The General turned round.

"Ah, George," he said, "your mother's here, isn't she? Look at this that your father's sent me!"

He held out a telegram in a shaky hand.

"Margery up at Green's Hotel. Go and see her at once.—HORACE."

And while George read the General looked at his nephew with eyes that were ringed by little circles of darker pigment, and had crow's-footed purses of skin beneath, earned by serving his country in tropical climes.

"What's the meaning of it?" he said. "Go and see her? Of course, I'll go and see her! Always glad to see your mother. But where's all the hurry?"

George perceived well enough that his father's pride would not let him write to her, and though it was for himself that his mother had taken this step, he sympathised with his father. The General fortunately gave him little time to answer.

"She's up to get herself some dresses, I suppose? I've seen nothing of you for a long time. When are you coming to dine with me? I heard at Epsom that you'd sold your horse. What made you do that? What's your father telegraphing to me like this for? It's not like him. Your mother's not ill, is she?"

George shook his head, and, muttering something about "Sorry, an engagement—awful hurry," was gone.

Left thus abruptly to himself, General Pendyce summoned a page, slowly pencilled something on his card, and with his back to the only persons in the hall, waited, his hands folded on the handle of his cane. And while he waited he tried as far as possible to think of nothing.

Having served his country, his time now was nearly all devoted to waiting, and to think fatigued and made him feel discontented, for he had had sunstroke once, and fever several times. In the perfect precision of his collar, his boots, his dress, his figure; in the way from time to time he cleared his throat, in the strange yellow driedness of his face between his carefully brushed whiskers, in the immobility of his white hands on his cane, he gave the impression of a man sucked dry by a system. Only his eyes, restless and opinionated, betrayed the essential Pendyce that was behind.

He went up to the ladies' drawing-room, clutching that telegram. It worried him. There was something odd about it, and he was not accustomed to pay calls in the morning. He found his sister-in-law seated at an open window, her face unusually pink, her eyes rather defiantly bright. She greeted him gently, and General Pendyce was not the man to discern what was not put under his nose. Fortunately for him, that had never been his practice.

"How are you, Margery?" he said. "Glad to see you in town. How's Horace? Look here what he's sent me!" He offered her the telegram, with the air of slightly avenging an offence; then added in surprise, as though he had just thought of it: "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Mrs. Pendyce read the telegram, and she, too, like George, felt sorry for the sender.

"Nothing, thanks, dear Charles," she said slowly. "I'm all right. Horace gets so nervous!"

General Pendyce looked at her; for a moment his eyes flickered, then, since the truth was so improbable and so

utterly in any case beyond his philosophy, he accepted her statement.

"He shouldn't go sending telegrams like this," he said. "You might have been ill for all I could tell. It spoiled my breakfast!" For though, as a fact, it had not prevented his completing a hearty meal, he fancied that he felt hungry. "When I was quartered at Halifax there was a fellow who never sent anything but telegrams. Telegraph Jo they called him. He commanded the old Bluebottles. You know the old Bluebottles? If Horace is going to take to this sort of thing he'd better see a specialist; it's almost certain to mean a breakdown. You're up about dresses, I see. When do you come to town? The season's getting on."

Mrs. Pendyce was not afraid of her husband's brother, for though punctilious and accustomed to his own way with inferiors, he was hardly a man to inspire awe in his social equals. It was, therefore, not through fear that she did not tell him the truth, but through an instinct for avoiding all unnecessary suffering too strong for her, and because the truth was really untellable. Even to herself it seemed slightly ridiculous, and she knew the poor General would take it so dreadfully to heart.

"I don't know about coming up this season. The garden is looking so beautiful, and there's Bee's engagement. The dear child is so happy!"

The General caressed a whisker with his white hand.

"Ah yes," he said—"young Tharp! Let's see, he's not the eldest. His brother's in my old corps. What does this young fellow do with himself?"

Mrs. Pendyce answered:

"He's only farming. I'm afraid he'll have nothing to speak of, but he's a dear good boy. It'll be a long

engagement. Of course, there's nothing in farming, and Horace insists on their having a thousand a year. It depends so much on Mr. Tharp. I think they could do perfectly well on seven hundred to start with, don't you, Charles?"

General Pendyce's answer was not more conspicuously to the point than usual, for he was a man who loved to pursue his own trains of thought.

"What about George?" he said. "I met him in the hall as I was coming in, but he ran off in the very deuce of a hurry. They told me at Epsom that he was hard hit."

His eyes, distracted by a fly for which he had taken a dislike, failed to observe his sister-in-law's face.

"Hard hit?" she repeated.

"Lost a lot of money. That won't do, you know, Margery—that won't do. A little mild gambling's one thing."

Mrs. Pendyce said nothing; her face was rigid. It was the face of a woman on the point of saying: "Do not compel me to hint that you are boring me!"

The General went on:

"A lot of new men have taken to racing that no one knows anything about. That fellow who bought George's horse, for instance; you'd never have seen *his* nose in Tattersalls when I was a young man. I find when I go racing I don't know half the colours. It spoils the pleasure. It's no longer the close borough that it was. George had better take care what he's about. I can't imagine what we're coming to!"

On Margery Pendyce's hearing, those words, "I can't imagine what we're coming to," had fallen for four-and-thirty years, in every sort of connection, from many

persons. It had become part of her life, indeed, to take it for granted that people could imagine nothing; just as the solid food and solid comfort of Worsted Skeynes and the misty morning and the rain had become part of her life. And it was only the fact that her nerves were on edge and her heart bursting that made those words seem intolerable that morning; but habit was even now too strong, and she kept silence.

The General, to whom an answer was of no great moment, pursued his thoughts.

"And you mark my words, Margery; the elections will go against us. The country's in a dangerous state."

Mrs. Pendyce said:

"Oh, do you think the Liberals will really get in?"

From custom there was a shade of anxiety in her voice which she did not feel.

"Think?" repeated General Pendyce. "I pray every night to God they won't!"

Folding both hands on the silver knob of his Malacca cane, he stared over them at the opposing wall; and there was something universal in that fixed stare, a sort of blank and not quite selfish apprehension. Behind his personal interests his ancestors had drilled into him the impossibility of imagining that he did not stand for the welfare of his country. Mrs. Pendyce, who had so often seen her husband look like that, leaned out of the window above the noisy street.

The General rose.

"Well," he said, "if I can't do anything for you, Margery, I'll take myself off; you're busy with your dress-makers. Give my love to Horace, and tell him not to send me another telegram like that."

And bending stiffly, he pressed her hand with a touch

of real courtesy and kindness, took up his hat, and went away. Mrs. Pendyce, watching him descend the stairs, watching his stiff sloping shoulders, his head with its grey hair brushed carefully away from the centre parting, the backs of his feeble, active knees, put her hand to her breast and sighed, for with him she seemed to see descending all her past life, and that one cannot see unmoved.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. BELLEW SQUARES HER ACCOUNTS.

Mrs. Bellew sat on her bed smoothing out the halves of a letter; by her side was her jewel-case. Taking from it an amethyst necklet, an emerald pendant, and a diamond ring, she wrapped them in cotton-wool, and put them in an envelope. The other jewels she dropped one by one into her lap, and sat looking at them. At last, putting two necklets and two rings back into the jewel-case, she placed the rest in a little green box, and taking that and the envelope, went out. She called a hansom, drove to a post-office, and sent a telegram:

"Pendyce, Stoics' Club.

"Be at studio six to seven.—H."

From the post-office she drove to her jeweller's, and many a man who saw her pass with the flush on her cheeks and the smouldering look in her eyes, as though a fire were alight within her, turned in his tracks and bitterly regretted that he knew not who she was, or whither going. The jeweller took the jewels from the green box, weighed them one by one, and slowly examined each through his lens. He was a little man with a yellow wrinkled face and a weak little beard, and having fixed in his mind the sum that he would give, he looked

at his client prepared to mention less. She was sitting with her elbows on the counter, her chin resting in her hands, and her eyes were fixed on him. He decided somehow to mention the exact sum.

"Is that all?"

"Yes, madam; that is the utmost."

"Very well, but I must have it now in cash!"

The jeweller's eyes flickered.

"It's a large sum," he said—"most unusual. I haven't got such a sum in the place."

"Then please send out and get it, or I must go elsewhere."

The jeweller brought his hands together, and washed them nervously.

"Excuse me a moment; I'll consult my partner."

He went away, and from afar he and his partner spied her nervously. He came back with a forced smile. Mrs. Bellew was sitting as he had left her.

"It's a fortunate chance; I think we can just do it, madam."

"Give me notes, please, and a sheet of paper."

The jeweller brought them.

Mrs. Bellew wrote a letter, enclosed it with the bank-notes in the bulky envelope she had brought, addressed it, and sealed the whole.

"Call a cab, please!"

The jeweller called a cab.

"Chelsea Embankment!"

The cab bore her away.

Again in the crowded streets so full of traffic, people turned to look after her. The cabman, who put her down at the Albert Bridge, gazed alternately at the coins in his hands and the figure of his fare, and wheeling his cab towards the stand, jerked his thumb in her direction.

Mrs. Bellew walked fast down a street till, turning a corner, she came suddenly on a small garden with three poplar-trees in a row. She opened its green gate without pausing, went down a path, and stopped at the first of three green doors. A young man with a beard, resembling an artist, who was standing behind the last of the three doors, watched her with a knowing smile on his face. She took out a latch-key, put it in the lock, opened the door, and passed in.

The sight of her face seemed to have given the artist an idea. Propping his door open, he brought an easel and canvas, and setting them so that he could see the corner where she had gone in, began to sketch.

An old stone fountain with three stone frogs stood in the garden near that corner, and beyond it was a flowering currant-bush, and beyond this again the green door on which a slanting gleam of sunlight fell. He worked for an hour, then put his easel back and went out to get his tea.

Mrs. Bellew came out soon after he was gone. She closed the door behind her, and stood still. Taking from her pocket the bulky envelope, she slipped it into the letter-box; then bending down, picked up a twig, and placed it in the slit, to prevent the lid falling with a rattle. Having done this, she swept her hands down her face and breast as though to brush something from her, and walked away. Beyond the outer gate she turned to the

left, and took the same street back to the river. She walked slowly, luxuriously, looking about her. Once or twice she stopped, and drew a deep breath, as though she could not have enough of the air. She went as far as the Embankment, and stood leaning her elbows on the parapet. Between the finger and thumb of one hand she held a small object on which the sun was shining. It was a key. Slowly, luxuriously, she stretched her hand out over the water, parted her thumb and finger, and let it fall.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. PENDYCE'S INSPIRATION.

But George did not come to take his mother to the theatre, and she whose day had been passed in looking forward to the evening, passed that evening in a drawing-room full of furniture whose history she did not know, and a dining-room full of people eating in twos and threes and fours, at whom she might look, but to whom she must not speak, to whom she did not even want to speak, so soon had the wheel of life rolled over her wonder and her expectation, leaving it lifeless in her breast. And all that night, with one short interval of sleep, she ate of bitter isolation and futility, and of the still more bitter knowledge: "George does not want me; I'm no good to him!"

Her heart, seeking consolation, went back again and again to the time when he *had* wanted her; but it was far to go, to the days of holland suits, when all those things that he desired—slices of pineapple, Benson's old carriage-whip, the daily reading out of "Tom Brown's Schooldays," the rub with Elliman when he sprained his little ancle, the tuck-up in bed—were in her power alone to give.

This night she saw with fatal clearness that since he went to school he had never wanted her at all. She had

tried so many years to believe that he did, till it had become part of her life, as it was part of her life to say her prayers night and morning; and now she found it was all pretence. But, lying awake, she still tried to believe it, because to that she had been bound when she brought him, first-born, into the world. Her other son, her daughters, she loved them too, but it was not the same thing, quite; she had never wanted them to want her, because that part of her had been given once for all to George.

The street noises died down at last; she had slept two hours when they began again. She lay listening. And the noises and her thoughts became tangled in her exhausted brain—one great web of weariness, a feeling that it was all senseless and unnecessary, the emanation of cross-purposes and cross-grainedness, the negation of that gentle moderation, her own most sacred instinct. And an early wasp, attracted by the sweet perfumes of her dressing-table, roused himself from the corner where he had spent the night, and began to hum and hover over the bed. Mrs. Pendyce was a little afraid of wasps, so, taking a moment when he was otherwise engaged, she stole out, and fanned him with her nightdress-case till, perceiving her to be a lady, he went away. Lying down again, she thought: "People *will* worry them until they sting, and then kill them; it's so unreasonable," not knowing that she was putting all her thoughts on suffering in a single nutshell.

She breakfasted upstairs, unsolaced by any news from George. Then with no definite hope, but a sort of inner certainty, she formed the resolution to call on Mrs. Bellew. She determined, however, first to visit Mr. Paramor, and, having but a hazy notion of the hour when

men begin to work, she did not dare to start till past eleven, and told her cabman to drive her slowly. He drove her, therefore, faster than his wont. In Leicester Square the passage of a Personage between two stations blocked the traffic, and on the footways were gathered a crowd of simple folk with much in their hearts and little in their stomachs, who raised a cheer as the Personage passed. Mrs. Pendyce looked eagerly from her cab, for she too loved a show.

The crowd dispersed, and the cab went on.

It was the first time she had ever found herself in the business apartment of any professional man less important than a dentist. From the little waiting-room, where they handed her the *Times,* which she could not read from excitement, she caught sight of rooms lined to the ceilings with leather books and black tin boxes, initialed in white to indicate the brand, and of young men seated behind lumps of paper that had been written on. She heard a perpetual clicking noise that roused her interest, and smelled a peculiar odour of leather and disinfectant which impressed her disagreeably. A youth with reddish hair and a pen in his hand passed through and looked at her with a curious stare which he immediately averted. She suddenly felt sorry for him and those other young men behind the lumps of paper, and the thought flashed through her mind, "I suppose it's all because people can't agree."

She was shown in to Mr. Paramor at last. In his large empty room, with its air of past grandeur, she sat gazing at three La France roses in a tumbler of water with the feeling that she would never be able to begin.

Mr. Paramor's eyebrows, which jutted from his clean, brown face like little clumps of pot-hooks, were iron-grey,

and iron-grey his hair brushed back from his high forehead. Mrs. Pendyce wondered why he looked five years younger than Horace, who was his junior, and ten years younger than Charles, who, of course, was younger still. His eyes, which from iron-grey some inner process of spiritual manufacture had made into steel colour, looked young too, although they were grave, and the smile which twisted up the corners of his mouth looked very young.

"Well," he said, "it's a great pleasure to see you."

Mrs. Pendyce could only answer with a smile.

Mr. Paramor put the roses to his nose.

"Not so good as yours," he said, "are they? but the best I can do."

Mrs. Pendyce blushed with pleasure.

"My garden is looking so beautiful——" Then, remembering that she no longer had a garden, she stopped; but remembering also that, though she had lost her garden, Mr. Paramor still had his, she added quickly: "And yours, Mr. Paramor—I'm sure it must be looking lovely."

Mr. Paramor drew out a kind of dagger with which he had stabbed some papers to his desk, and took a letter from the bundle.

"Yes," he said, "it's looking very nice. You'd like to see this, I expect."

"Bellew *v.* Bellew and Pendyce" was written at the top. Mrs. Pendyce stared at those words as though fascinated by their beauty; it was long before she got beyond them. For the first time the full horror of these matters pierced the kindly armour that lies between mortals and what they do not like to think of. Two men and a woman wrangling, fighting, tearing each other before the eyes of all the world. A woman and two men

stripped of charity and gentleness, of moderation and sympathy—stripped of all that made life decent and lovable, squabbling like savages before the eyes of all the world. Two men, and one of them her son, and between them a woman whom both of them had *loved!* "Bellew *v.* Bellew and Pendyce!" And this would go down to fame in company with the pitiful stories she had read from time to time with a sort of offended interest; in company with "Snooks *v.* Snooks and Stiles," "Horaday *v.* Horaday," "Bethany *v.* Bethany and Sweetenham." In company with all those cases where everybody seemed so dreadful, yet where she had often and often felt so sorry, as if these poor creatures had been fastened in the stocks by some malignant, loutish spirit, for all that would to come and jeer at. And horror filled her heart. It was all so mean, and gross, and common.

The letter contained but a few words from a firm of solicitors confirming an appointment. She looked up at Mr. Paramor. He stopped pencilling on his blotting-paper, and said at once:

"I shall be seeing these people myself to-morrow afternoon. I shall do my best to make them see reason."

She felt from his eyes that he knew what she was suffering, and was even suffering with her.

"And if—if they won't?"

"Then I shall go on a different tack altogether, and they must look out for themselves."

Mrs. Pendyce sank back in her chair; she seemed to smell again that smell of leather and disinfectant, and hear a sound of incessant clicking. She felt faint, and to disguise that faintness asked at random, "What does 'without prejudice' in this letter mean?"

Mr. Paramor smiled.

"That's an expression we always use," he said. "It means that when we give a thing away, we reserve to ourselves the right of taking it back again."

Mrs. Pendyce, who did not understand, murmured:

"I see. But what have they given away?"

Mr. Paramor put his elbows on the desk, and lightly pressed his finger-tips together.

"Well," he said, "properly speaking, in a matter like this, the other side and I are cat and dog. We are supposed to know nothing about each other and to want to know less, so that when we do each other a courtesy we are obliged to save our faces by saying, 'We don't really do you one.' D'you understand?"

Again Mrs. Pendyce murmured:

"I see."

"It sounds a little provincial, but we lawyers exist by reason of provincialism. If people were once to begin making allowances for each other, I don't know where we should be."

Mrs. Pendyce's eyes fell again on those words, "Bellew *v.* Bellew and Pendyce," and again, as though fascinated by their beauty, rested there.

"But you wanted to see me about something else too, perhaps?" said Mr. Paramor.

A sudden panic came over her.

"Oh no, thank you. I just wanted to know what had been done. I've come up on purpose to see George. You told me that I——"

Mr. Paramor hastened to her aid.

"Yes, yes; quite right—quite right."

"Horace hasn't come with me."

"Good!"

"He and George sometimes don't quite——"

"Hit it off? They're too much alike."

"Do you think so? I never saw——"

"Not in face, not in face; but they've both got——"

Mr. Paramor's meaning was lost in a smile; and Mrs. Pendyce, who did not know that the word "Pendycitis" was on the tip of his tongue, smiled vaguely too.

"George is very determined," she said. "Do you think—oh, do you think, Mr. Paramor, that you will be able to persuade Captain Bellew's solicitors——"

Mr. Paramor threw himself back in his chair, and his hand covered what he had written on his blotting-paper.

"Yes," he said slowly—"oh yes, yes!"

But Mrs. Pendyce had had her answer. She had meant to speak of her visit to Helen Bellew, but now her thought was:

"He won't persuade them; I feel it. Let me get away!"

Again she seemed to hear the incessant clicking, to smell leather and disinfectant, to see those words, "Bellew *v.* Bellew and Pendyce."

She held out her hand.

Mr. Paramor took it in his own and looked at the floor.

"Good-bye," he said—"good-bye. What's your address—Green's Hotel? I'll come and tell you what I do. I know—I know!"

Mrs. Pendyce, on whom those words "I know—I know!" had a strange, emotionalising effect, as though no one had ever known before, went away with quivering lips. In her life no one *had* ever "known"—not indeed that she could or would complain of such a trifle, but the fact remained. And at this moment, oddly, she

thought of her husband, and wondered what he was doing, and felt sorry for him.

But Mr. Paramor went back to his seat and stared at what he had written on his blotting-paper. It ran thus:

> "We stand on our petty rights here,
> And our potty dignity there;
> We make no allowance for others,
> They make no allowance for us;
> We catch hold of them by the ear,
> They grab hold of us by the hair—
> The result is a bit of a muddle
> That ends in a bit of a fuss."

He saw that it neither rhymed nor scanned, and with a grave face he tore it up.

Again Mrs. Pendyce told her cabman to drive slowly, and again he drove her faster than usual; yet that drive to Chelsea seemed to last for ever, and interminable were the turnings which the cabman took, each one shorter than the last, as if he had resolved to see how much his horse's mouth could bear.

"Poor thing!" thought Mrs. Pendyce; "its mouth must be so sore, and it's quite unnecessary." She put her hand up through the trap. "Please take me in a straight line. I don't like corners."

The cabman obeyed. It worried him terribly to take one corner instead of the six he had purposed on his way; and when she asked him his fare, he charged her a shilling extra for the distance he had saved by going straight. Mrs. Pendyce paid it, knowing no better, and gave him sixpence over, thinking it might benefit the horse; and the cabman, touching his hat, said:

"Thank you, my lady," for to say "my lady" was his principle when he received eighteenpence above his fare.

Mrs. Pendyce stood quite a minute on the pavement, stroking the horse's nose and thinking:

"I *must* go in; it's silly to come all this way and not go in!"

But her heart beat so that she could hardly swallow.

At last she rang.

Mrs. Bellew was seated on the sofa in her little drawing-room whistling to a canary in the open window. In the affairs of men there is an irony constant and deep, mingled with the very springs of life. The expectations of Mrs. Pendyce, those timid apprehensions of this meeting that had racked her all the way, were lamentably unfulfilled. She had rehearsed the scene ever since it came into her head; the reality seemed unfamiliar. She felt no nervousness and no hostility, only a sort of painful interest and admiration. And how could this or any other woman help falling in love with George?

The first uncertain minute over, Mrs. Bellew's eyes were as friendly as if she had been quite within her rights in all she had done; and Mrs. Pendyce could not help meeting friendliness half-way.

"Don't be angry with me for coming. George doesn't know. I felt I must come to see you. Do you think that you two quite know all you're doing? It seems so dreadful, and it's not only yourselves, is it?"

Mrs. Bellew's smile vanished.

"Please don't say 'you two,'" she said.

Mrs. Pendyce stammered:

"I don't understand."

Mrs. Bellew looked her in the face and smiled; and as she smiled she seemed to become a little coarser.

"Well, I think it's quite time you did! I don't love

your son. I did once, but I don't now. I told him so yesterday, once for all."

Mrs. Pendyce heard those words, which made so vast, so wonderful a difference—words which should have been like water in a wilderness—with a sort of horror, and all her spirit flamed up into her eyes.

"You don't love him?" she cried.

She felt only a blind sense of insult and affront.

This woman tire of George! Tire of her son! She looked at Mrs. Bellew, on whose face was a kind of inquisitive compassion, with eyes that had never before held hatred.

"You have tired of him? You have given him up? Then the sooner I go to him the better! Give me the address of his rooms, please."

Helen Bellew knelt down at the bureau and wrote on an envelope, and the grace of the woman pierced Mrs. Pendyce to the heart.

She took the paper. She had never learned the art of abuse, and no words could express what was in her heart, so she turned and went out.

Mrs. Bellew's voice sounded quick and fierce behind her.

"How could I help getting tired? I am not you. Now go!"

Mrs. Pendyce wrenched open the outer door. Descending the stairs, she felt for the bannister. She had that awful sense of physical soreness and shrinking which violence, whether their own or others', brings to gentle souls.

CHAPTER V.

THE MOTHER AND THE SON.

To Mrs. Pendyce, Chelsea was an unknown land, and to find her way to George's rooms would have taken her long had she been by nature what she was by name, for Pendyces never asked their way to anything, or believed what they were told, but found out for themselves with much unnecessary trouble, of which they afterwards complained.

A policeman first, and then a young man with a beard, resembling an artist, guided her footsteps. The latter, who was leaning by a gate, opened it.

"In here," he said; "the door in the corner on the right."

Mrs. Pendyce walked down the little path, past the ruined fountain with its three stone frogs, and stood by the first green door and waited. And while she waited she struggled between fear and joy; for now that she was away from Mrs. Bellew she no longer felt a sense of insult. It was the actual sight of her that had aroused it, so personal is even the most gentle heart.

She found the rusty handle of a bell amongst the creeper-leaves, and pulled it. A cracked metallic tinkle answered her, but no one came; only a faint sound as of

someone pacing to and fro. Then in the street beyond the outer gate a coster began calling to the sky, and in the music of his prayers the sound was lost. The young man with a beard, resembling an artist, came down the path.

"Perhaps you could tell me, sir, if my son is out?"

"I've not seen him go out, and I've been painting here all the morning."

Mrs. Pendyce looked with wonder at an easel which stood outside another door a little further on. It seemed to her strange that her son should live in such a place.

"Shall I knock for you?" said the artist. "All these knockers are stiff."

"If you would be so kind!"

The artist knocked.

"He must be in," he said. "I haven't taken my eyes off his door, because I've been painting it."

Mrs. Pendyce gazed at the door.

"I can't get it," said the artist. "It's worrying me to death."

Mrs. Pendyce looked at him doubtfully.

"Has he no servant?" she said.

"Oh no," said the artist; "it's a studio. The light's all wrong. I wonder if you would mind standing just as you are for one second; it would help me a lot!"

He moved back and curved his hand over his eyes, and through Mrs. Pendyce there passed a shiver.

"Why doesn't George open the door?" she thought. "What—what is this man doing?"

The artist dropped his hand.

"Thanks so much!" he said. "I'll knock again. There! that would raise the dead!"

And he laughed.

An unreasoning terror seized on Mrs. Pendyce.

"Oh," she stammered, "I *must* get in—I *must* get in!"

She took the knocker herself, and fluttered it against the door.

"You see," said the artist, "they're all alike; these knockers are as stiff as pokers."

He again curved his hand over his eyes. Mrs. Pendyce leaned against the door; her knees were trembling violently.

"What is happening?" she thought. "Perhaps he's only asleep, perhaps—— Oh God!"

She beat the knocker with all her force. The door yielded, and in the space stood George. Choking back a sob, Mrs. Pendyce went in. He banged the door behind her.

For a full minute she did not speak, possessed still by that strange terror and by a sort of shame. She did not even look at her son, but cast timid glances round his room. She saw a gallery at the far end, and a conical roof half made of glass. She saw curtains hanging all the gallery length, a table with tea-things and decanters, a round iron stove, rugs on the floor, and a large full-length mirror in the centre of the wall. A silver cup of flowers was reflected in that mirror. Mrs. Pendyce saw that they were dead, and the sense of their vague and nauseating odour was her first definite sensation.

"Your flowers are dead, my darling," she said. "I must get you some fresh!"

Not till then did she look at George. There were circles under his eyes; his face was yellow: it seemed to

her that it had shrunk. This terrified her, and she thought:

"I must show nothing; I must keep my head!"

She was afraid—afraid of something desperate in his face, of something desperate and headlong, and she was afraid of his stubbornness, the dumb, unthinking stubbornness that holds to what has been because it has been, that holds to its own when its own is dead. She had so little of this quality herself that she could not divine where it might lead him; but she had lived in the midst of it all her married life, and it seemed natural that her son should be in danger from it now.

Her terror called up her self-possession. She drew George down on the sofa by her side, and the thought flashed through her: "How many times has he not sat here with that woman in his arms!"

"You didn't come for me last night, dear! I got the tickets, such good ones!"

George smiled.

"No," he said; "I had something else to see to!"

At sight of that smile Margery Pendyce's heart beat till she felt sick, but she, too, smiled.

"What a nice place you have here, darling!"

"There's room to walk about."

Mrs. Pendyce remembered the sound she had heard of pacing to and fro. From his not asking her how she had found out where he lived she knew that he must have guessed where she had been, that there was nothing for either of them to tell the other. And though this was a relief, it added to her terror—the terror of that which is desperate. All sorts of images passed through her mind. She saw George back in her bedroom after his first run

with the hounds, his chubby cheek scratched from forehead to jaw, and the blood-stained pad of a cub fox in his little gloved hand. She saw him sauntering into her room the last day of the 1880 match at Lord's, with a battered top-hat, a blackened eye, and a cane with a light-blue tassel. She saw him deadly pale with tightened lips that afternoon after he had escaped from her, half cured of laryngitis, and stolen out shooting by himself, and she remembered his words: "Well, mother, I couldn't stand it any longer; it was too beastly slow!"

Suppose he could not stand it now! Suppose he should do something rash! She took out her handkerchief.

"It's very hot in here, dear; your forehead is quite wet!"

She saw his eyes turn on her suspiciously, and all her woman's wit stole into her own eyes, so that they did not flicker, but looked at him with matter-of-fact concern.

"That skylight is what does it," he said. "The sun gets full on there."

Mrs. Pendyce looked at the skylight.

"It seems odd to see you here, dear, but it's very nice—so unconventional. You must let me put away those poor flowers!" She went to the silver cup and bent over them. "My dear boy, they're quite nasty! Do throw them outside somewhere; it's so dreadful, the smell of old flowers!"

She held the cup out, covering her nose with her handkerchief.

George took the cup, and like a cat spying a mouse, Mrs. Pendyce watched him take it out into the garden.

As the door closed, quicker, more noiseless than a cat, she slipped behind the curtains.

"I know he has a pistol," she thought.

She was back in an instant, gliding round the room, hunting with her eyes and hands, but she saw nothing, and her heart lightened, for she was terrified of all such things.

"It's only these terrible first hours," she thought.

When George came back she was standing where he had left her. They sat down in silence, and in that silence, the longest of her life, she seemed to feel all that was in his heart, all the blackness and bitter aching, the rage of defeat and starved possession, the lost delight, the sensation of ashes and disgust; and yet her heart was full enough already of relief and shame, compassion, jealousy, love, and deep longing. Only twice was the silence broken. Once when he asked her whether she had lunched, and she who had eaten nothing all day answered:

"Yes, dear—yes."

Once when he said:

"You shouldn't have come here, mother; I'm a bit out of sorts!"

She watched his face, dearest to her in all the world, bent towards the floor, and she so yearned to hold it to her breast that, since she dared not, the tears stole up, and silently rolled down her cheeks. The stillness in that room, chosen for remoteness, was like the stillness of a tomb, and, as in a tomb, there was no outlook on the world, for the glass of the skylight was opaque.

That deathly stillness settled round her heart; her eyes fixed themselves on the skylight, as though beseeching it to break and let in sound. A cat, making a pil-

grimage from roof to roof, the four dark moving spots of its paws, the faint blur of its body, was all she saw. And suddenly, unable to bear it any longer, she cried:

"Oh, George, speak to me! Don't put me away from you like this!"

George answered:

"What do you want me to say, mother?"

"Nothing—only——"

And falling on her knees beside her son, she pulled his head down against her breast, and stayed rocking herself to and fro, silently shifting closer till she could feel his head lie comfortably; so, she had his face against her heart, and she could not bear to let it go. Her knees hurt her on the boarded floor, her back and all her body ached; but not for worlds would she relax an inch, believing that she could comfort him with her pain, and her tears fell on his neck. When at last he drew his face away she sank down on the floor, and could not rise, but her fingers felt that the bosom of her dress was wet. He said hoarsely:

"It's all right, mother; you needn't worry!"

For no reward would she have looked at him just then, but with a deeper certainty than reason she knew that he was safe.

Stealthily on the sloping skylight the cat retraced her steps, its four paws dark moving spots, its body a faint blur.

Mrs. Pendyce rose.

"I won't stay now, darling. May I use your glass?"

Standing before that mirror, smoothing back her hair, passing her handkerchief over her cheeks and eyes and lips, she thought:

"That woman has stood here! That woman has

smoothed her hair, looking in this glass, and wiped his kisses from her cheeks! May God give to her the pain that she has given to my son!"

But when she had wished that wish she shivered.

She turned to George at the door with a smile that seemed to say:

"It's no good to weep, or try and tell you what is in my heart, and so, you see, I'm smiling. Please smile, too, so as to comfort me a little."

George put a small paper parcel in her hand and tried to smile.

Mrs. Pendyce went quickly out. Bewildered by the sunlight, she did not look at this parcel till she was beyond the outer gate. It contained an amethyst necklace, an emerald pendant, and a diamond ring. In the little grey street that led to this garden with its poplars, old fountain, and green gate, the jewels glowed and sparkled as though all light and life had settled there. Mrs. Pendyce, who loved colour and glowing things, saw that they were beautiful.

That woman had taken them, used their light and colour, and then flung them back! She wrapped them again in the paper, tied the string, and went towards the river. She did not hurry, but walked with her eyes steadily before her. She crossed the Embankment, and stood leaning on the parapet with her hands over the grey water. Her thumb and fingers unclosed; the white parcel dropped, floated a second, and then disappeared.

Mrs. Pendyce looked round her with a start. A young man with a beard, whose face was familiar, was raising his hat.

"So your son *was* in," he said. "I'm very glad. I must thank you again for standing to me just that minute;

it made all the difference. It was the relation between the figure and the door that I wanted to get. Good morning!"

Mrs. Pendyce murmured "Good morning," following him with startled eyes, as though he had caught her in the commission of a crime. She had a vision of those jewels, buried, poor things! in the grey slime, a prey to gloom, and robbed for ever of their light and colour. And, as though she had sinned, wronged the gentle essence of her nature, she hurried away.

CHAPTER VI.

GREGORY LOOKS AT THE SKY.

WHEN Gregory Vigil called Mr. Paramor a pessimist it was because, like other people, he did not know the meaning of the term; for with a confusion common to the minds of many persons who have been conceived in misty moments, he thought that, to see things as they were, meant, to try and make them worse. Gregory had his own way of seeing things that was very dear to him—so dear that he would shut his eyes sooner than see them any other way. And since things to him were not the same as things to Mr. Paramor, it cannot, after all, be said that he did not see things as they were. But dirt upon a face that he wished to be clean he could not see—a fluid in his blue eyes dissolved that dirt while the image of the face was passing on to their retinæ. The process was unconscious, and has been called idealism. This was why the longer he reflected the more agonisedly certain he became that his ward was right to be faithful to the man she loved, right to join her life to his. And he went about pressing the blade of this thought into his soul.

About four o'clock on the day of Mrs. Pendyce's visit to the studio a letter was brought him by a page-boy.

"GREEN'S HOTEL,
"*Thursday.*

"DEAR GRIG,

"I have seen Helen Bellew, and have just come from George. We have all been living in a bad dream. She does not love him—perhaps has never loved him. I do not know; I do not wish to judge. *She has given him up.* I will not trust myself to say anything about that. From beginning to end it all seems so unnecessary, such a needless, cross-grained muddle. I write this line to tell you how things really are, and to beg you, if you have a moment to spare, to look in at George's club this evening and let me know if he is there and how he seems. There is no one else that I could possibly ask to do this for me. Forgive me if this letter pains you.

"Your affectionate cousin,
"MARGERY PENDYCE."

To those with the single eye, the narrow personal view of all things human, by whom the irony underlying the affairs of men is unseen and unenjoyed, whose simple hearts afford that irony its most precious smiles, who, vanquished by that irony, remain invincible—to these no blow of Fate, no reversal of their ideas, can long retain importance. The darts stick, quaver, and fall off, like arrows from chain-armour, and the last dart, slipping upwards under the harness, quivers into the heart to the cry of "What—you! No, no; I don't believe you're here!"

Such as these have done much of what has had to be done in this old world, and perhaps still more of what has had to be undone.

When Gregory received this letter he was working on

the case of a woman with the morphia habit. He put it into his pocket and went on working. It was all he was capable of doing.

"Here is the memorandum, Mrs. Shortman. Let them take her for six weeks. She will come out a different woman."

Mrs. Shortman, supporting her thin face in her thin hand, rested her glowing eyes on Gregory.

"I'm afraid she has lost all moral sense," she said. "Do you know, Mr. Vigil, I'm almost afraid she never had any!"

"What do you mean?"

Mrs. Shortman turned her eyes away.

"I'm sometimes tempted to think," she said, "that there are such people. I wonder whether we allow enough for that. When I was a girl in the country I remember the daughter of our vicar, a very pretty creature. There were dreadful stories about her, even before she was married, and then we heard she was divorced. She came up to London and earned her own living by playing the piano until she married again. I won't tell you her name, but she is very well known, and nobody has ever seen her show the slightest signs of being ashamed. If there is one woman like that there may be dozens, and I sometimes think we waste——"

Gregory said dryly:

"I have heard you say that before."

Mrs. Shortman bit her lips.

"I don't think," she said, "that I grudge my efforts or my time."

Gregory went quickly up, and took her nand.

"I know that—oh, I know that," he said with feeling.

The sound of Miss Mallow furiously typing rose sud-

denly from the corner. Gregory removed his hat from the peg on which it hung.

"I must go now," he said. "Good night."

Without warning, as is the way with hearts, his heart had begun to bleed, and he felt that he must be in the open air. He took no omnibus or cab, but strode along with all his might, trying to think, trying to understand. But he could only feel—confused and battered feelings, with now and then odd throbs of pleasure of which he was ashamed. Whether he knew it or not, he was making his way to Chelsea, for though a man's eyes may be fixed on the stars, his feet cannot take him there, and Chelsea seemed to them the best alternative. He was not alone upon this journey, for many another man was going there, and many a man had been and was coming now away, and the streets were the one long streaming crowd of the summer afternoon. And the men he met looked at Gregory, and Gregory looked at them, and neither saw the other, for so it is written of men, lest they pay attention to cares that are not their own. The sun that scorched his face fell on their backs, the breeze that cooled his back blew on their cheeks. For the careless world, too, was on its way, along the pavement of the universe, one of millions going to Chelsea, meeting millions coming away. . . .

"Mrs. Bellew at home?"

He went into a room fifteen feet square and perhaps ten high, with a sulky canary in a small gilt cage, an upright piano with an open operatic score, a sofa with piled-up cushions, and on it a woman with a flushed and sullen face, whose elbows were resting on her knees, whose chin was resting on her hand, whose gaze was fixed on nothing. It was a room of that size, with all these things,

but Gregory took into it with him something that made it all seem different to Gregory. He sat down by the window with his eyes carefully averted, and spoke in soft tones broken by something that sounded like emotion. He began by telling her of his woman with the morphia habit, and then he told her that he knew everything. When he had said this he looked out of the window, where builders had left by inadvertence a narrow strip of sky. And thus he avoided seeing the look on her face, contemptuous, impatient, as though she were thinking: "You are a good fellow, Gregory, but for Heaven's sake do see things for once as they are! I have had enough of it." And he avoided seeing her stretch her arms out and spread the fingers, as an angry cat will stretch and spread its toes. He told her that he did not want to worry her, but that when she wanted him for anything she must send for him—he was always there; and he looked at her feet, so that he did not see her lip curl. He told her that she would always be the same to him, and he asked her to believe that. He did not see the smile which never left her lips again while he was there—the smile he could not read, because it was the smile of life, and of a woman that he did not understand. But he did see on that sofa a beautiful creature for whom he had longed for years, and so he went away, and left her standing at the door with her teeth fastened on her lip. And since with him Gregory took his eyes, he did not see her reseated on the sofa, just as she had been before he came in, her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hand, her moody eyes like those of a gambler staring into the distance. . . .

In the streets of tall houses leading away from Chelsea were many men, some, like Gregory, hungry for love,

and some hungry for bread—men in twos and threes, in crowds, or by themselves, some with their eyes on the ground, some with their eyes level, some with their eyes on the sky, but all with courage and loyalty of one poor kind or another in their hearts. For by courage and loyalty alone it is written that man shall live, whether he goes to Chelsea or whether he comes away. Of all these men, not one but would have smiled to hear Gregory saying to himself: "She will always be the same to me! She will always be the same to me!" And not one that would have grinned. . . .

It was getting on for the Stoics' dinner hour when Gregory found himself in Piccadilly, and, Stoic after Stoic, they were getting out of cabs and passing the club doors. The poor fellows had been working hard all day on the race-course, the cricket-ground, at Hurlingham, or in the Park; some had been to the Royal Academy, and on their faces was a pleasant look: "Ah, God is good—we can rest at last!" And many of them had had no lunch, hoping to keep their weights down, and many who had lunched had not done themselves as well as might be hoped, and some had done themselves too well; but in all their hearts the trust burned bright that they might do themselves better at dinner, for their God *was* good, and dwelt between the kitchen and the cellar of the Stoics' Club. And all—for all had poetry in their souls—looked forward to those hours in paradise when, with cigars between their lips, good wine below, they might dream the daily dream that comes to all true Stoics for about fifteen shillings or even less, all told.

From a little back slum, within two stones'-throw of the god of the Stoics' Club, there had come out two seamstresses to take the air; one was in consumption, having

neglected to earn enough to feed herself properly for some years past, and the other looked as if she would be in consumption shortly, for the same reason. They stood on the pavement, watching the cabs drive up. Some of the Stoics saw them and thought: "Poor girls! they look awfully bad." Three or four said to themselves: "It oughtn't to be allowed. I mean, it's so painful to see; and it's not as if one could do anything. They're not beggars, don't you know, and so what *can* one do?"

But most of the Stoics did not look at them at all, feeling that their soft hearts could not stand these painful sights, and anxious not to spoil their dinners. Gregory did not see them either, for it so happened that he was looking at the sky, and just then the two girls crossed the road and were lost among the passers-by, for they were not dogs, who could smell out the kind of man he was.

"Mr. Pendyce *is* in the club; I will send your name up, sir." And rolling a little, as though Gregory's name were heavy, the porter gave it to the boy, who went away with it.

Gregory stood by the empty hearth and waited, and while he waited, nothing struck him at all, for the Stoics seemed very natural, just mere men like himself, except that their clothes were better, which made him think: "I shouldn't care to belong here and have to dress for dinner every night."

"Mr. Pendyce is very sorry, sir, but he's engaged."

Gregory bit his lip, said "Thank you," and went away.

"That's all Margery wants," he thought; "the rest is nothing to me," and, getting on a bus, he fixed his eyes once more upon the sky.

But George was not engaged. Like a wounded animal

taking its hurt for refuge to its lair, he sat in his favourite window overlooking Piccadilly. He sat there as though youth had left him, unmoving, never lifting his eyes. In his stubborn mind a wheel seemed turning, grinding out his memories to the last grain. And Stoics, who could not bear to see a man sit thus throughout that sacred hour, came up from time to time.

"Aren't you going to dine, Pendyce?"

Dumb brutes tell no one of their pains; the law is silence. So with George. And as each Stoic came up, he only set his teeth and said:

"Presently, old chap."

CHAPTER VII.

TOUR WITH THE SPANIEL JOHN.

Now the spaniel John—whose habit it was to smell of heather and baked biscuits when he rose from a night's sleep—was in disgrace that Thursday. Into his long and narrow head it took time for any new idea to enter, and not till forty hours after Mrs. Pendyce had gone did he recognise fully that something definite had happened to his master. During the agitated minutes that this conviction took in forming, he worked hard. Taking two and a half brace of his master's shoes and slippers, and placing them in unaccustomed spots, he lay on them one by one till they were warm, then left them for some bird or other to hatch out, and returned to Mr. Pendyce's door. It was for all this that the Squire said, "John!" several times, and threatened him with a razor-strop. And partly because he could not bear to leave his master for a single second—the scolding had made him love him so—and partly because of that new idea, which let him have no peace, he lay in the hall waiting.

Having once in his hot youth inadvertently followed the Squire's horse, he could never be induced to follow it again. He both personally disliked this needlessly large and swift form of animal, and suspected it of designs upon his master; for when the creature had taken his master up, there was not a smell of him left anywhere—

not a whiff of that pleasant scent that so endeared him to the heart. As soon, therefore, as the horse appeared, the spaniel John would lie down on his stomach with his forepaws close to his nose, and his nose close to the ground; nor until the animal vanished could he be induced to abandon an attitude in which he resembled a couching Sphinx.

But this afternoon, with his tail down, his lips pouting, his shoulders making heavy work of it, his nose lifted in deprecation of that ridiculous and unnecessary plane on which his master sat, he followed at a measured distance. In such-wise, aforetime, the village had followed the Squire and Mr. Barter when they introduced into it its one and only drain.

Mr. Pendyce rode slowly; his feet, in their well-blacked boots, his nervous legs in Bedford cord and mahogany-coloured leggings, moved in rhyme to the horse's trot. A long-tailed coat fell clean and full over his thighs; his back and shoulders were a wee bit bent to lessen motion, and above his neat white stock under a grey bowler hat his lean, grey-whiskered and moustachioed face, with harassed eyes, was preoccupied and sad. His horse, a brown blood mare, ambled lazily, head raking forward, and bang tail floating outward from her hocks. And so, in the June sunshine, they went, all three, along the leafy lane to Worsted Scotton. . . .

On Tuesday, the day that Mrs. Pendyce had left, the Squire had come in later than usual, for he felt that after their difference of the night before, a little coolness would do her no harm. The first hour of discovery had been as one confused and angry minute, ending in a burst of nerves and the telegram to General Pendyce. He took

the telegram himself, returning from the village with his head down, a sudden prey to a feeling of shame—an odd and terrible feeling that he never remembered to have felt before, a sort of fear of his fellow-creatures. He would have chosen a secret way, but there was none, only the highroad, or the path across the village green, and through the churchyard to his paddocks. An old cottager was standing at the turnstile, and the Squire made for him with his head down, as a bull makes for a fence. He had meant to pass in silence, but between him and this old broken husbandman there was a bond forged by the ages. Had it meant death, Mr. Pendyce could not have passed one whose fathers had toiled for his fathers, eaten his fathers' bread, died with his fathers, without a word and a movement of his hand.

"Evenin', Squire; naice evenin'. Faine weather fur th' hay!"

The voice was warped and wavery.

"This is my Squire," it seemed to say, "whatever ther' be agin him!"

Mr. Pendyce's hand went up to his hat.

"Evenin', Hermon. Aye, fine weather for the hay! Mrs. Pendyce has gone up to London. We young bachelors, ha!"

He passed on.

Not until he had gone some way did he perceive why he had made that announcement. It was simply because he must tell everyone, everyone; then no one could be astonished.

He hurried on to the house to dress in time for dinner, and show all that nothing was amiss. Seven courses would have been served him had the sky fallen: but he ate little, and drank more claret than was his

wont. After dinner he sat in his study with the windows open, and in the mingled day and lamp light read his wife's letter over again. As it was with the spaniel John, so with his master—a new idea penetrated but slowly into his long and narrow head.

She was cracked about George; she did not know what she was doing; would soon come to her senses. It was not for him to take any steps. What steps, indeed, could he take without confessing that Horace Pendyce had gone too far, that Horace Pendyce was in the wrong? That had never been his habit, and he could not alter now. If she and George chose to be stubborn, they must take the consequences, and fend for themselves.

In the silence and the lamplight, growing mellower each minute under the green silk shade, he sat confusedly thinking of the past. And in that dumb reverie, as though of fixed malice, there came to him no memories that were not pleasant, no images that were not fair. He tried to think of her unkindly, he tried to paint her black; but with the perversity born into the world when he was born, to die when he was dead, she came to him softly, like the ghost of gentleness, to haunt his fancy. She came to him smelling of sweet scents, with a slight rustling of silk, and the sound of her expectant voice, saying, "Yes, dear?" as though she were not bored. He remembered when he brought her first to Worsted Skeynes thirty-four years ago, "That timid, and like a rose, but a lady every hinch, the love!" as his old nurse had said.

He remembered her when George was born, like wax for whiteness and transparency, with eyes that were all pupils, and a hovering smile. So many other times he

remembered her throughout those years, but never as a woman faded, old; never as a woman of the past. Now that he had not got her, for the first time Mr. Pendyce realised that she had not grown old, that she was still to him "timid, and like a rose, but a lady every hinch, the love!" And he could not bear this thought; it made him feel so miserable and lonely in the lamplight, with the grey moths hovering round, and the spaniel John asleep upon his foot.

So, taking his candle, he went up to bed. The doors that barred away the servants' wing were closed. In all that great remaining space of house his was the only candle, the only sounding footstep. Slowly he mounted as he had mounted many thousand times, but never once like this, and behind him, like a shadow, mounted the spaniel John.

And She that knows the hearts of men and dogs, the Mother from whom all things come, to whom they all go home, was watching, and presently, when they were laid, the one in his deserted bed, the other on blue linen, propped against the door, She gathered them to sleep.

But Wednesday came, and with it Wednesday duties. They who have passed the windows of the Stoics' Club and seen the Stoics sitting there have haunting visions of the idle landed classes. These visions will not let them sleep, will not let their tongues to cease from bitterness, for they so long to lead that "idle" life themselves. But though in a misty land illusions be our cherished lot, that we may all think falsely of our neighbours and enjoy ourselves, the word "idle" is not the word at all.

Many and heavy tasks weighed on the Squire at

Worsted Skeynes. There was the visit to the stables to decide as to firing Beldame's hock, or selling the new bay horse because he did not draw men fast enough, and the vexed question of Bruggan's oats or Beal's, talked out with Benson, in a leather belt and flannel shirt-sleeves, like a corpulent, white-whiskered boy. Then the long sitting in the study with memorandums and accounts, all needing care, lest So-and-so should give too little for too little, or too little for too much; and the smart walk across to Jarvis, the head keeper, to ask after the health of the new Hungarian bird, or discuss a scheme whereby in the last drive so many of those creatures he had nurtured from their youth up might be deterred from flying over to his friend Lord Quarryman. And this took long, for Jarvis's feelings forced him to say six times, "Well, Mr. Pendyce, sir, what I say is we didn't oughter lose s'many birds in that last drive;" and Mr. Pendyce to answer: "No, Jarvis, certainly not. Well, what do you suggest?" And that other grievous question—how to get plenty of pheasants and plenty of foxes to dwell together in perfect harmony—discussed with endless sympathy, for, as the Squire would say, "Jarvis is quite safe with foxes." He could not bear his covers to be drawn blank.

Then back to a sparing lunch, or perhaps no lunch at all, that he might keep fit and hard; and out again at once on horseback or on foot to the home farm or farther, as need might take him, and a long afternoon, with eyes fixed on the ribs of bullocks, the colour of swedes, the surfaces of walls or gates or fences.

Then home again to tea and to the *Times*, which had as yet received but fleeting glances, with close attention to all those Parliamentary measures threatening, remotely,

the existing state of things, except, of course, that future tax on wheat so needful to the betterment of Worsted Skeynes. There were occasions, too, when they brought him tramps to deal with, to whom his one remark would be, "Hold out your hands, my man," which, being found unwarped by honest toil, were promptly sent to gaol. When found so warped, Mr. Pendyce was at a loss, and would walk up and down, earnestly trying to discover what his duty was to them. There were days, too, almost entirely occupied by sessions, when many classes of offenders came before him, to whom he meted justice according to the heinousness of the offence, from poaching at the top down and down to wife-beating at the bottom; for, though a humane man, tradition did not suffer him to look on this form of sport as really criminal—at any rate, not in the country.

It was true that all these matters could have been settled in a fraction of the time by a young and trained intelligence, but this would have wronged tradition, disturbed the Squire's settled conviction that he was doing his duty, and given cause for slanderous tongues to hint at idleness. And though, further, it was true that all this daily labour was devoted directly or indirectly to interests of his own, what was that but doing his duty to the country and asserting the prerogative of every Englishman at all costs to be provincial?

But on this Wednesday the flavour of the dish was gone. To be alone amongst his acres, quite alone—to have no one to care whether he did anything at all, no one to whom he might confide that Beldame's hock was to be fired, that Peacock was asking for more gates, was almost more than he could bear. He would have wired to the girls to come home, but he could not bring himself

to face their questions. Gerald was at Gib.! George—George was no son of his!—and his pride forbade him to write to her who had left him thus to solitude and shame. For deep down below his stubborn anger it was shame that the Squire felt—shame that he should have to shun his neighbours, lest they should ask him questions which, for his own good name and his own pride, he must answer with a lie; shame that he should not be master in his own house—still more, shame that anyone should see that he was not. To be sure, he did not know that he felt shame, being unused to introspection, having always kept it at arm's length. For he always meditated concretely, as, for instance, when he looked up and did not see his wife at breakfast, but saw Bester making coffee, he thought, "That fellow knows all about it, I shouldn't wonder!" and he felt angry for thinking that. When he saw Mr. Barter coming down the drive he thought, "Confound it! I can't meet him," and slipped out, and felt angry that he had thus avoided him. When in the Scotch garden he came on Jackman syringing the rose-trees, he said to him, "Your mistress has gone to London," and abruptly turned away, angry that he had been obliged by a mysterious impulse to tell him that.

So it was, all through that long, sad day, and the only thing that gave him comfort was to score through, in the draft of his will, bequests to his eldest son, and busy himself over drafting a clause to take their place:

"Forasmuch as my eldest son, George Hubert, has by conduct unbecoming to a gentleman and a Pendyce, proved himself unworthy of my confidence, and forasmuch as to my regret I am unable to cut the entail of my estate, I hereby declare that he shall in no way participate in

any division of my other property or of my personal effects, conscientiously believing that it is my duty so to do in the interests of my family and of the country, and I make this declaration without anger."

For, all the anger that he was balked of feeling against his wife, because he missed her so, was added to that already felt against his son.

By the last post came a letter from General Pendyce. He opened it with fingers as shaky as his brother's writing.

"Army and Navy Club.

"Dear Horace,

"What the deuce and all made you send that telegram? It spoiled my breakfast, and sent me off in a tearing hurry, to find Margery perfectly well. If she'd been seedy or anything I should have been delighted, but there she was, busy about her dresses and what not, and I daresay she thought me a lunatic for coming at that time in the morning. You shouldn't get into the habit of sending telegrams. A telegram is a thing that means something—at least, I've always thought so. I met George coming away from her in a deuce of a hurry. I can't write any more now. I'm just going to have my lunch.

"Your affectionate brother,

"Charles Pendyce."

She was well. She had been seeing George. With a hardened heart the Squire went up to bed.

And Wednesday came to an end. . . .

And so on the Thursday afternoon the brown blood

mare carried Mr. Pendyce along the lane, followed by the spaniel John. They passed the Firs, where Bellew lived, and, bending sharply to the right, began to mount towards the Common; and with them mounted the image of that fellow who was at the bottom of it all—an image that ever haunted the Squire's mind nowadays; a ghost, high-shouldered, with little burning eyes, clipped red moustaches, thin bowed legs. A plague spot on that system which he loved, a whipping-post to heredity, a scourge like Attila the Hun; a sort of damnable caricature of all that a country gentleman should be—of his love of sport and open air, of his "hardness" and his pluck; of his powers of knowing his own mind, and taking his liquor like a man; of his creed, now out of date, of gallantry. Yes—a kind of cursed bogey of a man, a spectral follower of the hounds, a desperate character—a man that in old days someone would have shot; a drinking, white-faced devil that despised Horace Pendyce, that Horace Pendyce hated, yet could not quite despise. "Always one like that in a hunting country!" A black dog on the shoulders of his order. *Post equitem sedet Jaspar Bellew!*

The Squire came out on the top of the rise, and all Worsted Scotton was in sight. It was a sandy stretch of broom and gorse and heather, with a few Scotch firs; it had no value at all, and he longed for it, as a boy might long for the bite someone else had snatched out of his apple. It distressed him lying there, his and yet not his, like a wife that was no wife—as though Fortune were enjoying her at his expense. Thus was he deprived of the fulness of his mental image; for as with all men, so with the Squire, that which he loved and owned took definite form—a something that he *saw*. Whenever the words "Worsted Skeynes" were in his mind—and that

was almost always—there rose before him an image defined and concrete, however indescribable; and whatever this image was, he knew that Worsted Scotton spoiled it. It was true that he could not think of any use to which to put the Common, but he felt deeply that it was pure dog-in-the-mangerism of the cottagers, and this he could not stand. Not one beast in two years had fattened on its barrenness. Three old donkeys alone eked out the remnants of their days. A bundle of firewood or old bracken, a few peat sods from one especial corner, were all the selfish peasants gathered. But the cottagers were no great matter—he could soon have settled them; it was that fellow Peacock whom he could not settle, just because he happened to abut on the Common, and his fathers had been nasty before him. Mr. Pendyce rode round looking at the fence his father had put up, until he came to the portion that Peacock's father had pulled down; and here, by a strange fatality—such as will happen even in printed records—he came on Peacock himself standing in the gap, as though he had foreseen this visit of the Squire's. The mare stopped of her own accord, the spaniel John at a measured distance lay down to think, and all those yards away he could be heard doing it, and now and then swallowing his tongue.

Peacock stood with his hands in his breeches' pockets. An old straw hat was on his head, his little eyes were turned towards the ground; and his cob, which he had tied to what his father had left standing of the fence, had his eyes, too, turned towards the ground, for he was eating grass. Mr. Pendyce's fight with his burning stable had stuck in the farmer's "gizzard" ever since. He felt that he was forgetting it day by day—would soon forget it altogether. He felt the old sacred doubts inherited

from his fathers rising every hour within him. And so he had come up to see what looking at the gap would do for his sense of gratitude. At sight of the Squire his little eyes turned here and there, as a pig's eyes turn when it receives a blow behind. That Mr. Pendyce should have chosen this moment to come up was as though Providence, that knoweth all things, knew the natural thing for Mr. Pendyce to do.

"Afternoon, Squire. Dry weather; rain's badly wanted. I'll get no feed if this goes on."

Mr. Pendyce answered:

"Afternoon, Peacock. Why, your fields are first-rate for grass."

They hastily turned their eyes away, for at that moment they could nct bear to see each other.

There was a silence; then Peacock said:

"What about those gates of mine, Squire?" and his voice quavered, as though gratitude might yet get the better of him.

The Squire's irritable glance swept over the unfenced space to right and left, and the thought flashed through his mind:

"Suppose I were to give the beggar those gates, would he—would he let me enclose the Scotton again?"

He looked at that square, bearded man, and the infallible instinct, christened so wickedly by Mr. Paramor, guided him.

"What's wrong with *your* gates, man, I should like to know?"

Peacock looked at him full this time; there was no longer any quaver in his voice, but a sort of rough good-humour.

"Wy, the 'arf o' them's as rotten as match-wood!" he

said; and he took a breath of relief, for he knew that gratitude was dead within his soul.

"Well, I wish mine at the home farm were half as good. Come, John!" and, touching the mare with his heel, Mr. Pendyce turned; but before he had gone a dozen paces he was back.

"Mrs. Peacock well, I hope? Mrs. Pendyce has gone up to London."

And touching his hat, without waiting for Peacock's answer, he rode away. He took the lane past Peacock's farm across the home paddocks, emerging on the cricket-ground, a field of his own which he had caused to be converted.

The return match with Coldingham was going on, and, motionless on his horse, the Squire stopped to watch. A tall figure in the "long field" came leisurely towards him. It was the Hon. Geoffrey Winlow. Mr. Pendyce subdued an impulse to turn the mare and ride away.

"We're going to give you a licking, Squire! How's Mrs. Pendyce? My wife sent her love."

On the Squire's face in the full sun was more than the sun's flush.

"Thanks," he said, "she's very well. She's gone up to London."

"And aren't you going up yourself this season?"

The Squire crossed those leisurely eyes with his own.

"I don't think so," he said slowly.

The Hon. Geoffrey returned to his duties.

"We got poor old Barter for a 'blob!'" he said over his shoulder

The Squire became aware that Mr. Barter was approaching from behind.

"You see that left-hand fellow?" he said, pouting.

"Just watch his foot. D'you mean to say that wasn't a no-ball? He bowled *me* with a no-ball. He's a rank no-baller. That fellow Locke's no more an umpire than——"

He stopped and looked earnestly at the bowler.

The Squire did not answer, sitting on his mare as though carved in stone. Suddenly his throat clicked.

"How's your wife?" he said. "Mrs. Pendyce would have come to see her, but—but she's gone up to London."

The Rector did not turn his head.

"My wife? Oh, going on first-rate. There's another! I say, Winlow, this is too bad!"

The Hon. Geoffrey's pleasant voice was heard:

"Please not to speak to the man at the wheel!"

The Squire turned the mare and rode away; and the spaniel John, who had been watching from a measured distance, followed after, his tongue lolling from his mouth.

The Squire turned through a gate down the main aisle of the home covert, and the nose and the tail of the spaniel John, who scented creatures to the left and right, were in perpetual motion. It was cool in there. The June foliage made one long colonnade, broken by a winding river of sky. Among the oaks and hazels, the beeches and the elms, the ghostly body of a birch-tree shone here and there, captured by those grosser trees which seemed to cluster round her, proud of their prisoner, loth to let her go, that subtle spirit of their wood. They knew that, were she gone, their forest lady, wilder and yet gentler than themselves—they would lose credit, lose the grace and essence of their corporate being.

The Squire dismounted, tethered his horse, and sat under one of those birch-trees, on the fallen body of an elm. The spaniel John also sat and loved him with his

eyes. And sitting there they thought their thoughts, but their thoughts were different.

For under this birch-tree Horace Pendyce had stood and kissed his wife the very day he brought her home to Worsted Skeynes, and though he did not see the parallel between her and the birch-tree that some poor imaginative creature might have drawn, yet was he thinking of that long past afternoon. But the spaniel John was not thinking of it; his recollection was too dim, for he had been at that time twenty-eight years short of being born.

Mr. Pendyce sat there long with his horse and with his dog, and from out the blackness of the spaniel John, who was more than less asleep, there shone at times an eye turned on his master like some devoted star. The sun, shining too, gilded the stem of the birch-tree. The birds and beasts began their evening stir all through the undergrowth, and rabbits, popping out into the ride, looked with surprise at the spaniel John, and popped in back again. They knew that men with horses had no guns, but could not bring themselves to trust that black and hairy thing whose nose so twitched whenever they appeared. The gnats came out to dance, and at their dancing, every sound and scent and shape became the sounds and scents and shapes of evening; and there was evening in the Squire's heart.

Slowly and stiffly he got up from the log and mounted to ride home. It would be just as lonely when he got there, but a house is better than a wood, where the gnats dance, the birds and creatures stir and stir, and shadows lengthen; where the sun steals upwards on the tree-stems, and all is careless of its owner, Man.

It was past seven o'clock when he went to his study.

There was a lady standing at the window, and Mr. Pendyce said:

"I beg your pardon?"

The lady turned; it was his wife. The Squire stopped with a hoarse sound, and stood silent, covering his eyes with his hand.

CHAPTER VIII.

ACUTE ATTACK OF—"PENDYCITIS."

MRS. PENDYCE felt very faint as she hurried away from Chelsea. She had passed through hours of great emotion, and eaten nothing.

Like sunset clouds or the colours in mother-o'-pearl, so, it is written, shall be the moods of men—interwoven as the threads of an embroidery, less certain than an April day, yet with a rhythm of their own that never fails, and no one can quite scan.

A single cup of tea on her way home, and her spirit revived. It seemed suddenly as if there had been a great ado about nothing! As if someone had known how stupid men could be, and been playing a fantasia on that stupidity. But this gaiety of spirit soon died away, confronted by the problem of what she should do next.

She reached her hotel without making a decision. She sat down in the reading-room to write to Gregory, and while she sat there with her pen in her hand a dreadful temptation came over her to say bitter things to him, because by not seeing people as they were he had brought all this upon them. But she had so little practice in saying bitter things that she could not think of any that were nice enough, and in the end she was obliged to

leave them out. After finishing and sending off the note she felt better. And it came to her suddenly that, if she packed at once, there was just time to catch the 5.55 to Worsted Skeynes.

As in leaving her home, so in returning, she followed her instinct, and her instinct told her to avoid unnecessary fuss and suffering.

The decrepit station fly, mouldy and smelling of stables, bore her almost lovingly towards the Hall. Its old driver, clean-faced, cheery, somewhat like a bird, drove her almost furiously, for, though he knew nothing, he felt that two whole days and half a day were quite long enough for her to be away. At the lodge gate old Roy, the Skye, was seated on his haunches, and the sight of him set Mrs. Pendyce trembling as though till then she had not realised that she was coming home.

Home! The long narrow lane without a turning, the mists and stillness, the driving rain and hot bright afternoons; the scents of wood smoke and hay and the scent of her flowers; the Squire's voice, the dry rattle of grass-cutters, the barking of dogs, and distant hum of threshing; and Sunday sounds—church bells and rooks, and Mr. Barter's preaching; the tastes, too, of the very dishes! And all these scents and sounds and tastes, and the feel of the air to her cheeks, seemed to have been for ever in the past, and to be going on for ever in the time to come.

She turned red and white by turns, and felt neither joy nor sadness, for in a wave the old life came over her. She went at once to the study to wait for her husband to ccme in. At the hoarse sound he made, her heart beat fast, while old Roy and the spaniel John growled gently at each other.

"John," she murmured, "aren't you glad to see me, dear?"

The spaniel John, without moving, beat his tail against his master's foot.

The Squire raised his head at last.

"Well, Margery?" was all he said.

It shot through her mind that he looked older, and very tired!

The dinner-gong began to sound, and as though attracted by its long monotonous beating, a swallow flew in at one of the narrow windows and fluttered round the room. Mrs. Pendyce's eyes followed its flight.

The Squire stepped forward suddenly and took her hand.

"Don't run away from me again, Margery!" he said; and stooping down, he kissed it.

At this action, so unlike her husband, Mrs. Pendyce blushed like a girl. Her eyes above his grey and close-cropped head seemed grateful that he did not reproach her, glad of that caress.

"I have some news to tell you, Horace. Helen Bellew has given George up!"

The Squire dropped her hand.

"And quite time too," he said. "I daresay George has refused to take his dismissal. He's as obstinate as a mule."

"I found him in a dreadful state."

Mr. Pendyce asked uneasily:

"What? What's that?"

"He looked so desperate."

"Desperate?" said the Squire, with a sort of startled anger.

Mrs. Pendyce went on:

"It was dreadful to see his face. I was with him this afternoon——"

The Squire said suddenly:

"He's not ill, is he?"

"No, not ill. Oh, Horace, don't you understand? I was afraid he might do something rash. He was so—miserable."

The Squire began to walk up and down.

"Is he—is he safe now?" he burst out.

Mrs. Pendyce sat down rather suddenly in the nearest chair.

"Yes," she said with difficulty, "I—I think so."

"Think! What's the good of that? What—— Are you feeling faint, Margery?"

Mrs. Pendyce, who had closed her eyes, said:

"No, dear, it's all right."

Mr. Pendyce came close, and since air and quiet were essential to her at that moment, he bent over and tried by every means in his power to rouse her; and she, who longed to be let alone, sympathised with him, for she knew that it was natural that he should do this. In spite of his efforts the feeling of faintness passed, and, taking his hand, she stroked it gratefully.

"What is to be done now, Horace?"

"Done!" cried the Squire. "Good God! how should I know? Here you are in this state, all because of that d——d fellow Bellew and his d——d wife! What you want is some dinner."

So saying, he put his arm around her, and half leading, half carrying, took her to her room.

They did not talk much at dinner, and of indifferent

things, of Mrs. Barter, Peacock, the roses, and Beldame's hock. Only once they came too near to that which instinct told them to avoid, for the Squire said suddenly:

"I suppose you saw that woman?"

And Mrs. Pendyce murmured:

"Yes."

She soon went to her room, and had barely got into bed when he appeared, saying as though ashamed:

"I'm very early."

She lay awake, and every now and then the Squire would ask her, "Are you asleep, Margery?" hoping that she might have dropped off, for he himself could not sleep. And she knew that he meant to be nice to her, and she knew, too, that as he lay awake, turning from side to side, he was thinking like herself: "What's to be done next?" And that his fancy, too, was haunted by a ghost, high-shouldered, with little burning eyes, red hair, and white freckled face. For, save that George was miserable, nothing was altered, and the cloud of vengeance still hung over Worsted Skeynes. Like some weary lesson she rehearsed her thoughts: "Now Horace can answer that letter of Captain Bellew's, can tell him that George will not—indeed, cannot—see her again. He *must* answer it. But will he?"

She groped after the secret springs of her husband's character, turning and turning and trying to understand, that she might know the best way of approaching him. And she could not feel sure, for behind all the little outside points of his nature, that she thought so "funny," yet could comprehend, there was something that seemed to her as unknown, as impenetrable as the dark, a sort of thickness of soul, a sort of hardness, a sort of barbaric

—what? And as when in working at her embroidery the point of her needle would often come to a stop against stiff buckram, so now was the point of her soul brought to a stop against the soul of her husband. "Perhaps," she thought, "Horace feels like that with me." She need not so have thought, for the Squire never worked embroideries, nor did the needle of his soul make voyages of discovery.

By lunch-time the next day she had not dared to say a word. "If I say nothing," she thought, "he may write it of his own accord."

Without attracting his attention, therefore, she watched every movement of his morning. She saw him sitting at his bureau with a creased and crumpled letter, and knew it was Bellew's; and she hovered about, coming softly in and out, doing little things here and there and in the hall, outside. But the Squire gave no sign, motionless as the spaniel John couched along the ground with his nose between his paws.

After lunch she could bear it no longer.

"What do you think ought to be done now, Horace?"

The Squire looked at her fixedly.

"If you imagine," he said at last, "that I'll have anything to do with that fellow Bellew, you're very much mistaken."

Mrs. Pendyce was arranging a vase of flowers, and her hand shook so that some of the water was spilled over the cloth. She took out her handkerchief and dabbed it up.

"You never answered his letter, dear," she said.

The Squire put his back against the sideboard; his stiff figure, with lean neck and angry eyes, whose pupils were mere pin-points, had a certain dignity.

"Nothing shall induce me!" he said, and his voice was harsh and strong, as though he spoke for something bigger than himself. "I've thought it over all the morning, and I'm d——d if I do! The man is a ruffian. I won't knuckle under to him!"

Mrs. Pendyce clasped her hands.

"Oh, Horace," she said; "but for the sake of us all! Only just give him that assurance."

"And let him crow over me!" cried the Squire. "By Jove, no!"

"But, Horace, I thought that was what you wanted George to do. You wrote to him and asked him to promise."

The Squire answered:

"You know nothing about it, Margery; you know nothing about me. D'you think I'm going to tell him that his wife has thrown my son over—let him keep me gasping like a fish all this time, and then get the best of it in the end? Not if I have to leave the county—not if I——"

But, as though he had imagined the most bitter fate of all, he stopped.

Mrs. Pendyce, putting her hands on the lapels of his coat, stood with her head bent. The colour had flushed into her cheeks, her eyes were bright with tears. And there came from her in her emotion a warmth and fragrance, a charm, as though she were again young, like the portrait under which they stood.

"Not if *I* ask you, Horace?"

The Squire's face was suffused with dusky colour; he clenched his hands and seemed to sway and hesitate.

"No, Margery," he said hoarsely; "it's—it's—I can't!"

And, breaking away from her, he left the room.

Mrs. Pendyce looked after him; her fingers, from which he had torn his coat, began twining the one with the other.

CHAPTER IX.

BELLEW BOWS TO A LADY.

THERE was silence at the Firs, and in that silent house, where only five rooms were used, an old manservant sat in his pantry on a wooden chair, reading from an article out of *Rural Life*. There was no one to disturb him, for the master was asleep, and the housekeeper had not yet come to cook the dinner. He read slowly, through spectacles, engraving the words for ever on the tablets of his mind. He read about the construction and habits of the owl: "In the tawny, or brown, owl there is a manubrial process; the furcula, far from being joined to the keel of the sternum, consists of two stylets, which do not even meet; while the posterior margin of the sternum presents two pairs of projections, with corresponding fissures between." The old manservant paused, resting his blinking eyes on the pale sunlight through the bars of his narrow window, so that a little bird on the window-sill looked at him and instantly flew away.

The old manservant read on again: "The pterylological characters of Photodilus seem not to have been investigated, but it has been found to want the tarsal loop, as well as the manubrial process, while its clavicles are not joined in a furcula, nor do they meet the keel, and the posterior margin of the sternum has processes and

fissures like the tawny section." Again he paused, and his gaze was satisfied and bland.

Up in the little smoking-room in a leather chair his master sat asleep. In front of him were stretched his legs in dusty riding-boots. His lips were closed, but through a little hole at one corner came a tiny puffing sound. On the floor by his side was an empty glass, between his feet a Spanish bulldog. On a shelf above his head reposed some frayed and yellow novels with sporting titles, written by persons in their inattentive moments. Over the chimney-piece presided the portrait of Mr. Jorrocks persuading his horse to cross a stream.

And the face of Jaspar Bellew asleep was the face of a man who has ridden far, to get away from himself, and to-morrow will have to ride far again. His sandy eyebrows twitched with his dreams against the dead-white, freckled skin above high cheekbones, and two hard ridges were fixed between his brows; now and then over the sleeping face came the look of one riding at a gate.

In the stables behind the house she who had carried him on his ride, having rummaged out her last grains of corn, lifted her nose and poked it through the bars of her loose-box to see what he was doing who had not carried her master that sweltering afternoon, and seeing that he was awake, she snorted lightly, to tell him there was thunder in the air. All else in the stables was deadly quiet; the shrubberies around were still; and in the hushed house the master slept.

But on the edge of his wooden chair in the silence of his pantry the old manservant read, "This bird is a voracious feeder," and he paused, blinking his eyes

and nervously puckering his lips, for he had partially understood. . . .

Mrs. Pendyce was crossing the fields. She had on her prettiest frock, of smoky-grey *crêpe*, and she looked a little anxiously at the sky. Gathered in the west a coming storm was chasing the whitened sunlight. Against its purple the trees stood blackish-green. Everything was very still, not even the poplars stirred, yet the purple grew with sinister, unmoving speed. Mrs. Pendyce hurried, grasping her skirts in both her hands, and she noticed that the cattle were all grouped under the hedge.

"What dreadful-looking clouds!" she thought. "I wonder if I shall get to the Firs before it comes?" But though her frock made her hasten, her heart made her stand still, it fluttered so, and was so full. Suppose he were not sober! She remembered those little burning eyes, that had frightened her so the night he dined at Worsted Skeynes and fell out of his dogcart afterwards. A kind of legendary malevolence clung about his image.

"Suppose he is horrid to me!" she thought.

She could not go back now; but she wished—how she wished!—that it were over. A heat-drop splashed her glove. She crossed the lane and opened the Firs gate. Throwing frightened glances at the sky, she hastened down the drive. The purple was couched like a pall on the tree-tops, and these had begun to sway and moan as though struggling and weeping at their fate. Some splashes of warm rain were falling. A streak of lightning tore the firmament. Mrs. Pendyce rushed into the porch covering her ears with her hands.

"How long will it last?" she thought. "I'm so frightened!" . . .

A very old manservant, whose face was all puckers, opened the door suddenly to peer out at the storm, but seeing Mrs. Pendyce, he peered at her instead.

"Is Captain Bellew at home?"

"Yes, ma'am. The Captain's in the study. We don't use the drawing-room now. Nasty storm coming on, ma'am—nasty storm. Will you please to sit down a minute, while I let the Captain know?"

The hall was low und dark; the whole house was low and dark, and smelled a little of wood-rot. Mrs. Pendyce did not sit down, but stood under an arrangement of three foxes' heads, supporting two hunting-crops, with their lashes hanging down. And the heads of those animals suggested to her the thought: "Poor man! He must be very lonely here."

She started. Something was rubbing against her knees: it was only an enormous bulldog. She stooped down to pat it, and having once begun, found it impossible to leave off, for when she took her hand away the creature pressed against her, and she was afraid for her frock.

"Poor old boy—poor old boy!" she kept on murmuring. "Did he want a little attention?"

A voice behind her said:

"Get out, Sam! Sorry to have kept you waiting. Won't you come in here?"

Mrs. Pendyce, blushing and turning pale by turns, passed into a low, small, panelled room, smelling of cigars and spirits. Through the window, which was cut up into little panes, she could see the rain driving past, the shrubs bent and dripping from the downpour.

"Won't you sit down?"

Mrs. Pendyce sat down. She had clasped her hands

together; she now raised her eyes and looked timidly at her host.

She saw a thin, high-shouldered figure, with bowed legs a little apart, rumpled sandy hair, a pale, freckled face, and little dark blinking eyes.

"Sorry the room's in such a mess. Don't often have the pleasure of seeing a lady. I was asleep; generally am at this time of year!"

The bristly red moustache was contorted as though his lips were smiling.

Mrs. Pendyce murmured vaguely.

It seemed to her that nothing of this was real, but all some horrid dream. A clap of thunder made her cover her ears.

Bellew walked to the window, glanced at the sky, and came back to the hearth. His little burning eyes seemed to look her through and through. "If I don't speak at once," she thought, "I never shall speak at all."

"I've come," she began, and with those words she lost her fright; her voice, that had been so uncertain hitherto, regained its trick of speech; her eyes, all pupil, stared dark and gentle at this man who had them all in his power—"I've come to tell you something, Captain Bellew!"

The figure by the hearth bowed, and her fright, like some evil bird, came fluttering down on her again. It was dreadful, it was barbarous that she, that anyone, should have to speak of such things; it was barbarous that men and women should so misunderstand each other, and have so little sympathy and consideration; it was barbarous that she, Margery Pendyce, should have to talk on this subject that must give them both such pain.

It was all so mean and gross and common! She took out her handkerchief and passed it over her lips.

"Please forgive me for speaking. Your wife has given my son up, Captain Bellew!"

Bellew did not move.

"She does not love him; she told me so herself! He will never see her again!"

How hateful, how horrible, how odious!

And still Bellew did not speak, but stood devouring her with his little eyes; and how long this went on she could not tell.

He turned his back suddenly, and leaned against the mantelpiece.

Mrs. Pendyce passed her hand over her brow to get rid of a feeling of unreality.

"That is all," she said.

Her voice sounded to herself unlike her own.

"If that is really all," she thought, "I suppose I must get up and go!" And it flashed through her mind: "My poor dress will be ruined!"

Bellew turned round.

"Will you have some tea?"

Mrs. Pendyce smiled a pale little smile.

"No, thank you; I don't think I could drink any tea."

"I wrote a letter to your husband."

"Yes."

"He didn't answer it."

"No."

Mrs. Pendyce saw him staring at her, and a desperate struggle began within her. Should she not ask him to keep his promise, now that George——? Was not that what she had come for? Ought she not—ought she not for all their sakes?

Bellew went up to the table, poured out some whisky, and drank it off.

"You don't ask me to stop the proceedings," he said.

Mrs. Pendyce's lips were parted, but nothing came through those parted lips. Her eyes, black as sloes in her white face, never moved from his; she made no sound.

Bellew dashed his hand across his brow.

"Well, I will!" he said, "for your sake. There's my hand on it. You're the only lady I know!"

He gripped her gloved fingers, brushed past her, and she saw that she was alone.

She found her own way out, with the tears running down her face. Very gently she shut the hall door.

"My poor dress!" she thought. "I wonder if I might stand here a little? The rain looks nearly over!"

The purple cloud had passed, and sunk behind the house, and a bright white sky was pouring down a sparkling rain; a patch of deep blue showed behind the fir-trees in the drive. The thrushes were out already after worms. A squirrel scampering along a branch stopped and looked at Mrs. Pendyce, and Mrs. Pendyce looked absently at the squirrel from behind the little handkerchief with which she was drying her eyes.

"That poor man!" she thought—"poor solitary creature! There's the sun!"

And it seemed to her that it was the first time the sun had shone all this fine hot year. Gathering her dress in both hands, she stepped into the drive, and soon was back again in the fields.

Every green thing glittered, and the air was so rain-sweet that all the summer scents were gone, before the

crystal scent of nothing. Mrs. Pendyce's shoes were soon wet through.

"How happy I am!" she thought—"how glad and happy I am!"

And the feeling, which was not as definite as this, possessed her to the exclusion of all other feelings in the rain-soaked fields.

The cloud that had hung over Worsted Skeynes so long had spent itself and gone. Every sound seemed to be music, every moving thing danced. She longed to get to her early roses, and see how the rain had treated them. She had a stile to cross, and when she was safely over she paused a minute to gather her skirts more firmly. It was a home-field she was in now, and right before her lay the country house. Long and low and white it stood in the glamorous evening haze, with two bright panes, where the sunlight fell, watching, like eyes, the confines of its acres; and behind it, to the left, broad, square, and grey among its elms, the village church. Around, above, beyond, was peace—the sleepy, misty peace of the English afternoon.

Mrs. Pendyce walked towards her garden. When she was near it, away to the right, she saw the Squire and Mr. Barter. They were standing together looking at a tree, and—symbol of a subservient under-world—the spaniel John was seated on his tail, and he, too, was looking at the tree. The faces of the Rector and Mr. Pendyce were turned up at the same angle, and different as those faces and figures were in their eternal rivalry of type, a sort of essential likeness struck her with a feeling of surprise. It was as though a single spirit seeking for a body had met with these two shapes, and becoming confused, decided to inhabit both.

Mrs. Pendyce did not wave to them, but passed quickly, between the yew-trees, through the wicket-gate.

In her garden bright drops were falling one by one from every rose-leaf, and in the petals of each rose were jewels of water. A little down the path a weed caught her eye; she looked closer, and saw that there were several.

"Oh," she thought, "how dreadfully they've let the weeds—— I must really speak to Jackman!"

A rose-tree, that she herself had planted, rustled close by, letting fall a shower of drops.

Mrs. Pendyce bent down, and took a white rose in her fingers. With her smiling lips she kissed its face.

THE END.

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