right angles, and I observed with astonishment that it was pointing direct to A.

"It's either A or P," said Lilith. "I'll put them both down."

Once again the pendulum changed the direction of its swing, and Lilith noted down E or S; and so, to my growing consternation, it continued to take up quite distinct changes of direction until six variations had occurred, when the pendulum became stationary and then began to swing round in a circle.

"It has finished," said Lilith—whereupon I instantly dropped the pendulum. "It is a word of six letters: U or J, A or P, E or S, A or P, E or S, F or R. Let us see if we can make out what the word is. It is a pity the letters were opposite; it muddles it up so. They ought to be in a half-circle, but then they would be too close. But let us try a few combinations. U P E A S F; it can't be that. U P S A S F; it can't be that. We'll try it with J J A E P E F; that isn't it. J A S E S F; that can't be the word. Do the letters suggest anything to you, Sibyl? Is there any name that might be lurking in your subconscious mind, beginning with U or J? Try to think. What did you do in town yesterday?"

"Oh, various things. I went to the dealer, of course; and then I went to a private show of pottery and antiques."

"Pottery," mused Lilith, scanning the letters that she had written down. "Let me see: Upchurch? No, that won't do." She looked the letters through again and then asked eagerly: "There wasn't any Wedgwood there I suppose?"

Now it happened that while Mr. Hawkesley was talking to us I had noticed an old gentleman tenderly placing a very fine green Wedgwood cup and saucer in the show case. So I could, and did, answer truthfully.

"Yes, there was; a beautiful green Jasper-ware cup and saucer.

"There!" Lilith exclaimed triumphantly. "Jasper! That is the word! And yet I don't suppose you have given that cup and saucer a thought since you saw it."

"I had forgotten its existence until you spoke of Wedgwood."

"Exactly," said Lilith. "And that is the mysterious

peculiarity of the subconscious. You see a thing or a person perhaps only for a moment, and straightway forget it. It seems to be gone for ever. But it is not. It has sunk into the subconscious, to remain there unnoticed possibly for years until some chance association, or perhaps a dream, brings it to the surface. But all the time it has been there. And at any moment it can be brought into view by the use of some kind of autoscope such as the pendulum or the crystal."

"The crystal is an autoscope, too, is it?" I asked.

"Yes; but of quite a different kind. The pendulum acts by the effects of the subconscious mind upon the muscles; the crystal by the effects of the subconscious mind on the centres of visual perception."

"That sounds very learned; but tell me exactly what you do with the crystal."

"As to me, personally," replied Lilith, "I do very little with it. Crystal vision—or 'scrying,' to use the technical term—is a rather rare faculty. I am a very poor scryer. But in the case of a really gifted observer, the most astonishing results are obtained. The method of using the instrument is this: The scryer sits in a restful position with the crystal before her (all the best scryers, I think, are women) and gazes steadily at the bright lights in it, keeping the conscious mind in a passive state—thinking of nothing, in fact. After a time the lights in the crystal grow dim; a kind of cloud or mist seems to float before it, and in this cloud, and gradually taking its place, the picture or vision appears; sometimes dim and vague, but often quite clear and bright, like the little pictures that you see in a convex mirror or a silver ball."

"And what is this picture? I mean what is its subject?"

"That varies. It may be a scene from the past that had been forgotten by the conscious memory, or something that never happened at all—just a jumble of bits of memory like a dream. Or it may be the picture of some event that is going to take place in the near future,"

"But," I objected, "how can an event which has not yet occurred be in your subconscious mind?"

"I know," said Lilith. "The whole subject of pre-recognition is a very difficult one. But there seems to be no doubt that prophetic visions do really occur. And then

there is clairvoyance—seeing across space and through obstacles. A really gifted scryer, by concentrating her thought on a particular person or place as she looks into the crystal, can see that person or place, no matter how great the distance may be ; can see exactly what the person is doing or what is happening at the place."

" Really ! " I exclaimed. " That sounds like rather an undesirable faculty. Doesn't it strike you, Lilith, as a very great intrusion on the privacy and liberty of the subject to scry a person without his or her consent ? Supposing the scryer should happen to discover the scryed one in the act of taking her—or his—morning tub. Wouldn't it be rather a liberty ? "

Lilith laughed (but I could see that the idea was new to her) : " You are dreadfully matter-of-fact, Sibyl. But, of course, you are quite right. We shouldn't misuse our powers. As for me, I have very little power of the kind to misuse, for I have never seen anything more than a sort of vague picture of unrecognisable figures in undistinguishable surroundings. But I think you might do better, for I am still convinced that you have special gifts. Would you like to try the crystal, Sibyl ? "

" Not now, thank you, Lilith. We ought to get to work after all this gossip. And that reminds me that, before you came up, I was looking at your exquisite paintings and wondering if you are not, to some extent, wasting your great talents."

" In what way ? " she asked.

" Of course," I said, " these designs would make magnificent tapestries or wall decorations. But if you can't get a wall, you might condescend to a smaller surface. Have you ever tried designing and painting a fan ? "

" No," she replied.

" I wish you would," said I. " You would do it splendidly with your power of design and your delicate technique. And Phillibar could make the sticks and carve the guards, or I could do you a pair in silver repoussé, and a jewelled pin and loop. Will you think over the proposal ? "

Lilith picked up the crystal on its cushion and, smiling at me, said :

" I will make a bargain with you. If you will take the crystal to your room and give it a thorough trial whenever

you have time, I will get out a design for a fan. Do you agree ? "

I held out my hand for the crystal. Primarily, my desire was to introduce Lilith to Fame and Fortune through the medium of the Magpies Club ; but the startling success of the magic pendulum had aroused my curiosity in regard to the other "autoscope," though I have to confess that, when I had borne it to my room, I concealed it guiltily in a locked drawer, where it should be secure from the prying eyes of the servant-maid, and above all from the observation of the sarcastic and sceptical Titmouse.

But there were other matters than crystals and magic pendulums to be thought of. There was, for instance, the set of twelve spoons which Mr. Campbell had asked me to make and to which he had again referred in his letter. I knew now that I should be paid for them at a reasonably remunerative rate, and this, and the congenial nature of the task, encouraged me to get to work. But before I could begin there was the motive of the design to be considered ; and since the apostles were ruled out as obsolete, I had to find some other group of twelve related objects. After a whole day's anxious thought, I fixed upon the Signs of the Zodiac as furnishing a picturesque and manageable motive, and with this scheme in my mind, I fell to work in earnest, first with the pencil and then with the wax and metal.

But busy as I was, and happy in the interest of my work, I was yet aware of a change, of a something new that had come into my life. From the little workshop which had been my world, I found my thoughts straying out into the larger world, and particularly that part of it which is adjacent to Temple Bar ; and if at times I viewed this change with some misgivings, I was more often conscious of a sense of exhilaration such as one feels when embarking on some new adventure.

In due course I received notice of my election as a member of the Magpies Club, and by the same post a letter from Mr. Davenant asking me to celebrate the event by lunching with him there ; and, as I had occasion to go into town to replenish my silver and some other materials, I accepted his invitation, intending to return to Wellclose Square in the afternoon. But it appeared that a loan collection of antique silver was being exhibited at the South Kensington Museum,

and that he had hoped to have the pleasure of inspecting it under my expert guidance. Now, to a craftsman (or craftswoman) of small experience, there is no technical education to compare with the study of admitted masterpieces. I felt that strongly, and I felt that I needed that technical education; furthermore, I felt that the attempt to explain the merits of the old work to an attentive and sympathetic listener would help me to concentrate my own attention. And perhaps it did. At any rate, I spent a long and pleasant afternoon at the museum, and we subsequently discussed the exhibits (and various other matters) very companionably over the dinner table at the club.

"It has been a jolly day for me, Mrs. Otway," said Mr. Davenant, as he wished me "good-bye" at the Underground Station. "I've learned no end about silver—you are a perfect encyclopædia of knowledge in regard to goldsmith's work. And the delightful thing to think of is that we've only scratched the surface of the museum. The place is inexhaustible. Do you think I may hope for the pleasure of another visit there with you before long?"

I gave what I intended to be an ambiguous answer. But it was not ambiguous to me; and I suspect that Mr. Davenant went on his way with a feeling that a precedent had been created.

When I arrived home, I found a letter awaiting me from Mr. Otway. It was not entirely unexpected, for I had felt pretty certain that he would presently hear further from his mysterious correspondent. It now appeared that he had received one or two short letters, ostensibly of the nature of warnings, but actually threatening, though in vague, indefinite terms, and one more recently of a more explicitly menacing character. These he wished me to see and discuss with him, and he asked me to make an appointment, at my convenience, to meet him for that purpose. I replied, suggesting, as before, the Tower Wharf; and there, a couple of evenings later, I met him.

In appearance he had by no means improved. His pale face had a strained, wild expression, his eye-lids were puffy and covered with curious, minute wrinkles. His hands were markedly tremulous, and his fingers bore the deep stains that mark the inveterate cigarette smoker. His dress was noticeably less neat than it had used to be; indeed, he

presented a distinctly shabby and neglected appearance. Oddly enough, too, he seemed to have grown somewhat stouter.

I should have been less than human if these plain indications of sustained misery had awakened in me no feeling of pity. That his sufferings were the indirect result of his indifference to the happiness or misery of others, could not entirely stifle compassion, and I found myself speaking to him in a tone almost sympathetic.

"I am afraid, Mr. Otway," said I, "you are letting these nonsensical letters worry you quite unnecessarily. You are not looking at all well."

"I am not at all well, Helen," he replied, dejectedly.

"And I think you are smoking too much."

"I am. And I am drinking too much—I, who have been a temperate man all my life. And I have to take drugs to get a decent night's rest. This worry is breaking me up."

"Oh, come, Mr. Otway," I protested, "you mustn't give way in this manner. What is it all about, after all? Just a wretched blackmailer whom you know to be an imposter, whose threats you know to be mere empty vapourings."

"That is not quite true, Helen. The man is an impostor, no doubt. He doesn't really know anything. There is nothing for him to know. But he could create a great deal of trouble. He could, in fact, cause the—ah—the inquiry to be re-opened and—ah——"

"Exactly. And if it were re-opened? There would be unpleasant comment on the fact that a detail of the evidence had been withheld at the inquest. But that is the worst that could happen."

Mr. Otway looked at me with a sort of dumb gratitude that was quite pathetic, but his gloom was in nowise dispelled by my optimism.

"It is very good of you, Helen," said he, "to speak in this cheerful, confident tone. But I assure you, you minimize the danger. There is no saying what construction might be put upon the suppression of that detail; what considerations of motive might be read into it—especially as there was what they would call collusion between us to suppress it. But let me show you the last letter—the others are of no consequence."

He produced his wallet, and, after some awkward fumbling, drew out the letter, which he held out to me with a hand that shook so that the paper rattled. Like the last, it was typewritten unskilfully, and characterized by the same semi-illiterate confusion in the wording, which ran thus :

" Mr. Lewis Otway,

" The writer of this warns you once more to look out for trouble. The person that I spoke of knows that something was held back at the inquest at least they say so and that they know why your wife won't live with you and that she knows all about it too and that someone knows more than you think anybody knows. This is a friendly warning.

" FROM A WELL WISHER."

I returned the letter to Mr. Otway after reading it through twice, and I must confess that my confidence was somewhat shaken. If the writer was merely guessing, he seemed to have an uncanny aptitude for guessing right. As to his claim to possess some further knowledge, I did not see how that could be possible. When the fatal interview took place between my father and Mr. Otway, there were—to the best of my belief—only three persons in the house. Of those actually present at the interview there was only a single survivor—Mr. Otway himself—and he alone knew with certainty what occurred. The claim was therefore almost certainly false. And yet, even as I dismissed it, there crept into my mind once again a vague discomfort, a doubt whether there might not be something that I was unaware of, and that Mr. Otway knew ; some dreadful secret that I, of all persons in the world, had been instrumental in guarding from discovery. And as I glanced at Mr. Otway—haggard, wild, trembling, and terrified out of all proportion to the danger, so far as it was known to me—the horrid doubts seemed to deepen into something like suspicion.

" Of course," said he, when he had returned the letter to the wallet, " I realize that you are right ; that there is nothing to be done but to wait for this person to show his hand more plainly. It would be madness to apply to the police. They would immediately ask if there had been any

evidence withheld and why you were not living with me. And if they succeeded in getting hold of the writer of this letter, we should have more to fear from them than from the writer himself. He may be, as you believe, a mere blackmailer who is preparing to extort money, but if he were brought to bay he would try to justify his threats."

With this I could not but agree. The implied allegations in this letter were, in point of fact, true ; and any attempt to obtain help from the police would probably result in their truth being made manifest.

"Have you no idea whatever," I asked, "who might be the writer of this letter? He can hardly be a complete stranger. Have you no suspicion? Can you think of no one who might have written it?"

He looked at me furtively and cleared his throat once or twice before replying ; and when he did answer, his manner was hesitating and even evasive.

"Suspicions," he said, "are—er—not very—ah—helpful. I have no facts. The mere—ah—conjecture that this person or that might possibly be concerned—if a motive could be supplied—and—ah—if one can think of no motive——"

He left the sentence uncompleted, giving me the vague impression that he was reserving something that he did not wish to discuss.

We were silent for some time, and I was beginning to consider bringing the interview to an end when he suddenly turned to me with a gesture of appeal.

"Helen," he said earnestly, "is it not possible for me to prevail on you to—ah—to reconsider your decision and—ah—to—to—to terminate this—er—this unhappy separation. Consider my loneliness, Helen, my broken health and this trouble—which is our joint trouble—and—ah——"

"Mr. Otway," I answered, "it is not possible. I assure you it is not. I am deeply distressed to think of your unhappiness and to see you looking so ill, but I could not entertain what you suggest. You must remember that we are strangers. We have never been otherwise than separated. As we are, so we must continue."

"You don't mean that we must always remain apart?" he exclaimed. "It was only meant to be a temporary separation."

"At any rate," I rejoined, "the time has not come to consider a change. But I shall be glad to hear how things go with you and to give you any help that I can."

I rose and held out my hand, which he took reluctantly (though it was the first time that I had ever offered to shake hands with him).

"I am driving you away, Helen," he said.

"No, indeed," I replied. "I had to go. You will write to me if anything fresh happens?"

He promised readily, and we turned and walked away in opposite directions. When I had gone a little way, I paused to look back at him; and as I noted his dejected droop and his air of something approaching physical decrepitude, I felt a pang—not of remorse, but of regret that I could not in some way lighten the burden of his evident misery. It is true that his unhappiness was of his own making, and that in wrecking his own life he had wrecked mine and my father's. But vindictiveness is a character alien to the civilized and developed mind. For what he had done I still loathed him; but it pained me to think of the haunting dread, the abiding fear that was his companion night and day.

Chapter XVI *The Sweated Artist*

I HAD told Mr. Otway that I had to go; but I did not tell him why. If I had, he would probably have been conconsiderably startled. For the fact is that while we were talking I had formed a resolution which had rapidly matured—the resolution to go to Dr. Thorndyke and make a clean breast of the whole affair. He had invited me to call on him and report from time to time, especially if I should be in need of advice or help, and I had been intending to write and propose a visit. Now, however, I decided to call on the chance of his being disengaged, and if he should be unable to see me, to make an appointment.

From the Tower Wharf I made my way quickly to Mark Lane, noting as I entered the station that it was a quarter to six; and as the train rumbled westward I turned over the

situation and decided on what I should say. That some trouble was brewing I had little doubt, and though I did not share Mr. Otway's alarm, I was more than a little uneasy. For, at the best, the re-opening of the inquiry into my father's death must entail a scandal and exhibit my conduct in a decidedly questionable light; and such a scandal would be a disaster. As a discredited witness, how could I face my comrades at Wellclose Square? And how should I stand with Jasper Davenant? These were unpleasant questions to reflect on. And underneath these reflections was the uneasy feeling that perhaps there was something more in Mr. Otway's fear than was known to me; something of which I had hardly dared to think.

From the Temple Station I found my way without difficulty to Dr. Thorndyke's chambers at Number 5A, King's Bench Walk, and was relieved to find the outer oak door open and a small brass knocker on the inner one tacitly accepting the possibility of visitors. I plied it modestly, and was immediately confronted by Mr. Polton, whose countenance, at the sight of me, became covered with a network of benevolent and amicable wrinkles.

"The doctor is up in the laboratory looking over his apparatus, but I expect he has nearly finished. I'll go and tell him you are here. Have you had tea?"

I had not and admitted the fact, whereupon Mr. Polton nodded meaningly, and having offered me an arm-chair, took his departure. In a minute or two Dr. Thorndyke entered the room and greeted me with a cordiality that put me at my ease instantly.

"I have been wondering when you were coming to see me; in fact, I have seriously considered calling at Wellclose Square to see how you were getting on. Polton will bring you some tea in a moment, and then you must tell me all your news. I hope you are comfortable in your new home."

"I am very happy, indeed, Dr. Thorndyke, and very grateful to you for finding me such a congenial home. And I have made quite a promising start in my new profession, too. But I have really come to ask your advice—and to make a confession."

"A confession," said Dr. Thorndyke, looking at me gravely. "Is it necessary? and have you given it due consideration?"

"Yes, I think so. There is only one point. I should have told you this secret before, but as another person is involved in it, I felt that it would be a breach of confidence. But I now feel that my legal adviser should be told everything."

"That is so. Advice can only be based on known facts. And I may say that anything that you may tell me in my professional capacity is a privileged communication. A lawyer cannot be compelled to reveal anything that his client has told him, and is, in fact, forbidden to do so. You are, therefore, committing no breach of confidence in giving me any necessary information."

"I am glad to know that, because, when I last spoke to you about my affairs, I held back something that you may consider important."

"Something relating to the inquest?" he asked.

"Yes. Did you suspect that I had?"

"I suspected that Mr. Otway was holding something back when he gave his evidence—but here is your tea, with all the little lady-like extras, just to show you what an old bachelor can do in the way of domestic miracles. I am ashamed of you, Polton. I call that embroidered tea-cloth sheer ostentation."

Mr. Polton laid out the dainty service, beaming with satisfaction at the doctor's recognition of his efforts to maintain the credit of the establishment, and as he went out I heard him close the outer door.

"Polton evidently smells a conference," commented Dr. Thorndyke. "The infallible way in which he always does the right thing without a word of instruction almost makes me believe in telepathy—which might be awkward if he were not as secret as an oyster. Now don't hurry, but tell me quietly what you want me to know."

Thus encouraged, I gave him the suppressed facts relating to the loaded stick that I had seen in Mr. Otway's hand, and then told him about the mysterious letters. He listened very attentively, and seemed deeply interested, for he questioned me at some length about Mr. Otway's establishment at Maidstone, his mode of life and such of his antecedents as were known to me.

"Is the stick in your possession or has Mr. Otway got it?" he asked.

"I suppose he has it. At any rate, I have never seen it since that day."

"And you know nothing of any of his associates, other than the housekeeper?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Is Mrs. Gregg still with him?"

"I believe so, but I am not sure."

"And you know nothing of his present mode of life excepting that he lives in Lyon's Inn Chambers?"

"No. I really know nothing about him."

"It is very satisfactory for you," Dr. Thorndyke observed. "You are quite in the dark. These letters suggest an intention to extort money, but they may come from a personal enemy or from someone who has some design other than direct blackmail. And the question is, what cards does that person hold. Is he acting on a mere guess or has he any actual knowledge. The problem involves two questions: was there anyone in the house, that morning, besides you, your father and Mr. Otway? and did anything occur on that occasion beyond what Mr. Otway told you? The answer seems to be in the negative in both cases; but we cannot be certain on either point. Meanwhile, your position is very unpleasant, and Mr. Otway's still more so, for his apprehensions, though perhaps exaggerated, are not entirely groundless. He has behaved with consummate folly. Whether his account of the tragedy be true or false, if he had had the courage to give it in full at the inquest, it must have been accepted in the absence of contrary evidence. But that is by no means the case now. If the inquiry were re-opened, a jury would tend to regard his suppression of certain facts as evidence of the importance of those facts.

"As to advice: there is nothing that you can do but try to forget these menacing letters. I will make a few cautious enquiries—though we have very little to go on; and you must let me know at once if there are any fresh developments."

This ended the conference, but not the conversation, for Dr. Thorndyke insisted on a full account of my progress as a craftswoman, and even called down Mr. Polton to give an expert opinion on Mr. Campbell's prices; which opinion was to the effect that they were as good as could be expected.

"So," said Dr. Thorndyke, as I rose to depart, "you have justified your rather bold choice of a profession. You have already made it an economic success, and with more experience on the commercial side, you will probably earn a very satisfactory livelihood."

This was encouraging enough, backed as it was by Mr. Polton's practical experience. But with the other results of this conference I was much less satisfied. Indeed, my talk with Dr. Thorndyke, though it had relieved me of the burden of concealment, so far from setting my apprehensions at rest, had rather increased them. Not only was it evident that he regarded these mysterious letters as indications of a real danger, but he clearly entertained the possibility that Mr. Otway might have something more than I knew to conceal; in fact, I was by no means sure that he did not suspect Mr. Otway of having killed my father.

Here, then, was abundant matter for reflection, and that none of the most pleasant; and during the next few days my mind was very full of these new complications, of this dark cloud which had arisen over my brightening horizon. Again and again I recalled in detail the incidents of that terrible morning when my dear father was snatched from me, but no new light, either on the tragedy itself or on these sinister echoes of it, came to me. I even tried Lilith's crystal—having first locked my door—but either my faith was weak or I lacked those special psychical gifts with which its owner credited me. I did, indeed, get as far as the cloud, or mist, of which Lilith had spoken; which gathered before my eyes and blotted out the crystal. But that was all. When the mist cleared away, no picture emerged from it, but only the crystal ball with the diminutive image of my own head reflected on its bright surface.

But anxieties sit lightly on the young and healthy. As the days passed, the gloomy impressions faded and I became once more absorbed in my work. The Zodiac spoons were progressing apace, and were going to do me credit; and daily I became conscious of growing facility, of increasing skill, which not only lessened my labour but was itself a source of pleasure. To do a thing with ease is to do it with enjoyment; and, incidentally, added skill means added speed and greater earning power. Already I began to

speculate on what Mr. Campbell's idea of "a good price" would turn out to be.

Moreover, there were other distractions. Once or twice a week I looked in at the club, and these visits had a pleasant way of developing into impromptu jaunts—to picture galleries, exhibitions, museums, and even on one or two occasions a concert or a matinée. Of the relations which were growing up between Jasper Davenant and me I did not care to think much. Perhaps the ostrich is a wiser bird than we are apt to imagine, for it does, at least, avoid the pains of anticipation. Sooner or later, no doubt, some understanding would have to be arrived at; but meanwhile Mr. Davenant was a delightful companion—gay, cheerful, buoyant, humorous, but withal a man of earnest purpose and a serious outlook on life. In all our junkettings there was little, real frivolity; the fun and gaiety were but the condiments to season the more solid and serious interests. In so far as a friendship between a young man and a young woman, which must necessarily stop at friendship, can be, our friendship was unexceptionable. But, of course, there was the qualification. However, as I have said, I let the future take care of itself and drifted pleasantly with the stream.

About this time, I made quite a startling discovery. It happened that in one of my journeys to town I had seen in a bookseller's window a book on studio pottery, and, thinking that it might be useful to Miss Finch, I had bought it, but had forgotten to give it to her. In the middle of my morning's work I suddenly remembered the book, which I had put in a cupboard in the workshop, and got up from my bench to take it to her. Her "works" were at the bottom of the garden, in an outhouse which had once been a shipsmith's shop; but, close neighbours as we were, and close friends, too, I had only once been in her workshop, when, on an off day, she had shown me her wheel, her lathe and her small glass kiln. About her work she was extraordinarily secretive; but then, she was a reticent girl in general, so far as her own affairs were concerned, though she showed a warm interest in her friends, and was, indeed, very affectionate and lovable.

As I came round the clump of bushes that hid her premises from the house, the silence and repose of the place

gave me some qualms, and for a moment I hesitated to interrupt her work. However, I pocketed my scruples and rapped boldly on the door; whereupon the familiar voice at its highest pitch—several ledger lines above the stave—demanded who was there.

"It is I, Peggy; Helen Otway," I replied apologetically. There was a pause of nearly half a minute, and then she unlocked and opened the door, looking rather embarrassed and very pink.

"I always lock myself in when I am at work," she explained.

"Well, Peggy, don't let me disturb you. I've only brought you a book that I got for you in town."

"Oh, come in, Sibyl," said she. "Of course I don't mind you."

She took the volume from me, and quickly turning over the pages and glancing at the illustrations, exclaimed, "What a ripping book! I *shall* enjoy reading it. And how sweet of you to think of getting it for me!" She linked her arm affectionately in mine and conducted me into her domain, passing through the outer room, which was devoted to plaster work—the making of moulds and "bats"—to the clay room, where the little gas engine and the mysterious wheel stood idle and a general tidying up appeared to have taken place. Here we stood chatting rather disjointedly, she still turning over the pages of the book with approving comments, and I looking about me with a craftsman's curiosity respecting the materials and appliances of an unfamiliar craft. And here I got my first surprise; for, on a side bench I noticed a collection of what were evidently bookbinder's tools. Was it possible that the secretive Titmouse was a bookbinder as well as a potter? I determined to inquire into this, but meanwhile my attention was attracted by the bench at which she had evidently been working, as suggested by the displaced stool. On this bench stood an object of some size—about twelve inches high—enveloped in a damp cloth. By its side were a spray-diffuser, a number of little spatulas and tiny bon modelling-tools, and several little covered pots of a creamy, white earthenware delicately ornamented with floral decoration in a warm blue. Venturing to lift the cover of one, I found

it to be filled with little rolls of brightly-tinted clay that looked like coloured crayons.

"You are mighty fastidious about your apparatus," I remarked, picking up the dainty little pot and wiping some smears of clay from its surface.

"And why not?" demanded Peggy. "Why shouldn't one have pretty things to work with? The old craftsmen did. I've seen some old planes and chisel-handles beautifully carved, and I am sure they did better work for having beautiful tools to work with. I would have pretty tools myself if I could make them."

"You shall, Peggy," said I. "You shall show me what you want and I will make them for you."

As I was speaking I absently turned the little pot upside down and glanced at the bottom. And then I really did get a shock. There was only a single spot of ornament on the base, but that spot was a revelation; for it was a little blue bird.

I smothered the exclamation that rose to my lips and put the pot down on the bench. What could be the meaning of this? Had Peggy, like Mr. Hawkesley, been attracted by Mr. Goldstein's wares? Or was it possible——

"Won't you show me what you were doing, Peggy?" I asked.

She turned scarlet at the question, and looked so distressed that I felt it a cruelty to press her. But cruel or not, I meant to get to the bottom of the mystery.

"I'd rather not, Sibyl, if you don't mind," she said, shyly.

"But why? What an extraordinary little person you are."

"Well," she said, doggedly, "if you must know, I am not allowed to show my work to anyone."

"Not allowed by whom?"

"By the dealer who takes all my work. For some reason, best known to himself, he makes a secret of it; won't allow anyone to know who makes it."

"But apart from the dealer, Peggy, you wouldn't mind my seeing your work?"

"Of course I shouldn't. I should like you to see it. But a promise is a promise, you know."

"Of course," I agreed; and then I stepped quickly up to

the bench and very carefully picking up the damp cloth, lifted it clear of the object which it covered ; which turned out to be a jar standing on a small turn-table. Peggy sprang forward with a gasp of consternation ; but she was too late. The deed was done ; moreover, the murder was out ; for in the moment when my first glance fell on the jar, Mr. Hawkesley's " mystery ware " had ceased to be a mystery so far as I was concerned.

The appearance of the jar was rather curious, but perfectly unmistakable. The clay, in its " green " state—unbaked and still somewhat plastic—was of a cool, grey colour, and the surface of the squat, octagonal body and the short neck and rim was covered with rich and intricate floral ornament, very minute, sharp and delicate. In the completed part this ornament was of dull blue and finished flush with the surface ; in the unfinished part it was simply indented and had the appearance of what bookbinders call " blind tooling," but was somewhat deeper.

From the work, my eyes turned with a sort of respectful wonder to the creator, who stood by my side with an air partly embarrassed, partly defiant. To me there was something very impressive in the thought that this unassuming, little lady was actually a master craftsman (I am compelled to use the masculine form, there being no feminine equivalent) ; the creator of masterpieces which would live in the great collections of the future for the admiration of generations yet unborn. And in the first shock of surprised admiration and pride in my friend's achievement I had nearly blurted out all that I knew. But reflection suggested a better plan.

" My dear Peggy ! " I exclaimed. " I never dreamed that you did work of this quality."

" There's nothing very wonderful about it," she replied, regarding the jar with a kind of affectionate disparagement. " It is only a poor imitation of the beautiful Oiron ware. That pottery has always interested me ; partly because it is so lovely, and partly because, according to tradition, it was made by a woman—Helene de Hangest-Genlis. But my work isn't a patch of hers, and it isn't even as good as I could do."

" How is that ? "

" Well, you see, it ought to have more modelled ornament

than I put on. It ought to be more important. Her pieces were most elaborately modelled—many of them had figures in the full round. But I can't afford to carry my work as far as that. It would take too long. Besides, I have to work to order, to some extent, and my orders are to keep to moderately, simple pieces."

"Your orders! From the dealer, I suppose? Tell me about him, Peggy, and how it is that you are such a slave."

"I'm not a slave," she retorted doggedly. "But I have a contract with a dealer. He takes the whole of my work, and he makes it a condition that I shan't sell anything to any one else or let anybody know what kind of work I do. I oughtn't to have let you in, but I know that I can trust you not to breathe a word to anyone of what you have seen here."

Mr. Hawkesley was right, then; and I recalled with sympathetic vindictiveness his desire to wring the dealer's neck.

"Concerning this contract, Peggy," said I. "You say the dealer has the right to the whole of your work. Did he pay you anything for this privilege?"

"Yes. He paid five pounds when the agreement was signed; but he deducted it from the payment for the first lot of pieces."

"Then it was only payment on account, not payment for the exclusive right to all your work. And with regard to the prices, how are they fixed?"

"Oh, the dealer fixes the prices, of course. He knows more about it than I do."

"Evidently. But what sort of prices does he fix?"

"Oh, ordinary prices, I suppose. He will probably give me fifteen shillings for this jar."

"And how long will it take you to make it?"

"Let me see," she said, reflectively. "There is the throwing and turning; that doesn't take very long. Then this one had to be shaped after it was turned. Then there comes the decorating; of course that is what takes the time. Including the cover, I should say there is nearly a week's work in that jar. And then it has to be fired and glazed; but the firing and glazing are done in batches."

"And all this for fifteen shillings a week!" I exclaimed.

"Say a pound," said she. "That is about what I earn.

It isn't much, is it ? But I have a little money of my own, though I spent most of it on fitting up the workshop."

"And what period does this precious contract cover ? When does it expire ? "

"Expire ? " she repeated, a little sheepishly. "I don't know that it expires at all. No period is mentioned in it."

"Peggy," I said, solemnly ; "you should alter your potter's mark. Take out the little, blue finch and put in a little, green goose. But, seriously, we must see into this. I am a lawyer's daughter—not that I profess to have inherited a knowledge of law. But I am certain that this agreement is not binding. Will you let me show it to a friend of mine who is a lawyer ? In strict confidence, of course."

"Yes, if you like, Sibyl. But I don't see that it matters. I like doing the work and I do make a living by it. What more would you have ? "

"I thought you said you would like to do something more ambitious—the very best work of which you are capable. Wouldn't you ? "

She was silent for a while, and a far-away, wistful look stole into her face. Suddenly she said : "Sibyl, I'm going to show you something ; but you mustn't tell anyone." She led me to a large cupboard, the door of which she unlocked and threw open. On the single shelf was a model in red wax of a tall candlestick or lamp-holder of the most elaborate design, the shaft and capital-like socket enriched —though sparingly—with fine relief decoration, and the base occupied by a spirited and graceful group of figures, beautifully modelled and full of life and expression.

"That," she said, "is to be my *chef d'œuvre*, though it doesn't look much in the wax. You must think of it in ivory-white, with a rich coloured inlay and perhaps some under-glaze painting. It has taken me months, doing a bit whenever I have had time, or when I couldn't resist the temptation to go on with it. Now it is finished, as far as the modelling goes, and the next thing will be to mould it. But I shan't actually make the piece at present, because I don't mean *him* to have it—the dealer, you know. If I finished it now, it would be his, of course."

"Yes, by the contract it would. And it mustn't. This piece ought to give you a position in the front rank of

artist potters. But I mustn't waste any more of your time. You will let me have that agreement, won't you ? "

She promised that I should have it at lunch-time, and with this I went back to my workshop to consider a plan that had come into my mind for her enlightenment and emancipation. But it turned out that there was no need for scheming on my part, for chance or Providence offered me the opportunity ready-made. That very evening I received a short note from Mr. Davenant informing me that Miss Tallboy-Smith had acquired a collection of English and French soft porcelain, and that she proposed to exhibit the whole of her new acquisition for a week at the club.

" She rather wants," he said, " to make the opening day something of a function, and has asked Hawkesley and me to be there to lunch. Can you come, too ? It would please her if you could—and you know how delighted Hawkesley and I would be. Besides, I think it will really be a very interesting show.

Here was the very chance that I wanted. Forthwith, I swooped down on the unsuspecting Titmouse and secured her agreement to bear me company to a " pottery show," without giving too many particulars. Then I wrote to Mr. Davenant telling him that I was bringing a guest who was deeply interested in pottery and porcelain, and suggesting that we might form a party of four at a small table.

By the same post I sent off Peggy's agreement to Dr. Thorndyke, with the request that he would tell me whether it was or was not legally binding. And, having thus laid the train, as I hoped, for the discomfiture of Mr. Goldstein, I felt at liberty to return to my own affairs.

Chapter XVII — *The Apotheosis of the Titmouse*

THE respective merits of hard and soft porcelain have been, from time to time, warmly debated by collectors and experts, but never, perhaps, have they been more earnestly discussed than on the occasion of the opening of Miss Tallboy-Smith's exhibition. During the half-hour which preceded lunch, the central glass case and the additional show-cases which had been set up for the occasion were surrrounded by groups

of eager connoisseurs, and the contrasting virtues of the *pâte tendre* and the more durable, if less beautiful, true porcelain were once more considered and expounded.

The attendance of the members and their friends must have been highly gratifying to Miss Tallboy-Smith, though it was no greater than was warranted by the importance of the exhibition; for the collection included representative pieces, not only of Chelsea, Bow, Nantgarw, Pinxton, and other English ware; but also of the old, French soft paste porcelain, including several early examples of Sevres. The preliminary glance at the collection had furnished material for conversation, as I could see by observing the occupants of the long central table, at the head of which sat the beaming hostess, supported by Major Dewham-Brown (who talked little, but consumed his food with intense concentration of purpose); and even our own small table, tucked away inconspicuously in a corner, was not immune from the influence of soft porcelain, for Mr. Hawkesley and my guest discussed the topic with a wealth of knowledge that reduced Mr. Davenant and me to respectful and attentive silence.

Our two friends were evidently very pleased with one another; and not without reason. For Mr. Hawkesley was much more than a mere collector; he was an enthusiastic and learned student of all kinds of ceramic work; while, as to my friend Peggy, her conversation revealed a familiarity with all kinds of materials and processes that made me feel quite shy as I thought of the artless handbook with which I had presented her.

But, indeed, Miss Peggy was quite transfigured. She had met with a kindred spirit. And under the influence of contagious enthusiasm, the usually silent and secretive Titmouse blossomed out in a manner that surprised me. As I listened to the animated duet of her chirping treble with Mr. Hawkesley's robust baritone, I found it difficult to identify her with the quiet little potter who was wont to work behind locked doors in the old shipsmith's shop at Wellclose Square.

After lunch the siege of the showcases began again on a more portentous scale. Glass cases were opened for more complete inspection of their contents, and pieces were even handed out to be handled, stroked and smelled at by the more infatuated devotees. As neither Mr. Davenant nor I

could be included among the latter, we were satisfied by a comparatively brief inspection of the treasures, after which we retired to a sheltered seat to look on and talk.

"Just look at those two china-maniacs!" exclaimed Mr. Davenant. "They are as thick as thieves already. And what is Miss Finch going to do with that *bieu de roi* vase? Is she going to kiss it? No; she has given it back to the Tallboy-Smith. Well, well; enthusiasm is a fine thing. By the way, she is a nice little lady, this friend of yours; pretty and picturesque, too, and uncommonly well turned out. I'm beginning to have a new respect for Wellclose Square."

I looked at the Titmouse with a sort of motherly pride (though she was about my own age). The word picturesque described her admirably with her warm colour, her graceful hair, and the trim, *petite* figure that was so well set off by the simple, artistic dress—in which I seemed to trace the hand of Lilith. She was my importation to the Magpies, and I felt that she was doing me credit.

"I have often wondered," Mr. Davenant said, after a reflective pause, "what made you choose such an unlikely locality as Wellclose Square for a residence, and, indeed, how you came to know of its existence. Very few middle-class people do. I hope Miss Vardon will not consider me unduly inquisitive."

"Mrs. Otway will not," said I.

"Mrs. Otway is a myth—a legal fiction. I refuse to recognise her existence. She is a mere creature of documents, of church registers. The real person is Miss Helen Vardon."

"That sounds rather like nonsense," said I, "but, of course, it can't be, because the speaker is Mr. Davenant. Perhaps there is some hidden meaning in these cryptic observations."

"There isn't," he rejoined; "or, at any rate, it shan't remain hidden. I mean that I refuse to recognise your connection with this man, Otway, or to associate you with his beastly name."

"But it is my beastly name, too, according to law and custom."

"I don't care for law and custom," said he. "The name Otway is abhorrent to me, and it doesn't properly belong to you. I shall call you Miss Vardon, unless you let me call

you, Helen ; and I don't see why you shouldn't, considering that we are old and intimate friends."

"It would undoubtedly have the support of a well-established precedent. There was a certain bishop who was called Peter because that was his name. That precedent would apply to Helen, but it certainly would not to Miss Vardon."

"Then," he rejoined, "let us follow this excellent precedent. Let it be Helen. Is that agreed ? "

"I don't seem to have much choice ; for if 'Mrs. Otway' is a legal fiction, 'Miss Vardon' is an illegal one."

"Well, don't let us have any fictions at all. Let us adhere to the actual baptismal facts."

"Very well, Mr. Davenant."

"But why 'Mr. Davenant' ? My baptismal designation is 'Jasper.'"

"And a very pretty name, too," said I. "But the precedent does not apply in your case. You have not married Mr. Otway."

"No, thank Heaven ! If I had, there would be a case of petty treason. But neither have you, for that matter. You have only gone through a ridiculous ceremony which means nothing and signed a document which sets forth what is not true."

"It seems to me," I said, "that we are not adhering to our agreement to avoid fictions. My marriage, unfortunately, is perfectly real and valid in the eyes of the law."

"The law ! " he exclaimed, contemptuously. "Who cares for the law ? Have we not the pronouncement of that illustrious legal luminary, Bumble C.J., that the law is a ass and a idiot ? And, mark you, he was specially referring to matrimonial law. Now, who would base his actions and beliefs on the opinions of a ass and a idiot ? "

"And to think," said I, "that you have abandoned the law for mere architecture ! With your gift for casuistry, you ought to have been a Chancery lawyer or else a Jesuit. But here is Miss Tallboy-Smith. She thinks we are neglecting her treasures."

But our hostess had not come to utter reproaches. On the contrary, she was brimming over with pleasure and gratitude.

"My dear Mrs. Otway," she exclaimed, beaming on me

and grasping my hands affectionately, "I can't thank you enough for bringing that dear young lady, Miss Finch, to see my porcelain. She is a *sweet* girl, and she simply knows *everything* about china. It is perfectly wonderful. She might be a potter herself. And her love of the beautiful things and her enjoyment in looking at them has given me, I can't tell you how much, pleasure. You must really bring her to see my whole collection. Will you? I shall love showing it to her."

I agreed joyfully, for this would mean another nail in the coffin of Mr. Goldstein; and as Peggy and Mr. Hawkesley joined us at this moment, I was able to complete the arrangement and fix a date.

As Miss Tallboy-Smith bustled away, Mr. Hawkesley put in his claim.

"I don't see," said he, "why I should be left out in the cold. I've got a collection, too; and I think it would really interest Miss Finch, for she tells me she has seen very little modern pottery. Won't you bring her to see it, Mrs. Otway?"

Again I accepted gladly, with Peggy's consent. My scheme was working rapidly towards a successful conclusion, and I felt that I could push it forward energetically; for that very morning I had received a letter from Dr. Thorndyke returning the agreement and denouncing it as legally worthless and utterly opposed to public policy.

"As to fixing a date," said Mr. Hawkesley, "I suggest that we all adjourn to my rooms now. Come and have a cup of tea with me and then we can look over the crockery. How will that do?"

It suited Peggy and me quite well, and we said so.

"And you, Davenant?" asked Mr. Hawkesley.

"Well, I had one or two cathedrals to finish," was the reply; "but they must wait. Art is long—deuced long, in my case. Yes, let us adjourn and combine crockery and tea—which, as Pepys reminds us is a 'China drink,' and therefore appropriate to the occasion."

On this, we sallied forth and made our way to the Strand, where we chartered a couple of hansoms to convey us to Dover Street, Piccadilly, where Mr. Hawkesley had his abode in one of those fine, spacious, dignified houses that one finds in the hinterland of the West End of London. His

rooms were on the first floor, and when we arrived there by way of a staircase which would have allowed us to walk up four abreast, we were received by a sedate and impassive gentleman, whose appearance and manner suggested a Foreign Office official of superior rank.

"Would you let us have some tea, please, Taplow?" said Mr. Hawkesley, addressing the official deferentially. Mr. Taplow opened a door for us, and having signified a disposition to accede to the request, departed stealthily.

As we entered the large, lofty room, well lighted by its range of tall windows, I looked about me curiously, for I was instantly struck by the absence of pottery among its ornaments. The available wall-spaces were occupied by important pictures—all modern; the mantelpiece and other suitable surfaces supported statuettes of marble or bronze—again all modern. But of ceramic ware there was not a trace, with the single exception of a small framed cameo relief. Rather did the apartment suggest the abode of a furniture collector, for one side of the room, opposite the windows, was occupied by a range of armoires, or standing cupboards, mostly old French or Flemish.

"You don't favour the glass case, I notice, Hawkesley," said Mr. Davenant.

"No," was the reply. "They are well enough for public museums, but they are unlovely things. And one doesn't want to look at one's whole collection at once. I like to take the pieces out singly and enjoy them one at a time. You see, each piece is an individual work. It was the product of a separate creative effort, and ought to be enjoyed by a separate act of appreciation."

"You seem, Mr. Hawkesley," said I, "to have a preference for modern work. Do you think it is as good as the old?"

"I think," he replied, "that the best modern work is as good as any that was ever done. Of course, I am not speaking of commercial stuff. That is negligible in an artistic sense. I mean individual work, done under the same conditions and by the same class of men as the old craft work. That is quite good. The pity is that there is so little of it. But I am afraid the supply is equal to the demand."

"Don't you think," said Mr. Davenant, "that that is partly the fault of the modern craftsman? Of his tendency

to confine himself to fine and elaborate, and therefore costly, productions? Of course, the old work was not cheap in the modern factory sense of cheapness. The pottery and china that was made at the Etruria works or those of Bow or Chelsea was by no means given away. But the prices were practicable for every day purposes, whereas modern studio pottery is impossible for domestic use. And the same is true of other craftwork, such as book-binding, fine printing, textiles, metal work, and so on. If the modern craftsman caters only for the collector and ignores the utilitarian consumer, he can't complain at being ousted by commercial production."

Here the arrival of Mr. Taplow with the tea arrested what threatened to prove a too-interesting discussion. I should have liked to continue it—on another occasion; at present, my desire was rather to "cut the cackle and get to the hosses." Accordingly, while the tea was being consumed, I rather studiously obstructed any revival of the debate by keeping up a conversation of a general and somewhat discursive character; and as soon as we appeared to have finished I introduced the subject of Ceramics.

"Is that plaque on the wall a Wedgwood cameo?" I asked.

"Oh, no," Mr. Hawkesley replied. "That is an example of Solon's wonderful *pâte-sur-pâte* work. It is done with white porcelain slip on a dark, coloured ground. Come and look at it."

We all rose and gathered round the plaque while Mr. Hawkesley descanted on its beauties; which were, indeed, evident enough.

"It is lovely work," said he; "so free and spontaneous. The Wedgwood reliefs look quite stiff and hard compared with these of Solon's. I have some of his vases with the same kind of decoration, and we may as well look at those first."

He wheeled a travelling turn-table towards a fine Flemish armoire of carved oak, and opening the latter, displayed a range of pieces of this beautiful work, at the sight of which Peggy's eyes glistened. One after another they were carefully placed on the turn-table, viewed from all points, admired, discussed and replaced. The other contents of the armoire were less important works—mostly French—but all

received respectful attention. The next receptacle, a French armoire of carved walnut, was devoted to modern stoneware by the Martin Brothers, Wells and other individual workers, concerning which our host was specially enthusiastic.

"There," said he, placing on the turn-table a wonderful Toby jug of brown Martin ware, "Show me any old salt-glaze ware that is equal to that! Look at the modelling! Look at the beautiful surface and the quality of the actual potting! And then go and look at the stuff in the shop windows. Just good enough for the slavey to smash."

"Well," Mr. Davenant remarked, "you can't say that she doesn't appreciate its qualities and do justice to them. If former generations had been as energetic smashers as the present, collectors of old stuff would have had to seek their treasures in ancient rubbish-heaps."

"Yes, that is a fact," agreed Mr. Hawkesley, as we moved on to the next cupboard. "When domestic pottery was more valuable it got more respectful treatment. Now this cupboard is only partly filled. I keep it for the work of one artist whose name I don't know. I've shown you some of the ware, Mrs. Otway, but it may be new to Miss Finch.

As he unlocked the door my heart began to thump, and I cast an anxious eye on Peggy. For I knew what was coming, but I didn't know how she would take it. At the moment she was looking at the closed door with pleased expectancy. Then the door swung open, and in a moment she turned pale as death. For one instant I thought she was going to faint, and so, apparently, did Mr. Davenant, for he made a quick movement towards her. But the deadly pallor passed, and was succeeded as rapidly by a crimson flush; but her quick breathing and the trembling of her hand showed how great the shock had been.

Meanwhile, Mr. Hawkesley, all unconscious, was glancing over the row of vases, jars and bowls, and expatiating on the peculiar beauties of the "mystery ware." The pieces were separated into two groups; the works in pure inlay and those combining the inlay with slip decoration and embossed ornament; and one of the latter he presently lifted from its shelf and placed on the turn-table.

"Now, isn't that a lovely jar, Miss Finch?" said he.

"And doesn't it remind you of the beautiful St. Porchaire, or Oiron ware?"

Peggy gazed at the jar with an inscrutable expression as she slowly rotated the turn-table. "It is somewhat like," she agreed; "at least, the method of work is similar."

"Oh, don't give my favourites the cold shoulder, Miss Finch," said Mr. Hawkesley. "I think I prize my pieces of this ware more than anything that I have. It is so very charming and so interesting. For, you see, it is real pottery; I mean that, beautiful and precious as it is, it is quite serviceable for domestic purposes, whereas much of the studio pottery is made for the gallery or the cabinet."

"You haven't discovered yet where it is made, I suppose?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "Its origin is still a mystery and something of a romance—which may be one reason why I am so devoted to it. I often speculate about the potter, and invent all sorts of queer theories about him."

"As for instance?"

"Well, sometimes I fancy that he may be in debt to this dealer—that he may have had advances or loans and be unable to pay them off and get free. It is quite possible, you know. Then, sometimes I have thought that he may be one of those poor creatures who drink or take drugs, and that the dealer may keep him slaving in some cellar for his bare maintenance and his miserable luxuries. But I've given that idea up. This work is too sane and reasonable and painstaking for a drunkard or drug-taker. But, whoever and whatever he is, I wish I could find him out, and thank him for all the pleasure that he has given me, and help him to get a proper reward for his labour, which I am sure he does not."

"I don't know why you are so sure," said Mr. Davenant. "This ware is pretty expensive, isn't it?"

"Not if you consider that each piece is an individual work on which a great deal of time and labour has been expended. The price that I paid Goldstein for this particular piece was seven guineas, which wouldn't represent very high remuneration if the artist had the whole of it."

"Seven guineas, Mr. Hawkesley!" exclaimed Peggy, incredulously.

"Yes, Miss Finch; and I should say very cheap at the price.

I glanced at Peggy with malicious satisfaction, for her cheeks were aflame with anger and the light of battle was in her eyes.

"What a shame!" she protested. "How perfectly scandalous! The grasping, avaricious wretch! To charge seven guineas for a piece that he bought for fifteen shillings!"

For a few seconds there was an awesome silence. Peggy's exclamation had fallen like a thunderbolt, and the two men gazed at her in speechless astonishment; while she, poor Titmouse, stood, covered with blushes and confusion, looking as if she had been convicted of pocketing the spoons.

"You actually know," Mr. Hawkesley said, at length, "that Goldstein gave only fifteen shillings for that jar?"

"Yes," she stammered faintly, "I—I happen to have—to be aware—that—that was the amount paid——"

She broke off with an appealing glance at me, and I proceeded to "put in my oar."

"It's no use, Peggy. The cat is out of the bag—at least her head is, and we may as well let out the rest of her. The fact is, Mr. Hawkesley, that this ware is Miss Finch's own work."

I now thought that Mr. Hawkesley was going to faint. Never have I seen a man look so astonished. He was thunderstruck.

"Do you mean, Mrs. Otway," he exclaimed, "that Miss Finch actually makes this ware herself?"

"I do. It is her work from beginning to end. She does the potting, the decorating, the firing and the glazing. And she does it without any assistance whatever."

Mr. Hawkesley gazed at Peggy with such undissembled admiration and reverence that I was disposed to smile—though I liked him for his generous enthusiasm—and the unfortunate Titmouse was reduced to an agony of shyness.

"This is a red letter day for me, Miss Finch," said he. "It has been my dearest wish to meet the creator of that pottery that I admire so intensely; and now that wish is gratified, it is an extra pleasure to find the artist so much beyond——"

He paused to avoid the inevitable compliment, and Mr. Davenant held up a warning finger.

"Now, Hawkesley," said he; "be careful."

"I know," said Mr. Hawkesley. "It is difficult to steer clear of banal compliments and yet to say what one would like to say; but really the personality of the mysterious artist has furnished a very pleasant surprise."

"I can believe that," said Mr. Davenant. "I can imagine, for instance, that you find Miss Finch a very agreeable substitute for the intoxicated gentleman in the cellar."

At this we all laughed, which cleared the air and put us at our ease.

"But," said Mr. Davenant, "proud as we are to have made the acquaintance of a distinguished potter, we are haunted by the spectre of that fifteen shillings. We get the impression that Miss Finch's business arrangements want looking into."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Hawkesley, "they do indeed. Why do you let this fellow have your work, at such ridiculous prices, too?"

"It isn't so ridiculous as it looks," replied Peggy. "When I began, I couldn't sell any of my work at all. It was frightfully discouraging. No one would have anything to do with it. My first work was simple earthenware, and even the cheap china shops wouldn't have it. Then I chanced upon Mr. Goldstein, and he bought one or two simple, red earthenware jars and bowls for a few pence each. It didn't pay me, but still it was a start. Then I experimented on this pipe-clay body with slip decoration and coloured inlay and showed the pieces to Mr. Goldstein; and he advised me to go on and offered to take the whole of my work, if I signed an agreement. So I signed the agreement, and he has had all my work ever since."

"At his own prices?"

"Yes. I didn't know what the things were worth."

"Well," said Mr. Davenant, "my law is a trifle rusty, but I should say that that agreement would not hold water."

"It won't," said I. "We have just had counsel's opinion on it, and our adviser assures us that it is worthless, and that we can disregard it."

"Then," said Mr. Davenant, "you had better formally denounce it at once."

"Why trouble to denounce it?" demanded Mr. Hawkesley. "Much better let me call on Goldstein and make him tear up the duplicate. He has got a fine, handy warming-pan hanging up in his shop. I saw it only this morning."

"The connection is not very clear to me," said I.

"It would be clear enough to him," was the grim reply.

Mr. Davenant chuckled. "Your methods, Hawkesley, appeal to me strongly, I must admit; but they are not politic. Legal process is better than a warming-pan, even if it were filled with hot coals. Let us hand the agreement to a reputable solicitor, and let him write to Goldstein stating the position. Miss Finch won't hear any more of her benefactor after that.

After some discussion, in which I supported Mr. Hawkesley's proposal, the less picturesque method of procedure was adopted, and Mr. Davenant was commissioned to carry it out.

"And we will have a one woman show of Blue Bird Ware at the club," said Mr. Hawkesley. "I will take my whole collection there and exhibit it with a big label giving the artist's name in block capitals. The pottery collectors will just tumble over one another to get specimens of the work when the artist is known."

The rest of Mr. Hawkesley's collection received but a perfunctory consideration. Even the gorgeous De Morgan earthenware, glowing with the hues of the rainbow, came as something of an anti-climax; and we closed the last of the cabinets with almost an air of relief.

"And now," said Mr. Hawkesley, as he pocketed his keys, "I suggest that we mark this joyful occasion by a modest festival—say, a homely little dinner at the club and an evening at the play. Who seconds my proposal?"

"We shall have to go as we are then," said I, as we can't change."

"I think we can enjoy ourselves in morning dress," he rejoined; "and as we shall all be in the same shocking condition, we can keep one another in countenance."

The proposal was accordingly adopted with acclamation and carried into effect with triumphant success, and some slight disturbance of the orderly routine of the establishment in Wellclose Square; for it was on the stroke of

midnight when Miss Polton, blinking owlishly, opened the green door to admit the two roisterers who had just emerged from a handsom-cab.

"It *has* been a jolly day!" Peggy exclaimed fervently as we said "good-night" on our landing. "And it will be a jolly to-morrow, too."

"Yes; you will be able to get on with your masterpiece now; and when it is finished we can show it at the club and you will be able to sell it for a small fortune."

"I shan't wan't to sell it," she said. "If it is good enough, and if it wouldn't seem too forward or improper, I should like to give it to Mr. Hawkesley—as a sort of thank-offering, you know."

"Thank-offering for what?"

"For his appreciation of my work. I really feel very grateful to him, as well as to you, Sibyl, dear. You see, he not only liked the things, but he thought of the worker who made them. All the time that I was working alone, with the door locked, from morning to night to fill that cormorant's pockets, Mr. Hawkesley was thinking of me, the unknown worker, looking for me and wanting to help me. I don't forget that it is you who have got me out of Mr. Goldstein's clutches. But I do feel very, very grateful to Mr. Hawkesley. Don't you think it is quite natural that I should, Sibyl?"

"I think you are a little, green goose," said I, and kissed her; and so ended the day that saw the end of her servitude and the dawn of prosperity and success.

Chapter XVIII

Among the Breakers

My preoccupation with Peggy Finch's affairs had to some extent submerged my own, but now that my little friend had triumphantly emerged from the house of Bondage, I returned to my labours with a new zest. In spite of the various interruptions, the Zodiac spoons had made steady progress, and it was but a few days after our momentous visit to Mr. Hawkesley's rooms that, almost regretfully, I put the finishing touches to the Fishes spoon—the last of the set.

It had been a pleasant labour, and as I laid out the completed set, I was not dissatisfied. True, there had been difficulties; but difficulties are the salt of craftsmanship. Some of the signs, such as Aries, Taurus, Leo, Virgo and Capricornus, had been quite simple, the head of the Ram, the Bull, or other symbolic creature furnishing an obvious and appropriate knop for the spoon. But others, such as Gemini, Pisces, and especially Libra, had been less easy to manage. Indeed, the last had involved a slight evasion; for, since it seemed quite impossible to work a pair of scales into a presentable knop, I had relegated them to the shoulder of the bowl and formed the knop of a more or less appropriate head of Justice blindfolded. So all the difficulties had been met by a pleasant and interesting exercise of thought and ingenuity, and the work—my *magnum opus*, for the present—was finished. And it was rounded off by a very agreeable little addition; for Phyllis Barton, who had seen and greatly admired the set, had made a delightful little case to contain it—just a pair of walnut slab hinged together, the lower slab having twelve shaped recesses to hold the spoons and the lid ornamented with shallow carvings of a winged hour-glass and the phases of the moon.

I made up the spoons into a parcel and the case into another, so that they should not be treated together in a single transaction; and having advised Mr. Campbell by a letter on the previous day, set forth one morning for Wardour Street. The silent willing which should have preceded my entry to the shop was inadvertently omitted, for as I crossed the street I observed Mr. Campbell exchanging blandishments with a large Persian cat of the "smoky" persuasion, and, as he saw me at the same moment, I had no choice but to enter straightway.

He received me with the most encouraging affability—indeed, he even condescended to shake hands—and was evidently pleased to see me. And his reception of my work was still more encouraging. There was none of the buyer's proverbial disparagement. He was frankly enthusiastic. He held up each spoon separately at arm's length, wagging his head from side to side; he inspected it through a watchmaker's lens; he stroked it with a peculiarly flexible thumb, and finally laid it down with a grunt of satisfaction.

Then came the question of terms; and when he offered twenty-four guineas for the set, I was quite glad that the silent willing had been omitted. For I should probably have willed eighteen.

Having settled the price of my own work, I produced the wooden case. Phyllis had priced it at half a guinea, which was ridiculous. I boldly demanded a guinea for it.

"That's a long price," said Mr. Campbell, pulling a face pf proportionate length. But I watched his thumb travelling over the clean-cut carving, I saw him delicately fitting the spoons, one by one, into their little niches, and I knew that that guinea was as good as in Phillibar's pocket.

"It *is* a long price, Mrs. Otway," he repeated, cocking his head on one side at the case. "But it's a pretty bit of work; and it's the right thing—that's what I like about it. Tho thootable; it would be a sin to put those spoons unto a velvet-lined case, as if they were common, stamped, trade-goods. Very well, Mrs. Otway, I'll spring a guinea for the case; and I should like to see some more work from the same hand."

This was highly satisfactory (though it was not without a pang of bereavement that I saw the little case closed and hidden from my sight for ever in a locked drawer); and when I had received the two cheques—I asked for a separate one for Phyllis—I tripped away down Wardour Street as buoyantly as if I had not a care in he world.

The association of ideas is a phenomenon that has received a good deal of attention. It was brought to my notice on this occasion when I found myself opposite St. Anne's Church; for no sooner had my eye lighted on its quaint, warty spire than my thoughts turned to Mr. Davenant—or rather, I should say, to Jasper. Perhaps he was in my mind already; possibly in the subconscious, as Lilith would have said, and the church spire may have acted as an autoscope—it would not have had to be an exceptionally powerful one. At any rate, my thoughts turned to him and to the Magpies Club, and it was not unnatural that my steps should take a similar direction.

As I followed the well-remembered route, I reflected on the changes that a few short months had brought. In that brief space a new life had opened. The solitary, friendless orphan who had sought sanctuary in Miss Polton's house,

how changed was her condition! Happy in her work, in her home, in her friends; for had she not her Lilith, her Phyllis, her Peggy—and Jasper? And here a still, small voice asked softly but insistently a question that had of late intruded itself from time to time. Whither was I drifting? My friendship with Jasper was ripening apace. But ripening to what? There could be but one answer; and that answer only raised a further question. In normal circumstances the love of a man and a woman finds a permanent satisfaction in marriage. But where marriage is impossible love is a mere disaster; a voyage with nothing but rocks and breakers at the end.

So whispered the still, small voice into ears but half attentive; and as I neared the bottom of Essex Street it became inaudible, for approaching the club-house from the opposite direction was Jasper himself.

"Well!" he exclaimed, "this is a piece of luck! And yet I had hoped that you might be coming into town to-day. Is it business or pleasure?"

"It has been business, and now I hope it is going to be pleasure. I am taking the rest of the day off."

"Now, what a very singular coincidence! I am actually taking the rest of the day off myself."

"Your coincidences," I remarked, "somehow remind me of the misadventures of the bread-and-butter fly; they always happen."

"Quite so," he agreed. "But then, you see, if they didn't happen they wouldn't be coincidences. Do we begin by fortifying ourselves with nourishment?"

"I don't know what you mean by 'begin,' but I came here to get some lunch."

"So did I—another coincidence, by the way. Shall we take our usual little table in the corner?"

We seated ourselves at the table, and as we waited for our lunch to be brought, I ventured on a few inquiries into Jasper's professional affairs.

"You seem to take a good many days off," I remarked.

"I do. There is, so to speak, a distinctly marked 'off side' to my practice."

"And when you are away, what happens? Do you keep a clerk?"

Jasper grinned. "You over-estimate the magnitude of

my practice. No; I have a simpler and more economical arrangement. I let my little front office to a law writer, at a peppercorn rent, subject to the condition that he shall interview my clients in my absence, furnish evasive answers to their questions, and supply ambiguous and confusing information."

"But don't the clients get rather dissatisfied?"

Again Jasper smiled. "That question," said he, "involves an important philosophic principle. A famous philosopher has proved his own existence by the formula '*cogito, ergo sum*'—I think, therefore I am—implying that if he didn't exist he couldn't think. Now, that principle applies to my clients. Before they can be dissatisfied, they must exist. But they don't exist. Therefore they are not dissatisfied. Q.E.D."

"I don't believe you care whether they exist or not—but that is the worst of having an independent income."

"It is a misfortune, isn't it? But I bear up under it surprisingly. Will you have some of this stuff? It is called a *pelion*. I heard the waitress describing it as a pea-lion, apparently misled by the analogy of the pea-cock and the pea-hen. Evidently she is no zoologist."

At this moment Miss Tallboy-Smith entered the room and halted at our table to exchange greetings and remind me of my engagement.

"Tell Miss Finch not to forget," said she. "It's next Wednesday. I shall have my things back from here by then, and I understand that Mr. Hawkesley has secured the cases for a special exhibition of studio pottery. You must bring Miss Finch to that, too."

Like Jasper's proxy, I gave an evasive answer to this, for I knew that wild horses would not drag Peggy to an exhibition of her own work. But evidently Mr. Hawkesley had made no confidences so far.

"Have you ever seen the Diploma Gallery at the R.A.?" Jasper asked when Miss Tallboy-Smith had flitted away. "If you haven't, we might look in there for an hour this afternoon."

As I had never seen the diploma works, I fell in readily with the suggestion, and accordingly, when we had finished lunch, we strolled thither and spent a very pleasant hour examining and comparing the works of the different

academicians, old and new. From Burlington House we drifted into the Green Park, and presently took possession of a couple of isolated and lonely-looking chairs. For some time we gossiped about the pictures at which we had been looking in the gallery; then our talk turned on to the affairs of my friend Peggy.

"Hawkesley seems to have appointed himself Miss Finch's advertising agent," Jasper remarked. "And he'll do the job well. He is an energetic man, and he knows all the pottery connoisseurs. I met him yesterday, and had to listen to Blue Bird ware by the yard."

"I like him for his enthusiasm," said I.

"So do I," agreed Jasper. "And it is quite a little romance. His admiration of the pottery is perfectly genuine, as we know; but there is something in what he calls 'the personality of the artist.' I think he is distinctly 'taken' with your pretty little friend. How does she like him?"

"I think she is decidedly prepossessed. At any rate, she is profoundly grateful to him for discovering her work, and especially for the interest that he took in the unknown worker."

"There you are, then," said Jasper. "There are the ingredients of a life-size romance. Fervid admiration on the one side, gratitude on the other, and good looks and good nature on both. We shall see what we shall see, Helen; and I, for one, shall look on with the green eyes of envy."

"Why will you? Do you want Peggy Finch for yourself?"

"I want Hawkesley's good fortune. If he loves this little maid and thinks she cares for him, he can ask her to marry him. That is what makes me envious."

I made no reply; indeed, there was nothing to say; and already the sound of the breakers was in my ears.

"I suppose, Helen," he said, after a long pause, "you realize that I love you very dearly?"

"I know that we are the best of friends, and very deeply attached to one another."

"We are much more than friends, Helen," said he; "at least, there is much more than friendship on my side. You are my all—all that matters to me in the world. You live

in my thoughts every moment of my life. When we are apart I yearn for the sight of you—I reckon the hours that must pass before I shall see you again, and when we are together the happy minutes slip away like grains of golden sand. But I need not tell you this. You must have seen that I love you."

"I have feared it, Jasper—and that I might presently lose the dearest friend that I have in the world."

"That you will never do, Helen, dearest, if I have the happiness to be that friend. Why should you?"

"It seems that it has to be. Our friendship has been a sweet friendship to me—too sweet to last, as I feared; and if some might cavil at it, it was innocent and wronged no one. But if it has grown into—into what I had feared it might, then it has become impossible. More than friends we can never be, and yet we cannot remain friends."

We were both silent for more than a minute, and both were very grave. Then Jasper asked, with a trace of hesitation:

"Helen, if we were as those other two are—if you were free—would you be willing to marry me?"

It was a difficult question to answer, in the circumstances, and yet I felt it would be an unpardonable meanness to dissemble.

"Yes," I answered; "of course I should."

"Then," said he, "I don't see why we can never be more than friends."

"But, Jasper, how can we? I am a married woman."

"I don't admit that," said he. "Your marriage is a fiction. You are really a spinster with a technical impediment to the conventional form of marriage. Your so-called husband is a stranger to whom you have no ties. You don't like, or even respect him; and certainly you have no obligations of duty to him, seeing that he induced you by a mere fraudulent pretence to go through this form of marriage with him."

"I am not thinking of Mr. Otway," said I. "He is nothing to me. I owe him no duty or consideration, and I would not sacrifice a single hair of my head for him. But the fact remains that I am, legally, his wife; and while he lives I can contract no other marriage."

"But is that quite true, Helen?" he objected.

"Certainly it is; unless you consider a bigamous marriage as an exception, which it is not."

"Of course I do not. Bigamy is a futile and fraudulent attempt to secure the appearance of a legal sanction. No one but a fool entertains bigamy."

"Then I don't see the meaning of your objection."

"What I mean," said he, "is that a fictitious marriage does not exclude the possibility of a real marriage."

"Still I do not quite follow you. What do you mean by a real marriage?

"A real marriage is a permanent, life-long partnership between a man and a woman. Ordinarily, such a partnership receives the formal endorsement of the State for certain reasons of public policy. But it is the partnership which is the marriage. The legal endorsement is an extrinsic and inessential addition. Now, in your case the State has accepted and endorsed a marriage which does not exist—which is a pure fiction. The result is that if you contract a real marriage, the State will withhold its endorsement. That is all. It cannot hinder the marriage."

"This is all very ingenious, Jasper," said I, "and it does credit to your legal training. But it is mere sophistry. The position, as it would appear to a plain person of ordinary common sense, is that a woman who is legally married to one man and is living as the wife of another, is a married woman who is living with a man who is not her husband."

"That is the conventional view, I admit," said he. "But it is a mistaken view. It confuses the legal sanction—which is not essential—with the covenant of life-long union, which is the essence of marriage—which, in fact, *is* the marriage."

"But what is the bearing of this, Jasper?" I asked. "We seem to be discussing a rather abstract question of public morals. Has it any application to our own affairs?"

"Yes, it has. At least, I think so, though I feel a little nervous about saying just what I mean."

"I don't think you need be. At any rate, there had better be a clear understanding between us. Tell me exactly what you do mean."

He considered awhile, apparently somewhat at a loss how to begin. At length, with evident embarrassment, he put his proposal before me.

"The position, Helen, is this: You and I have become deeply attached to one another; I may say—since you admit that you would be willing to marry me—that we love one another. It is no passing fancy, based on mere superficial attractions. We are both persons of character, and our love is founded on deep-seated sympathy. We have been friends for some years. We liked one another from the first, and as time has gone on we have liked one another better. Our friendship has grown. It has become more and more precious to both of us, and at last it has grown into love—on my side, into intense and passionate love. We are not likely to change. People of our type are not given to change. We love one another and we shall go on loving one another until the end.

"If our circumstances were normal, we should marry in the normal manner. That is to say, we should enter into a contract publicly with certain formalities which would confer a definite legal status and render our contract enforceable in a court of law. But our circumstances are not normal. We are willing to comply with the formalities, but we are not allowed to. We are not in the position of persons who, for their own purposes, lightly disregard the immemorial usages of society—who dispense with the formalities because they would avoid the responsibilities of formal marriage. We wish to enter into a lifelong partnership; we desire to undertake all responsibilities; we would welcome the formalities and the secure status. But the law refuses. There is a technical disability.

"We have, therefore, two alternatives. We may give up the marriage which we both desire, or we may marry and dispense with the formalities and the legal status. Supposing we give up the marriage. Just consider, Helen, what it is that we give up. It is the happiness of a whole life-time. The abiding joy of the sweetest, the most sympathetic companionship that is possible to a man and a woman. For though we are lovers, we are still friends, and friends we shall remain until death parts us. Our tastes, our interests, our sympathies make us prefer one another as companions to all other human beings. Of how many married couples can this be said? To us has been given that perfect comradeship that makes married life an enduring delight, a state of happiness without a cloud or a

blemish. And this is what we give up if we let this disability, this technical impediment, hinder us from marrying.

"On the other hand, supposing we marry and dispense with the formalities, what do we give up? Virtually nothing. The legal security is of no value to us, for each of us is secure in the constancy of the other. If we enter into a covenant, we shall abide by it, not by compulsion, but because we shall never wish to break it. As to the legal status and the social recognition, is it conceivable that two sane persons should give up a life's happiness for such trumpery? Surely it is not. No, Helen, let us boldly take our destiny into our own hands. Let us publicly denounce this sham marriage and cancel it for ever. I ask you, dearest, to give me the woman of my heart for my mate, my friend, my wife, for ever; to take me, unworthy as I am, for your husband, who will try, as long as he draws the breath of life, to make up to you by love and worship for what you have sacrificed to make him happy."

As I listened to Jasper's appeal—delivered with quiet but impressive earnestness—I think I was half disposed to yield. It was not only that I admired the skill with which he put his case and the virile, masterful way in which he trampled down the obstructing conventions; but deep down in my heart I felt that he was right—that his separation of the things that really mattered from those that were trivial and inessential and true and just. But there was this vital difference between us; that he was a man and I was a woman. Our estimates of the value of the conventions were not the same. Without the legal sanction I might be his wife in all that was real; but the world would call me his mistress.

"Jasper, dear," I said, "it is impossible. I admit the truth of all that you have said, and I wish—Oh! Jasper, *how* I wish, that I could accept the happiness that you offer me! You need not tell me that our companionship would be a delight for ever. I know it. But it cannot be. Even if I could accept it for myself, I could not accept it for you; I could not bear to think that, through me, you had been put outside the pale of decent society. For that is what it would mean. You—a gentleman of honour and reputation—would become a social outcast, a man who was living with another man's wife; who, if he were admitted at all to the

society of his own class, would have to be introduced with explanations and excuses."

"I think you exaggerate the social consequences, Helen," said he. "I propose that we should write to Otway and formally repudiate the marriage. Then, if we were boldly and openly to state our position and the exceptional circumstances that had driven us to it, I believe that we should receive sympathy rather than condemnation. I don't believe we should lose a friend; certainly not one whose loss would afflict us. And Otway could take his remedy, if he cared to."

"You mean he could divorce me," I said, with something like a shudder.

"Yes. But I am afraid he wouldn't."

"I don't think he would. But if he did, it would be an undefended suit, and the stigma of the Divorce Court would be on us for ever."

"It would be unpleasant, I admit," he replied. "But think of the compensations. Think of the joy of being together always, of having our own home, of going abroad and seeing the world together."

"Don't, Jasper!" I entreated. "It is too tantalizing. And even all this would not compensate me for the knowledge that I had dragged you from your honourable estate to a condition of social infamy."

"You need not consider me," he rejoined. "I have thought the matter out and am satisfied that I should gain infinitely more than I should lose; for I should have you, who are much more to me than all the rest of the world."

"You haven't thought of everything, Jasper," said I. "You know of the folly I committed at the time of my father's death—in withholding facts at the inquest, I mean—and you have excused it and treated it lightly. But others would view it differently. And now there is this blackmailer of whom I have told you. At any moment, a serious scandal may arise; and in that scandal you would be implicated."

"It wouldn't matter to me," said he. "Nothing would matter to me if only I had you."

"So you think now. But, Jasper, think of the years to come. Think how it might be in those years when the social ostracism, the loss of position and reputation, had

grown more and more irksome, if we should regret what we had done, if we should blame ourselves—even, perhaps, secretly blame one another——"

"We should never do that, Helen. We should always be loyal. And there wouldn't be any social ostracism. At any rate, I am quite clear as to my own position. I want you for my wife. To get you I would make any sacrifices and count them as nothing. But that is only my position. It isn't necessarily yours—or rather, I should say your sacrifices would be greater than mine. A woman's point of view is different from a man's."

"It is, Jasper. I realise fully how essentially reasonable your proposal is, and I am proud of, and grateful for, the love that has impelled you to make it. But to me the thing is impossible. That is the only answer I can give. What it costs me to give that answer—to refuse the happiness that you offer me, and that I crave for—I cannot tell you. But even if it breaks my heart to say 'no,' still, that must be my answer."

For a long time neither of us spoke. As I glanced furtively at Jasper, the dejection, the profound sadness that was written on his face wrung my heart and filled me with self-accusation. Why had I not foreseen this? Why had I, who had nothing to give in return, allowed his friendship to grow up into love under my eyes? Had I not acted towards this my dearest friend with the basest selfishness?

Presently he turned to me, and, speaking in quiet, even tones, said:

"It would not be fair for me to make an appeal on my own behalf. I may not urge you to accept a relation which your feeling and judgment reject. But one thing I will ask. I have told you what I want; and you are to remember that I shall always want you. I will ask you to reflect upon what we have said to-day, and if perchance you should come to think differently, remember that I am still wanting you, that I am still asking you, and tell me if you can give me a different answer. Will you promise me this, Helen?"

"Yes," I replied, "I promise you, Jasper."

"Thank you, Helen. And meanwhile we remain friends as we have been?"

"We can never be again as we have been," said I.

"Friendship may turn to love, but love does not go back to friendship. That is as impossible as for the fruit to change back into blossom. No, dearest Jasper; this is the end of our friendship. When we part to-day it must be farewell."

"Must it be, Helen? Must we part for ever? Could we not go back to the old ways and try to forget to-day?"

"I shall never forget to-day, nor will you. For our own peace of mind we must remain apart and try to avoid meeting one another. It is the only way, Jasper, hard as it will be."

I think he agreed with me, for he made no further protest.

"If you say it must be, Helen, then I suppose it must," he said, dejectedly. "But it is a hard saying. I don't dare to think of what life will be without you."

"Nor I, Jasper. I know that when I say 'good-bye' to you, the sun will go out of my life and that I can look for no other dawn."

Again we fell silent for a while; and again I reproached myself for having let it come to this.

"Don't you think, Helen," he said at length, "that we might meet sometimes, say at fixed intervals—even long intervals, if it must be so—just that we might feel that we had not really lost one another completely?"

"But that is what I should wish to avoid. For we have lost one another. As to me, it has no significance. I have nothing to give and nothing to lose. I am shackled for life to Mr. Otway. But you have your life before you, and it would only be fair that I should leave you free."

"Free!" he exclaimed. "I am not free and never shall be. Nor do I wish to be free. I am yours now and for ever. And so I would wish it to be. We may not be married in any outward form, but we are married in the most real sense. Our hearts are married. We belong to one another for ever while we live, and neither of us will ever wish to change. You know it is so, dearest, don't you?"

What could I say? He had spoken my own thoughts, had expressed the wish that I had not dared to acknowledge. Weak and unjust it may have been, but the thought that in the dark days of our coming separation we should still be linked, if only by an invisible thread, came as something like a reprieve. It left just a faint spark of light to relieve the gloom of the all too sombre future. In the end we

agreed to a monthly letter and a meeting once a year. And so, having fixed the terms of our sentence, we tried to put our troubles away and make the best of the few hours that remained before the dreaded farewell.

But despite our efforts to get back to our wonted cheerful companionship, the swiftly-passing hours were filled with sadness and heart-ache. Instinctively we went and looked at things and places that recalled the pleasant jaunts that were to be no more ; but ever Black Care rode behind. It was like the journey of two lovers in a tumbril that rolled its relentless way towards the guillotine ; for at the end of the day was the parting that would leave us desolate.

And at last the parting was upon us. At the corner of Cable Street we halted and faced one another. For a few moments we stood in the gathering gloom, hand clasped in hand. I dared not speak, for my heart was bursting. Hardly did I dare to look at the man whom I loved so passionately. And Jasper could but press my hand and murmur huskily a few broken words of love. And so we parted. With a last pressure of the hand I turned away and hurried along Cable Street. I did not dare to look back, though I knew that he was gazing after me ; for the street swam before my eyes and I could barely hold back my sobs.

I did not go straight home. The tumult of emotion sent me hurrying forward—whither I have no recollection save that somewhere in Shadwell a pair of friendly policemen turned me back with the remark that it " was no place for the likes of me." At length, when the first storm of grief had passed, and I felt myself under control, I made my way to Wellclose Square, and pleading the conventional head-ache, retired at once to my room.

And there, in quiet and seclusion, with tears that no longer need be restrained, with solemn rites of grief, I buried my newborn happiness—the happiness that had died almost in the moment of its birth.

Chapter XIX — *Illusions and Disillusions*

It is a generally accepted belief that of all the remedies for an aching heart, the most effective is distraction of the

mind from the subject of its affliction. And probably the belief is well founded. But it usually happens that the sufferer is the last to recognize the virtues of the remedy, preferring to nurse in solitude a secret grief and to savour again and yet again the bitterness of the Dead Sea fruit of sorrow.

So it was with me in these unhappy days. The seclusion of the workshop gave me the opportunity for long hours of meditation, in which I would trace and retrace the growth of my love for Jasper, would think with passionate regret of what might have been, and speculate vaguely upon the future. So far from seeking distraction in these first days of my trouble, I kept aloof from my comrades, so far as I could; shut myself in the workshop, or in my room, or wandered abroad alone, following the great eastern thoroughfares where I was secure from the chance of meeting a friend.

But the distractions which I would have avoided came unsought. First, there was the visit with Peggy to Miss Tallboy-Smith. It was due but a day or two after my parting with Jasper, and I loathed the thought of it; but it had to be; for who could say how much it might mean to Peggy? And as it turned out, I should never have forgiven myself if I had failed her. I had looked for a rather dull, social call flavoured with porcelain. But it was quite otherwise. Miss Tallboy-Smith had at length heard of Peggy's genius and had invited a few specially choice connoisseurs to meet her, including Mr. Hawkesley—unless he had invited himself. At any rate, there he was, reverential and admiring, but yet with a certain air of proprietorship which I noted with interest and not without approval. It was quite a triumph for Peggy, and she took it very modestly, though with very natural satisfaction. To me, however, there was a fly in the ointment, though quite a small one; for Mr. Hawkesley proposed an exploration of the Wallace Collection, which Peggy had never seen, and which I felt bound, for her sake, to agree to. But I looked forward with prospective relief to the time—not far distant, I suspected—when these two pottery enthusiasts would be intimate enough to dispense with a chaperon.

Then there came a distraction of another kind. One

evening after tea, Lilith took me apart, and looking at me with some concern, said: "Our Sibyl has not been herself of late. I hope she is not being worried about anything."

"We all have our little troubles, Lilith," I replied, "and sometimes we don't take them so resignedly as we should."

"No," she rejoined. "Resignation is easier when the troubles are someone else's. But we are very concerned to see you looking so sad—not only Margaret and I, but all of us. We are all very fond of you, Sibyl, dear, and any of us would think it a privilege to be of help to you in any way. You know that, don't you?"

"I have good reason to. No woman could have found kinder or more helpful friends than I have in this house."

"Well," she said, "friends are for use as well as for companionship. Don't forget that, if there is any little service that any of us can render you."

I thanked her very warmly, and she then opened a fresh topic.

"Some time ago, Sibyl, we were speaking of psychical experiments, and I suggested that you might like to see some carried out by my friend, Mr. Quecks, who is an authority on these subjects. Mr. Quecks was away from home at the time, on a lecturing tour in Kent; but he is home again now. I wrote to him about you and have had one or two talks with him, and he has asked me to invite you to a little demonstration that he is giving to some friends next Friday evening. Would you care to come with me?"

I would much rather not have gone, but I knew that a refusal would disappoint Lilith, who had set her heart on converting me. Accordingly, I accepted the invitation, and we were arranging details of the expedition when Peggy joined us. As soon as she heard what was afoot she was all agog.

"Oh, what fun!" she exclaimed. "You'll let me come, too, won't you, Lilith? I did so enjoy it last time."

Lilith, however, was by no means eager for her company, for the Titmouse was a rank unbeliever, and made no secret of it.

"What is the use of your coming, Peggy?" said she. "You don't believe in the super-normal. You would only come to scoff."

"Perhaps I should remain to pray," rejoined Peggy. "It is no use preaching to people who are already convinced. And I should just love it. That Quecks man is so *frightfully* amusing. He is the funniest little guffin you ever saw, Sibyl. Won't you let me come, Lilith?"

"Of course you can come if you really want to," Lilith replied with evident reluctance. "But you shouldn't speak of Mr. Quecks as if he were a mountebank or a buffoon. He may not be handsome, but he is a very learned man and very sincere."

"I beg your pardon, Lilith," said Peggy. "I won't call him a guffin any more. And thank you ever so much for letting me come."

The arrangements being thus settled, it is only fair to Peggy to say that she endeavoured, as far as possible, to treat the demonstration quite seriously. Even in our private conversations she made no further disparaging references to Mr. Quecks, though I did gather that her anxiety to be present at the séance was not unconnected with a desire to keep an eye on him to see that he did not impose on me.

Mr. Quecks' house was situated in a quiet street off Cromwell Road, Kensington, and the "demonstration" took place in a large room intermediate in character between a library and a drawing-room, lighted by three electric bulbs, all of which were encased in silk bags, so that the illumination was of a twilight dimness. The visitors were about a dozen in all, and while we were waiting for the late arrivals Mr. Quecks made a few observations upon supernormal phenomena in general.

To me he required no disparagement from Peggy or anyone else, his own appearance doing all that was necessary in that respect. The first glance at him impressed me disagreeably; but then he was a manifestly uncomely man, with a large, bald face and long, greasy black hair, which was brushed straight back and accumulated in an untidy bush at the nape of his neck. He spoke unctuously, and his manner was confident, persuasive, didactic and authoritative, and he gave me the impression of a man who was accustomed to dealing chiefly with women—his present audience was composed of them exclusively.

"In interpreting the results of the experiments which we