he had failed elsewhere. “But he really came to see your father,” he said.

“Did he see him?” Julia inquired.

“No, he was out. To tell the truth, I don’t believe your father ever knew he came,” Johnny confessed; “I meant to tell him, of course, but he was late home that day, and when he came he was—was—well, you know, he couldn’t—it didn’t seem—”

“Yes,” said Julia, coming to the rescue, “he was drunk and could not understand, and afterwards you forgot it; it does not matter; indeed, it is better so; I am glad of it.”

Mr. Gillat was fumbling in his shabby letter-case; he took out a card; it bore Rawson-Clew’s name and address of a London club.

“He gave me this,” he said, “and told me to let him know if I heard from you, if you were in any trouble, or anything—if I thought you were.”

Julia held out her hand. “You had better give it to me,” she said; “I’ll let him know all that is necessary. Thank you;” and she put the card away.

Soon after she went to her room, for it was growing late. But she did not hurry over undressing; indeed, when she sat down to take off her stockings, she paused with one in her hand, thinking of Rawson-Clew. So he had tried to find out where she was; he did not then accept her answer as final; he was bent on seeing that she came to no harm through him—honourable, certainly, and like him. He had come to Berwick Street and nearly seen her father—drunk; quite seen Mr. Gillat, in the first floor sitting-room certainly, but no doubt shabby and not very wise as usual. She was not ashamed; though for a moment she had been glad he had missed her father; now she told herself it did not matter either way. He knew what she was and what her people were; what did it matter if he realised it a little more? They were not of his sort, it was no good pretending for a moment that they were. His sort! She laughed silently at the thought. The girls of his sort eating steak and onions in a back bedroom with Johnny Gillat! Caring for Johnny as she cared, liking to sit with him in the pokey little room while he smoked Dutch cigars; not doing it out of kindness of heart and charity, but finding personal pleasure in it and a sense of home-coming! If Rawson-Clew had come that evening while they were at supper, or while she cured the smoky fire or mended the blind, or while they sipped black coffee out of earthenware breakfast-cups and talked of her father’s delinquencies! It would not have mattered; he knew she was of the stoke-

hole—she had told him so—and not like the accomplished girls whom he usually met—-who could not have got him the explosive!

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She dropped her stocking to take the wide-necked bottle in her hands, deciding now how best to send it. It must go by post, in a good-sized wooden box, tightly packed, with a great deal of damp straw and wool; it ought to be safe that way. She would send it to the club address, it was fortunate she had it; but not yet, not until her own plans were clearer. It was just possible he might suspect her; it was hardly likely, but it was always as well to provide against remote contingencies, for if he tried and succeeded in verifying the suspicion everything would be spoiled. He had made sensible efforts to find her before, he might make equally sensible and more successful ones again, unless she left a way of escape clear for herself. Accordingly, so she determined, the explosive should not go yet, thought it had better be packed ready. She would get a box and packing to-morrow; to-night she could only copy the formula. She did this, printing it carefully on a strip of paper which she put on the bottle and coated with wax from her candle. She knew Herr Van de Greutz waxed labels sometimes to preserve them from the damp, so she felt sure the formula would be safe however wet she might make the packing.

The next day she went to the lawyer's office and heard all about the legacy and what she must do to prove her own identity and claim it. Mr. Gillat waited outside, pacing up and down the street, striving so hard to look casual that he aroused the suspicions of a not too acute policeman. The official was reassured, however, when Julia came out of the office and carried Johnny away to hear about the legacy.

"It is more than I thought," she said, before they were half down the street. "Fifty pounds a year, a small house—not much more than a cottage—and a garden and field; that's about what it comes to. The house is not worth much; it is in an unget-at-able part of Norfolk, in the sandy district towards the sea—the man spoke as if I knew where that was, but I don't—and the garden and field are not fertile. I don't suppose one could let the place, but one could live in it, if one wanted to."

"Yes, yes," Johnny said, "of course; you will have your own estate to retire to; quite an heiress—your mother will be pleased."

Julia could well imagine what skilful use her mother could make of the legacy; it would figure beautifully in conversation; no doubt Johnny was really thinking of this also, though he did not know it, for actually the thing would not commend itself to Mrs. Polkington so highly as a lump sum of money would have done.

"Why do you think Great-aunt Jane let it to me?" Julia asked. "Because I went out to work! It seems that father and we three girls are the nearest relations she had, and though we knew nothing about her, she made inquiries about us from time to time. When she heard I had gone abroad as companion or lady-help, she said she should leave all she had to me because I was the only one who even tried to do any honest work. You know that is not really strictly fair, because I did not altogether go with the idea of doing honest work; although, certainly, when I got there I did it."

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Johnny did not quite follow this last, but it did not matter, the only thing that concerned him—or Julia much, either—was the fact that she was the possessor of L50 a year, a cottage, a garden, and a field. Johnny revelled in the idea and talked of what she was going to do right up to the time that he saw her into the train at Paddington. The only thing that put an end to his talking was the guard requesting him to stand away from the carriage door and Julia admonished him to leave go of the handle before the engine started. Julia herself did not talk so much of what she would do because she did not know; she felt, until she got home and saw how things were there, it was no good even to plan how and when to spend. Five pounds she did spend; it was really her saving accumulated by economy in Holland, but she reckoned it as drawn from her estate. Johnny found it in an envelope when he returned to the back bedroom, and with it a note to say that it was in part payment of Captain Polkington's debts, for which, of course, his family were responsible; "and if you make a fuss about it," the letter concluded, dropping the business-like style, "I shall trim 'Bouquet' to stink next time you come to Marbridge, and not come and sit with you."

I think Johnny sat down and wept over that letter; but then he was rather a silly old man and he had not had a good meal, except last night's steak and onions, for a fortnight.

CHAPTER XIV

THE END OF THE CAMPAIGN

The great Polkington campaign was over and it had failed. Mrs. Polkington and Cherie cheered each other with assurances of a contrary nature as long as they could, but for all that it had really failed and they knew it. There had been some small successes by the way; they had received a little recognition in superior places, and a few, a very few, invitations of a superior order at the cost, of course, of refusing and so offending some old friends and acquaintances. It might perhaps have been possible to achieve the position at which Mrs. Polkington aimed in the course of time, or a very long time; society in the country moves slowly, and she could not afford to wait indefinitely; her financial ability was not equal to it. Moreover, there came into her affairs, not exactly a crash, but something so unpleasantly like a full stop that she and Cherie could not fail to perceive it. This occurred on the day when they heard of Mr. Harding's engagement. Mr. Harding was the eligible bachelor addition to county society whose advent had materially assisted in giving definite form to Mrs. Polkington's ambition. He had helped to feed it, too, during the late summer and early autumn, for he had been friendly, though Cherie was forced to admit that his attentions to her had not been very marked. But now the news was abroad that he was engaged to a girl in his own circle; one whose mother had not yet extended any greater recognition to Mrs. Polkington than an invitation to a Primrose League Fete.

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This news was abroad in the middle of October, and there was a certain amount of unholy satisfaction in Marbridge. Some of the old friends and acquaintances who Mrs. Polkington had offended, recognised the Christian duty of forgiveness, and called upon her—to see how she bore up. The Grayson girls, whose dance Cherie had refused at the beginning of the month, came to see her. But they put off their call a day to suit some theatrical rehearsal; by which means they lost the entertainment they promised themselves, for by the time they did come Cherie was ready for them and, with appropriate shyness, let it be known that she herself was engaged to Mr. Brendon Smith.

At this piece of information the girls looked at one another, and neither of them could think of anything smart to say. Afterwards they told each other and their friends that it was “quick work,” and “like those Polkingtons.” But at the time they could only offer suitable congratulations to Cherie, who received them and carried off the situation with a charming mingling of assurance and graciousness, which was worthy of her mother.

But the Graysons were right in saying it was quick work; late one afternoon Cherie heard of Mr. Harding’s engagement; during the evening she and her mother recognised their failure; in the night she saw that Mr. Brendon Smith was her one chance of dignified withdrawal, and before the next evening she had promised to marry him.

There were some people in Marbridge who pitied Mr. Smith (only the Polkingtons put in the Brendon), but he did not need much pity, for the good reason that he knew very well what he was doing and how it was that his proposals came to be accepted. He was fond of Cherie, and appreciated both her beauty and her several valuable qualities; but he had no illusions about her or her family, and he knew, when he made it, that his proposal would be accepted to cover a retreat. He was not at all a humble and diffident individual, but he did not mind being taken on these terms; he even saw some advantage in it in dealing with the Polkingtons. If there was any mistake in the matter it was Cherie when she said “Yes” to his suggestion, “Don’t you think you’d better marry me?” She probably did not know how completely she was getting herself a master.

It was not a grand engagement; Mrs. Polkington could not pretend that her son-in-law elect had aristocratic or influential connections; she said so frankly—and her frankness, which was overstrained, was one of her most engaging characteristics.

“It is no use pretending that I should not have been more pleased if he had been better connected,” she said to those old friends and acquaintances whose Christianity led them to call. “I share your opinion, dear Mrs. ——” (the name varied according to circumstances) “about the value of birth; but one can’t have everything; he is a most able man, and really charming. It is such a good thing that he is so much older than Cherie; I always felt she needed an older man to guide and care for her—he is positively devoted to her; you know, the devotion of a man of that age is such a different thing from a boy’s affection.”

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After that the visitor could not reasonably do anything but inquire if Mr. Smith was going to throw up the South African post which all the town knew he was about to take before his engagement.

To this Mr. Polkington was obliged to answer, “No, he is going, and going almost directly; that is my one hardship; I have got to lose Cherie at once, for he positively will not go without her. Of course, it would be a thousand pities for him to throw it up, such an opening; so very much better than he would ever have here, but it is hard to lose my child—she seems a child to me still—almost before I have realised that she is grown up. Their passages are taken already; they will be married by license almost directly; there even won’t be time to get a trousseau, only the merest necessaries before the luggage has to go.”

It must not be thought that the news of Mr. Harding’s engagement was the one and only thing which convinced Mrs. Polkington and Cherie that the great campaign had failed; it was the finishing touch, no doubt, in that it had made Cherie feel the necessity of being immediately engaged to some one, but there were other things at work. Captain Polkington had returned from London just five days before they heard the news, and three were quite sufficient to show his wife and daughter that he was considerably the worse for his stay in town. Bills too, had been coming in of late; not inoffensive, negligible bills such as they were very well used to, but threatening insistent bills, one even accompanied by a lawyer’s letter. Then, to crown all, Captain Polkington had a fit of virtue and repentance on the second day after his return. It was not of long duration, and was, no doubt, partly physical, and not unconnected with the effects of his decline from the paths of temperance. But while it lasted, he read some of the bills and talked about the way ruin stared him in the face and the need there was for retrenchment, turning over a new leaf, facing facts and kindred things. Also, which was more important, he wrote to his wife’s banker brother—he who had been instrumental in getting the papers sent in years ago. To this influential person he said a good deal about the state of the family finances, the need there was for clearing matters up and starting on a better basis, and his own determination to face things fairly and set to work in earnest. What kind of work was not mentioned; apparently that had nothing to do with the Captain’s resolution; there was one thing, however, that was mentioned definitely—the need for the banker brother’s advice—and pecuniary assistance. The answer to this letter was received on the same day as the news of Mr. Harding’s engagement. It came in the evening, later than the news, and it was addressed to Mrs. Polkington, not the Captain; it assisted her in recognising that the end of the campaign had arrived. It said several unpleasant things, and it said them plainly; not the most pleasant to the reader was the announcement that the writer would himself come to Marbridge to look into matters one day that week or the next. Under these circumstances it is not perhaps so surprising that Cherie found it advisable to accept Mr. Brendon Smith’s offer of marriage, and Mrs. Polkington found the impossibility of getting a trousseau in time no very great disadvantage.

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When Julia came home it wanted but a short time to Cherie's wedding. A great deal seemed to have happened since she went away, not only to her family, but, and that was less obviously correct, to herself. She stood in the drawing-room on the morning after her return and looked round her and felt that somehow she had travelled a long way from her old point of view. The room was very untidy; it had not been used, and so, in accordance with the Polkington custom, not been set tidy for two days; dust lay thick on everything; there were dead leaves in the vases, cigarette ash on the table, no coals on the half-laid fire. In the merciless morning light Julia saw all the deficiencies; the way things were set best side foremost, though, to her, the worst side contrived still to show; the display there was everywhere, the trumpery silver ornaments, all tarnished for want of rubbing, and of no more intrinsic value and beauty than the tinfoil off champagne bottles; the cracked pieces of china—rummage sale relics, she called them—set forth in a glass-doored cabinet, as if they were heirlooms. Mrs. Polkington had a romance about several of them that made them seem like heirlooms to her friends and almost to herself. The whole, as Julia looked around, struck her as shoddy and vulgar in its unreality.

"I'm not coming back to it, no, I'm not," she said, half aloud; "the corduroy and onions would be a great deal better."

Cherie passed the open door at that minute and half heard her. "What did you say?" she asked.

Julia looked round. "Nothing," she answered, "only that I am not coming back to this sort of life."

"To Marbridge?" Cherie asked, "or to the house? If it is the house you mean, you need not trouble about that; there isn't much chance of your being able to go on living here; you will have to move into something less expensive. I am sure Uncle William will insist on it. There is more room than you will want here after I am gone, and as for appearance and society, there won't be much object in keeping that up."

Julia laughed. "You don't think I am a sufficiently marketable commodity to be worth much outlay?" she said. "You are quite right; besides, it is just that which I mean; I have come to the conclusion that I don't admire the way we live here."

"So have I," Cherie answered; "no one in their senses would; but it was the best we could do in the circumstances and before you grumble at it you had better be sure you don't get something worse."

Julia did not think she should do that, and Cherie seeing it went on, "Oh, of course you have got L50 a year, I know, but you can't live on that; besides, I expect Uncle William will want you to do something else with it."

“I shall do what I please,” Julia replied, and Cherie never doubted it; she would have done no less herself had she been the fortunate legatee, Uncle William or twenty Uncle Williams notwithstanding.

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This important relative had not been to Marbridge yet, in spite of what he wrote to his sister; he had not been able to get away. Indeed, he was not able to do so until the day after Cherie's wedding. Mrs. Polkington was in a happy and contented frame of mind; the quiet wedding had gone off quite as well as Violet's grander one—really, a quiet wedding is more effective than a smart one in the dull time of year, and always, of course, less expensive. Cherie had looked lovely in simple dress, and the presents, considering the quietness and haste, were surprisingly numerous and handsome. Mr. Smith was liked and respected by a wide circle. Mrs. Polkington felt satisfied and also very pleased to have Violet, her favourite daughter, with her again. She and Violet were talking over the events of the day with mutual congratulation, when Mr. William Ponsonby was announced.

Fortunately, Violet's husband, Mr. Frazer, had gone to see his old friend the vicar, and more fortunately still, he was persuaded to stay and dine with him. It would have been rather awkward to have had him present at the display of family washing which took place that evening. Mr. Ponsonby did not mince matters; he said, perhaps not altogether without justice, that he had had about enough of the Polkingtons. He also said he wanted the truth, and seeing that his sister had long ago found that about her own concerns so very unattractive that she never dealt with it naked; it did not show beautiful now. In the course of time, however, he got it, or near enough for working purposes. Out came all the bills, and out came the threatening letter and old account books and remembered debts both of times past and present; and when he had got them all, he added them up, showed Mrs. Polkington the total, and asked her what she was going to do.

She said she did not know; privately she felt there was no need for her to consider the question; was it not the one her self-invited brother had come to answer? He did answer it, almost as soon as he asked it.

"You will have to leave this house," he said, "sell what you can of its contents and pay all that is possible of your debts. You won't be able to pay many with that; the rest I shall have to arrange about, I suppose. Oh, not pay; don't think that for a moment; I've paid a deal more than I ought for you long ago. I mean to see the people and arrange that you pay by degrees; you will have to devote most of your income to that for a time. What will you live on in the meanwhile? This legacy—it is you who have got it, isn't it?" he said, turning to Julia; "I thought so. Fortunately the money is not in any way tied up, you can get at the principal. Well, the best thing to be done is to buy a good boarding-house. You could make a boarding-house pay, Caroline," he went on to his sister, "if you tried; your social gifts would be some use there—you will have to try."

Mrs. Polkington looked a little dismayed, and Violet said, "It would be rather degrading, wouldn't it?"

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“Not so degrading as being sued at the county court,” her uncle returned.

Mrs. Polkington felt there was truth in that, and, accustoming herself to a new idea with her usual rapidity, she even began to see that the alternative offered need not be so very unpleasant. Indeed, when she came to think about it, it might be almost pleasant if the boarding-house were very select; there would be society of a kind, perhaps of a superior kind, even; she need not lose prestige and she could still shine, and without such tremendous effort.

But her reflections were interrupted by the Captain.

“And what part have I in this scheme?” he asked.

His brother-in-law, to whom the question was addressed, considered a moment. “Well, I really don’t know,” he said at last; “of course you would live in the house.”

“A burden on my wife and daughter! Idle, useless, not wanted!”

The banker had no desire to hurt Captain Polkington’s feelings, but he saw no reason why he should not hear the truth—that he had long been all these things; idle, useless, unwanted, a burden not only to his wife and daughters, but also to all relations and connections who allowed themselves to be burdened. But the Captain’s feelings were hurt; he was surprised and injured, though convinced of little besides the hardness of fate and the fact that his brother-in-law misunderstood him. He turned to his wife for support, and she supported, corroborating both what he said and what her brother did too, though they were diametrically opposed. It looked rather as if the discussion were going to wander off into side issues, but Julia brought it back by inquiring of her uncle—

“What part have I in this scheme?”

“You will help your mother,” he answered, “and of course the concern will be nominally yours; that is to say, you will put your money in it, invest it in that instead of railways or whatever it is now in. I shall see that the thing is properly secured.”

He glanced at Captain Polkington as he spoke, as if he thought he might have designs upon the money or investment. Julia only said, “I see,” but in so soft a voice that she roused Mr. Ponsonby’s suspicions. He had dealt a good deal with men and women, and he did not altogether like the amused observing eyes of the legatee, and he distrusted her soft voice of seeming acquiescence.

“It is of no use for you to get any nonsensical ideas,” he said, “about what you will do and won’t do; this is the only thing you can do; you have got to make a living, and you have got to pay your debts; beggars can’t be choosers. The fact is, you have all lived on charity so long that you have got demoralised.”

Violet flushed. “Really,” she began to say, “though you have helped us once or twice, I don’t think you have the right to insult—” but Mrs. Polkington raised a quieting hand; she did not wish to offend her brother.

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He was not offended; he only spoke his mind rather plainly to them all, which, though it did no harm, did little good either; they were too old in their sins to profit by that now. After some more unpleasant talk all round, the family conclave broke up; Mr. Frazer came home, and every one went to bed.

Mr. Ponsonby had Julia's tiny room; there was nowhere else for him, seeing Violet and her husband had the one she and her youngest sister shared in their maiden days. Julia had to content herself with the drawing-room sofa; it was a very uncomfortable sofa, and the blankets kept slipping off so she did not sleep a great deal; but that did not matter much; she had the more time to think things over. Dawn found her sitting at the table wrapped in her blanket, writing by the light of one of the piano candles; she glanced up as the first cold light struggled in, and her face was very grave, it looked old, too, and tired, with the weariness which accompanies renunciation, quite as often as does peace or a sense of beatitude. She looked at the paper before her, a completely worked-out table of expenditure, a sort of statement of ways and means—the means being L50 a year. It could be done; she knew that during the night when the plan took shape in her mind; she had proved it to herself more than half-an-hour ago by figures—-but there was no margin. It could only be done by renouncing that upon which she had set her heart; she could not work out the scheme and pay the debt of honour to Rawson-Clew. The legacy had at first seemed a heaven-sent gift for that purpose, but now, like the blue daffodil, it seemed that it could not be used to pay the debt. That was not to be paid by a heaven-sent gift any more than by a devil-helped theft; slow, honest work and patient saving might pay it in years, but nothing else it seemed. She put her elbows on the table and propped her chin on her locked hands looking down at the unanswerable figures, but they still told her the same hard truth.

"I might save it in time; I could do without this—and this," she told herself. It is so easy to do without oneself when one's mind is set on some purpose, but one has no right to expect others to do without, too—the whole thing would be no good if the others had to; she knew that. No, the debt could not be paid this way; she had no right to do it; it was her own fancy, her hobby, perhaps. No one demanded that it should be paid; law did not compel it; Rawson-Clew did not expect it; her father considered that it no longer existed; it was to please herself and herself alone that she would pay it, and her pleasure must wait.

Possibly she did not reason quite all this; she only knew that she could not do what she had set her heart on doing with the first of Aunt Jane's money, and the renunciation cost her much, and gave her no satisfaction at all. But the matter once decided, she put it at the back of her mind, and by breakfast time she was her usual self; to tell the truth, she was looking forward to a skirmish with Uncle William, and that cheered her.

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After breakfast she led Mr. Ponsonby to the drawing-room, and he came not altogether unprepared for objections; he had half feared them last night.

“Uncle William,” she said. “I have been thinking over your plan, and I don’t think I quite like it.”

“I dare say not,” her uncle answered; “I can believe it; but that’s neither here nor there, as I said last night, beggars can’t be choosers.”

Julia did not, as Violet had, resent this; she was the one member of the family who was not a beggar, and she knew perfectly well she could be a chooser. She sat down. “Perhaps I had better say just what I mean,” she said pleasantly; “I am not going to do it.”

“Not going to?” Mr. Ponsonby repeated indignantly. “Don’t talk nonsense; you have got to, there’s nothing else open to you; I’m not going to keep you all, feed, clothe and house you, and pay your debts into the bargain!”

“No,” said Julia; “no, naturally not; I did not think of that.”

“What did you think of, then?” her uncle demanded; he remembered that she had the nominal disposal of her own money, and though her objections were ridiculous, even impertinent in the family circumstances, they might be awkward. “What do you object to? I suppose you don’t like the idea of paying debts; none of you seem to.”

“No,” Julia answered; “it isn’t that; of course the debts must be paid in the way you say, it is the only way.”

“I am glad you think so,” the banker said sarcastically; “though I may as well tell you, young lady, that it would still be done even without your approval. What is it you don’t like, spending your money for other people?”

Julia smiled a little. “We may as well call it that,” she said; “I don’t like the boarding-house investment.”

“What do you like? Seeing your parents go to the poorhouse? That’s what will happen.”

“No, they can come and live with me. I have got a large cottage, a garden, a field, and L50 a year. If we keep pigs and poultry, and grow things in the garden we can live in the cottage on the L50 a year till the debts are all paid off; after that, of course, we should have enough to be pretty comfortable. We need not keep a servant there, or regard appearances or humbug—it would be very cheap.”

“And nasty,” her uncle added. He was not impressed with the wisdom of this scheme; indeed he did not seriously contemplate it as possible. “You are talking nonsense,” he said; “absurd, childish nonsense; you don’t know anything about it; you have no idea what life in a cottage means; the drudgery of cooking and scrubbing and so on; the doing without society and the things you are used to; as for pigs and gardening, why, you don’t know how to dig a hole or grow a cabbage!”

But he was not quite right; Julia had learnt something about drudgery in Holland, something about growing things, at least in theory, and so much about doing without the society to which she was used at home that she had absolutely no desire for it left. She made as much of this plan to Mr. Ponsonby as was possible and desirable; enough, at all events, to convince him that she had thought out her plan in every detail and was very bent on it.

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“I suppose the utter selfishness of this idea of yours has not struck you,” he said at last. “You may think you would like this kind of life, though you wouldn’t if you tried it, but how about your mother?”

“She won’t like it,” Julia admitted; “but then, on the other hand, there is father. I suppose you know he has taken to drink lately and at all times gambled as much as he could. What do you think would become of him in a boarding-house in some fashionable place, with nothing to do, and any amount of opportunity?”

Mr. Ponsonby did not feel able or willing to discuss the Captain’s delinquencies with his daughter; his only answer was, “What will become of your mother keeping pigs and poultry and living in an isolated cottage? It would be social extinction for her.”

“The boarding-house would be moral extinction for father.”

Mr. Ponsonby grew impatient. “I suppose you think,” he said irritably, “that you have reduced it to this—the sacrifice of one parent or the other. You have no business to think about such things; but if you had, to which do you owe the most duty? Who has done the most for you?”

“Well,” Julia answered slowly, “I’m not sure I am considering duty only; people who don’t pay their debts are not always great at duty, you know. Perhaps it is really inclination with me. Father is fonder of me than mother is; I have never been much of a social success. Mother did not find me such good material to work upon, so naturally she rather dropped me for the ones who were good material. I admire mother the more, but I am sorrier for father, because he can’t take care of himself, and has no consolation left; it serves him right, of course, but it must be very uncomfortable all the same. Do you see?”

“No, I don’t,” her uncle answered shortly; “I am old-fashioned enough to think sons and daughters ought to do their duty to their parents, not analyse them in this way.” He forgot that he had in a measure invited this analysis, and Julia did not remind him, although no doubt she was aware of it.

“I should like to do my duty to them both,” she said; “and I believe I will do it best by going to the cottage. Father would get to be a great nuisance to mother at the boarding-house after a time, almost as bad as the pigs and poultry at the cottage. Also, if we had the boarding-house, father’s moral extinction would be complete, but if we lived at the cottage mother’s social one would not; she could go and stay with Violet and other people the worst part of the time, while we were shortest of money. Besides all that, there are two other things; I like the cottage best myself, and I believe it to be the best—I know the sort of living life we should live at a boarding-house—and then there is Johnny Gillat.”

Mr. Ponsonby had no recollection of who Johnny Gillat was, and he did not trouble to ask; Julia's other reason was the one he seized upon. "You like it!" he said; "yes, now we have come to the truth; the person you are considering is yourself; I knew that all along; you need not have troubled to wrap it up in all these grand reasons—-consideration for your father, and so on!"

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“Oh, but think how much better it sounded!” Julia said, with twinkling eyes.

Mr. Ponsonby did not see the twinkle; he read Julia a lecture on selfishness and ended up by saying, “You are utterly selfish and ingrain lazy, that’s what you are; you don’t want to do a stroke of honest work for any one.”

“Dishonest work is where I shine,” Julia told him. “Oh, not scoundrelly dishonesty, company promoting, and so on,” (Mr. Ponsonby was on several boards of directors, but he was not a company promoter, still he snorted a little) “I mean real dishonest work; with a little practice I would make such a thief as you do not meet every day in the week.”

“I can quite believe it,” her uncle retorted grimly; “lazy people generally do take to lying and stealing and, as I say, lazy is what you are. Sooner than work for your living, you go and pig in a cottage, because you think that way you can do nothing all day; lead an idle life.”

“Yes,” Julia agreed sweetly; “I think that must be my reason—a nice comfortable idle life with the pigs and poultry, and garden, and cooking, and scrubbing, and two incompetent old men. I really think you must be right.”

Here it must be recorded, Mr. Ponsonby very nearly lost his temper, and not without justification. Was he not giving time and consideration and (probably) money to help this hopeless family on to its legs again? And was it not more than mortal middle-aged man could bear, not only to be opposed by the only member with any means, but also to be made sly fun of by her? He gave Julia his opinion very sharply, and no doubt she deserved it. But the worst of it was that did not prevent her from exercising the right of the person who is not a beggar to choose.

The Polkington family, who were soon afterwards called in to assist at the discussion, sided with Mr. Ponsonby. Violet and Mrs. Polkington with great decision, the Captain more weakly. Eventually he was won over to Julia because her scheme seemed to hold a place for him where he could flatter himself he was wanted. The argument went on and angrily, on the part of some present; Julia was most amiable; but, as the Van Heigens had found, she was an extremely awkward antagonist, the more amiable, the more awkward, even in a weak position, as with them, and in a strong one, as now, she was a great deal worse. Mr. Ponsonby lost the train he meant to catch back to London; he did not do it only for the benefit of his sister, but also because Julia had given battle and he was not going to retire from the field. Violet and Mr. Frazer deliberately postponed the hour of their departure; Violet was determined not to leave things in this condition; Julia’s plan, she considered a disgrace to the whole family. Mr. Frazer was asked not to come to the family council; Violet explained to him that they were having trouble with Julia; she would tell him all about it afterwards, but it distressed her mother so much that it would perhaps be kinder if he was not there at the time. Mr. Frazer quite

agreed; he shared some of his wife's sentiments about appearances; also he had no wish to be distressed either in mind or tastes.

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Violet did tell him about it afterwards; a curtailed and selected version, but one eminently suitable to the purpose. On hearing it he was justly angry with Julia's heartless selfishness in keeping her legacy to herself. He was also shocked at her determination to go and live a farm labourer's life in a farm labourer's cottage. He was truly sorry for Mrs. Polkington, between whom and himself there existed a mutual affection and admiration. He said it was bitterly hard that her one remaining daughter should treat her thus; that it was barbarous, impossible, that a woman of her age, tastes, refinement and gifts should be compelled to lead such a life as was proposed. In fact he could not and would not permit it; he hoped that she would make her home at his rectory; nay, he insisted upon it; both Violet and himself would not take a refusal; she must and should come to them.

[Illustration: "A wonderful woman"]

Julia smiled her approval; when things were worked up to this end; she would have liked to clap her applause, it was so well done. Mrs. Polkington and Violet were so admirable, they were already almost convinced of all they said; in two days they would believe it quite as much as Mr. Ponsonby did now. She did not in the least mind having to appear as the ungrateful daughter; it fitted in so beautifully with Violet's arrangement. And really the arrangement was very good; the utilitarian feelings of the family did not suffer at wrenches and splits as did more tender ones; no one would object much to an advantageous division. And most advantageous it certainly was; the cottage household would go better without Mrs. Polkington and she would be far happier at the rectory. She would not make any trouble there; rather, she would give her son-in-law cause to be glad of her coming; there would be scope for her there, and she would possibly develop better than she had ever had a chance of doing before.

So everything was decided. The house in East Street was to be given up, and most of its contents sold; as Julia's cottage was furnished already with Aunt Jane's things, she need only take a few extras from the home. The debts were to be paid as far as possible now, and the small income was to be divided; part was to go as pin money to Mrs. Polkington, the main part of the remainder to go to the debts, and a very small modicum to come with the Captain to the cottage.

Julia was quite satisfied, and let it be apparent. This, with her obvious cheerfulness, rather incensed Violet, who regarded the sale of their effects as rather a disgrace, and Julia's plans for the future, as a great one.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," she told her younger sister, just before she left Marbridge. "I am positively ashamed to think you belong to us. It will be nice to meet Norfolk people at the Palace or somewhere, who have seen you tending your pigs and doing your washing. It is such an unusual name; I can quite fancy some one being introduced to mother and thinking it odd that her name should be the same as some dirty cottage people."

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“Well,” Julia suggested, “why not change it? Such a trifle as a name surely need not stand in our way; we have got over worse things than that. Mother can be something else, or I can; mother had better do it; father will forget who he is if I make a change.”

“Don’t be absurd,” Violet said; “I only wish you could change it though; I never want to write to you as Julia Polkington in case some servant were to notice the address; one never knows how these things come out.”

“Don’t write as that,” her sister told her; “address me as ’Julia Snooks’ or anything else you like; I am not particular.”

Violet did not take this as a serious suggestion; nevertheless, Julia told Mr. Frazer on the platform at Marbridge that she and Violet had been having a christening, and that she was now Julia Snooks. Mr. Ponsonby said it was ridiculous, to which Julia replied —

“That is what I am myself.”

Mrs. Polkington said it was foolish too, but she did not say so vehemently; she felt that in the Frazer circle, especially at the Palace where she would meet people from everywhere, she might possibly come across some one who had heard of Julia. It was unlikely; still it is a small world, and Polkington an uncommon name. “Why not choose something simple, like ’Gray’?” she suggested.

“Because,” Julia answered, “that is what I am not.”

* * * * *

But fate had one exceedingly bitter pill for Mrs. Polkington. On the day after Cherie and her husband sailed for South Africa, it was known in Marbridge that the news of Mr. Harding’s engagement was false. The girl gossip had coupled with him was engaged, it is true, and to a Mr. Harding, but to another and entirely different bearer of the name. The real, eligible Mr. Harding called at East Street to explain to Mrs. Polkington how the mistake had arisen, to tell her that he himself had been away in the north for some weeks and so had heard nothing of it. Also to hear—and he had heard nothing of that either—that Cherie was married and gone.

The news of Mr. Harding’s freedom and his call, and what she fancied it might have implied, did not reach Cherie till after her arrival in Africa. It did not tend to soothe the first weeks of married life, nor to make easier the rigorous, but no doubt wholesome, breaking-in process to which her husband wisely subjected her.

CHAPTER XV

THE GOOD COMRADE

Rawson-Clew was very busy that autumn, so busy that the events which had taken place in Holland were rather blotted out of his mind; he had not exactly forgotten them, only among the press of other things he did not often think about them and they soon came to take their proper unimportant place among his recollections. Julia he thought of occasionally, but less and less in connection with the foolish holiday, more in connection

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with some chance saying or doing. Things recalled her, a passage in a book, a sentiment she would have shared, an opinion she would have combated. Or perhaps it was that some one he met set him thinking of her shrewd swift judgments; some scene in which he played a part that made him imagine her an amused spectator of its unconscious absurdity. He had turned her thyme flowers out of his pocket; he had no sentiment about them or her, but he did not forget her; their acquaintance had, to a certain extent, been a thing of mind, and in mind it seemed he occasionally came in contact with her still. Also there is no doubt she must have been one of those virile people who take hold, for though one could sometimes overlook her presence, in absence one did not forget.

Of herself and her doings he never heard; at first he had half thought he might have some communication from Mr. Gillat, but as the autumn went on and he heard nothing, he came to the conclusion that she really must have arranged something satisfactorily and there was an end to the whole affair. He settled down to his own concerns and became very thoroughly absorbed in them, to the exclusion of nearly everything else. For women he never had much taste, and now, being busy and preoccupied, he got into the way of scanning them more critically than ever when he did happen to come across them. Not comparing them with any ideal standard, but just finding them uninteresting, whether they were the cultivated, well-bred girls of the country, or the smart young matrons and wide-awake maidens of the town.

That autumn the young Rawson-Clew, Captain Polkington's acquaintance, came into a fortune and took a wife. The latter was, perhaps, on the whole, a wise proceeding, for, though the wife in question would undoubtedly help him in the rapid and inevitable spending of the fortune, she was likely also to enable him to get more for his money than if he were spending alone. Rawson-Clew was not introduced to this lady till the winter, then, one evening, he met her at a friend's "at home."

She was very pretty, small and fair and plump, with childish blue eyes, and an anything but childish mind behind them. She had dainty little feet, as well shaped as any he had ever seen, and she was perfectly dressed, her gown a diaphanous creation of melting colours and floating softness, which suggested more than it revealed of her person, like a nymph's drapery. She was the centre of attraction and talked and laughed a great deal, the latter in little tinkles like a child of five, the former from the top of her throat with the faintest lisp and in the strange jargon that was the slang of the moment. She knew no more of Florentine art or Wagner or Egyptology than Julia did, and cared even less. She set out to be intelligently ignorant—to be anything else was called "middle-class" in her set—and she achieved her end, although she could do some things extremely well—play bridge, gamble in stocks and shares and anything else,

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and arrange lights and colours with the skill of an artist when a suitable setting for her pretty self was concerned. She had all the charms of womanly weakness without any old-fashioned and grandmotherly narrowness; she was quite free and emancipated in mind and manners, no man had to modify his language for her; she preferred a double meaning to a single one, and a *risque* story to a plain one. She had an excellent taste in dinners, a critical one in liqueurs, and a catholic one in men.

She was most gracious to Rawson-Clew when he was introduced, breaking up her court and dismissing her admirers solely to accommodate him. The instant she saw him, before she heard who he was, she picked him out as the game best worthy of her prowess, and she lost no time in addressing herself to the chase with the skill and determination of a Diana—though that perhaps is hardly a good comparison, enthusiasm for the chase being about the only quality she shared with the maiden huntress.

Rawson-Clew did not show signs of succumbing at once to her charms; she hardly expected that he would, for she gave him credit for knowing his own value and was not displeased thereby; where is the pleasure of sport if the quarry be captured at the outset? But if he did not succumb he did all that was otherwise expected of him, standing in attendance on her and sitting by her when he was invited to the settee she had chosen in a quiet corner. So well, indeed, did he comport himself that by the time they parted she felt fairly satisfied with her progress.

Perhaps she would have been less satisfied if she had heard something he said soon after. A man he knew left the house at the same time he did and persuaded him to come to the club. On the way the little lady came in for some discussion; the other man chiefly gave his opinion though he once asked Rawson-Clew what he thought of his young cousin's wife.

"As a wife?" he answered; "I should not think of her. If I wanted, as I certainly do not, the privilege of paying that kind of woman's bills, I should not bother to marry her."

The other man laughed, but if he quarrelled with anything in the answer, it appeared to be the taste rather than the judgment. He maintained that the lady was charming; Rawson-Clew merely said—

"Think so?" and did not even trouble to defend his opinion.

At the club he found a box that had come for him by parcels post. A wooden one with the address printed on a card and nailed to the lid, which was screwed down. It did not look particularly interesting; he told one of the club servants to unscrew it for him. When he came to examine the contents he found, first a lot of damp packing, and then a wide-

necked stoppered bottle, two-thirds full of white powder. It bore a label printed neatly like the address—

“Herr Van de Greutz’s Explosive.

“Formula as he said it....”

For a moment Rawson-Clew held the bottle, staring at it in blank astonishment; so tense was his attitude that it caught the other man’s attention.

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“Hullo!” he said, “some one sent you an infernal machine?”

Rawson-Clew roused himself. “No,” he answered shortly.

He put the bottle back in the box after he had felt in the packing and found nothing, then he fastened it up with more care than was perhaps necessary. He looked at the address on the lid, but it told him nothing more than it had at first; neither that nor the name of the post-office from which it was sent gave any clue to the sender. And yet he felt as if Julia were at his elbow with that mute sympathy in her eyes which had been there when they talked of failure in the wood on the Dunes.

He rose, and taking the box, went towards the door; the other man watched him curiously. “One would think you had found a ghost in your box,” he said.

“I’m not sure that I have not,” Rawson-Clew looked back to answer; “the ghost of a good comrade.”

Then he went home.

When he was alone in his chambers and secure from interruption, he opened the box again and took out all the packing, carefully sorting it. But he found nothing, no scrap of paper, no clue of any sort; he took off the linen rag that fastened in the bottle stopper, but that betrayed nothing either; and yet he thought of Julia.

She was the only person who could know about the explosive. It had never been actually spoken of last summer, but the chances were she knew. She was the only person who could have known or who could have got it. It was like her, so like that he was as sure as if her name were in the box that she was the sender. How she had got the stuff he could not think, he knew the difficulties in the way; but she had done it somehow, and now she had sent it to him, without name for fear of embarrassing him, without clue, with no desire for thanks—loyal, generous, able little comrade! He looked up again; he felt as if she were bodily present; the whole thing, astounding as he had found it at first, was somehow so characteristic of her. And because of her presence he suddenly wished he had not been to that evening’s entertainment and sat close by his cousin’s wife and heard the things she said, and answered the things she looked. He felt as if he were not clean, as if he had no right to entertain even the ghost of the good comrade.

Rawson-Clew was not self-conscious; it never occurred to him to think if he appeared ridiculous, whether he was alone or in company. He took off his dress coat and flung it aside with a feeling of disgust; its sleeve had brushed that woman’s bare arm; he could almost fancy that a suggestion of the scent she used clung to it. He put it out of sight and fetched some other garment before he came back to the thing which had recalled Julia. And yet the girl was no lily-child with the dew of dawn upon her; he did not for one

instant think she was; probably, had she been, she would not have been the good comrade. The facts of life were not strange to her, she knew them, good and bad; was not above laughing at what was funny even if it was somewhat coarse, but she had no taste for lascivious wallowing no matter under what name disguised. A man could be at home with her, he could speak the truth to her; but he would not make a point of taking her into the society of that woman, any more than he would invite a friend to look at the sink, unless there was some purpose to serve.

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Rawson-Clew took up the bottle and looked at it, and looked at the address card on the lid, all over again; and there grew in his mind the conviction that he been a remarkable and particular fool. Not because he had taken that holiday on the Dunes, nor yet because he had failed to get the explosive and Julia had succeeded—he believed that a man might have average intelligence and yet fail there, for he thought she had more than average. But because he had failed to recognise a fact that had been existent all the time—the need he had for the good comrade. Why had he a better liking for his work than of old? Because it was such as she would have liked, could have done well, every now and then he fancied her there. Why did he find new pleasure in the hours he spent reading Renaissance Italian, old memoirs, the ripe wisdom of the late Tudors and early Stuarts? Because he found her in the pages, saw her laugh sometimes, heard her contradict at others; felt her, invisible and not always recognised, at his elbow.

He looked round; why should not the presence be fact instead of fancy? He would go to Mr. Gillat and find her whereabouts; if Julia was in England, as she probably was, seeing that the box was posted in London, the old man would know where she was. He would go to Berwick Street—he looked at the clock—no, not now; it was too late, or rather too early; he would have to wait till the morning was a good deal older.

Unfortunately the carrying out of the plan did not prove very successful. Berwick Street he found, and No. 31 he found, but not Mr. Gillat; he was gone and had left no address. Mrs. Horn did not seem troubled by the omission; he had paid everything before he went away, and he practically never had any letters to be sent on; why, she asked, should she bother after his address?

Rawson-Clew could not tell her why she should, nor did he give any reason why he himself should. He went away and, reversing the order of his previous search, went to Marbridge.

But failure awaited him there, too. When he came to the Polkingtons' house he found it empty, the blinds down, the steps uncleaned, and bills announcing that it was to let in the windows. He stood and looked at it in the grey afternoon, and for a moment he was conscious of a feeling of desolation and disappointment which was almost absurd. He turned away and began to make inquiries about the family. He soon learnt all that was commonly known. They had been gone from East Street some little time now; they must have left before the box containing the explosive was posted. Julia had sent it to Aunt Jane's lawyer, before she set out for the cottage, asking him to dispatch it at a given date, and he had fulfilled her request, thinking it a wedding present and the date specified one near the impending ceremony. This, of course, Rawson-Clew did not find out; he found out several things about the Polkingtons though, their debts and

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difficulties, their sale and the break up of the family. He also found out that the youngest Miss Polkington was married and the second, and now only remaining one, had come home before the break up. As to where the family were now, that was not quite so clear; Mrs. Polkington was with one of her married daughters; her address was easily obtainable and apparently considered all that any one could require, and quite sufficient to cover the rest of the family. Captain Polkington—nobody thought much about him—-when they did, it was generally concluded he was with his wife. As for Julia, she must have got a situation of some sort—unless, which was unlikely, she was with her parents. Rawson-Clew took Mrs. Polkington's address—it was all he could get—and determined to write to her.

It did occur to him to write to Julia at her sister's house and request that his letter was forwarded; but he did not do so; he was not at all sure she would answer; he wanted to see her face to face this time. He wrote to Mrs. Polkington and asked her for Julia's address, introducing himself as a friend met in Holland, and explaining his reason, vaguely to be connected with that time.

When Mrs. Polkington received the letter she thought it over a little; then she showed it to Violet, and they discussed it together. At the outset they made a mistake; they only knew of one person of the name of Rawson-Clew—the Captain's young acquaintance; he had certainly gone away from Marbridge last spring and so in point of time could have met Julia in Holland, only it was not likely that he had, or that he had become friendly with her. At least so Violet said; Mrs. Polkington, who knew what remarkable things herself and family could do in the way of getting to know people, was inclined to think differently. On one point, however, they were agreed; it would be very unpleasant to have to tell one in the position of Mr. Rawson-Clew about Julia's present proceedings. Giving the address would be giving the information, or something like it—-one would have to explain—"Miss Julia Snooks, White's Cottage, near Halgrave."

"We can't do that," Violet said with decision.

"I might say I would forward a letter, perhaps?" Mrs. Polkington suggested.

But Violet did not think that would do either. "Julia would answer it," she said; "and that would be quite as bad; you know, she is not in the least ashamed of herself."

Mrs. Polkington did know it. "I believe you are right," she said, with the air of one convinced against her will; "Julia has voluntarily cut herself adrift from her own class; it would be unpleasant and embarrassing for her as well as for other people to force her into any connection with it again; I don't think any purpose can be served by reopening an acquaintance with Mr. Rawson-Clew, we did not know him at Marbridge"—she never forgot that his circle there did not think her good enough to know. "I cannot imagine that

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it would be advantageous for Julia to write to him or hear from him under the present circumstances. He comes of a Norfolk family, too (Mrs. Polkington always knew about people's families even when she did not know them personally; it was the sort of information that interested her); I don't know what part of the county his people belong to, very likely nowhere near Julia; but supposing it were near enough for him to know from the address what kind of a place Julia was in, it really might be so awkward; we ought to be very careful for dear Richard's sake, especially seeing his connection with the Palace. I really think it would be wiser as you say, to be on the safe side."

So she kept on that side, which, being, interpreted meant leaving Rawson-Clew's information much where it was before. She wrote very nicely, somewhat involved, not at all baldly; but reduced to plain terms her letter came to this—she was not going to tell Julia's address or anything about her.

So Rawson-Clew read it, and very angry he was. And the worst of all was that on the same night that he received this letter, he also received orders to go at once to Constantinople. He had no time for anything and no choice but to go and leave the search. But during his journey across Europe an idea came to him with the suddenness of an inspiration. He knew what Julia had done—she had "retired," even as she had said she hoped to on the first day they walked together. She had retired somewhere from shams and hypocrisy, from society and her family; possibly even she had adopted the corduroy and onions part of the ambition; if so, that would explain her mother's refusal, based on some kind of pride, to give her address. She had retired, and she had taken Johnny Gillat with her, and her own people had washed their hands of her! He knew now what to look for when he should come back. He might not be back for two months or even three, but when he did come he would be able to find Julia and talk to her about the explosive—and other things.

* * * * *

It may be here said that the wonderful explosive did not do what was expected of it, either in England or Holland, for it was found to decompose on keeping. It did everything else that was boasted of it, but no one succeeded in keeping it more than fifteen months, an irremediate defect in an explosive for military purposes. This, of course, was not discovered at first, and the honour and glory of obtaining the specimen was considerable, if only there had been some one to take it. Rawson-Clew did not consider himself the person.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SIMPLE LIFE

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Julia was collecting fir-cones. All around her the land lay brown and still; dead heather, and sometimes dead bracken, a shade paler, and, more rarely, gorse bushes, nearly brown, too, in their sober winter dress. It was almost flat, a wonderful illimitable place, very remote, very silent, unbroken except for occasional pine-trees. These were not scattered but grew in clumps, miles apart, though looking near in this place of distances, and also in a belt not more than five or six trees wide, winding mile after mile like a black band over the plain. Julia stood on the edge of this belt now, gathering the dropped cones and putting them into a sack. The afternoon was advanced and already it was beginning to grow dark among the trees, but she determined not to go till she had got all she could carry. It was the first time she had been to collect cones; she had sent her father once and Mr. Gillat once. They had taken longer and gathered less than she, but it was not on that account that she had gone herself to-day. Rather it was because she wanted to go to the dark belt of trees which she saw every day from her window, and because she wanted to go right out into the wide open land and see what it looked like and feel what it felt like. And when she got there she found it, like the Dunes, all she had expected and more.

At last she had her sack full, and, shouldering it, carried it off on her back, which, seeing the comfort of the arrangement, must be the way Nature intended weights to be carried. Clear of the shadow of the trees it was lighter; the grey sky held the light long; twilight seemed to creep up from the ground rather than fall from above, as if darkness were an earth-born thing that gained slowly, and, for a time, only upon the brighter gift of Heaven. It was quieter, too, out here, for under the pines, though the weather was still, there was a breathing moan as if the trees sighed incessantly in their sleep. But out here in the brown land it was very quiet; the air light and dry and keen, with the flavour of the not distant sea mingled with the smell of the pines and the dead ferns—a thing to stir the pulse and revive the memory of the divine inheritance and the old belief that man is but a little lower than the angels, related to the infinite and god-like.

White's Cottage stood where the heath-land ceased and the sand began. There was much sand; tradition said it had gradually overwhelmed a village that lay beyond; indeed, that White's Cottage was the last and most distant house of the lost place. Be that as it may, it certainly was very solitary, rather far from the village of Halgrave, with no road leading to it except the track that came from Halgrave and stopped at the cottage gate—there was nowhere to go beyond.

Dusk had almost deepened to darkness when Julia reached the house; it gleamed curiously in the half light, for it was built of flints, for the most part grey, but with a paler one here and there catching the light. She put her sack of cones in one of the several sheds which were built on the sides of the cottage, and which, being of the same flint material, made it look larger than it was. Then she went into the kitchen.

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Johnny Gillat was there before her; he had been busy in the garden all the afternoon, but, with the help of the field-glasses which he had not been allowed to sell, he had descried her coming across the open land. As soon as he was sure of her, and while she was still a good way off, he hurried away his tools into the house to get ready. He wanted it all to look to her as it had to him on the day when he came back from cone-getting—the fire blazing, the tea ready, the kitchen snug and neat; very unlike the dining-room at Marbridge with the one gas jet burning and "Bouquet" alight. Of course Johnny did not quite succeed; he never did in matters small or great, but he did his best. The dinner things, which Captain Polkington was to have washed, were not done, and still about. They had to be put in the back kitchen, and Johnny, who had no idea of saving labour, took so long carrying them away, that he hardly had time to set the tea. He had meant to make some toast, but there was no time for that; the first piece of bread had no more than begun to get warm when he heard Julia's step outside. But the fire was blazing nicely, and that was the chief thing; even though the putting on of the kettle had been forgotten. When Julia came in and saw the fire and crooked tablecloth and hastily-arranged cups, and Johnny's beaming face, she exclaimed, "How cubby it looks! Why, you have got the tea all ready, and"—sniffing the air—"I believe you are making toast; that is nice!"

Mr. Gillat beamed; then he caught sight of the kettle standing on the hearth, and his face fell.

But Julia put it on the fire. "It will give you good time to finish the toast while it boils," she said; "toast ought not to be hurried, you know; yours will be just right."

It was not; it was rather smoky when it came to be eaten, the fire not being very suitable; but that did not matter; Julia declared it perfect. This was the only form of hypocrisy she practised in the simple life; possibly, if she thought of the will more than the deed, it was really not such great hypocrisy. At all events she practised it; she did not think truth so beautiful that frail daily life must be the better for its undiluted and uncompromising application to all poor little tender efforts.

During tea the great subject of conversation was the hen house. The last occupant of the cottage had kept hens and all the out-buildings were in good repair; however, a recent gale had loosened part of the roof of this one, and Captain Polkington had been mending it. There had not been much to do; the Captain could not do a great deal; his faculties of work—if he ever had any—had atrophied for want of use. Still, he thought he had done a good day's work, and, as a consequence, was important and inclined to be exacting. That is the reason why he had neglected the dinner things; he felt that a man who had done all he had was entitled to some rest and consideration.

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Julia did not mind in the least; if he was happy and contented, that was all she wished; she never reckoned his help as one of the assets of the household. For that matter, she had not reckoned Mr. Gillat's of much value either, but there she found she was a little mistaken. Johnny was very slow and very laborious and really ingenious in finding a wrong way of doing things even when she thought she had left him no choice, but he was very painstaking and persevering. He would do anything he was told, and he took the greatest pleasure in doing it. Whether it was digging in the garden, or feeding the pigs, or collecting firewood, or setting the table for meals, he was certain to do everything to the best of his ability, and was perfectly happy if she would employ him. There can be no doubt that the coming to White's Cottage began a time of real happiness to Mr. Gillat; possibly the happiest since his wealthy boyhood when he spent lavishly and indiscriminately on anybody and everybody. The Captain was less happy; his satisfaction was of an intermittent order. His discontent did not take the form of wishing to go back to Marbridge or to join his wife, only in feeling oppressed and misunderstood, and wishing occasionally that he had not been born or had been born rich—and of course remained so all his life. He was dissatisfied that evening when the contentment begotten of his work had worn off; he wanted to go to the market town to-morrow. Julia was going to get several necessaries for the household; he considered that he ought to go too, but she would not take him.

"You will have a great deal to carry," he protested.

"Yes," Julia agreed; "but I shall manage it."

"It is not fit for you to go about alone," her father urged.

She forebore to smile, though the novelty, not to say tardiness of the idea amused her; she only said, "It would take you and Johnny too long to walk into the town; we can't afford to spend too long on the way, and we can't afford a cart to take us."

The Captain was not convinced; he never was by any one's logic but his own; perhaps because his own was totally different to all other kinds, including the painful logic of facts. He sighed deeply. "It is a strange, a humiliating condition of things," he observed to Mr. Gillat, "when a father has to ask his daughter's permission to go into town."

Johnny rubbed the side of his chair thoughtfully, then a bright idea occurred to him. "Ah, but," he said, "gentlemen always have to ask ladies' permission before they can accompany them anywhere—especially when it is the lady of the house."

A wise man might not perhaps have said this last, but Johnny did, and as it happened, it did not much matter; before the Captain could answer, Julia rose from the table and began to clear away.

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Sundry household jobs had to be done in the evening; some were always left till then; in these short dark days it was advisable to use the light for work out of doors. At last, however, all was done, and Julia began to arrange for to-morrow. The Captain was sulky and sure that he would have rheumatism and so not be able to go out. His daughter did not seem to be greatly troubled; she told him of some easy work in the house he could do, or if he liked and felt able, he would perhaps go and get more fir-cones; there were plenty, and they saved other fuel. The Captain replied that he was not in the habit of taking orders from his children.

Johnny looked unhappy; he did not like these ruffles to the tranquil life; it always pained him for any one to be dissatisfied, with reason or without it. When Julia turned to him he was even more ready than usual to take orders; he would have done anything she told him from sweeping the copper flue to calling upon the rector, but secretly he hoped she would give him work in the garden.

The garden was of considerable size, and, by some freak of nature, of fairly good soil, though the field and most of the surrounding land was very poor. They had all worked hard in this plot ever since their coming; there was not much more to be done, or at least not much planting, which was what Mr. Gillat liked. However, there had been no sharp frosts yet and Julia, who knew his tastes, thought she could find something to please him. She called him to the back kitchen and between them they brought from there a wooden case, the contents of which she began to sort over to find an occupation suitable to him. The box was getting rather empty now, but there was still something in it, bulbs and seeds and printed directions, and a strange mixed smell of greyish-brown paper and buckwheat husks and the indescribable smell of Dutch barns.

It had come from Holland, from the Van Heigens; it was Mijnheer's present to the disgraced companion who had been so summarily dismissed. When Julia went to the cottage, it occurred to her to write to Mijnheer and tell him where she was, and how she meant to live a harmless horticultural life. She had come to think that perhaps she ought to tell him; she knew how her own words, about the way they were thrusting a sinner down, would stay with him and his wife. They would quite likely grow in the slow mind of the old man until he became uneasy and unhappy about her, and blamed himself for her undoing. At the time that she spoke she wasted the words to so grow and germinate; but now, looking back, she could think differently; after all the Van Heigens had only done what they thought right, and she had done what she knew to be at least open to doubt. And they had not thrust her down; it would take considerably more than that to do anything of the sort; they had allowed her an opportunity which she had used to achieve a great success. And now that it was achieved and she had left it all behind and was settled to the simple life—her vague ambition—her heart went out to the simple folk who had first shown her that it might be good; who had been kind to her when there was nothing to gain, who had made her ashamed.

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So she wrote to Mijnheer and told him that she had fared well, and found another situation in Holland after leaving his service. Also that she had now left it and, having inherited a little property, had come to live in a country cottage with her father. She further said that she meant to imitate the Dutch and do her own house-work and also grow things, vegetables especially, in her garden.

And Mijnheer, when he got the letter, was delighted; so, too, was Mevrouw; Joost said nothing. They read the letter two or three times, showed it to the Snieders (including Denah) and to the Dutch girl who now filled Julia's situation—more or less. They talked over it a great deal and over Julia too; they remembered every detail about her, her good points and her great fall. They were as delighted as they could be to hear that she was well and happy and apparently, good. Mijnheer especially was pleased to hear that she was with her father—he did not know that gentleman—he was sure she would be well looked after with him, and that, so he said, was what she wanted. So, contrary to their theory, but not out of accord with their practice, they forgave the sin for the sake of the sinner, and Mijnheer ordered to be packed, seeds and bulbs and plants for Julia's garden. He selected them himself, flowers as well as vegetables, sorts which he thought most suitable; and he ordered Joost to stick to the bags strips cut out of catalogues where, in stiff Dutch-English, directions are given as to how to grow everything that can be grown. And if Joost put in some sorts not included in his father's list, and failed to tell the good man about it, it was no doubt all owing to his having at one time associated with the dishonest Julia.

The packing and dispatching of the box gave great pleasure to the Van Heigens; but the receiving and unpacking gave even greater pleasure when at last it reached Miss Snooks at White's Cottage. Julia had not told Mijnheer why she was Miss Snooks now and he, after grave consideration, decided that it must be because of the legacy, and in fulfilment of some obscure English law of property. Having so decided, he addressed the case in good faith, and advised her of its departure.

Julia and Mr. Gillat planted the things that came in the box; Julia planted most, but Mr. Gillat enjoyed it even when he was only looking on. There was one bulb she set when he was not there to look on, but it did not come with the others. She chose a spot that best fulfilled the conditions described in the directions for growing daffodils and there, late one afternoon, she planted the bulb that she had brought with her from the Van Heigens. Afterwards she marked the place round and told Johnny and her father there was a choice flower there which was not to be touched.

Julia went to the market town as she had arranged. Mr. Gillat worked in the garden; Captain Polkington watched him for a little and then went out, after spending, as he always did, some time getting ready. He took a basket with him; he thought of collecting fir-cones and he objected to the sack, though it held a vast deal more; he felt carrying it to be derogatory to a soldier and a gentleman. It is true he did not get fir-cones that day, but he really meant to when he started.

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Julia, in the meantime, did her shopping, and, having loaded herself with as much as she could carry—more than most people could except those Continental maids and mistresses who do their own marketing, she started for home. It was a long walk—a long way to Halgrave and a good bit beyond that to the cottage. She did not expect to reach the village till dusk, but she thought very probably she would find her father or Mr. Gillat there; she had suggested that one or both of them should come to meet her and help carry the parcels the rest of the way.

Johnny fell in with the suggestion; she saw him through the twilight before she reached the village. Her father, she concluded, was still sulky at her refusal to have his company earlier and so would not come now.

“I suppose father would not come?” she said, as she and Mr. Gillat walked on after a readjustment of the burden.

“Oh, no,” Johnny answered; “it was not that; I’m sure he would have come if he had been in when I started, but he was not back then.”

“Not back?” Julia repeated. “Why, where has he gone?”

“Well,” Johnny replied slowly, “he said he was going to get fir-cones, but I’m not sure, I didn’t see him go across the heath. Still, I dare say he went—he took a basket, so I think he must have gone.”

Julia apparently did not find this very conclusive evidence. “There is not anywhere much about here where he can go,” she said; much less as if she were stating a fact than as if she were reviewing likely and unlikely places. “There is only the one road, and that goes to Halgrave, and there is nowhere for him there.”

“No, oh, no,” Johnny said; “there really is nowhere there.”

“There is the ‘Dog and Pheasant,’” Julia went on meditatively, “but he would not get anything he cared about there.”

“No,” Mr. Gillat said decidedly; “besides he would not go there, he would not sit in a small country public house and—er—and—sit there—and so on—he would not think of going to such a place. It is one thing when you are out in the country for a day’s fishing or something, to have a glass of ale and a piece of bread and cheese at an inn, but the other is quite different; he wouldn’t do that—oh, no. To sit in a little bar and—”

“Booze,” Julia concluded for him. “Johnny, you are always a wonder to me; how you have contrived to live so long and yet to keep your belief in man unspotted from the world beats me.”

Johnny looked uncomfortable and a little puzzled. “Well, but your father—” he began.

“My father is a man,” Julia interrupted, “and I would not undertake to say a man would not do anything—on occasions—or a woman either, for the matter of that. There is a beast in most men, and an archangel in lots, and a snob, and a prig, and a dormant hero, and an embryo poet. There are great possibilities in men; you have to watch and see which is coming out top and back that, and then half the time you are wrong. Of course, at father’s age, possibilities are getting over; one or two things have come top and stay there.”

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Mr. Gillat opened the cottage door and, not answering these distressing generalities, fell back on his one fact. “Look,” he said, pointing to an empty peg, “he must have gone after fir-cones; you see the basket has gone; he took it with him; I am sure he would not have taken it to the ‘Dog.’”

“I believe their whisky is very bad,” Julia said, and seemed to think more of that than the argument of the basket. “I’ll give him another hour before I set out to look for him.”

She gave him the hour and then, in spite of Mr. Gillat’s entreaties to be allowed to go in her place, set out for Halgrave. But she did not have to go all the way, for she met her father coming back. And she early discovered that, if he had not been to the “Dog and Pheasant,” he had been somewhere else where he could get whisky. They walked home together, and she made neither comments nor inquiries; she did not consider that evening a suitable time. The Captain was only a little muddled and, as has been before said, a very little alcohol was sufficient to do that; he was quite clear enough to be a good deal relieved by his daughter’s behaviour, and even thought that she noticed nothing amiss. Indeed, by the morning, he had himself almost come to think there was nothing to notice.

But alas, for the Captain! He had never learnt to beware of those deceptive people who bide their time and bring into domestic life the diplomatic policy of speaking on suitable occasions only. He came down-stairs that morning very well pleased with himself; he felt that he had vindicated the rights of man yesterday; this conclusion was arrived at by a rather circuitous route, but it was gratifying; it was also gratifying to think that he had been able to enjoy himself without being found out. But Julia soon set him right on this last point; she did not reproach him or, as Mrs. Polkington would have done, point out the disgrace he would bring upon them; she only told him that it must not occur again. She also explained that, while he lived in her house, she had a right to dictate in these matters and, what was more, she was going to do so.

At this the Captain was really hurt; his feeling for dignity was very sensitive, though given to manifesting itself in unusual ways. “Am I to be dependent for the rest of my days?” he asked.

Julia did not answer; she thought it highly probable.

“Am I to be dictated to at every turn?” he went on.

Julia did answer. “No,” she said; “I don’t think there will be any need for that.”

Captain Polkington paid no attention to the answer; he was standing before the kitchen fire, apostrophising things in general rather than asking questions.

“Are my goings out and comings in to be limited by my daughter? Am I to ask her permission before I accept hospitality or make friends?”

“Friends?” said Julia. “Then it was not ‘The Dog and Pheasant’ you went to, yesterday? I thought not.”

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“Then you thought wrong,” her father retorted incautiously; “I did go there.”

“To begin with,” Julia suggested; “but you came across some one, and went on—is that it?”

The Captain denied it, but he had not his wife’s and daughters’ gifts; his lies were always of the cowardly and uninspired kind that seldom serve any purpose. Julia did not believe him, and set to work cross questioning him so that soon she knew what she wanted. It seemed that her surmise was correct; he had met some one at the “Dog and Pheasant”; a veterinary surgeon who had come there to doctor a horse. They had struck up an acquaintance—the Captain had the family gift for that—and the surgeon had asked him to come to his house on the other side of Halgrave.

When the information reached this point Julia said suavely, but with meaning: “Perhaps you had better not go there again.”

“I shall certainly go when I choose,” Captain Polkington retorted; “I should like to know what is to prevent me and why I should not?”

Julia remembered his dignity. “Shall we say because it is too far?” she suggested.

After that she dismissed the subject; she did not see any need to pursue it further; her father knew her wishes—commands, perhaps, he called them—all that was left for her to do was to see that he could not help fulfilling them, and that was not to be done by much talking any more than by little. So she made no further comments on his doings and, to change the subject, told him she had bought some whisky in the town yesterday and he had better open the bottle at dinner time.

The Captain stared for a moment, but quickly recovered from his astonishment, though not because he recognised that a little whisky at home was part of a judicious system. He merely thought that his daughter was going to treat him properly after all, and in spite of what had been lately said. This idea was a little modified when he found that, though he drank the whisky, Julia kept the bottle under lock and key.

It also seemed that she found a way of enforcing her wishes, or at least preventing frequent transgressions of them, although, of course, she was prepared for occasional mishaps. There really was nothing at the “Dog and Pheasant” that the Captain could put up with even if he had not been always very short of money—absurdly short even of coppers—and Julia saw that he was short. There remained nothing for him but the hospitality of acquaintances, and they did not abound in Halgrave, the only place within reach; also, as he declared, they were a stingy lot. The next time he called upon his new friend, the veterinary surgeon, he was at a loss to understand this; it was unlike his previous experience of the man and most disagreeably surprising; he could not think why it should happen. But then he had not seen Julia set out for Halgrave on the

afternoon of the same day that she explained things to him. She had on all her best clothes, even her best boots, in spite of the bad roads. She looked trim and dainty as a Frenchwoman, but there was something about her which suggested business.

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There are, no doubt, advantages attached to the simple life. It is decidedly easier to deal with your drawback when you do not have to pretend it has no existence. You can enlist help from outside if you can go boldly to veterinary surgeons and others, and say that whisky is your father's weakness, and would they please oblige and gratify you by not offering him any.

CHAPTER XVII

NARCISSUS TRIANDRUS STRIATUM, THE GOOD COMRADE

The winter wore away; a very long winter, and a very cold one to those at the cottage who were used to the mild west country. But at last spring came; late and with bitter winds and showers of sleet, but none the less wonderful, especially as one had to look to see the tentative signs of its coming. March in Marbridge used to mean violets and daffodils, tender green shoots and balmy middays. March here means days of pale clean light and great sweeping wind which chased grey clouds across a steely sky, and stirred the lust for fight and freedom in men's minds and set them longing to be up and away and at battle with the world or the elements. This restlessness, which those who have lost it call divine, took possession of Julia that springtime, and a dissatisfaction with the simple life and its narrow limits beset her. Surely, she found herself asking, this was not the end of all things—this cottage to be the limit of her life and ambitions; her work to grow cabbages and eat them, to keep her father in the paths of temperance and sobriety, and to make Johnny's closing days happy? The March winds spoke vaguely of other things; they whispered of the life she had put from her; the big, wide, moving, thinking, feeling life which would have been living indeed. Worse, they whispered of the man who had offered it to her, the man whom her heart told her she would have made friend and comrade if only circumstances had allowed him to make her wife. But she thrust these thoughts from her; she had no choice, she never had a choice; now less if possible than before, there was no heart-aching decision to make. The work she had taken up could not be put down; she must go on even if voices stronger and more real than these wind ones called her out.

One day the crocuses which Mijnheer had sent came into flower; Julia thought she had never seen anything so beautiful as the little purple and golden cups, partly because they had been sent in kindness of heart, partly, no doubt, because she had grown them herself, and she had never grown a flower which had its root in the inarticulate joy of all things at the first flowering of dead brown earth and monotonous lifeless days. The next event in her calendar, and Johnny's, was the blooming of the fruit trees. She had seen hillside orchards in the west country break into a foam of flower—a sight perhaps as beautiful as any England has to show. But, to her mind, it did not compare with the sparse white bloom which lay like a first hoar frost on her crooked trees and showed cold and delicate against the pale blue sky. After that, nearly every day, there was something fresh and interesting for Mr. Gillat and Julia, so that the March wind was

forgotten, except in the ill-effect on Captain Polkington with whom it had disagreed a good deal, both in health and temper.

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That spring, as indeed every spring, there was a flower show in London at the Temple Gardens. The things exhibited were principally bulb flowers, ixias, iris, narcissus and the like; the event was interesting to growers, both professional and amateur. Joost Van Heigen came over from Holland to attend; he was sent by his father in a purely business capacity, but of course he was expected, and himself expected, to enjoy it, too; there would be many novelties exhibited and many beautiful flowers in which he would feel the sober appreciative pleasure of the connoisseur. He came to England some days before the show; he had, besides attending that, to see some important customers on business, also one or two English growers.

Now, certain districts of Norfolk are very well suited to the cultivation of bulbs, so it is not surprising that Joost's business took him there. And, seeing that he had a Bradshaw and a good map, and had, moreover, six months ago addressed Julia's box of bulbs to her nearest railway town, it is not surprising that he found the whereabouts of the town of Halgrave. It was on Saturday night when he found it on the map; he was sitting in the coffee-room of a temperance hotel at the time. He had done business for the day, and, seeing that the English do not care about working on Sundays, he would probably have to-morrow as well as to-night free. Julia's town was close—a short railway journey, then a walk to Halgrave, and then one would be at her home—it would be a pleasant way of spending the morning of a spring Sunday. He thought about it a little; he had no invitation to go and see Julia, and he did not like going anywhere without an invitation or an express reason. She might not want to see him, or it might put out her domestic arrangements if he came; he knew domestic arrangements were subject to such disturbances. He hesitated some time, though it must be admitted that the fact that he had asked her to marry him and been refused did not come much into his consideration. He had not altered his mind about that proposal, and he did not imagine she had altered hers; his devotion and her indifference were definite settled facts which would remain as long as either of them remained, but there was nothing embarrassing in them to him. At last he decided that he would go, and it was the blue daffodil which decided him.

He had never heard what Julia had done with the bulb he had given her. It was only reasonable to think she had sold it, seeing it was for the sake of money she had wanted it, but no whisper of any such thing had reached him or his father. He longed to know about it, to hear the name of the man who had his treasure; for whom, in all probability, it was blooming now. It was some connoisseur he was nearly certain; Julia would not have sold it to another grower. He had not lain any such condition on her, but she would not have done that; she knew too well what it meant to him; he never doubted her in that matter, his faith was of too simple a kind. Still he determined to go and see her, partly that he might hear the name of the man who bought the blue daffodil, partly because he wanted to and remembered that Julia, in the old days, did not seem of the kind to be upset by unexpected visitors and similar small domestic accidents.

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It was a hot-dinner Sunday at the cottage. These occurred alternately; on the in between Sundays Julia, supported by Johnny and the Captain, went to church. On those sacred to hot dinners she stayed at home and did the cooking, the Captain staying with her. Mr. Gillat used to also in the winter, but lately, during the spring, he had been induced to teach in the Sunday school, and now went every Sunday to the village, first to teach and afterwards to conduct his class to church.

It was Mr. Stevens, the Rector of Halgrave, who had made this surprising suggestion to Mr. Gillat. He, good man, had in the course of time been to see his parishioners at the remote cottage, grinding along the deep sandy road on his heavy old tricycle; but it was not during the visit that he thought of Johnny as a teacher; it was when he made further acquaintance with him at Halgrave. Johnny was the member of the party who went most often to the village shop; he liked the expedition, it gave him a feeling of importance; he also liked gossiping with the woman who kept the shop, and he dearly loved meeting the village children. On one of these occasions, when Johnny was engaged in making peace between two little girls—little girls were his specialty—the rector met him and it was then it occurred to him that Mr. Gillat might help in the school. It was not much of an honour, the school was in rather a bad way just now, and boasted no other teachers than the rector and a raspy-tempered girl of sixteen, but Johnny was much flattered. He thought he ought to refuse; he was quite sure he could not teach; the idea of his doing so was certainly new and strange; he was also sure he was not virtuous enough. But in the end he was persuaded to try; Julia told him that he might hear the catechism with an open book, choose the Bible tales he was surest of, to read and explain, and have his class of little girls to tea very often. So it came about that Mr. Gillat set out Sunday after Sunday to school, and if his reading and expounding of the Scriptures was less in accord with modern light than the traditions that held in the childhood of the nation, no one minded; the children at Halgrave were not painfully sharp, and they soon got to love Mr. Gillat with a friendly lemon-droppish love which was not critical.

Captain Polkington did not approve of the Sunday-school teaching, especially on those days when he had to clean the knives. The Sunday when Joost Van Heigen came was one of these. The Captain watched Mr. Gillat's preparations with a disgusted face; at last he remarked, "I wonder if you think you do any good by this nonsense?"

Johnny, who had got as far as the doorstep, stopped and considered rather as if the idea had just occurred to him.

"There must be teachers," he said at length, looking round at the open landscape; "and there aren't many about."

"You are a fine teacher!" the Captain sneered.

Mr. Gillat rubbed his finger along the edge of the Bible he carried. “I was wild,” he confessed; “yes, I was, I don’t think—but then the rector said—and Julia—”

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His meaning was rather obscure, but possibly the Captain followed it although he did cut him short by saying, “I should never have expected it of you; if any one had told me that you, one of us, would take to this sort of thing, I would not have believed it. I mean, if they had told me in the old days, before things were changed and broken up, when we were still alive and things moved at a pace—when a man knew if he were alive or dead and whether it was night or morning.”

“Yes, yes,” Johnny said, but not altogether as if he regretted the passing of those golden days; “things were different then; we didn’t think of it then.”

“Teaching in the Sunday school?” the Captain asked. “Not quite! And if we had, we shouldn’t have thought of coming to it even when we had got old and foolish.”

Johnny looked uncomfortable and unhappy; then a bright idea occurred to him. “There wasn’t a Sunday school there,” he said. “You remember the hill station?”

Just then Julia called from the house, “Father, I believe we might have a dish of turnip tops if you would get them. Johnny, you will be late if you don’t start soon.”

Johnny promptly started, and the Captain, less promptly, sauntered away to find a basket for the turnip tops, muttering the while something about people whose religion took the form of going out and leaving others to do the work.

But by the time Joost Van Heigen arrived, the Captain was quite amiable again. He had had a quiet morning with nothing to do after the turnip tops were brought in and the knives cleaned, and Johnny had had a long tiring walk home from church in a hot sun and a high wind, which Captain Polkington felt to be a just dispensation of Providence to reward those who stopped at home and cleaned knives. Joost arrived not long after Mr. Gillat; Julia heard the gate click as she was taking the meat from before the fire.

“Who is that, Johnny?” she asked.

Johnny, who had just come down-stairs after taking off his Sunday coat, looked out of the window.

“I don’t know,” he said; “a young man.”

Julia, having deposited the joint on the dish, went to the kitchen door. “Put the meat where it will keep hot,” she said to Johnny; “I expect it’s some one who thinks the last people live here still; fortunately there is enough dinner.”

She pushed open the unlatched door and saw the visitor going round to the front. “Joost!” she exclaimed. “Why, Joost, is it really you?”

She ran down the garden path after him and he, turning just before he reached the front door, stopped.

“Good-morning, miss,” he said solemnly, removing his hat with a sweep. “I hope I see you well. I do not inconvenience you—you are perhaps engaged?”

“Come in,” Julia answered; “I am glad to see you!”

There was no mistaking the sincerity of her tone; Joost’s solemn face relaxed a little. “You are not occupied?” he said; “I do not disturb you?”

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“Yes, occupied in dishing up the dinner,” Julia said, “which is just the best of all times for you to have come. Johnny!” she called; “Johnny, Joost is here.”

Mr. Gillat, who had been carefully placing the dish where the cinders would fall into it, came to the door.

“This is Mr. Gillat, a very old friend of mine,” Julia explained, and Joost bowed deeply, offering his hand and saying, “I hope that you are well, sir.”

Whereupon Mr. Gillat impressed, imitated him as nearly as he could, and Julia looked away.

They had dinner in the kitchen on Sundays as well as week days, they made no difference to-day. Joost looked round him once or twice; he had never seen a place like this. It was the front kitchen; the cooking and most of the house-work was done in the back one, a big barn-like place with doors in all corners. The front one was half a kitchen and half a sitting-room, warm-coloured, with red-tiled floor and low ceiling, heavily cross-beamed and hung with herbs and a couple of hams, in great contrast to the whiteness of the kitchen at the bulb farm. There were brass and copper pots and pans such as he knew, but they reflected an open fire, a dirty extravagance unknown to Mevrouw. Joost glanced at the fire, and it is to be feared that he was at heart a traitor to his native customs. Then he looked at the open window where the sunshine streamed in—as was never permitted in Holland—and he wondered if it really spoilt things very much, and, being a florist, thought it certainly would spoil the tulips in the mug that stood on the wide sill.

During dinner they spoke English for the sake of the Captain and Mr. Gillat; Joost spoke well, if slowly, with a careful and accurate precision. He also observed much, both of outside things, as the fact that Johnny and the Captain cleared the table while Julia sat still, contrary to Dutch custom. And also of things less on the surface—as that Julia was head of the household and that Captain Polkington was not the impressive and authoritative person Mijnheer seemed to think. Concerning this last fact he made no remark when, on his return home, he described the ways and customs of Julia’s cottage to his parents. The description served Mevrouw at least, as representative of all English households ever afterwards.

When dinner was done and everything cleared up, or rather Julia’s part, she took Joost into the garden.

“Now,” she said in Dutch, “let us come out and talk and look at things.”

They went out and he began to admire her orderly garden and to tell her why this plant had done well and that one had failed. He did not speak of the blue daffodil, he thought

he could better ask about that a little later. She did not speak of it either by name; he and it were so inseparably connected in her mind.

“Come along,” she said, when he stopped to look into a tulip to see if its centre was as truly black as it should have been. “Come and see it.”

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He followed her obediently, but asked what it was he was to see.

“The blue daffodil, of course,” she said.

He stopped dead. “You have got it here?” he exclaimed. “You have not sold it?”

“Certainly not.”

“But why—why?” he stared at her in amazement. “You wanted money, it was for that you wanted the bulb, to sell; you told me so. Do you not want money now?”

“Oh, yes,” Julia said; “but that is an incurable disease hereditary in our family.”

“You do want money?” he inquired mystified. “This inheritance is small, not enough? Why, then, did you not sell the bulb?”

Julia shrugged her shoulders. “I could not very well,” she said.

“But why not? You thought to do so at one time; your intention was to sell it if you had —”

“Stolen it? Yes, that is quite true, and it would not have mattered then. If I had stolen it I might as well have sold it; one dishonourable act feels lonely without another; it generally begets another to keep itself company.”

Joost looked at her uncomprehendingly. “But why,” he persisted, clinging to the one thing he did understand, “why did you not sell it? It was for that I gave it to you, to do with as you pleased; I knew you would do only what was right and necessary.”

Julia could have smiled a little at this last word; it seemed as if even Joost had learnt to temper right with necessity to suit her dealings, but she only said, “That was one reason why I could not sell it. You expected me to do right, so I was obliged to do it; faith begets righteousness as dishonour begets dishonour.”

“I do not quite understand,” he began, but she cut him short.

“No,” she said; “we always found it difficult to make things quite plain, it is no use trying now. Come and see the daffodil, you will understand that, at all events, and better than I do. It is not quite fully out yet, but very nearly, and—please don’t be disappointed—it is not a real true blue daffodil at all.”

She took him to the chosen spot and showed him the plant—a bunch of long narrow leaves rising from the brown earth, and in the midst of them a single stalk supporting a partly opened flower. In shape it was single, like the common wild blossom, only much bigger; but in colour, not blue as was expected, but streaked in irregular unblended

stripes of pure yellow and pure blue. The marking was as hard and unshaded as that of the old-fashioned brown and yellow tulips which children call bulls'-eyes, and the effect, though bizarre, was not at all pretty. Julia did not think it so, and she did not expect any one else to either; but Joost, when he saw the streaky flower, gave a little inarticulate exclamation and, dropping on his knees on the path, lifted the bell reverently so that he might look into it.

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“Ah!” he said softly; “ah, it is beautiful, wonderful!” He looked up, and Julia, seeing the rapt and humble admiration of his face, forgot that there was something ludicrous in the sight of a young man kneeling on a garden path reverently worshipping a striped flower. It was no abstract admiration of the beautiful, and no cultivated admiration for the new and strange; it was the love of a man for his work and appreciation of success in it, even if the success were another’s; also, perhaps, in part, the expression of a deep-seated national feeling for flowers.

“Is it what you wished?” Julia asked gently, conscious that she was, as always, a long way off from Joost.

“I did not wish it,” he said, “because I did not foresee it. No one could foresee that it would come, though it always might. It is a novelty, an accident of nature perhaps, but beautiful, wonderful!”

“Is it a real novelty?” Julia asked. “Just as much as your first blue daffodil was? Oh, I am glad! Then you have two now.”

“I?” Joost said in surprise. “No, not I; this is yours, not mine; you have grown it.”

“That’s nothing,” Julia returned easily; “you gave me the bulb; it is really your bulb; I only just put it into the ground, I have had nothing to do with the novelty.”

But if she thought to dispose of the matter in that way she soon found she was mistaken; there were apparently laws governing bulb growing which were as inviolable as any governing hereditary titles. The man who bloomed the bulb was the man who had produced the novelty—if novelty it was; he could no more make over his rights to another than a duke could his coronet. In vain Julia protested that it was by the merest chance that Joost had hit on this particular sort to give her, that it was only an accident which had prevented him from blooming it himself. He said that did not matter at all, and when she failed to be convinced, added that possibly, had he kept the bulb, the result might not have proved the same; her soil and treatment were doubtless both different.

Julia laughed at the idea, saying she knew nothing about soil and treatment. But she made no impression on Joost and apparently did not alter the case; the laws of the bulb growers were not only like those of the “Medes and Persians which alter not,” but also refused to be bent or evaded even by a Polkington.

“It is yours,” Joost said, as he took a last look at the flower before he rose from his knees; “the great honour is yours, and I am glad of it.”

There was something in his tone which reminded Julia of that talk they had had in the little enclosed place on the last day she was at the bulb farm. She hastily submitted so

as to avoid the too personal. “What am I to do with the honour?” she asked. “I do not know, that is one reason why it is absurd for me to have it.”

“You must name your flower,” he told her; “and then you must exhibit it. Fortunately you are in time for the show in London.”

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“But I can’t go to London,” Julia said; “it is out of the question for me to leave home even if I could afford the fare, which I cannot.”

Joost answered there was no need; he could arrange everything for her. “I can take the daffodil to London with me,” he said. “It must be lifted—you have a flower pot, then it must be tied with care, and it will travel quite safely.”

“But,” Julia objected; “if it is exhibited with my name, and you say my name as the grower must appear, your father will hear of it and then he will know that you gave me a bulb—it cannot be exhibited. I do not care about a certificate of merit or whatever one gets.”

“It must be exhibited,” Joost said; “as to my father, he knows already, I have told him; that does not stand in the way.”

To this Julia had nothing to say; perhaps in her heart she was a little ashamed because she had suspected him of the half honesty of only telling what was necessary when it was necessary, that she herself was likely to have practised in his case.

“Now you must call your flower a name,” he said, “as I called mine Vrouw Van Heigen.”

“I will call it after you,” Julia said.

But Joost would not have that. “That will not do; the blue daffodil is already a Van Heigen; there cannot be another, it will make confusion.”

“Well, I’ll call it the honest man, then; that will be you.”

Joost did not like that either; he thought it very unsuitable. “Why not name it after”—he began; he had meant to say “your father,” but recalling that gentleman, he changed it to —“some one of whom you are fond.”

[Illustration: “‘Now you must call your flower a name,’ he said”]

Julia hesitated. “I like the honest man,” she said; “but as you say it is not suitable, the blue daffodil is really the honest one, this is too mixed—I shall call it after Johnny; I am fond of him.”

But Joost was romantic; it was only natural with the extreme and almost childish simplicity of his nature there should be some romance, and there was nothing to satisfy that sentiment in Mr. Gillat. “Johnny?” he said; “yes, but it is not very pretty; it does not suggest a beautiful flower. Why not call it after the heroine of some book or a friend or comrade? Perhaps”—Joost was only human—“he with whom you went walking on the Dunes.”

“Him?” Julia said. “I never thought of that. He was a friend certainly, and a good comrade; he tried hard to get me out of that scrape; he would have stood by me if I had let him—the same as you did—you were both comrades to me then. I tell you what, shall I call it ‘The Good Comrade?’ Then it would be after you both and Johnny too; Johnny would certainly stand by me through thick and thin, share his last crust with me, or father, give me the whole of it. Yes, we will call the daffodil ‘The Good Comrade,’ and it shall have three godfathers.”

With this Joost was satisfied, even though he had to share what honour there was with two others. Mr. Gillat, of course, when he was told, was much pleased; he even found he was now able to admire the wonderful flower, though before, he had agreed with Julia’s opinion of it. To Captain Polkington not much was said about it.

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“Johnny,” Julia said, as they stood watching Joost pot the bulb, “you are not to tell father how valuable this is. He will find out quite soon enough; people are sure to bother me to sell it after it has been exhibited, and I am not going to.”

“No,” Johnny said; “of course not, naturally not.”

So Captain Polkington had no idea why Joost carried away a carefully tied-up flower pot when he left the cottage that afternoon. He only thought the young man must have a most remarkable enthusiasm for flowers to so burden himself on a long walk.

* * * * *

And in due time the wonderful streaked daffodil, “Narcissus Triandrus Striatum, The Good Comrade,” grown by Miss Snooks of White’s Cottage, Halgrave, was exhibited at the Temple Show. And bulb growers, professional and amateur, waxed enthusiastic over it. And the general public who went to the show, admired it or not, as their taste and education allowed them. And among the general public who went, was a Miss Lillian Farham, a girl who, last September, had travelled north with carnations in her coat and Rawson-Clew in a corner of the railway carriage. Miss Farham was an enthusiastic gardener, and having means and leisure and a real taste for it, she had some notable successes in the garden of her beautiful home; and when she was in town she never missed an opportunity of attending a good show, seeing something new, and learning what she could. She was naturally much interested in the new streaked daffodil; so much so, that she spoke of it afterwards, not only to those people who shared her taste, but also to at least one who did not.

Rawson-Clew was back in London. He had not been back long, but already he had begun the preliminaries of a search for Mr. Gillat. He decided that it would be easier to find him than Julia, who might possibly have changed her name to oblige her family, and who certainly would be better able to hide herself, if she had a mind to, than Mr. Gillat. He had not as yet been able to devote many days to the search, and had got no further than preliminaries; still he could already see that it was not going to be easy and might possibly be long. He did not go to the show of spring flowers; he did not feel the least interest in it, but when by chance he met Lillian Farham she spoke of it to him and also of the new daffodil.

“It was grown at Halgrave, too,” she said; “that is not so very far from your part of Norfolk, is it?”

“Fifteen or twenty miles,” Rawson-Clew answered.

“Is it so much as that?” she said; “I thought it was nearer; of course, then, you can’t tell me anything about the grower.”

He could not; it is probable even if the place had been much nearer, he still could not, seeing that it was some years since he had been to “his part of Norfolk.” However, he gave polite attention to Miss Farham, who went on to describe the wonderful flower of mixed yellow and blue.

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“Blue?” Rawson-Clew’s interest became more real; he had once heard of blue in connection with a daffodil. It was one evening on a long flat Dutch road—the evening he had tied Julia’s shoe. She had spoken of it, she had begun to say, when he stopped the confession that he thought she would afterwards regret, that she could not take the blue daffodil.

“What is the name?” he asked; he meant of the grower in Norfolk, though he would have been puzzled to say why he asked.

Miss Farham, however, mistook his meaning and thought he was asking about the flower. “‘The Good Comrade,’” she said, and fortunately she did not see his surprise. “Rather quaint, is it not?” she went on. “Easier to remember, too, than some obscure grand duchess, or the name of the grower or his wife after whom new flowers are usually called. The blue daffodil, you know, is called after one of the grower’s relatives—Vrouw Van Heigen.”

Rawson-Clew said “Yes,” though he did not know it before. It struck him as interesting now; the Van Heigens had a blue daffodil then, and Julia went to them for some purpose besides earning a pittance as companion. She had not taken a blue daffodil; she said so; she also said at another time she had failed in the object of her coming and that failure and success would have been alike discreditable. Poor Julia! And now here was some one in Norfolk exhibiting a daffodil of mixed blue and yellow called, by a strange coincidence, “The Good Comrade.” Of course, it was only a coincidence and yet, when reason is not helping as much as it ought, one is inclined to take notice of signs and coincidences.

“What is the name of the grower of this new flower?” Rawson-Clew asked.

Miss Farham told him.

“Snooks,” he repeated thoughtfully; she imagined he was trying to remember if he had heard the name before. He was not; he was wondering if any one ever really started in life with such a name; if, rather, it did not sound more like the pseudonym of one who was indifferent to public credence, and possibly public opinion.

Rawson-Clew was not able to tell Miss Farham anything about the grower of the streaked daffodil; he was obliged to own that he had never heard of her before. But he made it his business to find out what he could in the shortest possible time; this he did not mention to Miss Farham. What he discovered did not amount to much, very little in fact, but such as it was, it was enough to bring him to Halgrave.

CHAPTER XVIII

BEHIND THE CHOPPING-BLOCK

Captain Polkington, Johnny and Julia were busy in the garden. It was a fine afternoon following after two or three wet days and the ground was in splendid condition for planting, also for sticking to clothes. The sandy road to Halgrave dried quickly, but the garden, of heavier soil, did not, as was testified by Julia's boots—she had bought a small pair of plough-boy's boots that spring and was wearing them now, very pleased with the investment. By and by the sound of a motor broke the silence; the Captain and Johnny left off work to listen; at least, Johnny did; the Captain was hardly in a position to leave off, seeing that he was off most of his time.

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“It sounds like a motor-car,” Johnny said, as if he had made a discovery.

“Then it must have lost its way,” Julia answered, giving all her attention to her cabbage plants.

Johnny said “Yes.” It certainly seemed likely enough; the ubiquitous motor-car went everywhere certainly; even, it was possible to imagine, to remote and uninteresting Halgrave. But along the ill-kept sandy road which led to White’s Cottage and nowhere else, none had been yet, nor was it in the least likely that one would ever come except by accident.

The sounds drew nearer. “It certainly is coming this way,” the Captain said; “I will go and explain the mistake to the people.”

The Captain went to the gate; but he did not stop there, nor did he explain anything. His eyesight, never having been subjected to strain or over work, was good, and the car, owing to the loose nature of the road, was not coming very fast; he saw it had only one occupant, a man who seemed familiar to him. For a second the Captain stared, then he turned and went into the house in surprising haste. He had not the least idea what had brought this man here; indeed, when he came to think about it, he was sure it must have been some mistake about the road. But he had no desire to explain; he felt he was not the person to do so, seeing that the last (and first) time he had seen the man was in an unpleasant interview at Marbridge. He connected several painful things, humiliation, undeserved epithets, and so on, with that interview and with the face of Rawson-Clew. Accordingly, he went into the house and waited, and the car came nearer and stopped.

Johnny and Julia went on with their work; they imagined the Captain was talking to the strangers; they had no idea of his discreet withdrawal until Julia came round the corner of the house to fetch a trowel, and saw Rawson-Clew coming up the path.

Julia’s first feeling was blank amazement, but being a Polkington, and being that before she took to the simple life and its honest ways, she allowed nothing more than polite surprise to appear.

“Why!” she said, “I had no idea you were anywhere near here.”

“I had no idea that you were until recently,” he returned.

She wondered how recently; if it was this minute when chance brought her for the trowel —very likely it was, and he was here by accident.

“Have you lost your way?” she inquired.

“Not to-day.”

“Where were you trying to go?”

“White’s Cottage.”

“Oh!” she said. He did not look amused, but she felt as if he were, and clearly it was not accident that had brought him.

“How did you know I was here?” she asked. “There are not many people who could have told you. I have retired, you know.”

He settled his eyeglass carefully in the way she remembered, and looked first at the cottage and then at her. “I observe the retirement,” he said; “but the corduroy?”

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“I am wearing out my old clothes first,” she answered.

Just then Johnny’s voice was heard. “Hadn’t I better water the plants?” it asked. Next moment Mr. Gillat came in sight carrying a big water can. “Julia hadn’t I better—” he began, then he saw the visitor.

“Ah, Mr. Gillat,” Rawson-Clew said. “How are you? I am glad to see you again; last time I called at Berwick Street you were not there.”

Johnny set down the water can. “Glad to see you,” he said beaming; “very glad, very glad, indeed”—he would have been pleased to see Rawson-Clew anywhere if for no other reason than that he had shown an interest in Julia’s welfare.

Meanwhile Captain Polkington sat in the kitchen listening for the sound of the departing motor. But it did not come; everything was still except for the ceaseless singing of larks, to which he was so used now that it had come almost to seem like silence. He began to grow uneasy; what if, after all, Rawson-Clew were not here by accident and mistake. What if he had come on some wretched and uncomfortable business? The Captain could not think of anything definite, but that, he felt, did not make it impossible. The man certainly had not gone, he must be staying talking to Julia. Well, Julia could talk to him, she was more fit to see the business through than her father was. There was some comfort in this thought, but it did not last long, for just then the silence was broken, there was a sound of steps, not going down the path to the gate, but coming towards the kitchen door! The Captain rose hastily—it was too bad of Julia, too bad! He was not fit for these shocks and efforts; he was not what he used to be; the terrible cold of the winter in this place had told on his rheumatism, on his heart. He crossed the room quickly. The door which shut in the staircase banged as that of the big kitchen was pushed open.

“You had better take your boots off here, Johnny,” Julia said; “you have got lots of mud on them.”

She took off her own as she spoke, slipping out of them without having much trouble with the laces. Rawson-Clew watched her, finding a somewhat absurd satisfaction in seeing her small arched feet free of the clumsy boots.

“Are not your stockings wet?” he said.

“No,” she answered; “not a bit.”

“Are you quite sure? I think they must be.”

“No, they are not; are they, Johnny?” She stood on one foot and put the other into Mr. Gillat’s hand.

Johnny felt it carefully, giving it the same consideration that a wise housekeeper gives to the airing of sheets, then he gave judgment in favour of Julia.

“I was right, you see,” she said; “they are quite dry.”

She looked up as she spoke, and met Rawson-Clew’s eyes; there was something strange there, something new which brought the colour to her face. She went quickly into the other kitchen and began to get the tea.

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Johnny came to help her, and the visitor offered his assistance, too. Julia at once sent the latter to the pump for water, which she did not want. When he came back she had recovered herself, had even abused herself roundly for imagining this new thing or misinterpreting it. There was no question of man and woman between her and Rawson-Clew; there never had been and never could be (although he had asked her to marry him). It was all just impersonal and friendly; it was absurd or worse to think for an instant that he had another feeling, had any feeling at all—any more than she. And again she abused herself, perhaps because it is not easy to be sure of feelings, either your own or other people's, even if you want to, and it certainly is not easy to always want what you ought. Moreover, there was a difference; it was impossible to overlook it, she felt in herself or him, or both. She had altered since they parted at the Van Heigens', perhaps grown to be a woman. After all she was a woman, with a great deal of the natural woman in her, too, he had said—and he was a man, a gentleman, first, perhaps, polished and finished, her senior, her superior—yet a man, possibly with his share of the natural man, the thing on which one cannot reckon. Just then the kettle boiled and she made the tea.

"Where is father?" she asked; and Mr. Gillat went to look for him.

"He is up-stairs," he said when he came back; "he does not feel well, he says, not the thing; he'll have tea up there; I'll take it."

Julia looked at Rawson-Clew and laughed. "He does not feel equal to facing you," she said.

"Yes, yes," Johnny added, "that's it; that's what he says—I mean"—suddenly realising what he was saying—"he does not feel equal to facing strangers."

"Mr. Rawson-Clew is not a stranger," Julia answered; she took a perverse delight in recalling the beginning of the acquaintance which she knew quite well was better ignored. "How odd," she said, turning to Rawson-Clew, "that father should have forgotten you, just as you told me you had forgotten him and all about the time when you saw him."

"I expect he regarded the matter as trivial and unimportant, just as I did," Rawson-Clew answered; "though if I told you I had forgotten all about it I made a mistake; I can hardly say that; I remember some details quite plainly; for instance, your position—you stood between your father and me—very much as you did between me and the Van Heigens."

"I did not!" Julia said hotly, pouring the tea all over the edge of the cup; "I didn't stand between you and the Van Heigens. I mean—"

"Allow me!" Rawson-Clew moved the cup so that she poured the tea into it and not the saucer.

“Dear, dear!” Johnny said; he had not the least idea what they were talking about, but he fancied that one or both must be annoyed, perhaps by the upsetting of the tea; he could think of nothing else. “Such a mess,” he said; “and such a waste. Is the cup ready? Shall I take it up-stairs?”

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“No, thank you,” Julia said; “I will take it.”

Rawson-Clew did not seem to mind, and Julia, after she had lingered a little with her father, decided to come down again. If she stayed away she knew perfectly well that Johnny would do nothing but talk about her; moreover it was absurd to be put out because Rawson-Clew could answer better than Mr. Gillat; that was one of the reasons for which she had liked him.

Captain Polkington sipped his tea and ate his bread and butter peacefully. Julia had told him Mr. Rawson-Clew would not be staying long; she had not exactly said why he was come, it seemed rather as if she did not know; but apparently nothing unpleasant had happened so far and he would be going soon, directly after tea no doubt. So the Captain sat contentedly and listened for the sound of going, but he did not hear it; they were a very long time over tea, he thought.

They were; two of them were purposely spinning it out, the third was only a happy chorus. Julia was in no hurry to face the questions about the explosive which she feared must come when Johnny’s restraining presence was removed. She knew, as soon as she was sure Rawson-Clew’s coming was design and not accident, that he must have suspected her; he had come to talk about it and he would do so as soon as he got the chance, so she put it off. And he was quite willing to wait too; he was enjoying the present moment with a curious light-hearted enjoyment much younger than his years. And he was enjoying the future moment, too, in anticipation, albeit he was a little shy of it—he did not quite know how he was to close with the garrison in the citadel even though he might have taken all the outposts.

But at last tea was done and the table cleared and all the things taken to the outer kitchen to be washed. Julia decreed that she and Johnny were to do that, then unthinkingly she sent her assistant for a tea-cloth. Rawson-Clew was standing by the doorway when Johnny passed; he followed him out.

“Mr. Gillat, your plants want watering,” he said, quietly but decisively.

“They do, they do,” Johnny agreed; “I will have to do them by and by.”

“Do them now, it is getting late.”

“It is,” Mr. Gillat admitted; “we were late with tea, but there’s the drying of the cups.”

“I will do that.”

Johnny hesitated; Julia’s wish was his law, still there seemed no harm in the exchange; anyhow, without quite knowing how it happened, he soon afterwards found himself in the garden among the water cans.

Rawson-Clew went back to the outer kitchen. Julia looked round as she heard his step, and seeing that he was alone, recognised the manoeuvre and the arrival of the inevitable hour.

“Well,” she said, coming to the point in a business-like way now that it was unavoidable; “what is it you want?”

“I want to know several things,” he said, shutting the door. “Principally why you called your daffodil ‘The Good Comrade?’”

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“The daffodil!” she repeated in frank amazement; she was completely surprised, and for once she did not attempt to hide it.

“Yes,” Rawson-Clew said; “why did you call it ‘The Good Comrade?’”

Julia began to recover herself and also her natural caution. This was not the question she expected, but the rogue in her made her wary even of the seemingly simple and safe. “I called it after three friends,” she said, “who were good comrades to me—you, Johnny and Joost Van Heigen. Why do you ask?”

“Because I wondered if it was a case of telepathy; I also named something ‘The Good Comrade.’”

“You?” she said. “What did you name? Was it a dog?”

“No, a bottle—small, wide-necked, stopper fastened with a piece of torn handkerchief, about two-thirds full of a white powder!”

Julia had begun washing the cups; she did her best to betray no sign, and really she did it very well; her eyelids flickered a little and her breath came rather quickly, nothing more.

“Why did you name it?” she asked. “It is rather odd to do so, isn’t it?”

“I named it after the person who gave it to me.”

Julia’s breath came a little quicker; she forgot to remark that the same reason had helped her in naming her flower; she was busy asking herself if he meant her by the good comrade.

“Perhaps I did not exactly name my bottle,” he went on to say, “but it stood for the person to me. It was a sort of physical manifestation—rather a grotesque one, perhaps—of a spiritual presence which had not really left me since a certain sunny morning last year.”

“That is very interesting,” Julia managed to say; her native caution had not misled her; the innocently beginning talk had taken a devious way to the expected end.

“It was interesting,” Rawson-Clew said, “but not quite satisfying, at least not to the natural man. He is not content with a manifestation any more than with a spiritual presence; he wants a corporal fact.”

Julia looked up; the talk was taking an unforseen turn that she did not quite follow, so she looked up. And then she read something in his face that set her heart beating, that

made her afraid, less perhaps of him than of herself, and the thrill that ran like fire through her body.

“I don’t quite understand,” she said, and dropped a cup.

It was meant to fall on the flagged floor and break; it would create a diversion, and picking up the pieces would give her time to get used to the suffocating heart-beats. She had enough of the Polkington self-mastery left to think of the manoeuvre and its advisability, but not enough to carry it out properly; the cup fell on the doubled-up tea-cloth that lay at her feet and was not broken at all. Nevertheless the incident and her own contempt for her failure steadied her a little.

Rawson-Clew picked up the cup. “Do you not understand,” he said. “It is quite simple; I have put it to you before, too—not in the same words, but it comes to the same—the plain terms used then were—will you do me the honour of becoming my wife?”

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Julia's heart seemed to stop for a second, then it went on heavily as before, but she only asked, "Did you not get my letter, the one I wrote in Holland about that?"

"The one when you told me of your arrangements? By the way you did not mention that you were going to Van de Greutz's for the explosive, yes, I got that, but it was scarcely an answer."

"I explained that it meant 'no.'"

"In a postscript; you cannot answer a proposal of marriage in a postscript."

There really does not seem sufficient ground to justify this statement, still she did not combat it. "Can't I?" she said. "Then I will answer it now—no. It was good of you to offer, generous and honourable, but, of course, I should not accept. I mean, I could not even if there had been any need, and, as you see, there was not a particle of need then, still less now."

"No need, no," he answered, and there was a new note in his voice; "it is not a case of necessity or anything of the sort. Put all that nonsense of justice and honour and gratitude out of the question, you know that it does not come in. I own it did weigh somewhat then, but now—now I want the good comrade; I don't deserve her, or a tithe of what she has done for me, but I can't do without her—herself, the corporal fact—don't you know that?"

"No," Julia said; somehow it was all she could say.

"You don't know it? Then I'll tell you." But he did not for she prevented him.

"Please don't," she said. "You cannot really want me because you do not really know me. Oh, no, you do not!"

"I think I do; I know enough to begin with; the rest of the ignorance you can remedy at your leisure."

"My leisure is now," she said; "I will tell you several things, I will tell you how I got the explosive. I went as a cook and stole like a thief—you could have got it as easily as I if you would have stooped as readily as I did. You admire that? Perhaps so, now, but you would not if you had seen it being done. That is the sort of thing I do, and I will tell you the sort of thing I like. The day I came home from Holland I did what I liked—as soon as I reached London I went to Johnny Gillat, my dear old friend, who I love better than any one else in the world, and we had a supper of steak and onions in a back bedroom, and we enjoyed it—you see what my tastes are? Afterwards I heard how father had taken to drink and mother had got into debt—you see what a nice family we are?"

But here Rawson-Clew stopped her. “I knew something like this before,” he said; “the details are nothing; I do not see what it has to do with the matter.”

“It ought to have a lot,” she answered. “But even if you do know it and a good deal more and realise it too, which is a different thing, there is still the other side. I don’t know you, I don’t even know your name.”

Then he remembered that he must have signed that offer of marriage, as he signed all letters, and so left himself merely “H. F. Rawson-Clew” to her.

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“You see,” she was saying, “it is a mistake for people who don’t know each other very well to marry, they would always be getting unpleasant surprises afterwards. Besides, it would be so uncomfortable; it must be pretty bad to live at close quarters with some one you were—who you didn’t know very well, with whom you minded about things.”

She had touched on something that did matter now, that might matter very much indeed; Rawson-Clew realised it, and realised with a start of pain, that there might be a great gulf between him and the good comrade after all. Her quick intuitions and perceptions had bridged it over and led him to forget that he was a man of years and experience while she was a girl, a young, shy, half-wild thing, veiled, and fearing to draw the veil for his experienced eyes.

“Tell me,” he said, facing her and looking very grave and old, “is that how you feel about me?”

She fidgeted the tea-cloth with her foot, but being a Polkington, she was able to answer something. “We belong to different lots of people,” she said, examining the shape the thing had taken on the floor; “I have got my life here, working in my garden and so on; and you have got yours a long way off among greater things.”

“You have not answered me,” he said. “Tell me—am I the man you described?”

He turned her so that she could look at him, the thing she dared not do. His touch was light, almost momentary, but it was too much, it thrilled through her wildly, irresistibly, and she drew back fearing to do anything else.

“Don’t!” she said, and her voice was sharp with the anger of pain.

He stepped back a pace. “Thank you,” he said; “I am answered.”

Captain Polkington had been dozing; there really was nothing else to do; but suddenly he was aroused; there was a sound below; the motor moving at last. Yes, it was going, really going; he went to the window and, taking care not to be seen, watched the car go down the sandy road. After that he went down-stairs, and finding Johnny, who had finished his watering, persuaded him to come for a stroll on the heath. They took a basket to bring home anything they might find, and shouted news of their intention to Julia, who did not answer, then set out.

Now, in the present state of their development, motors are not things on which a man can always rely. More especially is this the case when any one like Mr. Gillat has had anything to do with them. The obliging Johnny, had arranged the inside of Rawson-Clew’s car, covering up what he thought might be hurt by the sun and blowing sand while it stood at the roadside, and taking into the house when he went in to tea, anything that could be stolen if—as was quite out of the question—one came that way

with a mind to steal. Johnny had brought back most of the things and replaced them before Rawson-Clew started, but not quite all. When the car had got a little distance down the road it, with a perversity worthy of a reasonable being, developed a need for the forgotten item. Rawson-Clew searched for it, could not find it, discovered that he could not get on without it, and, thinking if not saying something not very complimentary about Mr. Gillat, walked back to the cottage.

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He supposed he would find Johnny in the garden, but he did not; he and the Captain were some way out on the heath now, and, fortunately for the latter's peace, neither saw any one approach the cottage. Rawson-Clew looked round the garden and finding no one decided, rather reluctantly, that he must go to the house. He did not want to meet Julia again; he thought it rather unlikely that she should still be in the kitchen, but there was a chance of it, so he approached with a view to reconnoitering before presenting himself. The outer kitchen, which partook rather of the nature of a wash-house, had a large unglazed window; when he drew near to this he heard a noise from within. It sounded like some one sobbing, not quiet sobs, but slow deep spasmodic ones like the last remains of a tempest of tears which has not spent itself but only been imperfectly suppressed by sheer will. Rawson-Clew paused though possibly he had no business to do so.

"Oh, why," one wailed from within, "why is not father dead? If he were dead—if only he had been dead!"

The unglazed window was large and rather high up, but Rawson-Clew was a man of fair height; he was also usually considered an honourable one, but when he heard the voice, saying something which was plainly only meant for the hearing of Omnipotence, he did not go away. He put his hands on the flintwork of the window-sill and in a moment found himself in the twilight of the unceiled kitchen.

Julia was crouching in a corner, her elbows on the old chopping-block, her face hidden on her tightly-clenched hands, while she struggled angrily with the shaking sobs. For a moment she struggled, then mastered herself somehow and looked up, perhaps because she meant to rise and set about her work. She had been crying hard and tears do not improve the average face, certainly they did not hers; and she had been trying hard to stop, cramming a screwed-up handkerchief into her eyes and that did not improve matters either. One would have said her face could have expressed nothing but the extremity of unbecoming woe, yet when she caught sight of Rawson-Clew standing just under the window it changed extraordinarily and to anger.

"Go away!" she said; "go away! Do you hear?"

Rawson-Clew did not go away; he came nearer and Julia drew further into the corner, ensconsing herself behind the chopping-block, and looking about as inviting of approach as a trapped rat.

"Julia," he said.

"Go away!" was her only answer.

"Why did you send me away?"

“Because I wanted you gone.”

“Because Captain Polkington is not dead? Is that it?”

“You are a dishonourable eavesdropper! No, it wasn’t that.”

He sat down on the chopping-block barricading her corner so that she could not get out without stepping over him. “Do you know it strikes me that you are not strictly honest either, at least not strictly truthful just now.”

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Julia tugged at her skirt; the chopping-block was on the hem and he on it so that she could not get free. “Will you please go,” she said, with a catch in her breath. That is the worst of these half-suppressed, unspent storms of tears, they have such a tendency to return and break out again inconveniently.

“If it were not for Captain Polkington would you have sent me away?” he asked.

“Y—e—s,” she answered, fighting with her tears. “Oh, go! Please, please go!”

She crumpled herself into a small miserable heap and he leaned over the block and drew her into his arms.

For a moment she struggled, burrowing her head into his coat; there was a good deal of burrowing and not much struggling. “No, you wouldn’t,” he said to her hair, “you would have married me.”

“I might have said I would, but I shouldn’t really have done it,” she contended without looking up. “I shouldn’t when it came to the point. You had better let me go, I am spoiling your coat, my face is all wet—and I don’t know where my handkerchief is.”

“Take mine, you will find it somewhere. Tell me, why would you not have married me when it came to the point? Because your courage failed you?”

No answer; then, “I can’t find that handkerchief.”

“You have not tried. Are you afraid to try? Are you afraid of me? Is that why you would not have married me—you would have been afraid to live at close quarters with me? Do you still think you don’t know me well enough?”

“I don’t know your name.”

The answer was ridiculous, but he knew how the ridiculous touched even tragedies for Julia.

“Hubert Farquhar Rawson-Clew,” he said solemnly. “Now—”

But whatever was to have followed was prevented, for at that moment she looked up, and for some reason, suddenly decided things had gone far enough, and so freed herself.

“I don’t think it matters much what I should have done,” she said, “or why, either. Father is not dead; you ought to know better than to talk about such a thing; it is bad taste.”

“Does that matter in the simple life? I thought when you retired you were going to dispense with falsity and pretences, and say and do honestly what you honestly thought, when it did not hurt other people’s feelings.”

“So I do,” she answered; “that is why, when I thought I was alone just now, I asked out loud how it was that father was still alive. Since then I have seen.”

“What have you seen?”

“That it is to prevent me from making a great muddle of things. If he had been dead I dare say I should have married you—I may as well confess it since you know—and we both should have repented it ever afterwards. As it is, if I were free to-morrow, I would know better than to do it.”

He did not seem much troubled by the last statement. “We should have had to talk things over,” he said.

“No, talking wouldn’t have been any good,” she answered; “there is a great distance between us.”

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He looked down at the space of red tiles that separated them. “That is rather remediable,” he observed.

“Do you think I am not in earnest?” she said. “I am. There is a real barrier; besides all these things I have mentioned there is something else that cuts me off. I have a debt to pay you and until it is paid, if I were your own cousin, I could not stand on the same platform.”

“A debt?” he repeated the word in surprise. His young cousin’s loan to Captain Polkington had slipped his memory, and even if it had not, its connection with the present would not have occurred to him. Julia had been there, it is true, when the affair was talked of eighteen months ago, and he himself had unofficially paid the money to end the matter, but he never dreamed of connecting either her or himself with it now. Still less would he have dreamed that she considered herself bound to pay him what her father had borrowed from another.

“What debt?” he asked, thinking the word must be hyperbolical, and meant to stand for something quite different, though he could not imagine what.

“You have forgotten?” she said. “I thought you had; that only shows the distance more plainly; you have one standard for yourself and another for me.”

“Tell me what it is and let us see if we cannot compound it.”

But she shook her head. “It can’t be compounded,” she said; “you will know when I pay it.”

“And when will that be?”

“Ten years, twenty perhaps, I don’t know. I thought once or twice before I could pay it—with the blue daffodil once, and once when I first got the cottage and things—I thought, to be sure, I could do it; it seemed a Heaven-sent way. But”—with a little glint of self-derision—“Heaven knows better than to send those sort of easy ways to the Polkingtons; they are ill-conditioned beasts who only behave when they are properly laden by fate, and not often then. Now you know all about it, so won’t you say good-bye and go?”

“I don’t know about it and, what is more, I don’t care. I am not going to let this unknown trifle, this scruple—”

Just then there came the sound of voices outside; Mr. Gillat and Captain Polkington unwarily coming back before the coast was clear.

“Yes,” Johnny was saying, “he came to see me in town, you know—or rather you, but you were out—”

“He came to see me? He”—there was no mistaking the consternation in the Captain’s tone, nor his meaning either.

Julia and Rawson-Clew looked at one another; both had forgotten the Captain’s existence for a moment; now they were reminded, and though the reminder seemed incongruous it was perhaps opportune.

“There is father,” Julia said.

And he nodded. One cannot make love to a man’s daughter almost in his presence, when the proviso of his death is an essential to any satisfaction. Rawson-Clew went to the door. “Good-bye,” he said, “for the present.”

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“Good-bye for always,” she answered.

She spoke quite calmly, in much the same tone when, on the morning after the excursion to the Dunes, she had bid him good-bye and tried to face the consequences alone. She had had so many tumbles with fate that it seemed she knew how to take them now with an indifferent face. At least, nearly always, not quite—the wood block still lay before the corner in which she had crouched the marks on his coat where her tears had fallen were hardly dry. There was passion and to spare behind the indifferent face, passion that for once at least had broken through the self-mastery.

He held out his hand and she put hers into it. “Good-bye,” he repeated; “good-bye for the present, brave little comrade.”

CHAPTER XIX

CAPTAIN POLKINGTON

Captain Polkington was watching a pan of jam. It was the middle of the day and warm; too warm to be at work out of doors, as Johnny was, at least so the Captain thought. He also thought it too warm to watch jam in the back kitchen and that occupation, though it was the cooler of the two, had the further disadvantage of being beneath his dignity. The dignity was suffering a good deal; was it right, he asked himself, that he, the man of the house, should have the menial task of watching jam while Julia talked business with some one in the parlour? He did not know what business this person had come on; he had seen him arrive a few minutes back, had even heard his name—Mr. Alexander Cross—but that was all he knew about him; Julia had taken him into the parlour and shut the door. Naturally her father felt it and was annoyed.

There was a door leading into the parlour from the front kitchen. It was fast closed but the Captain, leaving the jam to attend to itself, went and looked at it. While he was standing there he heard three words spoken on the other side by the visitor; they were —“your new daffodil.”

So that was the business this man had come on! He was trying to buy Julia’s ugly streaked flower. The Captain’s weak mouth set straight; he felt very strongly about the daffodil and his daughter’s refusal to sell it. He knew she might have done so; she had had a good many letters about it since it was exhibited in London. She said little about the offers they contained, but he knew she refused them all; he had taxed her with it and argued the question to no purpose. Now, to-day, it seemed there was a man so anxious to buy the thing that he had actually come to see her; and she, of course, would refuse again. The Captain sat down in the easy-chair; he was overcome by the thought of Julia’s contrary stupidity.

The chair was near the door, but he would have scouted the idea that he was listening; he was a man of honour, and why should he wish to hear Julia refuse good money? Also it was impossible to hear all that was said unless the speakers were close to the door. Apparently they must have been near for no sooner had he sat down than he heard the man say, “Haven’t I had the pleasure of seeing you somewhere before, Miss Snooks? Your face seems familiar though I can’t exactly locate it.”

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“We met at Marbridge,” Julia answered; “at a dance, a year and a half ago.”

“At Marbridge? Oh, of course! Funny I shouldn’t have remembered when I heard your name the other day!”

Captain Polkington did not think it at all funny; he did not know who Mr. Cross might be, nobody important he judged by his voice and manner—hostesses at Marbridge often had to import extra nondescript men for their dances. But whoever he was, if he had been there once he might go there again and carry with him the tale of Julia’s doings and home and other things detrimental to the Polkington pride. The Captain listened to hear one of the two in the other room refer to the change of name which had prevented an earlier recognition. But neither did; she saw no reason for it, and he had forgotten her original name if he ever knew it.

“I remember all about you now,” he was saying; “you danced with me several times and asked me about the Van Heigens’ blue daffodil”—he paused as if a new idea had occurred to him. “You were not in the line then, I suppose?” he asked.

“No, I knew nothing about flower growing or selling,” she answered. “What you told me of the value of the blue daffodil was a revelation to me.”

He laughed a little. “But one you’ll try to profit by,” he said.

The Captain moved in his chair. He could have groaned aloud at the words, which represented precisely what Julia would not do. Unfortunately his movement had much the same effect as his groan would have done, some one on the other side of the door moved too, and in the opposite direction. It must have been Julia, her father was sure of it; it was like her to do it; she must have gone almost to the window; he could not make out what was said. The man was no doubt trying to buy the bulb; a stray word here and there indicated that, but it was impossible to hear what offer was made. It was equally impossible to hear what Julia said; her father only caught the inflection of her voice, but he was sure she was refusing.

In disgust and anger he rose and, having pulled the jam to the side of the fire, went into the garden. There he took the hoe and started irritably to work on a bed near the front door; it was some relief to his feelings to scratch the ground since he could not scratch anything else.

In a little while Cross came out. “Well, if you won’t, you won’t,” he was saying as Julia opened the door. “I think you are making a mistake; in fact, if you weren’t a lady I should say you were acting rather like a fool; but, of course, you must please yourself. If you think better of it you can always write to me. Just name the price, a reasonable price, that’s all you need do. We understand one another, and we can do business without any fuss—you have my address?”

He gave her a card as he spoke, although she assured him she should not want it; then he took his leave.

She watched him go, tearing up the card when he had set off down the road. Captain Polkington watched her.

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“What did he want?” he asked, remembering that he was not supposed to know.

“The bulb,” she answered.

“And you would not sell it?”

“No.”

She had come from the doorstep now to pull up some weeds he had overlooked.

“I can’t understand you, Julia,” he said resting on his hoe, and speaking as much in sorrow as in anger. “You seem to have so little sense of honour—women so seldom have—but I should have thought that you would have had a lesson on the necessity, the obligation of paying debts. When you come to think of the efforts we are making to pay those debts, how I am straining every nerve, giving almost the whole of my income, doing without everything but the barest necessaries, without some things that are necessaries in my state of health, what your mother is doing, how she has given up her home, her husband, to live almost on charity in her son-in-law’s house. When you think of all that, I say, and of what your sisters have done, it does seem strange that you should grudge this bulb, simply and solely because it was given you by some people for whom you care nothing.”

Julia agreed; she never saw the purpose of contradicting when conviction was out of the question. “It does seem strange,” she said; “but there is one comfort, the worst of the debts will be cleared off by the end of the year. Uncle William knows that and has arranged for it in his own mind; I really think it would be almost a pity to disturb the business plans of any one so exact.”

“Are we,” the Captain returned scornfully, “to pinch and save to the end of the year? Am I to do without the few comforts that might make life tolerable? Am I to work like a farm labourer and live like one till then, because you choose to keep this bulb?”

Julia thought it was very probable things would go on as they were for some time, but she did not say so; she only said, “I am sorry you find it so trying.”

“Trying!” her father said, and stopped, as if he found the word and most others very inadequate. “After all, it does not much matter,” he remarked in a tone of gloomy resignation. “I shan’t be here, in any one’s way, much longer; there is not the least chance that I shall live till the end of the year, and when I am gone you can do what you please, what you must, with your bulb. I own I should like to see you a little more comfortable and better off now. I hate to have you doing servant’s work and going shabby as you have to. I should like you to be decently dressed, taking your proper place in society, but if you think it right to go on as you are and to keep your bulb, of course I have nothing to say.”

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It was as well he had nothing, for Julia remembered the jam and went indoors, so he would have had no one to say it to. She went into the back kitchen, thinking, but not of the jam. Once again the temptation to sell the daffodil beset her; not to Cross, he was the last man to whom she would have sold it, but to some collector who would care for it as the Van Heigens would. She could easily find such a one with or without assistance from Cross; little harm would be done to the Van Heigens by it; indeed Joost had expected her to do no less, and if she did it she could pay—not the debts her father had mentioned—but the one he had not. She had thought this all out before, seen the arguments on both sides, and arrived at her conclusion; but there are some things that are not content with this treatment once, nor even twice, but demand it a good many more times than that. So she thought it out again and came again to the old conclusion. Joost had given her the bulb because he loved her; he had made no conditions because he believed in her; he had even professed himself content that she should sell it because, in his humbleness and generosity, he wanted only that she should get what ease she could. He was content to make what was to him a great sacrifice for no other reason than that she should have a little more money on mere caprice, the very nature of which he did not know. And so she could not do it, that was the end of the whole matter. She could not take the gift of the man who loved her to pay a debt to the man she loved.

She went to fetch jam pots, without calling herself to order for the last admission. It was the one luxury she had at that time; daily and nightly she could admit to herself that she loved him and he loved her. Not exactly passionately—they were not passionate people, she told herself—but in an odd companionable equal sort of way which was the best in the world. Nothing would ever come of it, even in the remote future when her father was dead and the debt paid. By that time both of them would have grown old and set in their far separate ways, and even if he ever heard that she was free he would have become wiser and changed his mind. So there was no end to this thing, no awakening and disillusioning, none of the disappointment and dreariness which is likely to attend the translating of a dream into work-a-day life. For that reason it should have been possible to be content, even with the thing which stood between her and realisation—sometimes it almost was, at least she persuaded herself so. At others there were things harder to control; brief moments when crushing down all opposition and obliterating other thoughts, came the memory of how she had crouched behind the chopping-block, how hidden her tears in his coat. There was no reason or common-sense in that, no friendship or good-fellowship in the clasp of his arms; it was the natural man and the natural woman, and absence could not change it, nor time take it away; it had been, it might be again, it obeyed no law and answered to no argument in the world. It was something which made her ashamed and afraid and yet glad with a rare incommunical gladness that was pointed with pain.

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Just then the jam boiled over, and she had to leave her pots to run and save it.

It is a great thing to have your mind under fair control; the Polkington training, wherein the advisable and advantageous were compelled to rank high even in matter of emotion, is not without use in bringing this about. But it is also a great thing, almost, perhaps, a more important one for some people, to have plenty to do even if it is only making jam.

While Julia made her jam Captain Polkington hoed; at least he did for a little while, then he gradually ceased and stood leaning upon his hoe, lost in unhappy thought. At last he moved, and, gathering the withering weeds that lay beside the path, carried them to an old basket which he had left beside the garden wall. With the weeds he picked up the torn fragments of card which Julia had dropped beside the doorstep; he let them fall into the basket with the other rubbish, but when he saw them gleaming white among the green they arrested his attention. For a moment he looked at them, then he carefully picked them out; he had some thought of appealing to Julia once more, or telling her that he had saved the man's address for her and she had one last chance. He sat down on the wall; would it be any good to appeal? he asked himself despondently. Would anything be any good? Was not everything a failure? No one regarded him; Cross, the man whose card he held, had not even glanced in his direction when he went down the path. A miserable bargain-driving tradesman had passed him and paid no more attention to him than if he had been a gardener! Gillat, his own friend, did not regard him, thought nothing of his comforts; he was all for Julia; thought of nothing and no one else. As for Julia herself, she had not the slightest regard for him, no consideration, not even filial respect and obedience.

He looked gloomily before him for a little, then his eye fell on the white fragments he held, the address of the man who was anxious to buy the daffodil which Julia in her obstinate folly and selfish unreasonableness, would not sell. If it only were sold! He thought over all the good things that could then be done; they were the same as those excellent reasons that he had himself given a little while back. Some people might have said they were rather diverse and not all mutually inclusive, but no such idea troubled him; he was sure all could easily have been done if the daffodil were sold. He felt that he could have done it all quite well, he did not stop to think how—if he had had the handling of the money he could have been a benefactor to his whole family, especially Julia. It was hard that he should be prevented, bitterly hard; it had so often happened in his life that he had been prevented from doing what was good and useful by want of means and opportunity or the stupid obstinacy of other people. He grew more and more depressed as he sat on the wall thinking of these things and wondering if there were many men so useless, so unfortunate and misunderstood as he.

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This depression lasted all that day and on into the next; indeed, for some time longer. It lifted a little once in the course of a week, but not much, and soon settled down again, making the Captain very miserable, disinclined for work, and decidedly bad company. Johnny thought he was not well, but Julia fancied his trouble had something to do with annoyance and the daffodil. He did not confide in either of them, maintaining a proud and gloomy silence and nursing his grievance so that it grew. For days he cherished his sense of injury and wrong, until it became large and took a good hold upon him. Then, all at once, for no reason that one can give, a change came, and his mind, as if smitten by a gust of wind, began to veer about, to stir and lighten. Why, he suddenly asked himself, was it that Julia would not sell the bulb? Because—the answer was so absurdly simple he wondered it had not occurred to him before—because it was the Van Heigens' present, and one cannot sell presents. He perfectly understood the scruple, honoured it even; but he also saw quite plainly that, though it prevented her from selling the daffodil, it did not stand in the way of its being sold. She could not, of course, authorise the sale, any more than she could conduct it; but that was no reason why she should not be very pleased to have it sold. Indeed, not only was this a probability, practically a certainty, but more than likely she had had some such idea in her mind when she spoke of the matter to her father—in all likelihood she was wondering now why he had not taken the hint.

Thus Captain Polkington reasoned, seeing light at last in the dimness of the depression which had possessed him. Quite how much he really believed, or even if he were capable of real reasonable belief at this stage of his career, it is not easy to say. It is possible he may have thought he was right for the time being; his conscience was capable of remarkable gymnastic feats at times. It is also possible that he, like some others of the human race, was not really able to think at all. Anyhow the depression that weighed upon him lifted, and he remembered with satisfaction that he had kept the torn fragments of Cross' card.

In the early part of the summer the hyacinths, tulips, and finer narcissus had been taken out of the ground and put to dry. Julia hoped by this means to get more and better flowers from them next year than is the case when they are left in the earth. They took some time to dry and were not really ready till the summer was far advanced; but that did not matter to her, however it may have inconvenienced her father; she was too busy to attend to them earlier. By the middle of August they were ready, and she set to cleaning them in her spare time with Johnny to help her. He was proud and pleased to do so, and did not in the least mind the extreme irritation of the skin which befalls those who rub off the old loose husks. A place was prepared for the bulbs in one of the sheds, the wide shelf cleared and partitions made in it by Mr. Gillat, who also spent some time in writing labels for each of the divisions. Julia told him this was unnecessary as she knew by the shape which were hyacinths and which tulips; still he did it. Captain Polkington did not offer any assistance; he merely looked on with indifferent interest; the matter did not seem to concern him.

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But one day, towards the end of the month, but before the bulbs were all done, Julia went into the town.

Captain Polkington saw her start; then he wandered to the shed where Johnny was at work. For a little he stood watching, then he walked leisurely round the place looking at this and that.

“You will never be able to tell which is which of these things,” he remarked at last.

Johnny looked at his somewhat conspicuous labels. “I’ve named them, don’t you see ‘Tulips?’”

“But you don’t say what sort of tulips, which are red and which yellow. Nor what sort of narcissus, which are daffodils and which the bunchy things.”

“No,” Mr. Gillat admitted; “no, they got mixed in the digging up; I forgot, and put them all in the barrow together; that’s how it happened.”

“What? The whole lot?” the Captain inquired. “The streaked daffodil and all? What did Julia say?”

“She said it did not matter,” Johnny told him; “they’ll be all the more surprise to us when they come up next year.”

“She didn’t mind, not even about the streaked daffodil?”

“Oh, that was not there,” Mr. Gillat said, serenely unconscious that the fate of that bulb was the only interest. “We have got that by itself.”

He showed a little piece of shelf penned off from the rest and carefully covered with wire netting for fear of rats. Three different shaped bulbs were there in a row.

“That’s it,” Johnny said, pointing to one of the three. “And that end one is the red tulip with the black middle; it is supposed to be very good; and that other is the double blue hyacinth from down by the gate; we are going to try it in a pot in the house next year and have it bloom early.”

Captain Polkington nodded, but did not show much interest. “Did you put these here, or did she?” he asked.

“She did,” Johnny answered. “She cleans them much better than I do, and we knew they were choice ones, the best one of each kind, so she cleaned them; but I made the wire cover.”

The Captain did not praise the ingenuity of this contrivance, which he did not admire at all, and soon afterwards he sauntered back to the house. He was dozing in the easy-chair in the front kitchen when Johnny came in to change his coat before setting out to meet Julia. He did not seem to have moved much when Mr. Gillat came down-stairs ready to start.

“What?” he roused himself to say when Johnny announced his destination. “Oh, all right, you need not have waked me to tell me that, it really is of no importance to me if you like to walk in the blazing sun.” He settled himself afresh in the chair, muttering something about the heat, and Johnny went out, quietly closing the door after him.

It was an hour later when Julia and the faithful Johnny came back, the latter decidedly hot although he was carrying one of the lightest of the parcels. Captain Polkington was still in his chair; he woke up as they entered.

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“Why,” he said, “I must have dropped asleep!” He rose and went to take Julia’s parcels. “Let me put these away for you,” he said solicitiously; “it is a great deal too hot for you to be walking in the sun and carrying all these things.”

“Thank you,” Julia answered; “that’s all right. Perhaps you would not mind getting the tea, though; if you would do that I should be glad.”

He did mind, but he set about it, and it was perhaps well for him that he did, as otherwise he might have paid a suspicious number of fidgety attentions to Julia. As it was, doing the menial work which he always considered beneath his dignity, while Johnny sat still and rested, restored him to his usual manner.

But the Captain, though he was safely past the initial difficulty, did not find the working out of his scheme altogether easy. He had the bulb, it is true, and he was safe from detection for there was still under the wire cover a smooth yellow-brown narcissus root very like the first one; but he had got to get rid of it. It was not very easy to get a letter to the post here without remark from Mr. Gillat. That, in the circumstances, would be undesirable for it was likely to arouse Julia’s suspicions, and if they were roused she might think it her duty to interfere—even though, of course, she did wish the bulb sold. Her father recognised that and, determining not to give her the opportunity, got his letter written betimes and waited for a chance to give it to the postman unobserved. In writing he had been faced by one very great difficulty, he had not the least idea how much to ask. Cross had said “name a reasonable price,” and he must name one, or else it would appear that he were writing on his own behalf not Julia’s; but he did not know what was reasonable and he had no chance of finding out. A new orchid, he had vaguely heard, was sometimes worth a hundred pounds; but it was impossible any one should pay so much for a daffodil, an ordinary garden flower. Julia, whatever her motive, would not have refused to sell it if it would have fetched so much; he could not conceive of a Polkington, especially a poor one, turning her back on a hundred pounds. For hours he thought about this and at last decided to ask twenty pounds. It seemed more to him now than it would have done a year ago, by reason of the small sums he had handled lately; but it was a good deal less than his golden dreams had painted the bulb to be worth in the time when it seemed unattainable, and he was paying debts and providing for Julia out of the proceeds of the imaginary sale. Still, he finally decided to ask it and wrote to that effect, and after some waiting for the opportunity got the letter posted.

After that there followed an unpleasant time or suspense, made the more unpleasant by the fact that he had to look out for the postman as he did not want the return letter to fall into Julia’s hands. At last, after a longer time than he expected, the reply came safely to hand. This was it—

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“SIR,

“I am obliged to decline your offer of the streaked daffodil bulb, the price you name being absurd. To tell the plain truth, I would rather not do business with you in the matter; I prefer to deal with principals, else in these cases there is little guarantee of good faith.

“Yours faithfully,

“ALEXANDER CROSS.”

“P. S.—If you should fail to dispose of your bulb elsewhere and it would be a convenience to you, I will give you a five pound note for it, that is, if you can guarantee it genuine. It is not, under the circumstances, worth more to me.

“A. C.”

So the Captain read and then re-read; anger, mortification and disappointment preventing him from grasping the full meaning at first. Five pounds, only five pounds! No wonder Julia would not sell her bulb; no wonder she preferred to keep a present that would only fetch five pounds! What was such a trifle? The Captain glared at the letter as he asked himself the question proudly. His pride was badly wounded. Cross had not set him right in his mistaken idea of the daffodil’s value too politely; at least he thought not. Why should he, this tradesman, say he preferred to deal with principals? Did he imagine that a gentleman would attempt to sell him a spurious bulb? The Captain’s honour was not of that sort and he felt outraged. He felt outraged, too, almost insulted, at being told that the price was absurd. The absurd thing was that he should be expected to know anything about trade or trade prices. “The man can have no idea of my position,” he thought.

But there he was not quite correct; it was precisely because he had a suspicion of the position that Cross had written thus. No one with any right to it would offer the true bulb for twenty pounds; either, so he argued, it was stolen or not genuine; which, he did not know, the odds were about even. After making a few inquiries at Marbridge into Captain Polkington’s history he came to the conclusion that the chance in favour of the true bulb was worth five pounds to him. Accordingly he offered it, indifferent as to the result, but rather anticipating its acceptance.

It was accepted. The Captain was mortified and disappointed, but five pounds is five pounds. It even seems a good deal more when your income is very small and the part of it which you handle yourself so much smaller as to amount to nothing worth mentioning. It was September now, and already the mornings and evenings were cold, foretaste of the winter which was coming, which would hold the exposed land in its grip for months. Five pounds would buy things which would make the winter more tolerable;

small comforts and luxuries meant a great deal to real poverty in cold weather and feeble health. Of course to Johnny and Julia too; they were all going to benefit. Captain Polkington packed the bulb in a small box and posted it when he went to Halgrave to have his hair cut.

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By return he received a five pound note—a convenient handy form of money, easy to send, easy to change. Halgrave might not perhaps be able to give change for it without inconvenience, but Julia could get it changed next time she went into town. That would not be just yet, but a note will keep; it would perhaps be better to keep it for the present. The Captain folded it in his pocket-book and kept it.

CHAPTER XX

THE BENEFACTOR

It was not till October that Captain Polkington was able to change the five pound note. This was really Julia's fault, she went so seldom into the town; he had once or twice suggested her doing so when she said they wanted this or that, but she never took the hint, and the note was still in his pocket-book. At last, however, the opportunity came.

A keeper's wife with whom Julia had got acquainted had promised her a pair of lop-eared rabbits if she could come and fetch them. She was not very anxious to have them, but Mr. Gillat was; he said they would be very profitable. Julia doubted this; but, since he wanted them, she said they would have them, and accordingly, one morning, they started together with a basket for the rabbits. They started directly after breakfast for they had to go a long way across the heath and could not at the best be back before two o'clock. Captain Polkington watched them go, standing at the cottage door until their figures were small on the great expanse of heather. Then he went in and, sitting down, wrote a hasty note to Julia; it was to the effect that he had been obliged to go into town, but would be back by dark or soon after. It read as quite a casual communication, as if he were in the habit of going into town frequently and had much business to transact. The Captain was rather satisfied with it; he felt he was doing the straightforward thing in telling Julia, his whole proceedings were open and above board. When he came back he should tell her all about the money, how it had been raised and how spent. She should have had the spending of it herself if only she had gone to town when he suggested it; as it was, he must do it; it was absurd to wait any longer; the weather was already cold; he must go, and bring her some pleasant surprise when he came back.

Satisfied with these reflections and feeling already the glow of beneficence, he dressed himself and set out for Halgrave. He had to walk to the village and there take the carrier's cart which went into town twice a week; he reflected, while he waited for the vehicle, how fortunate it was that Julia and Johnny had chosen to go for the rabbits to-day, one of the days when the carrier went to town. There were a good many bundles going by the cart, and two other passengers who were inclined to be too familiar until somewhat haughtily shown their proper place. The Captain was a little annoyed by this; and annoyed, also, to find that the carrier was not in the habit

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of starting on the return journey till rather late, later than the note would lead Julia to expect her father. But as the carrier was not one to change his habits for anybody, that could not be helped and Captain Polkington made the best of it. Julia was not likely to be anxious about him, he was sure; and since he was going to tell her all about his doings, it might as well be late as early. By this time he had quite got rid of any qualms—if he ever had them—about the method of getting and the intention of spending the note. He had almost forgotten that it had not always been his, and was quite sure that he was doing the right thing—for others as well as himself—in the difficult circumstances which seemed to beset him more than the common run of men. Cheered by these thoughts he endured the discomforts of the journey with moderate patience; he almost felt that he was suffering them in a good cause, for the sake of Johnny and Julia.

The town was large and the centre of a large district, not at all like the retired gentility of Marbridge, very much bigger and busier. Captain Polkington, who had lived quietly so long, felt rather lost and bewildered at first in the bustling intricate streets; there were so many people, especially among the shops, they were always getting in his way. He only made one purchase before lunch; he would have plenty of time in the afternoon, he thought, and would be better able to decide what to buy when he had seen things and had a meal. The purchase made before lunch was at the wine merchants, it was whisky.

He lunched at the best hotel; that and the whisky made a rather bigger hole in the five pound note than one would have expected. Still, as he told himself the whisky really was a vital matter with winter coming on, a necessity, not a luxury, for all of them—-Johnny would be better for a little—he used to like a glass in the old days; and Julia would certainly be the better for it, working as she did in the cold. It was a medicine for them all, not himself alone. The lunch was the only personal extravagance and really, seeing what he was doing for the others, there was no need for him to grudge that to himself.

So he lunched and then the trouble began. He was not clear quite how it happened; at least, owing to the confusion there always was in his mind between facts as they were, as he wished them to be, and as they appeared in retrospect—he was never able to explain it thoroughly. There were other men lunching at the same time; he still had the Polkington faculty for making friends and acquaintances; he still, too, had the appearance and manner of a gentleman, if of somewhat reduced circumstances. He apparently made acquaintances; exactly how many and what sort is not certain, the account was very confused here. There was a whisky and soda in it, two whiskies and sodas, or even three; a cigar, a game of billiards—perhaps there was more than one game, or some other game besides

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billiards. At all events there must have been something more, for the Captain afterwards declared he was ruined in less than an hour, fleeced, cheated of his little all! It is quite possible that he was nothing of the kind, and that the acquaintances were perfectly honest and honourable men. They would not know he could not afford to lose, a true Polkington always set out to hide the reality of his poverty. And he was not likely to win, he seldom did, no matter at what he played or with whom; he was constitutionally unlucky—or incapable, which is a truer name for the same thing—it had always been so, even as far back as the old times in India. That day he lost at something, that at least was clear; then there was more whisky and soda and more losses, and perhaps more whisky again; and so on until late in the afternoon, he found himself standing, miserable and bewildered, in the main street of the town. Some one had brought him there, a good-natured young fellow who thought, not that he had spent all he ought, but that he had drunk all he should.

“Not used to it, you know,” he had said with good-humoured apology; “been rusticating out of the way so long. Better come out and get a breath of air, it’ll pull you together.”

And he persuaded him out, walked some way down the street with him and then, seeing that he seemed all right, left him and went to attend to his own business.

For a little the Captain stood where he was, the depression, begotten of whisky and his losses, growing upon him in the old overwhelming way. No one took any notice of him; passers by jostled against him, for the pavement was rather narrow, but no one paid any attention to him. The bustle bewildered his weak head, and the noise and movement of the traffic in the roadway irritated him unreasonably. A youth ran into him and he exploded angrily with sudden weak unrestrained fury. Thereat the boy laughed, and, when he shouted and stamped his foot, ran away saying something impudent. The Captain turned to run after him shaking his stick; but he was stiff and rheumatic and weak on his legs, too, just now. It was no use to try and run. Of course it was no use, nothing was any use now, he was a miserable failure, he could not even run after a boy; he must bear every one’s taunts; he could almost have wept in self-pity. Then he became aware that several passers by were looking at him curiously, arrested by the noise he had made. Annoyed and ashamed he turned his back on them and pretended to be examining the goods in a shop window near.

It was a large draper’s, rather a cheap one; the better shops were higher up the street. In this one the things were all priced and labelled plainly; the Captain at first did not notice this one way or the other; he simply looked in to cover his confusion. But after a little he became aware of what he looked at, and it recalled to his mind the fact that he was going to buy something for Julia. He did not

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quite know what, he had had large ideas at one time; they had had to be diminished once because five pounds will not do as much as twenty; they had to be diminished again because he had been fleeced of so much of the five pounds. A wave of anger shook him as he thought of that, but he suppressed it; he felt that he must not give way, so he looked steadily at the window. There were furs displayed there, muffs and collarettes of skunk and other animals, even the humble rabbit artistically treated to meet the insatiable female appetite for sable at all prices. The Captain decided on the best collarette displayed and turned towards the shop door feeling a little better in the glow of benevolence that returned to him as he thought of how much he was going to spend for Julia. Just as he was going in he caught sight of a girl selling violets in the street. She was a good-looking impudent girl, and catching his eye she pressed her wares on him glibly; he hesitated, smiled—here was one who treated him as a man, who considered it worth while. He looked defiantly at the passers by—he was a man, not an object for curiosity or kindly contempt. He returned the girl's glance with an ogle and, stepping as jauntily as he could to the edge of the pavement, took a bunch of flowers with some suitable pleasantry. Half-way through his remark he stopped dead; he had felt in his pocket for a penny and found nothing. Quickly, feverishly, almost desperately, he felt in the other pocket; there were three coins there; by the size he could tell that one at least was a penny; he took it out and gave it to the girl; he had not the courage to put down the flowers and go without them. Then he turned away. A narrow passage ran down between the draper's and the next house; fewer people went that way and in the window there, common and less expensive goods were displayed. The Captain went down the foot-way and examined the two remaining coins. They were a shilling and a penny.

People passed and repassed along the main road; carts and carriages rumbled over the uneven stones; no one heeded the shabby hopeless figure by the side window. They were lighting up in the draper's though outside there was still daylight; the gas jets were considered to make the place look more attractive. They shone warmly on the furs and silk scarves in the front window, making them look rich and luxurious. Two girls stopped to look in; then, their means being more suitable to the goods there, they came to examine the side window. They were two servants out for the afternoon; they wore winter coats open over summer dresses and hats that might be called autumnal, seeing that they were an ingenious blending of the best that was left from the headgear of both seasons.

"I shall get one of them woolly neck things, I shall," one said; "they're quite as nice as fur and not so dear."

The other could not agree. "Don't care about them myself," she said; "I must say I like a bit of sable."

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“Can’t get it under two and eleven,” her companion rejoined; “and those things are only a shilling three. Look at that pink one there; it looks quite as good as feathers any day. I’m not so gone on sable myself; you can’t have it pink, and pink’s my colour.”

They moved on to another window; they, no more than the passers by, noticed the old man who stood just at their elbow. When they had gone he looked drearily in where they had looked. There were the woolly things they had spoken of, short woven strips of loopy wool, to be tied about the neck by the two-inch ribbons that dangled from the ends. “Ostrich wool boas in all colours, price, one shilling and three farthings,” they were ticketed. He read the ticket mechanically. He still held his two coins; he held them mechanically; had he thought about it he would scarcely have troubled to do so, they were so cruelly, so mockingly inadequate. He read the ticket again; it obtruded itself upon him as trivial things do at unexpected times. But now its meaning began to be impressed upon his brain—“one shilling and three farthings”—that, then, was the interpretation of the servant girl’s “shilling three.” He had a shilling and a penny—a shilling and three farthings. He could buy one of those ostrich wool boas—he would buy it—that pink one for Julia.

The Halgrave carrier made it a rule to receive his passengers’ fares at the beginning of the expedition; if they were coming back as well as going with him they paid for the double journey at the outset in the morning. Captain Polkington had so paid, and it was that fact, coupled with the early arrival at the stables of his one purchase, which induced the carrier to wait nearly half-an-hour for him. The cart was packed, everything was ready, and the good man and the only other passenger he was taking back were growing impatient, when the Captain, carrying a small crushed paper parcel, appeared. He had lost his way to the stables and had wandered hopelessly in his efforts to find it. The carrier was rather short-tempered about it, and the other passenger said something to the effect that “They didn’t oughter let him out alone!” The Captain payed no attention but climbed into the back of the cart and sat down near his whisky. The other passenger got up beside the driver, and in a few minutes they were lumbering down the crooked streets. Soon they were out of the town and jogging quietly along the quiet lanes; the driver leaned forward to get a light from his passenger’s pipe; his face for a moment showed ruddy in the glow of the one lamp, then it sunk into gloom again. Captain Polkington did not notice; he did not notice the voices in intermittent talk, or the fume of their tobacco that hung on the moist air and mingled with the scent of the drooping violets in his coat. He knew nothing and was aware of nothing except that he was the most miserable, the most unfortunate of men. Throughout the whole interminable journey he dwelt on that one thing as he sat by his whisky in the dark, clutching tightly the soft paper parcel and finding his only fragment of comfort in it. He had after all bought something; poor, disappointed, fleeced as he was, he had spent his last money in buying a present for his daughter.

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CHAPTER XXI

THE GOING OF THE GOOD COMRADE

The cottage was very quiet. Although it was not late, both Captain Polkington and Johnny had gone to bed, the one to suit himself, the other to oblige Julia; she was in the kitchen now, as completely alone as she could wish. And certainly she did wish it; by the hard light in her eyes and the grim look about her mouth it was clear she was in no mood for company. She had got at the truth that evening, or most of it; the whole affair, with the exception of one point only, was quite plain to her; not by her father's wish or intention, but plain none the less. Subterfuge was an art the Polkingtons understood so well that it was exceedingly difficult to deceive them; Julia was the most difficult of them all to deceive, and the Captain was least clever at subterfuge; it was not wonderful, therefore, that she knew nearly all there was to know. Her heart was bitter within her, but against herself as well as against her father—after all he had but done what she had once thought to do. She had stayed her hand because the one who owned the daffodil was a child to her. Her father had had no such reason for staying his; the one who owned this daffodil was as cunning as he. He had done what he had, badly of course he could not do otherwise—a foredained failure such as he—bungled it hopelessly; but the idea was the same—a bad travesty of a bad idea, badly worked out. For a moment her mind glanced aside from the main issue in disgust and contempt for the method. It was sin without genius, a puerile theft without adequate return, a miserable fall, and for such a purpose! To expect to find the streaked daffodil unguarded in an outhouse! To sell it for five pounds and think to spend the money on creature comforts! It is hard to say which of the three was the worst. The really good have little idea how such fool's knavery looks to the shadily clever; it brings home to them the wrongness of wrong, disgusting them with it and with themselves, as no preaching in the world can.

The moon had risen by this time; its first beams shone in at the unshuttered window. Julia went to the door and, opening it, looked out. There was a little mist about and the moon, quite a young one, was struggling through it, shining with a soft, diffused light that made the landscape very unearthly.

It was wonderfully still out of doors, quiet and damp with belts of unexplained shadow here and there, and a sense of illimitable space and silence. Julia sat down on the door steps and smelt the good smell of the earth and felt the nearness of it. But it did not comfort her; she was not in tune with the night; she had neither part nor lot with these things. "Thief, and daughter of a thief;" the words kept coming to her—and he, the man whom she never named to herself, had called her his good comrade! She bowed her face to her knees and sat motionless.

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She had told him the truth about herself; she had not been ashamed; she would not have been even if she had taken the daffodil. But her father! She was ashamed for him with a bitter shame; ashamed of herself and him too, in thought and intention at least they were one, double-dealers. "Two grubby little people," as she had seen them long ago when they first stood in company with that man.

"But you don't know; you have not our temptations." She almost spoke aloud, unconsciously addressing the dewy silence as her mind called the man plainly before her. "You have never wanted money as I wanted it, or wanted things as father wanted them. Oh, you would despise the things he wanted—so do I; they are miserable and mean and sordid; you couldn't want whisky and comfort as he wanted them, but you can't think how he did! He would have justified it to himself too; you wouldn't, couldn't do that, while we—we could justify the devil if we tried. It is not right, any the more for that, I know it is not; it is dishonest and disgraceful, I know that as well as you; but I know how it came about and you—you can never understand!" Her voice sank away. That was the great difference between herself and this man; it did not lie in what she did; that was a remedial matter—but rather in what she knew and felt. Things that did not exist for him were not only possible but sometimes almost necessary to her and hers. The gulf between them which had almost seemed bridged in the early summer was suddenly opened again by the day's work; opened beyond all passage for her—-thief, and daughter of a thief.

She sat on the doorstone looking out with unseeing eyes while the moon rose higher and the light grew so that the belts of shadow melted and the misty land was all silver, a world of dreams, very pure and still. But neither her dreams nor her thoughts were pure and still; they were full of passion and pain, longing and regret and shame, and yet an underlying hopeless desire that all could be known and understood.

At last she rose and went in. The pink woolly thing Captain Polkington had bought her lay on the kitchen-table, half out of its paper wrappings, a silly, useless thing. As her eyes fell on it they grew dim and hot while the colour crept up in her cheek. Her father had bought it for her; he had thought to please her with the foolish thing; it was like a child's or a fool's gift; she hated herself for hating it. But he had deceived himself into thinking he was generous to make it with his illgotten gains; he had salved conscience with it—it was a liar's gift, a self-deceiver's, a thief's. There was no kindness, no generosity in it, and she despised him—and he was her father!

She picked up the thing, paper and all, and crammed it into the dying fire. Then suddenly she burst into tears. The world was all wrong, justice was wrong and suffering was wrong and mankind wrong, all was wrong and inexplicable and pitiful too.

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For a minute she sobbed chokingly, then she forced back the tears with the angry impatience of a hurt animal, and fetching a sheet of paper and pencil, sat down to write. He was her father and he was a man with a warped idea of honour, one whose self-respect had been taken away; it was too late to teach him, one could only safeguard him now. Opportunity did not make thieves of such as her, but it did of such as him, and she had left the opportunity—or what he took to be it—open. She would close it now for ever; she would be rid of the bulb, the cause of so much trouble. So she wrote hurriedly, a mere scrawl, while the passion was still upon her, and her eyes were still dim with tears—

“Joost, if you have ever cared for me, take back the daffodil; take it back and don’t ask me why.”

The next morning Julia posted a small parcel, and at dinner time told Johnny and her father that she had sent the famous daffodil back to its native land.

Johnny looked up in mild surprise; he had been to the outhouse that morning to see if the bulbs were keeping dry. “Why,” he said, “it’s in the shed!”

“No, it is not,” Julia answered, “and it never was. The one you think it is one of the large double pale ones; I told you at the time we put them away, but you have got mixed, I expect.”

“Ah, yes, of course,” Mr. Gillat said; “I remember now; of course, I remember.”

The Captain swallowed something, but contrived to keep quiet, and only darted a glance at Johnny, the muddler, whose information could never be depended on.

When the meal was over and Mr. Gillat in the back kitchen, Captain Polkington spoke to his daughter.

“Julia,” he said, moistening his dry lips, “that man Cross thought it was the streaked daffodil that I, that—”

His voice tailed away, but Julia only said, “Well?”

“I pledged by word of honour that it was the true one.”

Again Julia said, “Well?”

“What is to be done?” the Captain asked.

She showed no signs of grasping his meaning or at all events of helping him out. He burst out irritably, “What on earth have you sold it for? Nothing would induce you to do so before when I asked you to; now, all at once you have taken a freak and parted with

it without any consideration whatever. I never saw anything like women, so utterly irrational!"

"I have not sold it," Julia told him; "only sent it away."

"What for? It is perfectly absurd! I suppose you can get it back? You must get it back."

Julia asked "What for?" in her turn.

The Captain enlightened her. "There is Cross," he said; "I told him that was the daffodil, and it is not. Something must be done; we can't cheat him; we must send him the daffodil, or else refund the five pounds. We should have to do that—and we can't."

"No," Julia agreed grimly; "and we would not if we could."

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“But what are you going to do?” her father asked.

“Nothing.”

“Nothing! But I pledged my word! You don’t understand, I am in honour bound.”

Julia forbore to make and comment on her father’s notion of honour; indeed, it struck her as almost pathetic in its grotesqueness and certainly very characteristic of the Polkingtons.

“Cross paid five pounds for the streaked daffodil,” the Captain went on to say, believing that he was stating the case with incontrovertible plainness, “and if he does not have the true bulb he must have the money back; otherwise he will, with justice, say he has been cheated, for I guaranteed the thing.”

“He paid five pounds for a speculation,” Julia said; “your guarantee was nothing, and though he may have asked for it, it was just a form and did not count one way or the other. He knew there was a chance that you had come by the true bulb somehow and so had it to sell; he risked five pounds on that—and lost it.”

Captain Polkington looked bewildered. “He paid five pounds for the bulb,” he persisted; “he said it was worth no more to him.”

“Very likely not, if he could get it for that,” Julia said; “but if he could have been sure of it, it would have been worth two hundred pounds.”

“Two hundred!” Captain Polkington gasped, turning rather white.

Julia nodded. “With my guarantee,” she said. “You had not got that; I suppose you let him see it when you wrote first so he knew that, though you might have the real bulb, you were not in a position to sell it well.”

The Captain flushed as suddenly as he had paled. “You think he thought I had not come by it honestly, that I had no right in my daughter’s affairs?”

“I don’t see it matters what he thought,” Julia answered, taking up the dishes. “He risked his money, and lost it, knowing very well what he did; he does not mind doing business in that way; I don’t admire it myself, but I guessed he would do it when I first made his acquaintance.”

“You ——” the Captain said.

“I have nothing to do with it, and shall have nothing.”

“But the money must be paid; it is a debt of honour; I must clear myself.”

Julia shrugged her shoulders.

“You do not wish me cleared?” her father demanded haughtily.

“Paying the five pounds would not clear you,” she said; “neither that nor anything else. No, I am not going to pay it; I don’t feel any obligation in the matter. If Mr. Cross goes in for those sort of dealings he must put up with the consequence, and I am afraid you must, too.” And with that she went away.

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This was the last reference that was made to the sale of the daffodil and the expedition to town; after that the matter was left out of conversation and Julia behaved as if it had never existed. But Captain Polkington was very unhappy; he could not get over the affair and his own failure; he brooded over it in silence, feeling and resenting that he could not speak to either Johnny or Julia, they being quite unable to understand his emotions. Once or twice he raged weakly against Cross, who had given him five pounds when he had asked twenty for a thing worth two hundred; who had doubted his word, who had behaved as if he were a common thief—who would, doubtless, think him one. More often his indignation burnt up against Julia who would do nothing to remedy this last catastrophe, and clear him and reinstate his honour in the eyes of this man and himself. Most often of all his quarrel was with fate, and then his anger broke down into self-pity as he thought of all the troubles that were crowding about his later years; of his lost reputation, his lack of sympathy and comprehension; the failure of all his plans and hopes, the poverty and feeble health that oppressed him. In these gloomy days he had one ray of comfort only; it lay in the purchase he had made on that day that he went shopping. That whisky was the solitary thing in the day's adventure about which Julia had not heard; everything else she had been told, but somehow that had escaped. One reason of this, no doubt, lay in the fact that Captain Polkington had not brought his purchase home with him that evening. He had meant to; when the carrier set him and his property down just outside Halgrave, he had fully meant to carry it to the cottage. But he found it so heavy and cumbersome in his weak and dejected state that he had to give it up. So he found a suitable hiding-place in the deep overgrown ditch beside the road, and, thrusting it as much out of sight as he could, left it there and went home unburdened. He meant to tell Julia and Johnny about it, they of course were to have shared, and one or both of them would go with him to fetch it home in the morning. But he did not tell them; it did not seem suitable at first; they, each in a different way, were too unsympathetic about the expedition to town; he determined to wait for a fitting opportunity. The opportunity did not come; but in course of time the whisky was moved and gave comfort of sorts during the autumn days to the Captain's drooping spirits, if it had a less beneficial effect on his failing health.

In the meantime the daffodil, "The Good Comrade," had gone back to its native land, and with it an appeal, written in English, badly written, scrawled almost—but not likely to be refused. Joost read it through once, twice, more times than that; it said little, only, take back the bulb and ask no questions, yet he felt he had been honoured by Julia's confidence. The very style and haste of the letter seemed an honour to him; it showed him she had need and had turned to him in it. Of course he would do as she asked; he would have done things far harder than that. He folded the slip of paper and put it away where he kept some few treasures, and for a time he put with it the bulb she had sent; and sometimes when he went to bed of a night—he had no other free time—he took both out and looked at them.

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But “The Good Comrade” did not remain locked away from the light of day. Joost was a sentimentalist, it is true, and the bulb had come from Julia, winged by an appeal from her. But he was also a bulb grower, and he was that before he was anything else and afterwards too, and the daffodil was a marvel of nature, a novelty, a thing beyond words to a connoisseur. The lover asked that the token should be kept hidden from the eyes of men; but the grower cried that the flower should be given to the light of heaven and should grow and bloom according to Nature’s plan. For days the lover was uppermost and the old pain back. But in time the bitter-sweet madness died down again and, in the atmosphere which was saturated with the beloved work, the old love, the first and last and soundly abiding one, reasserted itself. The daffodil must bloom, the little brown bulb must go back to the brown earth, the strange flower must unfold itself to the sun and wind and rain.

So he went to his father. “My father,” he said, and it is to be feared he had learnt something of guile from the source of his bitter-sweet madness. “My father, I have heard from Miss Julia; she would wish us to have the narcissus ‘The Good Comrade.’”

Mijnheer was pleased. “That is as it should be,” he said; he had felt strongly about the gift of the bulb in the first instance, but that was an affair over and done with long ago between him and his son. He did not reopen it now, he was only gratified to think there was a likelihood of the daffodil coming back to its birthplace, where it certainly ought to be. “How much does Miss Julia ask for it?” he inquired.

“Nothing,” Joost answered; “she does not wish to sell it; she wishes to give it back.”

“But, but!” Mijnheer exclaimed, pushing up his spectacles in astonishment; he knew the value of the thing and the offers that must have been made for it; this way was not at all his notion of doing business; also he found it hard to reconcile with the Julia he remembered. He recollected talk he had had with her when she had proved herself an apt pupil in trade and trade dealings, and shown, not only a very good comprehension of such things, but also an eye to the main chance. “This is nonsense,” he said; “it is not business.”

Joost looked distressed. “I gave her the bulb,” he ventured; “she does not want to sell me back my present.”

Mijnheer did not recognise any such distinction in business transactions, and for a little it looked as if “The Good Comrade” would be sent wandering again, sacrificed to his old-fashioned notions of integrity. Joost should not have it unless he paid for it, he said so with decision. He himself would buy it if Joost would not, and if she would not sell it to him then neither of them should have it.

And Joost could not, even if he would, explain why and how the paying was so difficult. He used all the arguments he could; indeed, for one of his nature, he spoke with considerable diplomacy.

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“Supposing,” he said at last, “that it was only a sport, and that next year it reverts and is blue as are the others, the parent bulbs? Miss Julia thinks of that—she would not like to be paid for it now in case of such a thing, will you not at least wait until the spring? She has given nothing for it herself; it is not as if she had sunk money and wants an immediate return.”

Mijnheer did not consider that made any difference and he said so, reading his son a lecture on business morality according to his standard, of a very severe order. Joost listened with meekness to the entirely undeserved reproof for meanness and dishonourable views; then the old man announced finally what he should do. He should write to Julia and offer her a smallish sum down in case the bulb proved to be of no great worth, and a promise of a proportional percentage afterwards if it proved valuable. This idea pleased him very well; it satisfied his notions of integrity and fair dealing and also his thrifty soul, which found trying the otherwise unavoidable duty of paying a long price for what had been freely given. From this Joost could not move him, so there was nothing for him to do but write distressfully to Julia and explain and apologise.

CHAPTER XXII

THE LINE OF LEAST RESISTANCE

Julia was at work in the kitchen; it was ten o’clock on a November morning and she was busy; Captain Polkington had had breakfast up-stairs, he often did now, and it delayed the morning’s work. Mr. Gillat brought in two letters which the postman had left; both were for Julia, but she had not time to read them now, so she put them down on the table; they would keep; she did not feel greatly interested to know what was inside them. Things did not interest her as they used; in some imperceptible way she had aged; some of the elasticity and youth was gone, perhaps because hope was gone. It had been dying all the summer, ever since the day when she crouched behind the chopping-block; but gently and gradually, as the year dies, with some beauties unknown in early days and little recurrent spurts of hope and youth, like the flowers that bloom into winter’s lap. But it was dead now; there had come to her, as it were, a sudden frost, and, as befalls in the years, too, the late blooming flowers, the coloured leaves, the last beautiful clinging remnants of life withered all at once and fell away. It was unreasonable, perhaps, that the Captain’s theft of the daffodil and what arose from it should have had this result; but then it was possibly unreasonable that hope and youth should have had any autumn at all and not died right off when she said “No” and meant it that afternoon in the early summer. But then the mind of man—and woman—is unreasonable.

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It was nearly half-an-hour later when Julia picked up the letters; both were from Holland; one, she fancied, was from Mijnheer, one from his son. She opened the latter first; she rather wondered what Joost could have to write about; he had acknowledged the receipt of the daffodil bulb long ago. The matter was soon explained; the letter was as formal and precise as ever, but the emotion that dictated it, the distress and regret, was quite clear to Julia in spite of the primness of expression. Clear, too, to her were the conflicting feelings that lay behind the lover's contrition for what he feared was abuse of his mistress's trust, and the grower's desire that the treasured token should be resolved into, what it was, a wonderful bulb, a triumph of the horticulturist. Julia smiled a little sadly as she read; not that she regretted the existence of the grower with the lover; she was glad to see it and to know that it was triumphing. But the whole affair seemed so far off, so unimportant, so almost childish. She did not care who knew he had the daffodil, or whether it bloomed or rotted. In these days, when her self-apportioned burden was beginning to press heavily upon her shoulders, such things did not seem to matter. She had a sense almost of disloyalty in feeling how little it mattered to her when it appeared to be so much to this loyal friend.

Captain Polkington had of late had several sudden attacks of a faintness which more often than not amounted to unconsciousness. "Heart," the doctor had said when he was summoned after the first one; he had not regarded them as very dangerous, that is to say not likely to prove fatal at any moment if properly treated at the time. He had given instructions as to suitable treatment, emphasising the fact that the patient ought never to be long out of ear-shot of some one, as the attacks required immediate remedy. He forbade excitement and much exertion, orders easy to fulfil in this case, and also stimulants of all sorts, an order not quite so easy. Captain Polkington was much displeased about this last; he said it plainly showed the doctor a fool who did not know his business; stimulant, as every one knew, being the first necessity for a weak heart. Julia pointed out that that must vary with the constitution, nature and disease; she also recalled the fact that alcohol never had suited her father. He was naturally not convinced by her logic, and so was decidedly sulky; even in time, by dint of dwelling upon the subject, came to regard the treatment as a conspiracy to annoy him. Julia regretted this but did not think it mattered very much, seeing that she had the keys; but then she did not know of that purchase made in the town. The Captain, rebelling against the doctor's order, hugged himself as he thought of it and of the comparatively sparing use he had made of it so far—for fear of being found out. There was no need of him to die by inches while he had that store of life and comfort; so he told himself, and secretly made

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use of it, with anything but good result. Julia, marking the disimprovement in his health, thought it was the natural course and saved him all work, carrying out the doctor's instructions more carefully than ever. The hidden whisky remained unknown to her, for although in the larger affairs of duplicity and diplomacy she easily outmatched her father, in matters requiring small cunning he was much nearer her equal. In this one he showed almost preternatural skill; his whole heart was in it, and his wits, where it was concerned, were sharpened above the average; he clung to his secret as a man clings to his one chance of life, made only the more pertinacious by the contrary advice he had received. But on that November morning, after Julia had brought her father round by the proper remedies, she began to have suspicions. They were not founded on anything definite; she could not imagine how he should have got stimulant, and his condition hardly justified her in suspecting it, yet she did. And Captain Polkington knew by experience that that was enough to prove unpleasant; it did not matter much at which end Julia got hold of his affairs, she had a knack of arriving at the middle before he was at all ready for her. He resented what she said to him that morning very much indeed. He denied everything and defended himself well; although he was in fear all the time that some unwary word or unwise denial should betray him to his cross-examiner who, being herself no mean expert in the double-dealing arts, could frequently learn as much from a lie as from the truth. In the end, what between anxiety and annoyance, he lost control of his temper and from peevish irritability broke out suddenly into a fit of weak ungovernable rage. Julia was obliged at once to desist, seeing with regret that she had transgressed one of the doctor's rules and excited the patient very much indeed.

She left him to recover control of himself and went to look for Mr. Gillat.

"Johnny," she said, when she found him. "I believe father has got whisky. I don't know where, but I shall have to find out; you must help me."

Johnny professed his willingness, looking puzzled and unhappy; he looked so at times, again now, for even he had begun to discern a shadow coming on the life which for a year had been so happy to him.

"You will have to keep a watch on father," Julia said. "He won't do much while I am watching; he will wait till he is alone with you. Don't try to prevent him; that is no good; just watch and tell me."

Mr. Gillat said he would, though he did not like the job, and certainly was ill-fitted for it. Julia knew that, but knew also that to discover anything she must depend a good deal upon him, unless she could by searching light upon the store of spirit which she could not help thinking her father had in or near the house. She determined to make a systematic search; but before she did so she found time to open Mijnheer's letter.

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It was rather a long letter and very neat. It set forth in formal Dutch the old man's ideas concerning the daffodil bulb and his offer regarding it. It should be kept, he said, if it was paid for, not otherwise. Something now, she was to name her terms, while it was still uncertain whether its flower would be blue or streaked or even common yellow—-more later, in accordance with the flowering and the profits likely to arise.

So Julia read and sat staring. An offer for "The Good Comrade." Money from the people to whom it had always practically belonged in her estimation. She could not take it from them, it was impossible; the thing was virtually their own! But if she did not. She re-read Joost's letter with its protestations, and Mijnheer's with its offer—if she did not, the little brown bulb would be sent back to her. Mijnheer, now that he knew of its coming, would insist on its return unless it were paid for; and Joost, she knew very well, would not deceive his father and keep it secretly, or defy his father and keep it openly; the money or the bulb she must have. And the bulb she could not, would not have again; so the money, unearned, distasteful, having a not too pleasant savour, must be hers. At last, in this way, without her contrivance, against her will, there had come a way to pay the debt of honour!

She sat down and wrote to Mijnheer and named her price. Thirty pounds she asked for, no more in the future, no less now; that was the only price she could take for "The Good Comrade," it was the sum Rawson-Clew had paid to his cousin two years ago.

Johnny posted the letter that afternoon while Julia began her search for her father's hidden whisky.

All the afternoon Captain Polkington sat in the easy-chair, watching her contemptuously when she was in sight and moving uneasily when she was not. He did not think she would find anything, at least not at once, though he was afraid she would if she kept on long enough and he left his treasure in its present hiding-place. It would not last so much longer—he dared not contemplate the time when it should all be gone; it was characteristic of him that he was easily able to avoid doing so. The principal thought in his mind was a determination that it should not be found while any remained. That could not and should not happen; the last little which he had carefully hoarded, which he had stinted and deprived himself to save—to have that taken away, to be robbed of that—the tears gathered in his eyes at the pathos of the thought.

But the whisky was not found that day, and the Captain, who slept but badly at this time, lay awake long in the night planning how and when he could move it to a place of safety further away from the house. He would have gone down then and there, in spite of the fact that it was a blustering night of wind and rain and he not fitted to go out in such weather, but he was afraid of Julia. She was certain to hear and follow; she had almost an animal's alertness when once she was on the trail of anything. So he lay and planned and waited, hoping that a chance would come during the next day.

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It did not. Julia was at home all day and, as she had foreseen, he made no move while she was about. But the following morning she had to go to Halgrave about the killing of a pig; Johnny was hardly equal to making the necessary arrangements and certainly could not do so good as she. Accordingly, she went herself, not very reluctantly, for she was nearly certain her father would make an effort to get at his whisky, if he had any, as soon as her back was turned, and so give Johnny a chance of finding out about it. Of course it was quite likely that Johnny, being Johnny, would miss the chance, but he might not, and even if he did they would not be much worse off than before. So she thought as she started, leaving the Captain, who was still in bed, with a very vague idea as to when she would be back.

He was a good deal annoyed by this vagueness; it meant he would have to hurry, a thing he hated and did very badly; and, perhaps, entirely without reason, too, for she might be three hours gone; though, equally of course, only two, or perhaps—she was capable of anything unpleasant and unexpected—only one. He began to dress as quickly as he could; but, owing to long habit of doing it as slowly as he could so as to postpone more arduous tasks, that was not very fast. He wished he had known sooner that Julia was going to Halgrave, he would have begun getting up before this; he would even have got to breakfast if only she had let him know; so he fumed to himself as he shuffled about, dropping things with his shaking fingers. At last he was dressed and came down-stairs to find Johnny, pink and apologetic as he used to be in the Marbridge days, laboriously doing odd jobs which did not need doing.

There was not a detective lost in Mr. Gillat, he had not the making of a sleuth-hound in him; or even a watch-dog, except, perhaps, of that well-meaning kind which gets itself perennially kicked for incessant and incurable tail wagging at inopportune times. The half-hour which followed Captain Polkington's coming down-stairs was a trying one. The Captain went to the back door to look out; Mr. Gillat followed him, though scarcely like his shadow; he was not inconspicuous, and neither he nor his motive were easy to overlook. The Captain said something approbious about the weather and the high wind and occasional heavy swishes of rain; then he went to the sitting-room which lay behind the kitchen, and near to the front door. Johnny followed him, and the Captain faced round on him, irritably demanding what the devil he wanted.

"To—to see if the register is shut," Mr. Gillat said, beaming at his own deep diplomacy and the brilliancy of the idea which had come to him—rather tardily, it is true, still in time to pass muster.

The Captain flung himself into a chair with a sigh of irritation. "It is a funny thing I can't be let alone a moment," he said. "I came in here for a little quiet and coolness, I didn't want you dodging after me."

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“No,” Johnny agreed amiably; “no, of course not.” Then, after a long pause, as if he had just made sure of the fact, “It is cool in here.”

It was, very; it might even have been called cold and raw, for there had not been a fire there for days, but the Captain did not move, and Johnny, stooping by the fire-place, examined the register of the chimney, fondly believing in his own impenetrable deceptiveness.

“I can’t help thinking it ought to be shut,” he observed, looking thoughtfully up the chimney; “the rain will come down; it might rain a good deal if the wind were to drop.”

“The wind is not going to drop for hours,” the Captain snapped; “it is getting higher.”

A great gust rumbled in the chimney as he spoke, and flung itself with the thud of a palpable body against the window-pane. Mr. Gillat heard it; he could not well do otherwise. “Still,” he said, “it might rain; one never knows.”

He took hold of the register with the tongs and tried to shut it. It was obstinate, and he pulled this way and that, working in his usual laborious and conscientious way. At last it slipped and he managed to get it jammed crossways. Thus he had to leave it, for Captain Polkington, apparently cool enough now, wandered back into the kitchen.

Mr. Gillat, of course, followed and arranged and rearranged pots on the stove till the Captain said he had left his handkerchief up-stairs. Stairs were trying to his heart, so Johnny had to go for it. Up he went as fast as he could, and came down again almost faster, for he tumbled on the second step and slipped the rest of the way with considerable noise and bumping.

After that Captain Polkington gave up his efforts to get rid of his guard and resigned himself to fate. At least, so thought Mr. Gillat, who no amount of experience could instruct in the guilt of the human race in general and the Polkingtons in particular. The first hour of Julia’s absence had passed when Johnny went into the back kitchen to clean knives. He left the door between the rooms open, but from habit more than from any thought of keeping an eye on his charge. They had been talking in the ordinary way for some time now, the Captain sitting so peacefully by the fire that Mr. Gillat had begun to forget he was supposed to watch. And really it would seem he was justified, for the Captain, of his own accord, left the easy-chair and followed him into the back kitchen, standing watching the knife-cleaning. He had been talking of old times, recalling far back incidents regretfully; he continued to do so as he watched Johnny at work until he was interrupted by a loud sizzling in the kitchen.

“Hullo!” he said, “there’s a pot boiling over!” and he made as if he would go to it but half stopped. “It is the big one,” he said, “perhaps you had better take it off; I’m not good at lifting weights now-a-days.”

“No, no!” Johnny said hastily; “don’t you do it, you leave it to me,” and he hurried into the kitchen to take from the fire a pot which, had he only remembered it, had not been so near the blaze when he left it.

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“It is too heavy for you,” he went on as he lifted it; “I don’t know what is inside, only water, I think; it will be all right here by the side.”

A gust of wind swept round the kitchen, fluttering the herbs which hung from the ceiling and blowing the dust and flame from the front of the fire.

“Dear, dear!” Mr. Gillat exclaimed as he drew back, “What a wind!” Then, as he caught the whisper and whistle of the leafless things which whisper to one another out of doors even in the dead winter time, he realised that the outer door must be open.

“Shut it!” he said. “The latch is so old, it is beginning to get worn out, and the wind is so strong, too. Let me see if I can shut it.” He went to the back kitchen for that purpose and found that he was talking to empty air, the Captain was gone.

In great consternation he went out after his charge. He had not had a minute’s start; he could not have got far, not much more than round the corner of the house. So thought Mr. Gillat, and started round the nearest corner after him. Julia would not have done that; with the instinct of the wild animal and the rogue for cover, and for the value of the obvious in concealment, she would have looked by the water butt first. It was not a hiding-place; the bush beside did not half conceal Captain Polkington, yet he stood dark and unobtrusive against it and so close to the door that in looking out for him one naturally looked beyond him. As Johnny went round one side of the house the Captain left the meagre shelter of the butt and went round the other, bent now on finding some better hiding-place till it should be safe for him to go to his precious store. And seeing that he was braced by an insatiable whisky thirst and so possessed by one idea that he had almost a madman’s cunning in achieving his purpose, it is not wonderful that he succeeded. While Johnny hastily searched the out-buildings he lay hid. And when at last Mr. Gillat went back to the house, being convinced that his charge must have gone back before him, he, nerved and strengthened by a dose of the precious spirit, carefully climbed over the garden wall, carrying with him all that was left of his store. It was rather heavy, and the rising wind was strong, but he was strong, too, and he bore more strength with him. He could carry a weight and fight with the wind if he wanted to; his heart was well enough when it was properly treated. And it should be properly treated as long as he had his comfort, his precious medicine safe and in a place where prying hands could not touch it.

* * * * *

Julia came home from Halgrave later than she expected, but the wind had increased to a gale, so that walking along the exposed road had been no easy matter. Johnny by this time was almost desperate with alarm, for Captain Polkington had not come back and, in spite of a continuous search in likely and unlikely places, he had not been able to find any trace of him or his whisky. It is true his search was not very systematic at the best of times; it is not likely to have been now; as his alarm increased, it grew worse,

until, by the time Julia came in, it had become little more than a repeated looking in the same unlikely places and an incessant toiling up and down-stairs and across the garden in the howling wind.

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His account of the Captain's vanishing was much obscured by self-condemnation and anxiety, still she managed to make it out and she did not at first think so very seriously of it. She concluded from it that her father had succeeded in getting at his whisky and Johnny had failed to prevent him or find out the whereabouts of the store—a not very astonishing occurrence. The fact that the Captain had not returned or shown himself for so long was surprising and to be regretted, seeing the badness of the weather. But it was not inexplicable; he might be anxious to demonstrate his freedom, or, by frightening them, to pay them out for the watch lately kept on him; or—and this was the one serious aspect of the matter—he might have taken more of the spirit than he could stand in his weak state and be too stupid and muddled to come back alone. Julia reassured Johnny as well as she could, and then, accompanied by him, set to work to search thoroughly the house, garden and out-buildings.

It was dinner time before they had finished. Julia came to the doorway of the bulb shed uneasy and perplexed. "It is clear he is not here," she said, and turned to fasten the door. A gust of wind tore it from her hand, flinging it back noisily. She caught it again and secured it. "It is dinner time," she said; "come along indoors, there is no reason why you should go hungry because father chooses to."

Johnny followed her to the house. When they were indoors he said, "Do you think—you don't think he has had an attack?—that he is lying unconscious somewhere?" That was precisely what Julia was beginning to think; there seemed no other possible explanation. Johnny read her mind in her face and was overwhelmed with the sense of his own shortcomings and their possible consequences.

"It is not your fault," Julia assured him; "you might as well say it is father's for being so foolish and obstinate about his whisky—a great deal better and more truly say it is mine for leaving you, and for driving him into this corner, for not having managed the whole thing better."

Johnny, though a little relieved that she did not think him to blame, was not comforted. "Let us go and find him," he said; "we must find him; never mind about dinner—we must go and look for him—though I don't know where."

"We must look beyond the garden," Julia said; "he must have got further than we first thought—but I don't see how he can be far in this weather. Cut some cheese and bread; we can eat it as we go along."

In a little while they set out together, Julia taking restoratives with her, though she was also careful to leave some on the kitchen-table in case Captain Polkington should make his way back and feel in need of them in her absence. Outside the garden wall one felt the force of the wind more fully, and realised how impossible it was that the Captain should have gone far. Julia stood a moment by the gate. Before her lay the road to Halgrave; her father might

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have gone down it a little way; but if he had he must have turned off and sought concealment somewhere for she had seen no sign of any one when she came home. To the left stretched the heath-land, brown and bare, to the belt of wildly tossing pines; it was hard to imagine her father choosing that way. To the right lay the sandhills, a place of unsteady outline, earth and sky alike pale and blurred as the north-west wind fled seawards, lifting and whirling the fine particles till the air seemed full of them; it was impossible to think of any one choosing that way.

“We will go down the road to begin with,” Julia said, and started.

All through the early part of the afternoon they searched; sometimes stopped for a moment by a gust of wind; Julia caught and whirled, Johnny brought to a panting standstill. But on again directly, struggling down the road, looking in ditches and behind scant bushes, leaving the track first on the right hand then on the left, searching in likely and unlikely places. But always with the same result, there was no sign of the missing man. At last, when they had reached a greater distance than it was possible to imagine the Captain could have gone, they turned towards the house across the heath. It was difficult to think of the Captain going that way, seeing he would have been walking in the teeth of the wind, but it almost seemed he must have done it.

The short day was already beginning to close in when they reached the belt of pines. It had grown much colder; one could almost believe there would be frost in the air by and by. The wind was lulling a little; it still roared with strange rushings and half-demented tearings at the tree-tops, almost like some great spirit prisoned there, but it had spent its first strength. The rain clouds were going, too; already in places the sky was swept clear so that a pale light gleamed behind the trees.

Julia stood in the vibrant shelter of the pines, pushing back her hair; she was bareheaded; a hat had been an impossible superfluity when she started out.

“Johnny,” she said, “we have come too far; father could not have got to the trees in such weather as it was when he started; we must go back. I expect he is somewhere nearer home; we have not half searched the possible radius yet.”

Johnny said “Yes.” He was dog-tired, so tired that his anxiety was now little more than dull despair animated by an unquestioning determination to continue the search.

He would have done so somehow, and with his flagging energies been more hindrance than help, had not Julia prevented him; as they neared the house, now almost merged in the dusk, she said—

“I am going to fetch a lantern; the moon will be up soon, but until then I shall want a light. I am just coming in to get it, then I shall go out again; but you must stop at home; father may come back, and if he found us both out after dark he would think something was wrong and start to look for us; then we should be worse off than ever.”

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Johnny said “Yes”; but suggested, “I think we’d better look round about the house once more. I think I’ll take a light and look round again.”

Julia did not think it would be much use; however she consented, though she had to go with Johnny; she did not trust him with a lantern among the out-buildings. They looked round once more, in the sheds and in the dark garden; afterwards they went out and looked beyond the wall all round, on the side where the heather grew and also on the side where the loose sand came close. It took time; Johnny was too tired to move quickly or even to understand quickly what was said to him. At last Julia stopped and spoke decisively.

“You had better go in now,” she said; “it won’t do for us both to be out any longer; one of us must go in, and I think it had better be you. Make a good fire, see that there is plenty of hot water and get something to eat so as to be ready to do things when I come back.”

Johnny acquiesced and Julia, having watched him into the house, took up her lantern and set out in the direction of the sandhills.

It was her last resource; it did not seem to her likely that her father could have gone there; at the best of times he disliked the place, finding it very tiring. Still, with the wind behind him as it would have been this morning, it is possible he would have found it the easiest way—if he could have managed to forget what the coming back would be. At all events she determined to try it, so she set out for the waste.

By this time the moon was rising, and, in spite of the driving clouds which had not all dispersed, at times it shone clear. Beneath it the stretch of sand lay pale and desolate, a new-formed landscape of fresh contours, loosely-piled hills and shallow scooped hollows shaped by to-day’s wind. An easy place for a man to miss his way with a gale blowing and the sand dancing blinding reels. A hard place for a man to travel far when he had to face the wind; a strong man would have found it very tiring, a weak man might well have given it up, driven to waiting for a lull in the weather. As for a man in the Captain’s health—when Julia thought of it she hurried on, although she knew if her father had to-day, as he had all through his life, followed the line of least resistance, the chances were that her help would be of little avail to him now.

She carried her lantern low, looking carefully for footprints; soon, however, she put it out; she would do better without in the increasing moon-light. But she found no prints; after all, as she remembered, she was hardly likely to; the wind and blowing sand would have obliterated them. Over the first level of sand she went to the nearest rise without seeing anything; up to that and down the following hollow, looking in every curve and indentation, still without seeing anything. Then she began to climb the next rise. The moon was struggling through a long cloud, one moment eclipsed, the next shining with

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a half radiance which made the landscape unevenly black and white. For a second it looked out clear, and the sand showed like silver, tear-spotted with ink in the hollows; then the cloud swept up and all turned to a level grey. She had climbed to the top of a rise by now, sinking deep and noiseless into the soft sand. It was too dark to see what was below; all was shadow, black shadow—or was it a blackness more substantial than shadow?

The cloud passed from off the moon's face, the light shone out once more, turning the sand to silver. All the great empty space, where the dying wind still throbbed, was white silver, except down in the hollow where, black and still, lay the man who had followed the line of least resistance.

CHAPTER XXIII

PAYMENT AND RECEIPT

On the day of Captain Polkington's funeral, a letter was brought to White's Cottage. Julia herself took it in, and when she saw that it was from Holland she asked the postman to wait a minute as she would be glad if he would post a letter for her. He sat down, nothing loth; the cottage was the last place on his round and he never minded a rest there. He waited while Julia went up-stairs with her letter. She opened it before she got to her room and barely read the contents; there was enclosed a cheque for thirty pounds, the price of "The Good Comrade."

It had come, then, at last, this money for which she had been waiting two years—but too late. The man in whose name she would have paid the debt lay dead. She had planned to clear him without his knowledge, reinstate him in the good opinion of his debtor without letting her hand be seen; and she could not, for he was dead, and there was no hand but hers, and no name to clear. It was not a week too late, yet so much, so bitterly much. Too late for her cherished plan, too late for any of the things she had hoped, too late for triumph, or joy, or satisfaction; too late to demonstrate the once hoped for equality; too late for the fulfilling of anything but a dogged purpose. For a moment she looked at the cheque, feeling the irony which had sent her the means of paying his debt now that her father lay in his coffin, indifferent to his good name and his honour; unable, alike, to clear or be cleared, to wrong or be wronged; removed by kindly death from the scope of earthly judgment, even the just thoughts of one who had suffered on his account.

She put down the cheque and pencilled some hasty words—"In payment of Captain Polkington's debt (to Mr. Rawson-Clew) discharged by Hubert Farquhar Rawson-Clew on the—November 19—"

So she wrote, then she put the slip with the cheque in an envelope and addressed it to the London club where the explosive had been sent.

“It will be posted before the funeral,” she thought; “I’m glad—it will all end together—-poor father!”

She went down-stairs and gave the letter to the postman. Mrs. Polkington came into the kitchen as she was doing so, for Mrs. Polkington was at the cottage now.

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There are some women who seem designed by nature for widows, just as there are others designed for grandmothers and yet others for old maids. Mrs. Polkington was of the first sort; she seemed specially created to adorn the position of widow-hood; she certainly did adorn it; she was a pattern to all widows and did not miss a single point of the situation. Of course she came to the cottage as soon as possible after receiving news of her husband's death. The journey was long and expensive, the weather somewhat bad; that weighed for nothing with her; she was there as soon as might be, feeling, saying and doing just what a bereaved widow ought. The fact that she and her husband had been obliged through the force of circumstances, to live separate the past year did not alter her emotions, her real tears or her real grief. Considering the practice and experience she had had it would have been surprising if she had not succeeded in deceiving herself as well as most of her world in these things. So acute were her feelings that when she came into the kitchen and saw Julia dispatching the letter, she felt quite a shock.

"What is it?" she asked; "What is the matter?"

"Only a letter that could not wait," Julia answered.

"Surely it could have waited till to-morrow," her mother said; "under the circumstances surely one would be excused."

Julia thought differently but did not say so, and in silence set about some necessary preparation.

The Reverend Richard Frazer came to the funeral; Violet was unable to do so; he represented her and supported his mother-in-law too. The banker, Mr. Ponsonby, also made the tedious journey to Halgrave; he came out of respect for death in the abstract, and also because he expected affairs would want looking to, and it would suit him better to do it now than later. These two with Johnny, Julia and her mother, were the only mourners at the funeral; a few village folk, moved by curiosity, attended, but no one else; there was not even an empty carriage, representative of a good family, following the humble cortege. Mrs. Polkington observed this and felt it; an empty carriage and good livery following would have given her satisfaction, without in any way diminishing her sorrow and proper feeling. It is conceivable she would have found satisfaction in being shipwrecked in aristocratic company, without at the same time, suffering less than she ought to suffer.

After the funeral they returned to the cottage and had a repast of Julia's providing, eminently suitable to the occasion. Everything was eminently suitable, every one's behaviour, every one's clothes; Mr. Frazer's grave face, the banker's jerky manner—the manner of a man concerned with the world's money market and ill at ease in the intrusive presence of death. Mrs. Polkington's voice, face, feelings, sayings,

everything. Julia's own behaviour was perfect, though all the time she saw how it looked as plainly as if she had been another

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and disinterested person, and once or twice she had an hysterical desire to applaud a good stroke of her mother's or prompt a backward speech of her uncle's. Mr. Gillat, of course, did nothing suitable; he never did. He kept up a preternaturally cheerful appearance during the meal, stopping his mouth with large corks of bread, answering "Ah, yes, yes, just so," indiscriminately whenever he was spoken to, and starting three separate conversations on the weather on his own account. As soon as the table was cleared, he fled into the back kitchen, shut himself in with the dishes, and was seen no more. The others remained in the sitting-room and talked things over, arranging plans for the future and for the immediate present. And when the time came and the conveyance was brought to the gate, they set out on the homeward journey together. Johnny did not come out of the kitchen to say good-bye; only Julia came to the gate.

Mr. Ponsonby was going back home; Mr. Frazer and Mrs. Polkington were going with him to spend the night in town and go on westwards the next morning. Mr. Frazer was anxious to get back to his parish, and Mrs. Polkington to her daughter, who was expecting her first baby shortly. It was this expected event which prevented the young rector from asking Julia to stay with him and Violet until such time as she and her mother could settle somewhere together. It was this same event which prevented Mrs. Polkington from remaining at White's Cottage and sharing Julia's solitude until their plans were settled. All this was explained to Julia in the best Polkington manner and she seemed quite satisfied with the explanation. Mr. Ponsonby had to be perforce; there seemed no alternative; all the same he was not quite pleased. It was all sensible enough, of course, only as he saw Julia standing at the gate in the November afternoon, he did not quite like it.

"Look here," he said shortly, "you shut up this place here, send Mr. Gillat to his friends, or his rooms, or wherever he came from, and come to me. You can come and make your home with me, and welcome, till things are settled; there's plenty of room."

This was a good deal for Mr. Ponsonby to say, considering what an annoyance the Polkington family had been to him, how—not without wisdom—he had set his face against letting them into his house for more than twenty-four hours at a stretch, and how much this particular member had thwarted and exasperated him at their last meeting. Julia recognised this and recognised also the kindness of the brusque suggestion. She thanked him warmly for the offer though she refused it, assuring him that she and Johnny would be all right at the cottage.

"We do not find it lonely," she said; "we are quite happy here, happier than anywhere else, I think."

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The banker grunted, not convinced; Mr. Frazer shook hands with Julia and said he hoped it would not be long before he saw her; Mrs. Polkington reiterated the remark, kissing her the while; then they drove away and Julia went into the house. She went into the back kitchen; Mr. Gillat was not there; the dishes were all put away and the place was quite tidy. Julia went through to the front kitchen; there she saw Johnny; he was kneeling by the Captain's old chair, his arms thrown across the seat, his silly pink face buried in them, his rounded shoulders shaking with sobs.

Johnny loved as a dog loves, without reason, without thought of return; not for wisdom, worth or deserts, just because he did love and, having once loved, loved always; forgiving everything, expecting nothing—foolish, faithful, true. So he loved his friend, so he mourned him now, be-blubbering the seat of the shabby chair which spoke so eloquently to him of the irritable, exacting presence now gone for ever.

"Johnny," Julia said softly; "Johnny dear."

She put a hand on the round shoulders and somehow slipped herself into the shabby chair.

"Johnny," she said, "let us sit by the fire awhile and not talk of anything at all."

So they sat together till twilight fell.

The next day there came another to Julia, one who knew nothing of what had befallen in these last days. It was almost twilight when he came; Johnny had gone out to collect fir-cones; Julia sent him, partly because their stock was low and partly because she thought it would do him good. She did not expect him back much before five o'clock; it would be dark by then certainly, but not very dark for the day was clear, with a touch of frost in the air; one of those days when the last of the sunset burns low down in the sky long after the stars are out. It was not much after four o'clock when Julia heard something approaching, certainly not Johnny nor anything connected with him, for it was the throb of a motor coming fast. Only once before since she had been at the cottage had she heard that sound on the lonely road, on the day when Rawson-Clew came. It could not be him now, she was sure of that. He might have received the money this morning certainly, but he would not come because of that, rather he would keep away; there was no reason why he should come. She told herself it was impossible, and then went to the door to see, puzzled in her own mind what she should say if the impossible had happened and it was he.

The throbbing had ceased by now; there was the click of the gate even as she opened the door, and he—it was he and no other—was coming up the little brick path in the twilight. His face was curiously clear in the light which lingered low down; and when she saw it and the look it wore, all plans of what she should say fled, and the feeling came upon her which was like that which came when she crouched behind the chopping-

block and he barred the way. It seemed as if he had been pursuing and she escaping and eluding for a long time, but now—he was coming up the path and she was standing in the doorway with the pale light strong on her face and nowhere to fly to and no way of escape.

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“Why did you not tell me before?” he said without any greeting at all, and he spoke as if he had right and authority. “Why did you let this thing weigh on you for two years and never say a word of it to me?”

“I was ashamed,” she answered with truth. Then the spirit which still inhabits some women, making them willing to be won by capture, prompted her to struggle against the capitulation she was ready to make. “There was nothing to speak of to you or any one else,” she said, with an effort at her old assurance, and she led the way in as she spoke. “I never meant to speak of it at all, I meant just to pay the debt as from father, and not myself appear in it. I did not do it that way, I know; I could not; I did not get the money till yesterday and—and”—the assurance faded away pathetically—“that was too late.”

Rawson-Clew looked down, and for the first time noticed her mourning dress, and realising what it meant, remembered that convention demanded that a man, whose claim depends on another’s death, should not push it as soon as the funeral is over. However he did not go away, the pathos of Julia’s voice kept him.

“Late or early would have made little difference,” he said; “it is just the same now as if it had been early. Do you think I should not have known who sent the money at whatever time and in whatever circumstances it was paid? Do you think I know two people who would pay a debt, which can hardly be said to exist, in such a way?”

But Julia was not comforted. “It is too late,” she re-repeated; “too late for any satisfaction. I thought I would prove that we were honest and honourable by paying it; I wanted to show father—that I—that our standard was the same as yours, and I have not.”

“No,” he answered, “you have not and you never will; your standard is not the same as mine; mine is the honour of an accepted convention, and yours is the honour of a personal truth, a personal experience, the honour of the soul.”

But she shook her head. “It is not really,” she said; “and father—”

“As to your father,” he interrupted gently, “do you not think that sometimes the potter’s thumb slips in the making of a vessel?”

She looked up with a feeling of gratitude. “Yes,” she said; “yes, that is it, if only we could realise it—poor father. It was partly our fault, too, mother’s, all of ours—and he is dead now.”

“I know. Let him rest in peace; we are concerned no more with his doings or misdoings; our concern, yours and mine is with the living.”

She did not answer; a piece of wood had fallen from the fire and lay blazing and spluttering on the hearth; she stooped to pick it up and he watched her.

“I know I have no business here now,” he said. “Had I known of his death before, I would not have come to-day; I would have waited, but since I have come—Julia—”

She was standing straight now, the wood safely back in the fire; he put his hands on her shoulders and turned her to him. “Julia, you and I have always dealt openly, without regarding appearances, let us deal so now—since I have come. Won’t you let me give you a receipt?”

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Julia said afterwards that receipts for the payment of such debts were unnecessary and never given; which was perhaps as well, for the one she received in the dusk was not of a kind recognised at law. Could it afterwards have been produced it would not have proved the payment of money, though at the time it proved several things, principally the fact that, though friendship and comradeship are fine and excellent things, there are simple primitive passions which leap up through them and transfigure them and forget them, and it is these which make man man, and woman woman, and life worth living, and the world worth winning and losing, too, and bring the kingdom of heaven to earth again.

It also proved how exceedingly firmly a man who is in the habit of wearing a single eyeglass must screw it into his eye, for, as Julia remarked with some surprise, the one which interested her did not fall out.

* * * * *

Mr. Gillat came home with his fir-cones at a quarter to five. And when he came he saw that, to him, most fascinating sight—a motor-car, standing empty and quiet by the gate. He looked at it with keen interest, then he looked round the empty landscape for its owner, and not seeing him, wondered if he was in the house. He put away the cones and came to the conclusion that the owner was not there and the car was an abandoned derelict. For which, perhaps, he may be forgiven, for there was no light at the parlour window and no sound of voices that he could hear from the kitchen; even when he opened the door and walked in he did not in the firelight see any one besides Julia at first.

“Julia,” he said, bringing in the astonishing news, “there is a motor-car outside!”

“Yes,” Julia answered composedly; “but it is going away soon.”

“Not very soon,” another voice spoke out of the gloom of the chimney corner, and Johnny jumped as he recognised it.

“Dear me!” he said; “dear me! Mr. Rawson-Clew! How do you do? I am pleased to see you.”

The motor did not go away very soon; it stayed quite as long, rather longer, in fact, than Mr. Gillat expected. And when it did go, he did not have the pleasure of seeing it start; he somehow got shut in the kitchen while Julia went out to the gate.

When she came back she shut the door carefully, then turned to him, and he noticed how her eyes were shining. “Johnny,” she said, “I am a selfish beast; I am going to leave you. Not yet, oh, not yet, but one day.”

Johnny stared a moment, then said, “Of course, oh, of course, to be sure—to live with your mother, she’ll want you. A wonderful woman.”

“Not to live with my mother,” Julia said emphatically. “Sit down and I will tell you all about it.”

And she told, slowly and suitably, fearing that he would hardly understand the wonderful goodness of fate to her. But she need not have been afraid; he took her meaning at once, far quicker than she expected, for he saw no wonder in it, only a very great goodness for the man who had won her, and a great and radiant happiness for himself in the happiness that had come to her. As for his loneliness, he never thought of that, why should he? Of course she would leave him, it was the right and proper thing to do; she would leave him anyhow.

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“You couldn’t go on living with me here,” he said; “I mean, I couldn’t go on living with you; it wouldn’t be the thing, you know; you must think of that.”

Julia caught her breath between tears and laughter, but he went on stoutly: “I shall go back to town, to Mrs. Horn; I shall like it—at least when I get used to it. It is quite time I went back to town; a man ought not to stay too long in the country; he gets rusty.”

“You won’t go back to town,” Julia said; “you will never do that. You will stay here in the cottage, and Mrs. Gray from next door to the shop will come and live here as your housekeeper; I am going to arrange it with her. She will come and she will bring her little grand-daughter and you will keep on living here always.”

For a moment Johnny’s face beamed; the prospect was exquisite; but he sternly put it from him. “No,” he said, “I shouldn’t like that; it’s kind of you, but—”

“Johnny,” Julia interrupted, “you should always speak the truth—you do anything else so badly! I don’t mind if you like my plan or not, you will have to put up with it to help me; some one must take care of the cottage.”

“But you will want to come yourself,” Mr. Gillat protested.

“Never, unless you are here.”

In the end Julia had her way. Johnny lived at the cottage, and Mrs. Gray and her grandchild came to keep house. And Billy, Mrs. Gray’s nephew, came to help in the garden and take care of the donkey; in the spring there was a donkey added to the establishment, and a little tub-cart which held four children easily, besides Mr. Gillat. And it is doubtful if, in all the country round, there was a happier man than he who tended Julia’s plants in Julia’s garden, and drove parties of chattering children along the quiet lanes, and sat on warm summer evenings beside his old friend’s grave in Halgrave churchyard. He had forgotten many things, old slights and old pains, and old losses; forgotten, perhaps, most things except love. Foolish Johnny, God’s fool, basking in God’s sunshine.

And Julia and Rawson-Clew were married, very quietly, without any pomp or ostentation at all. And if, on the honeymoon, he did not show her all the places he had thought of on the day when he travelled north with the girl with the carnations, it was because he had not several years at his disposal just then. Afterwards he made up for it as work allowed and time could be found. In the record of their lives there are many days noted down as holidays, even such holidays as that first one spent on the Dunes. In the springtime, when the bulb flowers were in bloom, they went once more to the Dunes and to the little old town where the Van Heigens lived. They were received with much ceremony by Mijnheer and his wife, and entertained at a dinner which lasted from four

till half-past six. It is true that afterwards state had to be lain aside, for Julia insisted on helping to wash the

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priceless Nankeen china while her husband smoked long cigars with Mijnheer on the veranda, but that was all her own fault. Denah came to tea drinking, she and her lately-wed husband, the bashful son of a well-to-do shipowner. She was very smiling and all bustling and greatly pleased with herself and all things, and if she thought poorly of Julia for washing the plates, she thought very well of the glittering rings she had left on the veranda-table and well, too, of her husband, who she recognised as the mysterious "man of good family" they had seen on the day they drove to the wood. And afterwards when the tea drinking was done and the dew was falling, Julia walked with Joost among his flowers, and heard him speak of his hopes and ambitions, and knew that in his work he had found all the satisfaction that a man may reasonably hope for here.

Later, Julia and her husband walked through the tidy streets of the town, looking in at lighted windows, listening to the patois of the peasants and recalling past times. It was then that he told her how he had that day tried to buy back the streaked daffodil.

"And Mijnheer would not sell it?" she asked.

"No," he answered; "not at any price, so I am afraid that you will have to do without 'The Good Comrade' after all."

"I?" she said; "I can do quite well. Thank you for trying to get it; all the same I am not sure I want it back."

"Do you not? Then I am quite sure that I do not, indeed, I rather fancy I already have the real 'Good Comrade.'"