

Enter Bridget eBook

Enter Bridget by Thomas W. Cobb

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Contents

Enter Bridget eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	7
Page 1.....	8
Page 2.....	10
Page 3.....	12
Page 4.....	14
Page 5.....	16
Page 6.....	18
Page 7.....	20
Page 8.....	22
Page 9.....	24
Page 10.....	26
Page 11.....	28
Page 12.....	30
Page 13.....	32
Page 14.....	34
Page 15.....	36
Page 16.....	38
Page 17.....	40
Page 18.....	42
Page 19.....	44
Page 20.....	46
Page 21.....	48
Page 22.....	50



[Page 23..... 52](#)

[Page 24..... 54](#)

[Page 25..... 56](#)

[Page 26..... 58](#)

[Page 27..... 60](#)

[Page 28..... 62](#)

[Page 29..... 64](#)

[Page 30..... 66](#)

[Page 31..... 68](#)

[Page 32..... 70](#)

[Page 33..... 72](#)

[Page 34..... 74](#)

[Page 35..... 76](#)

[Page 36..... 78](#)

[Page 37..... 80](#)

[Page 38..... 82](#)

[Page 39..... 84](#)

[Page 40..... 86](#)

[Page 41..... 88](#)

[Page 42..... 90](#)

[Page 43..... 92](#)

[Page 44..... 94](#)

[Page 45..... 96](#)

[Page 46..... 98](#)

[Page 47..... 100](#)

[Page 48..... 102](#)



[Page 49..... 104](#)

[Page 50..... 106](#)

[Page 51..... 108](#)

[Page 52..... 110](#)

[Page 53..... 112](#)

[Page 54..... 114](#)

[Page 55..... 116](#)

[Page 56..... 118](#)

[Page 57..... 120](#)

[Page 58..... 122](#)

[Page 59..... 124](#)

[Page 60..... 126](#)

[Page 61..... 128](#)

[Page 62..... 130](#)

[Page 63..... 132](#)

[Page 64..... 134](#)

[Page 65..... 136](#)

[Page 66..... 138](#)

[Page 67..... 140](#)

[Page 68..... 142](#)

[Page 69..... 144](#)

[Page 70..... 146](#)

[Page 71..... 148](#)

[Page 72..... 150](#)

[Page 73..... 152](#)

[Page 74..... 154](#)



[Page 75..... 156](#)

[Page 76..... 158](#)

[Page 77..... 160](#)

[Page 78..... 162](#)

[Page 79..... 164](#)

[Page 80..... 166](#)

[Page 81..... 167](#)

[Page 82..... 169](#)

[Page 83..... 171](#)

[Page 84..... 173](#)

[Page 85..... 175](#)

[Page 86..... 177](#)

[Page 87..... 179](#)

[Page 88..... 181](#)

[Page 89..... 183](#)

[Page 90..... 185](#)

[Page 91..... 187](#)

[Page 92..... 189](#)

[Page 93..... 191](#)

[Page 94..... 193](#)

[Page 95..... 195](#)

[Page 96..... 197](#)

[Page 97..... 199](#)

[Page 98..... 201](#)

[Page 99..... 203](#)

[Page 100..... 205](#)



Page 101..... 207
Page 102..... 209
Page 103..... 211
Page 104..... 213
Page 105..... 215
Page 106..... 217



Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
LATE FOR DINNER		1
CHAPTER II		3
CHAPTER III		5
CHAPTER IV		9
CHAPTER V		13
CHAPTER VI		18
CHAPTER VII		22
CHAPTER VIII		26
CHAPTER IX		29
CHAPTER X		32
CHAPTER XI		35
CHAPTER XII		41
CHAPTER XIII		45
CHAPTER XIV		47
CHAPTER XV		52
CHAPTER XVI		55
CHAPTER XVII		59
CHAPTER XVIII		62
CHAPTER XIX		67
CHAPTER XX		69
CHAPTER XXI		73
CHAPTER XXII		79
CHAPTER XXIII		84
CHAPTER XXIV		86
CHAPTER XXV		90
CHAPTER XXVI		94
CHAPTER XXVII		97
CHAPTER XXVIII		102
THE END		106



Page 1

LATE FOR DINNER

Concerning Bridget there was from the outset considerable difference of opinion. Mark Driver, for instance, always showed a tendency to something more than tolerance, and even Carrissima Faversham, in spite of a manifestly unfavourable bias, strove to hold the balance even. It was her brother Lawrence who took the most adverse view; insisting that Miss Rosser was neither more nor less than an adventuress—"a pretty woman on the make" was his expression, uttered, it is true, before he had an opportunity of seeing her face.

Her entrance on the scene was heralded by Mark Driver one evening towards the end of March, when he had accepted an invitation to dine with his sister and Lawrence in Charteris Street, S.W.

Carrissima's maid found her so exacting that evening, that she might have been going to an important party, instead of merely to a quiet dinner with her brother and his wife; but then, expecting Mark to make a fourth, she wished to look her very best, and flattered herself she had succeeded.

Although she sometimes longed for the power to add a few inches to her stature, she realized that she had already much to be thankful for. Suppose, for example, that her eyebrows had been as fair as her hair, or even worse, her eyelashes, which as it happened were satisfactorily black.

Mr. Lawrence Faversham, barrister-at-law, was thirty-two years of age, and rather short, although he always held his head in the air as if he were doing his best to appear taller. Hearing the street door bell ring, Mrs. Lawrence Faversham waylaid Carrissima on the stairs and insisted on taking her to gaze at little Victor, aged two, peacefully sleeping in the nursery.

"Mark's late as usual," exclaimed Lawrence, as his sister presently sailed into the drawing-room. "Ten minutes past eight," he added, taking her hand.

He had fair hair, a long narrow face and sloping shoulders. Whether he was sitting down or standing up, there always seemed to be something stiff, self-important and formal about him.

"Mark wasn't due at King's Cross until tea-time," said Phoebe, a pretty brunette, several inches taller than her husband and seven years younger. "I wanted him to sleep here to-night, and really I cannot imagine why he refused."

"Not very complimentary to us," answered Lawrence, "to prefer to go to an hotel!"

"And," Phoebe explained, "he is off to Paris to-morrow morning."



“Well, I wish to goodness he would come soon if he’s coming at all,” grumbled Lawrence.

“Oh, of course, he’s certain to be here,” urged Phoebe, not liking to begin dinner without her brother, who might provokingly arrive as soon as they sat down; while on the other hand, her three years’ experience of married life had taught her that it was undesirable to keep Lawrence waiting. When half-past eight struck, however, she could restrain his impatience no longer; the three went to the dining-room, and Carrissima, with a sense of profound disappointment, sat down at the round table opposite the empty chair.

Page 2

Although Phoebe did her utmost to spin out the meal by eating with tantalizing and hygienic slowness, it ended without any sign of the absentee, and at last she felt bound to return to the drawing-room, where she was followed ten minutes later by Lawrence, who had stayed to smoke a cigarette.

"The worst of it is," he said, standing before the fire, "you never know quite where you are with Mark."

"I suppose," suggested Carrissima, "the simple fact of the matter is that he missed his train."

"In that case," returned her brother, "surely he might have run to sixpence for a telegram. For a steady-going fellow Mark is about as erratic as they're made."

"How extremely inconsistent!" exclaimed Carrissima.

"Not at all!" said Lawrence, frowning, as he took a chair. "A man may drive crookedly without exceeding the limit. Although there are things you can swear Mark would never dream of doing, you never know what folly he will be up to next."

As Lawrence was speaking in his rather pompous manner, the door opened and Mark Driver entered the room: tall, broad-shouldered, with a handsome, alert, shaven face and an obvious appearance of haste.

On leaving Cambridge he had gone to Saint Bartholomew's, and having completed his course there, taken a post as House Surgeon at Saint Josephine's, a small hospital in a southeastern suburb. Mark remained there two years and left at Christmas; after spending a few weeks idly in London he went to take charge of Doctor Bunbury's practice in Yorkshire, principally for the sake of being near to his own people, and having passed two months, more occupied by sport than patients, returned this afternoon.

"Why didn't you come in time for dinner?" demanded Phoebe, as he kissed her cheek.

"Upon my word, I am most awfully sorry," he replied, and turned at once to Carrissima, who was striving to hide her satisfaction on seeing his face again. Never, perhaps, during their long acquaintance, had they been so many months apart; but while Mark was in London between Christmas and his departure for the North of England, Carrissima had been on a long visit to Devonshire.

"I didn't expect to meet you this evening," said Mark. "Phoebe told me in her letter last week that you were staying in Shropshire with Colonel Faversham."

"So I was," returned Carrissima. "But I never had the least intention to live there for the remainder of my life."



“She took us all completely by surprise,” explained Phoebe, “by coming home the day before yesterday.”

“I really cannot understand even now,” said Lawrence, “why in the world you couldn’t stay to return with father!”

“Oh well, it’s an ill-wind that blows no one any good,” cried Mark, while Carrissima sat with her eyes averted, hoping that nobody would suspect her actual object.

But she had known of his intention to depart for Paris the next morning, to spend a month with his old friend Wentworth before finally settling down in London. If she had waited for Colonel Faversham’s return to Grandison Square she must, obviously, have missed Mark Driver again. One of the chief purposes of Carrissima’s life seemed to be the disguise of motives, concerning which she scarcely knew whether she ought to feel ashamed or not.



Page 3

"Well," suggested Lawrence, "we haven't heard why you didn't turn up in time."

"I hope I didn't keep you waiting," said Mark, at last shaking hands with his brother-in-law.

"Only half-an-hour!"

"You see," Mark explained, "I dined at Belloni's."

"Good gracious!" answered Lawrence, with evident annoyance, "if you could go to Belloni's, why in the world couldn't you come here as you promised?"

"I meant to come," said Mark, looking somewhat embarrassed, as he glanced at Carrissima. "You see, I went to Duffield's Hotel in Craven Street direct from the station. I thought I would just potter about and smoke a pipe or so till it was time to change."

"But you haven't changed!" exclaimed Lawrence, with a disapproving frown at Mark's blue serge jacket. It no doubt suited his long, athletic figure admirably; but, nevertheless, was very much out of place in present circumstances.

"No, of course not," said Mark. "The fact is I altered my mind. Instead of hanging about at Duffield's, I thought I would go to Golfney Place."

"What on earth for?"

"Oh well, to see Bridget, you know," answered Mark, and once more he glanced at Carrissima, whose eyes met his own.

CHAPTER II

MARK EXPLAINS

"Who is Bridget?" asked Phoebe, whereupon Mark swung round to face her, his hands thrust deep in his jacket pockets, his face slightly flushed.

"Miss Rosser," he said. "You remember Bridget Rosser, Phoebe! When we stayed at Crowborough four years ago."

"Five," suggested Lawrence, with his usual meticulous exactitude.

"You were not there," said Mark.

"But still," answered Lawrence, "I remember going down with father to look at the house before he made up his mind to take it."



“I recollect Bridget perfectly well,” said Carrissima in her most cheerful tone. “Her father was David Rosser the novelist.”

“He died in Paris about ten months ago,” explained Mark, “and Bridget was his only daughter.”

“A rather nice-looking girl, with reddish hair!” said Phoebe.

“The most wonderful hair!” exclaimed Mark. “I have never seen anything like it. Oh, she’s wonderful altogether!”

“Where did you come across Miss Rosser again?” inquired Lawrence, while Carrissima wished that her cheeks would not tingle so uncomfortably.

“At the Old Masters’ about three months ago—just after Christmas,” replied Mark. “I had lately left Saint Josephine’s, you know. I should never have recognized her, but she happened to drop her purse; I naturally picked it up, and then she asked whether my name wasn’t Driver.”

“Isn’t Golfney Place chiefly lodging-houses?” asked Carrissima.

“Number Five is one, anyhow.”

“Does Miss Rosser live with her mother?” suggested Phoebe.



Page 4

“Mrs. Rosser died shortly after we left Crowborough,” was the answer. “Then the house was given up. Bridget wandered about Europe with her father until his own death a little less than a year ago.”

“Then,” demanded Lawrence, “whom does she live with?”

“Oh, she’s quite on her own.”

“What is her age, for goodness’ sake?”

“Upon my word, I don’t know for certain,” said Mark. “I couldn’t very well inquire. I should say she’s about the same age as Carrissima.”

“As a matter of prosaic fact,” answered Carrissima, forcing a smile, although she did not feel very cheerful at the moment, “she is a few months older.”

“Well,” Lawrence persisted, “after picking up the purse at the Old Masters’, what was the next move in the game?”

Phoebe was beginning to look rather anxious. She realized that Mark was growing impatient under Lawrence’s cross-examination—he was supposed to be a skilful cross-examiner. It was occasionally a little difficult to keep the peace between these two men, who were her dearest; with the exception, perhaps, of the little man up-stairs.

“Bridget asked me to call,” said Mark, “or I asked whether I might. I forget which, and what in the world does it matter?”

“Anyhow, you went!”

“Why, of course,” was the answer.

“Is Miss Rosser—is she hard up, by any chance?” asked Lawrence.

“Good Lord, no!” exclaimed Mark. “My dear fellow, you’ve got quite a wrong impression. Hard up! You’ve only to see her.”

“No doubt,” suggested Lawrence, “you have had numerous opportunities.”

“Oh well,” said Mark, with a shrug, “she was on her lonesome and so was I at the time. It was just before I went to Yorkshire, you know. Carrissima was in Devonshire and I was kicking my heels in idleness at Duffield’s.”

“It really was rather too bad,” remarked Phoebe, “to go there this evening, considering that you were engaged to dine with us. Wasn’t it, Carrissima?”



“Oh, it was shameful of you, Mark!” cried Carrissima, with a laugh.

“You understand how it was,” he explained, taking a chair by her side. “I didn’t mean to stay ten minutes. I thought I could get there and back comfortably in a taxi, and so I should, but——”

“The temptation proved too strong for you,” suggested Lawrence.

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘temptation,’” retorted Mark, while Phoebe tried to catch her husband’s eye. “Bridget was most awfully pleased to see me. She had a fit of the blues for some reason or other.”

“Is she liable to that sort of thing?” asked Lawrence.

“Not a bit of it,” said Mark enthusiastically. “She’s just about the brightest girl you have ever seen in your life. That was what made it the more upsetting. I felt I must do something to cheer her up.”

“So you took her to Belloni’s!” said Lawrence. “They do you uncommonly well at Belloni’s.”



Page 5

“Anyhow,” Mark admitted, “they gave us some ripping Burgundy. I got away directly we finished dinner,” he continued, “and I knew Phoebe wouldn’t mind.”

“Well,” said Lawrence, in response to her warning frown, “now you’re here, suppose we have a game at bridge.”

CHAPTER III

BRIDGET

To put the matter plainly, Carrissima was jealous.

It was half-past eleven when she reached her father’s house at Number 13, Grandison Square, S.W., and she felt pleased to find that the fire was still alight in the drawing-room. Having told the butler that he need not sit up any longer, she threw off her long cloak, leaned back in an easy-chair right in front of the grate, crossed her feet on the fender, and clasped her miniature waist.

Remembering Bridget Rosser, with her vivid chestnut-coloured hair, her somewhat pale skin, her wonderful eyes (as Mark quite justifiably described them), her face, which was extraordinarily attractive, although it might not contain one perfect feature, Carrissima could not help feeling that there might be serious cause for jealousy.

Of course, it was evident that Mark had not expected to find her at Charteris Street; he had believed she was still at Church Stretton with Colonel Faversham, and perhaps, if he had been aware of her presence in London, Lawrence might not have had to wait for his dinner. Moreover, Mark Driver was precisely the kind of man who would go out of his way to do any woman a good turn—pretty or plain; but still, after making every allowance, the fact remained that Carrissima was jealous.

It had for long been an open question (in her own mind at least) whether he cared for her or not. If he did, she would have liked to know why he had waited so long before putting his fate to the touch, although the matter was again complicated by the sensitiveness of Mark’s disposition.

Carrissima’s modest fortune (derived from her mother), which would have proved a temptation to many men, might be an obstacle where he was concerned. The fact that it was just what he required at the beginning of his career might easily be conceived as holding him back. Not that she imagined that, in favourable circumstances, it would be regarded as a perpetual barrier; only Mark might prefer to wait until he had settled down to the more serious practice of the profession, about which no man could be keener. The truth was that Carrissima was prone to search for a variety of explanations for his backwardness, all more or less fantastic.



The immediate question was: Should she take any notice of Bridget Rosser, or leave her to her own devices?

In the ordinary course of things, Carrissima would scarcely have hesitated. If she had been told by anybody else that Bridget was living alone in London, doubtless she would have lost very little time in finding her way to Number 5, Golfney Place. She invariably strove to act in every particular as if she were entirely disinterested, although she was far from being so. She knew that her life's happiness depended solely on Mark!



Page 6

Five years ago Bridget had been barely eighteen; she had looked even younger than Carrissima: a slim, graceful girl, apparently just fresh from the school-room. She lived in a delightful, old-fashioned house with a rambling garden, situated about a quarter of a mile from that which Colonel Faversham had rented furnished for the summer because of its proximity to the golf-course.

His wife had died twelve months earlier, and Carrissima, in her eighteenth year, proved an inexperienced hostess to the relays of visitors, who included, amongst others, Mark Driver (at that time a medical student), his sister Phoebe and Miss Sybil Clynesworth. At the club-house Colonel Faversham met David Rosser and Mrs. Rosser, already an invalid, having been wheeled over in her bath-chair to make Carrissima's acquaintance; there were henceforth frequent journeyings on bicycles between the two houses, until the time arrived for the Favershams' return to London.

One or two letters had been exchanged between Carrissima and Bridget, who was invited to stay in Grandison Square; but the visit was prevented by Mrs. Rosser's increasing illness, and so the intercourse between the two families fell off.

Carrissima had not seen Bridget since their parting at the railway station five years ago. Ought she to go and see her now? If she refrained, might not people suspect some hidden motive? Her brother Lawrence, for instance, who was apt to search for mysterious springs of action, and who must not on any account be allowed to hit upon the true one.

No doubt Carrissima was sensitive and self-conscious; moreover, she was jealous. She was, however, extremely curious also—curious to see for herself how Bridget had developed—and in the end she made up her mind to go to Golfney Place. She looked very small and bright when, a few days later, she set forth, wearing the new set of furs, which were certainly her most becoming apparel. She had hesitated whether the March afternoon was really cold enough to justify their use, and before reaching her destination came to the conclusion that it was not.

But, regarding Bridget as possibly a rival, she wished to make her bravest show. With her dark, wide-brimmed hat, her remarkably fair hair, her fresh, clear complexion and her diminutive but piquantly womanly figure, she assuredly need not fear any ordinary comparison.

Golfney Place is a secluded thoroughfare, containing a few intensely respectable-looking shops, an estate-agent's office, a church and some superior lodging-houses. These, like the church, were all painted white, and, indeed, some of them were at present receiving their fresh spring coats.

The door of Number 5 was opened by a middle-aged man, Mr. Miller, the proprietor of the house, and indistinguishable in appearance from an ordinary butler.

“Miss Rosser?” said Carrissima, and, taking her up-stairs, he stopped to ask her name on the first landing.

Page 7

“Miss Faversham,” he announced, as she walked into the drawing-room, a large, lofty room with three windows, rather ornately furnished, and reminding Carrissima of various scenes on the stage. Before the fireplace stood a sofa covered with cretonne of a florid pattern, and from the middle of this Bridget rose.

She was obviously formed to play havoc with the hearts of men, and although she could scarcely be described as beautiful, she was no doubt marvellously seductive. If her features were not regular, the ensemble was delightful, even in the estimation of one who felt disposed to criticize. Her face would have run to a point at the chin if this had not been blunted by an entrancing dimple. Bridget’s vivid chestnut-coloured hair grew low over a somewhat wide forehead, while her eyes were dark and curiously expressive.

Without being conspicuously tall, she had the advantage of her guest by several inches, although her figure might be less developed, or perhaps it looked smaller because of her additional inches. She obviously employed an excellent dressmaker, and if she had hitherto been compelled to hide her light under a bushel, she had surely only to be seen to conquer. The important question was: Had she already succeeded in conquering Mark Driver?

For an instant she stood gazing at Carrissima as if unable to believe either her ears or her eyes; then with a slow, gliding movement, in contrast with the other’s more rapid, impulsive manner, she came forward holding out both hands.

“Why, it’s Carrissima, after all these many, many years!” she exclaimed, and without a moment’s hesitation kissed her cheek, just as she had done at parting that long time ago. “How nice of you to come,” she continued, still retaining one of her guest’s hands, and leading her to the sofa. “I suppose it was Mark who asked you,” she said, as they both sat down.

“He didn’t exactly ask me,” returned Carrissima. “Of course I shouldn’t have known you were in London but for him. I met him at my brother’s the other evening.”

“Ah, that was the night he arrived so late for dinner,” said Bridget. “Did he get into the most dreadful scrape?”

“Anyhow,” was the answer, “I suppose he was able to start to Paris the next morning, as I haven’t heard to the contrary.”

“Oh yes,” cried Bridget, “if he hadn’t gone I should have seen him here. Isn’t it tiresome of him!”

“What?” asked Carrissima.

“No sooner coming back to London than off he must go the very next day. He came to see me directly he returned from Yorkshire,” Bridget explained, “and—well, I happened to have a fit of the miserables. I assure you I am not often taken that way. Mark was tremendously nice—he always is, isn’t he? He insisted that I should go out to dinner and what could I do?”

“Why, nothing but go,” replied Carrissima, with the utmost cheerfulness.

Page 8

“Still,” said Bridget, “he seemed quite worried about his brother-in-law. I mustn’t tell tales out of school, and Mr. Faversham is your brother, isn’t he? Won’t you unfasten those furs,” she suggested. “You must find them rather warm to-day, although I’m certain I should have put them on in spite of the temperature if they were mine. Perfectly lovely! Do let me help you!”

She turned on the wide sofa to face Carrissima and deftly unhooked the furs, taking the end of the stole in her hands and pressing it against her cheek. When the butler brought in the tea-tray, Bridget asked him to move a small table on to the hearthrug, and as soon as he left the room again she began to talk while pouring out the tea.

“How often,” she cried, “I have wondered whether I should ever see you again during this earthly pilgrimage. Sugar?” she asked. “You remember our dear old house and the delightful garden! Of course my darling mother’s illness had begun before you came to Crowborough. Poor father was never really the same after her death.”

She paused, holding a cup and saucer in her hand, but turning her eyes towards the window. Carrissima saw that they were moist when Bridget began again.

“We gave up the house because he couldn’t rest long in any one place, and yet he could never write at his best moving about. You know, Carrissima, it was really a tragedy. He took such pains—writing and re-writing, especially after he and I were left alone; but he knew he wasn’t reaching his own standard. He never said a word, but of course I saw he was worrying himself to death. I have copies of all his novels; they are over on that shelf,” she said, turning towards a pair of hanging shelves at the farther end of the room. “And there are portfolios full of press cuttings. I used to cut them out and paste them in for him. It seems like a dream to look back. You know I used to think of you as ever so much older than myself, because you seemed to be the mistress of the house.”

“Well,” answered Carrissima, “I am not many months younger.”

“Ah! but now I regard you as quite a child in comparison.”

“That doesn’t prevent me from being twenty-two,” said Carrissima.

“No, of course not, but the actual years are nothing. It’s all that’s crowded into them—oh dear! I have had such experiences! During the last few months of poor father’s life we lived in an *appartement* in Paris, and afterwards I didn’t know what to do or where to go, so I kept it on for myself. I used to go to Ronseau’s studio—you’ve heard of Ronseau?—till he convinced me it wasn’t of the slightest use to persevere. Then I came to London and soon began to wish I hadn’t. Because I did know ever so many people in Paris, but over here I can’t tell you how deadly dull it was until I met Mark.”

“You must come and see me as soon as you can,” suggested Carrissima.



Page 9

“Oh dear, yes,” said Bridget. “Do let me fasten your furs!” she added, as Carrissima rose from the sofa. “I shall return your visit as early as if you were a royal personage. I shall love to come.”

“Number 13, Grandison Square,” said Carrissima. “It is not very far, and I am quite alone just now. I don’t know whether you remember my father——”

“Very indistinctly,” answered Bridget.

“He is away at Church Stretton playing golf.”

“Then you are in the same unprotected condition as I am,” suggested Bridget.

“Oh well, I have the advantage of a peculiarly attentive brother. Lawrence has the firm and unalterable opinion that no woman under forty is capable of looking after herself. During my father’s absence he generally pays me a visit once every twenty-four hours, either on his way home from the Temple or after dinner. I shall expect you before many days,” said Carrissima, and Bridget insisted on accompanying her down to the hall.

CHAPTER IV

BRIDGET AT GRANDISON SQUARE

Carrissima walked back to Grandison Square, feeling not a whit less jealous than she had set out. There seemed, it is true, something about Bridget Rosser to which she was scarcely accustomed in her own personal friends; something difficult to describe. It might be due to an innate ingenuousness, or, in part, to the quasi-Bohemian life she had probably lived during the last few years abroad.

There seemed to be an absence of reticence; a kind of natural freedom which assuredly had a charm of its own, although some persons might not approve of it—Lawrence, for one!

He came to Grandison Square the same evening, entering the drawing-room still wearing his heavy overcoat.

“A bitter wind has sprung up,” he said, standing close to the fire.

“What a pity you took the trouble to turn out in it,” suggested Carrissima, always rather inclined to resent his superintendence.

“What have you been doing all day?” he asked. “You haven’t given Phoebe a look in.”

“I went to Golfney Place this afternoon,” was the answer.



“Golfney Place——”

“To renew my acquaintance with Bridget,” said Carrissima.

“Quite unnecessary!” retorted Lawrence.

“Far better if you had stayed away.”

“Why?” demanded Carrissima.

“Phoebe suggested going,” said Lawrence; “but I wouldn’t allow it for a moment.”

“It’s certain,” cried Carrissima, “that she is a standing example of the way not to treat a husband. How ridiculous to form a prejudice against any one you have never even seen.”

“If she had been the sort of woman I should like my wife to call upon,” said Lawrence, “she wouldn’t have allowed Mark to see her so often. A woman who lives alone! Why on earth couldn’t you leave her to stew in her own juice? I don’t wish to see my brother-in-law make an idiot of himself.”

Page 10

“Anyhow,” returned Carrissima, “it can’t have been Mark’s account that set you against her.”

“Oh, of course,” exclaimed Lawrence, “Mark would swallow anything.”

“It is his business in life,” said Carrissima, with a laugh, “to make other people swallow things, isn’t it, Lawrence?”

He went away dissatisfied, and the following Monday afternoon Bridget Rosser paid her first visit to Number 13, Grandison Square. Although her movements were even and unhurried, her appearance in her out-of-door garments was conspicuous. The brim of her hat struck Carrissima as being a shade wider than that of any one else, her dress closer about the ankles, while yet she wore it without a trace of anything that could be called vulgarity.

“I should have come even earlier,” she said, taking Carrissima’s hand; “but I only got back from Sandbay this morning. I have been staying since Saturday with my aunts; the dearest little Dresden china aunts in the world. They are my mother’s sisters and they give me no peace. You see, they are terribly Early Victorian. You were saying that your brother insisted that no woman under forty is capable of looking after herself. Well, Aunt Jane and Aunt Frances think honestly that I am going to perdition as fast as I can.”

“I suppose,” suggested Carrissima, “they would like you to live with them?”

“Oh dear! they are quite mad about it. You know everybody is mad about something! They write every week, but I positively couldn’t endure it. Of course my father did his best to put me off, although I believe his chief objection was that they had a hatred of tobacco.”

“Still,” said Carrissima, “I don’t suppose you are a confirmed smoker and they might be good for you. I don’t think I am Early Victorian, but still——”

“Oh, I know!” cried Bridget; “but fancy wasting any little sweetness one may possess on the desert air of Sandbay. I should simply go mad—stark, staring mad. Carrissima,” she continued, “I suppose you know heaps and heaps of people. So did I when my father was alive—people who do things, whose names you read in the papers, who think for themselves and make others follow their lead. Oh, I long to be in the movement!”

Rising slowly from her chair, and with perfect coolness, she took a framed cabinet photograph from a table between the windows.

“Is this Colonel Faversham?” she asked. “I remember him now quite distinctly.”



The portrait showed a man of middle height, rather taller than Lawrence, with much broader shoulders. His face had an almost dissipated expression, and he wore a large, pointed moustache. His hair was still plentiful, although it had been grey when Bridget last saw him; his eyes were somewhat prominent, and he held himself unusually erect.

“How old is your father?” asked Bridget.

“Sixty-five,” was the answer.

“He doesn’t look so old!”



Page 11

“Nothing would give him greater pleasure than to hear you say that!” cried Carrissima. “But the photograph was taken some years ago.”

“Have you only one brother?” asked Bridget.

“Only one living. I had another brother and a sister. They came between me and Lawrence, and died a long time ago.”

“I love looking at photographs,” said Bridget, putting that of Colonel Faversham back in its place. “I hope you don’t mind—whose is this?” she inquired, taking up another frame.

“Oh, that is Jimmy!” cried Carrissima.

“Why do you laugh?” said Bridget.

“I really don’t quite know. There’s nothing very comical in his appearance, is there? Only somehow one does laugh about him.”

“I think,” said Bridget, “he is one of the pleasantest-looking men I have ever seen.”

“Yes, Jimmy has a nice face,” returned Carrissima.

“Of course,” Bridget continued, with her eyes still on the photograph, “it isn’t so distinctly handsome as Mark’s.”

“Perhaps not,” was the answer; “I thought you had seen him while we were at Crowborough. Mr. Clynesworth. Although his name is Rupert everybody has called him Jimmy since his school days.”

“I remember Miss Clynesworth,” suggested Bridget.

“His sister—or, rather, his half-sister. She might be his mother by the way she tries to look after him.”

“Does he require a lot of looking after?” asked Bridget.

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Carrissima. “He is one of those men who somehow give you the impression they could do wonderful things, and if they would. He is immensely rich and nice-looking, as you say, and people do their best to spoil him. I won’t insist that they have succeeded. Anyhow, he is immensely good to Sybil. Her father was a physician, and she lost her mother when she was a small child. When she was about ten Doctor Clynesworth married again. His second wife was very wealthy, and, to judge by her portrait at Upper Grosvenor Street, she must have been a beautiful woman. All her money went to her only son—Jimmy, but Doctor Clynesworth had very little to leave



to Sybil. Jimmy insisted that she should continue to live at the house in which her father had practised, and he is immensely fond of her although they are about as different as any two persons can possibly be. Should you," asked Carrissima, "like me to ask her to come and see you?"

"Do you think she would?" said Bridget, returning the photograph to the table.

"I am certain she would be delighted, especially if I explain that you have no one to chaperon you," replied Carrissima, whereupon Bridget smiled as if she were quite convinced of her ability to take care of herself. On saying "Good-bye" Carrissima made a point of urging her to come to Grandison Square as often as she felt inclined, and from that time forth she regarded Miss Rosser with curiously mingled sensations.

Page 12

While it proved difficult to refrain from liking the girl, with her frank joyousness, her youthful zest in life, the possession of such qualities furnished an additional excuse for that jealousy which still dominated Carrissima's waking thoughts. Without forming any definite design, the idea certainly occurred to her that Mark might come to occupy a smaller space in Bridget's sphere of things, if only she knew a few more of his kind.

The following afternoon Carrissima, according to her promise, went to Upper Grosvenor Street, where lived Sybil Clynesworth and, when he pleased, Jimmy. He had, however, a country house at Atlinghurst, and when he stayed in London sometimes preferred a room at one of his clubs, to that which his sister always kept in readiness.

On reaching the house Carrissima was disappointed to hear that Sybil had gone away the previous morning.

"When do you expect her back?" asked Carrissima.

"I have no idea," said the butler; "but Mr. Clynesworth might know."

"Mr. Clynesworth is in London then?" cried Carrissima, and in fact, he came out of the dining-room on the left of the hall the next moment.

The Favershams, the Drivers and the Clynesworths were old friends. They had known each other from their earliest years, and the three boys had gone to the same preparatory school at Brighton. Sybil, considerably the oldest of the group, tried still to hope that Jimmy would marry Carrissima, although for that matter, she would have rejoiced to see him the husband of any woman whom she could love.

Jimmy Clynesworth was about thirty years of age; a little younger than Lawrence Faversham, a little older than Mark Driver. In height he was between them, a little above the average; not a tall man, certainly not short, well built, but not noticeably broad-shouldered, and wearing this afternoon a rough, darkish tweed suit, fitting him rather loosely. In fact, you could not imagine Jimmy tightly buttoned up or putting on an uncomfortably high collar, or doing anything solely for the sake of appearances.

He had a somewhat round face, with straight dark hair and an almost downy-looking moustache, which barely hid his lips, although it was not brushed upwards in the mode of the moment. His eyes were rather far apart and he was characterized by an appearance of perfect health and equability of temperament.

"Hullo, Carrissima!" he exclaimed, coming forward to the door with his hand outstretched, "what a stroke of luck!"

"I wanted to see Sybil," she explained.



“She has gone to the Ramsbottoms,” said Jimmy. “Old Lady Ramsbottom was taken ill. She sent for Sybil yesterday, as people do when they’re seedy, you know. Won’t you come in?” he added.

“No, thank you, Jimmy. I mustn’t stay,” returned Carrissima.

“Now, that’s sheer conventionality,” he insisted. “You would really like to come in and have a talk, but for the melancholy reason that I’m alone, you’re afraid.”



Page 13

“Oh, wise young judge!” said Carrissima.

“Well, if you’re obstinate I’ll walk back with you,” he suggested, taking a bowler hat from the stand, while the butler handed his gloves and cane. “I’ve nothing in the world to do,” he added, as they walked away from the house.

“You never have, Jimmy!”

“No, I’m the most dreadful waster,” he admitted. “I’ve just been reading a penny pamphlet—by one of the labour members, and upon my word, it made me squirm like one o’clock. Did you want to see Sybil about anything of cosmic importance?” Jimmy asked.

“Oh dear, no,” said Carrissima, as they crossed the park. “Only to ask her to call on a girl she met when we were staying at Crowborough some years ago.”

“What’s she like—pretty, by any chance?”

“Very pretty,” answered Carrissima.

“Then I’m your man. I can go instead if you give me the address, and there’s no time like the present.”

“Jimmy, you must try not to be ridiculous,” said Carrissima. “For some reason you can’t have seen her during the few days you stayed with us.”

“What is her name?”

“Bridget Rosser. Her father was a novelist——”

“Oh!” cried Jimmy, “you mean David Rosser. I remember that the colonel introduced me; besides, I happened to run up against him again a few months later. A man who never got his due. David Rosser had a style, you know: a little precious, perhaps, if that’s a drawback. So you know his daughter! I will see that Sybil goes to see Miss Rosser. Then,” said Jimmy, “I shall have a look in.”

CHAPTER V

COLONEL FAVERSHAM

Colonel Faversham came home on Wednesday evening, the day after Carrissima’s visit to Upper Grosvenor Street. She was sitting alone in the drawing-room, doubtful as to the precise date of his return, when she suddenly became aware of his presence in the house.



Colonel Faversham was apt to be noisy and blustering. He had a loud voice, a rather demonstrative cough, he walked with a heavy tread, and, in fact, was generally assertive. Carrissima, not wishing to fail in her filial duty, went down-stairs to meet him in the hall, as the butler was helping him off with his thick overcoat.

“Ah, Carrissima!” he exclaimed at the top of his voice, “I’m sorry I didn’t wire; but, to tell you the truth, I forgot all about it. Well, how are you—quite well? Glad to see me back again, eh?”

“Very glad indeed,” was the dutiful answer.

“That’s all right. I’ve had dinner—if you can call it dining in the train. Where’s the best fire to be found?”

“You may as well come to the drawing-room,” said Carrissima.

“Good!” replied the colonel, and then turned to the butler. “Knight, I’ll have some soda and whisky.”

He accompanied Carrissima up-stairs, blowing out his red cheeks and beating his cold hands together with considerable energy. Going to the fire, he stood on the hearthrug warming his palms and making perfunctory inquiries after Lawrence and Phoebe and their child.



Page 14

“How do you think I’m looking?” he demanded, suddenly facing Carrissima.

“Splendid,” she answered. “I don’t think I have ever seen you looking better.”

“Well, I never felt better,” he exclaimed, putting back his shoulders and puffing out his chest. “Never in the whole course of my life. Nobody at the hotel would believe I was anything like my age—fifty or fifty-five at the outside. Upon my soul, I can scarcely believe it myself. I can give a start to a good many youngsters yet. Not too much soda-water, Knight,” he added, when the whisky and the syphon were brought in. “What’s been happening while I’ve been away?” he asked, alone again with Carrissima.

“I wonder,” she suggested, “whether you remember our holiday at Crowborough some years ago?”

“Remember it—of course I remember it. Do you think I’m in my dotage. You make an immense mistake. My memory was never better. I will back it against yours any day.”

“Then you haven’t forgotten Mr. Rosser——”

“Rosser!” cried Colonel Faversham. “A shortish man with a red beard and an invalid wife: wrote twaddling novels. I tried to read one of them—couldn’t get through it. He played a devilish good game all the same. What about him?”

“I have met his daughter,” said Carrissima, and, in reply to her father’s demand for further information, she told him all she knew about Bridget; how that she had made Mark Driver late for dinner; how that, after some dubitation, a visit had been paid to Golfney Place, and duly returned.

On learning that Bridget was good to look upon and only a few months older than Carrissima, Colonel Faversham blinked his eyes and fingered his large grey moustache. He took a cigar from his case by and by, Carrissima trying to stifle her yawns while he talked about golf and described some of his hands at bridge. To illustrate his skill, he made her bring some cards, and, sweeping clear a space on the table, kept her up until past midnight.

Colonel Faversham always came to breakfast with brisk and almost aggressive robustness. He had an enormous appetite, and when this was at last satisfied, it was his custom to retire with the newspaper to his smoking-room until eleven o’clock. The morning was so bright that he began to regret his return to London, although it was true that he could reach his favourite golf-course in three-quarters of an hour in a taxi-cab. There, indeed, Colonel Faversham spent the most of his waking hours, usually finishing up with a couple of hours’ bridge before returning by rail to Grandison Square in time for dinner. Then he was occasionally irritable, and although he would never admit that he felt tired, Carrissima had her own opinion.



On the Saturday after his return from Church Stretton, however, he stayed at home, and as he sat smoking after an excellent luncheon, Carrissima came in wearing her hat and jacket.



Page 15

"I'm going to see Phoebe," she explained, in the act of fastening her gloves. "I don't suppose I shall be home to tea unless you want me."

"Want you!" was the answer. "Good heavens, no! Why in the world should I want you. Do you imagine I can't feed myself? Thank goodness, I'm not in my second childhood yet. Besides, I shall most likely have tea at the club. What a day, Carrissima! What a day!"

Having finished his cigar about a quarter of an hour later, Colonel Faversham went to his dressing-room, where he spent a few minutes brushing his hair with great vigour and twisting his moustache to a point. On going down to the hall again, he noticed that the street door stood open, and that Knight was talking to some one on the threshold. As the colonel took his top hat from the table, he saw that the visitor was a young lady who looked admirably in harmony with the spring season. She wore a lightish grey cloth frock and a wide-brimmed hat, beneath which a vast quantity of chestnut-coloured hair conspicuously appeared.

He reached the open door as she was on the point of turning away, but, seeing him, she hesitated.

"Miss Rosser, colonel," said Knight, standing between the pair.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Rosser," cried Colonel Faversham. "Pray come in! You wish to see Carrissima! I assure you she will be immensely disappointed if you refuse to wait. I may mention that I had the pleasure of knowing your father."

"Oh, I remember you perfectly," she replied. "As well as if it were yesterday."

"Come this way, come this way," he insisted, replacing his hat on the table as she entered the hall. "Carrissima would never forgive me. She was talking about you before I had been in the house ten minutes——"

"But you were just going out," she expostulated. "You mustn't let me take you up-stairs again."

"Stairs are nothing to me," he said. "I could climb a mountain. I have climbed many a one before to-day, and I hope I shall again. What delightful weather!" he continued, as they reached the drawing-room. "It makes one feel quite—quite capable of anything."

She sat down, while the colonel talked about Crowborough and David Rosser; remembering whose vocation, he realized the desirability of giving the conversation a bookish turn. While he was remarking upon some of the most recent publications—quoted from advertisements, for he seldom opened a book—Knight and a small footman brought in the tea equipage. Colonel Faversham invited Bridget to officiate,



and told himself how delectable she looked as, half-shyly, she passed his cup and saucer.

“You know, Colonel Faversham,” she said, “I cannot help feeling immensely guilty.”

“A libel,” he protested. “I have never seen a more transparently innocent face in the whole course of my life.”

“Still, I am certain I have kept you from going to your club or somewhere. Of course I am duly grateful. Carrissima said I might come here whenever I felt too lonely.”

Page 16

“My dear Miss Rosser,” said Colonel Faversham, “I am afraid it must be a rather dull life you’re leading. But it will be entirely your own fault if ever you find yourself bored in future. Carrissima has no end of friends, and hers shall be yours. Then there’s my daughter-in-law! As for books, my library was left to me by an uncle who had nothing better to do than to read from morning till night. You must allow me to send you a suitable selection.”

When Carrissima came home, a little later, she raised her eyebrows on seeing Bridget Rosser presiding at the tea-table, with Colonel Faversham seated rather close by her side. As he began to explain his good fortune in meeting the visitor at the door, Carrissima told herself that she knew exactly how things would turn out!

The truth was that Colonel Faversham had always been somewhat dangerously susceptible. Lawrence could never feel certain that his father was too old to think of marrying again. Carrissima knew that for the next few days he would talk of nobody but Bridget; that he would lend her books, and perhaps even express a wish to invite her to dine. He would on every opportunity pay her extravagant compliments and make himself generally ridiculous; then he would begin to forget her existence and fall back into his ordinary routine of bridge and golf until another attractive face arrested his attention.

Although he sang Miss Rosser’s praises loudly that Saturday afternoon, and spoke of her frequently on Sunday and during the next few evenings, Carrissima scarcely suspected that the colonel had met Bridget since her visit to Grandison Square. She was certainly astounded when, going to see her small nephew one afternoon a week or so later, she found that she had run her head into a hornets’ nest.

“You have done a fine thing!” said Lawrence. “That is the worst of you.”

“Oh, do please tell me what is the best, or at least the medium, for a change,” was the answer.

“My dear Carrie——”

“If you call me Carrie you will drive me mad,” said Carrissima.

“I fancy you must be,” exclaimed her brother, standing on the hearthrug and looking as solemn as the judge he hoped some day to become. One hand was thrust between the buttons of his morning coat, the other clasped its lapelle, his head was flung back, and one foot rested on the fender. “An immense pity,” he added, “that you can never mind your own business.”

Carrissima skilfully mimicked his attitude.



“May it please you, m'lud, and gentlemen of the jury,” she said, causing Lawrence hastily to change his pose, and Phoebe to look a little scandalized.

“There's a time for everything,” he insisted, with a blush. “Let me tell you this is no laughing matter.”

“You should not make yourself look so ridiculous,” said Carrissima. “Why should you everlastingly be retained for the prosecution?”



Page 17

“You would certainly require a clever defence,” returned Lawrence. “A fine thing you have done by your unnecessary interference.”

“But what am I accused of?” she demanded. “What is all the fuss about?”

“As I was walking home on Saturday,” he explained, “I turned up the Haymarket. The people were just going in to the matinee——”

“I mustn’t forget I want to go to the Haymarket,” said Carrissima.

“Do, for goodness’ sake,” he expostulated, “try to fix your mind on one thing at a time.”

“It depends on its nature,” said Carrissima.

“Whom should I see getting out of a taxi,” cried Lawrence, “but the colonel and some woman.”

“My dear Lawrence,” was the answer, “knowing father as well as you pretend to know everybody, surely you cannot imagine there’s anything very unusual about that.”

“Carrissima,” interposed Phoebe, “I really think from Lawrence’s description that she must have been Bridget Rosser.”

“Oh, but surely not!”

“I think it was,” Phoebe insisted.

“He has only seen her once,” said Carrissima. “That was on Saturday week. She would scarcely——”

“Let me ask you one question!” cried Lawrence.

“Oh, a dozen,” said Carrissima.

“How do you know that was the only time he saw the woman?”

“Of course, I can’t say that I know for certain,” she admitted.

“There you are! You don’t know. You don’t even believe. You simply jump to a conclusion. You have no means of knowing. Depend upon it, he has been at Golfney Place over and over again. We shall be fortunate if he doesn’t end by marrying her.”

“Who is jumping to a conclusion now?” said Carrissima.



“Lawrence dear,” suggested Phoebe, quite humbly, “I understood you were afraid she might marry Mark. After all, she can’t very well make victims of both him and your father.”

“No, but she may like to have two strings to her bow. She may prefer a bird in the hand, and if he should escape, there’s Mark to fall back upon.”

“After all,” said Carrissima, “you have not even seen Bridget. You don’t know she has the slightest desire to marry anybody.”

“She is simply an adventuress,” was the answer. “A pretty woman on the make.”

Although Carrissima had little reason to be prejudiced in Miss Rosser’s favour, she was the possessor of an elementary sense of justice, and, moreover, it was always a satisfaction to contradict her brother.

“I don’t admit you have any right to say that,” she protested. “I saw a great deal of her at Crowborough——”

“Five years ago!”

“From what I have seen since,” Carrissima continued, “I believe you have found a mare’s nest. You seem to forget that father is sixty-five.”

“Ah, yes, but he doesn’t begin to realize the fact,” said Lawrence. “He thinks he is quite capable of acting like an ordinary man of half his age. If you had tried to provide your friend with an easy prey, you couldn’t have gone a surer way to work.”



Page 18

Carrissima, however, remained still unconvinced. She walked home to Grandison Square with the inclination to scoff at her brother's fears, although it was true that she was beginning to wish that Bridget had never crossed Colonel Faversham's path.

CHAPTER VI

CONCERNING BIRTHDAYS

"Carrissima!" said Colonel Faversham, as he rose from the breakfast-table a day or two after her conversation with Lawrence and Phoebe.

"Yes, father," she answered.

"I have been thinking that it is high time we asked Miss Rosser to dine with us."

He was standing by the window holding the morning paper in his hands, and as he spoke he raised it so that Carrissima could not see his face.

"Oh, but do you really think that is necessary?" she answered, and crushing the paper into a shapeless mass, the colonel turned upon his daughter quite fiercely.

Of course he was convinced that there could be nothing in the least ridiculous in his behaviour! A man, as they say, is as old as he feels, and especially during the last fortnight Colonel Faversham had felt almost a boy again. The spring was in his blood! Moreover, he flattered himself that he had not begun to look old! Still, he was sensitive lest Carrissima should fancy he was making an ass of himself, and, as usual at such times, he began to bluster.

"Necessary!" he shouted, growing dangerously red in the face. "If it comes to that it isn't necessary we should dine at all. Most of us eat a great deal too much. Anyhow, it is very desirable that Miss Rosser should be treated with common courtesy. Besides, I wish it. That, I imagine, ought to be enough! We don't want a crowd or anything elaborate. No infernal fuss or ceremony. Just a family party: just Lawrence and his wife. They have never seen Miss Rosser!"

"Oh yes," said Carrissima. "Lawrence has seen her."

"She told me only the other day that she hadn't met him. I wondered why on earth you hadn't introduced her to Phoebe!"

"Lawrence," Carrissima explained, "saw Bridget going into the Haymarket Theatre with you the other afternoon."



“Good heavens!” exclaimed Colonel Faversham, stamping about the room, “it has come to this! I mustn’t go to the play without begging my children’s permission. I haven’t a scrap of individuality of my own left! I am compelled to ask Lawrence before I move a step!”

“Not at all,” said Carrissima. “Only I seem to recollect your telling me you were going to play at bridge at the club that Saturday afternoon.”

“And mayn’t a man change his mind, I should like to know!”

“In time to book seats,” suggested Carrissima.

“No sarcasm, if you please,” was the answer. “I won’t allow it. I simply won’t allow it in my house,” he added, clenching his fist and bringing it down heavily on the breakfast-table so that the cups and saucers rattled.



Page 19

“Oh well, father,” said Carrissima, “there’s not the least use in getting angry, you know.”

“I am not angry,” cried Colonel Faversham, rubbing the side of his hand.

“I don’t know what you would call it!”

“I may have been a little vehement,” he replied. “No wonder. I make a simple suggestion, and surely I have a right to expect my daughter to adopt it.”

“If Bridget is to be asked to dine,” said Carrissima, with a sigh, “I think we ought to invite some one outside our own family.”

“Am I the master here, or am I not?” demanded Colonel Faversham. “Very well! You will write to Phoebe to-day. Get her and Lawrence to fix an evening—this week if possible—and then ask Miss Rosser.”

“Lawrence is not likely to come,” suggested Carrissima.

“Why not?”

“Anyhow, he refused to allow Phoebe to go to Golfney Place!”

“You will kindly do as I tell you,” said the colonel. “Lawrence has more sense than you give him credit for.”

Carrissima was compelled to admit that her father had a right to act as he pleased. She wrote to Phoebe the same morning, and Lawrence, reading the letter on his return from the Temple, at once declared that nothing on earth should induce him to go and meet “that woman”!

Having dined, however, and smoked a cigarette, he began to take a more tolerant view of the situation. Colonel Faversham had money to bequeath! As Lawrence told Phoebe, it might be their duty to pocket their feelings and consider Victor’s future.

Colonel Faversham had the satisfaction of hearing from Bridget’s own lips that she should be delighted to dine at his house. He seemed to live only for Bridget during these days. His golf was neglected, and he had come near to a quarrel with one of his oldest friends for revoking twice in one evening’s bridge.

Whatever he did, wherever he went, his thoughts insisted on wandering to Golfney Place. Although he longed to shower expensive gifts upon Bridget, he durst not at present go beyond flowers, and it was only after much persuasion that she consented to let him take her to the Haymarket Theatre. Whilst he revelled in her society and his hope of being permitted to enjoy it uninterruptedly for the remainder of his days ran high, he dreaded to imagine what Lawrence would have to say on the subject.



Colonel Faversham felt confident that his son would prove “nasty,” and even Carrissima could scarcely be expected to feel pleased by the prospect of a step-mother only a few months older than herself. The colonel found himself between two fires: longing on the one hand for the time to come when he might discreetly ask Bridget to be his wife, and fearing, on the other hand, the announcement of his good news!

It is true that the rose was not entirely free from thorns. In his less cheerful moods he could not regard Mark Driver as other than a possibly disturbing factor. Bridget made no secret of the frequency and gratification of his former visits to Golfney Place, with the result that Colonel Faversham wondered occasionally whether she looked upon himself rather too paternally. He would then puff out his chest, tug his moustache and make various other efforts to convince her that he was still in the prime of life.



Page 20

Nevertheless there hung persistently in the background the tragedy of his years! He might upon occasion strike one as a comic figure, and of course he saw no reason why he should not live to be a hundred. An exceptional age, no doubt, but then he was an exceptional man, as perhaps every man appears to himself. But Colonel Faversham was not already without warnings which he would not admit for the world. In his desire to convince himself that he was as robust as ever, he continued to take the same amount of exercise as he had enjoyed twenty years earlier. No one knew how weary the evenings found him, and, besides, there was that increasing stiffness of his joints.

He was particularly eager that Bridget should create a favourable impression on Lawrence, as indeed she could scarcely fail to do. Carrissima, notwithstanding a lamentable sense of inhospitality, when the evening arrived found it on the whole rather amusing. Her brother entered the drawing-room at Grandison Square with his head higher in the air than ever, while Phoebe looked as usual serenely pretty and contented. There was Bridget Rosser with her beautiful shoulders bare, with her piquant face, her glorious hair, obviously bent upon enjoyment.

Lawrence took her in to dinner, and Phoebe certainly thought that she had deliberately set herself to captivate him. So did the colonel, but Carrissima made a valiant effort to do her guest justice. It really seemed too paltry to be critical because Mark admired her. In Carrissima's opinion Bridget was not exerting herself to make a favourable impression either on Lawrence or his father. No such effort was necessary! Nature had anticipated any endeavours of her own. With her face and figure it must be positively difficult not to please any man with eyes in his head. Her curiously childlike ingenuousness was too perfect to be counterfeited. Bridget charmed because she must.

When she referred to the report of a recent lawsuit in which Lawrence had admittedly increased his already growing reputation, Carrissima smiled to see him unbend, although she might feel inclined to frown when she noticed that Colonel Faversham's eyes scarcely left Bridget's face until she rose from her chair to follow her hostess upstairs.

In the drawing-room, while the men were smoking, she inquired after Phoebe's boy. She declared she was "so fond of children" in a tone which compelled credence. She wished to know the colour of Victor's eyes and hair; she listened to Phoebe's marvellous stories of his precocity without the slightest sign of scepticism or boredom.

"He is going to have a party of his own next week," said his mother.

"Beginning early," returned Bridget, as the door opened and Lawrence and the colonel came in.



“What’s that, what’s that?” demanded Colonel Faversham, crossing the room to Bridget’s side.

“I was telling Miss Rosser,” Phoebe explained, “that Victor is going to have a party. Eight children all under three.”



Page 21

“Good heavens!” said the colonel.

“I was wondering whether you would care to come and see them,” suggested Phoebe, and she would have liked to invite the sympathetic Bridget, only that she felt certain Lawrence would disapprove.

“No, thank you, Phoebe, no, thank you,” was the prompt reply. “Still, you needn’t be afraid. I shall not forget his birthday. You’ll see!”

“Oh, then it is Victor’s birthday!” cried Bridget.

“On Tuesday,” said Phoebe.

“How old will he be?”

“Two,” returned his delighted mother, and Bridget leaned back in her chair with a profound sigh.

“Oh dear,” she murmured, “and I shall actually be twenty-three on Wednesday!”

“Now what are you going to do to celebrate the occasion?” demanded Colonel Faversham.

“Let me see,” said Bridget; “I shall breakfast alone, have lunch alone, tea alone and dinner in the same delightful company. How different it used to be when we lived at Crowborough! The day was a kind of festival. Before I was grown up we always had a primrose party.”

Carrissima could not refrain from looking at her sympathetically. Although her lips were smiling, her eyes seemed not a little pitiful. It was impossible not to like the girl, and, moreover, if it were granted that she was (as Lawrence insisted) manoeuvring for Colonel Faversham, it seemed to follow that there must be less fear for Mark! Perhaps, in some occult, subconscious way, this unbidden idea may have quickened Carrissima’s regard, and in any case she deprecated the lonely birthday, forming a small benevolent scheme of her own for its celebration. In the first place, she determined to send Bridget a present, and then she would go to Golfney Place during the afternoon and take her out to tea. A modest programme, but still better than nothing.

On Tuesday afternoon Carrissima was, naturally, bound to Phoebe and Victor, but during the morning she made her way to Donaldson’s, the jeweller’s, in Old Bond Street, where her family had dealt for many years. Lawrence went there for presents for his wife; Colonel Faversham (who, to do him justice, was generous in this respect) never went anywhere else at Christmas time or on Carrissima’s birthday.



She had not by any means made up her mind what to buy, and, indeed, in Carrissima's eyes shopping was always an elaborate rite. She stood for a few minutes gazing in at the tempting window, and entering presently, began to inspect various trays of rings and brooches, although she had no intention to purchase anything of the kind. During the process Mr. Donaldson, who had known her from childhood, came to the assistance of the salesman and talked about the weather. At last a silver card-case was selected.

"I wonder," said Carrissima, "whether it would be possible to have it engraved by tomorrow morning."

"I think that can be managed," returned Mr. Donaldson.



Page 22

“You might send it to Golfney Place with my card,” suggested Carrissima, taking one from her case.

“It shall be there quite early, madam,” said the salesman, making a note in a long, slim book.

At the moment Carrissima scarcely noticed the significance of the fact that he appeared already to know the name of the recipient and the number of her house. He had certainly written “Miss Rosser, 5——” before Carrissima had time to give him the address!

“The initials are B——”

But he had scribbled “B. R.” in his book while yet the sentence was incomplete.

“How did you know?” she demanded eagerly.

“I beg your pardon, madam!” said the salesman, whilst Mr. Donaldson drew watchfully nearer.

“You wrote down the initials before I told you what they were!” she exclaimed.

“I think not,” said Mr. Donaldson hastily. “I think you are making a mistake!”

She knew she had done nothing of the kind. She knew that Colonel Faversham must have been at the jeweller’s before her this morning; that he had selected something to commemorate Bridget’s birthday; something upon which also her initials were to be engraved.

“After all,” she said, “I think you shall send the card-case to Grandison Square tomorrow morning.”

Carrissima paid the bill, but in the reaction of her feelings she doubted whether she should give Bridget a present after all. It began to look as if there were some justification for Lawrence’s suspicions, and for the first time she experienced serious fears for the future.

CHAPTER VII

THE EXCURSION

Carrissima could not make up her mind. When she set forth to Charteris Street to help in the entertainment of Phoebe’s extremely juvenile guests, she was determined not to go near Golfney Place the following day. Seeing her amongst the children no one



would have imagined that she had a sorrow in the world; she was the life and soul of the youthful party, and finally returned to Grandison Square in a becomingly dishevelled condition in time for dinner.

The following morning Colonel Faversham went to the hall at eleven o'clock, wearing a flower in his buttonhole. Carrissima accompanying him dutifully to the door, remarked that he had a new top hat.

"Do you think it suits me?" he asked, turning to face her. "Not too much brim, Carrissima?"

"It looks a trifle small," she answered.

"Small—nonsense! A man doesn't want a hat to come down over his eyes. I'm not a foggy yet, I hope."

"Why, of course not," she exclaimed. "Still, you will have to hold it on in the wind."

"Anyhow, that's better than using infernal pins that are a danger to the community," said Colonel Faversham. "I'll tell you what: next time I choose a hat I'll get you to come with me."

"I suppose you will be home to lunch," she suggested, telling herself she was shamefully cunning. But she could not help suspecting that he was off on some jaunt with Bridget, and no doubt she felt a little bitter about it.



Page 23

“Shall I?” he answered, with a laugh. “Don’t take too much for granted. I may get a snack at the club. Anyhow, you had better not wait.”

She understood that he did not intend to return and wondered how she should dispose of her silver card-case. In no event would she go near Golfney Place that day! At about noon, however, it arrived from Donaldson’s in a cardboard box, and really seemed too pretty to be wasted. There, too, were Bridget’s initials, neatly engraved on its face, and, perhaps, after all, Colonel Faversham was reckoning without his guest. Miss Rosser might refuse to accept his present, whatever it might be—Carrissima felt very curious to know! She might decline to go out with him, and then her birthday would be spent in utter loneliness. Carrissima pictured her with melancholy reminiscences of her father and mother. Because whatever the girl’s faults might be, she was certainly not lacking in natural affection. Surely some allowances ought to be made for the circumstances of the case. Carrissima was excellent at making allowances for people! She was one of those tiresome, inconsistent young women who remain blind to the teachings of reason and experience, and ever find some remnants of good in the rag-bags of humanity.

Bridget had lost her mother when she was eighteen! She had knocked about with her father for several years since. Of course she ought not to have encouraged Mark’s visits night after night, as doubtless she had done; but, then, she may have had the intelligence to see that Mark was a man in a thousand—in a thousand! Mark was a man in a million!

In the end Carrissima left Grandison Square at a few minutes before four o’clock that afternoon, and having rung the bell at Number 5, Golfney Place, she was crushed to hear from Miller that Bridget had been out since a quarter to twelve.

“Oh!” said Carrissima, ashamed of her own artfulness, “I suppose she went with Colonel Faversham?”

“Yes,” returned Miller.

“Do you know where they have gone?” asked Carrissima.

“Colonel Faversham told the chauffeur to drive to Richmond.”

“To Richmond—thank you,” said Carrissima. “I will come another day.” Then she turned away with the card-case still in her hand and a heavier weight at her heart. She wished she had never gone to Crowborough that summer five years ago! Very devoutly she wished that Mark Driver had not visited the Old Masters’ Exhibition. She had not walked far on her way home when she saw Jimmy Clynesworth coming towards her, and thought it rather early in the year for him to be wearing a straw hat in London.



Of course he stopped to speak. Jimmy was not the man to allow any one he knew to pass by, although for once in a way Carrissima would sooner have avoided the encounter.

“Have you heard from Sybil lately?” she asked.

“Oh yes, she’s still with old Lady Ramsbottom—enjoying herself to the top of her bent, no doubt! You may be certain Sybil’s having a rattling good time! She always revels in illness. Goodness knows when I shall see her again. Where are you bound for?” asked Jimmy, as Carrissima showed signs of impatience.



Page 24

“For home and tea,” was the answer.

“Let me give you some,” he urged, walking on by her side.

“No, thank you, Jimmy!”

“Carrissima,” he said, with a glance at her profile, “what in the world’s the matter?”

“Why, nothing, of course!”

“Oh yes, there’s something,” he insisted. “I flatter myself I’m good at reading faces, you know, and yours is always interesting—one never has to read between the lines.”

“Does that mean I wear my heart on my sleeve?” she demanded.

“Naturally you fancy you’re inscrutable,” said Jimmy, with a laugh. “We all do. Come now, suppose you tell me what it is!”

“What would be the use—if there were anything?”

“You might enable me to do you a good turn! If I couldn’t cure your woe I could possibly make you forget it. Besides, people do tell me things. You would be astonished to hear what confidences are poured into my ears.”

“Is that because you’re sympathetic, or simply because you’re rich?” suggested Carrissima.

“What’s that you’re carrying?” he asked, with a shrug.

“A card-case,” she replied.

“May I look?” he said, holding out his hand. After a momentary hesitation she let him take it, whereupon he had no scruple about opening the box. “Hullo! who is B. R.?” he demanded.

“Nobody you know, Jimmy!”

“Bridget Rosser!” he exclaimed. “You see what a memory I have. Is to-day any special occasion?”

“Her birthday,” said Carrissima.

“How old is she?”

“Twenty-three!”



“What a delectable age! The same as your own. But if you’re taking Miss Rosser a present,” he added, “how is it you are on the way home?”

“Jimmy, you make me tired,” said Carrissima. “I wish you wouldn’t ask so many questions.”

“I can’t help it,” he replied. “An inquiring turn of mind, you know. I haven’t forgotten that Sybil is to pay your friend a visit directly she gets back.”

“Indeed, there is not the slightest necessity,” said Carrissima.

“Hullo! so you’ve changed your mind?”

“I suppose that is allowable.”

“Where does she live?” Jimmy persisted.

“Wild horses wouldn’t drag her address from me!” cried Carrissima, laughing quite cheerfully, “and kindly give me back the card-case.”

He came to a standstill close to Colonel Faversham’s house as he put it back in her hand.

“Now, I’m off,” he said. “That’s all I was waiting for.”

“What?” asked Carrissima.

“To hear you laugh again.”

“Jimmy,” she said, “I sometimes wonder whether your inveterate cheerfulness is the sign of a shallow mind!”

“Oh well, you see, it’s one of the few useful things I can do,” he answered. “To swing a light about.”

“Still, it isn’t always safe to go full speed ahead,” she suggested.



Page 25

“Oh dear, no,” said Jimmy. “We all have to put the brakes hard on now and then; but the fact remains that a coward dies a hundred deaths, you know.”

Carrissima entered the house a moment after he walked away, and going to the drawing-room sat down to tea just as she was in her hat and jacket.

Could it be possible that her father seriously thought of marriage? In that event, the whole course of her life would be altered! She could never consent to stay at home if Bridget ruled the roast! Looking at her watch, presently, Carrissima saw that it was about the time when Lawrence could usually be found in the bosom of his family, and going down-stairs again she let herself out of the house. On reaching Charteris Street she saw him with Victor on his knees, whilst Phoebe on hers looked at the boy with anxious eyes.

He looked pale and fretful in consequence of yesterday’s party, and when his nurse had carried him out of the room to an accompaniment of noisy expostulations, Carrissima turned to her brother—

“Lawrence,” she said, “I am really in the most dreadful state of mind. I am beginning to wonder whether you could possibly have been right, after all.”

“Thank you,” answered Lawrence stiffly. “But, of course, a prophet is not without honour——”

“Yes, I know,” Carrissima interrupted. “It’s about Bridget.”

“What has she been doing?” asked Phoebe.

“You remember she told us that to-day would be her birthday?”

“The most barefaced hint I ever heard in my life,” said Lawrence.

“Well, I thought I would take her a small present——”

“A pity you can’t hold yourself in a little more,” was the answer. “You must gush!”

“Anyhow,” Carrissima continued quite humbly, “I went to Donaldson’s—Phoebe, I saw the duckiest little opal brooch. I was half tempted——”

“For goodness’ sake get along with the story!” cried Lawrence fretfully.

“I bought a card-case—silver,” said Carrissima.

“Gun metal would have done just as well,” suggested Lawrence.



“When I asked the man to engrave Bridget’s initials on it,” said Carrissima, “he knew what they were without being told. He knew her number in Golfney Place too!”

“Ah, then father had been there before you!” exclaimed Lawrence.

“Yes,” answered Carrissima, “and he has taken her to Richmond to lunch!”

“What did I tell you?” said Lawrence.

“Oh, please don’t tell me again,” entreated Carrissima. “What is the use?”

“A pity you didn’t think of all this,” he persisted, “before you took the woman up. I knew what she was. I told Phoebe.”

“What nonsense,” said Carrissima. “As if any human being could have imagined she would dream of marrying father that night Mark told us he had met her again.”

“Well,” cried Lawrence in his most weighty tone, “we may see something when Mark comes back from Paris. Odd that he hasn’t written to Phoebe once since he went away—his only sister! Mark may upset the apple cart yet. It’s certain he was pretty far gone, and I don’t suppose she cares whom she marries, as long as he has a decent income. It’s true she would naturally prefer a husband who is not likely to live many years.”



Page 26

“Oh, Lawrence!” expostulated Phoebe. “How can you talk like that. He doesn’t mean what he says, Carrissima.”

“Indeed I do,” he answered. “I am a man of the world.”

“Still,” said Carrissima, “you needn’t be a man of the flesh and the devil!”

“Anyhow,” returned Lawrence, “we shall see what happens when Mark comes back.”

“One thing is certain,” said Carrissima, “nothing on earth would induce me to live at home if father were to marry Bridget.”

“As if you could live anywhere else. Where could you go?”

“I shouldn’t stay there!” said Carrissima.

“The idea of a girl of your age setting up on her own is ridiculous,” was the reply. “As bad as the other woman! You have made your bed and you will have to lie on it.”

“Ah, well!” said Carrissima, “it won’t be at Number 13, Grandison Square.”

CHAPTER VIII

A PROPOSAL

“Has Colonel Faversham returned?” asked Carrissima when Knight opened the door.

“The colonel is in the smoking-room,” was the answer, and she went there at once. He was leaning back in an easy-chair, with his feet on the fender, a cigar between his lips, and an unusually benignant expression on his face.

“Well, Carrissima,” he inquired amicably, “where have you sprung from?”

“I went to Charteris Street,” she returned. “What have you been doing since eleven?”

“What have I been doing?” said Colonel Faversham, rubbing his palms violently together. “Well, now, to tell you the truth, I’ve been out on the spree! Such a glorious day! I couldn’t resist the temptation. A man at the club—I don’t think you know him—Comberbatch—asked me to share a taxi and run down to Richmond to lunch. Delightful in the park. And the view from the Terrace! It made me long to go on the river again.”

“Why—why didn’t you?” Carrissima faltered.

“Come, come, what are you dreaming of?” said Colonel Faversham, with one of his boisterous laughs. “Picture my rowing in these clothes: a frock coat!”



“Oh well,” she returned, “I scarcely imagined you would row yourself.”

“Not row myself!” he exclaimed. “Why shouldn’t I, in the name of goodness? Let me tell you I can pull a good oar still. If only I had had my flannels! You seem to think I’m fit for nothing.”

Colonel Faversham astonished Carrissima by rising from his chair and taking off his coat. Removing the links from his shirt-cuff, he solemnly turned back the sleeve, then clenching his fist, slowly raised his forearm, looking the while so red in the face that she grew quite alarmed.

“Feel that!” he said.

“I will take your word for it——”

“Kindly do as I ask you,” he insisted, with his arm still bent. “I can’t stand like this all day.”

Carrissima accordingly felt his biceps with her thumb and forefinger.



Page 27

“As hard as wood,” she said.

“Ah!” he answered, with a smile of relief and satisfaction, as he turned down his shirtsleeve again; “I thought that would astonish you. Not row myself!”

He was obviously in the highest spirits, and indeed he was still under the influence of the intoxicating pleasures of the earlier part of the day. Not that this had passed without some drawbacks. The present which he had bought at Donaldson’s had been the cause of considerable cogitation. He was hampered by the fear that Bridget might regard what he would like to bestow upon her as too significant, and in the end had selected a handsome and costly crocodile-hide dressing-bag. It would prove suitable for her honeymoon, and it was with not a little regret that he felt bound to order the initials “B. R.” to be engraved on the gold stoppers of the bottles, instead of “B. F.” The alteration could, however, no doubt be made in due season.

Not wishing to open Carrissima’s eyes unnecessarily soon, Colonel Faversham gave instructions for the bag to be sent to Number 5, Golfney Place, before half-past ten on Wednesday morning, and he felt deeply disappointed when Bridget gently but firmly refused to accept it.

Incongruously enough, she was persuaded nevertheless to accompany him to Richmond, and the drive at close quarters in the taxi-cab, the *tete-a-tete* meal, the bottle of champagne which Bridget scarcely tasted, had, collectively and separately, inflamed Colonel Faversham to the sticking-point. When they reached Golfney Place at half-past five, another disappointment lay in store for him, inasmuch as she refused to allow him to enter the house—she felt too tired after the drive! He could come to-morrow, and, meantime, he might send for the dressing-bag.

She could be so tantalizing now and then, that it was easy to believe she was scoffing at him. During the day she had more than once dragged Mark’s name into the conversation, and even Carrissima did not feel more curious respecting their precise relationship than her father.

Notwithstanding his anxiety concerning the critic on his hearth, and the more exacerbating one in Charteris Street, Colonel Faversham had reached the end of his tether. This delightful girl, with her charming ingenuousness, her high spirits, might actually become his wife in the course of a few months.

A few months! She might be prevailed upon to marry him within the next few weeks. What cause could there possibly be for delay? Surely he was entitled to please himself! Absurd to imagine that a man of his age must regulate his life to please a slip of a girl like Carrissima, or a solemn young puritan like Lawrence!



When Colonel Faversham arrived at Golfney Place on Thursday morning, Bridget was wearing a new frock; quite light, almost white, in fact, and setting off her slender figure to the most admirable advantage. How many new frocks he had seen her wearing, Colonel Faversham found it difficult to count. The crocodile-hide dressing-bag stood ominously on the table, and, by way of a greeting, she reminded him that he had been asked to send for it.



Page 28

“Confound the bag!” he retorted. “If you won’t keep the thing, pitch it in the dusthole. Bridget,” he continued, standing close by her side, “I want you to accept all I have in the world and myself into the bargain. I am not going to blow my own trumpet. Thank goodness I was never that sort of man! I wish I were a boy just because you’re a girl, but if you’ll take me as I am, you’ll make me the happiest man in the world, and I’ll do my best to see you never regret it.”

“I shan’t pretend that you’ve taken me entirely by surprise,” said Bridget.

“Surprise!” exclaimed Colonel Faversham. “No one could have shown much more plainly what he wanted. There’s not much shilly-shally about me. For that matter, I made up my mind long ago——”

“Oh, but you really haven’t known me very long,” she suggested. “It can’t be more than a month since Mark went to Paris.”

“I wish,” said the colonel, “he had gone to Hades!”

“I know you are horridly jealous,” she continued, “because you always change the subject when I mention his name. I like Mark Driver immensely!”

“Anyhow, I want to hear you say you like me better,” said Colonel Faversham.

She stood looking at him critically—and very tantalizingly—with her head slightly on one side; and while he devoured her with his eyes, Bridget slowly took a chair.

“But why should you try to make me say what isn’t true?” she demanded.

“I hope it would be,” urged Colonel Faversham.

“I am not at all certain,” she said quietly. “It’s a vastly important question. It requires time for consideration.”

“How long, for goodness’ sake?”

“I really couldn’t possibly tell you offhand. I shouldn’t care to bind myself.”

“I am desperately impatient to bind you, though,” answered Colonel Faversham. “I would see to it we had a good time. There’s no wish of yours that shouldn’t be gratified—in reason, you know.”

“Haven’t you discovered by this time how unreasonable I am?” she asked.

“Bridget, come now, be a good girl!” he murmured.



“That shows how little you know me,” she returned, “because I’m not in the least good.”

“Well, well, call yourself what you please! Only have a little love for me, and I don’t care what the devil you are!” exclaimed Colonel Faversham, and at that moment he meant precisely what he said.

“I am not certain I have,” she cried, with a laugh. “You see that whatever I may be I am candid. I don’t think I have a particle of what I suppose you mean by ‘love’ for any living being. Perhaps there’s something wanting in my constitution. I don’t believe I shall ever be capable of ‘loving’ anybody as long as I live.”

“Good gracious,” was the answer, “don’t tantalize me. Why do you keep me on tenterhooks? Say you will marry me, and we’ll leave everything else.”



Page 29

"I can't say so this morning," she insisted. "I can say that I won't if you like."

"For heaven's sake, don't do that!" Colonel Faversham quite humbly entreated.

"Then please don't bother me for an answer," she said, and, with all her lightness, he realized that she had a will of her own. His only consolation was that, if her word could be accepted, she had not given her heart to Mark or any one else. Whether she was to be believed or not, however, his infatuation remained unaffected. He had reached a condition in which he longed for possession upon any terms whatsoever, but since it was obvious that she did not intend to pledge herself this morning, there was no help for it! He must be as little discontented as possible to leave the question open for the present.

"Well, then," he suggested, "if I manage to bottle up my feelings for a week or so, will you try to think favourably of me in the meantime?"

"Why, yes, of course I will," she answered. "But it must be distinctly understood. I am as free as the wind! I have not promised anything."

Beyond this she could not be prevailed upon to go, but before he left Golfney Place, she gratified him by consenting to keep the dressing-bag. She thanked him, indeed, very charmingly; so that, notwithstanding his rebuff, Colonel Faversham left the house disappointed, it is true, but even more her slave than ever.

CHAPTER IX

MARK RETURNS

It was one afternoon towards the end of April, and Carrissima congratulated herself that she had made up her mind to spend it indoors, although the trees in the parks were in fresh green leaf, and London was looking its brightest and best. There had been, however, a few showers at luncheon-time, and Colonel Faversham had set out through one afterwards "to his club."

Carrissima, of course, knew very well that he was bound for Golfney Place, and for her own part, she determined to stay at home until tea-time, with the consequence that she saw Mark about half-past four.

He entered the room looking as handsome, as alert and energetic as ever; a man, you felt certain, who would succeed in making his way in the world, as indeed he fully intended to do.

"When did you get back?" asked Carrissima, remembering that her welcome must not be too cordial.



“Late yesterday afternoon,” he answered.

“Have you had a good time?”

“Oh, ripping!” he continued. “Old Wentworth knows his Paris, and we didn’t waste many hours.”

Six months ago it would not have been in the least surprising that he should pay her a visit directly he returned, but now she was wondering whether he had already seen Bridget Rosser.

“You’re not staying in Charteris Street?” she asked.

“Not a bit of it. I’m at Duffield’s Hotel again for the present. But I thought I ought to give Phoebe a look up last night. I went there after dinner. She tells me you have seen Bridget?” said Mark, leaning forward rather eagerly in his chair.



Page 30

“Oh yes, it seemed quite the natural thing to do,” answered Carrissima, unable to repress a sigh as she remembered the train of circumstances which had followed her visit to Golfney Place.

“That sounds as if you wish you hadn’t done it!” he suggested.

“Have you seen her yet?” asked Carrissima, perceiving her opportunity.

“No,” said Mark; “but I’ve listened to a good deal about her. Lawrence is great on the subject. By Jove! according to him she might be the complete adventuress. He insists she has been trying her hand on the colonel—not without success!”

“Does the suggestion strike you as being inconceivable?” demanded Carrissima.

“Oh well, you forget that I have been away for more than a month. I have no means of forming an opinion——”

“Your previous experiences!” said Carrissima; and Mark stared at the carpet.

His previous experiences of Bridget had, no doubt, proved entirely agreeable. During Carrissima’s absence from London in the weeks after Christmas, when he had no occupation for his idle hands, he had certainly spent many enjoyable hours at Number 5, Golfney Place, and it had been necessary on more than one occasion to remind himself that discretion was the better part of valour.

If it had not been for Carrissima, the temptation to meet Bridget’s apparently “coming-on disposition” half way would have become more acute, and without any idea of a closer relationship, he might perchance have gone farther over night than he would have thought desirable the next morning.

Without being a coxcomb, Mark Driver, during those evening interviews, had been inclined to think that this was precisely what Bridget desired; but then again, he reasoned himself into the opinion that she must be entirely innocent of any such idea, which was due, rather, to his own less well-ordered imagination. And, besides, there was Carrissima!

“Goodness knows,” he answered at last. “I came here this afternoon to check Lawrence’s opinion by your own.”

Now it was Carrissima’s turn to hesitate. She wished to play the game and not for the world would she attempt to belittle Bridget if Mark desired to exalt her. On the other hand any reluctance to express a candid opinion might appear suspicious in his eyes!

“Oh well,” she said, “there are certain facts which can’t be disputed. You must draw your own conclusions. Bridget lets father take her to the play; to all sorts of places; she



receives him every day in the week, and he buys her presents. On the few occasions when I have seen them together,” Carrissima added, “he has made himself—well, I, if it were not for my filial respect, I should say ridiculous.”

“Of course,” answered Mark, “it’s easy enough to believe that the colonel admires her. Any man must! All I can say is that if Lawrence has any justification I am immensely sorry.”

For what? Carrissima wondered. Was he sorry for her sake, or for his own? Because Colonel Faversham was by way of winning Bridget, or because he himself had consequently lost her?



Page 31

“So am I,” murmured Carrissima.

“I can’t help seeing,” Mark continued, “that I am responsible in a way. If I hadn’t mentioned her name at Phoebe’s that evening I was late for dinner you would never have gone to Golfney Place, and Bridget would never have crossed Colonel Faversham’s path.”

“How devoutly I wish she hadn’t,” said Carrissima. “But what can anybody do? It is a day after the fair. She has the game in her hands if she cares to play it. The astonishing thing is that she has waited so long.”

“I wonder,” exclaimed Mark, “whether I should find her at home.”

“If so she is scarcely likely to be alone. The only way to make certain of catching her without father is to go soon after breakfast or after dinner.”

“I will go this evening,” said Mark.

“What for?” asked Carrissima.

“You see,” he answered, “I’m a bad hand at sitting still with my hands in my pockets. I suppose surgery makes one think something can always be attempted.”

“Still,” suggested Carrissima, with a smile, “you can scarcely dream of going to Golfney Place and asking Bridget’s intentions!”

“The Lord knows!” said Mark. “I shall see how the cat jumps. Anyhow, I am bound to have a look in.”

“I shall feel curious to hear how you get along,” answered Carrissima. “And now suppose we banish the topic. Can’t we talk about something more agreeable? I am afraid I have been making my poor father a little uncomfortable at home. Mark, I am developing into a little beast.”

On the contrary, he thought she had never looked more charming. It is probable that their recent separation caused him to regard Carrissima more favourably than when he used to meet her, as a matter of course, once or twice every week. He had not seen her face for longer than a month, then only once after two or three months’ separation. She came upon him now as a kind of revelation, the more because of her obvious anxiety on account of Colonel Faversham. For years he had ever found her bright and equable; the best of good comrades, but this afternoon their intercourse seemed for the first time to be touched by emotion.

“Tell me about your plans for the future—if you have made any,” Carrissima urged.



“Oh, I’m always making plans,” he returned, and began to explain his intention to lookout for rooms in the neighbourhood of Harley Street—that medical bazaar.

While still at Saint Josephine’s Hospital he had made the acquaintance of Mr. Randolph Messeter, a man considerably older than himself; an eminent surgeon, who had more than once invited Mark to dinner. Randolph Messeter frequently came to Saint Josephine’s to operate, and on such occasions Mark always administered the anaesthetic. Messeter had more than hinted that he might be able to put some work in Mark’s way, and the intention was that he should specialize as an anaesthetist, at the same time waiting for ordinary patients. Carrissima listened with the deepest interest, knowing, however, that his resources would be taxed to the utmost for some time to come. That he would make his way before very long she did not doubt for an instant, but how convenient he would in the meantime find her own income of eight hundred pounds a year!



Page 32

How willingly, too, would she place it at his service! When he rose to go away she wished that it were possible to keep him out of Bridget's reach, because she could not fail to recollect Lawrence's plainly expressed opinion.

Could it be possible, she wondered, after Mark had left the house, that Bridget had two strings to her bow? Was she holding Colonel Faversham on and off until Mark's return to London? Did she intend to make a last bid for the younger man, and if he eluded her to fall back on the older one?

For this supposition, however, there was only Lawrence's word, and for her own part Carrissima would have been sorry if the world were quite the rabbit warren which, in spite of his own remarkable domestic felicity, her brother appeared to think it.

CHAPTER X

CONFIDENCES

Mark Driver, having dined at Duffield's Hotel, set out, with a cigar between his lips, to Golfney Place. In the Strand he hailed a taxi-cab, and his arrival obviously took Bridget completely by surprise. She had always an alluring, seductive way with her, and now, unaware of his return from Paris, she rose almost impulsively from her chair, and came to meet him with such an air of abandon that he thought for the moment she intended to fling herself incontinently into his arms.

Bridget looked peculiarly fresh and fragrant this evening in the light morning frock, which she had not troubled to change for her solitary dinner. It was almost impossible that any man of Mark's age should not feel flattered and pleased by her satisfaction at the sight of him.

"Oh, how glad I am!" she exclaimed, holding both his hands so tightly that it would have been difficult to withdraw them if he wished. Her frock was touching his coat as she stood gazing into his face. "Such a dreadfully long time, Mark!" she continued. "I hope you are going to stay in London at last."

"Yes, all my wanderings are over," he answered.

"Do sit down," she said, releasing his hands. "I hope the room isn't too hot. I have a fire chiefly for company's sake, you know."

"Have you been feeling dull?" he asked, sitting down at one end of the large sofa, while she sank on to the other.



“Only during the evenings,” she explained. “I sit here by myself night after night. I try to read, but gradually my thoughts wander, and I’m back at home again. Home is always the dear old house at Crowborough.”

“Well now,” said Mark, “what have you been doing all these weeks?”

“Oh, I—I don’t know,” she answered, trifling with some trimming on her dress.

“Anyhow,” suggested Mark, looking round the large room, “you seem to have plenty of flowers.”

They were standing in every available space: in pots, in bowls, in vases; the air of the room was laden with their scent.

“They all came from Colonel Faversham,” said Bridget, more soberly than usual. “Have you seen Carrissima by any chance?”



Page 33

"This afternoon," returned Mark.

"Then you know she has seen me. I think she is perfectly sweet, Mark! She came here a few days after you went away, and asked me to go to Grandison Square. She gave me leave to look her up as often as I liked. I took her at her word. Oh, I assure you I feel very much at home there." Bridget lowered her eyes, paused a moment, then raised them again to Mark's face. "The question is," she said slowly, as if she were carefully choosing her words, "whether I shall make it my home—for good, you understand. I have been longing for you to come so that I might—that I might ask your advice."

"What about?" demanded Mark, somewhat taken aback by her outspokenness.

"Oh, how dense you must be if you can't really guess," she said.

"I don't think I shall try," was the answer.

"Oh well, if you make me say it! Colonel Faversham wants me to marry him. Now the murder is out, isn't it?"

"Almost as detestable a crime!" cried Mark. "Do you mean that he has actually asked you——"

"If he hadn't, how should I know?" she replied. "Because there's always the chance of a slip between the cup and the lip. Besides, even such an unreticent person as myself couldn't possibly anticipate. I dare say you wonder that I talk to you about it, in any case; but then, you see, I have nobody else."

"You haven't done anything so monstrous as to accept him?" said Mark.

"Oh—monstrous!" she murmured.

"Of course, it's unthinkable!"

"Indeed it is not," said Bridget. "If you only knew how I have lain awake thinking of it. Still, I wouldn't say 'yes.' I have kept the poor dear man in suspense till your return. He is quite ridiculously—well, in love with me, I suppose he would call it."

"Obviously you are nothing of the kind," suggested Mark.

"In love—with Colonel Faversham!" she cried, with a laugh. "You know, Mark, he is most horribly jealous."

"So there's some one else?"



“Only you,” she said, and Mark started to his feet.

“Jealous of me! Oh, good Lord!” he exclaimed, and suddenly became aware that Bridget was keeping him under close observation.

“Idiotic of him, isn’t it?” she remarked, continuing hastily, “but you haven’t given me your serious opinion. I want you to make a cool survey of the situation.”

“I thought I had,” said Mark. “Of course, you must refuse.”

“That is all very well,” she urged, “but there’s something else you must tell me. Supposing that I refuse to marry the colonel, what is to become of me?”

“There are your aunts at Sandbay!”

“Oh yes, my dear little Dresden china aunts! And, you know, Mark, there’s the River Thames. I would as soon plunge into the one as take a train to the others.”

“What is to prevent you from staying here?” he asked. “If you are tired of London, try Paris again. You can surely go where you please.”



Page 34

“How few are lucky enough for that!”

“I thought,” said Mark, “you had the world before you.”

“More likely the workhouse,” answered Bridget.

“You don’t mean to say you’re—you’re hard up!” he cried, returning to his seat on the sofa.

“Oh, I have plenty of money at the bank,” she explained. “Mark, I detest talking about it, but I really should love to tell you. During mother’s lifetime, you must remember how comfortably we used to live. I always had everything I wanted—for that matter, so I have until this moment. Naturally,” Bridget continued, “I believed that the house and everything were kept up by father’s books.”

“Wasn’t that the case?” asked Mark.

“As a matter of fact,” said Bridget, “they brought in very little money indeed.”

“Surely his name was very well known!”

“Yes, and he had heaps of friends who thought ever so much of him. There are hundreds of press cuttings praising him up to the skies. During the last few months of his life he scarcely read anything else. The doctors gave his illness a long name—I dare say you would understand if I could remember; but what killed him was a broken heart.”

“How was that?” asked Mark.

“What we really lived upon,” answered Bridget, “was my mother’s income. That died with her—all but a small sum, which she left to me. We were compelled to leave Crowborough, and father seemed to droop like some transplanted flower. We wandered from place to place, and I suppose he was extravagant. I seem to take after him. Neither of us could bother about economy and that sort of thing. He felt the change dreadfully, and the tragedy was that he couldn’t pull himself together in his necessity. Instead of writing better, he wrote much worse. He could satisfy neither himself nor any one else. His sales fell off; he saw he wasn’t doing good work. I believe that broke his heart.”

“Didn’t he leave you anything?” asked Mark.

“Nothing whatever. He knew he was dying and told me to communicate with his old friend Mr. Frankfort, a solicitor. But there was nothing due from publishers—not a penny; so it was fortunate I had the money that had been left by my mother, wasn’t it?”



“Do you mind,” suggested Mark, “telling me how much that was?”

“I don’t mind telling you anything,” she said. “I want you to know all about me. I love to tell you. It was invested to bring in a hundred and twenty pounds a year; but what is that?”

“Not enough to live upon as you are living here,” he admitted.

“Nor anywhere else,” she replied. “It’s no earthly use, Mark. I am spoiled for that. I draw cheques when I want any money, and now and then I get a letter from the bank manager to say my account is overdrawn. I go to see him; my deed-box is fetched up from the realms below, the manager sells something for me, and so I go along till the next time.”



Page 35

“Then you are living on your capital!” cried Mark.

“What else can I live upon?” she demanded.

“The interest—naturally.”

“Now, do you really think I look the sort of person to live on a hundred pounds a year?” she said, throwing out her hands.

“But if you haven’t got any more! Don’t you realize,” he suggested, “that the day is bound to come when you will find yourself out in the cold?”

“Oh yes,” she said, with a sigh. “That’s when I get a fit of the miserables. But something is certain to happen.”

“You anticipate a miracle?”

“It wouldn’t be far out of the natural order of things,” she replied.

“You expect some one—one of your aunts, for instance—to leave you a fortune!” said Mark.

“Oh dear, no! I am not in the least likely to wish any one to die. Really I think you are rather stupid this evening. There might be a marriage, you know. Such things do happen!”

“Anyhow,” he answered, “you mustn’t let yourself be frightened into marrying Colonel Faversham.”

Rising from her end of the sofa, Bridget glided to his, and standing close in front of him, so that her skirt brushed his knees, she looked insinuatingly into his face.

“Will you,” she said, “kindly tell me what I am to do, Mr. Driver?”

CHAPTER XI

MARK REPORTS PROGRESS

Mark Driver must have been much more obtuse than the most of his friends believed, to fail to recognize the invitation in Bridget’s demeanour. Although he had not the slightest intention to profit by it, he could not pretend that for the moment it lacked enticement.

It seemed perfectly clear that she was holding the balance between himself and Colonel Faversham; and realizing that her income must some day inevitably be exhausted,



shrinking from an appeal to her aunts at Sandbay, that she was determined to take Time by the forelock and seek safety in marriage.

Mark could understand now the significance of her behaviour during the first few weeks of their acquaintance, and while this offer of herself was in a manner distasteful, she looked so young, so seductive, so ingenuous while she made it that he must needs blame her environment rather than her disposition.

Bridget impressed him as a child masquerading in the garments of a somewhat audacious woman of the world, and he told himself that if she could be placed amidst more favourable surroundings, her natural character would shine forth triumphantly. Moreover, he was by no means free from egoism. He had enough vanity to experience some shadow of gratification, and even though the other candidate was no one more estimable than Colonel Faversham, there was, perhaps, a grain of satisfaction in the knowledge that he might have been first in the field.

As a matter of fact, Mark had never in his life been more attracted by Carrissima than on this first day after his return to London. At the same time he was a young man and Bridget was an extremely captivating young woman. Notwithstanding a sense of disapproval, it became judicious to take the precaution of saying "good-bye."



Page 36

“Well, what am I to do?” asked Bridget, as he sat silent.

“I’m blessed if I know,” he answered, and at once rose to his feet.

He saw that she was profoundly disappointed, and although it appeared plain enough that the transaction would in any case be regarded by her as mainly mercantile, he fancied that she would have been in other ways delighted if his answer had been different.

“Neither do I,” she said, with a sigh, “unless I make up my mind to gratify Colonel Faversham. Why shouldn’t I? Look upon this picture and on this. A year or two at the outside, and on the one hand I find myself without a penny. On the other, I have only to say the word and I make certain, as soon as I please, of a fair income, a good house and an excellent position in society; because, you know, I could hold my own. You see me here living through a kind of interregnum. I am just nobody! But in Paris and other places it used to be different, and so I intend it to be again. What else is there? You make an immense mistake if you imagine me as a governess or anything of that kind. What could I teach?”

“Anyhow,” answered Mark, holding out his hand, “you need not do anything impetuously. At the worst your money will hold out for some time to come.”

“Oh dear, yes!” she cried more brightly, “and before it has all gone, why, I shall be provided with somebody else’s.”

Still she looked up at him rather pitifully, her eyes meeting his own, her chin invitingly raised with its delectable dimple. Now, Mark wished devoutly that the idea of that dimple as a sort of *point d’appui* had never entered his thoughts, but there was the regrettable fact. Of course he had hitherto always resisted the temptation, which was the greater because he knew that he need not fear opposition; but still, there was Carrissima and he resisted it again.

He went to Grandison Square the following afternoon as if to seek a corrective; and once in her presence marvelled at his own weakness. Here was the woman, as somebody says, for him to go picnicking through the world with. Not that the time had arrived just yet. Mark was not without a sturdy independence. Besides, there would be Colonel Faversham to deal with. As soon as he had made a beginning in his profession, then would be the time to ask Carrissima to share his lot.

“Well, did you see Bridget?” she asked.

“Oh yes,” said Mark.

“If you appointed yourself her father-confessor she must have been a wee bit surprised.”



“The surprise was on my side,” said Mark.

“What about?” demanded Carrissima.

“The state of her finances. All she has in the world is the remnant of two or three thousand pounds she inherited from her mother. Rosser left her nothing, and she is calmly spending her capital.”

“But why,” suggested Carrissima, “should she go out of her way to enlighten you about her income?”



Page 37

"Anyhow," was the answer, "the time is bound to come when she won't possess one."

"What does she propose to do in that case?" said Carrissima. "At present her dressmaker's bill must be rather extravagant, and I wish I could buy such hats! I suppose," Carrissima added, "that marriage is to be the way out of her difficulty."

"At least," replied Mark, "you may console yourself that nothing is settled at the moment."

"How do you know?" asked Carrissima hastily.

"You may accept it as a fact," he insisted.

"Undoubtedly," she retorted, "your conversation must have taken an extraordinary turn last night. Mark, you are rather tantalizing. It is so evident that you are only favouring me with elegant extracts."

"Oh well, I don't want to give the girl away," he said. "And look here, Carrissima, I don't want you to drop upon her too heavily."

"Is that a custom of mine?" she exclaimed. "As if I want to drop upon her at all! Frankly, I like Bridget. You see, we are in agreement so far. Or rather, I should like her if she would let the foolish colonel go. Oh dear, I really ought not to talk in this way!"

"Upon my word," said Mark, "I believe she scarcely realizes what she is doing."

"Then you admit she is doing it!"

"A kind of youthful irresponsibility," he returned. "That accounts for everything."

"You seem to forget she is older than I am," said Carrissima.

He laughed as he looked down at her small figure, and if he had not by any means succeeded in relieving her dismal anticipations concerning Colonel Faversham, he had to a certain degree caused her to feel easier about his own future. Flattering herself that she had now a firm grip of the situation, Carrissima began to marvel that a man of her father's long experience could remain blind to the facts of the case.

"Father," she said, alone with him after dinner the same evening, "I heard some rather astonishing news this afternoon."

"Ah well," answered the colonel, "it takes a great deal to astonish me. The more I know of the world the more extraordinary things I expect to hear."

"It was about Bridget," said Carrissima.



“What about her?” he demanded, turning in his chair to face his daughter.

“Judging from the way she lives and dresses,” Carrissima continued, “I always assumed she had plenty of money.”

“I hate to see a girl of your age mercenary,” was the answer. “Good gracious, when I was two-and-twenty I never gave money a thought. I should never have dreamed of bothering myself about the amount of my friends’ incomes. I don’t now for that matter. Always keep your heart young, Carrissima! I am as disinterested now as ever I was in my salad days, thank goodness! Odd where you get this calculating habit!”

“I didn’t know I was mercenary and calculating and all the rest of it,” said Carrissima. “I thought, perhaps, you might feel interested to hear——”



Page 38

“To hear what?” cried Colonel Faversham. “If I had wished to learn the amount of Bridget’s income I should simply have paid a shilling and gone to Somerset House to look at David Rosser’s will. But I didn’t. I’ve a mind above that sort of thing.”

“You wouldn’t have got much information there,” said Carrissima, “because Mr. Rosser left nothing. Bridget’s money came from her mother.”

“How did you discover that?” asked Colonel Faversham.

“Mark told me.”

“Has he seen Bridget?” the colonel exclaimed in some surprise, because he had spent the afternoon at Golfney Place and she had not for a wonder mentioned Mark’s name.

“Yes, he went after dinner last night,” said Carrissima. “There’s not the least shadow of doubt that she has been waiting to see whether he would ask her to marry him.”

“Scandal!” shouted Colonel Faversham indignantly. “Abominable scandal! How the devil is it possible you can know whether she expected Mark Driver to ask her to marry him or not?”

“It is perfectly certain,” said Carrissima, “that unless she marries somebody or other she will find herself without any money to live upon.”

Although Carrissima spoke after prolonged reflection, and considered that the peculiar circumstances of the case justified the means she was employing, she could not feel very pleased with herself. She disliked anything underhanded; but, then, she disliked the prospect of Bridget’s becoming Mrs. Faversham still more. Instead, however, of causing Colonel Faversham to hold his hand, Carrissima merely succeeded in egging him on. Rising excitedly from his chair he stood glaring at her for a few moments, as if he were going to break into a torrent of abuse; but turning abruptly away he left the room, slamming the door behind him so that the house shook. Making his way downstairs he sat up late in the smoking-room, and when at last he went to bed, found it impossible to sleep.

During the small hours it seemed almost as though Carrissima’s hint might prove of some avail. For the first time he began to hesitate concerning the future. In an exceptionally sane interval he came near to agreement with his daughter. Her remark about Bridget’s means had been, in fact, a revelation. Not that he cared whether she possessed any money or not, but the absence of it might be a deplorable temptation.

Could it be possible that she had been deliberately awaiting Mark’s return, postponing her answer to the older man until she convinced herself there was not a chance of securing the younger? An infuriating suspicion, but still not capable of causing Colonel Faversham’s withdrawal. On the contrary, as he shaved the following morning, cutting



his chin rather badly, he told himself that if only Bridget would consent to marry him, every other consideration might go to limbo!

By eleven o'clock he was waiting in the sitting-room at Number 5, Golfney Place. Until her appearance he walked restlessly from the fireplace to the farthest window, stopping to look at the uninviting oleographs on the wall, inspecting the row of David Rosser's novels which filled the hanging shelf.



Page 39

Colonel Faversham was in an unstable mood this morning. Why couldn't Bridget come? She must know by this time that he detested waiting! Every other minute he glanced at the door, and at last when she entered breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"What a very early bird!" she cried, coming towards him in her graceful, unhurried way.

"I want to catch the—— No, no," he said, "that won't do! You didn't tell me you had seen Mark Driver!" he added, holding her hand.

"Didn't I?" was the casual answer. "But why should I? You surely don't imagine for a moment I tell you everything! How deeply astonished you would be! What an amusing disillusionment!"

"Why should it be?" he demanded. "What have you to be ashamed of?"

"Ever so much," said Bridget. "So many men would like to shut us up in harems, wouldn't they?"

"It depends on the woman," returned the colonel.

"I assure you it would never answer in my case," she exclaimed. "Neither bolts nor bars would keep me in."

"My dear," he said, "you drive me half out of my mind. You give me no peace."

"Oh, you poor thing!" she murmured, resting a hand on his shoulder.

"Say you will be my wife and have done with it," he urged.

"Now, supposing——only supposing that I were foolish enough——"

"You will," he cried, and doubtless he looked a little ridiculous as he went down on one knee. The joint, too, was stiffer than usual this morning.

"What do you imagine," she suggested, "that Carrissima would say—and your son!"

At this alarming reminder Colonel Faversham made an attempt to rise, but to his annoyance a cry of pain escaped. Unable for the moment to straighten his knee, he remained at Bridget's feet, conscious of the anti-climax.

"Let me help you," she said, sympathetically offering her hand.

"Good heavens!" he cried; "why do you imagine I require help! I am quite able to help myself. I never depend on other people. Give me independence," he added, standing upright though the effort made him wince.



“Yet you ask me to sacrifice mine!” said Bridget. “But what would Mr. Lawrence Faversham have to say?”

“Upon my soul I can’t imagine,” was the answer.

“I believe you are thoroughly afraid of him and Carrissima. Well, so am I,” she admitted.

Colonel Faversham had never held Lawrence in greater awe than at this moment when he believed that happiness lay within his grasp. He perceived that Carrissima the previous evening must have been attempting to influence him, and consequently that she already suspected his intentions. Now Colonel Faversham had often turned the matter over in his mind, with the result that he conceived a plan which, if it could only be carried successfully out, might obviate everything unpleasant.

“Lawrence,” he said, “is a good fellow. A little too good, perhaps. I have never pretended to be an anchorite. I’ve too much warm blood still in my veins. Come to that, I’m to all intents and purposes a younger man than my son. I have the greatest respect for Lawrence, but he seems to have been born old.”



Page 40

"You can't say that of Carrissima!"

"No, no, a dear girl," he replied. "But a little sarcastic at times. I detest sarcasm. I won't allow it. But no man can control a woman's face. I can see Carrissima's smile," he added, taking out his handkerchief and mopping his forehead.

"How ridiculous," said Bridget, "to make yourself so uncomfortable on my account."

"Let him laugh who wins!" cried Colonel Faversham. "If they think I'm a fool—well, I don't want to be wise. Of course, there's one way——"

"What is that?" asked Bridget.

"I don't know whether you would put up with it," said the colonel. "Why," he suggested with eager eyes on her face, "why in the world shouldn't we keep it to ourselves?"

"How would it be possible?" she said, with a thoughtful expression.

"Trust me for that," was the answer. "There are few things I can't do when I make up my mind. Admit the principle, and everything else is easy! Keep it dark, you know. In the first place you've got to promise to be my wife. We don't breathe a word to any living being. Then one fine morning we go out and get the knot tied: at a registry office, a church, anywhere you like."

"I shouldn't feel that I was properly married," said Bridget, "unless I went to church."

"Then you will!" urged Colonel Faversham, half beside himself with satisfaction.

"Please let me hear the whole scheme," she insisted.

"Don't you see," he explained, "you and I—my dear little wife—would be off somewhere abroad. Anywhere you choose!"

"Italy," said Bridget. "We would travel through to Milan, then on to Rome, Naples, Capri—Capri would be delightful."

"My darling!"

"But," she continued, "your plan is quite out of the question. I hate anything resembling secrecy. Surely you don't imagine that if I married you I shouldn't want every one to know."

"Why, naturally," said the colonel. "We should send Carrissima a telegram from Paris. The point is that she wouldn't know what had happened until we were out of reach. By



the time we got back to Grandison Square she would have learnt to take a sensible view of the accomplished fact. So would Lawrence.”

“Oh dear, you sound like a child who is bent on doing something he ought to be ashamed of!”

“It’s true you make me feel like a boy again,” he admitted. “Not that I have ever felt anything you could call old or even middle-aged. It will be the proudest day of my life if you consent,” he added, and then Bridget broke into a laugh. She threw back her head as if she were putting away every misgiving, and Colonel Faversham drew near with the intention to take her in his arms. Her demeanour suddenly stiffened, however. In a condescending way she graciously permitted him to press his lips to her cheek; nor was this unexpected reserve the only drawback to his new happiness.



Page 41

In his impetuosity he called her attention to the advantage of a quiet wedding, since there would be no absurd preparations to cause delay. As they had only to please themselves, they might just as well get married forthwith . . . say next week or the week after. Bridget, however, quite good-humouredly refused to entertain any suggestion of the kind, protesting that she had done enough for one morning. With these mitigations, Colonel Faversham's glee appeared fatuous. Always disposed to boast of his capacity to vie with men a quarter of a century younger than himself, he had never, surely, done so well as now! He went to Donaldson's for a diamond ring, which was put on Bridget's finger the same afternoon, although she declared it must be taken off again the moment he had gone. The secret must be thoroughly kept!

While Colonel Faversham approved of every endeavour to keep Carrissima and everybody else in the dark for the present, he was determined to stand no nonsense. He requested her to go to Golfney Place, and following the line of least resistance, she went, persuading Bridget to come to Grandison Square as her father wished. There one afternoon a few days after the beginning of her engagement she met Jimmy Clynesworth.

CHAPTER XII

SYBIL

Miss Clynesworth was considerably the oldest member of the group (consisting of the Favershams, the Drivers and the Clynesworths) with which this episode in Bridget Rosser's life is concerned.

She was, in fact, more than forty years of age, and even in her adolescence she had never been beautiful. On the other hand, her face wore too amiable an expression to be considered very plain, and there was an almost captivating quaintness in the old-fashioned figure she presented. She seldom added to her wardrobe unless Jimmy bantered her into it and gave her a cheque which, as a matter of honour, was to be used for that especial purpose. Even then Sybil sometimes ventured to deceive him.

Short, although not quite so short as Carrissima, she had a thickset but flat figure, and a conscientious objection to make her drabbish-coloured hair appear more plentiful than it was.

Her skin was rather florid, her light blue eyes were prominent, her features being the only part of her with any approach to boldness. A kind of amateur ministering angel, she was often appealed to—and never in vain—by those in illness or affliction. Sybil Clynesworth was one of the women (not so rare as might be imagined in these days) into whose calculations the idea of marriage had seldom or never entered. Perhaps her powerful maternal instinct had been diffused from her youth up, and she regarded all



who were in bodily or spiritual need as her children. It will be seen that she had a large family!

It seems probable that Sybil's charitable inclinations were inherited from her father and Jimmy's; since this half-brother of hers might be said to share them in a secret, shamefaced way. But with the difference that while the one took life with profound seriousness, the other appeared to look upon it as a huge jest.



Page 42

Without Jimmy, however, Sybil's hands would have been tied. Whilst disagreeing entirely with his opinions, disapproving of many of his actions, she never scrupled to avail herself of his munificence, failing which her occupation would have gone. Above everything, Sybil desired to see Jimmy take his proper place in the country. He ought certainly to enter the House of Commons, and, in fact, to do a great many things which he persisted in leaving undone; above all, perhaps, he ought to marry Carrissima.

"I wish," said Sybil, the morning after her return from looking after Lady Ramsbottom, "you would go to Grandison Square this afternoon, Jimmy. I should be so very much obliged if you would ask dear Carrissima to be kind enough to come and see me tomorrow."

"You obviously take me for a halfpenny postcard," he answered. "If I go it will be without prejudice. Don't imagine I'm blind to your little game! Sybil, I'm fed up with Carrissima. A thousand to one she will end by marrying old Mark."

"Jimmy," said Sybil reproachfully, "you know I never bet. You would give me the greatest pleasure in the world. I long to see you married to some really nice girl."

"Whether I care for her or not!" suggested Jimmy.

"Oh, how can you put such words into my mouth?" said Sybil. "As if I were capable of dreaming of such a thing. Some dear girl whom you love and respect——"

"That's the difficulty," he answered. "Here I am waiting and trying not to be impatient, but she doesn't come along. As soon as I see a dear girl and love and respect her, I'll marry her like a shot if she's willing. Probably she won't be because, you see, she would have to love and respect me."

Having nothing better to do and little dreaming of the fate in preparation for him, Jimmy set out in due course to Grandison Square, where, ten minutes earlier, Mrs. Reynolds had arrived: a tall, thin woman of about fifty years of age, who had been an intimate friend of the late Mrs. Faversham. She had a pleasant, if too grave face, and a certain dignity of bearing. On her entrance, she sat down close to Colonel Faversham's chair, holding him so closely in an uninteresting conversation that he could not pay the slightest attention to Bridget. She, left to her own devices, looked peculiarly charming this afternoon, in a new hat, which Carrissima knew must have cost quite five guineas.

Colonel Faversham's face wore a gloomy expression. He was annoyed because Bridget had not been introduced to Mrs. Reynolds, and in considerable pain from the increasing rheumatism in his knee joint. In the midst of his old friend's monologue, Knight announced—

"Mr. Clynesworth."



“Good-afternoon, Jimmy,” cried Carrissima, rising promptly from her chair. “How nice and surprising of you to come!”

“I’ll tell the truth if I perish,” he answered. “The fact is I was sent. I’m a special messenger.”



Page 43

“Then Sybil is at home!”

“She turned up last night,” he explained. “The world has naturally stood still during her absence, and she hasn’t a moment to spare for the ordinary pleasures of life. Moral, will you look her up to-morrow?”

Jimmy then turned to Mrs. Reynolds, who was sitting with a deprecatory expression on her face, while Colonel Faversham, seeing an opportunity to cross the room to Bridget, gripped the arms of his chair preparatory to rising.

“Ah, Jimmy!” he said. “I’m glad to see you!”

“Yes, but please don’t get up, colonel,” returned Jimmy, looking sympathetically at his host’s leg. “A little stiff at the joint? Rheumatism, I suppose?”

“Nothing of the sort,” said Colonel Faversham, wincing, as he stood erect. “I never felt better in my life.”

“In fact,” suggested Carrissima, “father has a growing pain.”

“I have not any pain in my body,” cried the colonel, devoutly wishing he had not. “I will walk you twenty miles any day you like.”

“Walking,” said Jimmy, “is becoming a lost art. We all choose some other mode of locomotion when we can. If we don’t fly, we motor, and before long it will be quite customary to skate on the pavement.”

“Jimmy, your presence is demoralizing,” answered Carrissima. “Mrs. Reynolds was discussing the influence of democracy on the fine arts, and now you have brought us down to frivolity.”

“I don’t think you know Miss Rosser,” said Colonel Faversham, drawing nearer to the empty chair by Bridget’s side. “Mr. Clynesworth—Miss Rosser.”

The colonel would have given something to avoid this presentation, but since Jimmy had unfortunately come, he would not allow Bridget to be left out in the cold. As Jimmy bowed, he coolly took the chair which would have already been occupied, if caution and time had not been desirable this afternoon in Colonel Faversham’s movements.

“I should have known you anywhere,” said Bridget, without the least hesitation. “Your photograph,” she explained, as Mrs. Reynolds changed her position to engage her host’s attention, “has represented you during your absence. Carrissima was kind enough to fill in the colours.”



"It's to be hoped she laid them on with a trowel," was the answer, "and gave me a better character than I deserve."

"Don't you deserve a good one?"

"Oh well, I am not going to give myself away," said Jimmy. "Anyhow, I'm far from deserving this good fortune."

Her cheerful laugh brought Colonel Faversham's anxious eyes to her face, and he began to realize the disadvantages of a secret engagement.

"I think," she was remarking, "that I used to know Miss Clynesworth."

"A liberal education," said Jimmy, "and I hope you will soon improve it. Quite infuriating," he added.

"What is?" asked Bridget.

"The cussedness of destiny! Weeks have passed since Carrissima came to ask Sybil to look you up. If she had been in London she would have flown to your house; you might graciously have returned her visit; I should have seen you, and precious time would have been saved."



Page 44

"It's never too late to mend," said Bridget. "I mean, of course, for your sister."

"You regard me as hopeless?"

"You appear to be full of confidence," she answered.

"I am," he said, "but naturally Sybil can't go to see you until she knows your address."

Hearing her tell him that she was lodging at Number 5, Golfney Place, Colonel Faversham could endure it no longer. Interrupting Mrs. Reynolds' discourse quite rudely, he limped across the room, whereupon Jimmy at once rose to his feet.

"Sit down, colonel," he urged. "You will have to give old Mark a turn before you've done."

"I have not troubled a doctor for the last ten years," said Colonel Faversham.

"Oh, Mark wouldn't mind the trouble," cried Jimmy, and then he began to say "good-bye."

Never until this afternoon had Colonel Faversham seen Bridget in a room with any one outside his own family. While on the one hand he rejoiced to observe the ease of her manner, it dawned upon him that she was not likely to be contented to shut herself off from all the world but himself. Departing from his custom, he went to Golfney Place after dinner that evening, and, flinging himself recklessly into a chair, began to rail against Mrs. Reynolds.

"I hate a woman with a long tongue!" he exclaimed. "Talk, talk, talk! She would argue with the Recording Angel! I positively saw nothing of you this afternoon. No time for a sensible word."

"Still, I have managed to survive, you see," said Bridget, "and Mr. Clynesworth is lovely!"

"So is a python from one point of view!" was the answer.

"Oh, what a far-fetched comparison!" she said, and leaned back, laughing, in her chair.

"Not at all," cried Colonel Faversham. "You'll generally find there's something in what I say. You can't be too careful of a man like Jimmy Clynesworth. For my part, I very seldom know what he is talking about; I question whether he knows himself. I am a plain, straightforward man—but there! I didn't come to talk about Jimmy."

"I thought you did," said Bridget.



“No, no,” he replied; “I want you to fix the day for our marriage. Upon my word, I don’t feel quite certain that frankness isn’t the best in the long run—far the best.”

The effect of this expression of opinion surprised Colonel Faversham. He had never seen Bridget so greatly excited. She started to her feet, and flushed almost as deeply as Carrissima.

“If you mean,” she exclaimed, “that you have changed your mind, I have not changed mine. After all your wonderful arguments! Please understand, you are not to breathe a word to anybody, and to talk of our marriage before we have been engaged a week is really too ridiculous for anything.”

Although Colonel Faversham left Golfney Place in a condition of intense dissatisfaction however, his sensations might have proved even more unenviable if he could have heard what Jimmy Clynesworth said to Sybil the same afternoon.



Page 45

CHAPTER XIII

A WALK ABROAD

"Sybil," said Jimmy, "at last I've seen her!"

"And did she say she would come to-morrow?" asked his sister.

"Oh well, of course you must go there in the first place," he answered.

"Jimmy, what do you mean?" said Sybil, with an expression of bewilderment. "It is not in the least like Carrissima to be so ceremonious——"

"Who was talking about Carrissima?" cried Jimmy.

"I naturally thought you were."

"Not a bit of it," said Jimmy. "Bridget—Miss Rosser!"

"Rosser—Rosser," murmured Sybil, taxing her memory. "I fancy there used to be some people named Rosser at Crowborough when I stayed with Colonel Faversham so many years ago."

"You must go and see her to-morrow," urged Jimmy. "The address is Number 5, Golfney Place. There's the woman I should like to marry," added Jimmy, causing Sybil to jump out of her chair.

She pleaded tentatively, however, that she could not go the following afternoon, for the simple reason that she expected a visit from Carrissima, whose arrival she now eagerly awaited.

"My dear," she said, pecking at her visitor's cheeks, as she clung to her hand, "I've been positively longing to see you. How very well you are looking! Now pray sit down and tell me all about this Miss Rosser."

"So Jimmy has already been singing her praises," suggested Carrissima.

"Oh dear, he simply took my breath away," said Sybil. "You would never believe it! He actually told me he should like to marry her! Did ever you hear such a thing?"

"He never loved who loved not at first sight," cried Carrissima, with a laugh.

"Of course, my dear, Jimmy was only joking," said Sybil.



“I scarcely imagined he had made up his mind so rapidly,” answered Carrissima, “although Bridget is obviously quite irresistible. What an admirable solution! How I wish it might come to pass!”

“Oh, but, Carrissima!”

“It’s no use,” she said. “Self-preservation is the first law of nature, and if she doesn’t marry Jimmy she will very likely marry my father.”

“Carrissima!” cried Sybil in the tone of one severely shocked.

“I am perfectly serious,” was the reply.

“But a man of the colonel’s age! And what a horrid—horrid person she must be!”

“Oh dear, no,” said Carrissima. “You will see what she is. If only Jimmy effects a diversion I shall feel grateful as long as I live.”

The net result of the interview with Carrissima was that Sybil did an extremely unusual thing. Although Jimmy strongly urged her to go to Golfney Place, she positively refused to gratify him.

“Jimmy, I am very, very sorry,” she insisted, “but I couldn’t possibly go. Miss Rosser really doesn’t seem to be quite respectable.”

Page 46

“That generally signifies something rather piquant, you know,” said Jimmy in his equable way. “Just think of the things and the people we do respect—in your delightful sense. If we could only see through their skins; though of course they’re far too thick. Anyhow, if you won’t go now, you will later on, and meantime,” he added, “you throw me on my own resources.”

The consequence of Sybil’s refusal was that Jimmy passed the end of Golfney Place several times a day and presently met with a reward. It was about half-past eleven one sunny morning that he saw Bridget come forth from her door, and without a glance in his direction, turn towards the further end of the street. Quickening his pace, he at once set out in pursuit. Walking behind her, he saw the light on her chestnut-coloured hair, saw that she knew (rare accomplishment) how to walk, and a few moments later, still a foot or two in the rear, he exclaimed—

“Good-morning, Miss Rosser.”

“Oh, good-morning, Mr. Clynesworth,” she answered, without stopping.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“To my dressmaker’s in Dover Street!”

“May I go with you——”

“That sounds,” cried Bridget gaily, “like the beginning of a nursery rhyme.”

“There never was a prettier maid,” he answered, walking by her side.

“I suppose you know a great many,” she suggested.

“They are all cast into oblivion——”

“Is it your experience,” said Bridget, turning to look into his face, “that they appreciate this—this sort of thing?”

“Don’t you?” asked Jimmy.

“I rather prefer being spoken to as if I were a reasonable being!”

“I was hoping you were not one,” he said. “The spring is too intoxicating. Everything,” he continued, as they turned with one consent from Knightsbridge into the park, “seems unaccustomed, fresh, young, and you the most of all. Hang being reasonable! Suggest something mad and let us do it together. But,” he cried, abruptly changing his tone, “what should you like me to talk about?”



“I suppose your favourite topic is yourself,” she said. “Tell me what you do—if ever you do anything.”

“I don’t,” he replied. “I am what is called a spoiled child of fortune.”

“You like being spoiled?”

“It depends on the spoiler. Sometimes I hate it.”

“Why?” asked Bridget.

“Oh well,” he said, as they walked by the side of Rotten Row, and Jimmy occasionally lifted his straw hat to some passer-by who did not fail to stare at his companion, “if we have to be serious, one has moments of inspiration and pines for better things.”

“Aren’t they within your reach?”

“Your most ardent socialist,” said Jimmy, “won’t dream of pooling his money till the millennium. What would be the use of my setting to work and cutting out some poor devil who wants it?”



Page 47

“Mightn’t you go into parliament?” suggested Bridget.

“Original minds there are at a discount.”

“Is your mind original?”

“An independent member is certain to be shunted at the first opportunity,” said Jimmy. “They want men who think in droves.”

“There’s the army,” returned Bridget. “At least you might learn how to defend your country.”

“Yes, I have done that,” he said, as they reached Hyde Park Corner. “I used to be in the —th Hussars. Unfortunately, I got a rather bad sunstroke in India. That may account for any small eccentricity you notice.”

“I was wondering,” answered Bridget.

“As I had to come home,” he explained, “and to keep quiet for I don’t know how long, I sold out. Since then I’ve raised a troop of yeomanry at Atlinghurst. I have a place there, you know.”

“Surely you might find a useful occupation in its management!”

“I did,” said Jimmy, “until it was taken away.”

“How?” asked Bridget.

“Simply because of one of the prettiest girls you have ever seen,” he answered, bringing Bridget’s eyes again to his face.

“I understand,” she murmured.

“I’m certain you don’t,” he said, with a laugh. “Erica Danvers. She got herself engaged to a man who used to be at Trinity with me. The misfortune was that he had six brothers older than himself. Well, Erica came to me one day and declared she had hit on a capital plan. Why shouldn’t I make Bolsover my steward, pay him a living wage, and all the rest of it. He and Erica have twins,” added Jimmy.

Bridget walked a few yards along Piccadilly in silence.

“You have been extraordinarily unfortunate,” she said rather gravely, “although you ought to be pitied rather than blamed.”



“Not since I met you the other afternoon. Do you see much of old Faversham?” he asked, for the colonel’s admiration had been manifest at Grandison Square.

“He has always been very kind to me,” she faltered.

“Surely you meet with kindness everywhere,” said Jimmy.

“Except from Fate!” answered Bridget, with a sigh.

“Wait and see!” he exclaimed. “The better part of life is before you.”

“Are you by way of telling my fortune?” asked Bridget.

“I hope to be allowed to influence it,” said Jimmy, as she stopped at the corner of Dover Street. “You will let me come and see you,” he urged, taking her hand.

“You said your sister was coming!” Bridget reminded him.

“Yes,” he said.

“You must ask her to bring you.”

CHAPTER XIV

THE WOOING O’T

Jimmy Clynesworth now began to employ all his arts to induce Sybil to take some notice of Bridget. His eagerness, however, stood in his way. The more forcibly he attempted to convince his sister of his desire, the more obstinately she maintained her ground. Her hand was strengthened by a visit to Charteris Street, where Victor often attracted her, although some glass beads on her jacket made the child regard her as an enemy.



Page 48

After Phoebe had voiced her husband's opinion of Miss Rosser, Lawrence himself came home in time to dot the i's and cross the t's. Sybil left the house with the opinion that poor Jimmy stood in the acutest danger. It seemed evident that she had scarcely exaggerated when she declared, in the first place, that Bridget was not "respectable"!

She stiffened herself as it was only possible to do when duty called her, and the consequence was that all of Jimmy's entreaties proved vain. He, however, was not on any account to be deterred. The only circumstance which would have been likely to hinder him was being sedulously hidden. Had he for an instant suspected the existence of any previous engagement he would have been the last man in the world to poach on another's preserve. As things were, he waited a few days, then presented himself with his usual cool audacity at Golfney Place.

"Where is Miss Clynesworth?" asked Bridget.

"I rather fancy she's spending the day somewhere in the neighbourhood of Deptford," was the answer.

"You must have forgotten what I told you," suggested Bridget.

"Every word you said is indelibly impressed on my memory," said Jimmy.

"I insisted," replied Bridget, "that you were not to come without your sister!"

"Oh dear, no," he exclaimed. "It's quite true you said I might come with her, but you will see on reflection that is a different matter."

"The fact is," said Bridget, "Miss Clynesworth is determined not to show me the light of her countenance."

"I am fairly certain that is a mistake," returned Jimmy. "I am convinced she will come, but not at present."

"Why not?"

He shrugged his shoulders and told himself that women were sometimes rather severe on one another. Wandering about the room, Jimmy looked at one or two of the oleographs on the light-papered walls, and presently his eyes rested on the hanging bookshelf.

"You have a collection of your father's novels!" he suggested.

"Have you read any of them?" she asked, with obviously quickened interest.



“Yes, several,” was the answer. He took one down from the slide. “I was introduced to Mr. Rosser by old Faversham at Crowborough,” he continued. “I wish to goodness I had seen you at the same time! Besides,” continued Jimmy, as he turned the pages while Bridget stood looking over his shoulder, “I met him once afterwards. That was at the Garrick. I was dining there one evening, and he joined the party. I remember perfectly well that he was the life and soul of it. His books were always a delight to me, if only for their style.”

Jimmy put back the volume he had been examining and took down another, continuing to discuss its contents for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour.

“Miss Rosser!” he cried suddenly, “I am the most arrant humbug!”

“Aren’t you really interested in the books?” she asked.



Page 49

“Yes, but, you know, life is more than letters. Not so much in the books as in you. Although I am going to ask you to let me take one of them home, and I shall enjoy reading it, my actual object is to find an excuse for coming again.”

“Which will you take?” she asked.

“This looks promising,” said Jimmy, selecting a grey-covered volume.

“It is about an ill-assorted marriage,” she explained.

“Oh well, the majority of modern novels are.”

“Certainly the majority of my father’s,” she said. “And yet his own marriage was such a perfect success.”

“Obviously!” answered Jimmy, turning to face her.

“You have heard——”

“Not at all. The happy country has no history, you know. I merely judge by the result.”

Her eyes fell under his gaze, and he saw the colour slowly mantle her face and neck. “Oh, why do you flatter me?” she murmured.

“Don’t you like flattery?”

Now she raised her eyes again, meeting his own.

“Oh, I love it,” she admitted. “But there are so very many undesirable things I adore.”

“I wish I might become one of them!”

“Do you fulfil the condition of undesirability?” asked Bridget.

“Anyhow, I am one of the unemployed,” he answered. “You see, I have been almost converted to opinions which cut away the ground from under my own feet. I have lived so far a delightful life, and now my conscience is beginning to nag me. The question is whether I am enjoying myself at some poor wretches’ continual expense.”

“Why have you never married, Mr. Clynesworth?” asked Bridget.

“I have seen only one woman I could ever care to make my wife.”

“Isn’t one enough?”



“She is bound to be in this country,” was the answer; “although we may have to alter all that in order to get rid of our surplus!”

“Why haven’t you married that one?”

“Well, I haven’t asked her yet,” said Jimmy. “Of course, I am going to, but there are, I suppose, rules to be observed. Hitherto, to tell you the truth, I have been a little frightened at the bare idea. One has so many object lessons! I know a man who was married a week or so ago. He was immensely fond of the girl, but I can swear she doesn’t care for him a rap. Yet I imagine she succeeded in satisfying him that she was—well, over head and ears in love! So she was with some one else.”

“Still, with so many awful examples,” suggested Bridget, “you will naturally be cautious. For your own part, you would not put the momentous question to any woman unless you had the most perfect confidence——”

“Oh, I have!” he replied, more enthusiastically than she had ever heard him speak. “Being human, I suppose I am bound to assume there must be blemishes about her somewhere—I don’t know where! But,” Jimmy continued, “of one thing I am as certain as a man can be of anything in this world.”



Page 50

“What is that?” faltered Bridget.

“Her utter incapability of the remotest shadow of deception. At least I know that when the time comes to put my fate to the touch, she will answer with absolute honesty. If she loves me I shall be the most fortunate beggar under the sun, and if unhappily she doesn’t, she will say so *sans phrase*.”

“You put a premium on candour!” she suggested.

“Why, yes,” he answered. “Whatever I may be I am not very intolerant, but double dealing is the one thing I think I might find it impossible to forgive. It isn’t the spoken lie that’s the worst.”

“What is?” asked Bridget.

“The abominable whitewash we daub over our lives. The eternal pretence to be something we are not. The—— But,” Jimmy broke off, with a laugh, “you must always pull me up when I show signs of beginning to preach!”

As he was speaking, the door opened and Miller in his quiet way announced—

“Colonel Faversham.”

“Hullo, Jimmy, are you here!” he exclaimed, as Bridget offered her hand.

“Don’t you think it looks rather like it?” answered Jimmy, with an ingratiating smile. “I hope your knee is better, colonel.”

“Quite all right,” said Colonel Faversham, with a scowl. “Never anything the matter with it. I am never ill. There isn’t a sounder man in London.”

“Oh well, that’s a large order,” answered Jimmy. “Still, at your age I don’t suppose there is.”

Colonel Faversham looked as if he would like to annihilate Jimmy, who was struggling to put David Rosser’s novel into his jacket pocket. Then he said “good-bye” to Bridget, adding coolly—

“I shall bring back the book in a day or two.”

With a nod to the colonel he left the room, whereupon Faversham lowered himself carefully into a chair.

“Has Jimmy often been here?” he demanded.



“Oh dear, no,” she answered. “This is the first visit.”

“Like his impudence! It won’t be the last.”

“I hope not,” murmured Bridget, standing by the side of his chair.

“How many times have you met him since that afternoon at my house?” asked Colonel Faversham.

“Only once besides to-day!”

“He took that book,” was the answer, “simply for the sake of bringing it back! I hate anything underhanded.”

“But he isn’t!” Bridget insisted. “He said that was his reason.”

“Barefaced!” shouted the colonel. “The fact is Jimmy Clynesworth has never been the same since his sunstroke. Bridget,” he added, “I should like to keep you entirely to myself. I should like——”

What his precise desire might be Bridget was not destined on the present occasion to hear. He suddenly stopped in the middle of his sentence, gazing at her with horror and alarm in his face. Covering hers, she had incontinently broken down, and her body shook with the violence of her sobs. Colonel Faversham found his feet so hastily that he could not suppress an exclamation as he stooped to rub his knee. He knew neither what to say nor how to act.

Page 51

“What’s the matter with you?” he demanded. “Tell me what it is. Only let me know. What more can a man ask?”

“Oh, it is nothing,” said Bridget amidst her tears. “Only that I am the most miserable woman in the world.”

Although he did his best, he could not succeed in tranquilizing her, and finally went away, leaving her in the most despondent mood. Alone in his smoking-room the same evening, Colonel Faversham did his utmost to arrive at some explanation of Bridget’s passionate outburst of grief.

Could it be possible she was distressed at the sight of his disapproval. He ought to keep a firmer rein on his temper! He must remember that Bridget was a delicate girl, and treat her with the kindness she deserved.

This more satisfactory explanation, however, did not prove entirely convincing. She might be unhappy because she repented of her promise; well, in any event he intended to keep her to it! She could scarcely think of breaking her engagement on Jimmy’s account! She had spoilt herself for that. Colonel Faversham, as she must know, was not the man to stand silently by while she transferred herself to a younger aspirant. She had sense enough to understand, too, that Jimmy had only to hear of the existing engagement to retire from the competition.

As a matter of fact, Jimmy had no thought of drawing back. The following Sunday morning the sun seemed to shine more brightly than usual, and Bridget stood at one of the windows of her sitting-room, looking out at the few passers-by on their way to the white-fronted church farther along the street. Its bell was ringing cheerfully.

Until the last few years she had always lived in the country, and now her thoughts flew back to earlier days, and she pictured the fields and hedgerows, remembering the places where she used to find daffodils and primroses and violets. A longing seemed to seize upon her as the church bells left off ringing, and then she heard a hooter, and saw a dark-red motor-car stop at the door, with a chauffeur driving and Jimmy, with a light-brown fur rug over his knees, sitting alone behind.

“A magnificent morning!” he cried, entering her sitting-room a few moments later. “I couldn’t resist the temptation, and to tell you the truth, I didn’t try very hard. I hope you’ll let me take you for a spin into the country.”

“Of course it would be lovely!” said Bridget.

“Then I shall give you five minutes to get ready,” answered Jimmy.

“I really mustn’t,” she insisted.



“Why not?” he demanded. “Aren’t you as free as the larks?”

Bridget sighed as she stood looking out at the car in the street below.

“Come,” urged Jimmy. “Let me take you to hear them sing!”

“Where?” she faltered.

“Oh, you must give me carte-blanche!”

“Suppose I were reckless enough!” said Bridget.

“We would go to the farthest and most secluded corner of the earth where the sun always shines, but never too fiercely.”



Page 52

"Then," she cried more brightly, "English wouldn't be spoken."

"You and I would understand each other," said Jimmy. "That is all I care for."

"There would be the coming back," she suggested.

"Not necessarily," he replied, and Bridget seemed to start as if some fresh idea had suddenly occurred to her mind. "Anyhow, we needn't think of returning before we set out," he continued.

"I mustn't," she repeated.

"But, indeed, you must."

"Mr. Clynesworth——"

"What," he asked, "is the matter with 'Jimmy'?"

"I fancy he is very—very foolish," said Bridget. "I should have to get back by three o'clock," she added.

"Well, half a loaf is better than no bread," he returned.

"You promise faithfully I shall be home by three!"

"Anything in the world so that you come," said Jimmy.

She went to get ready, and presently returned wearing a small hat which became her as well as the wide-brimmed one in which he had seen her the other morning. She carried a heavy cloak over her arm, and seemed to find it difficult to button her gloves. Finally she held out her hand to Jimmy, who lingered over the process; but by and by they went down-stairs together, out into the street, and he put her into the car, tucking the fur rug about her before taking his seat by her side. Colonel Faversham was at church with Carrissima, looking forward during the Lessons to the afternoon, when he intended to reach Golfney Place by half-past three.

CHAPTER XV

MARK MAKES A BEGINNING

Colonel Faversham, without being a bigoted Sabbatarian, liked to make a difference between Sunday and the other six days. He always expected a rather more elaborate dinner and never failed to go to sleep after luncheon. He allowed himself an extra cigar or two, and, in short, deprecated anything which threatened to disturb his peace.



During the last few days his mind, chiefly owing to lapse of time, had been easier concerning Bridget. Without being demonstratively affectionate, she appeared as cheerful as ever, so that he reached Number 5, Golfney Place at half-past three this afternoon with every hope of spending an agreeable hour or two in her presence.

“Hullo!” he exclaimed, before he had been many minutes in the room, “wild flowers!”

“I think they must be,” said Bridget, with a laugh.

“They look fresh!”

“They ought to be,” she answered. “They were growing an hour or two ago.”

“In the country?” suggested the colonel.

“Wouldn’t it be lovely if one could pick primroses and marsh marigolds in London!” said Bridget.

“Bridget,” cried Colonel Faversham, “I believe you take a delight in teasing me. I suppose the people of the house gave them to you!”

“How much I should like to have a motor-car,” she said suddenly.



Page 53

“Why not?” he demanded. “Why shouldn’t you have a motor-car? I often wonder I’ve never gone in for one before now. Bridget, there are few things you shan’t have when once you’re my wife.”

She leaned back in her chair, biting her nether lip, and every now and then glancing reflectively at the colonel, as if in hesitation.

“Such a delightful ride!” she cried a few minutes later.

“Eh—what—when?” he said.

“This morning, of course. Jimmy took me by surprise. He called for me shortly after eleven. I couldn’t resist going. We went through some of the loveliest Surrey villages.”

“What about lunch?” asked Colonel Faversham, with difficulty bottling up his wrath.

“Oh, we stopped at the sweetest little inn that seemed to be miles away from everywhere and everybody. Of course, we hadn’t much time to spare.”

That was one consolation, and Bridget’s candour was another; nevertheless. Colonel Faversham found his Sunday afternoon quite spoilt, and finally left Golfney Place in a humour to make things a little uncomfortable for any one who crossed his path. He was beginning to notice that Mark Driver came to Grandison Square somewhat often, and seeing Carrissima wearing her hat and jacket a few afternoons later the colonel asked where she was going.

“I am expecting Phoebe,” she answered. “Mark has taken some rooms in Weymouth Street and we are invited to inspect them to-day.”

Colonel Faversham chuckled as she left the house. Nothing could suit his purpose better! She would never, he felt certain, be content to stay at home under the new Mrs. Faversham’s regime, and her own marriage would prove an admirable solution of the difficulty.

Mark Driver was just now in his element. His friend, Doctor Harefield, had broken down in health, his only hope being to relinquish an incipient practice and spend a considerable time in a more favourable climate. Mark had taken over Harefield’s three rooms: a dining-room on the ground floor, intended to serve also as a patients’ waiting-room; a small consulting-room in its rear, and a bedroom at the top of the house. The furniture, such as it was, had been bought at a valuation, not that Mark had intended to make such an outlay at the moment, but it was understood that the goodwill of Harefield’s practice was to be thrown in. It was, in fact, far too small to be sold separately, although it might form the nucleus of the much larger one which his successor fully intended to build up.



Mark, having provided an elaborate tea and a profusion of flowers, looked forward with considerable zest to Carrissima's visit with Phoebe as her chaperon, and yet as he stood at the window awaiting her arrival he wondered whether he had not perhaps been a little too precipitate over his recent investment.

His outlook had been steadily changing since the day after his return from Paris. Although it appeared as if love had come upon him suddenly, he knew it had done nothing of the kind. While it seemed to have blossomed in a day, he understood that it had been developing for many months, perhaps, even for many years.



Page 54

He could not feel absolutely confident. Carrissima had builded better than she knew. So cleverly had she dissembled her emotions that there were times when Mark feared lest he should take her completely by surprise; but in any case the declaration must not much longer be postponed. If his desires were gratified, it appeared obvious that these three rooms would prove inadequate, while, incongruously enough, it was the fact that he had made some kind of beginning by taking them, which justified his increasingly impatient aspirations.

Carrissima, arriving with Phoebe at half-past four, was prepared to admire everything. She was taken first to the small consulting-room, and shown various kinds of apparatus for the administration of ether, chloroform and gas, then to the waiting-room, where Phoebe poured out tea. Mrs. Lawrence Faversham, for her part, was more critical. She insisted that Mark had paid more than the furniture was worth. Much of it was fit only for the dusthole! The curtains, for instance, were falling to pieces, and in any case he positively was bound to invest in a new carpet.

“Look at the darns!” she cried. “It must have served for generation after generation of physicians. It is enough to put any patient off! Whatever you do without, you really must have a new carpet.”

“Don’t you think I could rub along with the old one for the present?” asked Mark, turning to Carrissima, who, however, felt she must agree with her sister-in-law.

“Such a fuss about seven or eight guineas,” said Phoebe. “If you won’t buy one I shall have to make you a present.”

“Well, then,” exclaimed Mark suddenly, “suppose you and Carrissima help me choose it. I am a perfect idiot at that sort of thing. Where shall we go?”

“You would never ask such a question,” said Carrissima, looking wonderfully happy as she sat holding her cup and saucer, “if you had any real feeling for the Art of Shopping. We will go everywhere. The first thing is to land yourself in the neighbourhood—then you plunge. The idea of making up your mind where to buy a thing before you start. That’s not the way. Do it thoroughly and see all that is to be seen.”

“When shall we go,” asked Mark, “since I mustn’t ask where?”

“Any afternoon you like to name next week!”

“It is evidently going to be a long job,” said Mark. “Suppose we say Monday afternoon. I will call for Phoebe at three in a taxi, then we will make for Grandison Square.”

Carrissima left Weymouth Street in the highest spirits, and at last began to wonder whether her long patience was by way of being rewarded. When Monday arrived she



actually put on her hat—her most becoming hat—before the appointed time, and as she sat waiting for Mark and Phoebe Colonel Faversham looked into the dining-room.

“Oh, ah, Carrissima!” he said; “it occurs to me that you haven’t seen much of Bridget lately. I should like you to go to Golfney Place. You’ve nothing in the world to do. You look idle enough sitting there! Suppose you go this afternoon!”



Page 55

"I am expecting Mark," answered Carrissima.

"Mark again!"

"And Phoebe," said Carrissima.

"Off on the spree—the three of you?"

"Mark," Carrissima explained, "asked us to help him choose a—a carpet——"

"Devilish thoughtful of him," said the colonel in his most amiable and significant tone.

"For his patients' waiting-room!"

"Well, if you get one to match your cheeks," was the answer, "it will be a nice cheerful colour for them. It strikes me you're seeing a good deal of the fellow."

"I always have done," said Carrissima, devoutly wishing he would arrive to release her.

"Be candid now!" cried the colonel. "Be honest. I like honesty. Anyhow, you can't deceive me. Carrissima, I'll tell you one thing. There's nothing on this earth would give me greater gratification, nothing!"

She durst not even yet allow her hopes to run away with her, and while she was wondering whether there would be time to go upstairs and powder her face or whether, after all, the remedy might not be worse than the disease, she heard the street door bell ring.

"I will go to Golfney Place to-morrow, if you like," she said, with a momentary sense of something resembling sympathy for her father. Because, if what she was constantly hearing from Sybil were true, it seemed extremely probable that Colonel Faversham was doomed to disappointment. According to Sybil, Jimmy went to see Bridget day after day, and granting that she was determined upon escape from her pecuniary troubles by a marriage of some kind, surely she would choose Jimmy in preference to the colonel, if only for the fact that he was much more wealthy. So that Colonel Faversham were spared Carrissima did not feel disposed to judge Bridget too severely; disapproving of her manoeuvres, indeed, but having enough to do in the management of her own affairs.

"Well, well, go to-morrow," said her father. "I'll answer for it she will be pleased to see you. Take her a few flowers! Ah!" Colonel Faversham added, as the door opened, "here's Mark!"

"Where is Phoebe?" asked Carrissima, as she offered her hand.



“An awful bore,” answered Mark. “Victor has a bit of a cold; anyhow I couldn’t persuade his devoted mother to desert him this afternoon.”

“I suppose,” said Carrissima, hoping that she was not betraying her disappointment, “we must wait for another day.”

“Nonsense!” exclaimed Colonel Faversham. “Why shouldn’t you keep to your arrangement? What is to hinder it, I should like to know.”

“Do you mind, Carrissima?” asked Mark, gazing eagerly into her face.

“Not at all,” she said, and a few minutes later Colonel Faversham stood on the doorstep, looking after them with obvious approval, as they were driven away from the house in a taxi-cab.

CHAPTER XVI



Page 56

BUYING A CARPET—AND AFTER

Mark and Carrissima had not gone far on their way together before it became evident that they were not absolutely in harmony. His object was primarily to purchase a carpet for his dining-room as quickly as might be; while hers was to visit as many shops as possible and, in fact, thoroughly to enjoy the afternoon.

“Where shall we go first?” he suggested outside the door of Number 13, Grandison Square.

“Let me see!” she cried. “Tottenham Court Road will be the best.”

So Mark directed the chauffeur accordingly, and, on getting out of the taxi-cab, Carrissima ominously suggested that it should be dismissed. During the somewhat lengthy process which now began, she was not without moments of pleasurable embarrassment. No doubt the various frock-coated salesmen, who patiently displayed their wares, desired to do precisely the correct thing, but there appeared to exist a considerable difference of opinion concerning Carrissima’s status.

Some addressed her as “Miss,” some as “Madame,” but all agreed that she was either recently married to Mark Driver or on the point of becoming his wife. At first he enjoyed entering the huge warehouses by her side, standing by while she (obviously taking command of the expedition) expressed her wish to “see some carpets.” He was amused to hear her discuss the nature of carpets in general; also at her manner of resisting every effort of persuasion, and finally walking to the door. When, however, several shops had been fruitlessly visited and enough carpets inspected to furnish a large, modern hotel, Mark began to feel weary.

“This is uncommonly hard work,” he suggested. “I vote we have some tea as an *entr’acte*.”

“Oh, very well, if you’re tired already,” said Carrissima, “we will go to Prince’s.”

“Can’t we find a shop about here?” urged Mark.

“It won’t take us half-an-hour in a taxi,” she insisted, and a few minutes later they were on their way.

“After we have fortified ourselves,” said Mark, “perhaps we shall find it possible to make up our minds.”

When they reached the restaurant in Piccadilly, Carrissima admitted that she felt glad to sit down.



“Now, don’t you think,” suggested Mark, after she had drunk two cups of China tea and sampled the cakes, “we might begin serious business at the next place.”

“If you’re really sick of it,” she answered, “we may as well go back to the beginning, though I wanted to visit one or two places about here.”

“O Lord!” exclaimed Mark.

“You see,” she replied, “I really made up my mind at once. We haven’t seen anything so good for the price as that bronze and black Childema rug at Mabred’s.”

“Then we have simply wasted the whole afternoon!”

“It isn’t very nice of you to say that,” cried Carrissima, rising from her chair, with a laugh. They were soon on their way back to the first warehouse they had visited, and the bronze and black carpet having been after some trouble identified, Mark drew a cheque to pay the bill.



Page 57

On going out to the street again, he was on the point of hailing another taxi-cab, when Carrissima proposed walking at least a part of the way.

“Carrissima,” he said, gazing down into her eyes, a few minutes later, “what is the colour?”

“Oh well,” she replied, “there are ever so many blended together, you know.”

“I thought there must be two,” he admitted.

“Of course,” she said, “the general effect is bronze and black.”

“Blue or grey?” murmured Mark, as she looked up again.

“Have many carpets made you mad?” she demanded. “I don’t understand what you are talking about!”

“I was wondering about the colour of your eyes. I can’t quite make up my mind about them,” he continued. “At one moment they look grey, at another blue.”

“Surely,” answered Carrissima, quite unwontedly happy, “you have known me long enough to feel no doubt.”

“It is possible,” said Mark, “that I have known you too long.”

“Oh, thank you,” she exclaimed. “So custom stales any variety they possess.”

“Not at all,” he urged. “What I meant was that familiarity, as the copybooks say, may breed a kind of—well, scarcely contempt——”

“Mark,” said Carrissima, “the more you say the worse you will make it. I really think you had better be quiet. How long is it,” she asked, as they walked towards Weymouth Street on the way to Grandison Square, “since you saw Bridget?”

“Not since the day after my return from Paris,” he replied. “I have not been near Golfney Place. Nor,” he added, “have I any intention of going. To all intents and purposes, Bridget has dropped out of my life.”

“Any one would imagine,” said Carrissima, “that she had done something to annoy you.”

“Oh dear, no,” was the answer. “I am simply indifferent.” Before she had time to explain that she had promised to go to Golfney Place the following afternoon, he added, “By the bye, your fears have not been realized so far. I am immensely glad of that.”



“Ah, yes,” said Carrissima; “after Bridget’s curious confidences, I suppose you expected something—something horrid to occur quite soon!”

“We need not rake up the past,” cried Mark, who would have preferred to avoid Bridget’s name, which indeed had not been mentioned between them during the last few weeks.

“For that matter,” she said, “my anxiety is practically a thing of the past.”

“Is Colonel Faversham cooling off?”

“Not in the least. It is difficult not to feel rather sorry for him. He goes day after day—but then a fresh act has begun. Jimmy has appeared on the scene.”

“Jimmy!” cried Mark in unfeigned surprise.

“He met her at our house some time ago,” Carrissima explained. “It was really quite entertaining. Those two seemed to draw together on the instant, as if one were the magnet and the other the needle. Besides, I have the advantage of Sybil’s confidences. Poor Sybil! I can assure you she is in the most dreadful state of mind.”



Page 58

“But do you imagine that Jimmy means business?” demanded Mark.

“According to Sybil, he is merely biding his time: waiting until a sufficient number of weeks have passed to enable him to come to the point with something like decency.”

“If that’s really the case,” said Mark, “I can only say I am immensely pleased!”

“So am I,” answered Carrissima, with quiet fervour.

“I would have done a great deal, if it had been possible,” Mark continued, “to prevent Bridget from marrying Colonel Faversham, if only for your sake; but as to Jimmy, I don’t care a rap.”

“Neither do I,” said Carrissima.

“If he can’t take care of himself after all his experiences,” Mark insisted, “the Lord knows who can. I consider Jimmy fair game.”

They parted at her door, Mark refusing to enter the house, because he had a patient to visit—one of the very few he had taken over from Dr. Harefield. Never had Carrissima spent a more enjoyable or a more thoroughly satisfactory afternoon! It proved an immense consolation to hear that Mark had not seen Bridget, with that one exception, since his return from Paris; whereas his manner of taking the news of Jimmy’s entrance on the field could scarcely have been more desirable.

Not only had the afternoon seen the disappearance of her last lingering feeling of jealousy of Bridget Rosser, but it encouraged the growth of sensations which had long been kept back. As a rule, Carrissima enjoyed a serious talk with Mark, but to-day she had been the most delighted by his frivolity. She laughed quietly as she remembered his remarks anent the colour of her eyes, and spent some minutes examining them in her looking-glass.

“You won’t forget, Carrissima,” said Colonel Faversham at breakfast the next morning. “You won’t forget you’re going to see Bridget this afternoon. Take a few flowers—roses, if you ask me! She is fond of roses.”

She assured her father that she had not forgotten, and eventually set out in excellent spirits; the optimism with which she was disposed to regard the world at large including Miss Rosser. Carrissima made her way to a florist’s, and after hovering over various kinds of flowers for ten minutes, at last bought so many pink and yellow roses that she did not like to carry them through the streets. A taxi-cab soon brought her to Golfney Place, and Miller did not keep her long at the street door.

“Is Miss Rosser at home?” she inquired, as she took a firmer grip of the rose stalks, which did not seem to be fastened very securely together.



“Will you walk in, please,” said Miller, leading the way up-stairs.

When they reached the first landing, Carrissima was about two yards in the rear. She carried the large bunch of flowers in her left hand as Miller turned the handle and opened the sitting-room door. At the same, moment, she came to a sudden halt, starting so violently that the loosely-fastened roses fell scattering on to the floor.



Page 59

The sunlight fell into the room, making it much lighter than the landing. Full in the glare, Carrissima was appalled to behold two figures: Mark and Bridget. He, who but yesterday had declared that he had not seen her for some weeks, that he had no wish ever to see her again, was to-day holding her in his arms. Her head was thrown back, her chin invitingly raised; her lips were pressed to his.

CHAPTER XVII

HASTY WORDS

Miller had been too well trained to betray the slightest astonishment at what he must have seen as distinctly as Carrissima.

“Miss Faversham,” he imperturbably announced, and on the instant Mark’s arms dropped to his side, and Bridget, after a glance which was overflowing with reproach, turned towards the door.

“Where is Miss Faversham?” she asked in an unusually high voice, wondering that she could see no sign of a visitor.

Miller, glancing aside at the landing, saw Carrissima on her knees by the balusters, engaged in picking up the scattered roses. Her back was towards the room, and she wished that her heart would not beat quite so tumultuously.

“Oh, do let me help you!” suggested Bridget, going to her side, and from that instant Carrissima seemed to have only one object in life. Above all things she wished to lead both Bridget and Mark to believe that she had seen nothing out of the common! Unable at present to grasp the complete significance of the revelation which fortunately had been vouchsafed to her, she perceived, at least, that it implied the utter destruction of her own recent hopes. Nothing could be worse than the betrayal of her disillusionment: because obviously she had been the victim of a rather cruel illusion especially since yesterday. Now her *savoir faire* became her most valuable asset.

“I think I have picked them all up,” she said, rising hastily to her feet, with the roses loose in her hands.

“How sweet of you to come!” answered Bridget. “Mark is here, too! What lovely roses,” she continued, leading the way into the sitting-room, as Miller stood on the landing.

“I am sorry they are so untidy,” said Carrissima, with every appearance of cheerfulness.

“Are they really for me!” cried Bridget, taking the flowers and placing them on the table.



“What a lovely day,” said Carrissima, although it was the worst she had ever known. “Have they sent home the carpet, yet?” she added, as Mark offered his hand with some embarrassment. He was certainly the most awkward of the three; the women far surpassing him in *finesse*.

“Have you been buying a carpet?” asked Bridget, as she laid the flowers on the table. “How interesting! Do, please, tell me all about it?”

“For one of my rooms in Weymouth Street,” answered Mark.

“Have you actually taken rooms?” said Bridget. “Too bad not to tell me!”



Page 60

Carrissima, now prepared to recognize deception everywhere, found it difficult to look cheerful. She had no doubt that Bridget knew all about the rooms, which Mark began rather eagerly to describe. It was obvious, however, that he was impatient to get away, and Carrissima, raising her eyes abruptly, intercepted a curiously entreating glance from him to Bridget, who at once held out her hand.

“Shall you be at home this evening?” he asked, turning to Carrissima the next moment.

Although she would infinitely have preferred to say “no,” to avoid seeing him again, indeed, as long as the world lasted, she felt afraid lest she should awaken a suspicion of her enlightenment. It seemed inevitable that she must continue to meet him in the future as she had done in the past, and, perhaps, the sooner the next encounter took place the better!

“Oh yes, I think so,” she answered. “Shall I see you?”

“I—I thought of looking you up after dinner,” said Mark, and the moment he had left the room Miller, with his usual inscrutable face, brought in the tea. Not for the world would Carrissima cut short her visit, and for another quarter of an hour or more she sat listening to Bridget’s inquiries concerning Mark’s new quarters and his plans for the future.

“I had no idea that he had left Duffield’s Hotel,” she said presently. “Mark is a dreadful truant. He never comes near me now! I suppose,” she added, “he is a great friend of Jimmy’s?”

“They and Lawrence were at school together at Brighton,” replied Carrissima, and now she thought she might safely say “good-bye.”

Bridget seemed unwilling to release her hand, as they stood together on almost the same spot where Carrissima had seen Miss Rosser in Mark’s arms! She looked down at her guest furtively, as if she were unable to make up her mind about something. Perhaps, thought Carrissima, she was wondering whether or not it were desirable to do anything further to remove any possible suspicion! Still, Bridget said nothing unusual, and having once more thanked Carrissima for the roses she insisted on going to see her out of the house.

What a joy it was to breathe the uncontaminated air again! Carrissima walked in the direction of Grandison Square with her mind in a tumult. Her god had fallen! She was far too wildly excited to be capable of anything resembling a sane view of the maddening situation! She longed above all things to reach home, to run up-stairs to her own room, to lock the door, to be away from all mankind.



The pressing question was not whether Mark loved Bridget. That had already been answered. What she wished to make up her mind about was the nature of his “love”—much abused word! If he intended to marry Bridget, why not have said so and have done with it? He had the right to please himself.

His secrecy, his deception, surely signified something base! It was inconceivable that he had not seen her for three weeks—in the face of what Carrissima had witnessed half-an-hour ago! Why had Mark gone out of his way to keep his intercourse with Bridget a secret unless there was something to be ashamed of? Why had he pretended to feel satisfied, even pleased, at the news of her intimacy with Jimmy? Why, above everything, had he recently changed his demeanour towards his oldest friend?



Page 61

Carrissima must be pictured as approaching Number 13, Grandison Square with such thoughts crowding upon her mind, under the influence of the reaction from her necessary self-control in Bridget's presence. Her head seemed to be on fire, and, always apt to be impulsive, she had never in the course of her vast experience of twenty-two years been so completely carried away as now.

She experienced a deep pang of disappointment on seeing Sybil talking to Knight on the doorstep.

"Oh, I am so very glad not to have missed you!" cried the for once unwelcome visitor. "How extremely fortunate you were not a minute later, because I was just going home."

As a matter of course, without waiting for an invitation, Sybil stepped into the hall and accompanied Carrissima up-stairs.

"My dear," she exclaimed, as the butler shut the drawing-room door, "whatever is the matter? You look as if you had seen something dreadful!"

"What nonsense," said Carrissima. "What can I have seen?"

"I really can't imagine," answered Sybil, with a sigh. "I suppose I feel so terribly worried myself that I fancy everybody else has something to bother about. Still, you certainly do look as if I have never seen you before."

"The sun is quite hot," murmured Carrissima, sitting down by one of the windows.

"Although I always feel it I couldn't stay indoors," said Sybil. "Jimmy is more and more enthusiastic every day. He won't hear a word of advice! I have begged and implored him to give Miss Rosser up, but he insists that he is only going to wait until the end of this week. To think of Jimmy's throwing himself away!"

"Oh," cried Carrissima, rising impetuously to her feet, "you need not feel in the least alarmed!"

"But, my dear, how can I help it?" said Sybil. "I never close my eyes until past one o'clock, and when I wake it is impossible to get to sleep again."

"Well, you may rest in peace for the future," answered Carrissima, throwing out her arms excitedly. "Sybil, we have both been making the most dreadful idiots of ourselves!"

"You forget," suggested Sybil, with a perplexed expression, "that Jimmy has actually told me he means to marry the woman!"

"It takes two to make a marriage," said Carrissima.



“You can’t seriously imagine that Miss Rosser would refuse him!” cried Sybil.

“It isn’t a question of imagination,” retorted Carrissima, walking restlessly about the room. “There are the stubborn facts. I have just come from Golfney Place!”

“Surely she didn’t tell you——”

“There was no need for words,” said Carrissima. “I can’t disbelieve the evidence of my own eyes, however incredible it may appear.”

“Carrissima!” exclaimed Sybil, “you are making me so painfully curious. Do, please, tell me what you saw.”

“I saw Mark holding Bridget in his arms!”



Page 62

“My dear Carrissima!”

“I saw him kissing her—oh, how disgusting it is!” said Carrissima, with a shudder.

“How shockingly embarrassed you must all have felt,” suggested Sybil.

“Oh dear, no,” was the answer. “Neither of them had the slightest idea they were seen. We all behaved beautifully—beautifully.”

“Well, I must say this is the best news I have heard for a long time,” said Sybil, looking wonderfully relieved.

“The—the best news!” returned Carrissima, pressing her hands to her bosom.

“Of course, if she is going to marry Mark——”

“I don’t believe she is!” said Carrissima.

“But, my dear, if you actually saw them!”

“I don’t believe it,” was the answer. “If he means to marry her what is the object of all this secrecy? Mark told me only yesterday that he had not seen her for weeks. I shall never know whom to believe again as long as I live. While he pretended Bridget was nothing to him, this—this hateful business has been going on in the background. I have been afraid she would marry my father; you have dreaded that she would marry Jimmy, and yet this afternoon I actually saw—oh, it is abominable. There is only one explanation. There must have been some—some understanding between them from the first.”

“I always told Jimmy she might not be respectable,” said Sybil.

Hearing that on another’s lips, the slightest suggestion of which already Carrissima regretted should have passed her own, cooler judgment began to return. In her wrath she had felt prepared to think anything that was vile of both Mark and Bridget; but only for the moment. Already she repented that she had opened her heart to Sybil.

“Oh, I don’t want to go too far,” she exclaimed. “Of course there must be some explanation! You quite understand, Sybil! You are not to repeat a single word which I have said to any one.”

“My dear, I ought to tell Jimmy before it’s too late. I am sure only one conclusion is possible.

“Jimmy ought to be able to look after himself,” urged Carrissima.



“Ah, there are very few men who can do that where a pretty woman is concerned,” said Sybil.

“Anyhow,” returned Carrissima, “I shall not let you go until you have given me your solemn promise. You are not to breathe a word—not a syllable.”

“Of course if you insist——”

“I do,” said Carrissima. “I was idiotic to speak about the odious thing. You promise you will never repeat a word to any living being!”

“Very well, my dear,” was the docile answer, and then Carrissima breathed more freely.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW IT HAPPENED

Mark Driver, on returning from the carpet-purchasing expedition, spent the evening alone in his Weymouth Street rooms. He had not the least intention to go near Golfney Place the following day, and every word he had spoken during the walk home with Carrissima was precisely true.



Page 63

He believed he could never live happily without her! As he sat smoking his pipe that night, he smiled to remember Carrissima at the numerous warehouses she had visited, and his thoughts wandered back over the many years of their friendship.

Fortunate is the man who may count upon one sympathetic listener, too deeply interested in his most ordinary experiences for boredom; prepared to take his side (with or without justification) against the world. So it had always been with Carrissima. Of any scheme, any opinion, any ambition of his, she invariably tended to think the best. If ever he accomplished anything more meritorious than usual, she was always the first to be told; and when he happened to make a mistake, she would be certain to make light of it.

At nine o'clock on Tuesday morning Mark had an appointment round the corner in Beaumont Street. Mr. Randolph Messeter had a serious operation to perform at a nursing home, and Mark was to administer the anaesthetic. All had gone well; he had returned to Weymouth Street, and was in the act of putting away his apparatus, when the telephone bell rang.

He was wanted immediately by Lady Scones, in Burnham Crescent, S.W. Sir Wilford Scones had been one of Doctor Harefield's most lucrative patients, and naturally Mark felt gratified by the summons. A rapid examination showed that the patient was seriously ill, and having telephoned for a trained nurse and written a prescription, Mark left the house, with a promise to come again during the afternoon.

On his way home after this second visit at about four o'clock, he walked past the end of Golfney Place, and, a few yards farther on, saw a motor-car in which was seated Bridget. As he lifted his hat, she called to the chauffeur to stop, and seeing she was bent on getting out, Mark could scarcely do less than open the door.

"What a stranger!" she cried, holding out her hand. "Weeks and weeks since you came to see me! Anyhow, you must come now."

"Sorry," said Mark, "but, upon my word, I haven't much time to spare——"

"You won't want much," she insisted. "It's no use, Mark! You've got to be nice and reasonable, and you must just come in."

Taking out her purse, she paid the chauffeur—in gold, as Mark could not help seeing, and, judging by the expression of the man's face, adding an unusually liberal tip. Without any more excuses, Mark accompanied her along the secluded street, and, on reaching Number 5, Bridget admitted him with her latch-key.

"Where do you think I have been?" she asked, throwing off her cloak as soon as she entered the sitting-room.



“I don’t see how I can guess without something more to guide me,” said Mark, as she went to the looking-glass, drew some monstrous-headed pins from her hat, and began to arrange her hair, patting it here, pulling it there, while Mark admired its quantity and colour.



Page 64

“Oh, how the wind has made my cheeks burn,” she cried, pressing her palms against them. “You know how one pines for woods and pastures at this time of year!” she continued. “A kind of nostalgia! Directly after breakfast I sent Miller for a motor-car from the garage in the next street, and I went to Crowborough.”

“Alone?” asked Mark.

“Didn’t you see I was alone? That was the idea, you know. I hadn’t been inside the dear old house since father and I left it four years ago. There was a board up. It was to be let again, so I rang the bell and went all over it—round the garden, then to the churchyard. I suppose you scarcely remember my mother, Mark?”

“Very indistinctly,” he answered, seeing that she was in a somewhat emotional mood.

But, to tell the truth, he was inclined to distrust appearances. During his previous visit to Golfney Place, she had betrayed a certain amount of feeling, with the deliberate object, he felt convinced, of awakening his sympathy. On that occasion Bridget had told him about her pecuniary difficulties, in order to induce him to anticipate Colonel Faversham. At present he was wondering whether or not she had a similar end in view.

“My mother,” she said, drawing nearer, “was the best and sweetest woman in the world. You are a clever man. Tell me how she came to have such a daughter.”

Surely the late Mrs. Rosser could scarcely have had a more seductive child! At the moment, she stood almost touching Mark, her chin raised, gazing up into his eyes. The sunlight fell upon her hair, and he wished he could refrain from noticing her dimple.

“What is the matter with her?” he asked.

“Don’t pretend you are so dense,” said Bridget, resting a hand on his shoulder. “I gave myself away the last time you were here, and of course that’s the reason you have never been near me since!”

She was almost resting against him, either carried away by her emotion or deliberately trying to lead him on. Mark felt very little doubt as to her purpose; he was convinced that she was bringing all her batteries to bear upon him, and it is a painful task to chronicle a good man’s fall!

On the deplorable impulse of the moment, he put an arm around Bridget and kissed her lips. Then two alarming things happened. As the door opened and Miller announced “Miss Faversham,” Mark saw from the shocked, indignant expression on Bridget’s face, that on the present occasion, at least, he had misinterpreted her intention.

There seemed to be something ironic in the circumstances. Never had Mark felt more enthusiastic in his devotion to Carrissima than he had done when he entered Number 5,



Golfney Place, this afternoon. Hitherto when Bridget had in truth been tempting him, he had succeeded in standing firm; but to-day, when she had been making a sincere appeal for his help and sympathy, he had lost his self-control.



Page 65

But for the fact that Bridget was unwilling, he might not have taken a very serious view of his own behaviour, especially as it seemed obvious that Carrissima had appeared on the scene a moment too late to witness it. Even if she had not dropped her roses on the landing, her demeanour must have sufficed to lull him into a false sense of security. Nevertheless, he felt extremely uncomfortable until he left the room; and indeed he perceived that even his presence at the house might, after yesterday's protestations, require some explanation. Hence his suggestion to go to Grandison Square after dinner the same evening.

He wished devoutly that he had not made a fool of himself, without considering that he had been guilty of anything worse than an act of folly. It was not as if he were actually engaged to Carrissima, although he was now in a mood to regret that he had ever bestowed a thought on any other woman since his birth.

Mark had arranged to see Sir Wilford Scones again before night, and his intention was to make his way from Burnham Crescent to Grandison Square; but the question now arose whether he ought not to call upon Bridget and make some sort of *amende* for the incident of the afternoon.

"Oh, Mark!" she exclaimed, the moment he entered her presence, and before he found time to speak; "how could you do it! You, of all men! You always seemed just the one to be trusted. What can there be about me that you should imagine I was that—that sort of woman?"

"What was there about me, rather?" said Mark, looking rather shamefaced. "Bridget, I can only tell you I am immensely sorry."

"Suppose," she cried, "that Carrissima had seen you! Suppose she had not dropped her flowers! What would be the use of saying you were sorry then? She has always been horridly jealous——"

"Carrissima jealous!"

"From the first time she came here! I suppose it began that evening you took me to Belloni's and kept her waiting for dinner. She would never have forgiven you. Mark, you have had a very, very narrow escape, and I am not certain you deserve to get off so easily. Because, don't you see, your treatment of me was the worse on account of your love for her."

He stood with a dejected expression on his face, and nothing more was said, for a few moments; then Bridget lightly rested a hand on his sleeve.

"Ah, well," she said, "I don't want to pile up the agony. Besides," she added, with an obvious effort, "I must be honest. I—I know I have given you reason to think meanly of



me—vilely! But, don't you see, Mark, I—I have done with all that. I was never so anxious to make the best of myself. Not that it can conceivably matter.”

Mark left the house in a chastened mood, wondering as he walked towards Burnham Crescent whether it were possible that she had fallen sincerely in love with Jimmy Clynesworth.

Was it likely that, after all her alarms and excursions, she had found a resting-place at last; that Carrissima was right when she insisted that Jimmy had ousted Colonel Faversham, but wrong when she imagined that Bridget's inducement was his larger income?



Page 66

"I'm sorry to be so late," said Mark, when at last he entered Carrissima's presence that evening.

"Oh, it isn't too late," she answered. "My father is out, and I am thankful for any one to relieve the monotony of things."

"The fact is," Mark explained, "I have a serious case near here. I was kept rather longer than I anticipated. My third visit to-day!"

"You must be making a rapid fortune," she cried gaily.

"Anyhow, it's a beginning," he said, adding, after a momentary pause, "I thought you might be surprised to see me at Golfney Place this afternoon."

"No, I don't know that I was," returned Carrissima. "Just a wee bit, perhaps; but then, you know, one ought never to feel astonished to meet a doctor anywhere."

"Oh well, Bridget's not a patient," said Mark, with a smile. "I was on my way home from Sir Wilford's, when I saw her in a motor-car just by the corner of Golfney Place. She insisted that I should go in with her, and because of her importunity I consented."

"Has the carpet arrived yet?" asked Carrissima.

"It was laid while I was out this afternoon," was the answer.

"Well, I hope you approve of my taste."

"It looks first-rate," said Mark. "The room is transformed. I have some idea of putting up my fees on the strength of it. I should like you to come and have a look," he added.

"Why, of course," returned Carrissima. "I must ask Phoebe to bring me one afternoon, and you shall give us some more of those delicious cakes."

Mark Driver was certainly living in a fool's paradise that evening. He did not imagine for an instant that he should ever hear of the escapade again. The incident was ended. Carrissima remained in blissful ignorance, and he had made his peace with Bridget.

Bliss, however, was far from Carrissima that night. For one thing, she blamed herself severely for having opened her heart to Sybil Clynesworth. Although it seemed obvious that Mark had been playing an equivocal game, there could, Carrissima felt certain on reflection, be no justification for the innuendoes which she had allowed herself to make. The truth was that even now she scarcely knew what she had said in her wrath. She remembered that odious ideas had flashed unbidden across her mind—ideas which now appeared as unworthy of herself as of Mark.



Still, after making every allowance, her disillusioning remained complete. How could a man feel an interest in the precise colour of her own eyes one day and kiss the lips of another woman the next? She knew that her wish had been father to the thought, and she felt exceedingly bitter against Miss Bridget Rosser, who appeared still to have three men dangling at her heels.

One of these was becoming impatient. Colonel Faversham had reached the end of his tether. He realized that his authority over Bridget would not bear a great strain, and accordingly on Wednesday morning he made his way to Donaldson's, where he purchased a handsome and expensive jewelled waist-belt, such as she had admired on an actress when he took her to the play a few evenings ago. Armed with this peace-offering, Colonel Faversham reached Golfney Place at eleven o'clock on the morning after Mark Driver's unfortunate visit.



Page 67

CHAPTER XIX

AN APPOINTMENT

"Oh dear!" cried Bridget, as she clasped the belt round her waist, "how kind you always are to me!"

"I don't see why you should sigh about that," answered Colonel Faversham. "I mean to be kind to you as long as I live, and I hope that will be a good many years yet. But there's nothing like tit for tat, you know, Bridget. Come, now, my darling, I want you to be kind to me."

"If only you could see into my mind you would say I was a perfect little wretch!" she murmured, taking off the belt and laying it on a table.

"Just as well we can't do that sort of thing," said the colonel. "I never care for women who are too good for human nature's daily food. You don't mind if I light a cigar," he added, sitting down with caution.

"Oh dear, no," she returned, and going to the mantelshelf, brought a box of matches, one of which she struck, holding it to the end of his cigar. When he had lighted it, he captured her wrist with elephantine playfulness.

"Bridget," he exclaimed, as she laughingly freed herself, "suppose we cut the cackle and get to the bosses. I think I've been patient long enough."

"I have never imagined that patience was your strong point," said Bridget.

"Well, well, too much of it makes a man look like a fool," was the answer, "and besides, to tell the truth, I'm devilish impatient. Who could look at you and be anything else? What's the use of wasting time in this way? I could fix things up in a week, and never a word to Lawrence or Carrissima till we're safely out of England. Come now, when shall we get married?"

For a few moments, while Colonel Faversham sat smoking, she did not answer. She was standing a few yards away, with her fingers interlocked. Her breath came and went quickly and her face had lost all its colour.

"It's no use," she suddenly exclaimed. "I can't tell you."

"Why not—why not?" demanded Colonel Faversham. "Good gracious, my little pet isn't frightened of me!"

"I think I am," she faltered.



“What is there to be frightened about?”

“You have always been so kind—I am going to treat you so horridly——”

“No, you’re not,” he said. “You’re going to make me the dearest little wife in the world. Come, now, Bridget?”

He was too fatuously enamoured to dream that she could be struggling for strength to dismiss him. Her obvious timidity was ascribed to natural maidenly bashfulness, which made her appear wonderfully enticing. She clasped her hands more tightly together and turned her head this way and that, glancing at the windows, at the door, as if she longed to run away and make her escape from the man whose chief desire in life was to keep her always by his side.

He saw her moisten her lips and raise her hands for a moment to her forehead.



Page 68

"I can't say it," she cried. "I suppose I am too great a coward. You—you shall know to-morrow!"

"You will fix the day for certain!" said Colonel Faversham eagerly.

"You shall know to-morrow," she repeated.

"Now, that," he exclaimed, rising from his chair, "is a promise!"

"A solemn promise," murmured Bridget; and a few minutes later Colonel Faversham went away, strutting along the street with his chest puffed out, walking on air, and certainly never doubting that Bridget's promise would be fulfilled. At the end of Golfney Place his expression changed as he saw Jimmy Clynesworth—on his way to No. 5, no doubt! Well, let Jimmy make the most of his opportunities. He would not find very many more! Another week or two and Bridget would be whisked away from England to return as Mrs. Faversham.

"Some one," remarked Jimmy, as he entered Bridget's sitting-room, "has been smoking a decent cigar!"

"Colonel Faversham," replied Bridget.

"His visit doesn't seem to have bucked you up," said Jimmy, with his eyes on her face, as he held her hand. "I despise the man who can't interfere with what doesn't concern him on occasion! I have been wondering lately whether you can possibly be in any kind of hobble. Bridget, I should immensely like to help you out."

This was intended to be the prelude to a formal proposal of marriage. After keeping silence with difficulty so long, Jimmy considered that the time had at last come when he might put his fate to the touch. Nor was he tormented by any very serious doubts concerning her surrender. Jimmy had seen enough to feel blissfully satisfied that Bridget loved him, and for his own part, he had never met any other woman whom he desired to marry.

"Jimmy!" she murmured, looking up at him wistfully.

"Bridget," he said, in an equally low and solemn voice.

"You see—the fact is—I am engaged to Colonel Faversham!"

Although he suddenly released her hand, she still remained in the same attitude, watching his face as if waiting to see the effect of her announcement.

He drew in a deep breath and thrust his clenched hands into his jacket pockets.



“Then I ought to felicitate you,” said Jimmy. “Why,” he asked quietly, “didn’t you give me the opportunity earlier?”

“Colonel Faversham didn’t wish anybody to be told,” she answered.

“You are consequently not gratifying him by telling me now!”

“No,” said Bridget.

“Why have you told me?” he demanded.

“Oh well,” she replied, “I felt that I wanted you to know—that is the only reason.”

“Should you mind telling me something else?” said Jimmy.

“Anything—anything!”

“Did the—the auspicious event take place before or since that afternoon we first met in Grandison Square?”

“A few days before.”

“I am sorry you kept me in the dark,” was the answer.



Page 69

“So am I,” she said.

He took one hand out of his pocket and ran his fingers through his hair.

“You see,” he remarked, “I have known the colonel nearly my whole life. Well, good-bye,” he added, holding out his hand.

“Oh—good-bye,” said Bridget, and Jimmy was on his way down-stairs the next moment, out of the house and losing no time in finding his way back to Upper Grosvenor Street. Going at once to the smoking-room, he sat down, and leaning forward, covered his face with his hands. In this dejected attitude Sybil found him a few minutes later. As he had obviously not observed her entrance, she went to his side, resting a hand on his shoulder.

“My dearest Jimmy,” she explained, “whatever is the matter?”

Rising from his chair, he walked to the mantelshelf, took a cigarette from a box and lighted it.

“I may as well get it off my chest,” he said. “I went to ask Bridget to marry me.”

“Oh—Jimmy!” was the reproachful answer.

“You needn’t bother yourself,” he explained. “She took the wind out of my sails by the announcement that she was affianced to old Faversham before I saw her face.”

“To Colonel Faversham!” cried Sybil. “Poor Carrissima!”

Sybil, it is true, had too much experience to be actually astonished at such enormity, but nevertheless she was deeply shocked. Why, Miss Rosser was engaged to be married to the colonel at the time when she had been seen in Mark Driver’s arms.

“Understand,” said Jimmy, “Carrissima is not to be told. No one knows but the two concerned and myself. I was never so sorely tempted in my life.”

“Tempted!” exclaimed Sybil.

“To play the part of Young Lochinvar, you know. She would have gone with me!” he added excitedly. “She would have gone with me!”

“My dear,” returned his sister, “you could surely never dream of acting so dishonourably. Such an old friend as Colonel Faversham, too!”

“Oh yes, I dreamed of it,” said Jimmy. “You know they say we’re all no better than we should be in our dreams. My difficulty was that I woke too soon!”



CHAPTER XX

IN SIGHT OF PORT

“Good-morning, Carrissima!” said Colonel Faversham on Thursday morning, rubbing his palms briskly together as he entered the dining-room. “It looks as if there’s going to be a change in the weather. A little rain will do good.”

“Will it?” answered Carrissima, perfunctorily.

“What’s the matter?” he demanded. “You’re not eating anything. Always have a good breakfast. Lay a foundation for the day. Look at me! When my appetite fails, I shall begin to think it’s time I gave in.”

He made an enormous breakfast, and when at last it ended, took out his cigar-case. Having lighted a cigar, he carried the newspaper to his smoking-room and sat down, only to get up again the next minute. He did not care a scrap about the news! The Socialists might upset the constitution for all Colonel Faversham minded this morning! His thoughts already outran him to Golfney Place, where he fully expected to hear from Bridget’s lips that she should be prepared to marry him within a week or a fortnight at the latest.



Page 70

How enchantingly coy the dear girl had been yesterday! Taking down a Continental Bradshaw from one of the bookshelves, he looked up the route to Milan. She had chosen Rome, Naples and Capri for the honeymoon, and of course she should have her own way! Unable to control his impatience after half-past ten, Colonel Faversham went to his dressing-room, limping up-stairs as no one was looking, and imparted a more militant twirl to his moustache. When he reached the hall again Knight held his thin overcoat and handed his top-hat, gloves and malacca cane.

Seeing a taxi-cab Colonel Faversham hailed it, so that he reached Golfney Place earlier than ever before. As he rang the bell he could scarcely control his muscles. He coughed so violently that one or two people looked back at him in passing. He shifted the position of his hat so often as he waited for Miller to open the door, that he might have been making a series of automatic bows to imaginary acquaintances. He stamped his feet and felt that his necktie was in the middle of his shirt front, and then he rang a second time.

“Good heavens!” he muttered, “why can’t the man come! Why can’t he let me in!”

Miller opened the door at last, in the act of thrusting one arm into his coat. By the time Colonel Faversham had crossed the threshold the butler had assumed his usual deferential stoop and his manner was as suave as ever.

“Good-morning, Miller,” said Colonel Faversham, pacified the instant he obtained admittance. “I am rather early. Miss Rosser?”

“Miss Rosser is not here, colonel,” was the astounding answer.

“Not here! Good gracious! What do you mean?”

“Miss Rosser left the house at half-past three yesterday afternoon, colonel.”

“Do you mean to tell me she has not returned?” demanded Colonel Faversham.

“No,” said Miller.

“But I have an appointment with her this morning!”

“I understand that Miss Rosser is not coming back, colonel,” answered Miller.

Colonel Faversham was ceasing to look entirely bewildered. He grew exceedingly red in the face; his eyes appeared to be starting out of his head. Horrible thoughts occurred to him. He glared at Miller as if he were responsible for Bridget’s departure, and with miserable sensations he began to put a new interpretation upon the coyness which he had found so seductive yesterday morning.



“Miss Rosser,” said Miller, “left a letter for you.”

“Why on earth couldn’t you tell me so at once!” demanded Colonel Faversham.

“And a parcel,” said Miller.

“Where are they? Where are they?” exclaimed the colonel; and Miller went to the rear of the hall, returning the next moment with a fair-sized, brown-paper parcel in his hand. It obviously contained the crocodile-hide dressing-bag, which had been Bridget’s birthday present; the handle, indeed, projected for convenience of transport.



Page 71

“Would you like to step into the dining-room, colonel?” suggested Miller, giving him a square envelope.

“Damn the dining-room!” shouted Colonel Faversham, as with trembling fingers he broke the seal, whilst Miller still held the bag. Colonel Faversham did not wait to fix his eye-glass.

“*Dear colonel Faversham*” (he read),

“How sorry I am to give you pain, and I know that I am doing so. I cannot possibly marry you, and I have not the courage to say so to your face. Why didn’t you understand how hard I tried to tell you this morning—you really might have helped me out! You have always been so very kind. I positively hate to treat you badly. I have put all your presents inside the dressing-bag. Please try to forgive me, although I don’t suppose you ever will! If it is any consolation to you, I feel—oh, so miserable!

“Yours sincerely,

“*Bridget Rosser.*”

Although the contents of the letter were easy enough to master, Colonel Faversham must needs fix his monocle, in order to read it again. “That infernal Jimmy!” he muttered, then folded the sheet of paper and bestowed it in his breast pocket.

“The parcel, colonel,” suggested Miller, as he turned towards the door.

For a moment Colonel Faversham stood scowling at the butler and what he held in his hand. His first impulse was to refuse to have anything to do with it; but, after all, its contents were of considerable value. He might, perhaps, leave it at his club, although it could not remain there for ever, and perhaps it would be better to take it at once to Grandison Square and lock it up in the smoking-room cupboard.

At last he put out his hand, and came forth to the doorstep holding the crocodile-hide bag.

“Good-morning, colonel!” said Miller, but although his tone was even more suave and respectful than usual, Colonel Faversham fancied he detected in it something ironic. No doubt the man had formed his own opinion as to what was going on; but, thank goodness, nobody outside Number 5, Golfney Place had the faintest suspicion of his engagement!

He quite understood that this was broken beyond repair. Colonel Faversham knew when he was beaten. He had been treated in the most abominable manner, and he never desired to see Bridget’s face again. Unaccustomed to carry a parcel through the streets, he was annoyed inasmuch as he could not see any kind of cab until he drew



near to his own house, and unfortunately Carrissima happened to be looking out at the dining-room window.

She could not, however, see his face, and as he had left home in such ebullient spirits a little while ago, she went to meet him in the hall, where her eyes at once fell upon the bag.

“What is that?” she asked brightly. “A present for little Victor?”

“No,” exclaimed the colonel, mimicking her voice, “it isn’t a present for little Victor! What in the world should I be doing with a present for little Victor at this hour of the day?”



Page 72

She naturally perceived that something must have occurred seriously to ruffle him, even if he had not slammed the door of the smoking-room so violently behind him. It did not take Carrissima long to draw her own conclusions. It is true she was ignorant of her father's engagement to Bridget, but she had anticipated his deposition by Jimmy Clynesworth, until Mark's conduct had complicated the outlook. On the whole, Carrissima was inclined to think that the climax had been reached this morning; that Colonel Faversham, having gone to Golfney Place, had quarrelled with Bridget, who had insisted on returning such presents as he had from time to time given to her.

While Colonel Faversham remained hidden in his smoking-room, Carrissima's mind was busy with his affairs, until about three-quarters of an hour later she happened to be crossing the hall, and saw Jimmy on the doorstep in conversation with Knight.

"Oh, Jimmy!" she exclaimed, "do come in!"

Without any hesitation he entered the hall, accompanying her up-stairs to the drawing-room.

"I don't know whether you have heard the news," he said, as he shut the door.

"Not a word!" was the answer. "I am positively dying to hear it."

A smile broke over Jimmy's face.

"Bridget has left Golfney Place!" he cried.

"When did she go?" asked Carrissima.

"At half-past three yesterday afternoon."

"Has she sought refuge where she ought to have sought it long ago?"

"Where is that?" demanded Jimmy.

"With her aunts at Sandbay!"

"By the bye," he said, "can you tell me their name?"

"Now—let me see!" answered Carrissima, reflecting for an instant. "Oh yes—Dobson. I feel certain that is right. It sounds quite ordinary, doesn't it?"

Jimmy Clynesworth had gone to bed the previous night, but not to sleep very early, with the fixed determination to stand clear of Bridget for the future. He felt, indeed, too distrustful of himself to re-approach her and yet remain loyal to his old friend Colonel Faversham.



When, however, he went into his own den to smoke an after-breakfast pipe, the first thing his eyes rested upon was a copy of one of David Rosser's novels. It obviously ought to be returned! He knew that Bridget valued her complete collection of her father's works. Of course nothing would have been easier than to send it by his man, or, for that matter, by the parcel post.

But Jimmy determined to take back the book in person; he would not enter the house, he would leave it at the door and just ask Miller how Bridget was this morning! At the back of his mind probably was some subconscious, unrecognized desire to seize any chance of seeing her once more if only for a moment, but on reaching the house he heard a repetition of the story with which Miller had overwhelmed Colonel Faversham.



Page 73

For the instant Jimmy also was almost overwhelmed, but by vastly different sensations. He had no suspicion that Bridget intended to break off her engagement until the moment when Miller told him of the colonel's recent visit. Then Jimmy reached the truth by a leap. Bridget had gone away to escape from her elderly *fiance*! At the time Jimmy believed that her announcement yesterday morning was prompted by a sense of duty—a little belated, no doubt.

She saw how it was with him, but having already plighted her troth she felt compelled to issue that unexpected warning. Now, however, Jimmy saw her conduct in another light. She had made up her mind to have done with Colonel Faversham at all costs! Lacking the courage to tell him so to his face, she had opened her heart to the man whom she loved and on whose love she counted.

From Bridget's point of view, Jimmy saw that he had failed her at the pinch. Still, she had acted for herself, not, perhaps, in the most desirable manner! Still, she must have made her bid for freedom, and now it came to the point, this seemed to be all that Jimmy cared about. It is true he had spoken to Bridget of his high regard for candour, but even that by no means equalled his regard for herself.

Whatever she had done, and Jimmy perceived that she must have treated Colonel Faversham less than well, this was not the time for criticism. The salient fact was that she had shaken herself free! Such a desirable end appeared to excuse almost any means. Bridget's disappearance did not in the least alarm him. There would be little difficulty in finding her again; the point was that he had become justified in undertaking the search.

Having thanked and tipped Miller, Jimmy set about the quest at once, and determined to take the bull by the horns. He would go to Grandison Square in the first place, see Colonel Faversham, and ascertain beyond a doubt that the coast was clear. Colonel Faversham, too, or Carrissima might perchance be able to suggest some clue to Bridget's hiding-place.

CHAPTER XXI

JIMMY SETS TO WORK

"Is Colonel Faversham at home?" asked Jimmy.

"Do you wish to see him!" said Carrissima.

"Well, yes," was the answer, "I do—rather particularly."



“Because he is not in the very best mood for a visitor,” said Carrissima. “At the present moment he is shut up in his smoking-room. I give you a fair warning, Jimmy!”

“I think I shall have to risk it,” he returned.

“Oh dear!” exclaimed Carrissima. “How tremendously curious you make me! Although I’m entirely in the dark, I feel certain that important events are happening. You see, Jimmy, my father is constantly at Golfney Place—so are you! This morning he came home unusually early—actually with a large parcel in his hand. He had a face like ever so many thunder-clouds. Do you think there has been any sort of—of disagreement between Bridget and the colonel?”



Page 74

"Why, yes," said Jimmy, "I fancy you've hit the mark!"

"I wish you wouldn't be so dreadfully mysterious," she answered. "Now, why can't you tell me what it is all about?"

He could not see his way to gratify her. Bridget had insisted that the engagement had remained a secret at Colonel Faversham's wish, and Jimmy had no wish to make things unpleasant for him at home. He had told Sybil, it was true, but probably he would not even have enlightened his sister if he had taken time for reflection.

"Do you think," asked Jimmy, instead of replying to Carrissima's question, "that Bridget would be likely to go abroad again?"

"Jimmy," she answered seriously, "wherever she may have gone, you will be wise to take my advice."

"What is that?"

"To make no attempt to follow her!"

Jimmy laughed at this, and reminded Carrissima of his wish to speak to Colonel Faversham. Somewhat reluctantly she accompanied him down-stairs again, and opened the door of the smoking-room, taking the precaution to make as much noise as possible with the handle.

Colonel Faversham looked the embodiment of dejection, when at last, followed by Jimmy, she entered his room. He was sitting in an easy-chair, leaning forward with his hands to his head. All his usual exuberance appeared to have left him; he looked quite old and feeble. Seeing Jimmy, he scowled fiercely, making no attempt to rise or to offer his hand.

"Good-morning, colonel," said the visitor cheerfully. "Sorry if I am disturbing you, but I wanted a few words, if you can spare a minute."

"A broad hint for me to go," cried Carrissima, backing towards the door, with the most painful curiosity.

"Well, what is it?" demanded Colonel Faversham, as soon as he was alone with Jimmy.

"I am going to ask you a straight question!" was the answer. "I have heard of your engagement——"

"Who the devil told you?" exclaimed Colonel Faversham, sitting suddenly erect.



“Well, you know,” said Jimmy, “I imagine there was only one person who had it in her power to tell me.”

“Bridget, you mean?”

“Yes,” replied Jimmy.

“When was that?”

“Just after you left her yesterday morning.”

Rising from his chair, Colonel Faversham seemed to pull himself together. He blew out his cheeks, put back his shoulders and fixed his eyeglass as if he wished to examine Jimmy more distinctly.

“I should like to know,” he said, “what my engagement has to do with you!”

“Nothing in the world,” returned Jimmy, “if it still exists. That is all I am anxious to hear—whether it does or not.”

Colonel Faversham stood glaring into Jimmy’s face. So it was true, as he had suspected, that he had been thrown over for the benefit of this confounded fellow, who had the audacity to catechize him! Well, the battle was to the young! Colonel Faversham set it down to that. He must be growing old, hang it all! and here was Jimmy Clynesworth, whom he had nursed as a small boy, civil enough, as far as that went, but probably laughing in his sleeve, as those who win may.



Page 75

“Jimmy,” said the colonel, with a chastened and rather pathetic air, “I tell you what it is. I’ve been infernally badly treated. No use to mince matters. I’ve been jilted, sir. Jilted!”

“I suppose I may gather from that,” suggested Jimmy, striving to keep anything resembling elation from his voice, “that, as far as you’re concerned, Bridget is free——”

“Free!” cried Colonel Faversham. “Any woman can easily be free who attaches no value to her most solemn vows. Free! Good gracious! How can a man bind such a wench?”

“Thank you,” said Jimmy, turning towards the door, “that’s all I wanted to hear!”

His position did not appear very enviable, because while he could not tolerate any abuse of Bridget, to tell the truth it was impossible to say a word in her defence.

“One minute—one minute, Jimmy!” cried Colonel Faversham. “The more I think of it, the more extraordinary this visit of yours seems! As a boy you always had plenty of cheek! Between ourselves! You seem to know a good deal. I hope to goodness you haven’t blabbed to Carrissima!”

“About your engagement, do you mean?”

“Yes, yes,” said the colonel impatiently.

“I haven’t said a word. In fact, she has not the remotest idea of anything of the kind.”

“Well, that’s a blessing,” was the answer, and Jimmy went away, getting out of the house without seeing Carrissima again. The moment he reached Upper Grosvenor Street he inquired for Sybil, and being told she was in her own room, mounted the stairs several treads at a time.

“May I come in?” he asked, tapping at her door.

“Whatever is the matter now, Jimmy?” exclaimed Sybil, throwing it open.

“Well, it has been a wonderful morning,” he explained. “I have got a free hand. Bridget has thrown old Faversham over.”

“My dear,” said Sybil, “how extremely barefaced!”

“I have seen him,” Jimmy continued. “There is nothing on earth in my way. All I have to do is to find her, and that won’t take many days.”

While he stood outside Sybil’s bedroom door, explaining how he had heard the news of Bridget’s departure from Golfney Place, his sister underwent the sorest temptation of



her life. Surely no situation could be more tantalizing. If it were not for the solemn promise she had made to Carrissima, how easy it would prove to keep Jimmy from the pursuit which might end in his ruin!

Although he remained so strangely uninfluenced by the knowledge of Bridget's engagement to Colonel Faversham, her simultaneous intrigue with Mark Driver could scarcely fail to bring Jimmy to his senses. For the present, however, Sybil tried to hope that there might be more difficulty in running his quarry to earth than he anticipated. She might indeed be hiding somewhere perplexingly close at hand; and most likely Mark held the clue!

Jimmy lost no time in setting to work in earnest. In the first place, he inserted advertisements in the halfpenny evening papers and such of their morning contemporaries as made a special feature of betting news. These he thought would be most in favour amongst taxi-cab drivers, and, of course, the important thing was to discover the man who had driven "a lady and her luggage from No. 5, Golfney Place" that fateful afternoon.



Page 76

Not content with this, Jimmy motored to Sandbay, and stopping at a stationer's shop, succeeded in purchasing a local Directory. In this he found the name of "Dobson, the Misses," who lived at No. 8, Downside Road. The house was named "Fairbank." Thither Jimmy drove at once, and few thoroughfares could have had a more sedately retired appearance. A wide, gravelled roadway, smoothly rolled, with red-brick villas all precisely alike on one side, and yellow-brick villas, equally uniform, on the other.

There must have been fewer than the average number of children in the neighbourhood, and these must have been unusually silent and well conducted. Such dogs as there were always went out with a lead, and often wearing neat little home-made coats, with a leather strap instead of a collar.

On almost every gate a metal label was affixed: "No hawkers or street musicians." In the most sedate of the red-brick villas with the neatest front garden, lived the Misses Dobson. If any one ever ventured to speak of them in their hearing as the "Miss Dobsons" he was certain to be corrected. In truth, "The Misses Dobson" seemed to describe them far more accurately.

The difference between their ages was only eighteen months, and casual observers assumed that they were twins. They invariably dressed alike, in a fashion which had become out of date in London several years before. They never went out separately, and in order that the same ideas should penetrate their minds at the same moment, one of the pair read aloud while the other sewed and listened.

Well-to-do in the world, they were exceedingly kind to the poor, and they had never succeeded in grasping Bridget's reasons for refusing to accept their hospitality. This afternoon they were sitting together in their superlatively neat drawing-room, and Miss Dobson was knitting while Miss Frances was reading a novel from the circulating library. In the middle of chapter four they were astonished to hear the unwonted sound of a motor-car, and when the sentence was finished they both rose and walked to the window.

There stood a large red car, with a chauffeur in dark-grey livery with a light-brown fur rug round his knees. Before their astonishment permitted the remark that some one must have stopped at the wrong house, the door opened and the most demure parlour-maid in England stood nervously holding the handle.

"A gentleman in a motor-car," said Selina.

"I think," answered Miss Dobson, "that he must have made a mistake in the number."

"He asked for Miss Dobson," said Selina. "Not knowing the name, I left him in the hall."

"Quite right," returned Miss Frances.



“Name o’ Clynesworth,” said Selina.

“Perhaps,” suggested Miss Dobson, “he wishes to sell something.”

“A motor-car!” remarked Miss Frances.

“I suppose we ought to receive him,” said her sister, and accordingly Jimmy was conducted to the drawing-room, where he at once began to make an almost abject apology.



Page 77

"My only excuse," he concluded, "is that I have the honour to call myself a friend of Miss Rosser's."

"Our dearest niece," murmured Miss Dobson.

"You may know," said Jimmy, who had scarcely ever felt quite so nervous in his life, "that Bridget has been living at No. 5, Golfney Place!"

"Extremely unsuitable on all accounts," answered Miss Dobson.

"Extremely," said Miss Frances.

"As she left her rooms the day before yesterday," Jimmy explained, "I thought it possible she might have come to you."

"We sincerely wish she had," said Miss Dobson.

"Sincerely," said Miss Frances.

"You may think it is rather strange that I should be pursuing Bridget in this way," suggested Jimmy.

"We do," said Miss Dobson.

"My object," continued Jimmy, "is to ask her to marry me!"

"Will you kindly take a chair," cried Miss Dobson, and they all looked about as if to make certain there was nothing in the way, and then sat down. "The present," Miss Dobson added, "may not be the most suitable occasion to inquire concerning your eligibility. My niece is a sweet girl."

"I entirely agree with you," said Jimmy.

"A little impulsive, it may be," said Miss Dobson.

"Perhaps, a little," murmured Miss Frances.

"But exceedingly good to her father after our poor sister's death."

"Very, very good," said Miss Frances, and both sisters blinked their eyes as Jimmy rose to say "good-bye." He was, however, not to make his escape just yet. The Misses Dobson were obviously disturbed in mind. They could not tolerate the idea of Bridget's whereabouts remaining unknown, and all Jimmy's coolness and assurance were required to restore them to anything resembling tranquillity.



He left the house with a feeling that the scent of lavender must be still clinging to his clothes, and the next morning found him at Crowborough. There, however, he could obtain no news of Bridget, and now he began to wonder whether it was probable she had gone to Paris, where she had lived with David Rosser during the last years of his life. It was on Monday morning that Sybil saw Jimmy in the act of parting from a stranger at the door.

“Who was your visitor?” she inquired, having waited in the dining-room for the purpose.

“A man named Winchester—a private detective,” said Jimmy.

“Oh, my dear!” exclaimed Sybil, “how sincerely I wish you would let Miss Rosser go her own way!”

“Haven’t I succeeded yet,” demanded Jimmy, “in making you understand that her way will always be mine?”

“And yet you know how horridly she treated poor Colonel Faversham, Jimmy. You have always insisted on truth and honesty before anything——”

“Now I only insist,” said Jimmy, “that Bridget shall become my wife.”

At this Sybil grew reckless.

“Jimmy,” she cried, “it is really quite impossible.”



Page 78

“Why?” he demanded.

“My dear, I scarcely like to say the words, but she knew Mark Driver long before she knew you.”

“Well, I hope she will see a good deal of old Mark in the future also,” answered Jimmy. “You force me to break my word,” said Sybil, with considerable emotion. “Carrissima will never forgive me. I am sure she won’t. But I really cannot keep silence while you go to destruction. I really can’t. I promised I would never breathe a syllable——”

“Would you mind,” urged Jimmy, “breathing it quickly!”

“There has been an—an understanding between Miss Rosser and Mark from the very first,” said Sybil.

“Oh, you mustn’t talk foolishness,” returned Jimmy.

“Carrissima saw them——”

“What in the world did she see?”

“She happened to go to Golfney Place unexpectedly the afternoon before Miss Rosser left,” Sybil explained. “She saw the girl in—in Mark’s arms. Jimmy, he was kissing her; actually kissing her, and all the time she must have been engaged to Colonel Faversham.”

“Nonsense,” said Jimmy; “I don’t believe a word of it.”

“Do you imagine that Carrissima could possibly tell me an untruth?” demanded Sybil. “She was half beside herself when I met her, or she would never have said a word.”

“Now,” suggested Jimmy, “you have hit the explanation. Carrissima was beside herself. Of course,” he added, “I shall clear the matter up, but I tell you, to begin with, I don’t believe a word of it.”

“How Carrissima managed to carry it off,” said Sybil, “seems wonderful to me.”

“A wonderful story altogether,” returned Jimmy.

“Neither Mark nor—nor his companion had the slightest idea they were discovered,” said Sybil.

“Oh, then Carrissima didn’t tackle the fellow!”



“How could she?” asked Sybil. “You see, she had no actual right to complain! Mark Driver, I dare say, would consider himself free to—to kiss any woman he pleased.”

“Anyhow,” said Jimmy, with all the assurance in the world, “he didn’t kiss Bridget.”

“Oh, how can you be so blind!” exclaimed his sister.

“When other people see so much,” he answered, “what can be more desirable?”

“Well,” said Sybil, with tears in her eyes, “I have told you what Carrissima saw, and naturally she drew her own conclusions.”

“What were they?” asked Jimmy, thrusting his hands deep in his jacket pockets.

“You are bound,” Sybil explained, “to take into consideration what had gone before. Only a few hours earlier Mark told Carrissima that he hadn’t seen Miss Rosser for some weeks. He said he never wished to see her again. Then in face of that, Carrissima went to Golfney Place, and there was the woman in his arms.”

“Well,” cried Jimmy, “we shall hear what Mark has to say about it.”

“My dear,” said Sybil nervously, “I do hope and trust you won’t get me into trouble. I should never have uttered a word if it were not for your good.”



Page 79

"Any one would imagine," was the answer, "that I had been wrapped in cotton-wool all my life. I suppose I should have been if you could have managed it. Well, I am off to Weymouth Street at once," added Jimmy.

CHAPTER XXII

INCRIMINATING HIMSELF

Carrissima felt compelled to go to Charteris Street. She could not resist the temptation of telling Lawrence this latest news about their father and Bridget, whose departure from Golfney Place made him quite genial.

"The best thing I've heard for a long time," he exclaimed. "Let us hope we've all seen the last of her."

Lawrence found points of interest in the situation. If, as Carrissima insisted, Colonel Faversham had been in the habit of making Bridget frequent presents, and had now received them back, surely matters must have advanced farther than anybody believed. There was something formal about such a restitution, and perhaps they had even more than they knew to feel thankful for.

He took Phoebe to Grandison Square after dinner on Sunday evening in order to observe for himself the change in Colonel Faversham's demeanour, at which Carrissima had hinted. Certainly the colonel had not much to say even concerning the progress of the Parliament Bill through the House of Commons, and presently Lawrence skilfully introduced Bridget's name.

"By the bye," he asked, turning to Carrissima, "you haven't discovered Miss Rosser's address yet?"

"I haven't tried," was the answer, as Colonel Faversham's cough became troublesome.

"You ought to get Mark to give you something for it," suggested Lawrence, and the colonel was explaining that it was merely a tickling in his throat, when, opportunely, Mark Driver entered the room.

During his hospital days, he would often look in at Grandison Square on Sunday evenings, and just now he felt a greater longing for Carrissima's society than ever in his life before, as one may pine for a cooling draught on the morning following a night's carouse.

"Ah!" exclaimed Lawrence, "here's the man who may be able to enlighten us."

"What about?" asked Mark, as he shook hands with one after another.



“The bird that’s flown,” said Lawrence, with a laugh.

“Who’s that?”

“Bridget,” Carrissima explained, “has gone away from Golfney Place.”

“And left no address!” cried her brother.

Carrissima, having now recovered her usual common-sense, did not for a moment imagine that Mark’s astonishment was counterfeited. She felt certain that his inquiries were perfectly sincere, bewildered as she still remained whenever she thought of his conduct that afternoon of disillusion.



Page 80

She had dropped back into the habit which had prevailed so long, and was once more regulating her demeanour with a fervent desire to deceive. She was convinced of one fact at the least. She had counted her chicks before they were hatched; it appeared impossible, in the face of what she had witnessed, that Mark could entertain the shadow of a regard for her. Still, it was obvious that he knew nothing more about Bridget's movements than Jimmy or Colonel Faversham, who made a valiant effort to change the subject by asking Mark whether he had anything to do. As it happened, he was quite busy in his incipient way. Sir Wilford Scones was seriously ill, and Randolph Messeter had been called in for a consultation. There would probably be an operation before the week ended. With the deliberate intention of creating a favourable impression on the colonel, for whose daughter's hand he was on the point of asking, Mark explained that Harefield's practice was turning out far better than could have been expected. Now and then he glanced significantly at Carrissima, who might have bidden him "good-bye" very happily if Bridget Rosser had never entered her life.

The next morning, at about twelve o'clock, Mark was in his consulting-room when Jimmy was announced. Sybil had seen him leave Upper Grosvenor Street with considerable misgiving, dreading lest his interview with Mark should lead to trouble with Carrissima. She sighed to remember his scepticism about Bridget's backsliding, and felt confident that her brother was on his way to a very painful ordeal.

Jimmy, for his own part, had scarcely attempted to explain the discrepancy between Sybil's story and his own ideal of Bridget. Otherwise he might, perhaps, have come to the conclusion that Carrissima had exaggerated, while Sybil had added a little more ghastly colour. Sybil was sometimes given to that kind of trick.

That Mark was nothing to Bridget, never had been anything to her, Jimmy felt certain. Driver had, indeed, dropped so completely out of her life that it had not seemed worth while to take the trouble to go to Weymouth Street in the hope of discovering a clue to her present abiding-place. In any case, Jimmy reached the house this Monday morning with a conviction that the scandalous fiction would at once be exploded.

He came to the point at once.

"Rather an unpleasant business has brought me here, Mark," he exclaimed. "To begin with, there's one thing I want to say. Understand I believe the whole story is a *canard*."

"What story?" asked Mark, sitting in his swivel-chair on one side of the leather-topped writing-table, while Jimmy stood a foot from the other.

"Of course," Jimmy continued, "I know there's not a grain of truth in it. Still when such an abominable accusation has been made, it's just as well to lose no time in scotching it."



Page 81

Mark Driver had not the least suspicion. He sat with one elbow on the table, one hand supporting his chin, his handsome, alert face wearing the somewhat grave expression suitable to his professional environment. His visit to Grandison Square the previous evening alone would have been enough to prove, if proof were necessary, that Carrissima remained blissfully ignorant of that trivial act of folly in Golfney Place. An excellent test had been provided. Bridget's departure had been freely discussed, and Carrissima had not shown the slightest embarrassment. She had bidden him "good-bye" at eleven o'clock, and Colonel Faversham had encouraged him to come again before many days. They were always pleased to see him!

"But who in the world has been making an accusation?" asked Mark.

"Sybil—at least it originated with Carrissima," said Jimmy.

"My dear chap," retorted Mark warmly, "surely you must know that Carrissima is the very last person to make an accusation, founded or unfounded, against anybody."

"I should have thought so," Jimmy admitted.

"Whom is it against?"

"Bridget. I am bound to bring it out," said Jimmy. "The fact is Carrissima insists that you two have been gulling us all. To put it plainly, she declares there has been what she rather euphemistically calls 'an understanding' between you from first to last."

Mark was on his feet before Jimmy ceased speaking, but even now he did not perceive the real inwardness of the situation. The statement sounded incredible. If there was one fact of which this somewhat sceptical man was absolutely convinced, it was that whether Carrissima loved him well enough to marry him or not, she at least entertained the very highest opinion of him.

"You must be dreaming!" he cried. "Carrissima could never have said anything of the kind."

"Anyhow," answered Jimmy, "I had it from Sybil an hour or so ago."

"But, my dear fellow," Mark expostulated, "it's simply inconceivable. Carrissima knows that Bridget is nothing to me. To tell you the truth, I had my own reasons for going out of my way to tell her so."

"You thought it necessary!" exclaimed Jimmy hastily.

"Oh well," said Mark, "I had fallen into the habit of going to Golfney Place rather often—that was before I went to Yorkshire—as far back as January. Carrissima had the idea that I admired the girl; so I did, for that matter—who wouldn't? But she could never



have told Sybil that! She couldn't think anything of the sort without setting me down as a thorough-paced liar at the least."

"The odd part of it is," replied Jimmy, "that, according to Sybil, Carrissima went in for particulars."

"Oh, let me hear them," said Mark, sitting down again.

He was just beginning to wonder. Was it possible that Carrissima had not dropped those flowers until after she had obtained a glimpse of the interior of Bridget's sitting-room? But, even so, she could never build such an abominable theory on that ludicrously insufficient evidence.

Page 82

“Well,” said Jimmy, “Carrissima insists that she saw you holding Bridget in your arms—in the act of kissing her, to put it plainly.”

This was a trying moment for Mark Driver. His face was crimson, and he would have given a great deal to be able to deny the too soft impeachment. As this was impossible, he lost his temper with Carrissima. Egoism was probably the prime factor in his present mood. He thought less of the excuse he had provided than of the painful circumstance that he had been cutting such a sorry figure in her eyes.

While he flattered himself that she regarded him as a kind of king who could do no wrong, she had, in truth, looked upon him as a pretty contemptible scoundrel. It seemed an additional offence that she should have dissembled her opinion, so that when he, being beguiled, asked her to marry him, she might coolly send him about his business.

A suspicion of something, perhaps, resembling insincerity in his own conduct made him only more intolerant of hers. He saw now how much better it would have been, instead of trusting for immunity to her ignorance, to have taken his courage in his hands and made a clean breast of what, after all, was only a venial offence. A counsel of perfection, no doubt, but Mark wished that he had followed it.

He was deeply wounded in the most sensitive part, but while admitting his weakness in yielding to a commonplace temptation, he could make no excuse for Carrissima’s scandalous libel. An hour ago, she had been the only woman in the world for him; as to Bridget—well, the old Adam had cropped out for an instant. To account for his vulnerability one must embark on a study of the theory of Evolution! If he had been actually affianced to Carrissima, the case would, no doubt, have been more serious, although even then there could be no justification for her shameful accusation. But he was not affianced to her, and, in the face of what he had just heard, he never wished to be.

Jimmy saw that Mark was deeply moved, and made a shrewd guess at the cause. In a friendly way, he walked round the writing-table, and standing by the side of the chair, rested a hand on the other’s shoulder.

“I shouldn’t take it too seriously,” he said. “You’ll generally find there’s a way out somehow. You know I told you, to begin with, that I knew it was an infernal lie!”

“But—you see—it wasn’t,” answered Mark.

“I don’t understand,” said Jimmy, withdrawing his hand.

“It’s perfectly true,” muttered Mark, moistening his lips, “that Carrissima came to Golfney Place and saw me——”



“Saw you—saw you with Bridget in your arms! Good Lord!” exclaimed Jimmy, gazing down at Mark’s bowed head.

Rising from his chair, Mark gripped one lapelle of his frock coat in each hand as he paced the small room.



Page 83

“She was talking about her earlier days at Crowborough,” he said, with considerable embarrassment. “She had been there that morning. She seemed upset, and I—well, I lost my head for the moment. I hadn’t seen her since the day after my return from Paris. What I told Carrissima was absolutely true. The moment she entered Bridget’s room I saw what a fool I had been. Of course, we both made the mistake of imagining Carrissima had seen nothing. But anyhow—whatever she saw, to think she could jump to such a conclusion!”

“Not very surprising, after all,” said Jimmy quietly. “I fancy that I should have thought the same. You must admit the situation appeared a little compromising.”

“You wouldn’t say that if you had seen Bridget later on,” answered Mark.

“Look here, old fellow,” said Jimmy, “you and I have known each other a good many years. You remember when we used to fight like billy-oh at Brighton.”

“I dare say you feel rather as if you would like to punch my head now,” returned Mark.

“H’m, well—I tell you frankly,” said Jimmy. “This jaw we’re having may influence my whole life.”

“It has already influenced mine,” cried Mark.

“How’s that?” demanded Jimmy.

“I have been hoping to marry Carrissima—to put it plainly. You’ve shown what she thinks of me.”

“Surely,” said Jimmy, “she had more than a little excuse!”

“My dear chap,” replied Mark, “you’re not such a prig that you can’t understand the possibility of a man’s losing his head about a pretty woman.”

“Why, no,” said Jimmy; “but I wish to goodness you had not chosen that particular one.”

“If I had imagined Carrissima saw us, I should have explained things at once,” added Mark.

“The question is,” suggested Jimmy, “whether your explanation would have sounded quite convincing.”

“Good Lord!” said Mark, “you speak as if you were not convinced!”



“Of one thing—yes,” was the answer. “I can understand a fellow’s kissing a pretty woman—or a dozen if it comes to that, but I know you’re not the man to go where you’re not certain you’re wanted.”

Now Mark hesitated, thinking that he had humiliated himself almost enough. Seeing, however, that Jimmy was hanging upon his answer, he felt compelled to belittle himself to the uttermost rather than allow the slightest obstacle to remain between Bridget and this man who appointed himself her champion.

“The truth is,” said Mark, “I—well, I made a mistake.”

“About Bridget?” demanded Jimmy eagerly.

“Yes,” answered Mark. “I had no shadow of an excuse. From first to last she had never given me the remotest reason. It was simply my own egregious stupidity. To put it honestly, I acted like a bounder. I’m immensely sorry, Jimmy.”



Page 84

Jimmy could not help feeling sore about it. For one thing, he regretted the necessity to admit to Sybil that the false report contained that one word of truth. Worse than this! an indignity had been put on Bridget by Mark Driver, who seemed the last man in the world to inflict it. Jimmy, however, realized that one of her most potent charms was a delectable, seductive ingenuousness and irresponsibility, which might, perhaps, on occasion prove a little misleading to unregenerate man. Nevertheless, he felt sore as he left Weymouth Street.

CHAPTER XXIII

HAVING IT OUT

“Mr. Driver,” announced Knight at half-past three that Monday afternoon.

Carrissima at once came to the conclusion that she had never seen him look so solemn—or quite so handsome, although she wished that he had stayed away.

“How are you, Mark?” she said, mustering a smile, however, as she held out her hand.

“I have come rather early,” he answered, and Carrissima noticed that he barely touched her finger tips.

“Won’t you sit down?” she suggested, returning to her own chair.

“So that I might make certain of finding you alone,” continued Mark, still standing in the middle of the room.

“Well, your object is attained,” she cried brightly. “Father is not at home, and I am not expecting any visitors.”

“I thought the best plan,” he said, “was to have it out without any waste of time.”

“Oh dear!” murmured Carrissima. “Have what out?”

“I am going to speak quite plainly——”

“Why in the world shouldn’t you?”

“I want to know,” said Mark, “why you—of all people—told Sybil Clynesworth—well, what you did tell her?”

“What did I?” asked Carrissima.



“It amounts to this. That I have been acting like a pretty miserable humbug and scoundrel combined.”

“Mark!” faltered Carrissima, “I didn’t. I couldn’t have said anything of the sort.”

“Then Sybil deliberately invented the story!”

“But what—what story?” said Carrissima.

“The charming little tale she repeated to Jimmy!”

“If only you could manage to be a little more explicit,” urged Carrissima, with a suggestion of annoyance in her tone.

“Oh, I shall speak out plainly enough,” said Mark. “Sybil told Jimmy I had been carrying on a wretched intrigue with Bridget—neither more nor less. She gave you as her authority.”

“She had no right,” exclaimed Carrissima, and for an instant Mark’s face cleared.

“Do you mean to say that you haven’t mentioned my name to Sybil in such a connection?” he demanded, taking a step nearer.

“Yes, I mentioned your name,” Carrissima admitted. “But I could never have said that—never! I feel almost certain I couldn’t.”

“Good heavens!” cried Mark, “you don’t seem to know what you told her and what you didn’t!”



Page 85

Strange as it might appear to him, that was precisely the truth. She scarcely remembered what she had said in her excitement and disappointment, although she had little doubt it was something far too much to the point. His wrath was in some degree a relief to Carrissima, although she could not imagine what plausible excuse he could intend to offer. Because, after all, she could not disbelieve the evidence of her own senses.

“Mark,” she said, “I don’t think you are treating me in the least fairly.”

“How is that?” he demanded.

“Oh well, you come here and take the offensive——”

“Then you believe I have nothing to do but defend myself?” said Mark.

“I can only suppose,” she retorted, “that you fancy the best method is to try to carry the war into the enemy’s country.”

“My enemy—you! Good Lord!” exclaimed Mark.

“Of course,” she continued, “there doesn’t exist the slightest reason why you should take the trouble to excuse yourself to me. You have done me no wrong.”

“By Jove! you have done me a cruel one,” he said, with evident emotion.

“I am sorry I said a word to Sybil,” answered Carrissima. “But she happened to be here when I got home from Golfney Place that afternoon. You know what I saw there——”

“I wish to goodness you hadn’t gone near the house!” said Mark.

“No doubt you do!” she retorted. “It was no business of mine, only it seemed so utterly inconsistent with that you distinctly told me!”

“I told you precisely the truth,” he insisted.

“Oh, what nonsense!” said Carrissima.

“How could it be! You told me that Bridget was—was nothing to you.”

“She was nothing. She is nothing.”

“If that is really the case,” said Carrissima, “why, then your conduct appears inexplicable.”

“Why didn’t you tackle me?” he demanded. “Surely you have known me long enough!”



Carrissima realized that the circumstances were against her. She had, before to-day, come to the conclusion that those first excited suspicions were entirely unjustifiable; although Mark had no doubt deceived her, he could not be so bad as she had imagined at the time. She perceived that she might find one excuse which yet she durst not mention. If she could admit plainly that the sight of Bridget in his arms made her madly jealous and for the moment unaccountable for her words, then, perhaps, Mark might be mollified. At least this defence would be true. It seemed incongruous that she instead of him should be considered the offender; but above everything Carrissima must keep back the only explanation which was likely to sound plausible.

"It was nothing to me," she said.

"Anyhow, it was a great deal to me," replied Mark. "Of course I played the fool that afternoon. I don't want to make excuses. I admit there are none. But you ought to understand that Bridget was an innocent victim. No one was to blame but myself, and I not very severely. Yet because of one act of momentary folly you could tell Sybil that monstrous story."



Page 86

“Well, I am sorry,” said Carrissima. “I was carried away by excitement. I suppose it’s a weakness of mine! I sometimes do tell people things and repent afterwards. I don’t pretend to be immaculate.”

“The fact is,” returned Mark, “you’ve always been down on Bridget. The girl is absolutely straight! What beats me is that you could meet me as usual, as if nothing had come between us, take my hand and yet believe all the time I was that sort of outsider.”

“And now,” exclaimed Carrissima, “you ask me to believe that not having seen Bridget for weeks you went to her house and took her in your arms against her will! But there! what is the use of going over it all again? I feel immensely angry with Sybil. It is entirely her fault. She promised faithfully never to say a word.”

“You beg the question in a rather womanly way,” said Mark.

“Well, what would you have?” cried Carrissima, flinging out her arms. “I am a woman, you know. I dare say I am not always consistent, if that’s what you mean.”

“I thought it best to come and see you,” answered Mark, with a shrug.

“Oh yes, by far the best,” said Carrissima, with a shiver.

With that he went away, and Carrissima sought her room, locking herself in. She felt exceedingly angry with Sybil, and determined to write to her before the day ended. As to Mark, it was true she had done him an injustice, but his conduct appeared as difficult to explain as ever. Nothing which he had said made it any more comprehensible, and the only certainty seemed to be that a man could not conceivably love one woman and kiss another!

CHAPTER XXIV

A HOT SCENT

Mr. Joseph Dotting, having driven a hansom for several years, was compelled by force of circumstances to learn late in life to drive a taxi-cab or perish. He was not a man who, as a rule, took any absorbing interest in the events of the day, with the occasional exception, perhaps, of an exciting murder case; but he was always a close student of starting prices.

Having been ordered to wait outside Marshall and Snelgrove’s on Tuesday morning, however, the two ladies whom he had driven from Eccleston Square kept him so long that he took Monday’s 6.30 edition of the *Evening News* from beneath his seat.



Happening to glance through the advertisement columns, his attention became presently arrested by the offer of Five Pounds reward.

“Dashed if that ain’t the party I drove to Blackheath the other afternoon,” he said half aloud. “Leastways, I picked her up in Golfney Place whether it was Number 5 or not. ’Tain’t likely there was two of ’em!”

Mr. Joseph Botting felt certain that he could recognize the house again, and when at last the two ladies came forth from the shop, followed by a boy who was laden with many small parcels, Mr. Botting, in his haste to set them down at Eccleston Square again, put more than one life in peril.



Page 87

The next thing was to drive to the nearest public-house, where it did not take many seconds to swallow a pint of six ale. The sandwiches which a careful wife had wrapped in a piece of newspaper, could wait until he had made certain of his good fortune. On reaching Golfney Place, he saw beyond a doubt that the house from which he had driven the young lady and her luggage was assuredly Number 5, and then Mr. Joseph Botting lost no time in making his way to Upper Grosvenor Street, where the advertisement said he was to apply.

Before he had time to get down from his seat Jimmy, having seen him through the dining-room window, came out with his napkin in his hand.

“Morning, guvnor,” said Joseph. “I’ve come about this ’ere five pound reward.”

“You have only to tell me where you left the young lady,” replied Jimmy, taking out his pocket-case and temptingly exposing a bank note.

“Well, you see, guvnor, I can’t call to mind the address,” said Joseph.

“It wasn’t a railway station!”

“No,” was the answer. “I’ll tell you where it was.”

“Where?” demanded Jimmy.

“Blackheath,” said Dotting. “‘Cabman,’ she says, ‘drive to the Marble Arch.’ But when we got there she tells me to go over Westminster Bridge to Blackheath. As soon as we were at the village, as they calls it, she gets out and looks round for a second and then she darts across the road by the cab rank and goes into a sort of registry office. By an’ by,” Joseph Botting continued, “she comes out agin and tells me to drive on to—blest if I can recollect the name o’ the place.”

“Could you find your way to the house again?” suggested Jimmy, as Botting took off his cap and rubbed his crown.

“Like a shot, guvnor.”

“Jump up, then,” said Jimmy. “The moment I hear that the young lady has been at the house you shall have the fiver and a good tip beyond your fare.”

“Right you are,” cried Botting, and Jimmy, re-entering the hall, spoke a few words of unsatisfactory explanation to Sybil, while he thrust his arms into the sleeves of his motor coat.

When once he was on the way he quickly recovered his customary self-control. Lighting a cigar, he leaned back in the cab and was soon on the Surrey side of



Westminster Bridge. He was driven along the dreary length of Walworth Road, to Camberwell Green, through Peckham to Lewisham. From the Lee High Road Joseph Botting turned along a shady thoroughfare to the left, presently reaching Blackheath with Greenwich Park on the farther side, and immediately on the right a row of high, old-fashioned houses.

“Here we are, guvnor!” exclaimed Joseph, applying his brake, and Jimmy was out on the pavement in an instant, across the long front garden, ringing the bell, knocking at the door.

“Miss Rosser?” he asked when it was opened by a middle-aged woman.

“She went out three-quarters of an hour ago,” was the answer.



Page 88

“At what time do you expect her home?” said Jimmy.

“She ordered tea for half-past four,” replied the woman.

Jimmy could not wait until half-past four! He looked at his watch and saw there would be more than an hour!

“Can you tell me where she has gone?” he inquired.

“Well, she asked how to find Greenwich Park,” said the woman, and as Jimmy turned away from the door he took out his pocket-book. Standing on the pavement he handed a five-pound note, together with the fare from Upper Grosvenor Street and a liberal tip to Joseph Botting, who grinned with delight, then Jimmy crossed the road and struck across the heath. A few children were scampering about, some men were playing at golf on this, the oldest course in England. Entering the park a few minutes later he followed the broad walk, bordered by Spanish chestnut trees, keeping the while a brisk lookout and hesitating whether to take one of the diverging paths to the right or left.

Surely that must be Bridget! She was scarcely to be mistaken, with her slender figure, her rather closely fitting skirt, her wide-brimmed hat, her wealth of chestnut-coloured hair! On Jimmy’s left was the observatory, and two or three people were adjusting their watches by the large clock in the wall. She stood close to an iron railing, from which sloped down a grassy hill, and beyond lay Greenwich Hospital and the Thames; on its farther bank tall chimneys rising from amidst the docks and houses of the Isle of Dogs.

With her back still towards him, her eyes upon the wonderful prospect, she had no suspicion of Jimmy’s propinquity until he mentioned her name.

“Bridget!” he whispered, close behind her, and on the instant she turned, her face radiant with joy.

“Oh, I wondered whether you would come!” she cried.

“What else could I do?” he said. “Now I am here, where can we go to talk about the most important subject in the world?”

“Let us,” suggested Bridget, “stroll across the grass!”

They soon reached a secluded spot, and found some chairs near an ancient, ivy-covered tree-trunk, surrounded by an iron fence. The sun was shining brightly, and a fawn, which had strayed from the small herd of fallow deer, left off browsing to gaze. As Jimmy and Bridget sat down it turned and slowly ambled away.

“Why did you choose this particular place of all others?” asked Jimmy.



“Once upon a time,” said Bridget, “years and years ago, my aunts used to live at Blackheath.”

“I should rather like to take you to them at Sandbay,” replied Jimmy. “I have been there. They are the dearest old ladies, and your proper place seems to be with them—for the present!”

“Oh, I couldn’t,” she exclaimed. “Especially after what I imagine you have told them about me. I really couldn’t go,” she said.

“Then you leave me only one alternative,” said Jimmy. “I was anxious to do everything decently and in order, but it appears you won’t let me.”



Page 89

"You have not asked why I left Golfney Place," suggested Bridget, leaning forward in her chair and digging the ferrule of her sunshade into the turf.

"I fancy I know," said Jimmy. "You lacked courage to face old Faversham."

"Oh, how abominably I treated him!" murmured Bridget.

"There is not the least doubt about it," Jimmy admitted.

"So very, very badly," she continued gravely, with her eyes on the grass, "that I wonder you took the trouble to find me."

"Do you?" he asked, and as she remained silent for a few moments Jimmy repeated the question. "Do you?" he said.

"Why, no," she cried, raising her head and facing him with a laugh. "But it is more than I deserve," she added. "Jimmy, I was in great straits. I saw how fast my money was going, that I should have none left in a year or two, and so when Colonel Faversham bothered me to marry him I gave in. I thought I could do it, you know."

"Until I came to undeceive you!" suggested Jimmy.

"Yes," said Bridget; "but I was afraid you might be—be disgusted! I wanted you to know, and yet I didn't. I tried to tell you time after time, and still I couldn't say the word which I thought might drive you away from me. I saw it would be impossible to marry Colonel Faversham, but if I threw him over what should I do in the future? I hesitated and hesitated. I went to Crowborough because I hoped the influence of the place might give me courage; it didn't and I had some wild idea of appealing to Mark for help. That—that wouldn't do, and Colonel Faversham insisted I should tell him when I would be his wife—he talked of our being married within a week or ten days. Oh dear! how hard I tried to make him understand; but I couldn't succeed, and at last in desperation a fresh idea occurred to me: I would run away! I told him to come for his answer the next morning—oh, I know I was horrid to him!"

"Well, we agree about that," said Jimmy. "We are going to agree about everything, you see. I suppose," he added, "you thought you would appeal to me as a sort of forlorn hope?"

"Oh, it was scarcely worth calling a hope," she answered. "You had said so much about truthfulness. You could forgive anything else but deceit, and of course I had deceived you from the beginning."

"So that you love me in the end," he said.



“Ah, Jimmy!” murmured Bridget. “But nobody will ever relieve it. They will think I threw Colonel Faversham over because you were the richer. It is only natural they should say that.”

“Let them say what they like,” was the answer. “When you told me about your engagement I could do only one thing. I should have liked to ask you to come away with me then and there; but I—well, it couldn’t be done, dear. The moment I heard you were free of the colonel, I hadn’t a doubt in the world. Bridget, you will have to make up your mind to marry me at once.”



Page 90

She did not attempt to gainsay him, but placed her hand in his, and a few minutes later they rose from their chairs, walking across the grass to the gate by which Jimmy had entered the park. Bridget's step was light, she hung upon his arm as they crossed the heath, the sun shone upon her and she looked as if she had not a care in the world.

"I must say 'good-bye' now," said Jimmy, outside the garden gate. "I shall see you tomorrow afternoon, but Sybil must come in the morning."

"At last!" cried Bridget, with a smile.

"Well, I always told you she would come," he answered. "For the rest, I think your best plan will be to return to Golfney Place—it won't be for many days, you know. Suppose I see Miller this evening and Sybil can bring the motor-car to drive you back."

CHAPTER XXV

OPEN CONFESSION

Sybil Clynesworth made an unconditional surrender. It was true that, never having seen Bridget, she failed to understand Jimmy's facile satisfaction. She certainly still considered that he was ridiculously credulous. But while she would have been prepared to go to great lengths in order to prevent her brother from entering into what she could not help regarding as an unsuitable marriage, she saw that he had made up his mind.

The idea of living on unfriendly terms with him or his wife appeared preposterous, whereas a single false step at this critical period might easily make Bridget her enemy for life. So Sybil expressed her willingness to fall in with Jimmy's wishes; she would go to Blackheath in the motor-car early the following morning, inconvenient as the expedition would be; and she would bring Miss Rosser back to Golfney Place.

When the time came, however, Sybil set out with considerable nervousness, and her legs threatened to give way beneath her as she got out of the motor-car at the garden gate. The first sight of Bridget at least put an end to any surprise at Jimmy's infatuation, and when she came forward with both hands held out, kissing her visitor's cheek without the slightest hesitation, the way was half won to Sybil's accessible heart.

"You see, you are Jimmy's sister," said Bridget, with a charming air of entreaty, and in spite of her former equivocal opinion of Miss Rosser, Sybil could not refrain from answering—

"My dear, you must let me be yours."



Bridget, it appeared, was to return to lunch in Upper Grosvenor Street, and Jimmy, having already spoken to Miller, would escort her to No. 5, Golfney Place during the afternoon. It was while he was absent on this errand that Sybil sat down to write to Carrissima, sending the note to Grandison Square by hand. Since the reproachful letter which Sybil had received on the morning after the interview with Mark Driver, it seemed too soon to carry the epoch-marking news in person. So she explained that Jimmy was engaged to be married, and admitted her own more favourable impression of her prospective sister-in-law; she told Carrissima that Bridget had returned to Golfney Place, and added that the wedding was to take place at once.



Page 91

"Well," demanded Colonel Faversham, who happened to be sitting with Carrissima when Knight brought in the letter, "who's it from?"

"Sybil Clynesworth," she answered, with her eyes on the notepaper.

"What has she got to say?" exclaimed the colonel, fidgeting in his chair. "Why do you hesitate?" he added.

"Jimmy is going to be married," said Carrissima.

"H'm! Going to marry Bridget?"

"From what Sybil says, in a very few days," was the answer.

Colonel Faversham said nothing more at the moment. He had been doing his utmost to make a virtue of necessity. The grapes were sour. He ought to be thankful for a lucky escape! He wished Jimmy joy of his bargain! Nevertheless, he looked dejected as he sat in his easy-chair, and Carrissima could not help feeling sorry for him in one way, although she was profoundly thankful that he had been saved, in spite of himself, from a marriage which could scarcely have failed to turn out miserably.

"I suppose," said Carrissima, "I ought to send some sort of wedding present?"

"Send a wedding present! Of course! Why not?" answered Colonel Faversham, eager above all things to keep her for ever ignorant of his own engagement. "Better go to Donaldson's," he added.

"There's not much time to lose," suggested Carrissima. "I think I will go to-morrow morning."

"Upon my word," said her father, "I should rather like to get away for a bit."

"Oh, so should I!" was the answer.

"You wouldn't care to cut into the season!"

"I really shouldn't mind a scrap," said Carrissima.

She was inclined to feel that she did not much care about anything, and the news of Bridget's betrothal seemed to intensify her own disappointment.

"Would next week be too soon?" asked Colonel Faversham, and she promised to be ready by its end. He began at once to interest himself in the trip; they were to go abroad, and having fetched some old volumes of Baedeker from the smoking-room, he grew more cheerful than Carrissima had seen him for some days.



The next morning she spent an hour and a half at Donaldson's, inspecting various gold and silver articles, but at last selecting nothing more original than a large rose-bowl. On her way home, close to Golfney Place, she met Mark, and wondered whether she should stop if he showed no sign of doing so. She had never passed him by before, and in spite of a lingering sense of injustice, and even indignation, she had not the heart to let him go on without a word. She felt confident, however, that he would not have spoken if she had not taken the matter out of his hands.

"Have you heard the latest news?" asked Carrissima, as he raised his hat.

"About Jimmy and Bridget—yes, I was immensely glad to have a visit from him late last night."

"I have just been choosing a wedding present at Donaldson's," said Carrissima.

Page 92

“Oh yes,” replied Mark, so distantly that she looked up suddenly to his face.

“How is your patient?” she inquired.

“Sir Wilford?” said Mark. “I have just come from Burnham Crescent. Randolph Messeter operated. I hope we shall pull him through.”

“Father and I are going abroad,” Carrissima explained. “I dare say we shall be away quite a month.”

“I hope you will have a good time,” said Mark, and then raising his hat again, he walked on.

Carrissima bit her lower lip and kept her eyes on the pavement. She had done all she could, and there was an end of it! Perhaps the lapse of time would make him more reasonable, because it really was ridiculous to behave as if she were the original sinner. Not that she imagined that anything in the world would ever facilitate the happiness to which she had formerly tried to look forward.

The same evening brought a surprise in the form of a letter from Bridget. She wished to see Carrissima very particularly indeed. As it was not very convenient to come to Grandison Square, would Carrissima mind going to Golfney Place at half-past eleven the following morning?

Carrissima certainly could understand the “inconvenience” of a visit to Colonel Faversham’s house, but she scarcely hesitated about going to see Bridget at her lodgings. Personally, she had not the least antipathy to the marriage, and, moreover, it seemed inevitable that she should see something of Jimmy’s wife in the future. Consequently there was nothing to be gained by holding aloof in the present.

She was at once impressed by the subtle change in Miss Rosser’s demeanour. It almost seemed as if she had increased in stature during the last few days; certainly she held her head higher in the air. There was an obvious accession of dignity, and she greeted her visitor rather condescendingly—quite charmingly, nevertheless.

“Thank you so very, very much for that lovely rose-bowl,” she exclaimed. “So clever of you to know just what we wanted. Jimmy was here when it came yesterday evening, and he admired it immensely. Besides, it was our first wedding present!”

“Now I must add my congratulations,” said Carrissima.

“Carrissima!” answered Bridget, “it’s all beautiful. Do you like my ring?” she continued, holding out her left hand. “Jimmy wanted to see you, but I insisted upon having you all to myself. Do, please, sit down!”



Carrissima took a chair, and her thoughts flew back to that last dreadful visit when she had sat nearly in the same position, striving to lead Mark to believe that she had not seen him with Bridget in his arms.

“You must have been immensely surprised to get my letter,” said Bridget. “I had a long discussion with Jimmy before I sent it. Of course it would not have been written but for what he told me, only I should love to try and make you happy too, though you may hate me for it. I don’t want you to hate me,” Bridget added, “because I could grow very fond of you if you would let me. Mean to blame one’s circumstances, isn’t it? Still, you know, if my father and mother had lived I have no shadow of doubt I should have gone along quite decently, and you would have thought I was a very estimable person. But I really want to talk about Mark!”



Page 93

“What about him?” asked Carrissima, at once on her guard.

“The fact is,” Bridget explained, “I ought to have drawn in and lived on my hundred pounds a year, or whatever it was, only I hadn’t got it in me. I formed a different plan. I thought I would take London by storm—no less! I had been flattered and spoiled in Paris, and goodness knows what ridiculous ideas I came away with. Well, I was left alone with no one to speak to till I recognized Mark at the Old Masters’, and dropped my purse so that he might pick it up and give me an excuse to claim acquaintance. They say that open confession is good for the soul! Oh dear, mine ought to be in such splendid condition.”

“Why should you inflict the penance on yourself to-day?” suggested Carrissima.

“I liked Mark Driver,” said Bridget, “and I thought he liked me—in a rather different way. Until he went to Yorkshire, I believed he would ask me to marry him. I had tried to make him! After his return, that evening he took me to Belloni’s, I tried my hardest and wondered why I failed till I saw you.”

“I don’t see what I can possibly have to do with it,” murmured Carrissima.

“Oh, you were very discreet—very clever! But it wasn’t long before I saw you would give your heart for Mark——”

“You have not the least right to say that!” exclaimed Carrissima.

“Of course I haven’t,” Bridget admitted. “I am taking the most abominable liberty. Well, I was going to tell you that when Colonel Faversham asked me to marry him, I temporized until Mark’s return from Paris; then I knew for certain there was nothing to be hoped for from him. I am giving myself away pretty liberally,” said Bridget, “but this is what I want to make you understand. Though I deliberately devoted myself to captivate Mark, he never yielded—till just that once! Odd, that I who feel absolutely indifferent about him, should read his character so much more correctly than you who love him. Oh, please,” entreated Bridget, “don’t look so fierce, because if I had not been certain, there would have been no object in asking you to come here this morning.”

“I cannot see one in—in any case!” said Carrissima.

“Oh, I hope there is,” answered Bridget. “I know it sounds a wee bit inconsistent, because, of course, Mark was wrong, and at the time I felt immensely angry with him. But he wasn’t a thousandth part so wrong as you imagined, and, Carrissima! there are very few men of his age whom you or I couldn’t tempt if we gave our minds to it.”

“I am not in the least likely to make the experiment,” exclaimed Carrissima.



“No, but, you see, I did! It’s true nothing could have been further from my thoughts or my wishes on the afternoon you dropped the roses. But how was Mark to know that? And at other times I had done my very best to lead him on, and I failed only because of you! Imagine what it meant when he heard from Jimmy that the woman he loved, whom he had intended to ask to be his wife——”



Page 94

“That is your own imagination!” cried Carrissima. “You cannot possibly have any ground for believing such a thing!”

“Anyhow, I have his own assurance; besides, he told Jimmy, if my word is not enough. You told Sybil that Mark had lied to you, and acted goodness knows how horridly concerning me, and the truth was he had merely lost his head for a single instant, and what was it after all? Carrissima, I have taken myself to pieces just to convince you I am sincere for once in a way! I see the possibility of danger ahead . . . danger that Mark is too much hurt to come forward again, and what a pity! Take my advice and don’t let things rest. What does it matter who eats humble pie if you’re going to dine together for the remainder of your lives? Do something at once! Write to him—send for him as I sent for you. I hoped I might make you believe he loves you, and that then you might live happily ever after!”

CHAPTER XXVI

LAWRENCE SUMS IT UP

The ensuing few hours proved the most restless of Carrissima’s life. At luncheon she could scarcely concentrate her thoughts sufficiently to listen to the explanation of Colonel Faversham’s plans for the forthcoming tour abroad, and afterwards she retired to her own room, where she made a valiant attempt to persuade herself that as the mountain would not come to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain.

It required, however, considerable courage to follow Bridget’s advice and send Mark a letter, and when at last she succeeded in silencing her doubts, she scarcely knew what to say to him. Hitherto, in all her dealings with Mark, she had felt uncertain (to say the least) about his regard. Now, if Bridget were to be credited, there remained no room for disbelief. Mark loved her! In spite of that compromising situation which she had witnessed, he loved her.

If this were the case, nothing else seemed to be of any importance. Carrissima was prepared to condone an offence, the importance of which, she supposed, she had exaggerated; and perhaps if she were to make herself more abject, he would grasp the olive branch. As Bridget suggested, what did it matter so that they came together at last? Granting his love, as there could be no doubt about her own, it would be sheer foolishness to allow the present unfortunate estrangement to continue.

So she took a pen presently, and after profound consideration succeeded in writing the few necessary words—

“MY DEAR MARK,

“Will you be magnanimous and spare me a few minutes after dinner this evening?”



“Yours very sincerely,

“CARRISSIMA.”

The mountain in labour having brought forth a mouse, Carrissima put on her hat and set out, intending personally to post the letter. There would be ample time. He would receive it before seven o'clock, and, it was to be hoped, reach Grandison Square soon after nine. She determined to be on the watch for his arrival, in order to take him to some unoccupied room. Well, what then? she wondered, as she drew near the pillar-box. What could she do but repeat the assurance already given that she had never really believed what she told Sybil Clynesworth—or at the worst only for a few seconds.



Page 95

Bridget, presumably, expected her to employ some feminine wiles to bring Mark to a more amenable condition, but there Carrissima drew the line. Within reach of the pillar-box, she took the letter in both hands, tore it into a dozen pieces and scattered them to the winds.

She would not, after all, make any definite appointment. If Mark loved her he was not likely to change, and everything must eventually come right; if he did not, why, in that case she could not do aught to improve the existing condition of things, even if she would. Time might, unassisted, enable him to judge her more leniently. If she did not meet him before she left England, he could scarcely fail, sooner or later, to cross her path after her return. In the meantime, rather miserably, she began her preparations; and, as it happened, she was to depart two days after Bridget's marriage.

Although this had been arranged to take place very quietly at the church which Sybil so regularly attended, a good many of Jimmy's friends seemed to hear of the affair. Small as the wedding-party was (although it included the Misses Dobson), a large congregation gathered together. Mark was present, at the rear of the church; but although Carrissima hesitated, she conquered her curiosity and stayed away.

Going to Charteris Street the same afternoon, she found Lawrence in a mood to moralize.

"Well," he remarked, "they are a lively pair, Jimmy and this wife of his!"

"Yes, they will at least be that," returned Carrissima. "After all, I suppose it's something to the good, and they're certain to get along splendidly together."

"They will flourish like the green bay tree," exclaimed Lawrence.

"Oh, don't be a Pharisee!" said Carrissima.

"I am a man of common-sense," he protested. "We all know Jimmy! The only astonishing thing is that he was not too experienced a bird to be so easily caught."

"Perhaps he was willing to meet his fate," suggested Phoebe.

"Not a doubt about it," said her husband. "So complete was his beguilement."

"You entirely ignore the possibility that Bridget may be sincerely fond of him," said Carrissima.

"Just as she was fond first of Mark, then of father," retorted Lawrence. "You must admit that she angled for each in turn, and that she finally chose the richest."



“Oh dear, yes,” said Carrissima. “What is more, she would make the same admission herself.”

“A little barefaced,” remarked Phoebe.

“Anyhow,” Carrissima insisted, “I believe that Bridget simply fell in love with Jimmy, and that was why she altered her course.”

“Rotten sentimentality!” exclaimed Lawrence. “The curse of the age. Oh, there’s no doubt she was clever. She played her cards so well that she succeeded in deceiving the principal looker-on as well as her victim.”

“Victim or not,” said Carrissima, “I positively can’t feel sorry for Jimmy.”



Page 96

“Neither can I,” cried Lawrence. “I always find it difficult to pity a fool. Anyhow, I hope you have done with her,” he added.

“Lawrence would not let me send Jimmy a present,” said Phoebe.

“Certainly not,” was the answer. “The whole mischief,” he continued, facing his sister, “was brought about by the first visit you paid to Golfney Place.”

“Oh well,” said Carrissima, “there will scarcely be a question of my patronizing her in the future. You see, Mrs. Clynesworth will be a quite important personage.”

“We have every reason to be thankful she isn’t Mrs. Faversham,” returned Lawrence. “For the rest, it’s just the way of the world.”

So he dismissed the topic, and a few minutes later Phoebe inquired whether Carrissima had seen anything of Mark during the last few days.

“He really looks ill,” she insisted. “He was here yesterday, and I thought he had come to make an appointment to see the new carpet. He spoke about it the last time, but when I suggested we should go before you left England, he said he was afraid he should be too busy. I fancy he is bothered about Sir Wilford Scones.”

Carrissima did not see him again before her departure, and she was absent with Colonel Faversham six weeks. As Lawrence had taken a cottage in the country for the benefit of Victor, Carrissima, on her return to Grandison Square, stood no chance of meeting Mark in Charteris Street. As a matter of fact, he did not cross her path again until after she came back from her usual round of country-house visits at the end of October, with the intention of settling down for what promised to prove a dreary winter.

Her former avocations had lost their zest; life seemed to have become flat, stale and unprofitable. She longed for some kind of change, although she knew not what. At Charteris Street, whither Phoebe had by this time returned, the only news of Mark was that he had spent six weeks mountain-climbing in Switzerland. Lawrence complained of his brother-in-law’s neglect.

“Phoebe is his only sister,” he said one afternoon, during the first week of November. “The least he might do is to come and see her now and then. I say nothing about myself.”

“I have only seen Mark once for five minutes since he came back,” added Phoebe.

“When was that?” asked Carrissima.

“Last week——”



“And,” suggested Lawrence, “I don’t imagine he would have taken the trouble then if he hadn’t wanted you to do something for him.”

“You see, Carrissima,” Phoebe explained, “Dr. Bunbury’s wife and daughter are coming on a visit to London for a few weeks. Mark has promised to play cicerone, and he is anxious I shall call and invite the Bunburys here. Of course I told him I should be quite pleased. By the bye,” Phoebe added, “I met Sybil Clynesworth the other day. She said that Jimmy and his wife would soon be home.”

Page 97

“They are still living together,” said Lawrence.

They had not returned to England since their wedding, and it seemed that Bridget had passed entirely out of Carrissima’s life, after occupying a considerable space in it for many weeks. Whatever the future might prove concerning her influence over Jimmy, it certainly appeared that she had brought nothing but mischief upon the household in Grandison Square.

Colonel Faversham had never been quite the same man since that morning he went to Number 5, Golfney Place, and found that Bridget had departed. Signs of age had become suddenly visible; he devoted his life less to golf, and spent far more time at home—not an unmitigated advantage to his daughter.

As for Carrissima, she did her best to take a calm survey of the situation, but without being able to understand why Mark continued to sulk in his tent. If he really loved her, surely he would before now have admitted his own fault and made allowances for the momentary indiscretion which was provoked by Carrissima’s knowledge of it.

As a matter of fact, Mark felt as deeply vexed with himself as with her. But for his own lamentable weakness, he might have proved more tolerant of Carrissima’s shortcoming; the circumstance that his own withers were wrung, made a *rapprochement* less likely. There were moments when he wished that he had taken a different line from the beginning; but having already held aloof from Grandison Square so long, it became increasingly difficult to venture near the house.

Carrissima, who had not seen his face for several months, met him with Mrs. Bunbury and her daughter in Regent Street, and promptly came to the conclusion that his younger companion might prove quite dangerously attractive. At least, she presented a striking contrast to Bridget, being very quietly dressed, with dark hair, large “saucer” eyes, and a general appearance of demureness.

Phoebe had, as Carrissima knew, formed an exceedingly favourable opinion of Mary Bunbury, who had dined with her mother and Mark in Charteris Street. Carrissima wondered that she had not been invited to meet them, and realized that a year ago she would have been the first person to whom Mark appealed to help in their entertainment. Instead of taking advantage of the present encounter in Regent Street to introduce her, he passed on with a bow. His face did not wear a smile and Carrissima was left with the impression that she remained unforgiven. To tell the truth, his behaviour aroused rebellious feelings in her breast; because, after all, she was not the only or the original sinner.

So that each was going a separate way, Mark’s (by no means disagreeable) leading him on innumerable expeditions with Mary Bunbury, when the god stepped out of the machine.

CHAPTER XXVII

'MRS. JIMMY'

Colonel Faversham set out one morning in November after prolonged hesitation. A year ago he would not have thought twice, but of late he had grown much more careful of himself. The day was misty and the air struck raw and cold. He made no protest when Carrissima suggested that he should wear a scarf, although after she had wound it around his neck he, somewhat irritably, rearranged it in order to expose his necktie.



Page 98

“Bless me!” he exclaimed, with something of his former energy, “you seem to want to make me look like an infernal invalid. Thank goodness I haven’t got to that yet by a long shot. Molly-coddling a man in this way!”

“I don’t see much use in wearing a scarf if you tuck it down beneath your coat,” said Carrissima.

“Who wants to wear one?” he demanded, pulling it off and flinging it on to the hall table. “I won’t wear it. I won’t be bothered and interfered with!”

He selected a walking-stick from the stand, but when Carrissima opened the door for him, returned to exchange it for an umbrella; at last, setting forth at a quarter to twelve, walking rather slowly in the direction of his club. As he made his way along Piccadilly Colonel Faversham came almost to a standstill. Good heavens! that must be Bridget coming towards him. He fixed his eye-glass and saw that he had not make a mistake; in fact, it was difficult to be mistaken. She was as becomingly dressed as ever, and carried an enormous muff, with a great many of some small animals’ tails depending from it.

Colonel Faversham’s thoughts at once flew back to that last time he had seen her in Golfney Place, when he had insisted that she should name the date for their marriage—a week or two hence, as he had egregiously hoped! And she had seemed to promise that she would gratify him when he came the following morning, and he arrived with exuberant anticipations only to find the bird flown! Everything stood out clearly in his mind, and now that she was within a few yards he wished he had not passed Half Moon Street, so that he might have slipped down the turning in order to avoid a meeting.

Had he done so in all probability Bridget would have pursued him! Quickening her pace she bore down upon the colonel with her right hand outstretched, while with the left she held the enormous muff. He had no alternative; it seemed inevitable that he should meet her half-way. Although he had always admired her, she had never appeared quite so enticing as this dull November morning; looking into his face with merry eyes, while yet the corners of her mouth were drawn down as if to express the penitence, which he knew that no one in the world could have been farther from feeling.

“Oh, Colonel Faversham, how delighted I am to see you again!” she cried, and the provoking part of it was that he could not avoid a sensation of pleasure on seeing her at closer quarters. He did not imagine for an instant that she wished to see him, although for the time her manner might carry conviction. “I have positively been longing to meet you,” said Bridget.

“It is very kind to say so,” muttered Colonel Faversham.

“And,” she continued, with her eyes on his face, “how splendidly well you are looking!”



“Ah, you think I am?” he answered. “Well, thank Heaven, I feel pretty well. How long have you been in London?” he asked rather hastily, because no one could feel more anxious to omit any allusion to the painful past.



Page 99

“Only a couple of days,” said Bridget. “We had the loveliest time abroad, and the best of it was that I really knew my way about far better than Jimmy.”

Well, Colonel Faversham, for his part, did not doubt that she knew her way about better than most people.

“Now, tell the truth!” she exclaimed, as they stood in the middle of the pavement, “don’t you think you ought to feel immensely grateful to me?”

“Bless my soul, I had not thought of that!” he answered, with a laugh.

“Well, you can recognize the fact now it’s pointed out to you. Admit you had a happy release, as they sometimes say in different circumstances.”

“Now I have seen you again,” said Colonel Faversham gallantly, “it becomes much more difficult than ever to believe anything of the sort.”

“I hope,” replied Bridget, “you mean to come and see me often. Jimmy will be delighted. We have taken the duckiest little furnished flat while we look about for a house of our own.”

“You are not going to settle down in Upper Grosvenor Street?” suggested the colonel.

“Oh dear, no! We should never dream of disturbing Sybil, nor of living with her. You don’t know what a good fellow Jimmy is! Now he has a wife to keep him up to the mark he will do the most wonderful and unexpected things. You will see! He is going to stand for Atlinghurst, and I assure you I intend to get him in. Don’t you think I shall make an excellent canvasser? Now, please, understand,” she added, “I expect you to come and see me!”

“Where is the flat?” he inquired.

“Aberdeen Mansion,” she answered. “Jimmy took it while we were abroad——”

“Without seeing it? Good gracious!” said Colonel Faversham. That was just like Jimmy—and Bridget.

“Oh dear, yes,” she said. “We left it to an agent, and, really, nothing could have turned out better. It is only a few yards from Hyde Park Corner. Will you come and have lunch this morning? I know Jimmy will be at home—not that it matters if he isn’t.”

“Some other time, if you will allow me,” said Colonel Faversham, offering his right hand.

“I wish,” cried Bridget, as she stood holding it, “you would promise me one thing!”



“Upon my word,” he replied, “it’s difficult to refuse to promise you anything.”

“Well, then, please make Carrissima pay me a visit at once—at once, you understand?”

As Colonel Faversham walked on to his club, hastening because he had grown cold standing still so long, he doubted whether or not he should mention Mrs. Jimmy’s name at Grandison Square. He never ceased to congratulate himself, inasmuch as the fact of his abortive engagement had been kept secret. Even if Carrissima suspected anything of the kind, she could not possibly know for certain! Colonel Faversham realized, however, that his relationship to Bridget in former days might still be raked up as food for scoffers, and he shrank from anything of the nature of ridicule. Mrs. Jimmy, indeed, was a delicate topic, and he would probably have kept his own counsel concerning the meeting in Piccadilly, if he had not feared lest she should subsequently come into contact with Carrissima, when his silence might defeat his own end.



Page 100

“Whom do you think I saw this morning?” he asked, after dinner that evening.

“Not—not Bridget?” she exclaimed.

“Yes—Mrs. Jimmy! They have been in London only a couple of days.”

“Then you spoke to her?”

“Good gracious!” answered the colonel, “why on earth shouldn’t I speak to her. As a matter of fact there was no getting out of it. She insisted on speaking to me. She is living in a furnished flat—Aberdeen Mansion, close to Hyde Park Corner, you know, and she made me promise that you should pay her a visit as soon as possible. I don’t know whether you will care to go.”

“Oh yes,” said Carrissima, “I am bound to call sooner or later.”

“Well, well, you know best,” was the answer. “She thought I was looking uncommonly well—at least she said so. Goodness knows whether she meant it. Anyhow, I feel pretty fit!”

Although anything resembling an intimacy with Bridget might be out of the question, it seemed absolutely necessary to pay Jimmy’s wife an ordinary, complimentary visit. Deep down in Carrissima’s mind, perhaps, was an idea that Bridget might prove capable of an intervention as auspicious as her previous alarms and excursions had been unfortunate.

If this were the case, Carrissima scarcely admitted the impeachment even to herself; but two afternoons after the meeting with Colonel Faversham near Half Moon Street his daughter set out to Aberdeen Mansion, where she found Mrs. Clynesworth at home, and at once came to the conclusion that until the present, at least, she believed everything had turned out for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

She at once broke through Carrissima’s reserve. Paying no attention to her proffered hand, she leaned forward and demonstratively kissed her first on the right cheek, then on the left.

“So glad you have come,” she cried effusively. “And how extremely fortunate that Jimmy is out.”

“Is he all right?” asked Carrissima.

“Oh yes, quite all right,” was the answer. “You will say he looks splendid, though I don’t take any credit to myself for that, because he always did. I thought so the very first time I saw his photograph at your house. I haven’t the remotest notion where he has gone and I never inquire. That’s my theory of matrimony. Perhaps you are surprised to hear I



have a theory of any kind; but no," said Bridget, "of course you're more likely to go to the opposite extreme. You can't help regarding me as a horrid sort of schemer!"

"All's well that ends well," returned Carrissima, with a smile.

"Ah! but, you see, it isn't the end!" said Bridget. "It's only the beginning. We're not living in one of those novels where marriage is the end of all things. But Jimmy and I always go our separate ways and the consequence is when we meet we're generally quite glad to see each other. Such an immense mistake to imagine that any two people can tell one another everything."



Page 101

“Is it?” murmured Carrissima, who clung to a vastly different ideal.

“What bores we should become!” said Bridget. “And, you know, whatever you do to a man you must never bore him—poor fellow! But, please, don’t encourage me to talk about myself—not that I really need much encouragement. I feel so perfectly delighted with everything!—how is Mark?” she added, abruptly changing her tone.

“He looked very well the last time I saw him,” replied Carrissima, at once on guard.

“When was that?”

“A few days ago!”

“You don’t appear to have any interesting announcement to make,” suggested Bridget, with expressive eyes on Carrissima’s face. Now, Carrissima hesitated. She could easily have answered in such a way that her hostess, with all her audacity, would have been silenced.

“I haven’t spoken to Mark,” she faltered, “since your marriage.”

“How disappointing!” cried Bridget. “So, after all my efforts you didn’t follow the advice I gave you.”

“No,” said Carrissima.

“Why not?”

“Oh well, I couldn’t,” said Carrissima, and Bridget shrugged her shoulders as if to put the topic aside.

“Did the colonel tell you,” she inquired, “that Jimmy is going to stand for Atlinghurst? Between us we are going to accomplish the most wonderful things. He always insists that his mind is too independent for the House of Commons, but I tell him a man must expect to sacrifice some of his independence when he marries.”

“In spite of all your theories!” suggested Carrissima.

“Of course,” Bridget continued, “I quite understand that most people believe Jimmy sacrificed a great deal more than that! Your brother Lawrence, for instance! Oh dear, I can imagine exactly what he says! Carrissima, there’s one thing which makes me angry!”

“Only one?” said Carrissima.



“The want of discrimination in the human mind. I dare say that even yours is tainted! It’s of no use to pretend you can’t understand. In a moment of self-denying effusiveness I admitted that I deliberately angled for a husband: first for Mark Driver, then for Colonel Faversham. Well, although one would have none of me and I didn’t want the other, the fact remains that I am the wife of the richest of the trio! Everybody who knows Jimmy naturally thinks that was all I thought about—his money, his position and so forth. Well, there’s only one consolation,” said Bridget.

“What is that?” demanded Carrissima.

“Jimmy knows better. I can’t tell you how, but there’s the glorious fact that he does. All the evidence was against me! I suppose Jimmy is a kind of seer—oh, of course you can’t help smiling at that! But, then, neither you nor any one else has the slightest idea what there is in Jimmy. Carrissima, my husband is a clever man who has the misfortune—if it is really a misfortune—to see both sides of every question too distinctly! Being a poor partisan, he appears to lack enthusiasm. But, then, I have a boundless store!”



Page 102

“I begin to think,” said Carrissima, “that none of us imagined all there was in *you!*”

“Oh, as for me,” returned Bridget, “I was simply a little wretch during the few months you saw anything of me. I honestly believe that was a kind of interregnum. If you had met me while my father was alive you would have taken me for a quite different woman. All that is over and done with and for the rest—well, you will see!”

When Carrissima rose to go away Bridget clung to her hand—

“Jimmy will be immensely disappointed,” she exclaimed. “I wish you would do something to console him by dining with us one evening. Our space here isn’t sufficient for large parties.”

“I should be very pleased,” said Carrissima.

“Let me see,” returned Bridget, knitting her brows, “we were reckless enough to promise to go to Sandbay from Friday till Monday—my dear little Dresden china aunts, you remember! It is really very amusing! Jimmy paid them a visit just after I left Golfney Place and they have taken quite a fancy to him. The odd part of it is, that he seems to like them in return. Goodness knows how he will endure three days in a house where tobacco has always been tabooed. Would next Friday suit you?”

“Quite nicely,” said Carrissima.

“Oh, but Friday is an unlucky day, isn’t it?” cried Bridget. “I don’t know whether you are superstitious, although I believe everyone is about something. Suppose we say Thursday, and if I can’t get together the people I should like to meet you I must write and fix another evening. If you don’t hear to the contrary I shall expect you on Thursday—at eight o’clock. Or,” Bridget added, “perhaps half-past seven will be more convenient. Yes, please let it be half-past seven.”

Carrissima walked back to Grandison Square thinking of the change which had occurred in Bridget, who yet remained in many ways the same as she had ever been and most likely always would be. But she had no longer anything to disguise, anything to scheme for. Her manner was characterized by a new and delightful air of authority, and, indeed, Carrissima, if anybody, had become the plotter now! As far as Mrs. Jimmy was concerned the slate had been cleaned. No, in spite of anything that Lawrence might say, in spite of all that Bridget had done, Carrissima could not believe that Jimmy Clynesworth was to be very deeply pitied.

CHAPTER XXVIII

EXEUNT OMNES



Carrissima, in her curiosity to know the identity of the “people” whom Bridget wished her to meet, paid a visit to Upper Grosvenor Street. Sybil Clynesworth’s breach of trust had been long ago forgiven, and now she was asked, in the most casual tone, whether she was to make one of the party at Aberdeen Mansion on Thursday.

“My dear,” said Sybil, “Bridget quite understands that I do not care for that sort of thing. I must say she is kindness itself, and she wouldn’t hear of my turning out of this house; she wouldn’t hear of it. And really Jimmy seems exceedingly happy.”



Page 103

When Thursday evening arrived, Carrissima proved once more very exacting while she was being dressed for dinner. Her hair had to be twice taken down again, and at the last minute she changed her mind about her gown. Her maid had not found her so troublesome since that evening in March when she went to dine with Lawrence and Phoebe in Charteris Street, and on that disappointing occasion Carrissima expected to meet Mark Driver.

She could not feel quite so confident of his presence at Aberdeen Mansion this evening, and in any case such an encounter might not necessarily tend to mitigate the unfortunate coolness which had grown up between them. Still it would be a satisfaction to sit in the same room with him; perhaps he would even take her in to dinner, and to-night might prove the beginning of better days. Those through which Carrissima was living at present could scarcely be much worse!

Even Colonel Faversham remarked how well she was looking when she said "good-bye."

"I hope you won't feel very dull by yourself," she suggested.

"Dull!" he retorted. "Why in the world should I feel dull! You speak as if I couldn't tolerate my own society for a few hours. Give me a decent cigar and the *Field*, and I ask for nothing more. Besides, what do you imagine will become of me when you're married?"

"Oh well," said Carrissima, "there's no need to anticipate anything of that kind just yet."

"No," was the answer. "So it seems. What has happened to Mark Driver? He used to haunt the house, but now we never see him. I tell you what, Carrissima. A good many of you young women are just a little bit too exacting!"

"If I don't go I shall be late for dinner," exclaimed Carrissima hastily, and a few minutes later she was on the way to Aberdeen Mansion in a hired brougham.

Reaching the block of flats two minutes before the clock struck half-past seven, Carrissima went up to the second floor in the lift, pressed the bell button and was at once admitted by Jimmy's man. A tall parlour-maid met her in the hall, and took her to a bedroom, where Carrissima removed her cloak.

"Will you come this way?" said the parlour-maid, and led her to a miniature drawing-room which, to Carrissima's astonishment, was empty. "I am very sorry," the girl continued, in response to an inquiring glance, "but Mr. and Mrs. Clynesworth have not come in yet."

"Can I have made a mistake in the day?" said Carrissima. "Are you certain Mrs. Clynesworth expected me this evening?"



“Yes,” was the answer, given with some hesitation.

“At what time?”

“Dinner is ordered for eight o’clock,” said the parlour-maid.

“Oh, then that accounts for it,” cried Carrissima. “I understood it was to be half-past seven.”

“We always dine at eight,” returned the parlour-maid, as she stirred the fire. “If you wouldn’t mind taking a chair,” she added, “Mr. and Mrs. Clynesworth will not be many minutes.”



Page 104

With that she left the room and shut the door, only to re-open it again a few moments later, whereupon Mark Driver entered without any announcement. To judge by appearances, he was far more astonished to behold Carrissima than she to see him. For a second he stood stock still just within the door, gazing down at her face in silence. It was she who at last broke through the embarrassment, rising and offering her hand.

“Good-evening, Mark!” she said.

“Good-evening,” he replied, and then the conversation threatened to languish.

“What,” asked Carrissima, “do you imagine has become of our host and hostess?”

“Goodness knows,” said Mark. “There’s obviously some mistake. Anyhow, I was immensely surprised to see their other guest.”

“Really!” cried Carrissima, sitting down again in an easy-chair. “I don’t quite see why!”

“The fact remains that I was,” he answered, with the faintest of smiles.

“Were you also pleased, by any chance?”

“Suppose we say I was—well, dazzled,” said Mark, drawing closer to her chair.

“The simple explanation must be,” returned Carrissima, with a tremor in her voice, “that Bridget said eight, and we understood half-past seven.”

“In that event we must have been dreaming!”

“But then,” she suggested, “it isn’t likely that two persons would dream the same thing, is it?”

“Oh well, I’m not certain,” said Mark, and he rested a hand on the arm of her chair.

“You see, Bridget invited me when I was here last week,” Carrissima explained. “I might easily have made a blunder.”

“She wrote to me,” was the answer. “I have it in black and white. There’s no getting out of that.”

“It must be a quarter to eight!” Carrissima suggested.

“Seventeen minutes to,” said Mark, taking out his watch.



"I hope no accident has happened," suggested Carrissima, and bringing forward a chair, he sat down close to her side. "One is reminded," she added, "of a certain evening when Lawrence and Phoebe waited for you—do you remember?"

"Oh dear, yes," said Mark, passing a hand over his forehead. "Let us hope these people won't be quite so much behind as I was!"

"Are you afraid of being bored?" asked Carrissima. "Or are you merely hungry?"

"It seems a long time since I saw you last," he remarked.

"Whose fault was that?"

"My misfortune, anyhow," he admitted.

"You had only to come to Grandison Square," said Carrissima. "You knew I was always on view!"

They both lapsed into silence, thinking in common of his last visit to Colonel Faversham's, when, perhaps, neither of them had shown to the best advantage.

"It's difficult to shut one's mind to facts," exclaimed Mark suddenly.

"I fancy I have heard you protest that few things can be more misleading," she retorted.



Page 105

He sat leaning forward in his chair, close to Carrissima's, his arms resting on his knees.

"Yes, that's all right," he said. "But I have sometimes to advise patients to submit to operations, thinking how I should hate the ordeal on my own account. I quite understand that the only way is often to shut one's eyes. Life seems to include a good many things which simply won't bear thinking about. One realizes the fact, yet goes on thinking of them just the same."

"Well," murmured Carrissima, "you should try—you should try to mend your ways in the future."

"Do you think you could do it?" he asked.

"What?" asked Carrissima.

"Shut your eyes!"

"Mark!" she cried, after a pause.

"Well?" he said.

"Look——"

She was leaning back with her eyes tightly closed; her little face puckered, and one hand resting on each arm of the chair.

At the sight all Mark's hesitation fell away, and rising impulsively, he took her cheeks between his palms and kissed her lips. The touch of nature made them kin, but not within the tables of affinity. They might have reasoned with themselves for months longer in vain, but being thrown alone together, their feelings quickly found free play.

It was true that Carrissima, although she may have hoped, and indeed she did devoutly hope for such a consummation, was in the sequel taken rather sharply by surprise. She had not anticipated this sudden *denouement!* The time for procrastination had passed, however, and as she opened her eyes she wound her arms about Mark's neck.

"It must be nearly eight o'clock," she remarked, as she rose from her chair a few minutes later, going at once to look in the mirror which formed part of the overmantel.

"Carrissima," said Mark, "I begin to suspect——"

"What?" she demanded.

"That this must be a put-up job!"



“Oh, but Bridget would never dream of such a thing,” said Carrissima.

“I should be rather sorry to say what she wouldn’t be capable of. Anyhow,” Mark added, “it would be a pity to spoil a good intention! You haven’t said you will be my wife, you know.”

“I—I fancied that I had,” she was answering, when there arose a noise outside the drawing-room as if some one had violently knocked over a metal tray.

By the time the door opened, Carrissima was seated in the easy-chair gazing at the fire, while Mark stood at the farther side of the small room with one of David Rosser’s novels (hastily snatched from a side table) in his hand.

Enter Bridget, accompanied by Jimmy and looking her best in what might have been her wedding dress.

“So immensely sorry!” she cried, hastening forward as Carrissima rose.

“She looks sorry, doesn’t she?” said Jimmy, with a laugh. “You must both try your hardest to forgive us,” he added, as Bridget turned towards Mark.



Page 106

“I do hope you two good people haven’t been bored to death,” she continued.
“Especially as Mark seems to be reading one of my father’s books!”

“We’ve done our level best—in the circumstances,” he answered, with an embarrassed, boyish laugh, and then, dinner being announced, Jimmy offered his arm to Carrissima. While the servants were present everybody seemed to have a great deal to say with the exception of Miss Faversham, whose silence failed, however, to attract the least attention. By the time dessert was reached she began to show symptoms of recovering from her not unnatural embarrassment; Jimmy’s glass was full. He drank champagne this evening.

“I was wondering,” said Mark, when the four were left by themselves, “whether I might be of some use before the evening ended. Carrissima suggested an accident.”

“There was not much you could call accidental about it, was there, Bridget?” said Jimmy.

“Oh dear!” she exclaimed, “I wish somebody would say something illuminating! I am positively dying from curiosity!”

“The important question is,” suggested Jimmy, “what did Carrissima say?”

“And,” said Bridget, “what did Mark ask her?”

Carrissima looked entreatingly into his face across the table.

“The fact is,” he explained, disregarding her mute appeal, “I asked her to marry me!”

Bridget was on her feet in an instant.

“Oh, how immensely pleased I am!” she cried, stooping to kiss Carrissima’s forehead.
“Jimmy, you may drink your wine now!”

He lost no time in raising his glass.

“Carrissima!” he said. “Mark, old chap!”

She looked across the table, half smiles, half tears.

THE END