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BY JANET WHITNEY

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THE QUAKER BRIDE



*The Quaker Bride*



# *The Quaker Bride*

by

JANET WHITNEY



*An Atlantic Monthly Press Book*  
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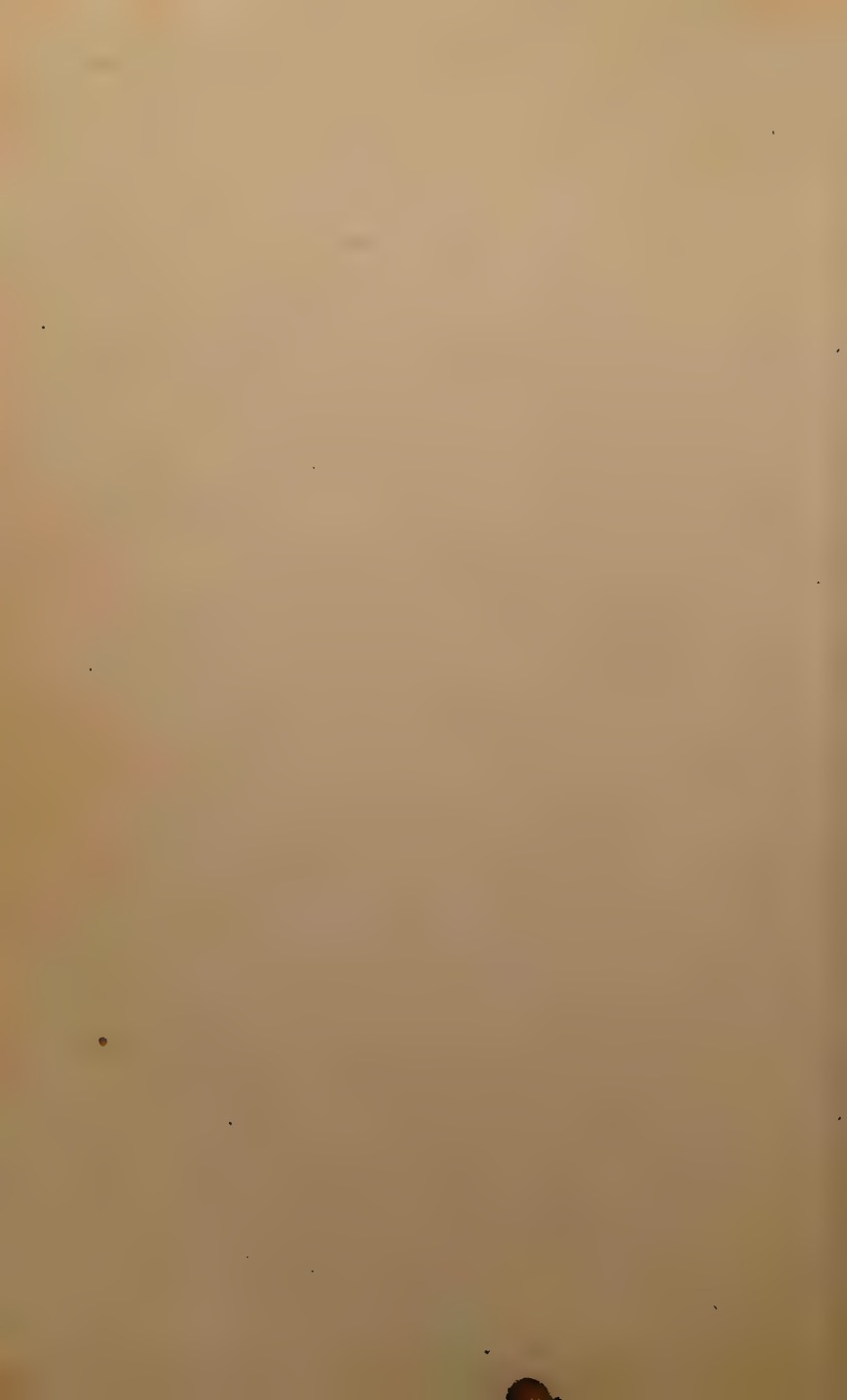
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*To my dear friend*  
Laura Benét,  
*who has a magic gift*



*The Quaker Bride*





*Newport, Rhode Island, April 1856*

NO ONE took any notice of me, nor did I expect them to. I helped the overdriven maids arrange the dishes of refreshments on the long table against the wall, which was to act as a buffet, and then being tired I sat down for a while to watch the dancing. They were dancing quadrilles and it was a pretty sight. There was only room for two sets and even that had meant a great rearranging and pushing back of furniture, but the dancers now had plenty of space for the odd mingling of dignity and romp which makes the fascination of the cotillion. The roaring fire and the lively movement made the room warm. Someone had opened a window a few inches at the top and a breeze was blowing in, fortunately near me, laden with a salt scent of the sea.

My sister-in-law was getting too plump and had laced herself too tight. She was in the set nearest me and when she passed in the ladies' chain, and more particularly in the great wheel, I heard her panting, and saw beads of sweat glistening on her forehead and spoiling her powder. She glanced angrily at me once or twice and tossed with her head that I should go away, but I saw no reason to take any

notice of that. I had a perfect right to be at my stepbrother's party, if I chose, so long as I was not neglecting any duties. And I was *not*.

I had been up before breakfast helping make the meringues. I had spent the whole morning at my governess work with the children. Later, I had given them their lunch, taken them for their walk, put them all to bed. And then helped with the final preparations for the party. My hand was always greatly needed with the flower decorations. Now it was after ten o'clock at night, and if I wished to sit a while in the ballroom no one could rightly blame me.

My stepbrother's eldest girl, Minnie, was just beginning to go to grown-up parties. She was jigging along now in the same set with her mother. I had helped lace her up. She was so thin that it was really foolish to do her up so tight, but they insisted. Now I feared the poor girl might faint — she was very given to it. It was supposed to be a charming, feminine trait. (And Minnie had the frail prettiness of early youth, as well as the *gaucherie* that sometimes goes with sixteen.) Minnie's dress was pink, and as the dance broke up and her partner brought her toward the table, the first to claim refreshment, the candles on the table caught the gleam of her dress and reflected it in a strange way in his face. It was as if a pale flame flickered over it, giving a sneering twist to his polite smile, and making his deep-set eyes into dark hollows with tiny points of light.

My sister-in-law came up to me, fanning herself, and stood with her back to me to speak to me over her shoulder behind her fan.

"Why cannot you begone, Rose?"

"Where is the harm in my watching, Emily?"

"It will be noticeable. You look like a servant in that Quaker cap. People will wonder to see a servant sitting down at her ease!"

It was true — I had no dresses except those my nurse Patsy had made for me, adapted from my mother's wardrobe; beautiful materials but Quaker in color and cut, finished off as my father liked to see them with the white fichu and cap of starched gauze. There were many like them at home in Philadelphia. It was only here at fashionable Newport that they were strange.

There was no use in making a fuss.

"Very well, if it annoys you," I said. "When the servants have finished coming in with the sherry and punch, I will slip out by the kitchen door."

I could see that Emily intended to stand in front of me, blocking me from a sight of the room with her wide crinoline skirts, but my stepbrother came up to her bringing a distinguished visitor to be presented, and she moved away on the newcomer's arm perforce.

Thomas was never directly unkind to me.

"You have found a nice quiet corner," he said to me hastily. "I hope you're enjoying yourself watching!"

I did not say that Emily was hurrying me off. Why make one more little cause of friction between an already ill-adjusted husband and wife? I only made a little face at him. He looked disconcerted, and hurried away.

But my sister-in-law's talking to me behind her fan had attracted the attention of Minnie and her partner, who were standing at the table nearby, helping themselves. I heard the man say to Minnie:

"Who's that?"

And I heard Minnie answer, offhand:

"Oh, she's our governess. A sort of distant relation."

They moved away from the table and I watched Minnie being steered skillfully among the billowing skirts to a seat in a row of young ladies at the far side of the room. He bowed and left her. My attention was attracted to the servants, just to make sure that the towering, light piles of meringues did not fly off the plates. But I was disinclined to move, and there was enough going and coming from the kitchen to justify me in keeping still. Now that the music had stopped and there was no dancing going on, a light chattering sound filled the room, with fans going to and fro, and I began to feel almost drowsy. There was nothing in particular to watch. I came to with a start, hearing my brother's voice again and seeing him before me with Minnie's recent partner.

"Rose, I want to present to you Mr. Luke Ashton. Mr. Ashton, you wished to be presented to my half sister, Miss

Rose Cartwright. You will realize that my sister is still in mourning for her father and is not officially joining in our festivities tonight."

Mr. Ashton sat down beside me before I could rise.

"Don't let me disturb you," he said. "Let me just sit by you for a few moments. If what you are wearing is mourning, I can only say that I wish everyone would adopt the fashion!"

I had been astonished at my brother's explanation of my wallflower position and lost no time in stating clearly that I was not wearing mourning, my father had been dead a full year, and Quakers did not *wear* mourning anyway.

"Go on talking," he said. "It doesn't matter what you say! Say that the room is warm — the ladies overdressed. Say that it would be nice to go out in a boat. Say anything, but let the pleasant sound of your voice go on, and let me watch your glorious, your incredible beauty! Forgive me for talking like this to you on so short an acquaintance, but to come upon a creature like you in a place like this is like wandering through a desert and suddenly coming on an oasis of water. Clear, sparkling, wonderful water. You must often have been told how extravagantly, how unnecessarily beautiful you are! And then a voice to match! It's too much! In India, from where I've just come, the gorgeous flowers have no scent, the dazzling birds have a harsh, raucous cry. Meeting you is like coming on a tropical flower with the

sweet scent of an English violet. Or like meeting a bird of paradise that can sing like a nightingale! . . . I see you glance at me suspiciously under those lovely eyelashes. You suspect that I have been too early to the wine cup. Well, I assure you, I am merely a traveler freshly returned from a tropical country, where perhaps our speech gets something exotic from the tropical atmosphere. In India the spectacle is always before our eyes, of life blooming at sunrise, dying at sunset. The richness and the shortness of life is a lesson impressed upon us at every turn. So we learn to pluck the flower of the moment quickly that we may enjoy it before dark."

"Oh, you are the great Mr. Ashton — the Indian nabob!" said I, trying not to be confused by his flattery. "All Newport is talking about you as, of course, you know. My sister-in-law was so full of your story that she actually came up and interrupted lessons three days ago to tell of some of your romantic doings. An Indian princess, a pet monkey, and a little Hindu page seemed to figure vaguely! And when I took Minnie for a walk yesterday, she had heard some more of your adventures and was pouring them forth to me. I didn't know that you were expected to come to our party. But I'm sure, sir, that you ought not to waste any more time talking to me. There are so many important people here to claim your attention."

"And of what does their importance consist?" said Mr. Ashton. "Don't you know even yet — though I think you

must have lived full seventeen or eighteen summers — don't you know that wherever you appear *you* at once become the most important person present?"

"I?"

"You, Rose Cartwright! You have what everyone desires and few possess. You have what can't be bought by money, and can't be taken away by lack of it. All the diamonds of India can't buy what you have received as a free gift from heaven. You have the irresistible talisman of *beauty*."

I did not know how to take such talk. It seemed to me that he said too much, too soon. But his manner was so princely, his appearance so ugly-handsome (black hair silvered at the temples, dark, tanned face, with two deep creases from the sides of the nose to the sides of the mouth) he had such polish, such capacity, such knowledge of the world, that I felt my ignorance was unable to judge. I felt the color come up in my face, while I sought for some kind of reply.

"Is the language of compliment so new to you?" said he, going on in a lower tone. "That in itself tells me a whole history. I need not ask the questions which my short acquaintance doesn't give me any right to ask. I can guess! Have you not been, for some time past, suppressed and belittled and shut away and kept down, here in your brother's house? How did it happen?" He broke off. "Several people are watching us, that is the worst of notoriety. Could you not guide me to another place where

we could talk for just a few minutes longer? Somewhere where we could get a breath of fresh air! After the heavy, odorous heat of India I can't get enough of our northern breezes."

I was not sure what etiquette demanded, but I saw my sister-in-law approaching. I got up and did what I said I'd do — slipped out by the kitchen door. I hardly expected the great nabob to follow me, but he did so very adroitly. There we were in the hot kitchen, among the hurrying servants. I walked through the kitchen and out at the back door. A wide veranda went all around the house. At this hour the back veranda was deserted. I veered to the left, away from the kitchen quarters, and presently turning the corner of the piazza, stood by the railing overlooking the wide lawn that sloped down to the sand. There was the great, calm sea, lapping, lapping, lapping at the shore, folding, turning, whispering; and a round full moon, sailing alone in the sky, made a path of silver across the waves. It was as if a shining carpet were spread almost to our feet, tempting us to go treading along it to some unknown fairy country. The gentleman gave one sigh of pleasure, and stood beside me, gazing, and sharing my silence.

"To watch a moonlit sea in sweet, fresh air, with a beautiful young woman at one's side, is one of the rarest and most poetic treasures known to mankind," said he at last. "But now to go on where we left off. What do you do in this house beside ornament it?"



"I ornament it very little, if at all. I am sûre no one here thinks I do."

"Especially your Cousin Minnie?"

"Well, perhaps."

"Then what do you do?"

"I make myself useful."

"Don't think me rude if I ask how and why. Particularly why."

"I am an orphan and penniless. My stepbrother kindly took me in when my father — who was his stepfather — died in ruin a year ago. . . . There was not only no money, there were debts. The overseers of the Meeting in Philadelphia were very much shocked, because my father, who was such an able businessman, had done what they called 'over-extended.' Speculation, you know. Quakers don't allow speculation — if it's unsuccessful. So they disowned us. You know what that means?"

"Yes, I think so. Threw you out. A bit rough, was it not? A bit hasty?"

"Oh, no," said I, startled at such words. "Friends are never hasty — never rough. It was done after great deliberation, and with the gentlest care. I was allowed to be present with my father when the committee came to give him their decision. And one of the committee, a wise and reverend Friend in the meeting, like a grandfather to us all, wept when he delivered the verdict. But he, at the time (and my father after agreed with him), explained to me that business

integrity was so important to Quakers — their reputation in the world so depended on it — that the slightest suspicion of gambling for gain, with other people's money, could not be let go. So many firms were being ruined at that time by unwise speculation, and the Quakers were keeping themselves clear of it in the main. The credit of one was the credit of all. My father accepted the verdict as just. We continued to go to Meeting. Had he lived he would have applied for membership again when he had re-established his business. But his death came of a sudden heart attack before he had been able to set things on their feet. My mother had died when I was just a little girl. She was my father's second wife, a young widow with one son, Thomas, a lad of twelve. When my father died Thomas was in business in Boston, successfully established by my father's earlier help. He sent for me. And I have been earning my keep ever since. They are very kind to me," I added hastily.

"And where are all the young men?" said Mr. Ashton.

"The young men?"

"Yes, the young men. Had you not droves of suitors in Philadelphia? Or are Quaker young men made of different stuff than the young men of the world? — Ah, that brought the tears out! Forgive me. You are nursing a broken heart?"

It was a luxury to let the tears fall quietly, there in the moonlight, with this sympathetic, sheltering presence, so courteous, so respectful and so sympathetic. His silence eased me. Then he spoke again.

"Will you allow me to ask — was your engagement broken off because of your father's ruin or disaster?"

"Yes."

I could not say more. Old bitterness and humiliation rose up. I felt Mr. Ashton suddenly take my hand in the darkness. He held it gently for a moment and let go of it at once.

"I am grateful for this small confidence that you have given me," he said. "I will leave you now and return to the party. That cap on your hair in this moonlight looks like a lovely piece of frozen mist. You might be the moon goddess, Diana herself, come down here to condescend to mortals. I shall meet you again soon. I shall ask your brother's permission to call upon you."

His movements were so definite, so finished, that I hardly knew what had happened till after he had left me. He had kissed my hand!

No one had done that to me even in the old days. Indeed, in the old days it would have seemed affected. Quakers don't use such manners. But Mr. Ashton had done it with such a beautiful simplicity and naturalness that it thrilled me. And that he, the most important person at the party, the most talked of man in Newport, possessed of a princely fortune, and a little Hindu page, should seek out the poverty-stricken orphan and give her the treatment of a queen, showed him in a very pleasing light. I stole up to the bed I shared with my ten-year-old cousin and pupil, Camilla, but tired as I was I could not sleep for a long time. My heart was in a torrent

of aroused feelings, good and bad. The old agony of injury and loss and self-pity, that was bad. Vanity — that was bad. Often my father in my motherless childhood had taken my chin in his kind hand and looked at me with his grave eyes under the shaggy eyebrows, and said:

“Beware of vanity, my pet!”

And my nurse, at his command, had tied the child’s tight Quaker bonnet over my shining hair and put upon my person particularly sad-colored Quaker clothes, in order to diminish the temptation to that sin. My sister-in-law had taken up the good work, insisting on my wearing black for my governess duties both indoors and out — particularly out, where a close, black bonnet was tied over my hair, and a black mantle suitable for a much older woman wrapped me up in a shapeless bundle. I had tried not to mind, and now I minded it again. Mr. Ashton had made me feel that in many ways my sister was unkind. And he had made me feel that Minnie was jealous of me. Another thing I had tried not to think about. But, above all, he had opened up the fountains of my grief for the days long gone, and the insulting love that had valued me at my money’s worth and no more.

The next morning, when the fashionable calling hour of eleven o’clock arrived, Mr. Luke Ashton drove up in his curricula, the Hindu page on the step at the back, to pay his after-party call. I saw him arrive from the nursery window, summoned by the excited shrieks of Brian and Camilla,

while I was tying the baby's shoes. My sister and my Cousin Minnie received him, where they sat on the wide back piazza with other visitors, overlooking the sea. But Mr. Ashton almost immediately, in his stately way, asked for me. I was told of it afterward by our good butler, Caesar. Emily was flustered, got red, but could think of nothing else to do but send for me. I was at that moment preparing to take the three younger children for their walk, as well she knew. When the message came summoning me, I did not at first understand it; and supposing my sister-in-law had some urgent errand for me, I went down to the piazza as I was, with my bonnet on and all. There were perhaps a dozen people present, elegantly dressed, the women crinolined and gay with tiny parasols like flowers. A crisp wind was taking the whitecaps off the waves, but the sheltered porch was comfortable to sit in. The sun streamed into the front portion.

I was going straight up to Emily in my black outfit to see what she had sent for me for. But I was intercepted by Mr. Ashton. He came to meet me, bowed, took my hand, kissed it in front of all those people.

"I am indeed grateful to you, Miss Cartwright," he said, "for allowing me this privilege! I am afraid you were about to go off on some errand of your own, and I am delaying you. But I have not forgotten the kind way in which you talked to a stranger at the party last night, and I must include you in the thanks which I offer to my hostess."

"Sit down with us, Rose," said my sister stiffly. "There is no hurry, I think, about taking the children for their walk."

She introduced me in a general way to the others, with a rather awkward gesture.

"I think most of you know my husband's stepsister, Miss Cartwright."

I glanced shyly round the circle and made a slight bow. I hardly knew the names of anyone present, but I recognized the faces of some as people whom I had seen coming and going. Mr. Ashton placed a chair for me and sat down beside me. The group around Emily resumed its chatter, but Mr. Ashton had so placed my chair that he and I could have a quiet conversation, not separated from the group but not part of it. He began at once in his easy bold way. I could not help calling it, above all, a *competent* way.

"Won't you take off your bonnet?" he said. "This air is delicious. You ought to feel it playing in your hair. Besides, I can't be sure that you hear me. Those large blinkers prevent me from seeing whether you do or not!"

I did not see any harm in obliging him, and I took off my bonnet. Everybody stopped talking for a half a second.

"Even these female Philistines gasp a little at your beauty," said Mr. Ashton, very softly. "It's like the sun coming out!"

I could not help smiling and blushing. But I was more ready for him today. I had thought of a technique.

"Tell me about India, sir," said I. "Is it true that it's so hot there and yet the people all wear thick turbans like your little page? I should think it would be like wearing a cushion on the head!"

The subject was one on which Mr. Ashton could be very entertaining. He willingly plunged into descriptions and anecdotes. I listened, fascinated. Suddenly I happened to lift my eyes and catch the eye of my Cousin Minnie. Her face was unconsciously twisted into almost a grimace of jealousy and spite. It quite startled me, and I rose to my feet.

"It's been delightful to listen to you, Mr. Ashton. I must get back to my duties now. I am really a governess here, you know. My little pupils are waiting for me to take them for their walk."

"Yes, Rose, I expect you had better be taking them," said my sister, almost gratefully.

I made a little general bow again to the company, in case any should be glancing my way, and turned to leave the piazza. I found Mr. Ashton was beside me. He opened the door for me into the house and when I passed in, to my astonishment, he followed me.

"May I make the very bold request, Miss Cartwright, to accompany you a little way on your walk?" he said. "I'm very fond of children, and I would like to go on

telling you more about India. So few people take a really intelligent interest in another country. Are you interested in jewels? Sometime you must let me show you my collection. I always think they are like bits of light made solid — colored light! . . . There were some remarkable and terrible disturbances beginning in India when I left, and I had difficulty getting my jewels out of the country. In fact, I brought them through a very dangerous area in the stomach of my little page!”

I turned, startled, to look at the page, who was standing at the horse's head. The horse was hitched, however. At the merest gesture from his master the page moved to heel, like a faithful dog. I saw then that he was not a boy, as I had supposed, but a midget. His sullen expressionless face was wrinkled and mature.

“Don't touch him!” said Mr. Ashton, as the inquisitive children crowded around him. “He might bite! He is deaf and dumb. That is, he has no tongue, and his eardrums have been broken by blows. I purchased him from cruel masters. He knows no English and only a few words of Hindustani. But he loves and serves me like an intelligent little animal. He is miserable out of my sight. He snarls at others. Well, shall we go?”

So Mr. Ashton accompanied me and my three little charges on our walk along the shore, and kept the children entertained and happy with stories of elephants and tigers and monkeys, which I confess bewitched me also.



Ahmed followed along behind, like a spaniel, or a shadow.

Every day after that Mr. Ashton (with his Hindu page) punctually appeared at the house at eleven o'clock, was ushered into my sister's presence, and after paying his respects in proper form, asked for me.

"I have come to accompany Miss Rose Cartwright and your delightful children on their walk," was what he said.

Emily hardly knew how to take it.

"I thought you said that man was coming here with an eye to Minnie."

My sister's voice carried through from their bedroom, with the windows open and the breeze blowing in at my window.

"*You* certainly gave me to understand so," said Thomas's voice, a little vexed and uneasy.

"He paid Minnie a lot of attention that first night, when they met at the Governor's At Home," said Emily.

"Yes, everyone noticed it. Minnie was certainly looking quite pretty that first night. It was a pity she fainted before they left. It was the fermented cider I think. Why do you lace her so tight?"

"It's rather touching when a girl faints," said Emily.

"A girl in a faint is *no* charming sight," said Thomas.

"It couldn't have been that, anyhow," said Emily, "because he came to our party within three days. And he's very hard to get. Lots of hostesses haven't been able to

get him to their houses at all! Very wary, they say. He's afraid of the matchmaking mothers of Newport. A widower with all his wealth. But he himself singled out Minnie — made her the talk of the place for a week. Can't you bring him to the point? Can't you, for instance, double Minnie's dowry?"

"If the man's half as rich as report says, he's not after a dowry. He can afford to pick a penniless wife if he wants to," said Thomas. "Some men enjoy playing King Cophe-tua, if they can find a beautiful enough beggar maid. And Rose is prettier this year than last. Speaking honestly, there's not another girl in Newport who could hold a candle to her, if she were dressed to kill!"

"You're an unnatural father," said Emily, in tears. "That's the way you stick up for your own daughter. That's all you can do for her with all your money. There's Minnie as nice a girl as anyone could find. Delicate, sweet, frail, just what a man wants. And you —"

"How do *you* know what a man wants?" said Thomas, brutally.

I got up and closed my window in a hurry.

It was a strange sensation after all this time in the shade, treated little better than an upper servant, to know that I was the talk of Newport. There were moments when I shrank from Mr. Ashton — like that one when he told me that the jewels had traveled in the stomach of his little

page. There were other times when the polish and finish of his manner, his assured air of knowing the world exactly and being more than equal to it, exercised a powerful fascination over me. But my first feeling toward him was one of gratitude. He had taken me by the hand and lifted me up out of the gutter, almost, it seemed to me. He made me feel honored, admired. He led me out, as it were, into the sunshine and turned me about this way and that for the beholding of others, and said. "Look, I've found something lovely that none of you had noticed!" When I went about Newport with the children before, I had moved invisible. But now my black shapeless mantle and black bonnet were no longer a disguise. People stared. Eyes turned my way, heads turned after me. The murmur went:

"That's the young lady that's being courted by the nabob!"

I was not deceived, of course. I knew that I merely pleased his eyes, and that he liked to talk to me. Not many people, he assured me, had my gift of listening. And I was fascinated by his talk. For this he singled me out, and for this he accompanied walks with the children or sat with me in my sister's drawing room or piazza. But nonetheless it made me marked, it gave me what my sister called *consequence*. Overnight instead of being the poverty-stricken orphan of a disgraced father, earning her bread by the charity of her relations, I became of a sudden a princess in my own right. For Mr. Ashton certainly had no self-

interest in seeking me out. In my early girlhood my father had warned me of fortune hunters. But Mr. Ashton sought me out when I had no fortune, when I had nothing and was nobody. So that in a way it was almost a secondary excitement when a courier arrived one Monday on the morning train from Philadelphia and brought the news direct to me that my father's ship, long recorded as lost at sea, had come in.



Often when I was a child I had heard those words, spoken in jest or earnest. "We will buy a horse — we will lay out the rose garden — you shall have a new mantle — when my ship comes in!" Turns of fortune were sometimes rapid in the West Indies trade. But my father, determined always to avoid entanglement, direct or indirect, with the slave trade, had ventured far afield, and this ship, the *Saucy Nancy*, had been sent to traffic with the East Indies. Delayed by storms, driven off her route, chased by pirates; lying becalmed, short of food and water, stricken with scurvy; miraculously saved, it appeared, by finding fruit and water on remote islands of the deep — the *Saucy Nancy* had at last struggled back into port, richly laden. My father's reputation and his daughter's fortune were re-established at a blow. From being a penniless orphan I

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suddenly became a substantial heiress. The Governor himself, who was still in residence in his country house, arranged to have a reception for me. Such a rare sea-miracle sent every sea-merchant's credit sky-high, and everyone wanted to celebrate.

My sister implored me, almost with tears, to accept the services of her dressmaker, or to allow her to adapt one of Minnie's expensive dresses to my larger size, but it pleased me to go to that reception just as I ordinarily was, in my Quaker dress. Whether it was perversity, or a silent reproach to my brother and sister hidden in my secret heart, or whether it was a tribute to my dead father, I could not tell. The choice was made somewhere deep within me. Opposition only fastened it the tighter. I went to the Governor's reception in my Quaker gray.

I stood at the Governor's right hand. His lady was on his left, first in line to greet the incoming guests. My brother Thomas stood at my right, and Emily beside him. The brilliant scene was supposed to be all in my honor, a festivity to celebrate my good fortune and to share my joy. But I felt cynical about it. Few of these people who passed by in an endless stream had consciously set eyes on me before, and none had taken the least interest in me. The Governor had given the party to satisfy the curiosity of the fashionable community. Everyone wanted to see the girl who had suddenly been raised from penury to riches. Some, as they shook hands with me, said candidly, "I want

to touch you for luck!" Most of the eyes I met were hard, inquisitive, even envious. Only a few looked really merry and friendly — probably those who had so much of youth, beauty and wealth, or of contentment and interest in life, that they really had nothing to envy in me.

When all had been presented, refreshments were served, and dancing began. Instead of being required to leave the room or to sit hidden in a corner, I was now besieged with would-be partners. But I neither could nor would dance. I felt as if I had in the whole room only one friend. And he kept himself modestly in the background. He did not join the presentation line until the very last. Then he came by as a matter of necessary courtesy, and held my hand for just a moment, but with a pressure gently felt and instantly relinquished.

"What a wonderful surprise this is," he said. "I do congratulate you from my heart! It is the story of Cinderella complete — except for the want of a prince charming."

"He won't be long coming now!" said the Governor, jovially, overhearing this. "Indeed, when I look at this young lady I wonder how even her brother, astute as he is, has managed to keep so much beauty hidden under a bushel."

"When the name of the bushel is poverty —" said Mr. Ashton.

My stepbrother hastily intervened with his pat about my having been in mourning for my father.

Still, a party is exhilarating. I was dazzled by my change in fortune, and full of rainbow hopes for the future. My plans had no very definite shape, but adventure had a large part in them. To go away, far, far away. To see new places, new scenes, to use the freedom money would give me to travel, to find out more about the fascinating world. To live, to live!

Whenever I caught sight of Mr. Ashton across the room he was always watching me. He danced three times, once with the Governor's lady, once with my sister Emily, and once with Minnie. Having done his social duty in that way, he apparently did not care to dance any more. He did not come near me, he left me to the new friends who crowded round me. But he seemed to place himself here or there always in such a way that he turned toward me. He was never near enough to overhear what I was saying but I felt his kind, admiring attention, and it was as if a warm beam were directed toward me from wherever he stood.

I longed wistfully for him to come within speaking range. I missed his familiar company. But at long last when in the small hours the party was breaking up, the carriages were coming up to the door, and I was standing with Thomas receiving last compliments from the Governor and his lady, with my brother's carriage waiting, then Mr. Ashton came up and, having made his bow to the Governor, took me by the hand as if to put me into the carriage and he said, softly:

"It's such a fine night and such a short distance, may I not escort you home on foot? I know you love to walk."

"I should like it of all things!"

"You will allow me?" he said to my stepbrother, gave me his arm, and without attracting any attention led me down the shadowy garden path.

After we had got away from the house, we, by common consent, stood still a moment among the trees, reveling in the darkness after the brightly lighted room, becoming aware of the stars, and hearing the everlasting sound of the sea.

"I hope you found the party to your liking?" said Mr. Ashton, breaking our silence in his courteous, polished voice.

"Oh, indeed yes," said I. "It was delightful, but this is better. I like the end of a party. The strain of being polite to everyone is all over, and you have the whole occasion, with all its memories, complete in your hand, like an apple."

"Have you been to many parties?" said Mr. Ashton, unexpectedly. "As your wealthy father's daughter, home in Philadelphia, did you have much society?"

"Not society of this kind," I said. "Quiet, Quaker parties — picnics, and suppers, and essay and poetry clubs of young people and older. No dancing, you know, or cards, or even music."

I felt the answer satisfied him, though I could not think



why. He laid his hand on mine, where it lay on his arm. The path divided where we stood, and one branched off across an open lawn, the other wound into a shrubbery of ornamental trees and rhododendrons.

When we were halfway through the little wood he stopped again.

"Rose," he said, very softly, "I mustn't take advantage of your youth. But many suitors will be now at your command. So I must speak sooner than I had intended. You must have seen, my dear child, how much I admire you —. I am a lonely and disillusioned man. I never thought to find such sweetness again in my life as I have found in your lovely company. With you I forget many past miseries. You have known unhappiness yourself, but you hold the gift of happiness! Rose, I can't live without you. I have fallen in love with you!"

He could not go on. His voice shook with emotion. And I began to tremble so violently that I thought I could hardly stand. I had not imagined that this distinguished man had gone so far in his feeling for me, although I *had* been made to feel, yes, I had, that I was courted.

"Tell me, Rose," he said, anxiously, "why do you tremble so? Is it disagreeable to you to hear this from me? Do I seem to you too old?"

"Oh, no, indeed, Mr. Ashton," said I, "oh, no, no, no."

He took my hand a little firmer, and put his arm around my waist.

"Then, Rose, may I formally ask you to be my wife?"

The whole long month of his attention lay behind his words. It had all been overwhelming, astonishing. This was merely a grand climax coming sooner than I expected. It was as if a great seventh wave had come up on a quiet tide and crashed over the beach. I was inundated with it. I could think of but one answer possible, and I made it with my whole heart.

"Indeed, Mr. Ashton, you honor me. I could imagine no better happiness!"

I felt very shy of him and bent my head. He stooped his head in the darkness to kiss my cheek. His lips found my temple and also encountered the frill of my starched cap. He made a smothered exclamation in the dark.

"One may say poetically that that cap looks like frozen mist," said he, "but it's a damn bit of scratchy stuff. I beg your pardon! I must get over my Indian ways and coarse language. Indeed, I shall have to reform very thoroughly in many respects now I'm to have a Quaker bride! But you will be to me, my dear, my guiding star!"

I lifted up my face and put my arms shyly around his neck.

"I don't indeed want to be your guiding star, Mr. Ashton!" said I. "I feel very humble, and ignorant — a mere nobody — beside you. But I will try to make you a good wife!"

He gently untied my cap and his touch was thrilling.

Then he passed his hand over my hair, stroking it, and each movement of his fingers awakened in me sensations I had never known before. I was on the edge of swooning, when he stopped, set me gently away from him, took my hand under his arm, and continued walking along the path. It was just comfortably wide enough for two. I was conscious of nothing but happiness, excitement, and the salty, leafy scents in the cool, night air. My cap was being carried by the strings. I had forgotten it, until it caught on some twigs, and I felt the slight pull and stopped short, anxious not to tear it. Little hands unexpectedly, deftly set it straight and at liberty, and I was so startled I uttered a low cry before I saw, by the starlight flashing on the jewel in the front of his turban, that it was only the little Hindu page. He always followed behind his master like a faithful spaniel. I said, "Thank you," although I knew he could not understand me. Mr. Ashton turned, clapped his hands angrily and gestured as one does to order off a dog. Ahmed scurried back into the dark. But I gathered the cap up closer and carried it carefully the rest of the way home, like a little gauze basket, the strings wound firmly round my hand.

We presently emerged from the garden to the pavement, and walked a block and a half along the quiet street to my brother's house. But when we came into the lighted hallway I was suddenly overwhelmed. I shrank from meeting curious or spiteful eyes. And Mr. Ashton, with his sympathetic perception, detected it.

“Go up to bed, dearest Rose,” he said. “Leave me to explain everything to your brother.” He kissed my hand, and I went dreamily up the staircase.

My first action as my own mistress had been to turn my little cousin, Camilla, out of my room. (Camilla now slept with Minnie.) Never was I so glad to have a room to myself. The candles were lighted and the bed turned down — for even these few days had entirely transformed all my treatment in the house. My ivory hairbrush and comb were ready for me on the dressing table, and I knew that if I pulled the bell by the side of the fireplace the competent colored servant called Susan would hurry in to help me to bed.

But I cared for nothing at the moment but solitude. I flung a cushion on the floor by the window, and kneeling down on it put my elbows on the sill and stared out for a long time at the starlit sea. This sea, which was my friend, and had brought my ship to port. This sea beside which, even in my poverty and humiliation, I had found a friend and protector. For a long time I meditated and prayed — a wordless prayer of reaching out to the presence of angels.

Then relaxed, rested, and calm, I rose up to prepare for bed. My weightless cap was still hanging, forgotten, like a little basket on my arm. I shook it off onto the bed, and then I saw that there was something inside it. Yes, a leaf, a large green laurel leaf, which must have somehow de-

tached itself and got into my cap at that little moment among the shrubbery. And yet — the cap was much more fragile than a laurel twig, one would have thought it would tear before a leaf would be pulled off! I took the leaf out of the cap and then I saw that there was something strange marked on it. Yes, there were letters. I held it up to the candle. “NO” — those were the letters which were roughly but clearly scratched upon the shiny surface of the leaf.

It was a message to me. Perhaps a message from heaven? But to what did it apply? And whose was the hand which had scratched it on the leaf? Ahmed must have put it in my cap. But who commissioned him to do so?

I went down early before breakfast, and there was Ahmed waiting for me like a waxwork, in the front piazza, with a note from my betrothed. I was alone with him in the clean, salty sunshine, and the opportunity was good. I had put the leaf in my pocket, and I took it out and showed it to him. I might as well have shown it to a puppy. He seemed not to look at it, took no notice of it; turned his head away.

I moved in front of him again.

“Look, Ahmed!” I commanded, tapping it with my finger. “What do you know about this?”

I knew he could not hear me, but I talked to him as to a pet animal. He seemed to gaze at the leaf, which I held under his nose; he all but sniffed it. Or was he sniffing my fingers? He turned away again, apathetic, imperceptive. I

could not keep going round and round him. It was no use. I carried my lover's letter upstairs and laid the leaf among the handkerchiefs in my sachel. I would ask Mr. Ashton himself for a clue.

But when my lover called for me at eleven to take me for a drive, and I again took a look at the leaf on the dressing table, there was a stop in my mind about mentioning it to Mr. Ashton. I put it back in the sachel and said nothing about it to anyone.

The NO was for him as well as for me. The NO was for our marriage. And I had said Yes, and my heart and will said Yes, yes, yes.

My stepbrother and sister announced the engagement in the newspapers, and Newport buzzed agreeably. The Governor's lady said:

"Why, this is fine! The two people we've gossiped about most this season in Newport have been our Indian nabob and our little heiress. It seemed entirely appropriate that the two should make a match of it!"

It was necessary for me to go to Philadelphia to assume my fortune, and *my* arrangements were now of first importance in the family. My sister-in-law's social plans for two or three weeks to come, my stepbrother's engagements, all must give way to the urgency of my affairs. My brother and sister were playing their part under the eyes of all Newport. The newspapers were paying attention to our movements. A middle-aged widow, an aunt of Emily's,

was engaged to take care of their house, servants, and the younger children, and my brother and his wife with Minnie and myself took the train to Philadelphia.



My father's house in Philadelphia, although it was my personal property, left to me in his will, had been sealed up by the creditors. But my father's lawyer, Mr. Silas Graham, had gone down with the constable and broken the seals, and had had the house got ready for my occupancy. He met us at the railway station with the keys. My brother and sister and Cousin Minnie were now my guests and I was the mistress of the house. What a delightful change! I made haste to write to my old nurse Patsy to come to me, a good sturdy woman who had brought up my mother before me, but apart from this one indulgence I had no time to enjoy the feeling of being rich. My days were full of business. I set to work to pay off my father's creditors, and it was no light or easy task. Sometimes in the lawyer's office, and sometimes in my father's study in my home, I pored over papers, documents, bills, and interviewed claimants, with the guiding explanations of good Mr. Graham. I determined to be as intelligent about it as if I had been a son, and not to sign documents with my eyes shut. I trusted Silas Graham to the full, but he was glad enough to

have me pay attention, and to make sure that I understood what I was about.

Mr. Ashton, meantime, was busy hurrying forward arrangements for our wedding. His business affairs, which were, I understood, on a far larger scale than my father's, required his attention in Europe and London. There were rumors of troubles in India increasing day by day, and it was urgent that we set sail for the capital of Great Britain as soon as our wedding could be accomplished and my own affairs set in order. Marriage settlements were being drawn up by the lawyers, and with these, at least, I had very little to do. My stepbrother and Silas Graham were the ones who saw to the (to me quite unnecessary) protecting of my interests. Naturally, I was glad I did not come to my bridegroom empty-handed, but I was thankful to remember that he had sought me when I *was* empty-handed. I should have been glad to realize my whole fortune in one great, glittering pile of gold and put it all at his feet. But since that kind of thing could not be done, I simply kept out of the business arrangements, which were being made over my head for my unknown future as Mrs. Luke Ashton.

But first we were to have a honeymoon in the south of France.

"The English winter is not a thing to subject a bride to!" said my husband-to-be. "I would have taken you to India if I could. Now, there's a country! There's where you can be really truly warm. But we shall avoid the chills of the



## THE QUAKER BRIDE

British Isles as long as we are resident there by always going to the Riviera or the coast of Africa for the winter season.”

The days passed like a dream. My new business duties were so interesting and absorbing, the satisfaction of paying my father's debts and clearing his honor was so great that I worked long hours. When I got back home each evening from the lawyer's office, or bade him farewell after working with him in my father's study, I was tired like a businessman. Dinner at five and then festivities. My old friends rallied round me. Parties were given for me and by me, of the quiet, Quaker kind — all the more warm-hearted for that. Owing, however, to the Meeting's attitude toward my father, I did not accept their invitation for a wedding in the Friend's Meeting. My husband-to-be (who wrote me daily letters from Boston, where his business detained him) also pointed out that the procedures of the Quaker method of passing two consecutive Monthly Meetings would delay our wedding, and haste was urgent on his business grounds. So, when the day came at last, we were married in my own house before a gathering of friends, both Quakers and others. Though we used the simple Quaker ceremonial, a Congregational minister from Newport pronounced us man and wife. A pleasant banquet followed, and we drove away at sunset to the river to catch the evening tide.

It was one of the last days of a glorious October when

the captain of my father's ship ran up my pennant to the masthead, cast off from the wharf, and steered with the ebb down the Delaware for the open sea.

The first thing I discovered about my husband was that he was a bad sailor. The very first lift and roll of the ocean at the river's mouth made him shudder. He gave hasty excuse, took his arm from my waist and went below. I did not see him again except at rare intervals for the remainder of the voyage. I offered several times, beginning with the first evening, to go down and sit with him, bathe his forehead, do what I could to ameliorate his sufferings. But he sent me notes every day, two or three times in the day, by the hands of his little Hindu page, and all of them bore the same message in different words:

"I appreciate your kind thought, my dear, but I am not fit to be seen. I had rather dree my weird in decent solitude. Ahmed takes remarkable good care of me. The Captain sends me gruel from his table. I have had this atrocious seasickness before and it does not kill. I know by experience that one survives! But I had rather not subject myself to your view, my beloved, until I can look more like a bridegroom."

I treasured all these letters and put them in an Indian sandalwood box one by one as I received them, carefully flattened out and laid one upon the other. But the voyage nonetheless was a happy time. I had several times been out to sea with my father, and I loved the water. The rocking

of the ship did not upset me any more than sitting in a rocking chair. I had brought a case of books and some embroidery to do, and I sat up on deck when the weather was fine, reading or sewing with my good old nurse Patsy by my side. Captain Sparks or the mate, Mr. Malcolm, would take time off to talk to me betweenwhiles, or pace the decks with me in turn. And when it rained they made it cozy for me below, in a pleasant cabin with a swinging lantern which kept level however the ship pitched from side to side.

Since my heart had been broken by Randolph, I had for many months set the idea of marriage completely behind me. So this gentle approach to married life suited me very well.

We landed at Lisbon, and spent the next few months in Spain, Italy, and the south of France. My husband had made the grand tour when he was a young man, and after his long years in India it was a delight to him to revisit some of the scenes of his youth and look at them again — as he said — through my fresh eyes. The warm sun, the variety every day of strange and beautiful sights, and my husband's caressing manners — which made me feel almost too much like a petted child — caused time to pass in a sort of enchantment. I found, too, that my husband had oriental ideas of luxury. He lavished expense on daily living. It was all so different from the theories of austerity and simplicity

and duty in which I had been reared. Only in one thing did my life during my honeymoon make a link with the life of my girlhood, and that was, strangely enough, that my husband was devoted to my Quaker dress. When he took me out to some gay function — as he occasionally did — then he insisted on my wearing one of the fashionable dresses he had bought for me in Paris, such as other ladies wore on those occasions. But for our ordinary daily living, and particularly in the privacy of our own villa or palace or hotel room, as the case might be, he liked to see me in my quiet, simple Quaker costumes, with the high starched gauze cap over my hair.

One day I found Ahmed packing up.

“We must go to England for the spring,” said Luke. “Even in India I constantly got homesick for England in the spring. I am going to take you to my paternal mansion and you may not altogether like it. But that’s where we must live when we are in London. I think I have broken you in sufficiently to be a fashionable lady at the right times so that a spell of it won’t come too hard for you. You will of course have to be presented at Court in June.”

I had no objections to offer. What pleased my husband pleased me.

What a strange house Friar’s Court was. We drove up to it in the watery morning of an April day, having docked in the Thames. The house was invisible behind brick walls

and a row of poplars planted thick together so that a second fence of dense greenery showed above the fence of brick as we approached down the Chelsea street. Wrought-iron gates were opened for us by some servant stationed there for the purpose — our coming was expected. The screech of the opening hinges and the clang as the gates closed to behind us was not a very cheerful sound. There was something final about that clang.

The driveway within the gate was well kept and wide, but it was densely hedged on either side with ancient, clipped yew. I suppose this hedge of yew is twelve or fifteen feet high. The drive was short, but one did not see the house until one turned at right angles into a square, graveled court. Then I admired the handsome, severe, monastic front of red brick, with windows high in the walls. An iron bell hung outside the front door with a long wrought-iron bell-pull. Probably it and the front door too — which was of heavy oak studded with nails, with a barred grille high in the middle of it — dated from the time when the house was really a priory or something of the sort, inhabited by friars and monks. Ahmed had jumped down to open the door of the carriage, and my husband getting out first, as usual, handed me out. By this time the front door had creaked back on its heavy hinges, and an array of English servants stood there respectfully to welcome us.

Most of the staff were as new to Luke as to me, owing

to his long absence in India. The official words of welcome were spoken and introductions were performed by a dignified-looking manservant, who was apparently butler and major-domo in one. He seemed to be an old retainer and called my husband Master Luke. But most of the others were new, even new to the place. As my husband had explained, the house had been kept clean and ready for occupancy at any time, in a skeleton sort of way, by the housekeeper and this butler, John Cooper, with such occasional help as they needed for hard cleaning from time to time. Luke had written from Italy to order those two to engage a proper permanent staff of servants for us; and here they were.

When each one had made a bob or curtsy and I had smiled acknowledgment, my husband turned to the butler and said:

“And where’s Mrs. Tabitha? In her room I suppose?”

“Yes, sir, she’s awaiting you there, hoping as you and the lady would do her the honor to visit her there right away. She’s fair burning with impatience to see you, Master Luke.”

My husband gathered my consent with his eyebrow, and John Cooper proceeded to lead the way, rather by means of a royal escort than a guide. He, I’m sure, expected my husband to know the direction.

The house had many features that reminded of its monastic past. The corridors were arched and in some cases

pointed like a church. The windows were mostly so high in the walls that I walked along below the level of the window sills. My husband, taller by a head, could sometimes see out. But the upstairs corridors had been white-washed — perhaps from time immemorial — and this gave them a light, pure look. The fitful sunlight streamed through the windows on our right as we went, and was reflected in checkered patterns from the white wall on the other side. The doorways, as we passed the various closed rooms, had Gothic tops and were made of the heavy, weathered, gray-looking oak. One could not say it was not picturesque.

At the end of the light corridor we went down two little dark steps and through a dusky windowless vestibule into another wing. I stumbled at going up an unexpected, awkward little three-cornered turned stair. My husband's hand was instantly under my elbow. A step or two more in pitch darkness and then — we knocked on a door. A voice inside said:

“Come in, come in,” in sharp peremptory, querulous tones. John Cooper opened the door before us with a flourish.

The room we entered was bright and hot and smelled of spice. A blazing fire flickered on the walls, candles were lighted and the curtains drawn, although I knew the sun was shining outside. In a winged and hooded chair, shielded from every draught, sat a very aged lady. Luke had told

me all about her. I knew she was to him what Patsy was to me — and perhaps even more, since Luke was an unfortunate child, who had never loved his mother and had hardly known her. Mrs. Tabitha was now verging on ninety years of age. The parchment, wrinkled skin of her face was drawn so tight over the bones as to give a sort of death's head appearance, not at all mitigated by the large, frilled cap which she was wearing. Her decent black silk dress covered a form which had once been so tall that though shrunken and shriveled now with age, it was by no means little. She had, I presume, the big bones of a grenadier. Her sharp old face was turned to the door with an intense and almost inhuman eagerness. I felt as if a bony wolf or a beaked eagle, startled in its lair, was staring at me, ready to attack. In fact, though we all sat and talked together quietly for fifteen or twenty minutes in that hot stuffy room, I could not get over the fact that the first glance Mrs. Tabitha had given me had been one of savage hostility. Hostility and something else. I could not quite make out what.

But my husband had got her gnarled, rheumatic hand in his and was sitting by her side with some suggestion of a renewal of childhood.

“Well, Tabitha,” he said, “are you glad to see us?”

“I’m glad to see you, sir,” she said. “I’m glad to see you, Master Luke. Eh, I sometimes used to think these old eyes never would look on your face again! And now here you



come after these many years, and I wouldn't have known you — I wouldn't have known you!"

"Oh, tush," said my husband, vexed. "I can't have changed that much in the time."

"You've changed for the better, Master Luke. You were a sick man when you came home for a visit ten years ago. You had the shakes — the Indian shakes. And now look at you! A fine, handsome gentleman —"

"Well, well! Now you see, I've brought you a mistress." He indicated me, where I sat across the hearth, as if anxious to change the subject and divert her attention from himself.

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Tabitha, with the utmost decorum, smoothing her skirt with her other nobby, mittened hand. "Yes, indeed. And glad I am to see the *mistress* that you've brought!" Her deep-set, beady eyes met mine and I could see them dancing with a curious, wicked gleam. "Yes, indeed, madam, I welcome you to Friar's Court. It's long needed a mistress. It's glad we all are that you've come. If anyone fails to give you good service, report him to me and I'll — *grease his head and swallow him*, as your husband used to say when he was a boy!"

"Thank you, Mrs. Tabitha!" said I. "You knew my husband in his unhappy childhood, I think. What a lot of stories you'll be able to tell me. I look forward very much to hearing them and to getting to know you better."

She gave a high, cackling laugh. Upon my word, if she'd

caught up a broomstick and flown up the chimney, I shouldn't have been very much surprised.

We sat the proper amount of time, exchanging banalities. I let my husband as usual carry the major share of the talk. We were then conducted to our bedroom, which was dim and rich, with heavy hangings to the high windows, and a carved, four-post bed with valance and tester of dark crimson. A coal fire burned very cheerfully in the grate, but I, brought up with the generous log fires of America, found it rather a feeble affair. Merely better than nothing. A small dressing room for the master opened off the bedroom in the English way, and there Ahmed was already, busy sorting shirts, socks, and ties, and arranging them in a big highboy. He had them spread out in piles on a narrow featherbed which was made up there. A washstand, with a little brass can of hot water was provided in this room as well as in the main bedroom, and abundant towels, both fleecy and plain, were hanging on the towel-horse in both rooms.

When we were freshened up we went downstairs to the dining room, where cold sliced chicken, a huge ham, thin-sliced bread and butter, and oranges, and hot tea had been prepared for us. The omnipresent Ahmed had slipped down to make the tea. My husband could not trust English servants with this delicate operation. The heavy, ornate, plushy furnishings of the dining room did not suit the austere, monastic architecture. After lunch, Luke took me

on a tour all over the house, and I noticed the same over-trimmed, overdressed effect everywhere, except in one room.

“This one is your boudoir — if you’d like to have it so!” he said, opening a door. The door was just like the others, but the room we entered was flooded with sunshine. The windows were to the south and west. There was a fireplace with the invariable fire in it (someone had seen to it that every room should have a fire to greet our arrival). The walls were plain white, like the corridor, and against them was placed furniture of a delicate simplicity. I believe I learned afterwards to call it Queen Anne. The floor was highly polished, and two delicately tinted rugs, imported from India, were thrown loosely upon it. My husband looked around with some dissatisfaction.

“It’s rather bare,” he said. “You may like to change it entirely. I’ll be glad to have it refurnished for you. A flowered wallpaper, with glints of gold in it, for instance, to flash back the sunshine? A thick carpet in a prevailing tone of green? Furnishings in dark green plush, with cushions of old gold — and perhaps an occasional one of purple? Would not that give a pleasant and rich effect?”

“Oh, Luke, I like it so much as it is,” I said. “It’s a charming room!”

I lifted the polished lid of a piece of furniture, which seemed to be a worktable, that stood against the wall. There was revealed a tray with little compartments filled with dif-

ferent colored silks for embroidery, and needles in a separate pocket.

“Embroidery silks!” said I, delighted. “You remembered my hobby! I suppose these lovely silks came from India?”

“Yes, they did,” he said, gruff and short.

I lifted the tray, and below, in the well of the table, was a half-finished piece of fancywork with the threaded needle still in the stitch. I realized in a flash why Luke had sounded and looked uncomfortable.

“Oh, is this your first wife’s work?” said I. “Did she like to embroider, too?”

“Yes, Lydia did a great deal of it,” said he. “This was her room. She arranged it like this. You can have any other room if you prefer.”

“No,” I said, “I think Lydia’s taste is very like mine. I love this room!”

I lifted the folded embroidery up to examine it. The needle was rusted into the work. As I opened it out to see the whole design — and it was of an exquisite workmanship quite beyond my capacity to reproduce — some folded pieces of paper fell out with writing on them.

“Oh, she has left the directions, the patterns!” I said.

My husband suddenly snatched the work from my hands, crumpled it up, picked up the pieces of paper that had dropped out, and pushed the whole into the fire.

“We’ll get rid of that, at all events” said he.

The dampish stuff, kept in the drawer so long, did not

catch readily. Dull smoke, bad smelling, sprang up. As I stood amazed at his gesture, regretting not being able to examine more closely the beautiful sewing, I saw sheets of paper catching fire and crackling among the stuff, and one charred scrap flew up the chimney on the rolls of smoke, carried in a sudden draught. As it hovered up I saw the word "Beloved" written as it were in fire.

Luke's breath was coming heavily and fast as if he had heaved a heavy weight into the fireplace instead of a light piece of stuff.

"Your first wife must have been a charming woman," said I, "if this room represents her mind and character. And that lovely sewing!"

"Speak of her no more," said my husband sharply. "It is unnatural! It is improper!"

My own mother having been a second wife, it seemed to me neither. I stared, but my husband's glare was so harsh that I felt myself blushing. I had hurt him.

"As you like," I said, gently, casually.

"Come, I will show you the gardens," said Luke, turning to lead the way abruptly. As I followed him from the room I glanced back to have one more lingering look at its charm. Ahmed, whom I had not known was with us — his small, neat, silent presence so often passed unnoticed — was closing the lid of the worktable, in his serviceable, tidy way. It came down without a sound.

The gardens were not large though most carefully laid

out. They were the remains of the monkish gardens planned hundreds of years ago for quiet converse and solitary meditation. One walk was edged with tall yews, whose solemn air made one feel grave, and which laid strong bars of shadow across the sunlight. Another path was like a cavern of darkness made by weaving the branches of lindens overhead to make a solid arched tunnel, what my husband explained to me was called a pleached alley. This alley led to a sundial in the garden's center. There was a sunny circle of grass with flower beds. Close around the sundial were gay flowers, and birds came fluttering down to a stone basin at the side of the enclosure, where water trickled from a stone lion's mouth in an ivied wall and splashed over the edge of a small stone basin. The gentle splashing of this water was very soothing. I sat down for a moment on a stone bench. This, I decided, should be my favorite place, and though I did not dare ask my husband (he was in no mood to give me further information on that score) I wondered if these flowers and this arrangement of the bird fountain had been another legacy from the Lydia whose presence and influence I had already pleasantly felt. But it seemed older than that. I expect it was the friars.

The dark pleached alley led again into another lawn, more shady, where there was a lily pond, very small, and again stone benches which one expected to see inhabited by statuesque Romans. Julius Caesar would have been appropriate sitting there. They were, however, comfortable

to sit on, most elegantly curved, and had been, Luke said, designed in the eighteenth century by an Italian architect, who had copied the curve of the seats for patricians in the Roman forum.

One thing the professional gardeners had done through the long passage of centuries was to make the garden a series of surprises. This no doubt was due to the original monkish garden planner and had been amplified by those that had come after him, so that the area seemed much larger than it was. Our cursory look round, I felt, by no means revealed all the hidden charms this garden held. Penetrating behind the more ornamental parts, there was a kitchen garden with a potting shed in the corner, too, and a back boundary wall, edged with poplars, with a final door in it.

"Where does that door go?" said I.

"That," said my husband, "opens out onto what is called the Old Chelsea Reach. I haven't got the key in my pocket at the moment, but some day I will open it for you and you shall see. A road runs past there, a public street, and across that public street is the river Thames."

I could hear indeed trotting horses and sounds of passing traffic and wished very much to open the door and see out, but Luke very gently turned me back through the straight orderly paths, edged with bright herbaceous borders, of the vegetable garden, and through an arch in the inner wall (the same wall which backed the sundial lawn) and then into the darkness of the pleached alley. In that green gloom

Luke's face looked pale. I felt as if he was about to say something to me, important, even ominous, and drew closer to him and looked up at him. But nothing important came.

"Do you feel," said he, "as if you can play the hostess happily here? We shall have a great many visitors, I expect."

"I can be happy anywhere where you are!" said I.

"You don't feel afraid," said he, "in a strange country, far away from your friends, in this rather bleak walled house with all its seclusion? You don't feel afraid alone with me?"

I laughed at him. What was the use of answering in words? I stood still and put my two hands on his shoulders and held up my face. With an almost fierce gesture he caught me close to him. I felt he was about to give me the long, deep kiss for which I had been waiting and had not been able to receive owing to the business and publicity of our day. But at that moment our solitude was broken into by the clang of the iron bell, and though I had only heard its sound once I recognized it easily as it sounded harsh and untuneful over the garden.



We went into the house by the side door, and along a stone-flagged passage, which ran into the central hall. The central hall, also stone flagged, was not large but it was lofty with a gothic, fretted ceiling. The windows, high up



in the wall, were pointed and mullioned, and contained stained-glass pictures of saints. I think one was Saint Peter and the other Saint John. Coming into the hall to face the windows for the first time, it occurred to me that perhaps this entrance hall had once been part of the church of the monastery. It was more solemn than cheerful, but I could not deny its beauty, even though the dwelling house imposed upon the monastic framework had taken away a good deal of the space and left a square flagged hall with a few carved benches against the walls, and an Elizabethan staircase which I had of course become familiar with already.

A servant met us in the hall and discreetly murmured a name which I did not catch. My husband looked me up and down with a somewhat appraising air.

"Do I look ready for company?" said I, a little nervous, for this was to be my first caller.

"Just one thing!" said Luke. "You're perfect — as always. But would you gratify me by putting on your Quaker cap? Would it be too much trouble?"

"Why, not at all!" said I, surprised. I started upstairs at once.

"You will find us in the library," said Luke, as I went up.

When I came downstairs again, Ahmed was waiting at the foot of the stairs to guide me. Rich Indian rugs were being thrown down on the flags by two of the men. One of the undergardeners had been roped in — the same red-headed fellow who had opened the gate as we arrived. I

followed Ahmed across the hall and down a passage to the door of a room that obviously faced on the garden. Ahmed softly, as always, opened the door wide for me to enter. Luke was talking in a close, intimate, earnest manner to a fashionable woman. That was my first impression of her — fashion. My second was beauty. For she was the handsomest creature I had ever seen, ripe with nearly thirty years, and every item of her costume and complexion was geared skillfully to make the very most of her beauty. A diamond in her ear caught the light as she turned. She wore a little hat with a plume, soft over her dark hair. She was perfumed like a bed of violets. She positively seemed to me to shine and glitter as she moved. I was dazzled. I stood still to take it in. Luke quickly came to meet me and took me by the hand. Somehow the way he took it made me feel that my standing still in that way unconsciously was in his eyes exactly right.

“My dear,” said he, “I want to present to you Lady Diana Villiers. Lady Diana, this is my wife.”

Lady Diana made me a graceful, haughty bow and I returned it shyly. Her eyes were fixed not on my face but on my cap. As I stood there in the shade I felt as if she could see nothing of me but my cap.

“So this is our little Quakeress!” she said.

She had the highbred, clearly accented voice of the English aristocracy. It was the first time I had heard it — in this case cool, insolent, deeply conscious of its own unques-

tioned superiority. I knew the tone of patronage, because I had heard it in my stepbrother's house. But I had not been born to it. And something in me rose up and rejected the possibility of my submitting to it in my husband's house.

"I am a Quakeress, indeed, Lady Diana," said I, gently and softly. "I am also an American girl new come to this country, very open to lessons in English manners."

"Well, I hope you won't take me as a pattern, dear Mrs. Ashton," said she, after just the least, slight pause. "My manners are notoriously bad! I only behave well when I am on duty with the Queen — I'm one of her ladies in waiting. The strain of those months simply wrecks my behavior for the rest of my year. Ask Mr. Ashton. He knows!"

We seated ourselves and my husband said to me, in his leisurely way:

"Lady Diana is an old friend of mine and she has promised to present you at Court."

"Is your wife going to wear that charming cap before the Queen?" said Lady Diana. "Mrs. Ashton, you must forgive me, but where your husband has placed you, with the sunshine from that high window coming through your gauze cap, it looks like a halo. You might be an ethereal saint! I never saw anything so effective!"

"Would my wife be allowed to wear this cap before the Queen?" said my husband suavely.

Lady Diana laughed, a trilling, light laughter.

"Not on your life," she said. "The Queen is very fussy.

Court costume, especially for the presentation, must be absolutely correct to a feather. The only people allowed to dress otherwise are foreign potentates. Or members of the great Indian empire, who have some native dress of their own, and could not very easily be put into Western costume."

"Then the question of the cap is redundant," said my husband casually.

"If you will allow me to be your guide, Mrs. Ashton," said Lady Diana directly to me and very politely, "we will go round together to the shops and choose exactly the right thing for your debut. I have a dressmaker who is a perfect wonder, and she will make your dress if you will agree."

"I think my wife will agree," said Luke, in his definite way.

I felt a little hesitant myself at going round with this lady of high fashion and allowing myself to be dressed according to her design, but my husband had taken-for granted my presentation at Court, and I saw that this was a time when one wore a prescribed dress, so perhaps there was nothing else for it. I felt a little distrust, however, of the lady. I hoped she would not make a monkey of me. Although she had made quick amends for her first speech, I still felt inwardly alert, as if I had to keep on my watch-tower to beware of flank attack.

"I shall be grateful for your help, Lady Diana," said I, politely. "I should be entirely at sea."

"Well, we had better start soon," said Lady Diana. "We have no time to lose. Here we are well into May and the first drawing room is early in June. Let me see, tomorrow is Sunday. Suppose I come on Monday morning with my carriage and we can begin?"

I looked at my husband.

"I don't know what our plans are. We are just settling into our house. But as far as I know —"

My husband seemed to look at me in an assenting way. I supposed he would make some objection if the plan were inconvenient or unsuitable.

"I suppose you have no friends or relatives in London, Mrs. Ashton?" said Lady Diana, as Ahmed and one of the servants now came in with sherry and cake. "You must feel rather lonely in a foreign country."

"I can't feel lonely with my husband," said I confidently and warmly. "However, I do have a distant relative in London. I don't know him, and perhaps he will take no interest in me. So I suppose it's just as good as if I had none."

"Who is your relative?" said Lady Diana casually, as she took her plate in her lap and sipped at her wine.

"Well, he's probably no one you know. He was a modest young American banker in my father's youth, who was sent to Europe to work in the foreign department of the Boston firm of Gray, and I think he's been fairly successful. He is now a partner in Barings, I believe, if you've ever heard

of that firm. He was a cousin of my father's, and his name is Joshua Bates."

Lady Diana set her wine down on her plate so quickly that a little spilled.

"I do know Mr. Bates," she said. "Not intimately, but he is very well known in the London world. His daughter I know better. She married a Mr. Van de Weyer — Baron Van de Weyer in his own country. He is the Belgian ambassador. Madame Van de Weyer is a very close friend of the Queen. Far, far closer to the Queen than I am. Perhaps she would be the proper person to present you."

"She hardly knows of my existence," said I. "I'm not even sure that she *does* know!"

Lady Diana rose to take her leave.

"With Mr. Bates and Madame Van de Weyer behind you, you are indeed well protected, Mrs. Ashton," she said. "Your beautiful aplomb is understandable!"

"I am not sure that I follow you, Lady Diana," I said. "I need no protection. My husband —"

"Will take care of you?" she finished, as I paused, shy of saying it. "You are right, Mrs. Ashton. It makes an unmarried woman like myself guilty of envy. . . . Well, I can still help with the dress. I am to call for you on Monday?"

My husband personally escorted her out to the front door while I remained in the room a moment not quite certain of my hostess duties. I had been brought up to believe that if you were not sure what to do, the best thing was to sit

quiet and do nothing. But on the other hand, I had learned by the experience of my stepbrother's negations that doing nothing is itself doing something. What did I want to do? I wanted to go with my husband! So I went out after them along the dim passage. The new laid rugs shod my steps with velvet.

They were talking as they went. Luke's head, attentively bent, was not far above hers. Her tones were low, but the vaulted passage caught them, as Luke and she stepped out into the loftier entrance hall, and carried her words clearly to my ears.

"Take care, Luke! That girl will be too clever for you!"

It gave me a queer shock.

I turned round, and softly re-entered the room I had just left.

As I went in, Ahmed scuttled past me and hurried along the passage after his master.

I stood alone in the room, trying to rearrange my thoughts and sensations.

A slight sick feeling in the center of my body assured me, beyond thinking, that there was a secret understanding of some kind between Lady Diana and my husband.

Nothing else mattered.

How much did this matter? Was it something that belonged to their youth, long past, that I ought not to mind?

I remembered that Luke had secured a private first greeting between him and Lady Diana, and some moments

alone with her, by sending me up for my cap. And he had got another private moment by escorting her to the front door.

How stupid it had been of me to think that I should go too!

But I pulled myself up short. Where were these thoughts taking me? There couldn't be a worse guide than hurt feelings. I had seen in Emily the miseries that a suspicious wife could give and suffer. I *would not* be among that tribe! Who, after all, had been the "too clever" woman against whom Diana had been warning my husband? There was only one in the house who would bear that description — old Tabitha. She indeed, I increasingly felt, was devilish clever. She was a witch!

There was surely nothing to mind in the casual intimacies of an old friendship, and a salutary secret warning against a person who, in honest fact, hated me.

Peace and serenity flooded back into me as these common-sense ideas took shape. My husband came back.

"You did not tell me of these London relatives of yours," he said.

"I've hardly thought of them," said I, turning my mind to them with an effort. "It was only when Lady Diana thought that I was so alone that I did remember that I had a distant relative in London. I've not thought of Mr. Bates as anyone I especially wanted to know. I suppose I had better call on them sometime?"



"Yes, as soon as possible," said my husband. "The banking firm of Baring is a very important one and very aristocratic. Several men of title are on the board. I believe Mr. Joshua Bates is the head now of the whole, the president of Baring's. He does not go much into society. For all I know he's a Quaker. But his influence in society is great and he has the entrée wherever he wishes to go. His grandchildren are playmates of the royal children, Lady Diana tells me, and his daughter and her little ones are intimates at Buckingham Palace. Not at all on the level of the ordinary society callers, who go only at stated times to attend Court functions. The Queen has a gift, Lady Diana says, for intimate, domestic friendships, unusual in a crowned head. Your relatives may be useful in more ways than one."

"But I haven't the slightest desire to enter Court circles!" said I. "I'm going to be presented, to please you, since that is absolutely necessary — you say — to enter London society as you wish me to do. But the kind of life we were leading in France — well, I know it was too much of a holiday life, but I mean the domestic part of it — would be more the kind of way I like to live. A simple, friendly way. Collect flowers. Study birds. Have neighbors . . . But London, I know, is a large city with all kinds of people in it, and I shall soon find the kind of friends I want."

"And of course I have a good many friends of my own to introduce to you," said my husband. He took me by the

chin and kissed me. I felt again that for some reason I had risen in his esteem.



There are three antagonisms in this house. One between Patsy and Tabitha, one between both of them and Ahmed, and one of Tabitha against me! But I'm not going to think of that one. It's a natural passing jealousy. She's been accustomed to bossing everything here (when there was anything to boss) and to have a mistress come in over her head, a stranger too, can't be easy.

The oddest seems to me the one between these two and Ahmed (that they should in anything agree!), but that perhaps is more of an antipathy — each one probably feels about him as they would about some unnatural creature in the house, like a goblin. He goes about so quietly. He appears so suddenly; or you notice that he is present at times when you thought the room was empty. He is small and light, he wears soft shoes, he can't help having a catlike tread. I don't like to have him go out with me, he attracts too much attention. But I've grown accustomed to finding him at my elbow at home, and he can make himself remarkably useful. He never seems to be looking at anything, and yet if one drops a book or handkerchief he is prompt to return it; and he is very quick at the uptake in running

## THE QUAKER BRIDE

an errand. A few signs, one or two carefully mouthed words, and he gets a general idea of what is wanted. But I think he works best on his own. He has a great gift for tidying up and arranging things neatly, and generally trying to think how to make life more convenient for the one he serves. My husband is away so much on his business, from breakfast time till sometimes late at night, that Ahmed is left very much at my disposal. I notice the servants take advantage of him, making him polish shoes and clean knives and other little odd jobs proper to their own work, but that's only natural. I don't interfere.

But I did interfere with his sleeping quarters when I found that he was being put to sleep in a sort of cupboard under the kitchen stairs. Then I made a tour of my house with a view to assuming real control of it, with a cheerful maidservant called Polly and with my own Patsy, and found a number of rooms on the third floor, adjoining the attic, where light and air and cleanness were easily obtainable. So I had some furniture moved into one of these empty rooms, enough for Ahmed's use, and removed him from his dingy, airless cupboard to this light and airy little nook. An old monk's cell perhaps it was, with one high window; narrow-spaced, but something pleasant and secluded about it. It was apart from the other servants' quarters, all the better for that. When Ahmed understood that this was to be his room — I pointed to the bed and pointed to him, pointed to a chair and pointed to him, pointed at the bureau and pointed

to him, and then made a little sweeping gesture to indicate that the whole business was for him — I saw the first real expression on his face that I had ever seen. Something approaching a hidden smile came on it, a softening of the harsh lines of sullenness and unhappiness. He crossed his arms over his breast and salaamed three times to me very low. I realized he was trying to say thank you and saying it quite eloquently.

It was over giving this room to Ahmed that I had my first direct conflict with Tabitha. News of it reached her promptly by the house grapevine, and that very evening I was in my boudoir (which I had taken possession of with great joy) arranging some of my things there and making the room more my own, when the door opened silently and apparently nothing entered. I knew this was probably a signal of Ahmed's coming in, and turned round to find him in the shadow. I had only one candle alight over my desk. He put his hands across his breast and salaamed. Since he brought me nothing and did no more than stand near the door, it occurred to me that he was uttering a silent appeal for help. I was as astonished at his initiative as I should have been if a dog had suddenly learned a new trick. I went over to him at once and said:

“What is it, Ahmed? Where do you want to take me?”

I knew he could not hear, but at any rate, he saw my lips move, he saw my gestures and expression, and with a slight gesture to follow him he stole quickly away along

the passages and up the stairs, looking round now and then to see that I was coming. Crossing over into the other wing, I soon heard a thumping sound of things being carried, and coming up the narrow stairway that led to the little corridor in the east wing where Ahmed's cell-like room was, I met a couple of the menservants carrying the furniture out of the room which only that afternoon I had had carried in. When the men saw me they put down the bedstead two of them were carrying.

"What is this?" I said. "Who told you to move those things?"

"Mistress Tabitha did, madam," said the man at the back. It was the redheaded gardener again.

"Mistress Tabitha made a mistake," said I. "Take the things back."

The leading man looked red and sheepish, pulled his forelock uncomfortably.

"What's the matter?" said I. "Why do you wait? Take everything back and put it where it was before."

"Mistress Tabitha said, madam, as how the master had always let her arrange the rooms in this house and had left her in charge of them — she's been in charge many years — she felt as if she was responsible to the master, like. She said the master knowed about Ahmed's sleeping place before, and was quite content. She says it's not fitting that odd critter should be up here among Christians. He belongs down below."

"Well," said I, remembering not to be vexed, "that's neither here nor there. We are not talking about the proper place for Ahmed. I am simply telling you to take those things back, to the room from which you took them. I am the mistress here, you know."

I saw that both men looked at me curiously and even respectfully.

Said the one at the back, the redhead, who seemed the more intelligent of the two:

"But Mistress Tabitha has said that the master had given her orders!"

"At any rate," said I, "take them back for now. I will consult the master myself. For tonight it is to be as I said."

They saw that I was determined, and in their perplexity between two conflicting sets of orders they felt that the safest thing was to do for the moment as I wished. They took the furniture back, Ahmed standing behind my skirts. As soon as it was back, he made me another salaam with his hands over his breast, slipped into the room like a shadow and shot the bolt on the inside.

News certainly traveled fast in that house. I had not reached the bottom of the main staircase before a young woman came running after me. She was a rather neat-looking, citified wench, whom I had seen very little about the house, and was apparently the special attendant of Mistress Tabitha.

"Excuse me, madam," she said, in her prim careful way, "Mistress Tabitha has sent me to ask you if you would come to visit her in her room now?"

I could hear the veiled insolence in the girl's tone and it put me on my guard.

"Tell Mistress Tabitha," said I, "that I am tired tonight. I shall see her in the morning, as I so often do. If there is anything that she wants for her comfort you may get it for her."

Again I saw a flicker of surprise in the girl's face. What did these people suppose? Did they really think that I did not know my position in my own house? Or did they imagine, for instance, that I was afraid of something in particular?

"Are you sure, madam, that that is the message you want me to take to Mistress Tabitha?" said the woman.

"Quite sure," said I. "Good night."

I turned away and went on into the library where I had been going to get a book, gathered myself three or four that I had noticed on the shelves there and wanted to read, and carried them with me up to my room. There were a dozen or two others that I wished to have on my shelves in my boudoir and I would tell Ahmed to get them for me in the morning. I would show him them on the shelves, marking them with my finger, and I knew that his acute eyes would pick them out for me afterwards — by color or position, or perhaps he would make a light chalk mark on their

backs — but they would certainly all be conveyed in an hour or so to the place where I wished them to be.

Sitting in my boudoir, cozily reading by the fire very late, I fell asleep over my book. So I did not hear my husband come in, or perhaps that is what woke me. I opened my eyes to see him standing leaning on the mantelpiece looking down at me, his eyebrows drawn together with a strange expression. He looked harsh, vexed, but he looked something else, too. Half awake as I was I did not wait to read his expression. I recollected it afterwards. At the first instant of waking it was just a pleasure to see him there, and I held out my arms and lifted my face.

His face changed as if clouds rolled away. He knelt down and took me in his arms. I had never been kissed before as my husband kissed me, and whether it was wrong or not I could never have enough of it. It was several minutes before he spoke. Then he held me away from him and said:

“What’s this about you quarreling with Mistress Tabitha?”

“Quarreling with Mistress Tabitha?” said I. “Why, what a queer expression. I haven’t quarreled with Mistress Tabitha!”

I then told him the whole affair, such as it was. I had determined to regard it as a small thing, a misunderstanding by Mistress Tabitha of her rights and responsibilities, and an unconscious expression of her dislike of Ahmed.



The account seemed to stir him beyond its right dimensions. He took his hands away and put them in his pockets and walked up and down the room.

“Why the fuss on this particular point?” said he. “What does Ahmed matter? I don’t know where they put him to sleep, I’m sure, but anywhere in this house would be as good as what he’s mostly been accustomed to, and better. Do you realize that all through London, apprentices in shops are sleeping under the counters all night, and little maids-of-all-work are housed in a corner of the back kitchen with black beetles all over the place? You’ve too high a level for servant housing, and Ahmed doesn’t know enough to appreciate it. He’s only half there!”

“I felt that Ahmed’s cupboard under the stairs was unsuitable,” said I, “and there’s plenty of room in the house, I find. No other use was being suggested for the room that I’ve put Ahmed in. Do you want me to ask you about every household change that I may make?”

“It presents a problem,” he said.

“What sort of problem?” said I.

“I don’t like to rescind your orders, my dear!” said he.

“Rescind my orders?” said I. “How could you? Am I not your wife and the mistress of this house?”

“Yes,” he said, “you are. That’s where the difficulty comes in.”

“I must say I don’t see the difficulty,” said I.

“Well, it’s this way. Old Tabitha protected me when I

was little. She has stood by me through thick and thin — and there's been quite a lot of thin. She feels she has rights in this house — rights over me, even. And she's not mistaken. She does have rights."

"I see that," said I. "I'm willing to acknowledge her rights. But if it comes to a conflict of authority between us, as in this case, what then?"

"Yes," said my husband, slowly, "what then?"

He came over to the fire and kicked the coals in place with his boot. A bright flame sprang up in response and illumined his face. It was dark and perplexed. Then he turned to me and looked at me, as he sometimes did, as if I were a picture. The spurt of flame was illuminating me. I was bathed in its light and glow.

"What then?" he said, as if suddenly making his decision. "Why, then, you of course are the mistress!"

He took my hands and pulled me up to him and kissed me passionately. "You are extraordinarily lovely, my dear," he said. "Let your possession of powerful beauty make you generous. Don't lock horns with poor old Tabitha oftener than you can help."

He left the room, and I heard a little colloquy going on outside the door. Evidently the maid, Matilda, had waited up for him, to catch him in the hall when he came home and give him her version of Tabitha's complaint! I suddenly knew that Tabitha was sitting awake in her sitting room, expecting perhaps that I would be brought to her, captive

to my husband's will — and hers. What an extraordinary thought. Why the woman couldn't be quite sane!

I believe my husband went straight to old Mistress Tabitha's room and told her of his decision.

In the morning, after breakfast, I made a point of going along to visit Tabitha before I even gave my orders for the day. I wanted her to feel that I was not treating her as a servant. I was touched particularly by what Luke had said about her protecting him when he was little. I had not heard many stories from his past, but I had read between the lines that he had had a great deal of unhappiness and suffering in his life, even cruelty.

Tabitha's room was just as usual. It was always the same temperature, the same climate, the same time of year, in that room all the year round.

We exchanged politenesses. Neither of us said a word about Ahmed.

I presently said that if there was anything that she wanted at any time if she would let me know of it, I would have it bought for her if it were possible.

"Thank you, madam," she said, with her strange satiric little cackle. "I have already been told that. Yes, yes, I've already been told that by the master! But it's very nice to hear it from the mistress. It's a great thing when the *mistress* takes an interest in a poor old body like me!"

And she cackled away.

I suppose it is a stupid self-consciousness on my part, but

it does give me so much the idea that she is laughing at me! Laughing at me in an unkind way, as if she knew something very ridiculous, very absurd about me, or noticed some peculiarity of manner or behavior. I must put this out of my head. It is morbid.

I noticed, however, a quickening of attention with regard to me throughout the house, a livelier desire to please me. In my brother's house I had lived so closely on the fringe of the servants' section, I had associated with them so much, in a way, that I realized as I never had done in my father's home how the servants provide always a body of witnesses, a chorus of comment on what goes on in the house. So, my antennae being sensitive to their vibrations, I realized that they had expected a battle to be joined between me and Mistress Tabitha, and seeing that I was young and shy and new to the country and a bride, they expected Mistress Tabitha to have an easy walkover. The fact that I had known what belonged to my position had increased their respect for me.

I was glad that Patsy had not been involved in this affair. Her position in the house is rather invidious.



My letter to my father's cousins was followed very promptly by their cards being left at Friar's Court by a

footman, along with a note inviting me to visit them at their home. I therefore went to visit Mr. and Mrs. Joshua Bates on the second Sunday after my arrival at Friar's Court. My husband had engagements that day which prevented his going with me, and I gathered, by that sixth sense that every wife develops, that for some reason he preferred me to make this call by myself. The carriage was placed at my disposal, and I took Patsy with me for company. Ever since I have been grown up Patsy has been like a cushion. When I was little I thought she was strict and tiresome, and I suppose she often was, but I knew underneath it all that she adored me, so it did me no harm. Now that I have her as part of my new household, her quiet silent ways are most soothing. She loves to mend and make for me, and at Friar's Court she has little to do but sit and sew. It was a great outing for her, I could see by the quiet sparkle in her mild gray eyes, to go with me to East Sheen.

This village (still a village though almost a suburb of London) was full of charm. It was delicious to drive into the country greenery. My relations received me most kindly. Mr. Joshua Bates and his wife had summoned a party to meet me — Mr. Van de Weyer, the Belgian minister, and his wife, Madame Van de Weyer, who was Mr. Bates's daughter; and a handsome trio of children, a boy and two girls, adored little grandchildren of Mr. and Mrs. Bates. I looked at these children with great interest, remembering that they were the playmates of princes and

princesses, Queen Victoria's own family. From an American standpoint, they were almost excessively well bred and well behaved; but when they were released from the room I heard them shrieking and running along the corridor like any natural American children.

The house was luxurious and comfortable in an unostentatious way, but I somehow felt myself in the presence of great wealth. This was partly conveyed by the preciousness of various objects which I could recognize (especially now that I had been to Paris and to Rome), but particularly in the large size and beautiful cultivation of the grounds surrounding the house. As soon as tea, with its accompanying polite conversation, was over, Mr. Bates, whose face all the while expressed the utmost kindness and good-natured liveliness, suggested eagerly that I might like to see over the grounds.

"Don't let him tire you, my dear!" said kind Mrs. Bates.

I was as anxious to get out-of-doors into that delicious spring sunshine and see at a nearer view the many bright flowers which I observed out of the window, as Mr. Bates could possibly be to show them to me. The rest of my visit was spent roaming about the grounds with him, accompanied sometimes in a group and sometimes at a little distance by Baron and Madame Van de Weyer. Mr. Bates loved nothing better than to show his flowers, his rare plants, and perhaps above all his greenhouses. I discovered that his hobby was botany. My own father had never been.

able to give much attention to his garden and merely had it kept up very carefully in honor of my mother's memory. She had been the one for the flowers when she was alive, I had often heard. I told Mr. Bates this, and he listened with great interest, as he did to everything that I told him about my old home and former life. In fact, as soon as he felt that I was thoroughly at ease sharing with him his pleasure in his plants, he inserted a number of questions about America. He knew Philadelphia hardly at all, but he was eager to hear every detail I could tell him about Boston and Newport. He listened earnestly to everything I had to tell about my father, whom he remembered only as a young man. He was interested, of course, in the business side of his life, and of this I could give quite an unusually good account owing to my work on the business end before I was married. Mr. Bates complimented me, in fact, on my intelligent grasp of it.

"Not many young ladies have such a head on their shoulders," he said and then added gallantly, "I mean to say, indeed, in every sense of the word."

"Father is a terrible flatterer," said Madame Van de Weyer sweetly from behind. "You will soon learn to be on your guard against him, Cousin Rose."

It was delightful to me to be taken into this circle so quickly and to feel myself treated at once as a kinswoman. Before the sun beginning to set reminded me that I had to go home before dark, Mr. Bates had succeeded in asking

me a good many discreet questions about my marriage. Where had I met my husband and how was it I hadn't married a Quaker, and how the Quakers took my "marrying out," and various things of that kind. I explained that owing to my father's previous disownment, there wasn't any question about my marriage on the part of the Quakers. I gave him a clear account of my courtship in rather short answers — not that I was unwilling to answer but because I did not always know how to. Particularly he expressed a natural though polite curiosity as to my husband's business.

"I think you said your husband was engaged in the shipping trade, something like your father?" he said.

"I'm not quite sure that my husband owns any ships," said I. "I really haven't given it a great deal of thought. He has large business interests, I know. Lawyers drew up marriage settlements and all that sort of thing."

"Perhaps he is in banking, something similar to my own," said Mr. Bates. "I should be very glad to be of service to him in any way that I could, as a man married to one of my kinswomen."

"I have an idea," said I, "that it is perhaps less banking than the stock exchange. I seem to feel that my husband is concerned with stocks and shares and fluctuations of the market. But he is not a husband who discusses business affairs with his wife — and I dare say he is not at all uncommon in that!"



"He probably does not know yet what a clever wife he's got!" said Mr. Bates. "However, he's quite right. Newly married couples have more important things to talk about. As you wear on in life together, no doubt discussion of business will creep in more and more. I am only interested in a general way. I gather from what you tell me that your husband is in some line of life rather similar to my own. Please present him my compliments and tell him from me that I do have to study the market somewhat, and might occasionally be of use to him."

"I shall be most grateful to do so, Mr. Bates," said I.

"And by the way," said he, "will you not invest a little friendliness right away in my concerns, and call me Cousin Joshua?"

I was delighted at that request from this distinguished, important, and noble-looking man. Wandering through the greenhouses, suffering from the excessive heat of the ones that produce the tropical plants (orchids and such), and again admiring the great flowers that were blooming in other glass houses, and tomatoes that were showing green in pots (I laughed with him at the fact that the English have to grow their tomatoes under glass whereas we fortunate ones in the States can ripen ours in the open air!), I soon felt as if I had known him for years.

When he put me into my carriage at the close of the afternoon, my farewells all said, I felt a cozy sense of added security.

"Remember," he said, "any young American lady in London, who is about to be presented to the Queen and is inevitably going to mingle somewhat in our circle, would be a matter of concern to my wife and myself! But when we realize our relationship, it is much more so. Please take us seriously when we beg you to consider our house a second home. Whatever my wife and I, or in fact my daughter, can do for you in any way we shall be most proud and happy to do. We hope to see much of you. We are very, very glad that your husband has brought you to London to live."

As he closed the carriage door he turned back.

"My compliments to Mr. Ashton! I hope to make his acquaintance in the very near future. And may I say I'm very glad you have that faithful Patsy there about you!" He waved his hand and we were off.

The question of my presentation at Court had been discussed at tea and Madame Van de Weyer had said at once:

"Why, Mrs. Ashton, it would have given me pleasure to present a kinswoman to Her Majesty, but since I am the wife of the Belgian minister I'm in peculiar circumstances. By his position I belong to the Belgian foreign service! The people whom I present at Court are those who come under the protection of the Belgian ministry. As an American citizen, you would be presented by the American minister, Mr. Adams. But your marriage makes it necessary for you to be presented by an Englishwoman. Lady Diana would

be very suitable, and I am quite surprised — since she has all the etiquette and protocol at her fingers' ends — that she did not remember that I shouldn't be eligible to act as your sponsor. I could help with your costume, though. Please let me know what I can do in that way. It would give me a great pleasure if you would allow me at least to see the finished dress before the presentation. Let's have a little dress rehearsal, you and Lady Diana and me."

"I should like that very much," I had said. "Lady Diana is being most kind, taking me to her shops and dressmakers, and I think the dress is well underway. But her ideas are very, very elaborate. I would like to keep everything as simple as the Court custom will permit!"

"That's just what I should have thought!" said Madame Van de Weyer, with some satisfaction. "Lady Diana is herself extravagant, opulent — *you* know, a little inclined to be extreme! You and I would perhaps have quieter tastes. So, by all means let me have a hand in it, and offer a little criticism now and then. Nothing that you wore could possibly fail to look lovely on you, but there's no reason why we should not set off your beauty at its best. You will only be presented once. We may as well make a superb impression on that occasion!"

My husband was waiting supper for me when I got back. We sat down together in the candlelit dining room, waited on by the dourly efficient John. Luke was most interested

in having a full account of my visit at East Sheen. He listened attentively to my descriptions of the large and well-laid out grounds, the variety of flowers already in bloom, the greenhouses and the large ornamental water with swans on it. He heard about Madame Van de Weyer and her portly husband, and the three charming children. And I repeated to him a good deal of the conversation, for which I have always had a good memory. He was entertained by the dialogue, and laughed more than once. But that reminded me of my stately cousin's question which I had found it difficult to answer.

“At one point Mr. Bates very naturally asked me a question as to your occupation, your profession, Luke,” said I.

“And what did you say?” said my husband.

“I said you were not, as he suggested, a ship owner as far as I knew, nor a banker, but you were interested in stocks and shares and in the fluctuations of the market,” said I, repeating my own words as near as I could, like a parrot.

Some slight tension was eased in my husband's eyebrows.

“Claret, John!” he said. And then to me, “You did quite right, my dear. That was a very good answer.”

“Mr. Bates sent you his compliments and repeatedly assured me of his desire to be of service to you,” said I.

“And that is very good hearing,” said my husband, suavely. “There is not a man in London who would not be flattered and probably benefited by an offer of service from

Mr. Joshua Bates. The time may come when we will hold him to his word."

I was almost asleep with my head tucked into my husband's shoulder when I realized — and woke up for a moment to think about it — that I could not answer Mr. Bates's question any better now than I could before. But there was plenty of time to find out exactly how to describe my husband's profession. As Mr. Bates himself said the time for discussing business matters between us, and for me to take an interest in my husband's occupation, was still in the future. Our honeymoon was over, but our serious life together had hardly yet begun.

The difference in age between us made him treat me rather as a child — even if a loved, admired child. But time would correct this.



The shadow of the sundial was etched sharp and black by the June sunshine on the stroke of nine. Ahmed was carrying for me a basket of rare plants given to me by my cousin, and I knew they ought to go into the ground as fast as possible.

The red-haired gardener was busy in the sundial enclosure. I was glad of that because he had attracted my attention and I liked the look of him better than the old

man who was head gardener; and of course he was more responsible than the garden boy, the youngest helper. He came to me now with his light, easy gait.

“You want me to plant those things, madam?” he said.

“Yes, or I want to plant them myself,” said I.

He gave a glance at my dress.

“If you’re going to kneel around in the garden, Mrs. Ashton, you’d better go in and get yourself a big apron,” he said.

His tone surprised me. It was not that of a servant. It was natural and equal.

Ahmed held up the basket at his gesture and he looked closely at the plants that were nestled in its boat-shaped curve.

“Why,” he said, “these are remarkable plants indeed! Here are some beauties, including a cyclamen which ought to produce a most delicate bloom, possibly white with a tip of purple. This garden is so sheltered, when the sun is good, I think you’re right that these will all bloom out-of-doors. We don’t go in much for glass at Friar’s Court.”

“My cousin, Mr. Joshua Bates, told me that all these things would grow out-of-doors with care,” said I.

“Ah, you got them from Mr. Bates!” said the red-haired gardener. “That accounts for it!”

“Then you know Mr. Bates?” said I, surprised.

“Oh,” said he, as if catching himself up, “there are very few people in London who haven’t heard of Baring’s Bank

and its president, and he has a very famous botanical garden. They're becoming the fashion now. We haven't, of course, room for such here, even if there was anyone to take an interest in it. But we can get some very good effects with what we have got. The arrangement of the place is very attractive here, very promising for gardening."

"I suppose you were accustomed to a larger estate than this before?" said I.

"No," said Mr. Redhead, "as a matter of fact, I was not. Now where, madam, would you like these plants to go?"

I looked around. The beds seemed full already of pinks and canterbury bells and such, all around the sundial.

The gardener saw and understood my glance.

"Of course, there's a lot here already," he said, "but the soil is rich and it's always been well stocked. We'll have out some of these more ordinary flowers and put some of these little treasures in. If you've any fancy for any special place, you let me know. If not, I can use my own judgment. I am at your orders."

"Do you really think it necessary to mention that?" said I, aroused and piqued.

"I see you don't yet know the English gardener," he said quickly. "He's an autocrat and a tyrant in his domain. I've known of dowager duchesses who daren't pick their own flowers without their gardener's permission."

Although I was new to England I'd come to expect a

certain form of speech from a servant which this man didn't have. The different classes in England are rather indicated by speech as they are not in America. The uneducated people have a different way of talking from the educated people. Perhaps gardeners are a higher order of workmen than, for instance, the indoor servants and the coachmen and others that I had encountered.

He made me laugh.

"Suppose you tell me where you think they would go best," said I.

"Nothing would be more pleasant," said he.

He began to walk with me around the small enclosure. The lawn was dewy, fresh, and newly mown. The flowers were borders of delicate color. This garden was, as I had expected it to be, a perfect gem. He showed me here and there where he thought the new flowers could be shown to advantage. Ahmed followed along with the basket, holding it out from time to time as if he expected us to help ourselves at any moment, much as a child might offer a box of candy. The redhead smiled at one of these offers as he gestured it away.

"That's a nice little servant you've got there, that Ahmed," he said, casually.

It was such a new comment on Ahmed that I quite stared. Perhaps this was the first time that I had looked at the gardener fully. He had an unusual face. I had noticed it before in passing as being almost bizarre. His skin was



very deeply tanned, as if from long exposure to sun and wind — almost like a sailor's face. He had auburn whiskers. His thatch of hair was rough and untidy. In this brown and auburn setting his eyes were surprisingly blue.

He walked away from me and stood for a moment considering the flower beds. The hand that held the trowel was on his hip, bent at the wrist, and his stance was unmistakably that of a well-born man. He turned, not with the indefinable clumsiness of a yokel, but with the easy athleticism of a fencer and a horseman, and came back to me, untied the coarse sacking apron from around his waist, and before I knew what he would be at, tied it around mine. He put the trowel in my hand.

"There you are," he said, pointing, "right there, ma'am. I'll take out that little row, see." He yanked the flowers out with his hands. "Now you can kneel down and plant whatever you want."

I moved toward the flower bed and then looked over my shoulder.

"You, Mr. Redhead, what is your name?"

"Some call me Red, some call me Cain," said he.

"It seems to me," said I, "that you were not always a gardener."

"Well, whether I was or not," said he, "I am one now, and a damned good one, too. So don't go losing me my job, madam."

"How lose you your job?"

“By telling on me to the master! He hired me as a born professional gardener. So long as I do my work that way, why shouldn’t I be? Why wake up any of my shady past?”

I knew he would not speak in that joking way if his past was really shady. And it was no business of mine that he had come down in the world.

“Well, I won’t tell,” said I, “as long as the garden looks like this.”

There’s something about gardening — at any rate moderate gardening — which makes one forget everything else. One forgets one’s worries. Fretting thoughts slip away. One’s attention is entirely taken by the things of the senses — the feel of the damp soil, the singing of birds, the warmth of the sun on one’s back and head, the tender green feeling of plants with their juicy little stalks, the strange sense of a life akin to and yet totally otherwise than one’s own. So I was lost most happily to all the small perplexities that I had begun to find waking in the bottom of my heart.

Cain moved beside me, clearing a space now and then, with his long-fingered muscular hand, for me to put in my individual precious plants, and Ahmed hovered in the background, pushing the basket in reach exactly when I wanted it.

The peace was hardly broken by the entrance on the scene of my faithful Patsy.

"I've been looking for thee, Miss Rose," she said. "I wasn't quite sure in which part of this garden thee was going to put those plants."

"Look, Patsy!" said I. "See there, and there, and there! I've got them *in*, and that's where they'll get the most sun. One or two of these others, Cain tells me, are shady plants, and I shall have to put them on the other side of the lawn where there comes the most shade. Are you going to stay and help, Patsy?"

I knew she'd like to stay with me, and I always liked her company.

"Why, yes, Miss Rose," she said, "I could stay a while and watch, but I've got something on my mind."

"Well, what is it, Patsy?" said I, still kneeling with my back to her, patting the earth around my last plant. I knew whatever was on Patsy's mind would come off slowly, deliberately, and quietly at its own good pace.

"Well, thee knows that I've been going around the clocks in the house," said she.

Indeed I did know it. Patsy's hobby, curiously enough, was clocks. She had always kept the clocks in order at home and wound them up at their proper times, seventh day nights or first day mornings. One can always trust Patsy with a job like that. She's rather like a clock herself. Quiet, punctual, ticking away at her duties. I don't know that she ever took a clock apart completely, but I know that she could do oiling and a little polishing without taking the works out,

a delicate brushing off of the little wheels. So she had been going over the clocks at Friar's Court, as one resuming a familiar task in a strange place; becoming acquainted with the new clocks, finding out their little habits and tricks, their needs of winding or cleaning, and listening with a careful ear to their different voices.

"Well, Rose," said Patsy, "there's that grandfather clock that I found in the corner of the passage, that dark corner near Mistress Tabitha's room."

"Oh? I don't think I ever noticed it," said I.

"Well," said Patsy, "it's real dark there and the clock wasn't going. There was no tick. But I saw it there when I was going round the house with a candle looking over my clocks a day or two ago, and meant to give it some attention, and this morning I got around to examining it to see why it wasn't going. I thought maybe it just wanted winding up. But when I come to look inside the clock case, why it had no weights. The weights was missing."

Cain was kneeling near me at the flower bed. At these words he rose straight up and walked toward Patsy with an uprooted bunch of button daisies in his hands.

"Weights?" he said, in a peculiar tone. "Weights? That's a funny thing to find missing. What could any thief want them for? They've got no value! And they'd be devilish awkward to carry away."

"It's near lunchtime," said Patsy to me. "I really come to call thee, Rose. The master's home and he'll be looking for thee."

Cain turned abruptly away and went through the arch in the wall toward the kitchen garden. A moment later my husband's footstep was clearly heard on the gravel of the pleached alley and then was silenced by the turf as he stepped into the sundial garden.

"Ah, there you are, my dear," he said. "They told me I should find you here. You look mighty pretty! Worthy of your name, come out a little sooner in bloom than your little sisters in the garden."

I got up from my knees and brushed the moist earth from my skirt and untied the sacking apron. Since its owner had disappeared I just dropped it on the grass and went to meet my husband.

"Well," said I, "I've had a good morning and it has gone fast. I've got all my little precious flowers planted in now. Oh, by the way, Luke, Patsy has been doing her jobs with the clocks — you know, I told you — and she's discovered something wrong with that old grandfather clock in the upstairs passage. It has no weights."

I was in my husband's arms at the moment. And his arms seemed to turn to metal or stone around me. I felt them change into something nonhuman. For some unaccountable reason I felt faint. I had been kneeling too long in the sun. A dizziness swam in my head. I just heard my husband say in a peculiar, muffled voice:

"Patsy mustn't work too hard. . . . There are always a lot of things missing in an old house where many people have lived and much has happened."

“Of course.”

He turned me toward the house, and in the green tunnel of the limes his face looked like a face under water. He felt me shudder. His hand dropped from my elbow, and he said, mastering his natural voice — composed, confident, assured:

“Lady Diana tells me that everything’s now in train and that you will be presented next week.”

The sun went behind a cloud as it so often does in this climate. The early sunshine was over and before we reached the house a fine needle rain had begun to fall.



It was the sixth of June, the day of the Queen’s first drawing room of the season. I was up early to get ready for my presentation. Patsy helped me get dressed immediately after breakfast. My final costume was a white dress trimmed with seed pearls, a close-fitting bodice, with bare shoulders, and a full crinolined skirt with a long train lined with palest sky blue. Lady Diana sent her hairdresser at eleven to arrange my hair in the fashion and fasten my head-dress into it — a wreath of artificial flowers, white and pale blue, with seed pearls to imitate drops of dew.

“Well,” said my husband, when I had sent Ahmed scurrying for him to see how I looked, “you’re a regular fairy

queen, nothing less!" He stared at me with a strange look, as if he saw me for the first time.

"Do you like it?" I said, rather nervous, because I felt terribly dressed up, and very naked around the neck.

"You're too beautiful, my dear!" he said. "I didn't imagine — I'm tempted to exercise my rights and rumple you all up. . . ."

Patsy crawled round from behind me, where she had been kneeling, concealed, putting a stitch in the hem of my train, and knelt down in front of me, with pins in her mouth.

"Oh, I see you have your ubiquitous watchdog!" said Luke. "Well, come and show yourself off to Mistress Tabitha. She is waiting impatiently. Matilda has been taking along quarter-hourly bulletins of the progress of the toilette!"

Bother Tabitha. It was a nuisance, but I saw it would be unkind to refuse. I had meant to show her on my return, when it would not matter if I crushed my dress.

The warm June day made Tabitha's room seem, even more than usual, oppressively hot.

Luke led me in by the hand, like a princess, and Matilda helped me shake out the long billowing train which I had carried bundled over my arm.

I saw Tabitha catch her breath as she saw me.

She stared for a minute in silence. Then she tried to assert herself.

"You look grand, mistress, you certainly do look fine and grand! Now show old Tabitha how you'll make your curtsy!"

I saw through her. Besides, it was too hot.

"No, no," I said, lightly, "that is only for the Queen! Give me my train, Matilda! I must go and cool off on the lawn. They'll be coming for me in a few minutes."

I turned away and Tabitha cried, "Good-by, mistress. The luck's with you today!"

Her tone was so queer that I looked back over my shoulder. One advantage of a long neck is that it turns easily. I caught Tabitha off guard, and for the first time in my life I saw an unmitigated expression of malignant hate. It was unmistakable. But what had I done to make her hate me?

The servants had all gathered in the entrance hall to see me in my finery — including the three gardeners; so I did not need to go out on the lawn to dazzle Mr. Redhead! His controlled face had no expression, except in his eyes. And after one look he slipped away into the back passage and went, I suppose, back to his work.

Madame Van de Weyer called for me promptly with her carriage. Lady Diana was to meet me when I got to the palace. The weather was fine, hundreds were out in the streets, sharing vicariously the excitement of the opening day of the season, and actually helping, in doing so, to make it exciting. My cousin drove me to the Belgian Legation in



Grosvenor Square, where we had sandwiches and wine, and started again from there with Baron Van de Weyer at half past one. We drove rapidly up to Hyde Park, under the Wellington Arch at the entrance of Green Park, and then proceeded down Constitution Hill and on to St. James's Palace. Here was a crowd of carriages, horsemen, guards, and all sorts of people watching in the streets. Swarms of the street urchins were turning cartwheels for pennies. They were so ragged and miserable-looking that it gave me a shock. How could the well-to-do people around them bear it?

When our carriage had edged its way to the main doorway we were assisted out by the equerries, and went into a long corridor crowded with brilliantly dressed ladies and gentlemen, all moving toward a magnificent staircase. The angles of the stairs were guarded by members of the corps of Gentlemen-at-arms and Beefeaters — Yeomen of the Guard. The uniforms were fascinating to me. They were just the same, said Madame Van de Weyer, as in the reign of Henry VIII.

When we reached the first floor we turned south to a long gallery hung with paintings, filled with chattering people, and the fountain-splash sound of polite conversation. There were crowds of people, radiant with perfume, beauty, aristocracy, and jewels. But more and more poured in, moment by moment, and found room. Here I was introduced to Sir Edward Cust, the Master of Ceremonies, who reassured

me by his easy manners, and his pleasant compliments on my dress.

We gradually moved along into an immense oblong room, which was immediately outside the throne room. The walls were hung with pictures here, too. The ladies' dresses all around me were most magnificent, and the uniforms of the men were varied and rich. All was coruscating color.

We waited in this room until it was time for us to go into the throne room. The scene was simply enchanting. Everything was in taste. My cousin introduced me to Sir John Harding, the Queen's Councilor and Justice, a fine-looking man dressed in his law-court costume of large white curled wig and long, black gown ornamented with gold embroidery. The dress was warm to wear on a hot day, and sweat stood in beads on his forehead. I was pleased to think that American lawyers were able to adapt themselves to their climate, and did not wear this cumbersome dress. But I liked seeing it on Sir John Harding. It was picturesque and suitable. I saw it was a symbol. "I am no longer a man, I am the Law!"

A buzz of conversation ran through the room continuously. Pretty girls, some rather ugly dowagers, some dignified ones, officers and foreigners, a splendid Chinese mandarin, some fabulous Indian rajahs right out of my husband's tales; oh, it was fascinating to see it and be a part of it. Then word passed round from Sir Edward Cust that it was time for the Diplomatic Corps to go in for

their presentation. They, of course, took precedence, and Madame Van de Weyer delivered me over now to Lady Diana (who appeared, looking radiant in the throng), and herself joined her husband with the Belgian Legation. Lady Diana was in fine fettle.

"My dear," she said, "you look marvelous. You do me credit. I'm delighted to be the one to present you to our beloved Queen!"

The long line of debutantes now formed, the marshals civilly harrying them like sheep dogs arranging sheep, one behind the other, and since I was in very good time and had been brought by so distinguished a person as Madame Van de Weyer, I was not more than ten from the leader. Nearly all of the girls were very, very nervous, trembling and fidgeting. We were all holding our trains over our left arms until the moment when we would enter the throne room, when we should have them unfolded by servants ready at the door. Gowns of all colors, amber, sky-blue, deep green, white, and in some cases black silk, were worn by the ladies to be presented, and headdresses of wreaths, bows, pearls, flowers, and gems, according to their tastes, decorated them all. When the line began to move, and the first ones went slowly ahead into the throne room, I could see as they went how their trains whirled out behind them over the floor with an effect of splendor. Some glanced round with a look of terror as if they would be glad to fly back but for the oncoming procession behind them; others went on, hanging heads and

trembling, like sheep to the slaughter. At last it was my turn. I found that I was not in the least nervous. I was curious, interested, but it all seemed to me a sort of elaborate make-believe, a dignified child's game. I followed Lady Diana in and came up slowly in front of the Queen. The Queen was standing with her tall husband, Prince Albert, beside her. She was short, dignified, dressed in black with a tiara of jets and black feathers. Her teeth were prominent and bright. Lady Diana presented me, and the Queen received me with a very pleasant smile and bow, and said, "I hope you will be happy in England!" I shyly thanked her and made the curtsy that I had been taught to make and passed on, when Prince Albert took me by the hand as I curtsied, less low, before him. Then I had to curtsy — the merest sketch of one — to the Princess Royal, the eldest daughter, who was standing beside her fiancé, Prince Frederick William of Prussia; and then to the Queen's cousin, the Duke of Cambridge. He twirled his mustache slightly, his eyes twinkled at me, he bowed, but he did not take my hand. I thought he gave something like a wink to my companion Lady Diana.

He murmured to her:

"This is the young lady you told me of?"

And she replied:

"Yes, your Highness. You see I did not exaggerate!"

Then, steered by Lady Diana, I took my place at the side of the room with many others, and watched some of my

fellow debutantes presented. The whole ceremony was extremely brief. The Queen looked to me almost girlish (although of course she was old enough to be my mother), and her smile was unaffected and natural. I looked at her thoroughly and with great curiosity. I could observe her face closely from where I stood, and I was agreeably surprised at the beauty of her features after some of the pictures and descriptions I had seen and heard.

The Princess Royal is to be married within a few months, to the heir of the crown of Prussia. She is a plain, even homely girl. She would not be a beauty in an ague swamp in Illinois. She has a snub nose, large projecting mouth (almond-shaped), roundish eyes, dark brown hair, small bullet-shaped chin, a fat face and flushed — and she is not a pretty figure. But she smiles constantly in a good-humored way and shows a set of very good teeth.

Prince Frederick William, to whom she is soon to be married, is about five feet ten, light complexioned, and rather good-looking, though he wears a frown. But the handsome man in the royal party is Prince Albert. He has such a fine, frank face that I wondered why he was so unpopular with the aristocracy, as Lady Diana had told me. She says they think him prim and foreign. But a lady remarked to me as I stood there that the Prince was “most uncomfortably handsome.”

At first the pageant was fascinating, but it soon got monotonous, and the mind felt crushed with the tide of

richness. Lady Diana tried to entertain me, murmuring who different people were, but of course I forgot in most cases as soon as I was told. There was, however, one in particular who did take my attention — a tall, queenly woman dressed in black. It was Mrs. Norton, who had had such a cruel life, who had a husband who tormented her and deprived her of the right to live with her children, and who attacked her reputation — which she defended in a lawsuit and won it. It is her final triumph that she is now received by the Queen. But nothing could undo the agony that she has gone through. Her fight was not only for herself but for all women. A law has now been passed in Parliament limiting the rights of a husband in England to torment his wife, or to deprive her of her children without just cause. Mrs. Norton was a very noble-looking woman, with not only beauty but a face glowing with mind.

I got quite fatigued myself after an hour of watching. I felt very sorry for the Queen, poor creature, who had to stand there long weary hours receiving seven hundred people or more, and bow to every one. She was tired out, as Lady Diana after told me, and glad to see the end of the torture. But she has been Queen for twenty years! A drawing room is nothing new to her. She knows what she is in for.

There was really no need for me to remain after I had made my curtsy, but Lady Diana, not being on duty, thought it would entertain me to stay a while and watch the

scene. But when more than an hour had passed she saw that my attention was a little flagging, and softly suggested that we might now suitably make our escape. I thankfully followed her through a side door, where we drew deep breaths of relief at being out of "the Presence," and in the labyrinth of dark, gloomy passages which traversed the more private parts of the palace. After wandering as one would wander in a forest through a maze of corridors and rooms, we reached at last a staircase to a side entrance, and Lady Diana dispatched a servant for her carriage. Since her coachman had been warned previously where to come, and had kept out of the jam of traffic at the main entrance, we did not have to wait very long.

We drove peacefully home in the late afternoon light.

"One of the best things about being at Court," said Lady Diana, "is getting away from it. Ouf! What a relief! What a pleasure just to sit in a carriage and lean back, cross one's knees, scratch one's neck, do what one pleases, make faces, say what one wants as loud as one likes. Ah, the hours of confinement are almost paid for by this nice feeling of freedom. Do you know what the Queen did the day of her coronation, when all the pomp and pageantry was over and she was safely back again in Buckingham Palace? She gave her pet dog a bath!"

"How well I can understand her," said I.

When we turned into our street, I saw Ahmed's conspicuous little figure near the front gate, surrounded by a

bunch of little street boys. They were catcalling and throwing things at him, perhaps only dust and horse-dung since loose stones aren't readily found in a well-cared for street in London, but the sight was horrid. I saw that Ahmed had his hands over his face and was shrinking back against the wall in obvious terror, inarticulate, of course, silent, miserable, unable to defend himself. The coachman quickly scattered the boys with a flick of his whip, and Ahmed scrambled onto the carriage step at my side. At that very moment the redheaded gardener hurried out of the gate. When he saw the carriage turning in, he stood back to let it pass.

"Ah," he said, "I got word that Ahmed was in trouble and ran out, but I see he's got rescued by a better!"

The carriage rolled past him up the short dark drive, turned into the enclosed court, and Ahmed leapt from the step and pulled the big bell with all his little might. It clanged overloudly and too long, since Ahmed could not tell how hard he was pulling it. The door opened quickly, even impatiently. Matilda, rather to my surprise, stood there. She looked frowning, as if she were about to pounce on Ahmed and scold him for making such a racket, but when she saw the carriage she stood back with sullen politeness. I got out, carefully gathering my dress around me and bundling up my train with Ahmed's skillful help.

"Come in," I said to Diana. "I'll order some tea right away. Isn't tea what you'd like?"



“Indeed I should!” said Lady Diana. “While it’s getting ready, do you mind if I walk in the garden? You told me, you know, about those plants round the sundial. I know the way.”

“By all means,” said I, and went indoors. “Matilda, will you send Patsy to me? I’d like to get out of some of this finery and then have tea.”

“I’ll order the tea, madam, right away,” said Matilda.

I went on up the staircase to my bedroom, and there struggled with my dress, trying to unhook some of the complicated fastenings here and there, impatient for Patsy to arrive. Of course, for one thing, I wanted to tell her all about the day. I knew my husband would not be home till much later.

I was surprised at Patsy’s delay. Indeed I’d expected to find her quiet, friendly face waiting for me at the door, or at least watching perhaps out of some side window, to see when her nursling would arrive back from this grand and great experience. I began to feel hurt and a little vexed. I rang my bell twice. For a while there was no reply, then Matilda presented herself.

“I’m sorry to keep you waiting, madam,” she said, “some of the servants have got the afternoon off, seeing as there was nobody at home and you wasn’t expected till later. I’ve started the tea, ma’am, and if you’ll now allow me, I’ll unhook your dress for you.”

“But where is Patsy?” said I.

"I don't know as I rightly know, ma'am."

The answer struck me as singular. A pang of anxiety suddenly seized me. Could Patsy have been taken ill? But remembering that nobody would know the exact hour of my arrival, I put such silly apprehensions away. Patsy might be out in the garden sitting and sewing by the sundial. Or she might be in her room busy with something, maybe to do with her precious clocks. I set aside a feeling of neglect and injury and accepted Matilda's help, since there she was. I'm sorry to say that I dislike this girl. When her fingers touched my skin I felt myself shrinking away from them. To do her justice, however, she unhooked me very deftly, and there were hundreds of hooks. At last the dress was rustled and shuffled, with exquisite care and precision, over my head. My headdress had been taken off before and was lying on the bed. There I stood in my petticoat. Matilda, laying my court dress carefully on the bed, hurried to the closet, and came out with one of my home dresses, that I had brought with me from America — one of those made in the old-fashioned Quaker mode.

"I don't think I'll put that dress on today, Matilda," said I. "Something more airy and cool, I think. I've a pink flowered calico in there and a white muslin. One of them I think must be clean and in good order."

"The master's coming back to dinner, ma'am," said Matilda, "and he left word that he hoped tonight you would be pleased to wear your gray dress, and the gauze cap and all. I've got it all laundered and ready."

What an odd message. However I was in a hurry to join my guest, and also in a hurry to get rid of Matilda so, for the moment, I let the gray dress be slipped over my head and the fichu arranged. My hair was still elaborately dressed, but the cap let it show through, and curls slipped out from under on my neck and temples. In this mixture of attire I went downstairs to look for Lady Diana.

The sundial lawn was empty. I stood there a moment to enjoy the sweet scents of the flowers, the solitude. I almost wished I'd ordered tea brought there. But I was still a little nervous of giving the servants much extra work. I didn't know quite how much I ought to expect.

The plants that I had put in were taking root nicely. The fountain on the wall was splashing cheerfully and soothingly. One arch in the wall led to the path that went to the kitchen garden. But another opened to the turfed path which, hedged on either side with yew, led to the lily pond lawn. I strolled along this grassy walk. The silence, only broken by birds, was so delightful that it was a pleasant thing to me that my footsteps made no sound. I walked slowly along in the shadow of the hedge, in no real hurry to find Diana. As I came near the end of the walk and saw the lawn and a corner of the lily pond before me, I heard Diana's voice talking to someone, though in a low, discreet tone.

"But how did you get here?" she said. And there was something in her voice that sounded both apprehensive and astonished. I stood still instinctively, with a feeling that I

should not interrupt. The voice which answered her was unexpected. It was the voice, I knew, of the redheaded gardener.

“Gambler’s chance!” said he.

She made a low vexed exclamation as if the words stung her. But she kept her tone light.

“Even the maddest gambler risks something in order to get something,” she said. “He doesn’t play for a certain loss!”

“I’m playing for considered stakes.”

“What, for instance?”

“An introduction to the loveliest woman of the season, shall I say, to go on with?” said he, with obvious irony. “Or a chance to be of use to her?”

“You’re becoming a professional ladies’ man,” said Diana, with bitterness.

“Lady Diana,” I called, “tea’s ready. What are you doing, dear friend, talking mysteries with my gardener?”

When I came in sight of them round the hedge the gardener was coming to meet me.

“A gardener’s work is all to do with mysteries, madam,” he said, “and I was once this other lady’s gardener. I wasn’t much of one in those days, though. Useful for very little but to do some weeding.”

“I see you are now an expert at *planting*,” said Lady Diana to his back. Her tone seemed to carry a double meaning. But it struck me that she spoke throughout as to an

equal. She was sitting on the stone bench beside the pond and there was room beside her for another. I could not say of course whether another had been sitting there. But I could see that the lady was deadly white under her rouge.

"You've changed your dress," she exclaimed as I came near.

"Yes. I feel so relaxed in this dress. I wish we could have tea out here, but it's to be in my sitting room, so shall we go in?"

In my last sight of the gardener he was kneeling by the little pond with his brawny arms deep in the water groping around in the muddy bottom. Does one weed water lilies?

"Peculiar man," said Lady Diana tentatively, her arm linked affectionately in mine, as we walked back to the house. "Peculiar, and powerful handsome!"

This seemed self-evident, so I made no reply. Instead in a moment I said:

"Luke is coming back to dinner. Could you stay and dine with us, perhaps?"

"I should like it of all things!" said Lady Diana.

Was it that she accepted too readily, without any of the usual slight excuses — "Oh, dear, I ought not to do it at this last moment," or "Oh, I haven't let my aunt know that I'm not coming home" or "Are you sure that it'll be quite convenient on a night like this?" Anyhow, something gave me a strange idea. I felt that my invitation was redundant. That she had been invited already.

My suspicion, if so small a thing is worthy such a big name, was confirmed a few moments later in another unexpected incident. Diana and I were relaxing on soft chairs in my boudoir, flinging out our arms and fanning ourselves and in general making all the motions which those who have escaped from a stiff restraint go through to express relief at being once more at liberty, when a knock at my door admitted Ahmed, ushering in the stout hard-looking lady whom I had already become acquainted with as Lady Diana's aunt and chaperone, the dowager Countess Cassell. Lady Cassell bustled in, with a great crown of black and red feathers on her head and a dress of dark crimson, with strings of garnets so large that they looked false. She wore long earrings to match, and her pudgy fat hands were loaded with rings. If I had not known that she had blue blood I might have thought her an overdressed lodging-house keeper, but I had grown used to Lady Cassell, as far as anyone ever got used to such a being. As I poured her tea, she seated herself now at the table and helped herself to thin rolled bread and butter and a slice of fruit cake.

"Well, you are nice and cosy here," she said. "Bread and butter and cake together on the same plate," she said to me, nodding. "That's what we call 'matrimony' in England."

Then she turned to her niece:

"I was told I should find you here, dear. And since you'd taken the carriage, I got me a hackney cab and followed you, to pick you up. I knew dear pretty Mrs. Ashton

wouldn't mind me coming. What a sensation you made at the Court today, Mrs. Ashton. Everyone was talking about you. Your beauty, your lovely costume, *and* — not *least* — the Queen's gracious reception of you. It's very seldom that she speaks so many words to one presented to her for the first time."

"Phew, how uncomfortable it must be to live in a palace," I said. "I could not bear being always on show, or having to stand and sit about merely as part of the room furnishings, to make someone else look important."

"Even a Queen?" said Lady Cassell, shocked, her mouth full of cake.

"Even a Queen," said I, "though as Queens go I think Queen Victoria is simply wonderful. I could easily be her loyal subject."

"But not her lady in waiting?" said Lady Diana.

"Well, do you enjoy it?" said I.

"Frankly, it does get a bit irksome," said Lady Diana, "although of course a lot of honor goes with it, prestige, and that sort of thing, and there are times when it gives one the best seats at a grand show, and one feels part of an immense and glorious pageant. That of course I can't help enjoying. Yes, you do get a good deal of reflected glory. And I adore the Queen!"

This started Lady Cassell on a whole round of anecdotes about the Queen and her life, manners and ways, and how particularly fond Her Majesty was of Diana, and how

wonderful it was for Diana to have such a wonderful opportunity, and so on. Then as the clock chimed six Lady Cassell pulled herself erect and shook out her rustling skirt.

“Well, niece, shall we join our homeward trek in the carriage, or shall I sent out a servant to call me another cab?”

“Mrs. Ashton has very kindly invited me to have dinner here,” said Diana, “just to wind up the day thoroughly well. It’s been such a pleasure to me to take her into the Queen’s presence myself! And we have still a lot to talk over.”

“Oh, in that case,” said Lady Cassell, “let me borrow one of your servants, Mrs. Ashton, to call me a cab.”

The repetition of the hackney cab could not possibly be overlooked or misunderstood. I did perforce the only thing there was for me to do, and tried to make it sound spontaneous.

“Lady Cassell,” said I, “it would give me great pleasure, and I’m sure it would please my husband, if you also would join us at dinner this evening. It’s getting close to the hour. Lady Diana and I can’t possibly let you go.”

“Why, my dear Mrs. Ashton, how very kind of you!” said Lady Cassell. “That is indeed a very pleasant surprise. It will make a perfect finish to what for me, at any rate, has been a most delightful day.”

She settled herself again so promptly and with such an air of being thoroughly at home that I again felt an inward conviction that she also had been previously invited to



dinner that night. Feeling vaguely disturbed by this as well as by the other things which had happened which I wanted explained, I rang the bell to have the tea things cleared away. To my surprise the person who answered the bell (and who came into the room looking exceedingly neat in black dress, white cap and apron) was again Matilda.

“Why, where *is* Patsy?” said I.

“I don’t know, madam,” said Matilda.

“But I hate to trouble you with my tray,” said I. “You must have so much else to do. Are you not usually waiting on Mistress Tabitha at this hour?”

“Mistress Tabitha has released me for this since we’re shorthanded today,” said Matilda primly.

“When you take the tray away, Matilda, will you just look about the house or ask some of the other servants to do so, and *find* Patsy for me? I’m getting a little anxious about her.”

“It’s no use looking in the house, madam,” said Matilda.

“Why not?”

“I ’appen to know that she is not in the ’ouse,” said Matilda.

I was aware that she was under unusual emotion else she would not have dropped her h’s, which were generally rather breathily pronounced, as by one who took pains and had not been brought up to the art of the aspirate.

“Not in the house?”

“No, ma’am.”

"Matilda, you know more than you are saying. Explain to me."

"Well, it's not my place, madam," said Matilda, "but as I understood it, she and Mistress Tabitha had words this afternoon after you and her ladyship had gone off to see the Queen, and Patsy just packed up her trunk and went."

"Went? Went where?"

"How should I know? It's no business of mine, ma'am. I'm not one to go poking my nose into other people's business, although I did notice that Patsy was good at that!"

With these words, Matilda, having gathered all the tea things together on the tray and folded the cloth under her arm, flounced out of the door and pulled it up behind her with her foot. But for the observers in the room I should have flown off to look about the house myself. But one had to remember guests. I said to them:

"I'm so glad you're both staying for dinner. Please excuse me while I make some inquiries as to what has happened to my old nurse."

"We will get out of your way here, dear Mrs. Ashton," said Lady Cassell tactfully. "We will go downstairs to the library, as soon as we've made ourselves ready for dinner."

This reminded me again of my hostess duties.

"I will put a bedroom at your disposal at once," said I.

I went out of the room. Ahmed was lingering in the passage. He trotted along behind me in his silent, catlike way. It occurred to me that Ahmed had seen things which he

could not tell me. I wished I could think of some means of communication between us. Since I could think of none I merely said to him as one would have said to a pet dog:

“I wish I knew what happened to Patsy this afternoon.”

Ahmed drew in front of me at a narrow turning and I became aware that he was going ahead of me to Mistress Tabitha’s room. Yes, that’s where I was making for, and that’s where he knew I needed and wanted to go. Arrived in that dark corner, he knocked once, opened the door for me instantly, and bowing, with his hands across his breast, stood aside for me to enter.

Since Matilda had carried the tea things downstairs to the kitchen, Tabitha was, for the first time in my experience of her, alone. She turned toward the door in a startled way and gripped the arms of her chair. But her look was no less malevolent for having a hidden fear in it.

“Why, why, it’s the mistress in person,” she said. “Well, well. So soon after seeing the Queen to come to see an old servant like me! But what a change there is in your appearance, mistress. I never would have known you for the same lady. Going off this morning in all such splendor as if you could buy the world, and looking now, he-he, looking now rather as if you had got a job, heh-heh, in the kitchen or something like that. I know, I know, I know what it is, madam, it’s just your Quaker humility. I know all about that! Well, well, well! Here we are, rags or riches, come and sit down.”

I took no notice of all this.

"Where is Patsy?" said I, without beating about the bush.

"Oh, Patsy? That's what your ladyship's looking for? Your good Patsy that you brought with you from America! He-he-he. Well, all I can say, ma'am, is, that as far as I can make out, London didn't agree with your Patsy and she thought she wouldn't stay here. She just packed up and left. Or so they told me. Naturally I didn't see her do it. I can't stir out of this room. *I've* not been an eyewitness to what Patsy did, whatever it was. Mind you, mistress, I never did think your Patsy was a woman of good judgment. But she just took up and left, so they tell me."

"You mean you actually dared to have Patsy put out?" said I, rashly. But I had no doubt of it. "Put out of the *house*?"

"Now, mistress," said Tabitha smoothly, "how could you accuse a poor old woman like me of anything like that? How could I have your Patsy put out of the house, as you call it? Here I sits all day in my chair by my fire, and all the change I get is to be carried to my fourpost bed in the corner yonder. What power have I to have anybody go or come? Your Patsy went on her own feet, if go she did, but that I've only rumor and report for, just as you yourself have, mistress. Patsy must have gone (if gone she has) of her own free will."

"Patsy would never leave me like that without telling

me first!" said I. "Something cruel, something wicked has been going on here!"

"Words are cheap, mistress, words are cheap," said Tabitha.

She was right. I controlled myself.

Ahmed held open the door for me and I went out, filled with anger at Tabitha and fear for Patsy. Round the bend, where the passage grew lighter, I met Matilda hurrying to her old mistress's help (perhaps in answer to an urgent bell). I paused just long enough to tell her to see that the blue spare room was ready for my visitors and that they were told that it was at their service. Her eyes searched my face once, and then dropped demurely, as she received my orders like any well-bred servant. I was glad that I had myself sufficiently in hand to give her no further inkling of my feelings. I would discuss this whole business with nobody else but Luke.

Ahmed, who was going on before me, turned back at the head of the staircase, put his hand on his head, which was his usual signal for his master, and then pointed toward the hall. So I understood that the person whose entrance was just now being made through the front door was my husband. Ahmed had, I had noticed before, a quite uncanny way of recognizing who people were several seconds ahead of anyone else, just as a dog or cat will detect people by other senses than those open to humans, maybe a keener scent.

I went downstairs quickly to meet my husband, but halfway down the staircase I paused, as several entering voices made me aware that he was not coming home alone. On the contrary, he had brought with him half a dozen visitors, all gentlemen. Their cultivated gruff voices, masculine laughter, heavy footsteps, made the old hall seem quite a different place. I could see that this was no time for me either to speak to Luke privately or to come down to be presented to strangers. Halfway down a staircase is not the best position in which to be introduced as the new mistress of your husband's house to people who have been invited in to dinner. My husband, with one of the servants, was taking the gentlemen to one of the downstairs rooms, in which toilet arrangements had been placed for casual male visitors. I returned to my bedroom. I did not want to see anybody else before the dinner hour. I rather hoped that Luke would join me there, and that I could have a few moments quiet conversation with him to soothe my ruffled nerves and set my apprehensions at rest, but he did not come. Not until the sounds of the gong signaled that the soup had been placed upon the table did Luke's muffled footstep outside my open door greet my ears, and he came into the room.

"Well, my dear," he said, "how did it all go?"

My mind was so full of Patsy and of my recent duel with Tabitha that I hardly got the meaning of his words for a second and then I said:

“Oh, my presentation to the Queen? Ask Lady Diana. She seems to think it went very well. It was an amazing scene. I want to tell you all about it. But Luke — there’s something else — ”

“My dear, I’d like to hear all that you have to tell me about it, or anything else that’s on your mind, but we have to hurry down to our guests. I understand you have invited Lady Diana and Lady Cassell to dine with us. Very suitable, my dear, very right. And I have brought back half a dozen of my old friends whom I met about the town today, so we will all have a festive meal together, and then they will stay for some evening amusement. I am glad to see you dressed like that, my dear. Nothing could be more suitable for your first introduction as my wife. Some of these fashionable bloods, men about town, are accustomed to meet only women of the highest fashion. They will see that you are their equal, but at the same time something different. That’s exactly what I want them to feel. Now, my dear, unruffle that little brow. Don’t look so grave. You’ve been introduced to the Queen! You’re looking charming! You’re going to have your first dinner party in your husband’s house. Don’t let anything cloud it.”

“But about Patsy,” said I, urgently. I would not be completely silenced.

“Oh, don’t worry about Patsy. We can go into all that tomorrow. No doubt she’ll be back. At the moment, I believe, she’s gone off in a huff to your cousin’s. Satisfied?”

Yes, that did make me feel fairly satisfied. That Patsy might have found things uncomfortable, left alone with Tabitha all day, I could well imagine. That she should have gone off on her own as far as my cousin's house was surprising for so unenterprising a woman, but it was very sensible. If she was there, she was safe, she was comfortable! My brow no doubt did clear. My husband kissed me on the cheek, gently set my hand under his arm, and led me down the staircase to the drawing room.

The roomful rose to receive me.

"This, gentlemen," said my husband, "is my Quaker bride."



We sat down ten to the table. The dining room was gay with large vases of flowers, many candles in tall silver candlesticks on the table, and the gas candelabra above was turned out to give full value to the candle glow. The table glittered with silver, and two silver dishes of fruit stood either side of the three huge candlesticks in the center. Little mirrors were placed about with artificial swans floating on them, and little peasant figures of bright painted china stood here and there — not at all to my taste, but they did add to the gay and almost gaudy effect, the *opulent* effect, of the dinner table. There were no other ladies present besides myself and Lady Cassell and Lady Diana.



## THE QUAKER BRIDE

Instead of sitting at the head and the foot of the table, as we had been hitherto accustomed to do with the table of a smaller size, and as I had hitherto always seen done in America, my husband had put me in the center of one side, and sat himself opposite me in the center of the other side. I would have liked this arrangement better — it seemed to give more opportunity for mingling with one's guests and a wider range of possible conversation — but for once in my life I felt shy and embarrassed. My dress was so conspicuously plain beside that of my guests. And the Quaker cap on my hair, which my husband had suggested that I should put on for the occasion, had to me an element of fancy dress. In fact, I had an uneasy inner feeling that when my husband said, "This is my Quaker bride," he had meant me to look and dress the part. Quakers are leaving off the Quaker dress (Quakers of my generation) for the very reason that it makes them look conspicuous, and therefore the reverse of simple. But here I was. I could not help it. I could only consider whether another time I would not wear a dress that would melt more into the scene.

Our guests seemed to choose their own seats at the table. Lady Cassell took the seat at the head, and the most elderly of the stranger gentlemen, a man with a very lined face and an eyeglass in one eye, took the seat opposite at the foot. Lady Diana, putting her arm affectionately around my waist, seated herself by me. On my other side was a

very young man, perhaps no older than I was. His fair hair hung in a poetic — and untidy — manner over his forehead, and something in his appearance, loose around the collar and generally pale and hollow-eyed, made me think he was modeling himself on the pictures of Lord Byron.

I soon saw that Lady Diana had put herself beside me in order to act as hostess, which with great ability she did. It is true that I was very inexperienced and felt myself a fish in new waters. But I did not feel a fish *out* of water. I had an inner feeling that I could act as hostess in my husband's house perfectly adequately. However, I tried to realize that Diana was being kind to my inexperience, keeping her eye on the table to see that each guest was supplied with what he needed, murmuring orders to the servants from time to time as they came and went behind her chair. I had no one to order except Ahmed, who I presently discovered was standing firmly at my elbow. Although his eyes were as usual cast down, his face blank and expressionless, his presence there made me feel that I had someone almost defending me. Certainly someone who was totally devoted to my service and who would obey me no matter what I asked, however unreasonable or however sudden, provided I could only make myself understood. Having Ahmed behind my chair gave me at least a little show of authority, a little imitation of queenliness. But I was not to have that for long. My husband presently leaned across the table with a frown and caught Ahmed's eye,

lifted his finger and pointed behind himself. The peremptory gesture was neither to be misunderstood nor disobeyed. Ahmed silently left me, went around the table and took up his position behind my husband's chair, as I had always seen him do until that night.

When the soup was served my husband looked up and down the table and gathered everyone's attention. Sherry was being poured into the glasses. My husband held up his glass.

"Friends," he said, "it is a pleasure to see you gathered here for the first time at Friar's Court. Yes, the first time but not I hope the last! Let us drink to our future merry meetings. This house, now reopened, is going to be a center of civilized and moral pleasure to a select few. I will see to the civilized part — my wife will see to the moral. I give you then — Friar's Court! May it forever keep its gates closed against the intruder and open to the friend!"

There was a general murmur of approval and people lifted their glasses and drank. The young Byron next to me, who was already, I perceived, far gone in his cups, muttered in my ear, "Is that fellow your husband? I don't know how he picked up a girl of your sort! He's a bit of a bounder, you know!"

I gazed at him with indignant astonishment.

"I could not have heard you correctly! You look like a gentleman — but a gentleman could never say such a thing to a wife — and his hostess!"

He blushed deeply. His fair pale skin turned peony color. His blue eyes watered.

"Shorry, shorry. I'm a little tight, madam! You must excuse me. Not responsible . . ."

I was sorry for him.

"I don't think I was told your name," I said, mainly with the idea of changing the subject and setting him at ease. Lady Diana was talking earnestly with her other side. Her elbow on the table shut me off. Lady Cassell's neigh was echoing down the table. The man with the eyeglass was telling an anecdote about the Duke of Wellington in early days snubbing the new-wed prince consort. My young Byron's indiscretions were unheard in the hubbub.

"Oh, call me Sham — short for Shamael, you know. We all agreed before we came not to use our real names and titles in thish club. Shafer, y'know. Fellow with eyeglass there is a duke. But we'll call him T-Tim, and sho on."

Lady Diana had turned her attention to me, and heard the last sentence.

"Sammy," she said sweetly, "you're drunk. Don't take any notice of him, Mrs. Ashton. He doesn't know where he is. He thinks he's still at Whites! You're not at a club, Sammy! You're a guest at the home of Mr. Luke Ashton at Friar's Court, so come, sit up and behave yourself!"

"Never met Mr. Luke Ashton till thish evening," said the young man, blinking owlshly. "Don't know the chap.

Don't want to know him. Wash told there was going to be cards. Have I made a mishtake?"

"Oh, there'll be cards, no doubt," said Lady Diana. "Most of us play here a little, after supper. But you won't be allowed to play, Sammy, unless you're sober!"

There was a little sharpness in her tone, a little anxiety.

One of those pauses in the conversation happened at that moment, and the noise of laughter and talk around the table suddenly ceased. Everyone seemed to be paying attention to the conversation between Lady Diana and my other neighbor. Lady Diana was quick to notice it.

"Well," she said to the table, in a different tone, "let me tell you that we have here, in our charming hostess of this evening, the most distinguished person who was this afternoon presented to the Queen!"

She then to my great embarrassment launched into a most elaborate account, trimmed up with fancy touches, of our whole afternoon's experience. Some of the little portraits she drew of people whom we had encountered in the great anteroom were highly amusing, I couldn't help laughing. The whole table was presently in a gale of laughter, listening to her lively narrative. But much as she told about my appearance at Court and flattering as it all was — or was intended to be — my husband, I felt, came to my rescue. As I was left speechless and blushing, he spoke to me across the table.

"I wonder, Rose," he said, "if you would feel inclined

to tell the company how such an affair differs from a reception by the President of the United States? Or by any other American dignitary, if you don't know what happens at the White House?"

I felt that I was being drawn out to talk, like a good child, performing for the company. But I did my best to please my husband, and gave as racy an account as I could. The company were ready to be pleased, and they were pleased. When the laughter had died down — because part of it they found amusing — the gentleman with the eyeglass asked me:

"Now, Mrs. Ashton, that you've seen both courts, what would you say was the principal difference between the Court of Queen Victoria and the court of your President?"

"I should say the chief difference, sir, was that one court was held by a gentleman, the other by a lady," said I. This occasioned a great guffaw around the table.

"Well," said he of the eyeglass, "granting that, what is the second difference?"

"The second difference," I said, "— and it's a very important one — is that the Court of Queen Victoria is exclusive, only a few may go, and the fact that most people are excluded gives it an extra value to those who are allowed in. The court of the President of the United States is open to everyone. Anyone may go at the proper times and shake hands with the President. It is inclusive."

"And which do you prefer?" said Mr. Eyeglass.

"Why, I prefer the President's way," said I. "The American way!"

They laughed again.

"Then you are not consistent, madam," said the gentleman. "For here you have arranged a most exclusive party, and are running your household here on principles of the most strict exclusiveness! How do you reconcile that with your republican opinions?"

"My husband arranges his house and his company to suit himself!" said I. "I am a newcomer to this country and its ways."

My husband sharply ordered the port wine to be passed, and leaning across the table to me, suggested in a low tone that I should rise now and take the ladies away with me to the drawing room.

I rose at once to do so, having read or heard somewhere that it was the English custom at a dinner party, and feeling sorry that I had forgotten to obtain previous information as to what would be the right signal for my departure. Young Byron had moved his chair nearer to mine and got it entangled with my skirt. As I twisted back unexpectedly to pull it loose, I overheard Mr. Eyeglass, who had thought I had moved further, saying *sotto voce* to Byron:

"That was a clever answer. She's not so naïve as she looks!"

I led my two ladies across the hall to the drawing room as directed, expecting that the gentlemen would follow in

twenty minutes or half an hour perhaps. The party struck me as being an oddly arranged one, but I supposed that was due to its haphazard character. My husband, in moving about his business in the city, had met friends and acquaintances here and there and had casually invited them home. That accounted for the bad balance between gentlemen and ladies.

"I'm tired out!" said Lady Diana. "Since there are only just us three, why don't we each take an easy chair and shut our eyes and have a short nap until the gentlemen claim us?"

I noticed again that she was playing hostess, but the suggestion suited me. I didn't want to talk, I wanted to think. So each of us subsided into deep comfortable armchairs, or sofas, of which there were all too many in the overfurnished but beautifully shaped room.

More than half an hour passed before the gentlemen came. And then, his footsteps silent on the rugs of the hall, my husband opened the door suddenly.

"Well, you are very quiet in here!" he said. "It seems to me you need the gentlemen to liven you up!"

He came over to me, where I sat wide-eyed, wide awake.

"My dear," he said, with his arm on the back of my chair, "you may think it a little discourteous that I don't bring all my gentlemen guests in here to be entertained in some way by you three ladies. But the fact is we all got talking politics



— which I know is a very dull subject to women! — and then nothing would suit them but a game of cards. I had to consent. But we are one short. We need eight to make up two tables. May I borrow one of your guests, my dear? I know that you don't play yourself."

I smiled at him.

"Am I to choose which guest to keep with me and which to send with you?"

"You may choose!"

I pretended to consider the matter deeply. It was, as a matter of fact, a little delicate, I thought. I did not want the one I sent into the cardtable to feel in any way slighted. In my momentary pause, as I looked from one of the ladies to the other, Diana moved from the seat in which perhaps she had been fast asleep (for all I knew) and began touching up her hair at a mirror on the side wall. From where I sat I saw her face reflected in the mirror. My husband's back was toward it. Her eyes met mine out of the looking glass, and her lips quite clearly formed the words:

"Choose me to stay! Choose me! Choose me!"

Feeling that she had communicated with me secretly, I looked back at Lady Cassell, who was frankly yawning and rubbing her eyes.

"Well, I think Lady Cassell, if she doesn't mind, would be the best one to send all alone into such a lion's den of gentlemen," said I. "Lady Diana and I will entertain ourselves quite happily, so don't worry about us."

"Oh, my dear," said Lady Cassell honestly, "I am delighted! You're giving me a treat. I do love a good game of cards. And really men play better than women — on the whole. I'm an exception, I'm a very good player. I can take care of myself among them. You two young things have as good a time as you can."

She rose, shook out her skirts and bustled to the door. My husband hurried to open it for her and they went out together. Then I turned to Lady Diana.

"What — ?" I began.

But she held up a quick finger.

"Wait!"

She seemed to listen, and then moved nonchalantly to the piano, sat down and began to play one of the popular Scotch songs, loved by the Queen. "Flow gently, sweet Afton —" her fine contralto softly sang.

The next instant Matilda entered through the drawing room's back door, nearest to the kitchen quarters. Prim, discreet, and shut-faced, she moved in my direction.

"Would you like some coffee now, madam?" she asked.

"Coffee? Yes, indeed," said I. "Why wasn't it served immediately after dinner when we came in here first?"

"That isn't the way in this house, madam," said Matilda. "The gentlemen generally have their coffee when they come in here after wine. Anyhow, I was waiting for you to ring, madam!"

She made a mistake in giving two excuses. The one coun-

teracted the other. I sat thoughtfully, listening to Diana's music.

The coffee came, and we partook.

"We can't talk yet," murmured Diana. "She will soon come to fetch the things away! We must mark time. Tell me about America . . . or how did you like the Queen's dress today?"

"I've told you that," said I, "she was lovely. But what struck me was the number of ragged starving children in the street. I never saw such little scarecrows. Why isn't something being done for them? How can a great rich country like this let them run around like that? There are none like that in America. There's plenty there for everybody!"

"I didn't notice them," said Diana, eagerly entering into the subject. "Tell me about them. Where did you see the most? What were they like?"

"Surely you saw them?" said I. "There was one hollow-eyed little urchin almost run over by our horses!"

"The thing is, I've seen them so often," said Diana, "that they've become almost invisible. I don't notice them, any more than I notice the sparrows. If I *do* happen to notice them I throw them money. I may have done so today without thinking of it!"

"But that's no good!" said I. "Are they to live on casual ha'pence?"

"There are Ragged Schools I've heard of —" said Lady

Diana. "Maybe I can take you to one, if you'd like.—"

We were talking eagerly, animatedly, when Matilda came back for the coffee cups.

Matilda left, and Ahmed entered bearing a tray of sweetmeats and sugar cake.

"I see we're to be spied on," murmured Diana.

"Oh, I trust Ahmed," I said.

"Don't trust anybody!" said Diana.

"Why do you say that?" I said, startled.

She seemed to draw in her horns; to cover her tracks.

"No special reason. It's just what I've learned of life."

"But life would be impossible on such terms. One has to trust most people, most of the time. And one's dearest, all of the time!"

"By one's dearest you mean — mother and father, brothers, sisters, husbands, I suppose."

I reflected on my experience.

"Not necessarily brothers and sisters maybe. But parents in general. And husbands, of course."

"I'm an orphan," said Lady Diana inconsequently, "and so are you. Parents are out. I have no husband. But most of the women I know don't trust their husbands. Heavens, no! Nor the husbands their wives! Why, the society wits would dry up for lack of material if marital infidelity on all levels wasn't taken for granted."

"What's taken for granted isn't necessarily true."

"You mean for instance — you trust your husband?"

"Of course."

"You believed what he told you about your Patsy?"

I stared at her.

"How do you know what he told me?"

"I don't. I only asked if you believed it — whatever it was."

We had been strolling up and down the room, arm in arm. At this I relinquished her arm and sat down and looked at her.

"Yes, I did."

"Well, it will be interesting to see whether it checks with the facts. That may be just the little chink through which doubt may enter. Doubt sometimes comes in, you know, like light showing up a dark corner. Very little will do."

"Was it to make chinks for doubt that you wanted to stay with me this evening?"

"Oh, no, dearest Mrs. Ashton!" said Lady Diana. "That was an accidental mischievous thought. I'm not really trying to do *that*. I wanted to keep out of the card game because, frankly, there's a man in there that I especially don't trust. In fact, I'm afraid of him. I stayed with you to keep away from *him*."

"Why didn't you tell Luke frankly that you wanted to stay with me?" said I. "I wanted you anyway. I should have chosen you, you know. But if he had seen you signaling to me, he might have thought it queer."

"You may be right," said Diana in a strange tone. "You yourself, I know, go in very much for being open and aboveboard. I've almost got a habit of being devious. It's getting more natural for me to talk in a mirror than to talk face to face!"

At that moment there were sounds of fresh arrival in the front hall. Perhaps it was some belated guest. It might even be news of Patsy. But before I could move to inquire, the door of the drawing room opened and Matilda entered, looking flustered.

"Excuse me, madam, for interrupting you — will you receive two or three gentlemen who have come here for some special reason that I don't understand?"

"Certainly," said I. In America one would never refuse to receive anyone. What an idea.

The men had the same idea as myself about their rights to be received. They were following hard on Matilda's heels. Three of them came in, and one I noticed was in the uniform of the police.

"This is the lady of the house," said Matilda to the leader.

The man looked taken aback, and pulled off his hat.

"You are Mrs. Luke Ashton, ma'am?" he said.

"That is my name. What can I do for you?"

"May I ask you, Mrs. Ashton, what may seem an impertinent question? Is your husband at home?"

"Yes, indeed," said I. "We entertained a few friends for

dinner, and the gentlemen are still at their wine. I will send —”

“Several gentlemen and only one lady guest?”

“Oh, no,” said I. “There was another lady. She has joined the gentlemen temporarily, I believe. My friend and I are expecting them any moment. So will you be seated?”

I turned to send Ahmed for my husband, but he had already disappeared.

The two men seated themselves, the policeman remained standing.

“I have a warrant in my pocket,” said the leader, “for a gambling den that my spies led me to suppose was in the basement or attic of this house, madam.”

“You are mistaken,” said I, “you have picked the wrong house. Only myself and my husband and our friends are here.”

“I’m afraid I *have* got the wrong house,” said the man, “or if not the wrong house, at any rate the wrong information. I must apologize for breaking in on you like this! I know the Quakers well. I know no Quaker would tolerate the breaking of the gambling law.”

At this moment my husband entered the room with Lady Cassell.

“This is evidently an evening of informality, my love,” said Luke genially to me. “First I bring unexpected guests home to dinner, in the pleasure of meeting old friends. Next I steal your friend Lady Cassell to make up a rubber

— and now, my other friends having taken early leave, you are surprised by these gentlemen of the police.”

He turned to the visitors, and became stern.

“And what, sirs, may I ask, are you doing in my house?”

“Well, Mr. Ashton,” said the leader — they had got to their feet somewhat uneasily — “you know the law against gambling is very strict, and we are putting it down wherever we find it. The big clubs we can handle, but we know that a lot of private clubs exist in London, and we were given a tip that led us to this spot. Mrs. Ashton has explained things and we can only apologize. I wish you good evening, madam, and you, sir. We didn’t know it was a Quaker house.”

My husband made some coldly polite rejoinder, and went with them to the door.

Diana looked at her aunt, who sat fanning herself vigorously and examining her bracelets.

“I see!” said Lady Diana, casually, *à propos* of nothing in particular.



I did not see my husband again after the visit of the police. Apparently he went home with the young man I called “Byron.” I could easily imagine that Byron was too drunk to get home by himself, since even at dinner he had been pretty far gone. Since my husband had brought him



and the other gentlemen in his own carriage, Luke had taken away the largest carriage and two horses. My first object after breakfast (which I had all alone, waited on by John in stately silence) was to go to my cousin's and inquire about Patsy. So the moment I rose from the breakfast table I told John to order me whatever carriage there was left in the stables, and a horse and driver to go out. John bowed silently, went away and returned in a moment or two to say that he was very sorry but there was no horse or carriage available for madam.

"That must be nonsense," said I. "I *must* go out this morning. I can't wait. It's a very urgent errand that I wish to make. I'm sure if my husband were here —"

"Mr. Ashton may be home any moment, madam, and then could take you himself or put his carriage at your disposal."

Perhaps I was infringing etiquette with which I was unfamiliar. Perhaps an English wife had no right to order out the family horses? I thought wistfully of my predecessor, she of the embroidery. I had an absurd wish to ask her counsel. "Were you ever up against a situation like this? What did you do? How did you handle it?" Her boudoir was so sympathetic to me that I felt her nature was too. I was sorry that her beautiful work had been burned, and the more I thought of that odd incident the more I felt that it alone provided the little chink of which Lady Diana had disturbingly spoken the night before. A little

chink of doubt? But I did not think the light that came through that little chink (small as it was, no larger than a question mark) was directed in any way at my husband. I thought it was directed at old Tabitha. She seemed to me to be the spider in the center of the web, the gatherer up of any evil that there might be in the house. But here I was in the region of instinct, not of reason.

I walked out of the house into the garden. The natural way of throwing off oppression for me was always to get into the open air. And there was more than fresh air, well-mown grass, sweet scents, to be found in my garden. I did not pretend to myself. I went straight through the pleached alleys to the sundial lawn; and there sure enough I found Red Cain, busy with his shears on the hedges, keeping them square and trim. He did not turn round or greet me. He went right on with his work. I felt this was proper manners for a gardener. Until his employers summoned him to human existence, he was merely part of the garden furniture.

"Could you run an errand for me, Red?" said I.

"I hope so, ma'am," said Red. He went on clipping, without turning round.

"I want you to go to the stable yard and see whether there really is no available horse and carriage for me."

Red bent down to gather up the green twigs to lay them in the wheelbarrow.

"I'm sorry I can't do that errand for you," said he.

"Can't?"

"No, ma'am. It would occasion remark if I were to go to the stable yard for you on such a trip, with such a message. Above all it is my duty as a good gardener not to occasion remark."

The sense of hostility, of secrets, of mysteries, thickened around me even out there in the sunshine, and I instinctively said something that I had not thought of saying at all. It just sprang out.

"You're on my side, aren't you?"

He then turned his face toward me, swinging easily at the waist with his hand on his hip. His eyes met mine, flower-blue, direct as swords.

"Yes, Mrs. Ashton, I'm on your side."

The fact that he did not say "What do you mean by sides," "Who's on the other side," "What's the meaning of your question," or anything of that, only confirmed the rightness of my impulse. It made me feel that I was not totally wrongheaded. He too was aware of some of the things that I was aware of. There were "sides" in this house, and one of them was against me.

"Then give me your advice," said I. "I want to go out and look for Patsy."

"And where did you think of looking for her, ma'am?" said Red.

"At my cousin's. That's where I was told she had probably gone."

"I should think to drive to your cousin's wouldn't be at all a bad idea," said Red, thoughtfully. "If that's your intention, take the matter up yourself. No one can do it for you. Go in person to the stable yard and see if they would dare refuse your orders, as mistress of the house — the master's lady — to put a horse into the curricle or landau and take you wherever you command."

That was all I needed. He was an Englishman. He knew what was expected of the master's wife. I turned away and went straight through the windings of the garden toward the back of the house and through another wall with an arch in it, which led into the stable yard. I had never been there. It was an attractive place to me, paved with large slabs of stone, the stables on one side, a haybarn and harness room on the other, the house itself on the third, and big wooden gates which would open wide to let a whole coach through at the back. A stableboy with a bucket was sling- ing water over the stones of the yard to clean them. The splash of the water, its glint where it caught the sunshine, the early morning freshness of the action, all pleased me, and all seemed so normal. Since the lad was the only person in sight I went up to him. He put down his bucket and pulled his forelock, very much rattled.

"Fetch me the head stableman," said I. "I'm Mrs. Ashton. I want to be shown around." And when a gray-haired man hurried out, I said, "This is part of my domain that I haven't yet penetrated. It's very nice. Show me the horses."

I could see that the man was very much taken aback. He did not know quite what to do. But to refuse to take me round was impossible, even though taking me would display the fact — as it presently did — that there were three horses having comfortable meals in their stables, one of them in a loose box.

“One of these horses will do very well for me,” said I. “Or two, if whatever vehicle you have requires two horses. Please harness them at once. I’m going to take a drive.”

“It’s the master’s orders that no one but himself is allowed to order out the horses,” said the man, uncomfortably.

“I will settle it with the master,” said I.

“We’re supposed, in master’s absence, to take orders from Mistress Tabitha,” said the man, hesitating awkwardly. “I could send and ask her, ma’am?”

“Don’t *dare!*” said I. “Surely you realize that I am the mistress here now? Can you imagine that a gentleman like Mr. Ashton would deny his wife a carriage?”

“No, ma’am, I can’t say as I would,” said the man. He was uneasy, puzzled, anxious to see some way out of it. But I stood right there in the yard and watched while they got out an elegant open carriage called a landau and harnessed a horse in it. One was enough. One of the coachmen was told off to spruce up and change into his driving uniform, and in fifteen minutes the equipage was all ready. The man on the box with cockades, and white gloves, gathered up the reins, the stableboy — now dressed to match

as footman — held the carriage door for me, I got in, Ahmed (whom as usual I had not noticed) sprang into the carriage in front of me, and we drove out through the big gates at the back of the yard. These gates led by a side sweep into the drive before the house. One passed the front door in order to get out. And there at the front door was another carriage. Was I being visited, “called on,” thus early in the day? Naturally, no one had known where to look for me. I could imagine that my name was resounding through the passages within, and Matilda and her cohorts looking high and low for me. I could also imagine how those who went out into the garden in search of me would encounter the redhead Cain, and receive from him no more attention or information than an indifferent back would provide.

The visiting carriage was a closed chaise, and I was astonished when the further door opened and out stepped my husband and Lady Diana. The latter was wearing a broad-brimmed hat in the new fashion. Colored glass pendants hung down all around the brim and made a kind of glistening veil, very fetching, but very concealing to the expression if the wearer wished. They came to where I sat, almost touching their carriage, in my open landau.

“Why, good morning, my dear,” said my husband. “Where are you off to at this early hour?”

“Why, I’m going to my cousin’s, of course, to inquire after Patsy!”

I had always felt that my husband had the most perfect command of his expression, and had admired his ability to conceal his feelings. But I saw this time a very slight change in his countenance. I couldn't exactly name it, I could only say that there was a slight flicker of change in his expression.

"I told you so," said Lady Diana gaily. But nonetheless it seemed to me there was an undercurrent of meaning between them. "She's no sit-at-home-and-see-what-happens lady!" She opened my carriage door and stepped in beside me. "May I come with you, dear Mrs. Ashton? You and I are due to have a talk."

This move took me by surprise. I distinctly did not want to take Diana to East Sheen with me. But above all I wanted to talk to my husband. He had relinquished my hand and stepped back to make room for Lady Diana to get in, and had closed the low carriage door behind her. But he was still near. I wanted to draw him nearer, to get an intimate word from him, but did not know how to do it in front of a third person.

"Luke?" I said, with appeal, and entreaty.

He understood, at least in part. He spoke to me, and not to her.

"I must explain my absence," he said. "Poor young Sam Coburn was too screwed to get home alone. I took him home in my carriage and dosed him and put him to bed, and then the poor youth burst out with all his troubles.

It seems he's been wild and has run into debt on the turf. So I arranged to lend him some money. I knew his deceased father. I hadn't much money on me, and he couldn't cash my check, today being Sunday. I thought Lady Diana might be able to cash it for him. And here we are, all in the middle of that, and coming to tell you all about it."

"Shall I stay?" said I, glowing at my husband's generous kindness to poor Sam Coburn. My hand was on the carriage door to get out. But he took it again in his own to prevent me.

"No, no. I'm off now to take the money to Sam's creditors. They're not the kind who'll be at church! We will meet later. Lady Di will take care of you. Enjoy yourselves!" He waved us off.

We did not go to my cousin's after all. The first few words that Lady Diana had to say to me caused me to change my orders to the coachman.

"Patsy is not at your cousin's," Lady Diana said. "I know where she is. I didn't know last night, but I know now. I will explain everything. Order your man to take us to Hyde Park, where we can talk without being overheard, and at the same time we can show ourselves off and please your husband."

So we drove instead to Hyde Park, and became one of the stream of the fashionable on Rotten Row. We drove slowly along under the trees, the soft June air fanning our faces. Lines of less-fortunate citizens sat and stood along



the edges of the drive, enjoying the passing show of fashion as if it were a pageant; staring. Some of them — outside the iron fence — were gaunt and ragged. But these signs of misery seemed totally invisible to my companion. The glass baubles on her hat tinkled and flashed when the sunlight caught them.

Suddenly a bugle blew in the distance, a stirring dramatic signal. All the carriages drew to the side, a tide of cheering ran along the crowd like a ripple, and presently the Queen's carriage passed. Prince Albert rode horseback by her side, and Princess Alice and the Princess Royal sat in the carriage with their mother.

A handful of guards followed in smart uniforms, including two giant Indians with gleaming turbans. Then normal traffic resumed. But there was an added spice to the morning. Everyone felt they had seen something, and could go home with something to tell. I saw that one of the chief uses of royalty was to provide this kind of mild excitement.

When the little flurry had passed, Lady Diana said to me:

"I don't quite know how to explain what I'm going to tell you, Rose. May I call you Rose? Don't you feel that we are becoming friends? I've hoped that in spite of everything you were beginning to be my friend."

"Why, yes, Lady Diana," said I, "you've been very kind to me."

"That's not the right answer," said Lady Diana. "I

haven't been more kind than any old friend of your husband's who had the power to introduce you at Court would have been. I want a woman friend very badly, and I've hoped ever since that very first day — when you put me in my place so neatly! — that you would be the one. I didn't expect it beforehand. But you fascinated me."

"You are so accustomed to fascinating other people," said I, "that it must be a strange sensation if ever anyone else fascinates you. I should be happy, of course, to have you for a friend. Who would not? But forgive me if I am awkward and shy. I'm anxious and puzzled about my dear old nurse."

"Well —" said Lady Diana, in a rather discontented voice, as if my answers hadn't been quite what she was looking for — "I won't beat about the bush any longer. I believe with a person like yourself it's better to come right out. I'll tell you first of all where Patsy is. But I don't want you to exclaim or jump to conclusions until you've heard all I have to say. Will you promise me to listen patiently and try to understand?"

"I think I can promise that," said I.

"Patsy is at my house!" said Lady Diana. At the same time she clasped my hand, which was lying on the seat by her side. I didn't respond to her pressure. But I didn't draw it away. I let it lie in her clasp. But I began to tremble. Indignation, fear — yes, something like fear seized me. At any rate I was moved in a way which I couldn't control.

“Needless to say — at least, I hope it’s needless —” said Lady Diana, “I knew nothing about it. They took advantage of our absence, yours and mine, at the Queen’s drawing room. Patsy was brought to my house at that time in order to provide her with a refuge. As you know, I came with you straight from the drawing room to your house, and stayed at your house until late at night. Not until I got home did I find out what had happened during my absence. And I drove round to your house first thing this morning in order to tell you all about it. You can bear me out in that.”

“I suppose so,” said I, since she waited for reply, and squeezed my trembling hand harder, and more tenderly. I lifted my eyes urgently to the coachman’s back and leaned forward. Ahmed read my wish, jumped up into the back seat and touched the coachman’s back. He looked round quickly. The horses were going almost at a walk.

“Yes, ma’am?”

“Jerry, please drive to Lady Diana’s house!”

“Yes, ma’am.”

We turned out of the park at the next gate. Lady Diana did not relinquish my hand nor protest my movement. She seemed to expect it.

“They told me —” said Lady Diana, evidently beginning further explanation. But I interrupted her quite ruthlessly.

“I’d rather hear first what Patsy has to say,” said I. “She

at least was an eyewitness and you were not." (And who, I said to myself, are "*they*"?)

I reminded myself that I had seen Lady Diana drive up with my own husband. If there was to be any explanation regarding Patsy which involved my husband I preferred to hear it from no third person.

Lady Diana's pleasant, small, three-story house, painted white in the front like all the others in the row, was in a pleasant side street off a London square. All had steps going up at the front door, and curved iron railings in the Queen Anne style. I even then felt it was a cheerful house for a young unmarried woman to live in with her chaperone, and gave her security, elegance, and convenience.

In a moment I was in a paneled parlor off the front hall, and Patsy was sent down to me. Lady Diana was manifestly fidgety until Patsy appeared, but when she came in Diana had the tact to leave us alone together.

Patsy looked so much like her serene, plain-faced, shut-in self that I could hardly believe anything out of the ordinary had happened to her. Her gray dress, her white apron, her white Quaker cap (of linen, not of the transparent gauze which the better class of caps were made of) made her look as if she were standing in my father's house and telling me, "Now, Rose, thee must not let thy curls show outside thy bonnet during Meeting. Thee must push them in!"

I took her by both hands.

"Why, Patsy," I said, "what has happened?"

Then I saw what I never expected to see. Her mouth turned down and quivered and two tears slowly squeezed unwillingly out of her eyes. She took her hands away, pulled a big handkerchief out of her pocket, wiped her eyes and blew her nose, with a gesture of one ashamed of showing such emotion.

"I knew thee'd take it hard, Miss Rose. I knew thee'd take it hard. But I didn't know as thee'd be able to come and see me. I pretty near give that up yesterday, they seemed that savage!"

"Who — who did? Tell me everything."

"Well, Rose, as far as I can tell thee, it was all that Tabitha. But the chief thing is this, I've give my word that I won't make trouble for thee. And therefore, Rose, I shall tell thee no more. Thee can see for thyself that Tabitha just made it impossible for me to stay any longer at Friar's Court. I would have put up with just about anything for thy sake, Rose, and I put up with a lot more than thee knew anything about. But they made me understand clear that the longer I stayed the worse it would be for thee. So I come away yesterday while thee was with the Queen. I had no choice. It was all planned. She had her men ready to carry me out if I balked. Matilda went to my room and went through all my things and packed my trunk while I was with thee, fitting and stitching on thy dress! But now they've let thee come and see me, I shan't mind so much. If thee'll come and visit me now and then, I'll give good

service here, so long as I don't have to go back and put up with that Tabitha!"

I sat down. I was trembling still. I was deeply perplexed. Wounded. Angry. The chief thing that established itself in my mind was this — that in my absence there had been a quarrel (and very natural that!) between my old nurse, Patsy, and my husband's old nurse, Tabitha. And while I was still away — my husband had sided against me. For was it not to "side against me" to turn out my old nurse and send her to live among strangers, when she had crossed the wide Atlantic for my sake, just to take care of me — she, the most conservative, most timid of women? Back in America, Patsy had a whole circle of nieces and nephews and cousins. On her day off she would be visiting one or other of them; on her longer holidays she would be going upcountry to stay on a farm belonging to a nephew — now perhaps to her great-nephew. And she was a woman to whom kin were dear. She had left them all for me out of loyalty — because I was the nearest thing to her of any child of her own — and now her sacrifice in cutting all those ties was put at naught. And why? Not because she had done anything wrong. I was even certain that she had not even done anything willingly provoking. She did her best to keep out of Tabitha's way. And considering that Mistress Tabitha was confined to her own room, it should not have been hard. Something had been done behind my back. And my husband had been in collusion with my en-

emy! I could not but regard Tabitha as a kind of enemy, childish as it might be to think so.

Tabitha's enmity meant nothing to me. But that my husband should take her part — that cut me deep.

I saw that I should not and ought not to try to get anything more out of Patsy. I soothed her, promised visits, and in a few minutes more she excused herself, said good-by, and went away. No doubt Lady Diana was waiting somewhere in sight of the door, because it had not long closed behind Patsy when Diana came back again.

"I do hope you feel fairly satisfied, dearest Mrs. Ashton," she said. "I'm doing the best I can. I'll take good care of Patsy, and she'll have plenty to do here. Sewing, and oddments of work that she likes. Apparently she put the other servants' backs up. You know what servants are! And she's an American, and she's prim and disapproving. . . . Oh, she's as good as gold! . . . But she and Tabitha had a big scene, a hammer and tongs, and Patsy had to go somewhere in a hurry. Someone thought of my house. Of course I'm only too glad — both to oblige you and for her own sake. She's invaluable! . . . No doubt the arrangement will be only temporary."

Although I felt she meant to be kind, and although there was nothing physically uncomfortable in Patsy's present situation — she had security and occupation, and no unkindness around her — Lady Diana's words gave me a fresh cause of uneasiness. It reminded me that she, too, was *in*

whatever the conspiracy was which Tabitha and my husband were united in. Granted that neither Lady Diana nor my husband had anything against *me* — granted that they were trying to do their best in their own eyes for my ultimate comfort — still they two and Tabitha were joined in a secret operation of which I was the sufferer. And the ignorant sufferer.

I felt there was nothing more I could discuss with Lady Diana. I must go home and see Luke. So I thanked her for taking care of Patsy, assured her politely that I was satisfied for the present, and bade her farewell. I did not suggest her coming back with me to lunch. I just went down the steps to my carriage and drove back home.



The house was empty and silent. I was struck afresh by its seclusion, its lack of views, its being so shut in by walls, heavy hedges, and artificial courts and parterres. The mon-asterial atmosphere hung heavy over it.

Luke did not come back to lunch. I went into the dining room alone. There were fresh roses on the table. The grim-faced butler, John, served me with cold chicken and jelly, with fresh lettuce from the garden, with hot chocolate, and a dessert of early strawberries and cream. Luke's place was laid, and I waited from moment to moment for his foot-



steps in the hall or his sudden opening of the door, if the carpets silenced his coming. The whole house seemed muffled now that all the rugs were down. And for summertime the draperies at the windows seemed to me unnecessarily heavy.

After lunch I wandered a little about indoors, going at last into the library where the gentlemen had spent the evening the night before. A smell of tobacco still hung about the curtains. The windows were wide open, however; since on one side there was a French window giving access to the garden, I stepped out into the shady drive which ran along the side of the house, and soon turned off into one of the garden paths, leading by twists and turns into the pleached alley and on into the sundial garden. Just to be out-of-doors and walking in the garden was cheering. The birds were singing all around me just as if we were in the country. I reflected that I ought to have left word where I was in case my husband should suddenly arrive. I was so impatient to see him and talk things over that the suspense was making my heart beat twice as fast as usual. But not a sound of coming wheels broke the silence and the bird songs.

At that hour of the afternoon it was hot in the sundial garden, and I went on to the shady peace of the lily-pond lawn. But sitting there on the stone bench and looking at the quiet water made me remember over again the scene I had interrupted between Lady Diana and Red Cain. My restlessness returned, more questions than were comfort-

able pressed within me. I wandered on through the garden paths, so hedged that each path provided a solitary walk, even when the garden was filled with people; and soon emerged into the open, frank expanse of the kitchen garden, crisscrossed with narrow paths edged with low box. This too was hot with sunshine and sweet with the scents of flowers and of ripening fruit. Red Cain was there, arranging the nets over the strawberry beds to keep the birds from helping themselves too liberally to the fruit. I was certain that he saw me but as was his custom he took absolutely no notice. I was the mistress and he was a nobody, until I summoned him to life by a word. The elderly head gardener was here also, digging in the potato bed. The golden new potatoes being turned up by his fork probably representing fare for the dinner to come. I paused beside the potatoes sniffing the nice earthy smell of them, and said to old Stokes:

“I hope we shall have some of your delicious peas again tonight!”

“Yes, ma’am, peas is being picked. Mistress Tabitha’s orders have already come down.”

Mistress Tabitha, indeed. A most un-Quaker resentment filled my heart. These small pinpricks were almost as bad to bear as the larger things. I left him, walking on slowly around the garden as if I were observing the layout of the plants with a housekeeperly eye, and then, turning up a little box-edged path near Red Cain — who had, I grant,

caused his work to bring him several yards in my general direction — I said to him as I passed:

“Come to the lily pond, I have something to say.”

As I expected he gave not a sign that he heard me. He was a most discreet pretender. Did that make him less trustworthy, or more? Certainly he had a secret of his own, and he was a man used to secrets. But he was not unique in that. The house seemed full of them. Or perhaps it was my imagination? I must guard against getting morbid and suspicious.

It was refreshing sitting on one of the stone benches beside the lily pond. Goldfish swam about in the pond and from time to time were visible through the greenish water. They put their little round muzzles up to bite at the surface. Dragonflies darted jerkily and hovered with their strange suspended animation above the lilies. The place was very green, shady, and quiet. I had not been there many minutes before Red Cain appeared. He had brought a trowel and shears with him and laid the shears down on the flower bed nearby and kept the trowel in his hand, as if it was very important to have about him at all times some implement of his vocation. He stood behind me as I sat on the bench, turning his head toward a flower bed which contained some myrtle, and remarked:

“This myrtle, or periwinkle as some people call it, needs a bit of thinning.”

He went down on one knee and prepared to prune the

plants. But he was within easy earshot of a low tone, even of a whisper.

"Well, madam," said he, "how did you get on with your cousin?"

"I didn't go to my cousin's!"

"What?" He turned round upon me with a face of surprise. "What? After all that trouble — ordering out your carriage and all — you didn't go to your cousin's? Why, how was that, madam?"

I felt for some reason that the question was important. Not only to me but to him. Or that it had an intrinsic importance of its own.

I told him exactly what had occurred. He remained kneeling on one knee, the hand holding the trowel relaxed across his other knee and the other hand knuckles to the ground. It was an attitude of suspended motion that could rapidly turn into one of work or departure. But in the meantime I felt it was an attitude of the closest, most complete attention. It was almost as if I was speaking in a foreign language and he had to give concentrated listening in order to translate my words (as I spoke) into his own tongue.

"So that's where your woman went!" said he, slowly, when I had quite finished.

"Then you saw her go?" said I.

"Yes," he said. After a moment's more hesitation he added, "You remember, madam, I was out in the street when you came back from the Queen."

“You mean she had only just gone?”

“You all but met the carriage. I take it you came home earlier than was expected.”

I took this in.

“It *was* a plan, then. A plot to get Patsy away while I was out? It wasn’t a sudden flare-up?”

“I don’t myself have any doubt that it was a plan — with a purpose.”

“But what purpose could there be?”

He stood up and went through the arch cut in the ancient seven-foot yew hedge behind me, and looked up and down the hedged turf walk. Then he returned.

“I’ll answer your question with another. Ask yourself, ma’am — what result does it have?”

“What result?” I wondered. “Why, none. It only gratifies Tabitha’s malice and makes me — a little unhappy.”

“That’s considerably something,” he said. “Think further — how does it leave you in the household?”

“It leaves me — a bit lonely. The other servants are strangers. I was sure of Patsy. She was my own.”

“That’s immensely something. Put that all together.”

He hesitated. Walked round the lily pond in front of me, examining his plants, and came round again to my other side, by the periwinkle bed. I felt he was marking time, debating with himself whether to say something. I waited expectantly and he looked me straight in the eyes and smiled.

"You've never been afraid, have you, madam?" he said. He spoke as one who expresses a conclusion he has come to, not as one who asks a question. I smiled in return, feeling an unreasonable delight at something. I could not quite tell what. Something young and gay had come into the garden, something brave and lively, nothing to do with past monks or present mysteries and malice. Patsy was all right, after all. What did it matter?

"I've never had anything to be afraid of!" said I, challenging life. "Why should I?"

"And I hope you never may!" said he, glowing on me.

"It's unlikely for some time, anyhow," said I. "What could be more secure than this place?"

"If anything does make you afraid," said he, "get word to me. A very small hint is enough. And remember this, madam — nothing looks more secure than a trap."

"You do talk in mysteries!" said I. "You know more than you say."

"If I make that plain — for your sake — I put myself in your hands. So don't give me away."

"I won't even ask what you mean. My husband will take care of me! He will see that I'm not trapped!"

"But he's often away," said Red. He picked up his shears and began wiping off their blades with an oily rag taken from his pocket. He gave close attention to this task. I watched it, fascinated, puzzling out what his warnings meant.

"Tabitha's not *that* dangerous," I said at last.

His blue eyes met mine, warm again with laughter and joy.

"Never underestimate an enemy," he said. "But yet you're right. It's more important never to sit down and shiver. I believe you're equal to anything. I'll drink your health in dew at sunrise tomorrow. . . . Someone's coming."

"And since when," said Luke, stepping on the silent turf through the arch behind me, "have you thought it proper to carry on a flirtation with my servants?"

Cain had withdrawn like a shadow. The uprooted periwinkle on the grass, with fresh earth around its roots, was the only evidence that he had been there. I was left alone with a suffocating sense of shock to face a husband who had extraordinarily put me in the wrong. But I sprang to my feet to throw off this unnatural feeling. I had been wanting Luke all day! I went to him quickly with my arms outstretched, anxious to come to complete understanding. But he took me by the wrists and held me in front of him like an arraigned prisoner. His grip was new to me, his face was different.

"Luke," said I, "I'm waiting for you! It's about Patsy —"

"Answer me," said he. "It's I who have to ask for an explanation! They told me at the house that you had returned. I came into the garden to look for you. Wandering through the kitchen garden and back on the alleys I

heard voices. I paused a moment behind the hedge. And what did I hear? My gardener talking in a tone of close intimacy with *my wife*."

I stood now passive in his grasp, trying to think calmly, trying to see things from his point of view. What had he overheard? Nothing wrong. Yet the mere tone of equality might seem wrong in England. He was seeing me against a background alien to me. I tried to get away from this curious coil in which I had suddenly been made to seem guilty, and to get to a place where I could speak honestly to his honesty. I said to myself that after all *I* had thought *he* was in the wrong. I had at first had an accusing attitude toward *him*. I saw it plainly, now that he had turned the tables. My silence made him give me a slight shake. He thought it was a silence of fear. Was he trying to frighten me further? Could he be trying to bully me? Nonsense! Of course not!

"Luke," said I, "it's not your fault, it's Tabitha's, but something has gone very wrong in this house. Something unkind has been done behind my back. Please tell me —"

"If you are trying to talk to me," said he, in this new harsh voice, "about some domestic quarrel between your old nurse and mine, I receive that as a mere excuse. Oh, you've long cast a spell on me with your devilish beauty, your confiding ways, your innocence. But you are like all women. Your innocence will last no longer than your protection from temptation. I have left you too much alone.



I can't always avoid having handsome servants, and don't choose to dismiss them merely because I have a young wife. I must put a guard on you. I'm an old hand, my dear! I've had this experience before, I know of what I speak. From now on, madam, you will go nowhere alone — not even in this garden. No, nor in the house. A constant companion shall be my protection when I am away. You are my precious jewel, and I shall keep you in a locket."

I could not believe my ears. But for the hard grips still on my wrists like fetters, I should have almost supposed that I was dreaming or that he was joking.

"Dearest," said I gently, "don't let's talk any more now. Let's just be quiet together. Later on you will be able to listen to what I want to say!"

"I think," said he, "that you don't fully understand my point. Or you don't choose to. But you will learn."

"I hope to learn," said I.

He let go of me then, and the moment my hands were free I used them to put them round his neck and try to bend his stiff head down to kiss me. For a moment he resisted. Then all of a sudden his arms went round me fiercely, and he strained me closely to himself and kissed me until I had hardly any breath. I had never been so handled and was a little shocked. But perhaps this was part of those married rights of which Luke said I was still ignorant. Then I linked my arm in his and we strolled gently and silently to the bench and sat down together watching the

goldfish. I did not say a word about my injury, and he was now silent as to his. The quiet of the evening settled round us. The sun, low in the west, no longer reached to any part of the grounds, but the sky above us was bright. Swallows made their airy evening dance, and in a tree to our left a thrush sang his repeating liquid song. So we sat in a Quaker silence, and I reached out into the unseen which to me was so real, and sought the help of heaven in the mysterious troubles which seemed to be about me.

The clanging of the front door bell broke our temporary peace.

"I am afraid," said my husband, "that that is the arrival of our first dinner guests, and you are not yet ready."

"Am I not ready?" said I as we walked back arm in arm. "I thought this dress was pretty enough to do even for company."

"It is my pleasure," said he, "that you dine every day in your Quaker dress — cap and all. It is suitable, it is becoming, and I wish it."

I wanted to ask him why, but I would not start a fresh cause for argument. There was a lot between us to be discussed much more important than that. And all of it must be postponed until my husband's temper had calmed down, until a peaceful trust in me had resumed its place in his heart. I took it for granted that mutual trust was the very base of proper married relations, whatever Luke might say about my ignorance of a wife's duty. When we entered

the house, I paused only a moment in the hall to greet the guests who had just arrived in their carriage — the gentleman with the monocle, and young Byron, who seemed to be his companion — and then I went upstairs and changed. A few moments of quiet in the bedroom were agreeable to me. I needed solitude. I was not pleased when Matilda knocked at the door and entered, to help me fasten my dress.

“I don’t need your help with this, Matilda, thank you,” said I. “The fastenings are not complicated and I’m accustomed to them.”

“Mistress Tabitha sent me along to you, madam,” said Matilda, going quietly along with her hooking, indeed taking possession as it were of me and of my costume.

I pulled myself away from her hand. “Matilda,” said I firmly, “go back to Mistress Tabitha and thank her for me for sending you. I don’t need you tonight. I will ring whenever I need you.”

Matilda did not attempt to approach me but stood with her hands by her sides like a soldier at attention.

“As you please, ma’am,” she said, “but the master himself told me as I was to bear you company while you changed and give you such help as I could.”

Then a little cold feeling did touch my heart like a lump of ice. I controlled it quickly.

“Well, since you are here,” said I, “fetch me out my clean fichu and the cap I’m going to wear. You’ll find it, I think,

on the top shelf of the closet among the hats. As a matter of fact, Matilda, if I'm to wear this costume frequently I shall need to have a cap or two prepared carefully every day, laundered and ironed. Perhaps you will see to that for me!"

"Certainly, madam," said Matilda, sourly.

Somehow I felt I had won this particular gambit, or she felt I had, which was as good as victory. I left her behind tidying up my room with a sullen, defeated look.

This evening duplicated the first except that my companion after dinner was Lady Cassell. We did not attempt to do much in the way of talking. Lady Cassell got out Patience cards and played, offering to teach me if I liked. I contented myself with a book. Matilda came into the room several times, bringing coffee, or refreshments later, or making up the fire. Ahmed remained with us the whole time. He had a capacity for remaining motionless in one spot with his arms folded for incredible periods. I pushed a hassock over to him with my foot once, gesturing to him that he should sit down. But he seemed not to understand me. His face, solemn and expressionless as ever, remained turned to the carpet, and his hands for the most part were crossed over his breast. If, however, Lady Cassell should happen to drop a card, or if I put down my book and seemed to display signs of wanting another, Ahmed was always alert to return the dropped object or to hold out his hand for my book and try to receive directions for re-

placing it. Like everything else around here he is a puzzle. But I am sensitive to atmosphere, and I am sure that I feel tendrils of affection and loyalty reaching out to me from this strange little creature. When Matilda is in the room I am beginning to feel spied on. But Ahmed's presence is one of protection.



I find myself beginning to plot like other people. I decided to see Tabitha after breakfast, but not wishing Matilda as audience I set her to washing my caps. When she was well into it, I went along the passage with Ahmed.

"I've seen Patsy," said I to Tabitha, without preliminary.

"Oh, yes, ma'am? I hope you found her well and comfortable," said Tabitha, as mild as milk.

"Both," said I.

"I'm glad to hear it, ma'am. Very glad. Patsy wasn't well suited here. She didn't get on with the other servants. She hadn't enough to do, and so she took on things as was out of her sphere, like them clocks! She'll do better where she is." She rubbed one bony mittened claw over the other, and peered at me with a lively, satisfied spite, so at variance with her oily tone that I remained silent, expecting more. I was not wrong. My silence drew her on.

"She'll do better, that is, if *you* allow it, ma'am!" she openly grinned.

“What do you mean, if I allow it?”

“Well, the master said you’d better realize that if he needs to move her — to a *more* uncomfortable place — he’s got the means to do it. There’s huts on moors in Scotland, where they talk the Gaelic. There’s poor peasants in the French country would take her in. . . . You understand me, *mistress?*”

That sneer was open too.

“You mean you are trying to use Patsy as a hostage?” said I, angrier than I had ever been in my life.

“Oh, she’ll be all right, *mistress*, she’ll be as right as rain, as long as you do what you ought!” she falsely soothed.

“As I ought?”

“What I and the master want,” she brought out brazenly.

“Don’t dare to speak to me of the master!” said I. “That’s my business!”

“Maybe, maybe,” said Tabitha, pulling in a little. “But he can have Patsy spirited away this very day, where you’ll never find her. He don’t care nothing for old Patsy, but he’d do a lot for his old nurse. So be careful, ma’am! That’s all I say. Be careful!”

“How careful?”

“Oh, nothing much, ma’am — nothing hard! Just be obliging to my Mr. Luke and kind to poor old Tabitha. Just be a good Quaker, like you are — or should be!”

This should not put my back up, but it does. What does she know about Quakers?

"Am I not kind to you?" said I, coldly.

"You don't come to see me every day, ma'am. Every morning after breakfast poor old Tabitha watches for you and watches for you. Sometimes the pretty mistress will come looking in for a few minutes. And then again she won't. It's dull watching for a visitor that don't come. And it's tiresome to have the pleasant visit cut short, too!"

I thought back to Lydia. She went through some of this. What was the chain on the leg of *that* bird to pull it in to perch in this stuffy witch's room?

"The first Mrs. Ashton — did *she* visit you every day?" said I.

"Indeedy, so she did, ma'am, and glad to do it!"

"How long did she make her visits?"

"A full half-hour by the clock. She came when the clock struck nine, and she would stay until it struck half-past. She never missed. Very fond of me she was."

Slavery, thought I. The beady eye watched me with a sort of crafty triumph, as a cat might watch a wounded mouse. But I am not a mouse, and I am not that much wounded; yet. She mistakes me. She thinks pacificism is passivism. Nothing farther from the truth.

I got up.

"Well, good-by for now," I said. "Tomorrow perhaps I will bring a book and read to you."

I went out.

From the dark passage I looked back over Ahmed's head as he softly and deliberately closed the door behind me. I caught Tabitha's expression again off guard. It was blank, gaping surprise. Perhaps she was wondering if she had gone too fast. She had.

If only I knew where Luke was, I could send him a message, an appeal. It hit me forcibly — I did not know where my husband's place of business was.

But if Tabitha was going to beguile him to injure Patsy further (in order to hurt me) why would she wait for me to give offense? Her malice would act unprovoked. She had already proved it. I must get to Luke first. And I felt that there was no time to lose.

There was only one person who knew what was going on — perhaps even more than I did. Maybe he would be unable to act. But to try him (even though it would give color to my husband's suspicions) seemed the only chance.

I went straight to my boudoir, followed of course by Ahmed. I sat down at my pretty inlaid desk (Lydia's desk) and thought a moment, pen in hand, just as I often sat to write my letters to America.

I found Ahmed close at my elbow, looking up at me with speaking eyes. He was sensitive to crisis. He expected a message. He was ready.

I wrote: "*They are going to use Patsy as a hostage.*" I folded the slip of paper small, with no direction or signature,



and pressed it into Ahmed's open palm. He promptly bent his head and sucked the paper into his mouth. Fine! I nodded and smiled. But how could I direct him to the gardener? I took the slender wrought-iron shovel hanging beside the fireplace and pretended to dig in the rug. One gesture was enough. Ahmed nodded and melted away. He slithered past Matilda in the doorway, much as a spaniel might.

Matilda was a little flustered.

"There's callers below, madam. John has showed them into the drawing room. Is that correct?"

"I suppose so."

I moved to go down, but Matilda intervened.

"Please, madam, your cap!" And as I stared at her — "Didn't the master leave orders? He did to me, ma'am. I've got one ready."

Well, *well!* But may it not be touching, in a way, that my husband (who gives no other sign of being a religious man) values every symbol of his wife's religion so highly? He might have thought that a Quaker was rather an unfashionable thing to be, but instead he is proud of it. He wants to show it off. Let me take his insistence on my dress in that spirit. After all, doesn't this gauzy cap help me to be more thoroughly myself? To strike, at least, my own especial note? Without it, like a chameleon, I should be inclined to take the protective color of my environment. I like so much to be like other people; and

it has always been my fate to be made to be different!

Madame Van de Weyer and Mrs. Bates were below. But Lady Diana arrived on their heels, and they did not stay long.

I received callers all day, ably assisted, I will say, by Lady Diana. Late in the afternoon she left me, intending to return for dinner in the evening. I had no idea whether my message had been delivered or had had any effect. Matilda presented herself as soon as Lady Diana left, apparently intending to bear me company, at any rate as long as to help me change, and I set her to work sewing on fresh fichus and what not. There were fifteen dinner guests tonight, which made quite a little stir in the drawing room before dinner. But as the clock struck the hour of six and John came anxiously to the door, I realized that something was wrong. I left the gentleman to whom I was talking and went to my husband.

"What is it, Luke? I believe John is trying to signal me whether or not to announce dinner."

"Lady Diana has not come," said my husband. "We must wait for her."

This understood, I relinquished responsibility, shook my head at John (who at once retired) and sat down to talk to Mr. Eyeglass, who was patting the couch by his side. He had established a queer sort of friendship with me. I thought that he was regarding me as a curious specimen, perhaps, from the wild woods of America. But I also thought that I

detected that he was an unhappy man, and this gave me a sympathy for him.

“Do you know, you little republican, that you have a group here tonight that represents the very highest society?” said he. “Half the hostesses in London would like to assemble the people that you have here. They find them hard to get, even singly.”

“They have nice manners,” I said. “One or two of them have been here before, and I’m beginning to know them. There are several strangers tonight. I don’t get the names very well — they have difficult names to begin with, and my husband is not a very good introducer. He seems to mutter them. I suppose he knows them so well, he doesn’t think it worth the trouble to pronounce them clearly. But, Lord Rivers, tell me, is this a typical English fashionable party?”

“What is that you call me? Lord Rivers?” he said, leaning his ear to me a little. He chuckled. “That’s what you thought your husband said? Oh, well, that’s as good a name as any. Stick to that. Stick to that, Mrs. Ashton! I will be Lord Rivers for you. But as to your question — have you been into society much?”

“I’ve only just begun on my London society education!” said I. “One had to be introduced to the Queen, Luke said, in order to receive the right style of callers. *His* style! I am now receiving callers. And later on I shall have to return the calls. Invitations are coming in, too. Lady Diana is giving

a party — a *soirée* I think she calls it. I expect to go to that . . . But no, I haven't seen much here yet. I'm judging by Philadelphia and Newport."

"What's the matter with this party?" said Lord Rivers.

"Well, there seem to me rather few ladies," said I.

Lord Rivers cleared his throat. He scratched the side of his nose.

"Hmm, it's true, yes, most parties would show a greater preponderance of ladies," he said slowly. "But your husband, you know, has collected around him a number of friends who are very fond of certain games, and most of these friends happen to be gentlemen. Later on, I dare say, some of them will bring their wives or sisters; or some lady friends of Lady Diana and the Countess Cassell will hear of our goings-on and want to be invited. It will then be your privilege, Mrs. Ashton, to invite them. But, in the meantime, you may feel yourself a very successful hostess, I assure you. The little gatherings here are becoming so popular among a very select circle that I have heard that a royal duke is going to appear here three days from now — none other than the Queen's cousin, the Duke of Cambridge. He has no wife, you know, so you will not be surprised that he does not bring a lady."

"Oh, I remember him when I was introduced to the Queen," said I. "He is a pleasant-looking gentleman. He seemed to be a friend of Lady Diana's."

"Don't be too observant, Mrs. Ashton. One day those

very bright and very innocent eyes of yours will see too much."

"Too much?" I said, looking him straight in the eye.

"Too much for your peace — and for our comfort," he said. "Just take things as they are, Mrs. Ashton — take them at their surface value. That's wisest. Think always that you have come from one country to another, and from one set of customs and manners to others quite different."

"I'm afraid I'm not a successful hostess," said I, impulsively. "I'm hardly a hostess at all. I have very little part to play."

"My dear young lady," said he, "you are quite mistaken. You are the very center of this gathering. You are the big draw. You give us confidence, you know. You make it normal — you make it right. You give the whole thing countenance."

"I'm afraid you are only paying me extravagant compliments!" said I.

"No, no, indeed," said he. "I could pay you extravagant compliments, and they would all be true. You have a rare beauty! But your mirror can tell you that. Pretend you are my granddaughter — as your age would entitle you to be — and listen to what I say in quite another field and mood. Do you know that subtle thing which bankers call credit? You are your husband's credit! And he knows it."

I supposed he meant something to do with my fortune, and was not sure that his remarks were quite in good taste.

Yet I liked him and found him easy to talk to. At this moment, however, there was a little flutter of Lady Diana entering the room.

Luke was standing by the mantelpiece with young Byron, facing the doorway, and Lady Diana, seeing him so, made her way straight to him. I got up from my sofa and went across to them from the side. I reached my husband in time to hear Lady Diana say, softly:

“Patsy has disappeared!”

My eyes happened to be on Luke’s face watching his stiff expression in greeting Lady Diana (as if he wore a mask). And I saw a look of startled consternation momentarily take its place. He took her by the elbow and moved her away from young Byron, which turned her toward me, and her eyes met mine momentarily with misery and fear.

“I couldn’t help it,” she said to me in a low tone, “I wasn’t there!”

“What happened?” said I.

“It seems she went out. I never thought of her doing such a thing. She was so nervous of the streets. She went out to buy a matching ribbon or something of the kind and never came back.”

My husband looked down. His face presented an impassive surface.

“She knows no one in London, I believe,” he said, ruminating, “and no one knows her. No one, that is, outside of this household.”

"I haven't set the police searching yet," said Lady Diana.

"Don't," said my husband abruptly. "I will take charge of this. Nothing more can be done tonight. We must go in to dinner." He rang the bell and gave his arm to Lady Diana.

Young Byron gave his arm to Countess Cassell, and Mr. Eyeglass presented his elbow with a bow to me. I was glad to have my confusion and excitement covered by this movement and ceremony. I knew that I had flushed up to my hair. I could feel it. But when we were in our customary places at the table, Lady Diana squeezed my hand under the cloth apologetically and tenderly, and whispered to me:

"Don't fret, dearest Rose! I've blamed myself all kinds of ways, but she may be back even now, you know. She might have asked a policeman or taken a cab. She should know we would pay for the fare."

I made no answer because I could think of none to make that would not be insincere. But I did squeeze her hand under the table so that she might know that at least I was not angry with her.

The contrary was true of my husband. He was very angry, and I knew him well enough to read it. Whatever use he had intended for Patsy, good or bad, it had been circumvented by this accident. I could see that he gnawed his underlip, blaming himself, I was sure, for having deposited Patsy in Lady Diana's careless hands. And my heart warmed to Lady Diana just because she was careless. I began to feel that she was no plotter. She had spoken the truth

when she had told me that her involvement had not been of her own will. But how then could my husband have made free with her house in the first place? Or, if it had been Tabitha's scheme only, what power had *she* to do it?

Lady Diana's arrival brought the party up to sixteen, counting my husband but not me. Dinner went through as rapidly as usual. My husband had trained his servants well. Only three courses were served but they were of the best — soup, beef or roast chicken with accessories and vegetables, followed by a rich trifle, and all accompanied by the appropriate wines.

"Your husband has a marveloush cook," said young Byron, as usual three sheets in the wind. "Wish my housh-keeper could get a cook like thish! Even those who know better than I do, tell me thish ish the besh cooking in London!"

I only smiled at him. I did not feel inclined to talk to young Byron that night, or anyone else. And my silence seemed very natural both to my husband and Lady Diana. They took it for granted that I would be terribly upset.

When the dessert was served my husband took an opportunity to lean across the table to speak to me.

"Rose, my dear," he said, with a show of kindness, "I think tonight, since we began dinner late, we won't have the ladies retire separately. We will go straight to our cards. Will you think it unpleasant if I claim both your lady companions? We shall then have four tables."



"I don't mind at all," said I. "I feel like a quiet evening."

After port had been served, then, my husband nodded to me and we all rose from the table together. Luke came round to my side.

"I will send Matilda to sit with you in the drawing room," he said.

"I should prefer to go upstairs with a book," said I drily.

"You can't do that," he said curtly.

"Why not?"

"Because of your responsibilities as hostess. If you don't play cards with us, you must at least remain in the drawing room. Some guests might want music. Some might want to take leave early. You must be on hand."

"Well, if it's necessary for politeness, I will stay there," said I, "and to please you. But not if Matilda is planted there with me. There is no reason why I should be saddled with the company of an unpleasant servant."

"I thought you did not seem to object to the company of servants," said Luke, with sarcasm. It stung me and made me defiant.

"I draw the line at Matilda," said I.

While we were speaking, in order to talk to me privately and yet not attract attention, he had been pushing me before him through the arch into the library, where four tables were set out ready for cards. The room looked very pleasant, a shaded lamp near each table, a sealed new pack of cards on each, the windows open to the soft night air and

heavy curtains blowing a little inward over the long French windows. It was a snug inviting place, quietly rich. I looked at it with the satisfaction of a hostess, even though I had had nothing to do with its arranging. But while the others were coming in a slow higgledy-piggledy way, talking among themselves, behind us, my husband drew me on into a corner and said in a new tone:

“Do my orders mean nothing to you?”

“Your orders, my dear Luke? Of course not!” said I, laughing tenderly in his face. “No Quaker wife listens to orders. Quakers don’t obey their husbands, you know! But they are anxious to oblige them in everything reasonable. As I am anxious to oblige you.”

I wanted to put my arms round his neck but it did not seem the moment to do so. I did try, however, to take his hand in mine and kiss it. But it was rigid to my clasp. His face had turned livid. I saw to my astonishment that he was passionately angry. Much angrier now with me than he had been at table with Lady Diana. He was a changed man — a man I had never known. While my smile died out in astonishment and distress, I began to say soothingly:

“Luke, dear, don’t be worried. I’m going to do what you want. I’ll stay, of course. . . .”

There was a distraction. Approaching footsteps were heard on the gravel drive outside the French windows. My husband turned sharply in that direction. And the room, now full of gentlemen who had drifted to the various tables

and seated themselves, all looked that way. There entered with a rapid step a man with a cloak muffling his face, followed by another, equally disguised. They dropped their cloaks and stood revealed in the light. Every man present who was seated instantly rose to his feet, although none mentioned the name of the royal personage. I knew him because I remembered him well. It was the Duke of Cambridge.

He looked around with his cheerful jovial air and saw me standing conspicuously there in front of my husband. He made his way across the room to me at once and, sweeping off his top hat, he bowed low over my hand.

"This is a great pleasure, Mrs. Ashton," said he. "I hoped when I saw you at the Queen's drawing room that I might meet you again. I hope we may become friends. I could not be present at your dinner party, but I beg you will admit me nonetheless for an evening of my favorite amusement!"

"I am very glad to welcome you to my house and my husband's house — your Highness?" said I, shyly. I was not quite sure how to address a royal duke but the question in my voice was answered by him at once.

"Just call me Mr. Cambridge," said he. "That is how I shall enter these doors. If you are to be among us, Mrs. Ashton, I shall hope to come often. It's worth the trip just to have a look at you! People go all the way to Paris to gape at the 'Winged Victory' — and she's only made of marble, and broken at that!"

THE QUAKER BRIDE

He paid these compliments in so cheerful, easy and friendly a way that it was impossible to take offense. I smiled without being able to help it. And I welcomed his coming very much, because he had broken our awkward moment. My husband was now all suavity. He conducted Mr. Cambridge to a table with Mr. Eyeglass (Lord Rivers, I should say) and set him down there with Lady Diana.

"I hope to do myself the honor of being the fourth at this table," said he.

"You gratify me," said Mr. Cambridge in his easy way.

"Allow me just time to escort my wife to the drawing room," said Luke. "She is not a card player."

"I imagine not, with that cap!" said the duke cheerfully and gallantly. "It's a very lovely thing to see a Quakeress among us. She gains by contrast and incongruity. Something like seeing a dove in a rookery! Or better, cap or none, Mrs. Ashton's more like a bird of paradise!"

Since his coming had occasioned a general silence, everybody heard this little joke and burst into polite laughter. In this I made my escape, my husband at my side. Luke's anger had been put away for the time at any rate. He was in high good humor. I took his arm and he allowed it. He led me to the drawing room, which was brightly lighted, the piano in readiness, music on the rack. And there he noticed Ahmed in the corner.

"Ah," said he, "you are there. Very well. That will be enough, perhaps."

He talked to Ahmed in a rapid finger speech which I could not follow — probably even had I known the finger-language it would have been in Hindustani. Luke then turned to the door but remarked as he went:

“I may be able to release both of the ladies, because the coming of ‘Mr. Cambridge’ and his friend has given us two extra players. So you will after all have good company.”

But it was the Countess Cassell and young Byron who presently joined me. The latter was as peevish as a cross spoiled child.

“They shay I’m too drunk,” said he. “They’ve put me out. Sh’not fair. I *show* drunkenness more than many a man but there’s sheveral there as tight as I am. They jus’ carry it better on the top, but my mind’s ash clear ash cryshtal. I can judge the cards! I can think! I can make my —”

“Now, now,” said Lady Cassell interrupting him and patting him down like a kindly aunt or grandmother. “Now, now, don’t worry dear Mrs. Ashton with all this grumbling! Make yourself agreeable. Come, we’ll have a little music. I can’t play like my niece,” she said to me, “but I can strum out a tune or two. Let’s sing together some songs that maybe you know.”

She sat down and began to strum some popular melodies and presently had young Byron joining in, with a rather sweet tenor voice, indistinct and broken. I picked up some of the tunes and hummed, although I had never even been

allowed to sing or play, such were the rules in Philadelphia. But London Quakers I found were not so strict, or were of a different opinion. I had been called on that day by some Quakers, a lawyer's wife, and her two daughters. The mother wore a Quaker bonnet and could have been picked out as one of the sect anywhere, but her two daughters, though quietly dressed, were most elegant, fitted sleekly by an excellent dressmaker with rich materials. There was nothing distinctively Quaker about them that I could see. But they came to welcome me, having heard of my coming from Friends in Philadelphia, and invited me to attend the nearest Quaker Meeting, the Westminster Meeting, at St. Martin's Lane. In every way they gave me to understand that the London Friends would be very happy to have me among them. From these pleasant people I learned to my surprise that they had a piano, and that one of the girls, at least, was taking singing lessons, in order to sing to her father, as she said, "in the evenings."

"And her husband when she marries," said her younger sister, who had quite an un-Quaker pertness.

I liked them immensely. So I felt quite free about trying to sing with Lady Cassell and young Byron.

Matilda came in with coffee and Sir Samuel drank his strong and black. It cleared his head a little. He glanced around miserably, like a person trying to throw off a heavy dream.

"I'm not fit for thish society of pretty ladies," said he.

"And since I can't play cards, I think I'll go home. Good-night, Lady Cassell. . . . Thanksh for having me, Mrs. Ashton. I hope to behave better nex' time I come. Believe me, I value your friendship. I should hate to do anything to make you think badly of me."

I felt sorry for the young man and pressed his hand.

"Don't worry, Sam," I said. "I understand. You're not feeling well. Go home and get a good night's rest."

He bowed awkwardly, almost losing his balance as he did so, and staggered somehow out of the room. A moment later I heard the front door bang and knew that he had left the house.

"Well, that lets us off duty!" said Lady Cassell. We exchanged glances, and settled down to our own occupations, she with her Patience and I with my book. But I had hardly opened the page, Lady Cassell had hardly set out one row of cards, when there was a commotion at the front door. John opened the door, and in a moment young Byron was again with us, looking somewhat the worse for wear. His coat was dusty, as if he had been down on the ground, his cravat was pulled awry. His face was even more flushed. Yes, he was crying.

"I protesht!" he said angrily. He was sobbing. "I protesht! The gate's guarded! They wouldn't let me through. I want to go home and they wouldn't let me through. A mansh got a right to go home when he wantsh to. Ain't this a free country?"

## THE QUAKER BRIDE

I had not seen Ahmed leave the room but he slipped off for my husband. Indeed, the noise young Byron was making was enough to be heard across the hall, through the dining room, perhaps even in the library. In a moment my husband, followed by Ahmed, entered the room. He spoke sternly to poor young Byron.

"Now then, Sam, pull yourself together. What's all this fuss?"

Sir Samuel Coburn repeated tearfully and pugnaciously what he had said to me.

"Of course you can't go home," said my husband. "You're in no state to go alone through the streets. You must wait until either I or Lord Rivers can take you home. I see that you're not fit for the company of ladies — I'm sorry I sent you in here. Come with me. I'll find a place where you can lie down and sleep it off."

"Don't want to shleep it off," wailed young Byron, showing resistance to Luke's hand. "Want my revenge! How can I pay my debtsh —"

"Look, you young fool, hold your tongue. Don't you know that nothing but my bond stands between you and debtor's prison? If you give me any more trouble I'll have you in the Marshalsea by ten o'clock tomorrow morning."

The young man collapsed, sniveling.

My husband hustled him out of the room.

I thought I heard him take him to the closet under the stairs, once Ahmed's, where there was still a little camp



bed. And I distinctly heard a key turn in the lock. Yes, I suppose he had locked poor young Byron up.



I sat with my book open on my knee but I was not reading. I was thinking.

The window sills of this room too, were above my eye level. The gold brocade curtains were fanned inward slightly by the summer wind. The quiet made my companion drowsy, and presently her substantial snores made me aware that she had fallen asleep, her head bent onto her plump bosom. The cards dropped from her slack hand, but the watchful Ahmed knew better than to return them. He stood very near me this evening, almost as if he were looking over at the pages of my book, which remained unturned. Suddenly a footstep was heard casually crunching the gravel on the drive that ran under the windows. The passer-by, whoever he was, whistled a tune softly as he went. It was familiar — “Flow gently, sweet Afton” — the song Lady Diana had sung the night before. Only a few bars, and then the casual whistler had passed. For a moment it seemed so natural that I did not think of it particularly. Then it suddenly struck me — is this my delayed message? What did it mean? . . . If he had wanted to call me outside (an impossible feat for me) he would have thrown a pebble

in, or whistled a soft call. No, the choice of tune meant something. I got up like a sleep walker and went to the piano, turned over the music. The song was standing on the piano rack all ready for use. Had I been more musical I should have recognized it at once. I sat down at the piano wondering whether I needed to finger the unfamiliar keys. My left hand turned the pages of the song. There on the second page, lightly written in the margin, I spelled the letters "s-a-f-e." I had looked closely at the sheet of music the night before in order to follow the words while Lady Diana sang, to turn the leaf for her. There had been nothing penciled in the margins then, I was certain. Yes, this undoubtedly was my message. I took it to my heart. I understood.

I had nothing to erase it with, so I took the music sheets and pushed them in among the pile of music on the top of the piano. A newcomer or a spy would never pick that song out of many. But I now felt a deep sense of security. Red Cain had not forgotten me, nor had he been powerless to help me. How he had done it and what he had done I could not guess, but that this was his message I felt sure. *Patsy was safe*. I had nothing to fear. I relaxed like the Countess, and went to sleep in my chair.

It must have been a couple of hours later when my husband and two or three of the gentlemen came into the room.

"Well, well," said the Duke of Cambridge, who led the

way with Luke, "now we know what ladies do when they have no gentlemen to enliven them!"

Lady Diana was close behind him with Lord Rivers.

"Well, I can assure you we had a much livelier evening when *I* was allowed to keep Mrs. Ashton company!" she said.

"It's like waking a rose," said the duke, as I got to my feet and he took my hand. "I feel as if I ought to shake the dew off you."

"Well, sir, here's some dew," said my husband, "to apply or shake off as you wish."

John and one of the other servants came into the room with trays and glasses and a pail of ice with bottles in it. The duke took one of the shallow tall-stemmed glasses, which fizzed and bubbled as the wine was poured in, pale gold. He bowed again and offered me the glass.

"Dew, extra dew for your roses!" said he.

"A little champagne, my dear," explained my husband. "Would you mind that?"

I was grateful to him for what I took to be a protective gesture.

"Not for me, I thank you, sir," said I.

"A real Quaker," said the duke but he said it in a satisfied not teasing voice. "Well, Mrs. Ashton, you and your Quaker cap, your purity, your sweetness, have brought me luck tonight. I've had a winning streak!"

I could see that he was glowing with bonhomie, indeed

triumph, like a little boy who has made a dozen runs at cricket. I was pleased with his pleasure.

"It's always nice to play to win," said I.

"Nice is a nice word in that connection," said the duke. He laughed heartily, as if I had said something witty, and his laughter made me laugh just for the pure pleasure of company.

Lady Cassell had roused up and joined jovially in the talk and in the champagne.

They did not stay long. They all took a courtly or affectionate leave of me within half an hour. Perhaps I was extra alert because of my nap but I seemed acutely conscious of everything that was going on. Lord Rivers had a whispered colloquy with Luke in the hall and went to the little back room and roused Sam Coburn from his imprisonment. I could hear that my poor young Byron woke up peevishly and slowly, and was still half asleep when he came through the hall leaning on Lord Rivers's arm. They left by the front door, and ultimately by the front gate in Lord Rivers's carriage. The Duke of Cambridge and his friend, however, and presumably some of the others, left through the dining room and the library. Going that way, they would step out of the French windows onto the gravel drive that went round the house from the stables. Perhaps they had left their carriage in the stable yard, and would drive around the house and out the front drive. Yet after they went from the hall, I heard no more car-

riage wheels. How then did they leave? What gave me the idea that they walked back through the dark garden, winding along the alleys with a torch, to that door in the back wall which I had never seen undone? My husband had told me that it went out to the road along the Thames. Perhaps, grand as my husband seemed in some ways to be, and ducal as his manners were, we were not quite grand enough in the English social scheme to receive a royal duke by the front gate. I remembered again that the duke had not come to dinner. He came for the game, for the play. He had certainly enjoyed himself. No doubt a man of his kind went about London freely, taking his pleasures where he could. Anything, I thought, would be a relief from that stuffy court life.

Luke turned from the front door, and saw me at the bottom of the stairs.

"Are you tired, Rose, my dear? Want to go to bed? I think they've all gone."

"Then I will go," said I, smothering a yawn. "Aren't you coming?"

"Yes, very soon, very soon," said Luke. "I have to go back and look over things in the library. I don't trust John to see to the final turning out of lamps and so on. One is always afraid of fire. And I have some accounts to do before I come up."

He was much more explanatory than usual. I felt I had acquired an added importance in his eyes and therefore

in my own. In fact the whole evening had tended to bring me out. I felt maturing fast into my rights as mistress of a house. I put my arms round his neck as he stood below me in the hall and I stood a step above him.

"Luke," I said, "there are some questions I want to ask you, dearest, and some painful, vexing things I want to tell! Let's get everything explained!"

He put his hands up to my arms and gently undid them.

"Don't play your little wiles on me, my dear," said he. "You have powerful arts. But I have experience. And don't ask too many questions. I hate inquisitive women! . . . We will talk, perhaps, in the morning. I too have some things to say."

Why did not such a snub hurt me more? Certainly I felt dashed. I felt my new dignity diminished. But the sensation was rather that which a young person feels when he has tactlessly trespassed on the attention of an elder who is preoccupied and therefore irritable. My father had sometimes behaved in the same way, as his business worries multiplied. Yet was it the way a husband should behave to a wife? I knew, from the day of my engagement, that I should have to develop and mature and grow up in order to become worthy of being the wife of a mature and distinguished man like Luke Ashton. I had told him so, humbly. During the honeymoon he had taken pleasure in instructing me. But now that I was finding my feet and

becoming more worthy of him, he seemed to put me back into childhood. Time, I thought, was the best answer. I made, after all, so many mistakes. Yet a turmoil of feeling kept me a long time from sleep.

When I woke it was bright morning. The sun was streaming in at the high, open windows. The windows were above the treetops, but I could see the sky with white clouds floating. However, something dark moved between me and the sky and in a quarter of a second I saw my husband's head. He was sitting on the edge of my bed.

"Tell me, Rose —" said he, in a very quiet voice, while sleep was still chasing away from my eyelids — "are you worried about Patsy?"

The sudden question in my half-asleep state brought all the blood to my face. I felt the deep self-accusing convicting blush. Luke took me by both wrists. I felt a terrible sense of powerlessness.

"Of course!" said I, trying not to be untruthful. Naturally I still could be said to be worried until I knew actually where Patsy was and what she was doing.

"Do you know where the woman is?"

His grip on my soft arms was hurting me. I lay very relaxed and passive.

"Of course I don't know where Patsy is." He gripped harder and I blazed at him. "No, *I don't.*"

"Diana says you know more than you tell," said Luke.

His eyes burned into mine. But I opened my eyes wide at the injustice of this and stared him back.

“Why, Luke — can *you* say that to *me*? It’s *you* who know surely far more than you tell. Or at any rate Tabitha does!”

And then I plunged rapidly before he could stop me into a full account of Tabitha’s outrageous behavior the morning before.

Luke heard me out. Bored into my eyes again as if to try to pull out any secret hidden thought. Then he let go of my arms — where the marks of his fingers were white on my flesh and flushed deep red when he let go.

“Tabitha’s an old fool!” said he and swung angrily out of the room.

I leapt out of bed, ran to the door and locked it, to keep Matilda from coming in to help me dress.

What happened between Luke and Tabitha I don’t know, but I had breakfast alone as usual. I was not sorry. I needed to think. *Diana* had said to Luke that she thought I knew more than I would tell? Is Diana then not “on my side”? She has pretended so. And I searched myself severely also to find out what this instinctive question about sides meant to me. Who was the other side? I had thought up to now it was Tabitha. Could it possibly be my husband?

That was not possible. I wouldn’t let it be. I must put myself at once on my husband’s side, for better, for worse. Let me only find out, discover, what that side was! Patsy



seemed very small game for his enmity. It was like an eagle going after a rabbit. No, that metaphor won't do. Rabbits are the natural prey of eagles. Let me say it was rather like a lion starting a feud with a nice tame house cat. It was unreasonable. I came back again to my original point of view. I had Tabitha, and Tabitha only to blame for everything. My husband was confused by his loyalty to his old nurse. Naturally his loyalty to his wife must come first, now that he understood that his old nurse had really entered a feud with his own wife. He had not understood before! He had thought the quarrel was one, as he had said, between our two old nurses. Something beneath his notice. And beneath mine.

I ate my morning porridge cheerfully, thinking of the tone in which he had said, "Tabitha's an old fool." He had gone off undoubtedly to put her in her place; and so secure me in mine.



We have had ten days of continuous rain — a gentle fine rain, not like the American downpour. People come and go in it just as usual. John has a big umbrella which he opens with a flourish and holds over the heads of callers, to step from their carriage to the front door. One can't sit out in the garden any more, but it's nice with a hooded

cloak or an umbrella to wander now and then about the rainy paths. It's wonderful weather for weeding, says Red Cain. When I meet Red Cain it's always like the sun coming out. He carries an air of gaiety about him. But it's a grave gaiety. He may hum a tune now and then when he's earnestly tying a rambler to a stick or clipping the dead flowers from the zinnias, wallflowers, phlox, but he's not one of your nervous perennial whistlers. The last time I met him in the garden — our last sunny morning — he whistled a note or two of that old tune, "Flow gently, sweet Afton, among thy green braes." So then I *knew*. Then I was sure. But that day he didn't talk to me at all. He walked right away with his wheelbarrow in the opposite direction, and I took the hint and went slowly through the pleached alleys back to the house, with Matilda, and a few clipped sweet williams.

The next day the rain began.

I slipped out unseen while Matilda was with Tabitha.

I stood by the sundial in the softly falling rain and saw its gray dial and the metal pointer registering no hours, and I said aloud —

"A cloudy day is a day 'out of time' in the garden. The sundial can't measure it."

"So we may count this moment as a piece of eternity," said Red Cain. He stood beside me, as if he had just materialized out of the mist. I felt safe, warm and happy.

"However," he went on, "this garden is designed for

eavesdroppers. I knew it in my childhood. So I must carry eternity away with me into the kitchen garden, and not get you into trouble."

"I seem to be *in* trouble!" said I involuntarily. It seemed so natural to confide in him. And a question popped out, useless to ask him. "Why has that Tabitha so much power?"

"She might know something, mightn't she? Something important — something secret?"

I stared.

"Does Lady Diana know it too?"

"I'm sure not!" He flushed as he said it, and his eyes entreated my faith.

"If it is my husband's secret, I ought to know it," I said. "I am his wife. I have a right. Tabitha seems to usurp my rights — it's absurd!"

"The question is," he said, "can I help you? Or shall I make it worse?"

Yet his blue eyes, looking into mine, were reassuring and presently gay.

"What do you think?" said I.

"I think somebody — we won't mention names — would like to get something against you. Your protector, Patsy, has been taken away. Yes, they would have used her as a hostage — to make you amenable — and that's been prevented. Don't ask questions. Safer for you not to know anything. But still she's gone. You're on your own. You're

alone. So you must be mighty careful not to give anyone the faintest whiffle of a cause for scandal."

I could feel myself blushing red.

"You overheard — ?"

"I heard what Ashton — what your husband said. Oh yes, I stayed to hear behind the hedge, just in case you should need me. Absurd of me, of course. A wife and husband can settle matters between them, we hope. . . . But jealousy is a disease, and a very painful one. It knows no reason. I must guard you from *me*, madam, that in your lovely innocence you give no handle to suspicion."

"You mean?" I faltered.

"I mean I must not talk to you in the garden. You are watched. You are listened to."

I shivered, and glanced round nervously.

"Now?" I whispered.

"Not at this moment — I think," said he. He held his tall rough head aslant, listening. The patter of the rain, the splash of the fountain. . . . "I know the sounds of this garden well, and my hearing is uncommon good. They don't know yet that you like to come out in the rain! But they'll tumble to it. They will see you come in — or see your wet cloak, your muddy shoes. Then they will know. It won't be safe again. We'd best not linger."

But he put his brown, long-fingered hand on the sundial, and clasped the metal pointer. My hand lay near it. I wanted suddenly to touch his hand. I trembled with the

longing. I think I should have done it, as an iron filing moves to a magnet, but for my shy sense that he would not like me to take the initiative. I knew all at once that *he* wanted to take my hand. I gently opened it, palm up. His knuckles grew white with strain, but he held on to the sundial.

"Oh," he said, huskily, faintly, "you are too young, too unguarded to be here. You are in danger from yourself. An enemy could snare you too easily, with your own beauty. But I will not let them use me as bait for your snare."

He let go the sundial and turned away.

I said suddenly, "You are not a gardener, Red Cain! Who are you?"

He looked back and smiled. I was irradiated with his smile.

"I am your servant, at all events," he said.

"You are my friend!"

"I am anything you wish — except your betrayer! Stay close by your husband."

He went through the arch beside the fountain. And I obeyed his warning. I did not linger. I went in, with an unreasonable happiness, like one who carries a secret talisman.

We have not talked again.

I have a lot of visitors and I've been to one or two quiet parties, in company with Lady Diana. But I can't go to evening parties, nor apparently can she; that is, only at our

house. Every evening I must be on hand to receive my husband's intimate friends, and preside — if that's what it can be called by courtesy — at the dinner table before they go into their games. This is now quite a routine. I feel at home in it and am getting to know them all; all the regular ones, that is. There are always some whom I don't know. I go to see Mistress Tabitha almost every morning, because after all she has no hold on me. It doesn't hurt my pride. And I do feel sorry for her, mewed up in one room. I take along the newspaper or something to read to her, and our conversation is limited to the news or to remarks about the weather, and her health, and quite innocuous things like that. She is as meek as Moses — with a wicked eye. But I am unhappy at my husband's neglect. It is extraordinary how little I see of him. One would hardly think that two people could live in the same house and have so little private contact. Indeed, I am left alone in every way. The threat that I should have somebody guarding me wherever I went has been forgotten. Perhaps on account of the weather. Or perhaps my protest about Matilda, and my revelation of Tabitha's spite, have been effective. If I want anyone to help me dress, I have to ring the bell and ask the rosy little kitchen maid, who is the one I like the best of the domestic staff, to come and hook me up. She is clumsy and has had no experience of being a lady's maid, whereas Matilda is highly skilled. But at any rate she is human.

## THE QUAKER BRIDE

Of course my days are not forlorn. The meals are exquisitely served. I have lots of company. But all the normal routine of married life, as I had imagined it, and as I little experienced it on my honeymoon, does not exist.

I put down my husband's absences in the first days of our settling in at Friar's Court to his extra work in re-establishing his business contacts in London. But I did not expect these engagements, early and late, to go on for so long. I'm always trying to find an opportunity for a good long talk. For instance, about his place of business. Ever so many particulars that I want to clear up. I want to come out openly with everything — every little doubt, every lurking apprehension — and have them all fully explained away by him with that mixture of the tender father and the kind husband which he showed to me at first. But in our chance encounters he seems cold and forbidding. So much so, that if I did not know that he loved me — for did he not frequently tell me so? — I should imagine that he disliked me.

My cousin's wife, Mrs. Joshua Bates, has been to see me once, and I have been out again to East Sheen. But happy as both these times were (especially the afternoon at East Sheen, I was so at home there), I felt her sympathetic half enquiry, her little anxious look at me, led me too far. I was almost afraid to be there in case I should reveal too much. Going round the greenhouses with my cousin, reporting to him the welfare of the plants he had given me, and

accepting one or two more to take back, I caught myself on the verge several times of telling him things which I felt a wife should not tell about her new household. There were confidences that could not be broken, there were decencies to be observed. Perhaps if I had had a mother to talk to I might have been able to open my heart with a good conscience. But my cousins, paternal as they were, I must hold at a distance. And since it was very hard to do this, since their affectionate perceptiveness made them occasionally ask a question such as, "It would be very nice if you could bring your husband to dine with us someday soon, couldn't you?" I felt I might say more than I ought. A conviction rose up within me that my husband would never go with me to dine at East Sheen. Now where did that conviction come from?

I said nothing at all about the pattern of my life at Friar's Court, except that I saw a good deal of company and that most of it was very pleasant, and that we gave a great many dinner parties but they were mostly for my husband's special cronies and (as I understood) business associates. I had to explain some way why I was not able to invite Mr. and Mrs. Joshua Bates at present to dine at my home! But I was sure that I could not do so. I went back from that visit comforted and soothed by the "afternoon off," as it were, and yet at the same time with a fresh set of questions alive within me just because of my entering that different environment. Why did I know the things I knew? And



## THE QUAKER BRIDE

why did I not know some of the things of which I was ignorant? I began to ponder whether the evening parties were not uncommonly regular and limited. Being in contact with the Bateses' household and hearing them casually talk about the pattern of their lives, made me feel again that the pattern at Friar's Court was not merely an English one, it was peculiar to my husband and his secretive plan of living.

It was perhaps fortunate that Madame Van de Weyer was unable to either visit me or have me to her house, because two of her children had the measles. She wrote me a very pleasant note to this effect, to explain why she had to temporarily cut off association with me and with her other friends.



In going to my boudoir before breakfast today I was conscious again that someone has been going through my papers. The first time I thought it was only perhaps in the process of dusting. A chambermaid with a duster may disarrange everything, trying as best she can to put things back in the same place. A very conscientious maid might have thought it necessary to move letters and dust inside pigeon holes. But this second time I'm sure that dusting is not the reason. There is, at it happens, a little dust along the

shiny inlay left by a not too conscientious worker. Yet my letters, which I had left in a particular order with an eye to answering them, are not in that same order. For instance, Madame Van de Weyer's note about the measles, which I answered very promptly and put in a pile of answered but "to be kept" letters on one side of the desk, has got moved into the pile "to answer," and I found it there, three or four letters down in the pile. I don't suspect Luke of going through my letters. And yet I'm glad that this clumsiness exonerates him. He would have been more clever than that. Someone not too used to the arts and duties of correspondence is fumbling among my things.

It is easy to guess who. Matilda is probably using this method of satisfying both her own and Mistress Tabitha's restless curiosity. I feel another link with Lydia. I remember she hid some letters in her fancywork, and they remained there too, quite safe, unfound, unread, until my coming. What had those letters been about that Lydia had to hide? I have nothing to hide. But I began to think automatically about where I should hide letters if I wanted to.

I wandered about my pleasant room, idly asking myself this question. It was all so open and candid. There seemed to be no hiding places. The worktable was of course now useless — all cleared out, empty, open, suspect. I lifted the lid. The lovely silks were there in the little compartments in the upper tray; packets of needles, probably all rusty.

But when I lifted the tray, the well of the table was clean and empty. I had not somehow taken up yet my own hobby of embroidery. There had been so much to do, so much to see, to adjust to. And I had a project afoot, not yet realized, which took precedence in my mind over anything that would keep me sitting indoors alone with my needle. Some of my recent correspondence had been about this project, and one of the letters had been folded back the wrong way. Yes, it had been read. Old Tabitha was cackling over it now, perhaps, with Matilda. But I really didn't see why I should care.

Ahmed came in, and saw me looking dreamily in the empty well of the worktable. He suddenly made an urgent gesture for attention, his face came to life as I had never seen it. He fumbled in his tunic and pulled out a twisted, crumpled morsel of paper, and while he handed it to me he pointed with the other hand to the well, and made signs that that was where he had found it. And I remembered when. That first day when I had looked back and seen Ahmed closing the lid. . . .

It was a scrap of paper such as skeins of silk are wrapped in when you buy them. Fine, tough, India paper.

I spread out its creases gently. Yes, a message was written there in faded ink. "Tonight beloved."

So brief, so small, so easily hidden. The past floated into the room like a mist. I saw the new packets of silks in Lydia's hand. I saw her unwrapping them, with her back

to the door; so casual seeming; so quietly, innocently employed. I saw her examining each delicate wrapping until the one came — perhaps one only among three or four — that spoke to her heart and directed her secret life.

Had it been truly secret?

Had her guilty happiness been discerned by spying eyes?

How could it not be, in that house?

Was it a thread of embroidery silk that had pulled that bird into old Tabitha's cage?

Did this have anything to do — strange thought — with Tabitha's present power?

I remembered Red Cain's words. He was the one, if any-one, to whom this scrap of paper might have present meaning. I gave it back to Ahmed impressively, and lifting the delicate wrought-iron shovel from its stand I sketched our signal for the gardener. Ahmed's eyes flashed at me, wide, lustrous, intelligent. Then he bowed with his arms crossed and stood aside, holding the door wide. I heard the breakfast gong sounding.

My husband, for a wonder, was breakfasting with me today. Now perhaps there would be a chance for my talk. But as soon as we were seated and the bacon and coffee passed, he dismissed the servant and started in at once on a subject of his own.

"Are you finding enough to do, Rose, or is time hanging heavy on your hands?" he said abruptly.

"I've been wanting to tell you, Luke," said I, "I plan to

teach in a Ragged School three mornings a week. You have no objection, have you?"

"I thought your mornings were always full," said Luke.

"Well, they're rather full at present," said I, "but Lady Diana tells me that the season will be over in August, and people go away to the moors and places, and then I thought if we were still in London that would be a time when I might have hours to spare. If we go away then, I could start in the autumn. But I'm very eager to start. These poor ragged children that run around the streets have been on my mind ever since I saw them first. Lady Diana took me to see one of the schools. I know what I'm in for. Several of the Quakers go to teach in them. And some of the Earl of Shaftesbury's aristocratic friends as well."

I was beginning to know (without thinking very much about it) that a title had great influence with my husband.

"I don't like it," he said. "I don't like your getting yourself into this so far without consulting me at all."

"I wish I saw more of you," said I. "I want to talk to you about everything!"

"I've never been a man that could sit still long and listen to a woman's chatter," said Luke.

The astonishment took my breath away, like a douche of cold water. Tears came into my eyes.

"Oh, cry if you wish," said Luke. "It's time you learned you are not everybody's paragon! I should have you with me more if you had learned to hold your tongue."

I winked away my tears.

"Luke," said I, "are you cross with me because of the Ragged School?"

"Oh, as for the Ragged School," said Luke, "I forbid it. Don't embark on any activity outside the house without my permission."

Once or twice, when he was very angry, my father had spoken to me like that; but that was when I was a child. A tide of anger rose in me, which I tried to quell.

"You have no right to speak to me like that," said I.

"No?" said Luke. "You will find out differently. Lydia learned to carry herself meekly in the house, and so will you!"

"Dearest Luke," said I — bracing myself to meet this in a tone of affectionate protest — "what do you want? A wife with no spirit?"

"You are right," said Luke. "A wife with no spirit. Or only spirit to the outer world, at such times as it may be useful to *me* that she show some spirit. The Queen herself subjects her spirit to her husband, setting an example for all wives everywhere. Grand as she is on her throne, do you know what she calls her husband in private life? Her master!"

"That just shows," said I, cheerfully, "that the Queen is not a Quaker!"

"You had better think twice before you defy me," said Luke.

I swallowed anger again and sat silent for a moment trying to collect myself.

"I can't imagine how we got to talking like this," I said. "I had no wish to offend you. I want to please you."

"You don't please me," said Luke.

"Well," said I, with an effort, "I'll give up the Ragged School teaching, dear, until I can persuade you to see it in a different light. Or at least I will try."

"Thank you for nothing," said Luke. "I'll see that you give *that* up. I mean — you don't please me in general."

He stared into my face across the table, and a peculiar cruel smile twisted his lips at what he saw there.

"Ah," he said, "that gave you a shock, didn't it? Well, my dear, to speak candidly, I'm a man that likes change. Oh, you're very pretty. But I own your beauty. It's my private property. I can have it when I wish. There are a lot of other pretty women in London. Some that are hard to get, and give me the sport of the chase."

He went into a fit of ugly laughter.

"If you could see your face!"

A tall glass of milk was standing by my plate. Before I knew it, I had thrown the contents of the glass into Luke's grin. The ludicrous change made me laugh, in my unnaturally excited and wounded state. The milk went all over his grizzled hair, ran down the creases of his lined face, soaked his winged collar and his broad cravat, and made

little milky rivers down his elegantly tailored black frock coat. His mocking expression changed in an instant to dismay, disgust, and then furious wrath. He controlled himself, however. He took up his table napkin and wiped himself off, head, face, inside of collar, shoulders of coat, and threw the sopping napkin on the floor. I took my own napkin from my place and went over to him to finish wiping off his coat, carefully rubbing the silk lapels. He allowed it.

"I'm really terribly sorry, Luke," I said in penitence. The quick action had given release to my anger for the moment. I was shocked at myself.

"Now you shall be punished," said Luke. "Wipe it off my back. I can feel some running down behind."

I did so, contritely.

Then he suddenly seized me in his arms and pulled me down onto his knee. He put his arms around mine so that I was held powerless.

"You are a nice soft armful," said he, "and I can hold you whenever I like, however I like. You are my toy, my possession. Did you ever think of that? It doesn't matter whether I like you or not. It's all the better fun, perhaps, if I don't. We shan't have any more of that daughterly stuff, maybe. I shall come up tonight after cards. It will be amusing!"

Between each sentence he kissed me fiercely, hard, painfully, until at last he broke down my control and my re-



sistance, and I began to sob. It was humiliating to lie in his arms sobbing violently, unable to cover my face or wipe away my tears. He regarded me with satisfaction.

"Ah, hysterics," he said. "I hope, I hope! Squall away! We shall break the fine lady in time. I had Lydia so that when I looked at her in a certain way she would burst into tears at once before anything had happened. She knew that plenty would! Yes, my dear, I am a past master in making women unhappy — when I choose! Did you never hear the old adage 'marry in haste and repent at leisure'?"

I set my teeth and bit back my sobs.

"What has made you repent?" I managed to say.

"Oh, *I* haven't repented, my dear. It's going to be a great entertainment seeing *you* repent at leisure! *I* have nothing to repent. I have a beautiful wife, young, sweet, fresh, to enjoy at my ease. Her Quaker dress and manners are just what I want to decorate and protect my house."

"But I don't please you," I sobbed.

"Ah, you must learn to please me. You will find out how. There will be times when you will succeed. You pleased me for a while when I married you. You were gentle, submissive. You were grateful for my attentions. You'd been beaten down by being a governess and losing vanity and pride; and you were very rich."

"But you asked me to marry you before you knew that I was rich," said I. My tears were stopped by astonishment and protest. "It was so wonderful to me that a great, dis-

tinguished man like you should fall in love with just a poverty-stricken young girl, living like a pauper in her brother's family."

Again he broke into that devil's laughter.

"Ha! Ha! So you believed, and so did everybody else, including your goof of a brother! Don't cherish that illusion, my child. I had just come in from a sea voyage, had I not? I had encountered the captain of your vessel far from shore. He was taking his time, enriching his cargo. I traveled on a faster ship. Chance took me to Philadelphia instead of London. I knew the *Saucy Nancy* was coming safely into port. I knew who was her heiress, too. I went up to Newport, to look the heiress over. At first I thought it was your brother's chit and gave her a rush. Faugh! Then I identified you. Venus in disguise. What a piece of gambler's luck. . . . I married you, my dear, for your money!"

He fell again to his rough, wild, punishing caressing.

The front door bell clanged. Shuddering, weeping, helpless, it was to me a signal of rescue. My husband pushed me off his knee and got up, still holding me by the elbows.

"You look a sight," said he, with malicious pleasure.

I must have. My hair was shaken loose from its pins and was half down and half up. He had pulled open the front of my dress and torn my fichu.

John was knocking on the dining-room door. Luke hustled me into the large china closet which was at the side

of the room, with shelves of precious seldom-used china all around inside it and a tiny window at the top. He closed the closet door, and walked away to meet the visitor who was being ushered in. I heard that it was Lady Diana.

"Why, Luke," she cried, "what has been going on here? Have you had the dogs loose on the table?"

"The cats more like!" said Luke. "Just a little domestic spat, my dear Diana."

"You've not been trying to bully her, Luke?" Her tone was one of anxious protest.

"I bully *her!* Why, my darling, you don't understand the lady's disposition! She's been trying to bully me. Do you see these creases and marks all over the top of my coat? Ah, there's a neglected trickle of milk running down my elbow! Yes, the ladylike, the dignified beauty recently presented to the Queen behaved like a little devil and threw a glass of milk at her lord and master!"

There was a peculiar silence. It was broken by Luke speaking again.

"Now, my pretty darling," said he, "come and give your old lover a kiss and comfort him for having married a ter-magant. . . . *Come here!*"

"Oh, Luke, please let me off! Please, please, don't tumble me here."

"Why, what's the matter with you? I've locked the door."

"No, Luke, please — please!"

Could that frightened, supplicating voice be that of my brave, reckless, self-confident Lady Diana?

"It's as you please," said Luke in a cold, piqued tone. "You know the consequences of refusal."

"Yes, Luke," she spoke almost in a whisper. She must be close outside the closet door.

"Well, then. Why play coy? Unless to make it more interesting for me, perhaps?"

"No, Luke, I'm long past being coy with you. But, I've grown to love your wife. I would like to respect her house."

"Her house do you call it?" said Luke.

"No, no, yours, of course, Luke, dear," said Lady Diana humbly and quickly, placating. "Well, do as you like, dear, do as you like."

"I mean to!" said he.

There was a short silence again.

"Have you seen your friend the gardener today?" said Luke then, lively and clearly.

"No," said Lady Diana so softly that again I could hardly hear it. I knew then that Luke was holding her close by the closet door in order that I should miss nothing.

"You'd better not neglect him," said Luke sarcastically. "You have a rival in his affections. My wife and he seem to have found a great deal in common."

"Oh, Luke, how can you?" moaned Lady Diana. "Must you soil everything you touch?"

"Be careful, my dear," said Luke. "I am touching you, you know. Do you feel soiled?"

"I'm already soiled past hope."

"By me, I presume?"

"No, no. By myself."

"Well, don't fluster. Don't fidget! I can't handle these hooks if you do. Stand still. You know I like a passive woman. . . . That's better. I wonder why women will mark a fine skin with tight lacing? . . . You're really wonderful, Diana. You rouse all my old ardor. The only way you show your age is that you're putting on flesh. But in the Orient that's considered an advantage. I've come rather to their way of thinking."

Diana was crying bitterly.

"Luke, I thought you weren't going to require this ever again. I thought we'd made a pact. You ruined me. Oh, it was my fault — except that you are a devil! But when I helped you get away to India —"

There was so sudden, so abrupt a silence that I knew her speech had in some way been cut off. I seemed to see his hand grip her throat. . . . A sense of horror, like a palpable fog, came through the door and choked me like a poisonous gas. I fainted.

I had been crouched on the floor, and when I became unconscious I fell over backward and hit my head against a corner of the bottom shelf. When I came to, my head ached so badly that I lay still, trying for a moment or two

to collect my wits and remember where I was. I heard Luke's voice, in the other room, mocking, saue, but good-humored.

"I really could get a job any time as a lady's maid. I've done a much better job at lacing you up than your own maid can do! You've a perfect hour-glass figure. But I'm not, alas, so good at hair dressing. All I seem to be able to manage is like this. Twist it up in a rope, twine it in a tight knot, and pin it firm. You can't lift your arms high enough in that tight dress to do your hair, can you? Funny what women will put up with. Well, it's not quite the Court style of coiffure, but the hat will hide it well enough. Here, don't forget your gloves. John will be in presently to tidy the room, and whatever he may suspect — the door has been locked quite some time — he must find no positive evidence."

Diana remained perfectly silent. I heard them leave the room together and the door clicked shut. But in a moment or two, as I sat there holding my throbbing head, wondering how soon I could try to get away without being seen, I heard the dining-room door open and close again. Someone was coming in. I feared it was John coming to clear the table. But no sound of heavy footsteps followed. A moment more and a little click at the door of the china closet told me that the key was being turned in that lock. I had not known till then that Luke had locked the door of the closet, but even as I knew it the door was opened by Ahmed.

He salaamed with his arms over his breast exactly as if it were the normal thing to find his mistress sitting, disheveled, in the china closet. Then he offered me both his hands. He looked too small to be of much use, but I needed some help to get to my feet. I took his hands. They were surprisingly strong. When I was erect he led me to a chair, and with hands as deft as a woman's arranged my crumpled dress, lifted my tangled curls back from my shoulders, and went to the table and poured a glass of wine and brought it to me. I drank it gratefully. The pain in my head was a little less and I felt more myself.

I made the gesture which Ahmed always used to indicate his master, and added a question.

Ahmed shook his head vigorously. He presented his shoulder to help me to the stairs, and slowly, with him on one side and the banister on the other, I reached my bedroom, by good luck meeting no one on the way.

I washed my face and hands, brushed my hair, and changed my dress completely. I wanted to get away from my husband's touch. I threw the other dress into the bottom of the closet. Had there been a fire in the grate I should have burned it, as Luke had burned the fancywork. My thoughts turned on that incident with fresh illumination. I could now well imagine him burning the fancywork of a live wife. But why had he bothered to burn that of a dead one? *That* could not vex or hurt Lydia. Was it a queer gesture of annoyance that she had gone beyond his reach?

Had she in some way defied him while she was alive, so that the sharp recollection of her brought by the sight of her needlework had roused him to a frenzy of futile and petty revenge? Ah, what must I now think of my husband, the man to whom I had committed my life? He had thrown away my loyalty willfully, torn it up, scorned it. Was it destroyed? Or must I mend it up again, as a beggar mends his rags, to keep my marriage vows? I had promised in the presence of God and my friends "to be, by divine assistance, a loving and faithful wife so long as we both shall live." It did not say "so long as he is worthy" or "so long as he keeps his equal vow." I could not think. I could not even pray. The mechanical actions of washing, and changing my dress, all the little attentions to my toilet, which I made meticulous and slow, helped me by distracting my thoughts, bringing them up to the calm familiar surface of life, as a man whose boat has overturned, tired with frantic struggling in the water, turns on his back to float for a restful moment on the surface of the deep lake, and seeing the sky above him, is filled with a curious peace. There was no sound in the house except the occasional domestic movement of a sweeping servant, with a broom and a pan, working down the stairs, or the clatter of a tray of crockery carried from the kitchen to dining room.

As soon as the activity of tidying my person was over, however, and I had to think of what I would do next, disgust, horror, and anger seized me. I must get out of this



polluted house. I must go to my cousin's. There I should find refuge and protection until I could think what it was right to do. But to get away, to get away, was all my inward cry. I chose a hat, the first that came, took my reticule and two or three clean handkerchiefs out of my drawer, nothing else. I looked into my purse and found only a few pounds in it. I remembered that I had been doing accounts the day before and had left the bulk of my money in the desk — its natural abiding place — in my boudoir. The money was in a locked leather purse, which I kept in a little side drawer, and it had never been tampered with. I believed I had about fifty pounds there. Yes, I needed money!

When I came out of the bedroom, Ahmed was waiting at the door. This not unusual lingering on the threshold made me wonder, in my new suspicious state, whether Ahmed was not only like a faithful dog but like a watchdog. Had he been set to guard me? After all, what reason had I for thinking that Ahmed was loyal to me, except my instincts? And how well had my instincts served me? Poorly indeed. They had thrown me into this morass. However, I took no notice, but turned along the passage toward my boudoir, and Ahmed fell in noiselessly behind me.

I opened the door onto the bright room, with a sense of entering my own sweet private domain, the one part of the house which I had truly made my own, and the only thing inside the house which I should be sorry to leave. But the

room was occupied. Someone was sitting there in a hat with dangling twinkles round the brim. . . . Impossible. But it was. It was Lady Diana, sitting with her back to the light, rising nervously to greet me. The pendants on her hat trembled and shook.

"You must forgive me, Rose, dear, for invading your privacy without your invitation. Your husband sent me here. . . ." My silence made her stammer and repeat herself. "I called on you earlier than usual and found you not available, so he sent me here to wait for you. . . . I hope you don't mind! . . . And I see you are all ready to go out."

I sat down because my legs would not support me. But I felt an immense pity for this woman. I knew she could not help herself. She was in bondage to Luke, and I felt I must know why. Yet no inkling of what I already knew must escape me.

Now her words gave me an idea.

"Yes, I was going out," I said. "Have you your carriage here? Can't we drive out together, and talk as we go?"

We had so often done this, it would be the most natural thing in the world. And transportation was one of my difficulties.

She sat there with all her splendid poise of a woman of the world, her dashing hat, her rather gay, but always elegant, style of dress. I could hardly believe at one and the same time both my senses and my memories. But she was

embarrassed to answer me, cover it though she might.

"I haven't got my carriage here, dearest Mrs. Ashton! I sent it away to fetch Countess Cassell, my aunt. Your husband, you know, whom I met just as he was going out to business, invited both of us to lunch with you today. He was uncertain whether he himself would be back in time or not. I hope it won't interfere with your other plans?"

I was struck, and sat still. I felt that Luke had barred that exit, just as if he had slammed the gate in my face. Then it *had* occurred to him that I should try to leave at once! I felt certain that he had guessed even my destination. Indeed what other plan could I have? All this was unspoken, below the words; Lady Diana possibly did not know it. What she did know — what was equally unspoken below the words — was her misery. I sprang to this.

"I'm always glad to have you," said I, sincerely.

"I hope you will always be so," said Lady Diana, timidly. "My times with you have been some of the happiest I've ever had. I like you so much."

"Then if you truly like me," said I on an impulse, "and if we are friends — will you answer me a question?"

"If I can."

"What is Luke's business?"

"What does he tell you?"

"He doesn't tell me anything. I believe he thinks me too young to talk to about such things."

"Is that what you quarreled about?"

"Did Luke say we had quarreled?"

"Yes," she hesitated, and added softly. "I know it was not your fault."

Sympathetic and charming as she was, I felt nonetheless that she was sidetracking me skillfully. She knew — I knew she knew — a good deal about our morning quarrel. Supposing, on all the evidence, that I had left the room in a passion of anger after breakfast, she thought that if she led me to talk about the quarrel, the scene at the breakfast table, my emotions would get the better of me; I should be off hue and cry after *that* fox, and the quarry that I had started would be lost sight of. Her premises were all mistaken. So her ruse was not successful — if it had been a ruse. I despised myself for my mistrust even while I felt it.

"Perhaps it *was* my fault," I said, thoughtfully and coldly, "but that was not the reason that he gave me."

She felt my coldness. She sent me an appealing glance from her melting dark eyes.

"I'm not a good one to ask!" she said.

Well, I had expected to be put off. I looked away from her and stared steadily up at the window, which was closed. Every now and then handfuls of rain were dashed against the glass by a capricious wind. The room was chilly, and I felt chillier still. I had thought the subject and our conversation were alike closed. I was surprised and looked down quickly at her face when she suddenly said in quite a different tone, an earnest tone, a secret tone:

"Why don't you ask one of the men?"

"What men?"

"One of your husband's friends."

"At dinner tonight, you mean?"

Again she paused for a perceptible instant, but she came across.

"Choose your time wisely, dear Mrs. Ashton. But I don't need to tell you that."

We exchanged a long glance. I felt she had let down her guard, she was no longer fending me off, she had decided to take a risk — for my sake. A warmth grew between us, a comradeship. She waited for more. So I said:

"Do you remember the first evening saying that you didn't want to go in to the cards because there was a man there that you were afraid of? Later on I decided that it was Lord Rivers. He was there the first night, and he was not there the next night when you did go into the game. But now I wonder. Is it Lord Rivers?"

"No!"

"Is it my husband?"

She sat silent. A deep, deep silence grew between us. Only the dashing sound of the rain against the glass broke it, and the ticking of the little French clock on the mantel. All of a sudden, without any warning, she put her hands to her face, and sitting upright and dignified, began to weep.

I could not touch her. I had nothing to say.

She controlled herself soon. She found her handkerchief

and blew her nose and wiped her eyes. But what she struggled to say then was no excuse, no appeal.

"Don't let him corrupt *you*. He has no hold on *you*."

"What hold has he on you?" I asked her then.

"I can't tell you. . . . Think of it as my own weak error. . . . It involves someone else."



Ahmed, with his acute sixth sense, became aware of someone coming before I was, and laid an urgent hand on my arm and pointed to the door in warning. So taking the hint I quickly led Diana to sit at my desk with her back to the room, where she could compose her features at leisure. She was no sooner in place, pretending to write a letter, than Matilda knocked and entered.

"If you please, madam, the Countess and two other ladies are below. I showed them into the drawing room."

"That's right, Matilda," said I casually.

"Why, madam, are you going out?" said Matilda.

I had forgotten to take off my hat.

"No, I've changed my mind," said I, "now Lady Diana and the Countess have come we'll stay at home and have an early lunch together."

"Then let me take your hat, madam," said Matilda obligingly.

Why not? I unpinned the hat, let her have it. But when, after the two extra callers had gone, I went to my room before lunch, and opened my closet, I found my cupboard almost stripped. Every hat had been taken away, and all my dresses, except the two or three Quaker gray or fawn-colored that I had brought with me from Philadelphia. Two or three of my caps, beautifully got up, were on the hatstands in the top shelf of the closet. Now what does that clean sweep mean? I can only be sure that it means nothing good, and that it is in itself an impertinence.

Lady Diana and her aunt had evidently been "invited" — if that's the word — to stay all day. Lady Cassell half apologized at lunch time, saying,

"I'm dressed up very grand for lunch, my dear, but I hoped the same dress would do for dinner as well! The weather's so horrid and rainy that when Luke suggested we should stay and keep you company and be here for dinner, without going back home, I thought it was a good idea — if you agree — if not troublesome to you, sweet Mrs. Ashton."

I said they were welcome. And it was the truth. I was glad to have their company. As long as I could not go out of the house, the more people that were in it the better for me. I needed a screen of people, it seemed to me, to put between myself and the new terror that was my husband.

I was wearing a blue flowered calico, very fashionable that season, which Lady Diana had helped me choose. It

had been made up by her own dressmaker. But if I was to change for dinner I had nothing to change into but a Quaker dress and cap, and if I had to be present at dinner anyway perhaps it was better to go on as usual as long as possible.

I have heard that when people suffer physical shock, after serious accident or narrow escape, they grow deadly cold. Their pulse becomes slow, their heart almost ceases to beat. So it is with me in my soul. I feel as cold as death. If Tabitha had been a real witch, and been able to exercise bad magic and wave a black wand, and turn me into a bird, for instance, and Luke into a snake, I could hardly have been more conscious of complete transformation in us both. Neither of us was the same person whom I had known the day before. Still less the same persons who had stood up before a wedding company in Philadelphia, or had been involved in a courtship which had seemed generous and romantic on the shores of the moonlit sea at Newport.

Now I unpacked some sewing from my trunk, and set to work on some petit point. I felt for the first time the refuge a woman can take in needlework, which keeps the hands occupied, the attention partly engaged, the eyes fixed on something impersonal. I needed something to give me an outward appearance of quiet while I took stock of my inward ruin.

I was sewing at my needlepoint when Luke came in early with a carriage load of company, and the drawing room



filled up with the usual party. There were several strangers tonight, rakish-looking men I did not like the look of. My husband had a new formula in presenting them to me.

“And this demure little person sitting here in the corner,” said he, “sewing her sampler like a medieval saint, is my Quaker bride. She knows none of the fashionable arts of our wicked city, gentlemen. To her, every card in the pack bears the portrait of the archfiend himself. So if we play cards after dinner — and I admit that is our usual habit — we shall not be able to have the privilege of Mrs. Ashton’s company. She will remain here in the drawing room, to entertain such of you as would rather sit around and watch her sew than observe the tricky fall of the cards.”

I barely acknowledged these pleasantries with a brief and silent bow. I did not look at my husband at all. I kept my eyes averted, on my fancywork, not only because I could not bear the sight of him, but because I dreaded lest he should perceive the contempt and loathing with which my heart was filled.

Lord Rivers and young Byron were a little late. Lord Rivers, barely nodding to my husband, made his way through the crowd to my side, and sat down beside me. He fixed his monocle more firmly in his eye and looked quizzically at my work.

“This is something new,” said he.

"Nerves!" said I, my face bent over my needle.

I was taking a risk, but Lord Rivers had always made me a favorite. I did not misjudge him. He picked up a corner of the canvas as if to examine the pattern more closely and so leaning toward me said softly:

"And what causes the nerves?"

"I've been wondering too much!" said I.

"Wondering what?"

"Wondering, for one thing, about my husband's business."

"Hmmm?"

"I don't know what it is, you know. And I wonder why I don't!"

He dropped my work, and fixed his monocle on me again.

"Upon my word, *you're* a wonder!" he said. "I don't believe there's another like you."

My husband had come within earshot, in time, I was sure, to hear the last word, but young Byron unconsciously helped us by taking it up on my other side, in his rather naïve way.

"Yes she is, isn't she?" he said easily. "She's a wonder! I'd like to have her for a shister. Yes, I would. She'd see to it that I didn't go astray. Never have had a mother or a shister or anybody that cared tuppence what became of me."

"We are, as usual, praising your wife," said Lord Rivers

to Luke. "It's not good manners to keep on talking about a lady to her face. But it's great fun to do it, to one like your rare discovery here. Or does she seem so rare to us because she's an American? Are there lots like her, really, on the other side of the Atlantic? Our English fields are covered thick with daisies. But imagine what a daisy would look like to a fellow that had never seen anything but poppies!"

"The Duke of Cambridge has sent word that he is coming to dinner tonight," said my husband including me in his glance. "The message also denotes that he is doing so in your honor, Mrs. Ashton. So you see how useful as well as decorative my wife is to me," he added to Lord Rivers.

No one, not Rivers himself, could turn a sentence more neatly.

But when Luke had gone away again, with a slight air of bustle, to make some arrangements in the dining room relative to the Duke's coming, Lord Rivers spoke directly to my inner thought. To which I had given him a slight key.

"Don't let nerves get the better of you," said he. "You'll find out all you want to soon enough — too soon, I dare say."

My husband, as if by an afterthought, came back to ask Lord Rivers to go with him and give his advice on the seating of the table. Some protocol to be observed, since a royal duke was to be present, so my husband thought. Or

was it merely that his alert perception had seen something suspicious in Lord River's attention to me this evening? Something a little more earnest than usual, a little more paternal? At any rate, he broke it up. Lady Diana and Countess Cassell were told off somehow, subtly, to come and take charge of me; they moved into place on either side of me, like a naval maneuver. I drew my stitches in and out, in and out, matched my colors thoughtfully across my work, threaded a fresh needle; said little and looked less. But all the time there was hammering in my mind my husband's words, "*I married you for your money.*" It was those words which had made it urgent for me to discover what my husband's business was. I had supposed him to be a rich man, with a large fortune acquired in the Indies. If that were so, why was my fortune important to him? If that were not so, what was he occupying himself with, and making money with now? Was it all done with my own wealth? I believed not, because in my business experience in Philadelphia, I had been aware that it would be some time before all of my assets would be in realizable form. They would come eventually into the ownership of my husband, but they represented investments here and there over the United States, and in the refitting and loading of the *Saucy Nancy*, and were not easily turned into liquid assets. I began to feel that I could not make up my mind as to my course of action until I was clear as to my husband's profession. The one would shed light on the other.

It was certainly a profession or occupation which left a large margin for pleasure. Office hours were incompatible with the kind of late nights my husband was accustomed to.

The Duke arrived. I laid aside my work, arose, curtsied in response to his low bow and jocular yet respectful greeting, and taking his arm, led the way into the dining room.

Tonight the dinner was more stately, in the Duke's honor. My husband and I were placed at the head and the foot of the long table, with the Duke at my right hand and Lady Diana next on his other side, while Byron as usual sat at my left. This arrangement suited me very well. The farther away I was from my husband the better. The Duke talked to me very pleasantly about the city of Philadelphia, asking questions which it was a pleasure to me to answer, and expressing astonishment at my descriptions of the comparative size of the Delaware and the Thames.

"But nothing can be lovelier than the Thames!" he said, unjealously though loyally. "Have you grown yet to know and love our river? Have you been, for instance, the boat trip up to Hampton Court Palace?"

I said I had not, and should like to, and one of those silences then falling on the table, which often fell on that rather ill-mixed company, the Duke took the occasion to call down the table to his host.

"Here, Ashton, you're not doing your duty by your American bride! She tells me that you've not yet shown her the river!"

The effect was extraordinary. My husband's face went, for a second, livid. Then he had himself in hand, with his suave double-edged tongue.

"There are many things I have not yet had the opportunity to show my American wife, sir. I am making up for lost time as fast as I can."

A moment after, my husband's peremptory nod signaled me to rise from the table and collect the ladies in the drawing room. Besides the Countess Cassell and Lady Diana, there were three strange ladies this evening, all hard-bitten women of high rank, loaded with jewels, which, like the Countess Cassell's, looked false, because they were so flamboyant. However, I was prepared to believe that they were real, as in fact they were. We had little conversation. The three newcomers chattered among themselves, current court gossip, and presently roped in Lady Diana and Countess Cassell. I devoted myself to my needlepoint. Matilda for once came promptly in with coffee, the serving and taking of which occupied our time in a surface sociability. Then Luke came in to pick out those who were to go play cards and arrange who should stay (as I now said to myself) to keep guard on me! I was pleased that the three strangers and Diana were taken away, and the Countess Cassell was left as my companion, with the ever-watchful Ahmed. Seeing my husband do his deaf and dumb talk in Hindustani to Ahmed at the doorway, with nods and gestures in my direction, I felt sure that Ahmed was

being commanded to see to it that I was up to no monkey business, or his head would practically be the forfeit!

The Countess Cassell, as usual, soon fell asleep over her Patience, and I soon gave up the pretense of my needle-point, and sat with idle hands staring at the bleakness of my thoughts. How wrapped up one gets in one's own miseries, and forgets the crises that others may be going through right at one's elbow. The evening was wearing late when a hasty shuffling footstep at the doorway heralded young Byron. He looked even more disheveled than usual, more like the wild poet, or the distraught boy who had not fully grown up. His eyes were terribly bright. His cheeks had a bright red spot on each one as if he had rouged himself carelessly. Was he simply drunker than usual? No, even as I thought that, I corrected myself, because he walked uncommonly steadily. He came up to my chair, tiptoeing on the rugs not to waken the Countess. He bent down at my side and lifting up his coat showed me a pistol at his belt.

"I just came to shay good-by to you, Mrsh. Ashton. I've always felt you were my true friend. I'm shorry to be going to blow my brains out in your garden, but don't let it alarm you. When you hear the report don't come out. Send a shervant. Send your John. He's a steady fellow."

I laid my hand urgently on his thin bony wrist.

"What can you be meaning, Sam? . . . Come, Sam, don't be foolish! I should break my heart if you went and blew

your brains out in my garden! You can't do it, Sam. Why are you talking this wild way?"

"I'm ruined, that'sh why. I've borrowed and borrowed again, and losht and losht again. The luck's hardly ever with me. Never with me for long enough. It's gone on too long. I can't bear it any longer. I've losht my house. I've losht my land. I've losht my money. I've losht my future. I've nothing. Debtor's prison tomorrow. That's all there is for me. Once I get in there I'll never get out again. Who's going to buy me out? And if they do, what am I going to *do*? I don't know any way of earning my living. I can't get my money back. I shall have to beg. I sheen men, men of good family, begging down there on Westminshter Bridge — Blackfriars — places! No, no, death's better. I'm goin' to blow my brainsh out."

"You mean you've been gambling?" I said. "You've gambled away all you have?"

"Thatsh it, thatsh it," he said. "Good-by, Mrs. Ashton. I couldn't help it. Your husband lent me money time and time again, but he couldn't help winning from me. He couldn't *help* winning from me. He'sh too clever. Oh, he'sh too clever, damn him to hell! He's ash clever as the devil!"

"I know that," said I. "Come, Sam, give me your arm. We're going in there to ask my husband about this. If he's got something of yours that you ought to have, come, let's try and get it back. Now, Sam, be a man."

"It's worth a try," said Sam, startled, half sobered. He



gave me his arm with a gallant and proud gesture. He liked to have me there. We went out of the room together. Lady Cassell never waked. Ahmed fell in behind us, though I didn't notice him at the time. We crossed the wide hall, turned around the staircase, in at the dining-room door and through the dining room to the closed and curtained door of the library. The library had three doors. One that opened into the dining room, one that opened into the passage, and the window door that opened into the garden.

Sam knocked in a peculiar way. A servant stationed for the purpose opened the door at once. And we went in.



The games were over and people were preparing to depart. Some had already left. Four tables were being dismantled and folded up, packs of cards collected from them, shuffled quickly together by my husband himself. Oh, they had not been playing for fun. One man was pocketing gold and bank notes almost more than he could hold, his winnings for the evening. And the card tables for *écarté* were not the most conspicuous object in the room. That was a table marked in red and black with a spinning disc sunk in the middle. Lady Diana, with glazed bright eyes and scarlet cheeks of excitement, was pushing this object up

to fill the hollow place in the bookcase from which it had come. It worked on a hinge and pulley. The balance of weights was so well adjusted that obviously a very small effort on her part was all that was needed. The table, with its wheel imbedded in it, rolled easily up, fitted smoothly in, and there on the back of it were rows and rows of books, real books but firmly fastened into place. Many times I had seen that bookcase and yet I had never suspected the existence of the dummy part of the shelf. The volumes were ones that had not attracted me. Gilt and calf-bound encyclopedias and sets of travels and voyages, old-fashioned and dull in their titles but sufficiently imposing in appearance. The kind of books with which a person not very fond of books fills up his library in order to make an impression on the casual visitor.

Lord Rivers was fastening some bank notes into his pocketbook with a broad India-rubber band.

He was the first to see me.

"Ah," he said, looking up at me, "an angel come to judgment! Mrs. Ashton, I see you have come to answer your question for yourself."

It took me a moment to take in what he had said. A fat gentleman in front of me was crawling around on the floor after some spilt gold coins.

"What a lot of money!" I said involuntarily and stupidly.

"Yes," said Lord Rivers, "we do things here on quite a scale. Fortunes can be won and lost in a single night. No

poor man can afford to come here, however blue his blood. That's what makes it exciting. Our starting point here is about the finishing point at many of the well-known clubs."

"Then this is what is nicknamed a gambling hell," said I, looking round.

The fat man on the floor, picking up his gold around my feet, guffawed.

"Could be called a gambling *heaven* if you win!" he said, as he got hold of a chair and scrambled awkwardly to his feet.

"But it's against the law," said I. "You could all go to prison!"

I was still thinking aloud, perhaps naïvely uttering the impressions that came into my mind.

"You, my dear," said my husband, "are our guardian spirit! You give an air of such impeccable respectability, of such high-class sanctity, really, to the house, that it would be a bold police officer indeed who would come past your guard. You're the angel, my dear, with the flaming sword. We keep you planted in the drawing room to look decoratively Quaker and receive the police."

Light broke.

"That's why you have insisted on my Quaker cap!" said I.

"You think quickly, my dear wife, and quite as justly. That's why!"

I was untying my cap as he spoke, and pulled it off.

"I will not play-act for you any longer," said I.

"I think you will reconsider that," said my husband without raising his voice in the slightest.

"Why?" said I.

"Well, I appeal first to your reason. It's only sport. People come here who can well afford to play. I don't take any others. They come because they enjoy it. They play for fun. The thrill it gives them makes them have a zest for life which they had lost. *You* may find a zest in life, with your fresh palate, in the smell of flowers, for instance, and — shall I say — the subtle pleasures of walking and talking in your garden? But some of these gentlemen and ladies have run through the gamut of that kind of emotion. They need something with more pepper and spice. They cannot take a trip to India and dip into oriental luxury and excitement. This modest room here, and these harmless games, give them an alternative. The law may be reasonable in its endeavor to protect the poorer man from dangerous risk. It is not really meant to apply to the top of society. Our gracious Queen may have somewhat prim and narrow views about gaming, but she has never experienced, not needed to experience, that kind of excitement. Her cousin, the Duke of Cambridge, thinks differently. And why should his younger female cousin prevent him from satisfying his pleasure on this side of the Channel, when he could just as well get his fun by going to Paris or Monte Carlo? The Queen likes his debonair presence at Court. I am doing the Queen herself a

service in providing this outlet close at home for some of the more dashing members of her nobility."

"Here is a man whom you have ruined and brought to the very point of death in his despair," I said.

"Oh, Sammy!" said my husband casually. "Is Sammy threatening suicide again? Come, come, Sam, I thought we got rid of that idea. Why, have you actually got a pistol there?"

He came over and opened Sir Samuel's coat unceremoniously. He pulled the pistol out of his belt.

"Now, Sam, don't go carrying around loaded weapons like that. You might hurt somebody. You'd have been just as likely to shoot my wife as yourself! Besides, ladies hate the sight of blood. What were you thinking of, showing my poor wife that weapon? She won't be able to sleep a wink all night. Now, now, Sammy, if you've lost too heavily tonight and are feeling down and out, I'll give you a temporary loan again to set you on your feet, and you'll possibly win everything back tomorrow!"

"Ah, will you so?" said my young Byron looking sheepish and hopeful and excited all at once. "Will you really? Well, well, you are a good sort, Ashton, there's no denying it. And your winess are of the besht. Your winess are of the very, very besht."

"My whiskey, too," said Luke. He signaled John. In a moment a tray of drinks which had been prepared in the pantry was brought in and circulated.

My husband placed one in young Byron's shaking hand. He drank it at one gulp and held out the glass for more. I stepped back through the curtains and closed the door.

Among the avalanche of humiliations which had accumulated on my head, the phrase, "I married you for your money" seemed the very key of the downfall.

Then what about the great Indian fortune that had dazzled Newport? The priceless jewels smuggled aboard ship in Ahmed's stomach? If I could only question that inscrutable little servant. But I could perhaps use him. I went to my boudoir, my refuge, sat down at my writing desk, and wrote a letter to my cousin. It was very short.

"Dear Cousin — since you are so kind as to invite me to call you so — may I be bold enough to ask if I may come to you for a visit? Would you be kind enough to call for me as soon as possible? I mean today. Your affectionate cousin, Rose Ashton."

I directed it to Joshua Bates, Esq. at Baring's Bank, so that it might look as if I were writing on some financial matter, perhaps making a deposit or a withdrawal, and therefore even Ahmed would not realize that it was an urgent personal message. I stamped it and gave it into Ahmed's hands with gestures which I hoped would easily convey the idea that I wanted him to put it in the post. But Ahmed refused. He took the sealed letter from my hand, turned it over and over, looked at it back and front, then handed it back to me with a low bow, crossed his arms over his breast.

With downcast eyes, immobile figure and face, it was impossible to tell what he was expressing. Was he saying he didn't know where the post was? Was he saying that a letter of that size and kind was too big for his conveyance, and that he was only accustomed to the tiny kind he could conceal? In any case he put me at a stand. I wondered who else could be trusted to perform that errand for me. Perhaps this is the crucial test as to whether Ahmed is really at my service; *for me*. It may not be so simple, however. He may be for me and yet be afraid to do anything to show that he is! He knows better than I do what it is possible for him to accomplish.

There was a soft knock on my door and Lady Diana came in. She stood with her hand on a chairback, looking at me.

"Now you know!" she said. "It couldn't be long before you knew!"

"Yes."

"I'm a gambler, too, you see — like my father before me. It's in my blood! I can't stop. . . . It amused my father to give me dice to play with instead of a rattle. . . . When Luke came back from abroad and asked me to be his partner in this newest, most exciting, most select of the secret clubs, I couldn't refuse."

"His partner, you said?"

"Dear Mrs. Ashton, I want to be honest with you."

"Is this the hold my husband has on you?"

“Yes.”

The answer came deliberately and firmly. Yet there had been the least hesitation. Some undercurrent gave me the idea that Lady Diana was not speaking the whole truth. So I looked at her with surprise, thinking to myself, what else could it be? She met me with a veiled look, and then turned restlessly away and sat down with her head leaned wearily on her hand.

“How long was my husband in India?” I went on, trying to piece things together. She answered that quickly and simply.

“Five years.”

He had told me fifteen. But I did not say so now.

“What made him go to India?”

“I never knew quite exactly — but I think the law was on his trail for illegal gambling. Luke had owned a lot of gaming houses in London before the law was passed — some quite low ones, run for him by toughs. He uses a few of those toughs to guard this place at night. After 1845 every gaming house in London, good or bad, high or low, was closed. And gambling was made illegal in the smart clubs. Luke was hard hit. He had won some solid property, such as this house, and he lived quietly here with his first wife. No gambling was done here then. It was all away, in other places. But he couldn't give it up. He had a tavern-keeper who acted as his front, and no one knew Luke Ashton was the secret head of a gambling syndicate. Anyway, I sup-



pose in the end they got hot on his trail, and he left with his wife in a hurry, one night . . . seven years ago."

"Did you help him?"

"Not that night. I didn't know. . . . Then he wrote from Gibraltar, telling me his wife had died of fever there, and asking me for letters to friends and relatives of mine in the East India Company at Calcutta, and in the Indian Army. And I sent him the letters. They were invaluable to him. . . . They got him into the good clubs. I gambled again, you see! I gambled that he would make his fortune in India and pay me for it by cancelling my old debts to him."

"But didn't the law protect you anyway from having to pay gambling debts?"

"It was impossible to get a test case. Our circles considered it bad form to bet and gamble in good faith and then welch on your losses by appealing to the law. Indeed, *I* would consider it so!" said Lady Diana, flaming up.

"Of course! I can see that!" said I. Nothing could break that odd sympathy between us. We warmed to each other now, as if we were fellow gamblers, honoring our dishonorable debts of honor. But I got back to my questions.

"Explain about me! Why does my husband behave like a man of fashion? Why did he have me presented at Court?"

"Because he is flying high. He has done with the low-class and with the second-rate, and even with the good

class moderately rich. He is aiming at the top. The richest cream. It pays! He and I — we are partners, you remember — make as much here in a single night as we made in six months in the old days.”

“Then you were partners before?”

How she blushed.

“Yes, Mrs. Ashton. For a short time before he went.”

“But how does it pay?” I was puzzled. “Isn’t it pure chance? If there is skill in the cards, there’s surely none in dice — or roulette? . . . *Does my husband cheat?*”

She went deadly pale, and wrung her long fingers together.

“I wish I knew. . . . The packs of cards are fresh every night — sealed. The old ones are burned. . . . Dice, I don’t know — I daren’t — ”

It was at that moment that Luke came in. I spoke before he could.

“Then that’s what you are, Luke,” said I, “a professional gambler!”

“My dear Diana,” he said, turning his back on me, “I thought that you had been dotting the i’s and crossing the t’s for this young lady.” He turned to me then with his most supercilious look. “Your description of my occupation sounds a little crude,” he said. “Suppose you call me a gentleman of fortune? That is how you first knew me, you know! It has a double meaning.”

“Could all gamblers be described as gentlemen of for-

tune? Is Sir Samuel Coburn, for instance, a gentleman of fortune?"

"I should rather call him a gentleman of *misfortune*," said my husband.

In my excited state I laughed, and my husband was perversely vexed that his witticism had amused me.

"You find it all very funny!" said he. "You are learning life so fast it goes to your head. The champagne would have been safer, my dear."

"Learning life!" said I, stopping laughter with anger. "Is that what you call it? *I* think it's learning death."

His face grew singularly dark and he looked at me hard.

"And what might you mean by that?"

"Sir Samuel Coburn has shown me the heart of a loser," said I. "Full of fear and anxiety and despair. He may not kill himself tonight, but I feel he will kill himself some night. You take away his hope. If you load your dice with despair you play with men's lives. And what's that but to play with death?"

"A sentence worthy of Shakespeare himself," said my husband. "Did you make it up or did you read it somewhere?"

"Even the winners," I went on, "are going backward — away from manhood. Oh, I shall never forget what that room looked like! The fat nobleman crawling about on the floor like a baby who had lost his toys. Lord Rivers, with a greedy look, packing his bank notes into his India-rubber

band like a schoolboy caught in a robbery. You, whom I thought so stately a short while ago, going around like a careful housemaid collecting the cards and packing them neatly into shape, putting away *your* toys like a tidy boy —”

He glared. But the contrast of his angry look and the half-ludicrous, hellish tragedy of the gaming room as I had seen it flashed over me in incongruity, and again my excitement turned into laughter. I laughed and laughed.

“Hysterics again,” said my husband. “I will send Matilda in to you. She will know how to treat it. She’s quite an old hand. I need you downstairs, Diana, with the accounts. I must go home with young Coburn. We can’t have him going off the handle.” He turned to me, “You will see me at breakfast,” he said, “and I shall have something more to say!”

“You may see me at breakfast, Luke, but not at dinner! I’ve helped you in your trade for the last time.”

“You think so?” said Luke, with ominous quiet.

“I am certain. As sure as I stand here — as sure that I married you with love and devotion — I will never again sit in your drawing room in my Quaker cap to deceive the police. Nor ever preside at your club dinners to give you credit in the eyes of those whom you are going to fleece.”

“Then what will you do?” said Luke, in a tone of polite enquiry.

I was silent, thrown off balance by the question.

“I am interested to know,” he prompted.

His suave manner was back in full possession. It gave him an advantage over me, emotional, warm, worked up to some kind of complete showdown, out of which I — foolishly, in the bottom of my heart — longed for some kind of reconciliation. But I tried to answer him, as he waited there with icy politeness.

“I don’t know yet,” I stammered lamely.

“Let me know when you have made up your mind. I shall be deeply interested. I might even have advice to offer! It would be a pity to set your heart on doing something impossible. The law, you know, requires your residence in this house or any other your husband may choose! *And* the performance of all your wifely duties.”

“Is helping you to break the law one of my wifely duties?” I asked. And again my complex of feeling broke its tension in laughter.

He laughed too, with a snarl.

With this threat — for threat it definitely was — he left the room.

“You should not provoke him!” said Lady Diana, nervously.

“I didn’t mean to,” said I, choking my laughter into my handkerchief. “Perhaps he is right — perhaps this is hysterics.” I stopped laughing. “I feel dizzy,” I said.

“Let me help you!” said Diana. “Let me put you to bed! Shall I stay? I would like to stay all night. I feel as if you need me. It would really comfort me if you did.”

"I do need you," I said. Who else was there? I had nobody. "Please stay!"



By the time Lady Diana got me to bed I was shivering violently and could not control the chattering of my teeth. As soon as she had me tucked up she said:

"I'll get you some mulled wine!"

"Yes, d-d-do," I said, "and h-have some yourself, t-too!"

She left me a few moments with Ahmed on watch, and went down to the kitchen herself, or perhaps to the butler's pantry, to get the wine and warm it. She came back with two glasses full. I was snuggled down in the bed shivering. She put the wine on the bedside table and said:

"Here, dear! Drink this!"

I said, "Oh, t-thank you, I w-will. P-please w-will you light the f-fire?"

The fire in the fireplace was always left laid. Rainy weather in midsummer in England is very chilly, and many of my friends had lighted their fires during the rainy days. Now the fire was ready for a match, and Lady Diana bent over it. Ahmed, at the bedside, gently turned the small, round, copper tray around on the bedside table so that the glass that had been farthest from me was now nearest to me. He pointed at it urgently. I leaned up on my elbow at once and began to drink. The warm liquid was grateful to my

stomach. My teeth chattered a little against the glass and Lady Diana turned from the crackling fire and saw me beginning to drink.

"That's right," she said. "That will make you feel better. I hope it will give you a good long sleep."

She came up to the bedside and took the other glass. She lifted her glass to me.

"A good night, and good fortune in following days," she said.

"I need comfort more than fortune," said I. "I will wish you good comfort, which is what I want for myself."

We looked at each other over the tops of our glasses and our look was friendly. We did not talk any more. When the glasses were empty, Lady Diana handed the tray to Ahmed to carry away, patted and smoothed the bed, saw that the candle and matches were within my reach, and put out the lamp.

"Good night, dearest Rose," she said. "If you need anything, call. I shall hear you!"

"Thank you, I will," said I.

Indeed she had arranged to be within earshot. Instead of using one of the guest rooms, she put herself to bed in the little dressing room which opened off the bedroom. The bed there was both handsome and comfortable, the one often used by Luke. As the mulled wine did its work and I fell asleep, exhausted, it seemed comfortable to have her there.

I was awakened by the first bird. The dawn was hardly

gray in the window. The garden was asleep and the whole house was still. But something urgent knocked in my heart. The resolution which I had half formed the night before but had been too tired to nurse, rose up to its full height and its full strength. I got quickly and softly out of bed and dressed, wondering what I would do if Diana came in from the dressing room and protested. Would she help or would she hinder? I could not tell. But I was afraid Luke's power over her was too great for her to be able to help me. The door into the dressing room was wide open. I crept about like a mouse, and strangely enough she was snoring heavily, louder and more raucous than even her aunt. Lady Diana was not sleeping like a lady. The deeper her sleep, however, the better for me! I was soon ready. I had no cloak, no hat, no gloves, no outdoor shoes. I shivered in my light clothing: Quaker dress, fichu and cap. But that was all that had been left me. My reticule, too, had been taken away. I had no money. I even had no plan, or only the most indefinite one. But one step at a time. That was how a baby learned to walk, and that was how the wisest traveler had to proceed. The one step before me was to get dressed, the next was to open the bedroom door. And there was Ahmed stretched across the threshold.

He woke at once, rose as silently as always, stood upright before me, crossed his arms and salaamed. Now was the test. I put my hand on his shoulder, which made him lift his eyes to my face. It struck me again how old his eyes were. I had



never thought about Ahmed's age. We exchanged an earnest glance. Then I stepped past him, and Ahmed softly closed the bedroom door behind me. That gesture was my answer. Ahmed was with me.

He had been left on my threshold as a watchdog to guard me, keep me safe, keep me in. But instead he was acting as my guardian, along the way of my own will! I could have felt sorry for my husband.

I crept softly down the front stairs. How thankful I was for the deep, thick rugs. Then I paused before the front door. Sometimes the boldest way was the best way. But Ahmed quickly came round from behind me and spread his arms out to prevent my going that way.

"Not?" I raised my eyebrows at him.

He saw I trusted him and a flicker of a smile came across his inexpressive face. He held up a beckoning finger. I nodded. He led the way down the side passage, through the dining room and through the library. Of course! I might have thought of that myself. The best way out was by the French windows.

It was a tribute to the upset which my appearance last night had caused that the French windows were not fastened. The bolts top and bottom had not been shot, the key had not been turned or taken out. Our going out was so easy that it would almost seem prearranged. Indeed I did for one half-moment say to myself, am I walking into a trap? But I went on.

Now I was in the garden in the twilight of the dawn. Even Ahmed did not seem to know what to do next. He hesitated nervously behind the big clipped boxbush which stood on the right side of the library door. (A twin to it stood on the left.) I gathered that he was exceedingly afraid. I remembered what Sam Coburn had said about the gates being guarded. Whether that was only for nighttime or whether it went on all day I could not risk finding out. Most likely it was only for the meeting of the club; but after last night the guard might have been extended. I knew by experience that it was no use going to the stable yard, especially at that hour, and trying to get myself a carriage. I might as well run through the whole house screaming and wake them all up at once! But I knew what to do. Stepping slowly and cautiously over the gravel so that not a pebble should roll beneath my slipper, I entered the dark shade of the pleached alley. From there I looked back. Ahmed, seeing me confidently on my way, stole back into the house, and I saw the glass doors close.

Then I went forward without haste, with a lovely feeling of security in that sheltered place. Old monks, pacing there before me in generations gone, had left behind an atmosphere of peaceful meditation, of prayer and faith. The leaves above me, the interlaced branches, were at their thickest. Even in sunshine hardly a ray got between them. At this hour, to go up that alley was to re-enter the night. It might have been made for one like me, escaping, to whom

it was important that no one glancing from the windows of the house should see my white cap moving. It was not long before I was in the heart of the garden, at the sundial lawn. Here there was faint daylight. The close-mown grass was soaking with the dew. It was chilly to my feet, but refreshing too. I at one and the same time shivered with the chill of the morning, and burned with a fever of excitement. I reached the sundial and stood leaning on it. And standing there in the quiet, my heart ceased to beat so fast. The early birds were all about me, some flying down to peck their worms, others making their morning songs in the dim trees. I did not know what time the gardeners came to work, nor whether this would be a likely spot for any of them to visit. I could hardly hope that Red Cain would be the first to come. The old head gardener might wander by, or more likely still the little garden boy, coming for the first and earliest chores, perhaps putting tools out for the others. But if either of those two did come, said my heart, why worry? Why should not the mistress, if she wanted to, come out for early prayers by the sundial? They knew nothing of what went on in the house. Not until the hue and cry after me was raised would they be anxious to tell of my whereabouts, if they knew it. So I leaned there for a while and tried to escape from my human trouble, feeling like a part of nature myself, like a plant or a bird. Waiting for a signal of action. I felt certain that, just as the swallow gets the signal for flight across the sea, so I would get the signal

at the right moment for my flight. I remembered what it said about the sparrow!

The light around me grew intenser. The sky was shot with colors like a sunset above my head. The horizon was hidden from me, of course, by hedges and trees but there was an opening through, and of a sudden the gold finger of the rising sun stabbed across the garden, and the sundial registered the hour. It was five o'clock. The appearance of that shadow was like a signal. I heard in the paths coming from the kitchen garden the clanking of a wheelbarrow, and presently over the hedges I heard someone whistling that familiar tune, "Flow gently, sweet Afton, among thy green braes, flow gently. . . ." I knew that tune now. My uneducated ear had picked it up. My heart had held it. For the first time I really lifted up my voice and sang; only a few words. The barrow stopped. I heard no approaching footsteps on that soft thick turf, but in a moment Red Cain was beside me.

He was not only beside me, but he knew. "I was watching for you," he said.

"I must go!" said I to his look. "I know everything. I must leave this house."

"Come then," he said, "we won't talk here. Follow me closely."

We left the lawn for the yew-hedged path whose top was open to the sky, whose turf was silent under our feet. So we moved by one turfy path to another, silently as

shadows in the early morning, to the opposite pleached alley which led to the kitchen garden. There under the shelter of the leaves Red Cain stepped back beside me, took my hand, and held it under his arm. But he still said not a word, he only supported me in case I should feel weak. Was that it? — for I did not feel weak. At the end of the pleached alley he went forward again into the open paths of the kitchen garden. This I knew was the riskiest part of our walk. The old gardener or the garden boy might come out at any moment. Although I could pretend, no doubt, that I was picking some of the flowers from the cutting beds near the strawberry patch, or was taking an unusual interest in what vegetables might be gathered for the luncheon table, still my appearance in that garden simultaneously with that of Red Cain would certainly give rise to talk. I could imagine the old gardener looking suspicious and sending the boy racing back to the house to Matilda, and Mistress Tabitha, with news, with questions. But I need not have worried. They did not come on duty before six. Red Cain was there so early for his own special reasons. Still, the guards might not have gone off duty and Red took me to the potting shed and hid me there while he went on to make sure. Sitting on an overturned basket in that earthy-smelling place, among the tools and the dead and replanted plants and seedlings, I felt an unreasonable happiness. Absurd, because I was caught on every hand. There was no real way of escape. I could go away

to possess my soul, to make terms for return. But return I must. I was like a bird, a wild bird caught, taking a flight on a long string, but fastened nonetheless to its cage.

Red Cain returned and smiled, and joy bubbled up in me. I smiled back. We did not say a word. He went ahead and I followed, past the sun-drenched raspberry canes, the wall fruit so neatly spread, to that doorway in the wall which I had never seen open. Red Cain had somehow found the key. A large and clumsy key. He fitted it in the lock, undid the door, which swung back on oiled hinges, and beyond it was the cheerful traffic of the river. I saw the boats and barges before I saw anything else as I stepped out. The street between was all but empty. A lame, stray dog. A distant sweep, with his brushes sticking up and his gnomelike boy . . . Red Cain locked the door behind us, put the key in his pocket, and guided me along to the left. We walked freely under the shadow of the wall. I had been afraid that my dress would attract attention on the street, but Red Cain reassured me of that right away.

“You look like a housemaid in her cap and workdress!” said he. “We’d be taken for a gardener or manservant walking along with his sweetheart, a pretty housemaid, on their way, no doubt, to perform some errand for master and mistress so early in the morning! That occasions no remark. Now if you were dressed up like Lady Diana I should have some trouble! Imagine that fancy hat with the dingley-

danglums! You'd have little boys running after us and cat-calling!"

"I must have a shallow character to be enjoying a walk at such a moment," said I. "But I've got such a feeling of freedom. It's so lovely to walk. And it's so beautiful here!"

This was the river and the scene that Wordsworth wrote a poem about. No wonder it sank into me and refreshed and rejoiced me, who saw it for the first time. "The city now doth like a garment wear, The beauty of the morning."

We turned from the glory of the misty river up a side street. Little houses all alike stood in a double row, not yet having opened their shutters to the day. A few servants, however, were out in front, whitening the doorsteps with their bricks of white, kneeling on folded-up squares of sacking to do it. A messy, chilly job; but what beautiful results. The steps looked like snow; only to be soiled by the first footstep.

"It's not so picturesque here, but it's safer," said Red Cain. And in a moment we took another turning, always moving toward the city, but doubling on our tracks to leave no clear trail. We were hunted deer and London was our forest.

At this second turning a hackney cab stand came into view, with five cabs in a row standing in the middle of the street, not yet dejected, the horses, bony and poor as they were, tossing up their heads friskily inside their nosebags eating their breakfast. Red Cain left me on the curb while

he went over to the first cab and negotiated with the driver. It was uncommon for servants to want to ride in cabs, and I saw that Red gave the man some money. Then he turned and beckoned me, and I crossed the shadowy, empty street. Red handed me into the fusty interior of the cab, let down the window, and shut the door.

"You just have to wait for the horse to finish feeding, and then you're off," he said, standing close. "I explained to the driver that you had been sent for by your mistress at Grosvenor Square, for her sick children. You are going, of course, to Madame Van de Weyer's. It's a marvelous stroke of luck that your cousin is the Queen's friend."

I had thought of East Sheen, but of course I saw that would be too far. The nearer the better. And what could be safer than the Belgian Ministry?

He leaned through the window of the cab and placed a gold sovereign and some shillings in my surprised palm.

"I've paid the fare, but you should not be without money."

My hand clasped his and his warm grasp held mine.

"But you're coming with me?" I said in anguish, stretching out my arms to him. "Stay with me! Take me away."

"I am a convict on ticket of leave, Rose, liable to arrest any time — for I've overstayed my leave. Where should I take you? Back with me to Australia?"

"To Philadelphia!" I cried, inspired. "Where English law doesn't run!"



"Nor marriage lines either?"

"Ah," said I, coming to myself, like death, "I am still his wife." Our hands parted.

"Go, *my darling!*" he said, and stood back.

The cab jerked to a start, and moved off at a slow, rocking trot.

Through all my overwhelming misery and horror a ray of ecstasy broke.



The church clocks were striking six when I reached Grosvenor Square. I went up the steps to the front door and rang the bell. The door indeed was already opening. The early cab had been observed. A manservant with tousled hair stood back to let me in, and there further back in the hall I saw Patsy, waiting by some premonition, at the foot of the stairs. She cried out:

"Ah, my lamb!"

In a minute I was in her arms. Madame Van de Weyer was running down the stairs in her crimson dressing gown, calling my name. Baron Van de Weyer, an early riser, came out of his study. But in all this atmosphere of welcome and safety the thing that struck me most was — I was expected.

\* \* \*

“Oh, I got out of there easy,” said Patsy, who was never one to tell much of a tale. “It was that gardener fellow. He had a coat and hat on, but I knew him directly. He came in to Lady Diana’s house as bold as brass and said he had come to wind the clocks. The servants didn’t know no different. And the lady was out. So he presently come to the room where I was sitting sewing at the back of the house there, overlooking the garden. A cozy little sewing room it was. And he says to me quiet like, with his back to me, winding of the clock, ‘Your mistress wants you out of here. Don’t lose no time about it. Walk right out and round the corner and I’ll meet you there.’ So I did just as he said. I just put my needle in my sewing and I walked right out of there. I didn’t even go upstairs for my bonnet because I thought I might meet some of the other servants and they would be asking me this and that! So I walked round the corner, and this gardener chap joined me in about a minute, and we walked to the bottom of the street, where those horse-trams run along, and he put me onto a tram and got on with me, and brought me right here to the corner that runs up to the square. Then we walked another block, and here we were, and he explained everything to Madame Van de Weyer, and I’ve explained to her some more. It was because that Tabitha took a dislike to me. She treated me real mean.”

I gathered that Patsy had no complaint of Lady Diana’s, and was surprised at being moved, but since she had been convinced that I wished it she had made herself contented

with Madame Van de Weyer, and enjoyed taking care of the children, particularly when they were sick.

“We knew that as soon as you found out you would try to escape,” said Madame Van de Weyer. “We’ve been on the watch for you. How I wished I could call at the house and pick you up and bring you off. But I knew that was impossible. And my husband indeed forbade me to call. I sent you that note about the measles to explain my apparent neglect. Father had found out all about it — the gambling, I mean. He suspected it, and he made certain by the unwilling witness of Sir Samuel Coburn, who banks at Baring’s. That poor foolish young man has been running through an enormous fortune. Somebody has been simply plucking him bare. My dearest Rose, you have just got away in time. They are planning a really serious raid on the place tonight. How terrible it would have been for you to have been involved in all that disgrace. You poor innocent! To see you coming into the house this morning, straight from that den of iniquity, with your radiant beauty, the sunshine behind you and your Quaker cap and dress — well, my husband said he now understood the legend about Eurydice coming up from Hades! *So* uncontaminated, so beautifully yourself — none of those evil associations having clung to you in the least.”

“It’s a stroke of luck,” said Baron Van de Weyer, “that this house provides complete sanctuary. Your husband no

doubt will come, claiming you by British law, commanding you to return to his roof. But here you have a double safeguard — foreign asylum, and one might say the personal protection of the Queen herself. My wife has told Her Majesty some of the story of you and Friar's Court, and the Queen advises you to seek a private audience with the Lord Chancellor as soon as possible to make some arrangements for getting your freedom, some sort of permanent separation, with a money settlement. What I suggest, and what your cousin, Joshua Bates suggests, of course, is simply that you obtain full command of your own fortune, and don't touch one penny of your husband's contaminated money. I wish the case admitted of divorce. But of course it doesn't."

So one and another sat with me in the cheerful breakfast room, and so they talked. An early continental breakfast was the custom in that house, and it was speeded up. Hot *café au lait*, foamy chocolate, fresh rolls, creamy butter and honey soon appeared on trays. I ate, because I was hungry, but I listened for the most part in silence. More and more I felt dazed by the complications of the situation and the solutions that were suggested. In all this affection and comfort and protection, I began to feel increasingly out of place.

The mention of the Queen brought me up to the surface. "Please don't appeal to the Queen on my behalf," I said.

"Let me do that in my own time, in my own way, for myself."

This seemed to strike Madame Van de Weyer.

"Yes, that might even be better," she said, in a pleased way. "I shall be delighted to arrange for the interview and I feel sure I can!"

The talking and planning rose around me again like a sea. Patsy had reluctantly gone to take care of the children. Baron Van de Weyer presently went away to his ambassadorial duties. The cook came in for the orders of the day. I felt a fish out of water. I had no part in their doings in this house. There was no place for me in their pattern. I had come away from my place, from my duties. I had forsaken my function.

What was my function? I did not know. What was the duty of a gambler's wife? I had been so eager to escape, I never questioned the rightness of it. But now I had had this breather, this refresher, this dipping into the pure outer air, it seemed as if my holiday was rightly over. I had an inward pressure to return. I began to picture my husband coming back to Friar's Court and discovering my absence. What would happen to Lady Diana? To Ahmed? Perhaps even to Red Cain?

It was unlikely that the gardener would necessarily be connected with my escape. But Ahmed — Ahmed would be plainly guilty. A horrifying picture of what might be done to him suddenly presented itself to my imagination.

Common sense protested. Could I do anything to help them if I were there? But something deeper in me than common sense maintained that if I were present I could at least try. By abandoning my husband I left him to the worst of himself. Whatever being "a loving and faithful wife" might mean under the extraordinary and bitter circumstances in which I was placed, desertion certainly cut me off entirely from any fulfillment of that promise. Was not my life involved with his? It was my own fault that it was so. Granted that he had used all the wiles of a clever man to capture my imagination, win my heart, and (horrid thought) obtain my fortune, I had acted of my own free will when I married him. I had been too headstrong and too hasty to wait to take advice of friends of my father's generation, who would have been all ready to make investigations for me in the ordinary Quaker way. On the contrary, I had been rather glad that my father's disownment had put me outside of the strict Quaker routine. Had I passed Monthly Meeting, had committees been appointed to investigate my husband, my catastrophe could never have happened!

On the other hand — and this was the strange butterfly in the bottom of my Pandora's box of trouble — if I had not married Luke, if I had not come to Friar's Court, I never should have met Red Cain. . . . The complications and subtleties of these ideas were too much for me. I could not sort them out. But the double loyalty of which I had be-

## THE QUAKER BRIDE

come possessed — the loyalty to the man who would be forever, even if only in memory, my dearest beloved, and my loyalty to the man whom I had married with solemn promises to be loving and faithful so long as we both should live — drew me, like the double poles of a horseshoe magnet, to the same place, Friar's Court.

I was alone in the room. The busy household hummed round me. I sat down at the desk and wrote a note.

DEAREST COUSINS —

Thank you for the refreshments and for the plans. You have given me something I needed. I see my duty now.

I must go back.

Yours with love,

ROSE ASHTON

I knew how to get about London. I walked out of the house and took a cab.



The middle of the morning is a brave, bright time. High summer was smiling on London that day. An Italian organ-grinder with his barrel organ was grinding out a gay tune at the corner, and his quaint tiny monkey with a red cap and blue coat was holding out a tin cup for pennies to the passers-by. But he was a petted monkey, a loved monkey. When he got a penny he tugged lovingly at his master's

trouser leg to get his attention. A bunch of barefoot street children, including two very graceful little girls (though thin and dirty) were dancing to the tune. "And — pop — goes the weasel," one of them was chanting as the cab jogged slowly by. I had given my cabman the address of Countess Cassell, because it had occurred to me that I wanted to return in some style. Nothing hole and corner. No awkward explanations to servants as to why the mistress was coming in without mantle or hat, looking somewhat disheveled and crumpled, between breakfast and lunch in the morning! Perhaps they had already been hunting for me for hours. To go with Countess Cassell was not only to give myself company but was in a sense to account, without words, for my absence. What more natural, in the eyes of the domestic staff, than that I should have gone off to call on Lady Diana's aunt, especially as Lady Diana might be feeling somewhat unwell this morning? I seemed to be quite good at plotting once I started. Maybe it's dangerous to begin.

By good luck the Countess was at home, and gushingly delighted to see me. She was also exceedingly surprised, but I gave her no explanation. It's much simpler not to explain if you don't know what to say.

I said, "It was such a lovely morning, I went to breakfast with my cousin at the Belgian Legation, then came to fetch you to come home with me to lunch. Did Lady Diana come back? She spent the night with me, but when I left



the house she seemed rather unwell. She was still asleep, rather stertorously!"

The Countess had no news about her niece but seemed quite unconcerned. The invitation to lunch was very natural and she accepted it with pleasure.

We drove back to Friar's Court in Lady Diana's carriage, which had brought the Countess home the night before.

All went as I had planned and foreseen. With the Countess's opulent and voluble presence at my side, I entered Friar's Court casually, and told Matilda, who opened the door to us, to have an extra place laid for lunch. Matilda's black eyes stretched so wide at the sight of me that I felt they would pop out. It was a pleasure to me to see such an expression of complete stupefaction. But Matilda pulled herself together by the time we had reached the bottom of the stairs.

"Pardon me, madam," she said, stepping after me, "but have you had breakfast?"

"Oh, yes, thank you, Matilda. It was such a lovely morning I went out and had breakfast with my cousin, Madame Van de Weyer."

I was not loath to convey that information. But I asked no questions. I knew I should find everything out quite soon enough. I would not offer any leads.

The Countess and I continued upstairs, talking cheerfully, and I took her along to my bedroom. The door was wide open, the room was neat, the bed made. The door into the

dressing room was ajar, and I could see that the bed in there too was neatly made up and was empty. No sign of Lady Diana or of Ahmed or of anything untoward. Except that — yes — there was something! Every drawer had been pulled and left a little open, and when I looked at them they were all empty. Nothing in them but the clean paper which was laid along the bottom of each drawer. My handkerchiefs, underwear, slips, sachet, petticoats, all had been cleanly swept away. And when I opened the closet door, the closet too was empty, nothing on the hooks, nothing on the shelves. Even my caps and fichus and Quaker dresses had all disappeared. So I had exactly nothing but what I stood up in.

This I felt was something to take notice of. I called Countess Cassell's attention to it, and while she oh'd and ah'd uncomfortably I rang the bell. Matilda answered the bell.

"Yes, ma'am?" she said with oily politeness. "You wanted something?"

"I want everything!" I said. "What has been going on? Where are all my things?"

"Well, madam, it was Mistress Tabitha's orders," said Matilda. "Maybe you'd best ask her."

"I'll do that without delay," said I.

I took Countess Cassell by the arm and led her along the passages with me. She hung back a little. I felt she came unwillingly. I understood her. She had been careful to keep

out of everything, and she did not want to get into anything. But I gave her no chance to object. I talked to her all the time, all the way we went, about the charms of the house in spite of its apparent gloom, how its first impression of dreariness and austerity was relieved by some of its charming rooms. . . .

“To let more sunshine in would be a great thing,” said I, “but Mistress Tabitha’s room, as you will see, is always bright.”

We were there as I spoke and I opened the door and went directly in. I drew the Countess in with me. Matilda, following us closely behind, tried to push in also, but I turned round and said:

“I will excuse you, Matilda!”

She gave me a black look but she was not ready for open defiance.

“Very well, madam,” she said. And discreetly withdrew.

Tabitha, taken by surprise, was seized with a fit of coughing. While she was still unable to speak I got in the first word.

“Well, Tabitha,” I said casually, “we have come to see how you are! And I’ve also come to ask what has been going on in my room while I was out to breakfast?”

“Were you out to breakfast, mistress?” said Tabitha, struggling with her cough. “I never heard of a mistress going out to breakfast without any warning to the household!”

"You forget I am an American," said I. "If a lady in Philadelphia wants to go out to breakfast with her cousin, why, she just goes!"

"Without asking her husband's permission, ma'am?" said Tabitha, through her handkerchief.

"That's between the lady and her husband," said I, "though in this case her husband was not present. What I want to know, Tabitha, is what happened in my room? Why has there been a clean sweep of all my clothes?"

"Well, I gave orders (since you was not there, ma'am, to be asked!) to get your things and look them over for the laundry. It's laundry week this week, and we does everything over."

"Clean things as well?" said I. "Things freshly laundered, starched and ironed? Matilda has been taking very good care of my caps and fichus. But even they, as well as my clean petticoats and handkerchiefs, are all gone."

"Well, ma'am, Matilda thought as you hadn't enough of them. She took some to launder and she took one to the dressmaker to be copied so as you could have a fresh set."

I broke into peals of laughter at these ingenious answers. And the Countess, always good natured and ready for merriment, joined me. Laughter is poison to witches. Tabitha could not bear to see me so gay and carefree when she had imagined something very different — indeed was flabbergasted at seeing me there at all. There is triumph in

laughter, there is freedom. She had to break that up at any cost. Even if it meant giving herself away.

"Well, madam, if you force me to it —" said Tabitha, her cough now under control — "I'll tell you straight. I was being polite on account of the Countess being here. But *another* version is that your husband said that *you'd eloped with the gardener*, and he ordered all your things packed up to be stood out in the front drive in trunks until we had an address to send them to."

"That was a bit premature," said I. "But that again I can discuss only with Mr. Ashton."

"It was Ahmed as gave it away," said Tabitha with oily malignancy, "though he didn't intend to, he tried hard not to. Mr. Ashton all but twisted his arm off right here in this room in front of me! First one of us asked a question and then another. I can't talk that finger lingo, but Ahmed knows your name all right. He can see my lips move, and the word *mistress* or Mrs. Ashton and '*where*'? He couldn't pretend too long that he didn't know what we was asking. We finally made him nod his head at '*gardener*' (that's the word Mr. Ashton kept on asking in the finger talk — '*gardener*,' '*gardener*,' and Ahmed would shake his head and shake his head but he nodded it at last) — when Matilda gave me the hot tongs! She held him close to me here and I myself — I'll stop mistress, you're too sensitive to hear these things. You look like as you would faint!"

"I think I do need some fresh air," said I.

"In the garden?" shrieked Tabitha after me as I went. Her cackling laughter pursued me down the passage. "The master may have something to say to that!"

Her words and laugh pursued me because I had left the door open for Countess Cassell to follow me and the Countess had not closed it. I heard it shut as we got to the more lighted part of the passage and looked back. Yes, as I expected. It was Ahmed, appearing as usual from nowhere. Ahmed had closed the door, and now stood in the dark corner. I called him softly but he did not come — of course! He could not hear. I went back and drew him into a lighter place. He read in my face my horror at what I saw, and his lips quivered downward like a child's. His left arm hung useless and limp in the sleeve with his hand turned back at an unnatural angle. His face — Tears poured out of my eyes.

"Oh, Ahmed," I sobbed, "go to bed. I will put salve, I will bring bandages. You need help and care. I'll give it you!"

His large, suffering animal eyes were on my face as if he treasured my tears and knew my sympathy, but whether or not he understood what I said he wanted to discourage my attention. He shook his head violently twice or thrice, twitched himself from my grasp and scuttled away into the dark passages behind. I tried to follow, but the passages forked beyond there, some up to the servants' quarters, some down into the kitchen areas, others into unused parts

of the house. I could not tell which way he had gone. I listened but I heard no sound of his feet. Though that was typical of Ahmed. One never did hear him come or go. Perhaps he knew what was best for himself. Perhaps my help would only get him into further trouble. I went into my boudoir, my refuge, and sat trembling and sick. If Matilda spied on me there through the half-open door she had her triumph. I, too, was tortured.

I had forgotten the Countess. But when some fifteen minutes had gone by, she came in, more stealthily and with less bustle than was her wont.

"Cheer up, dearest Mrs. Ashton," she said kindly. "I know you're upset. And we won't talk about it! But there's one thing I can do, and that's provide you with a dress. Look!"

She was carrying a bundle wrapped in a sheet, and when she opened the sheet I saw three dresses and accessories shaken out upon the floor. One green and white, one rose-colored, and one yellow and black.

"I'm afraid I've taken a great liberty, Mrs. Ashton — I must apologize to you as mistress of the house — but you must remember I know this house very well, and I'm a very old friend. It came on me that there was a lot of Lydia's dresses up in the attic, which I thought had been forgotten. I remembered discovering them one day by accident when — well, when we were looking about! And here they are, and there are several more there for you to

choose from! I thought you might not want to go climbing up there, so I brought these three down for you. I believe you're very near Lydia's size. Of course she was brunette and you are most gloriously blonde. But you could wear any color!"

She had fastened the door securely behind her, and covering my surprise, and almost my embarrassment, with her cheerful chatter, she shook out the dresses on the chairs for me to choose.

The lunch gong sounded through the house. A soft musical Indian note. The Countess folded the dresses up quickly and deftly, laid them in the sheet, and pushed them under the sofa.

"We will hide them here until after lunch," she said, "and then we'll get dressed at your leisure whenever you like!"

The lunch was a gesture of indifference on the part of the kitchen to two women who were not only unimportant but unexpected. Cold ham, salad, rice pudding, and stewed plums. The afternoon clouded over. I longed to go into the garden, but I realized prying eyes. The whole house seemed to be listening, waiting, watching. I began to feel an oppression of suspense for Luke's coming. But it was incumbent on me to entertain my guest. We went to the drawing room after lunch and I allowed her to teach me Patience, which amused her more than it did me. Then I rang the bell and ordered the little kitchen



maid, who appeared, to bring us an early tea. And tea duly arrived, served by John, expressionless as ever.

Having successfully got rid of such a large part of the afternoon, I took the Countess up to my boudoir and we foraged under the couch and got out the dresses. She had brought sashes and slippers and ornaments, all of which had evidently been most efficiently packed with each dress. I chose the one with the yellow satiny stripes. I wanted, for a change, to be completely gay. We took the other two dresses along the passage and hung them up in my bedroom closet, and closed the door on them there. I washed, and did my hair, while the Countess took over the dressing room for the same purpose. I expected to hear her say something about Lady Diana, but she did not, and I discreetly asked no questions. I felt more and more oppressed, but I was more and more certain that I had done the right thing in coming back. One would have thought the house was deserted. No one seemed moving about. The servants might all be taking a holiday. I remembered what Patsy had said about their gathering downstairs for parties of their own when they thought that they could get away with it. Perhaps that was all! It was different from the usual smooth efficiency of the household, the feeling that tasks were being performed around one in due rotation. Yet odors from the kitchen when I crossed the front hall gave evidence that dinner was in preparation, as good and as elaborate as usual. I wrote a note for Luke, sealed it,

and left it on the chest in the front hall. It was just a line.

LUKE—I have been warned that there is to be a raid tonight.

Yours,

ROSE

The Countess and I were playing Patience in my boudoir. I rang the bell and the little kitchen maid answered it. I told her that I had a headache and was not coming down to dinner that night and ordered a tray of soup, glass of milk and some toast or something like that, fruit maybe, served here in my boudoir.

At last there was a sound of arrival, carriages driving up, the front door opening and closing, masculine voices in the hall; among them I could hear my husband's. It was very hard not to go down, but I did not want a scene in front of other people. I felt sure that my husband would order me to remain to dinner and to greet my guests, and I felt that I had better not involve myself in it in any way. Nor did I want to publicly defy him. The Countess Cassell, however, of course went down, saying politely and discreetly that she was so sorry that I had the headache and hoped to see me later. As the door opened and closed on her, I thought I heard Lady Diana's voice below, but I would not leave the door open to listen. The more I detached myself from the scene downstairs, since I wasn't going to join in it, the better.

I sat down in a comfortable chair with a book. But the clock chimed the hour twice, and no tray of dinner, however light, was brought up to my room. I was entirely ignored, neglected. No husband and no friend came up to inquire for me. And the time certainly dragged, and the suffocating sense of suspense grew worse.

I noticed then how I missed even the inexpressive presence of Ahmed. I had become so used to having him about, to raising my eyes from book or work and seeing him, never watching, never moving, never occupied, apparently, and yet always there, as contented apparently as an animal to sit or stand and brood, half dozing and yet so uncannily alert. A dog or cat is company. A canary is company. And so was Ahmed. But I had not seen hide nor hair of him since that one glimpse, that one terrible glimpse. He had rejected and fled from my help. He had hidden himself like a sick beast. I could only hope that someone was giving him kindly aid, care, and assuagement of pain. I reassured myself, or tried to, by saying to myself that he was too valuable to my husband to be neglected entirely.

I gave way at last and set my door open to welcome any visitor — or a dinner tray, for I was healthily hungry — so I heard occasional sounds of what was going on below. Trays carried to and from the dining room, the rattle of dishes, the smell of savory viands. ("The best cooking in London!") But after the leisurely dinner was

over, the guests evidently did not go into the library, as usual, but came across the hall. I heard their loitering footsteps, the men's voices, I heard Countess Cassell and Lady Diana's lighter talk and laughter as they moved across into the drawing room. There apparently they settled down for coffee, conversation, a little music. Perhaps, who knows, an informal game of cards? I reasoned out at once that this was my husband's answer to my warning. If the raid came, they would only find a perfectly normal and harmless party in progress, where some very aristocratic people of high society were enjoying themselves in a civilized manner with conversation and music and each other's company. I was surprised how hard it was not to go down and join in. Lord Rivers, young Byron — what were they thinking of my absence? Were they not missing me? I was missing them!

I could not be quite sure, as I kept half my attention on my book and half on what was going on below, but I *thought* the raid occurred! I thought some unexpected visitors came in late, between ten and eleven (early that would have been for the club proceedings), and were shown into the drawing room. As the door was opened for their entry, I thought I heard my husband's voice in haughty, embarrassing, polite inquiry as to what he could do for them at that hour of night. But I could not be sure, because, before they had even arrived, many of the guests had left. There was a stir of departure, so early in the

evening. Carriages were brought to the front door. Farewells called. Lord Rivers went away, young Byron, Lady Diana. Yes, only some half dozen were left if — as I surmised — the secret agents of the police did come.

Soon everything was silent. Everyone had gone. My clock had barely struck eleven when I heard John going through the house locking up; fastening the windows, barricading the doors, putting out the lamps. My husband at this hour, if not driving off with some of the guests, would go into the library to work on his accounts. But perhaps there were no accounts to work on tonight. Then where was he and what was he doing?

John passed my brightly lighted door carrying his candle, and glanced in.

“You’re not ready yet, madam? I’ll come back in half an hour, or would you wish later?”

His tone, with undercurrents of injured remonstrance, was precisely that of the orderly servant who has been kept up beyond his hours by inconsiderate employers. One would never suppose that John was getting off to bed hours earlier than usual.

I was nonplussed. The Countess also had deserted me! I was alone. And it suddenly came over me that I was afraid to go to my bedroom. Ahmed had been put out of action. Lady Diana and the Countess were at their own house. Luke’s ominous absence did, no doubt, what

he had expected it to do. It struck a chill to my heart.

"You need not trouble," I said to John. "I will lock up here myself. You need not come back."

"I will come back, madam," said John. "I have to go the rounds outdoors. Then I will come back if it is your pleasure. Any time that you choose is all right with me, madam."

("I have to go the rounds outdoors!" Really?)

I heard John going down the back stairs, the only uncarpeted stairs in the house. I might not have heard him had my ears not been sharpened to attention, and the house so preternaturally still.

Now what next?

It was no use pretending any longer to read. I stood in the middle of my room waiting. Waiting for what?

But why should I wait? That was what was getting my nerve. The party was over. I would go and look for my husband for myself.

Leaving the lighted room behind me with its door wide open, I went down the stairs into the darkened house. A candle burned in a lantern on the chest in the front hall. I paused at the foot of the stairs and listened. Perhaps I should hear the chink of money or the rustle of papers behind the closed door that led through the dining room into the library. . . . Nothing! The front door was barred up for the night with chain and bolt in place. Was Luke in the house or out? I turned into the drawing room and sat

down in the dark room. It is calming to sit alone in the dark. I sat there and collected myself.

Presently I heard Matilda softly calling my name in the upstairs hall.

“Madam! Mrs. Ashton!”

I realized, as her voice and footsteps died away, that no one knew where I was. Momentary relief and release were in the thought.

How long did I sit there, protected and hidden by the simple darkness? I know my thoughts traveled far over past weeks and months, and I blamed myself for carelessness, blindness, stupidity. But into the future I dared not let them run. Not even into the future of the next hour.

Suddenly there was noise in the garden. Vague, violent commotion. Running steps, voices. John hurried heavily through the hall, unfastened the front door, rushed out leaving it open behind him. A raid! Another larger police raid, was my first thought.

I went out into the hall, lighted only by the dim lantern. I hesitated, straining my ears in the open doorway. And of a sudden my name rang through the garden on a shout.

“Rose! Rose!”

It was my husband’s voice.

The night around me was velvet black, but I saw an intermittent glare in the direction of the lily pond. I stepped back into the hall, threw a man’s cloak over my bare shoulders, took the lantern from the chest, and walked

quickly into the garden. I heard voices, men's rough voices subdued. I heard scuffling, and as I grew nearer, panting breath. I came out through the dark patch into the lily-pond lawn as if coming onto a stage lit by torchlight.

It seemed crowded. My entrance was the cue for silence. Everybody looked my way. The half-dozen men here gathered were, I suppose, the night guards. A set of burly toughs. Two of them held Red Cain. Two others and the garden boy held torches. Red Cain was the only person in the place who looked calm. He was captured and surrounded, but he had never looked so much the master. His eyes met mine the instant I stepped into the lighted circle. He smiled.

His deep look, his smile, his calm, said as plainly as words, "Rose, here we are! Don't be afraid. Don't let anything they do make you afraid!"

The sudden silence was uncanny. It was apparently my cue to speak. I turned to my husband.

"You were calling me, Luke?" I said.

"I was. I don't want you to miss this. It will interest you."

"I have been looking for you!" I said.

I was now in the full circle of the torchlight and my cloak fell back. My husband suddenly glared at me as if he had seen a ghost.

*"Where did you get that dress?"*



It was he, not I, who was thrown off balance. I did not know the secret of his fear, but what would that matter? It was he, not I, who was afraid.

I did not think my husband's question needed answering, and I did not realize that my silence was baffling to him, and seemed to cover more knowledge than I had. I did not know either that the beauty that my mother had given me was so enhanced by this dress as I stood in the favorable light of the torches, that without doing anything at all, just by standing there and gleaming, I stole away the hearts of my husband's rough henchmen. This was most unfair! They gasped at me. My husband broke the momentary spell. He eclipsed me by standing in front of me. He had been in the middle of an interrogation of Red Cain. He now savagely addressed him.

"Take off that wig! . . . I said — take off that wig!"

Red put his hand to his head, as one gentleman who obliges another, worked his fingers in and out here and there and finally pulled off a well-made and close-fitting wig of rough red hair. It was that shock of rough, carrotty hair, coarse in texture, never well combed, too long, which had given Red Cain all that he had of a plebeian appearance! It was that hair which had at first sight made him look a young roughneck of a raw gardener. Underneath it, his own hair, smoothly brushed, cropped and oiled flat to go under the wig, was a dark chestnut, almost black. With the wig off, and his fine head revealed, he was one of

the handsomest men in England. He refrained from looking at me. He twirled the wig in his hand, looking at it as much as to say, "Well, good-by, old friend. You served your turn!" and threw it into the bushes. His face took on an immovable gravity. He saw now that he was fully exposed, whatever the exposure meant. He braced himself for the worst. He must now pay full attention to his own affairs. There was a general grunt of surprise, followed by an indrawn breath of silence, as everyone took in this transformation. Then my husband spoke again:

"You recognize him, John? Yes, he's the *Honorable* Walter Cain Rayle, who forged your master's check for two thousand pounds. *Seize him*. . . . Truss him up. . . . Put him over that bench. . . . Now, John. Take off your belt and let fly, buckle end. If the *Honorable* Walter never got a licking before, this'll be one to remember. . . . Don't move, my dear! For every word of protest from you, your friend here will get two extra strokes. We'll count 'em."

Ah, my bravery, my vanity, my triumph, was short-lived!

"Please! Please!"

I covered my face and turned to go for help, but my husband gripped me fiercely by the arm.

"No, my dear Rose. It is my will that you shall stay and see this."

"Why?"

"Because — let us say that I have discovered — oh, I see it, my pet, in your face, your blanched cheeks, your terror — a way of punishing you!"

"*What for?*"

"What for?" He mimicked my stiff lips. "It would be hard to explain to you. For all sorts of daily unconscious slights! I believe I could beat you in vain, beat you to death, and you would die like a martyr, defying me steadily to the last. Wouldn't you, dear? Wouldn't you?" He shook me with savage violence as if he would shake my heart out. He grit his teeth. "But now I've accidentally found a way of bringing you to heel — like Ahmed! . . . Patsy was to have been your whip, but she escaped me. This is better. . . . Watch! Watch! . . . Ah, poor fellow, he can't control his groans: They will soon be shrieks. . . . That was a shrewd stroke! The blood begins to fly!"

"Luke, do you want to make me hate you?"

His painful grip on my arm increased, and his teeth bared like an animal as he looked into my face.

"Yes, my dear, you have guessed it. Hate is a corroding poison. *I* have felt it from my childhood, when I hated my abominable father. The Honorable Walter feels *hate* now, worse than the strap, and it will last longer! You, my pearl of purity, shall be inoculated with it."

He laughed, harsh, shrill and long, as if he were the devil himself. He shook me violently with his laughter, as he rocked to and fro. And I suddenly saw him as a lost soul in

hell. In agony of torment. Desperate and sick. My furious anger and horror evaporated as if I were in a sickroom with a delirious patient. He felt me relax in his grasp, he saw my face become calm. He threw me savagely from him, and I lost my balance and fell prone, just as Ahmed hurried into view with gestures proclaiming guests.

It was Lord Rivers and Lady Diana.

"What's going on here, Ashton?" said Lord Rivers.

"I've caught the spy — the informer!" said my husband.

But there was a general stampede. Luke's toughs were not the kind who could face recognition by a man like Lord Rivers. They disappeared promptly into the convenient greenery, the dark passages of the garden. I had got nimbly to my feet, and Lady Diana linked her arm in mine. Red Cain — or the Honorable Walter Rayle — got up, and turned to face us, casually putting on his coat. He was pale but calm. In spite of what my husband said, not a groan or sound had come from him. He was looking down meditatively, as if to say, Now everything is coming out.

"Is that true? You're the informer?" said Lord Rivers, addressing him.

"Yes, that's true," said Cain casually. His words and manner attracted Lord Rivers's closer attention.

He took the torch from the garden boy and held it up close to Cain's face.

"Why, dammit, ain't you Abel Rayle's young brother?"

"That's who I am, sir," said Cain.

"Ay, you have the very look of your noble grandfather!" said Lord Rivers.

"Whatever he may have of his noble grandfather's look," said my husband, "he is a convict on ticket of leave, which has now expired. I shall keep him locked up for the night and deliver him tomorrow to the law."

"I would not have guessed that you and the law were on such friendly terms," said Cain.

"Your spy work has done you little good," said my husband. "You and your wig! Where is that wig? I must produce that in evidence! Why, you low-down scoundrel, you hire yourself out to me to work in my garden, take my wages, and pry around into my private affairs! No British jury is going to take warmly to a fellow of that kidney! Add that to your forgery, and your expired ticket of leave. I'll wager that transportation for life is the least you'll get, my young cockerel!"

Cain looked at him attentively.

"I have another opinion as to what a jury may think of what I have to tell!" he said.

"The police have raided my place here twice and found nothing suspicious," said my husband. "Your word — the word of a convict — will be unsupported by evidence!"

"I have been collecting some evidence," said Cain. "My own doom is certain, that does not affect the matter. Have you ever reflected that it is hard to intimidate a man who has accepted the worst?"

"But this is very tall talk, Rayle," said Lord Rivers. "There's something behind all this. You mean that to bring Luke Ashton to justice, and get the rest of us in hot water, you'd face with equanimity the almost certain risk of being sent for life to the hell of Botany Bay? You've got a hold on us, we admit! All right, use it for your own ends. Collect some blackmail. Disappear quietly, and we'll connive at it. What say, Ashton? We'll buy him off. Get that wig on again, man, and emigrate to America!"

"I'd swear, for all the devil's bravado, that that's the scheme at the back of his mind all the time," said Luke. "I think I could put my finger on the companion he has chosen to emigrate with! *Someone who knows the country!*"

"Thank you, Riversholme, I'm not ready to emigrate yet. But don't paint things too black. Botany Bay is not necessarily hell. It's becoming a colony. My cousin, Diana, gave me a letter to the Governor, and I've had an interesting job there using my hobby of botany, making a botanical garden for the Governor. He is my very good friend. When my brother Abel died here in England last year the Governor gave me a ticket of leave to come back and settle up my inheritance. Friar's Court is the chief part of my inheritance. That's why I'm here."

"Your brother lost Friar's Court to me in fair play at cards," snapped Luke.

"Whether it was fair play or not is a question," said Cain. "But I have something even more interesting to bring

before a judge and jury than marked cards. I have matter connected with certain lost clock weights, with a note written in smudged ink on paper used to wrap a skein of silk, sounds heard by a watchman on a barge out in mid-river on a certain stormy, winter night. A night on which you would not suppose people would come out to throw rubbish into the river. . . . A dated night, seven years ago."

There was a startled silence. Luke's face was in shadow. I saw bewilderment like my own on the faces of Lord Rivers and my near companion Lady Diana.

"Clock weights?" said Lord Rivers. And he then muttered to himself: "Marked cards seem to me to be more to the point! I must confess I've had my suspicions on that score. . . ."

"Prove it," said Luke. His voice was cool. "Prove it. I call Lord Rivers to witness that we always played with new sealed packs."

"And the old packs were carefully burned by you each night," said Cain. "That's my first piece of evidence! This job was cunningly prepared. The marking was done when you were abroad. I shall charge — and prove — that you bought hundreds of packs of cards, marked them, and had them sealed —"

"I shall put my partner, Lady Diana, on the stand to witness for me," said Luke coolly. "You forget her honor is bound up with mine."

Lady Diana let go my arm and stood forward.

“I had almost no suspicion of such trickery!” she said. “I didn’t see how it could be done. But let me say this, Luke. I will go on the witness stand and I will tell the jury *why* my cousin Walter Cain Rayle committed his forgery as a young man. Oh, I am myself to blame, I can’t help gambling. I am a gambler! But you know how when I had played away my fortune, you took advantage of my despair to set my fortune against my person on the cards. And I lost! My young playmate, Cain, learned of it because I appealed to him to get his brother to lend me the money to buy myself off. Abel would not lend me the money, although he had just had big luck on the racecourse. And young Cain, desperate for me — whom he regarded as an elder sister, almost as a mother — forged his brother’s check to save me. He thought it would pay off my worst gambling debts, and he knew that, once I could tear myself away from the tables, I could before long pay him back. But *you* know what happened! . . . I don’t know whether Cain fully knows. . . . I got the money from him — thinking it was from Abel — I cashed the check, I took the money to you at your club, and offered it to you. And you said to me, ‘Why pay back all this money? Give me back a thousand, and use the other thousand for the gaming tonight! Look, I’ll put it all on the throw of the dice. Double or quits!’ I could not resist. It was my weakness. Luke plied me with wine. . . . I was excited. I felt luck was with me. . . . I’m not blaming you for all this, Luke. So I gambled away what my young cousin



had risked his liberty and his honor to get for me; and I lost. I lost *everything*. . . . Yes, *everything*. . . . Cain's brother had him arrested for forgery. He pleaded guilty, and got his sentence of ten years' transportation. He never breathed a word to anybody which involved me. He bore the whole brunt! All I could do was to soften the cruelties of his fate. I wrote to the Governor of New South Wales . . . as he says. But what is that? His life has been ruined. It's my fault. It will be a relief to me to go before a court and tell it all out to the world!"

"What do you mean?" said Luke. "If you tell this fantastic story to the world it won't undo your cousin's forgery. But it will be *your* ruin. What will the Queen say?"

"It's time for Cain to be freed from my burden," said Lady Diana, but I heard her voice wavering. "All I can say, Luke, is, that if you force me into a court of law to witness for you, this is the witness that I shall give!"

"Don't worry, Diana," said Cain affectionately. "If you gave yourself away like that it would only make all that I've done even more useless. You have told it here, before these people. That's enough. I thank you for that. But Ashton is not going to call you to the witness box. The marked cards are a minor detail to me, they're hardly worth attention. Let Riversholme attend to that. My charge against Luke Ashton when I go to a court of law is going to be a charge of murder."

He then turned away through the dark archway. I went with him in imagination back through the dark garden path through the twilight of the kitchen garden and out at the back gate. My imagination could not follow him farther.

The word he had spoken hung in the air like an invisible sword of Damocles.

Lord Rivers said to Lady Diana, "Allow me to drive you home."

"Come to my house, Rose!" she said, almost in a whisper.

Lord Rivers nodded with urgent approval. They had moved one on either side of me, to bear me away with them. Lord Rivers was still holding the torch, and as he came nearer, it accidentally illuminated my husband's face. It was the face of a man stricken to stone, with all his lines etched deeper in a moment. Ten years at least were added to his age. Inward vultures consumed him. His expressionless eyes stared like a man who has received an incalculable shock. He was defeated and shown up on all sides. His practiced dignity, his suave manners, were useless to him. The game was up. His big gamble had lost. He was a ruined man. Whom had he to stand by him now? His friends would all fall away. His aristocratic circle was irretrievably broken. He would have no one left but old Tabitha and his little slave, Ahmed. An unreasonable pity that carried with it the relics of my old affection rose in my heart. I had linked my life with his out of my own free will. As I had said to myself before, one should take the consequences of one's

own actions, one's own choices. I saw Red Cain resolutely taking the consequences of his.

I had fled my home once already with hate and loathing and condemnation in my heart. I had felt what they were like. I had experienced the empty feeling of mere escape, the turning one's back upon one's problems, one's duty. It had been short but it had been enough. It was empty, arid. I felt even now a healing in my own nature as the gush of pity ran over all my ravaged heart, like a refreshing flood over the parched banks of the Nile.

"I must stay with my husband," I said.



They turned toward the house for their carriage. Luke and I followed them. The torch had been thrown down like the other one, quenched in the lily pond. A moon had floated out from the clouds, and the garden was bathed in a pale greenish radiance. By avoiding the covered ways of the pleached alleys it was possible to see one's way without extra light. My husband was carrying my lantern. Except that none of us was speaking, it seemed a normal end to an evening — two guests being escorted to the door by their host and hostess.

Lord Rivers did not have to call for his carriage. It was there waiting for him before the house. Someone had lighted the big lantern beside the door on the stone pedestal for

it, which lighted departing guests. Ahmed had probably brought the word, though he had now disappeared.

Lady Diana made a little movement of her eyebrows at me, as she was handed into the carriage, as if to say, Won't you change your mind? Even Lord Rivers looked round with a half-extended hand as if to say, Let me hand you in too!

I simply said as normally as possible:

"Good night. I hope to see you soon!"

"The first thing in the morning, dear Rose," said Diana very clearly, leaning forward in the carriage.

"Yes, the first thing in the morning," said Lord Rivers, "you'll see us here again!"

"And to what am I to attribute the honor of so early a visit from the Duke of Riversholme?" said my husband. "Are you coming as a friend to examine with me the curious events of the evening? Or are you coming as an accuser, having already made up your mind on the word of a handsome convict who resembles his grandfather?"

"Say I am coming as a friend of your wife's!" said Lord Rivers (as I had called him), quietly, and noncommittally.

"I have much indeed to thank my wife for," said my husband.

"More perhaps than you know," said the Duke of Riversholme. "And you may live to be more thankful to her yet."

"Is that remark weighed with meaning?" said my husband. "Or is it merely the expression of a pious hope?"

“Well —” said the Duke, with his hand on the carriage door and his eyes searching the gravel — “my thoughts run something like this. I do not wish to see your wife disgraced. That is, sharing *your* disgrace. . . . My opinion is that all that was said here tonight had better be kept out of the law courts and out of the press. I believe the Honorable Walter Rayle will share this opinion. I have a plan forming something like this. Your wife’s cousin, Madame Van de Weyer, is fortunately most influential with the Queen. All the more so that she very seldom uses her influence. It is a private, most disinterested and affectionate friendship. A friendship which began between two young women, and has been cemented between two mothers and their growing families. I hope and believe that Madame Van de Weyer can be moved, for your wife’s sake, to present the case of young Walter Cain Rayle to the Queen in such a light that the young man may receive the royal pardon. And I think that Lady Diana’s name need never come into it! . . . We cannot bargain with Walter Rayle to leave the country, but I think that will be his choice. . . . And as for the club here, I enjoy it! You have not *always* cheated me, because I have sometimes won! I enjoy a good gamble. I miss it in the clubs where it is suppressed. I am prepared to support the continuation of this club, under perhaps a committee of management which will offer reasonable guarantees of as much straight dealing as one could ever expect in any gambling association! Being cheated occasionally is one of

the risks we all run on the racecourse, roulette table, cards, or any other form of chance. Fate itself sometimes cheats us. Fate has cheated you tonight, Ashton. But in your wife you have turned up trumps!"

"And what about Mr. Rayle's parting thunder?" said my husband.

Lord Rivers got deliberately into the carriage and closed the door behind him, and then he leaned out of the open window.

"I don't know what he meant," he said, "and I am inclined not to inquire. Some drunken brawl, perhaps, with faults on both sides, some heated blood over gambling debts? Do I guess rightly? Window weights, a body sunk in the river? Ashton, you have your toughs! I have seen them. I have shared in their payment as guards here. Things are sometimes what we think them into being, and will turn out as we make them. I am not going to acknowledge — or to allow anyone else to acknowledge — that the lovely Mrs. Ashton is the wife of a murderer! Walter Rayle is an angry and an injured man. But I think he, too, is vulnerable on that score. For Rose Ashton's sake we will all agree to let bygones be bygones. Tomorrow, Ashton, can mark a new start — if you will have it so!"

"I wish you good night then," said my husband, suavely. "Until ten o'clock tomorrow!"

"Until ten o'clock tomorrow!" said the Duke of Riversholme. He saluted slightly with his hand. "Good night!"

We stood and watched the carriage out of sight. Then Luke picked up the lantern and brought it into the hall. Set it down on the chest.

"And so my wife has turned up trumps!" he said, looking at me. "And, thanks to her, I have a grand new start."

He roared with laughter.

"And the best of the joke is, it's *true!*"

He was locking and bolting up the door as usual for the night, with the big bolts top and bottom, the chain across the lock. I knew it was always done, yet the thoroughness of it, and the oddness of his behavior, his side glance at me in his laughter, gave me a touch of nerves. I was definitely at the mercy of a man whom I had known to be incalculable.

Lantern in hand he went into the other room, glancing at the fastenings to make sure that everything was secure. He particularly examined the French windows that led out of the library. He even went back into the kitchen.

"Wait for me in the library," he said to me, in his usual cool tone.

So I sat down and waited there while he finished his rounds.



The bedroom candles had been put ready on the chest, and I had lighted mine and carried it with me into the library. The closed-up room seemed both chilly and airless.

The candle burned with a straight-up flame shaped like a leaf, tapering from its pale yellow base to a faint blue tip. Looking around the shadowy room I recalled meeting Lady Diana here for the first time. I remembered that her air of fashion had made me feel shy. I remembered my husband perceiving this, and setting me at ease with his kind manner, his air of pride in presenting his bride to his friend. And I remembered also overhearing Lady Diana in the hall saying softly to her intimate, who was my husband, strange words of warning: "Take care, Luke! That girl will be too clever for you!"

Well, I had not been too clever. I had been very stupid, very unsuspecting, imperceptive. In fact I had not known how to exercise half measures — to trust, and not to trust. Since I trusted, I closed my eyes to anything that might awaken my distrust. But now that my eyes were fully open, now that there was surely nothing else to learn, I found my memory had recorded all the evidence that my loyalty had refused to accept. Granted that with my inexperience this evidence would take some time to sink in and to find its meaning, to accumulate into a definite charge against my husband of one sort or another, still my ignorance and suppression of it had resulted in me in a kind of untruth. "Since I know my husband to be kind, he cannot be unkind. Since I know my husband to be noble, he cannot be dishonest. Since I know my husband loves me, he cannot love another woman. Since I know my husband



courted me when I was poor, he cannot be influenced by mercenary motives." All these naïve, schoolgirlish, pre-conceived ideas cut a pattern for my husband into which he would not fit. And the continual presentation of that pattern before his eyes had been the source of what he called my daily slights. . . . When he had tried to eaves-drop behind the hedge, and had accused me of flirting with his gardener, I had been righteously indignant, thoroughly outraged, deeply, profoundly insulted. I had wrapped myself up in conscious innocence, in flawless pride, and my caresses, forgiving him as it were for his injustice, had seemed to him patronizing. And he had been right! With a blush to my very heart I acknowledged it. His experienced evil eye had seen the evil in me; not only seen it but encouraged it, had tried to give it opportunity. Yes, was disappointed because Red Cain and I had withdrawn from the brink of a precipice.

But why did Luke want to bring out the evil in me except that he was sickened by my holier-than-thou attitude? And if I had reversed that, and had even unconsciously said to myself that I would like to see him as good as myself, what was that but the horriest sin, a sin that had thrown Lucifer out of Heaven, the sin of pride? What was my religion worth if it could not teach me more about living than that? I saw into my heart just as clearly as if the candle flame were burning inside there. This house was full of evil, like a palpable presence. And I was alone with

it. But I was part of it. If killing could be done by a mere wish, I would have killed Luke when I came on that hideous scene of attack on Red Cain in the garden. Luke's own words had shown me that it was myself I was killing with that thought. Lady Diana was Luke's mistress, willing or unwilling, but the best of my own heart was no longer my husband's, and deep within myself I should be forever untrue to him.

Gambling? What had my marriage been but a gigantic gamble, a throwing of my whole life on the wheel of chance? Cruelty? I had never been cruel and I hoped I never should be. But if *I* had been cruelly treated as a child, if *I* had been through the bitter experiences of life which had afflicted Luke, that too might have been my revenge on others, my answer to my sense of life's injustice. Even now and here, how could it fail to rouse my husband's jealousy to see his former love, Lady Diana, won to my side and taking my part? And his little slave, Ahmed, serving my cause? That was to breach his inmost citadel, and why should it not justly make him hate me? For me, too, tomorrow should be a new beginning. If Cain could serve his sentence, I could serve mine.

Luke came in. He put his lantern down beside the candle. These thoughts had given me courage. I hoped that I could meet him with kindness. But he thrust his head forward and looked at me as I sat relaxed in the shadows of the wing chair. The light of the candle caught his eyes in

a peculiar way, and they glittered like a snake's. He did not say anything, and for some reason I could not.

A Swiss clock hung on the wall, one of those with a carved top and no clock case. The brass pendulum swung to and fro in the open, catching on each swing the light of the candle in a momentary gleam; tick, tock, tick, tock. The weights, one higher and one lower, as the clock imperceptibly unwound, were shaped like pine cones and were made of bronze. My husband walked across the room to the clock and unhooked the two weights. He brought them back and laid them on the table. He then sat down. The candlelight flickered in the draft of his motion, and I thought what a model my husband could make for a Mephistopheles. Then I was a Faust who had sold my soul to the devil? The thoughts that had been in me before took a sudden downward twist. Perhaps my desire to be at one with my husband was only an evidence of my corruption. The room was very still. The clock, of course, had stopped. I felt as if my heart had stopped too.

"You are very quiet, my dear," he said. "Have you no comment on this evening of surprises?"

"I was thinking that I've been very much to blame," said I tremulously.

He gave a short laugh.

"That's new," he said. He had been fingering one of the weights, and he laid it down. "Well, I suppose you are looking forward to bed?"

He leered at me with that glitter-eyed flash over the candle flame.

“Well, I’m sorry to disappoint you — and myself, of course — but we’ve a lot of things to do tonight. We’re going to do a flit. When your friends — and mine! — come back at ten o’clock tomorrow morning, they won’t find us here. I am for France on the morning tide. One of the first things I did on coming back to Friar’s Court was to purchase — with your money, my dear — a yacht seaworthy enough for the Channel. She lies now tied at Wapping Stairs wharf, and several boatloads of goods have been conveyed to her already by my trusty men, under cover of the dark, for two or three nights past. A trunk with your clothes is already on board. Perhaps you missed them from your wardrobe? Yes, that’s where they are! My roulette table has gone too, you see.”

He moved to the bookcase and touched the spring, and down came the shelf of books, the screen, but nothing but a hollow was behind. He touched the springs and sent it up again by the pulleys.

“Yes, your warning of the raid was kindly meant, but had the police come right in here they would have found nothing. When my friends gathered as usual I explained to them, in the drawing room, that we should not be playing for a few nights, as a precautionary measure. I did not break to them the sad news that they would never again have the pleasure of gambling in my house. No, London

has become too hot to hold me, largely owing to the interest taken in you, my dear! I used you and Lady Diana as bait for the highest circles, and you succeeded beyond my wildest dreams. But unfortunately some of your other connections, quite unexpected and unknown to me, were not of the right kind to benefit me. No, not of the right kind at all. It was a definite misfortune that you should be related to the President of Baring's Bank. Oh, I don't accuse you of telling tales! You have been most discreet. . . . Ah, how your discretion irritates me — that you never put yourself in the wrong!"

He picked the weight up and banged it on the table with startling effect. I shuddered involuntarily. But he continued quite quietly.

"It was Sammy Coburn gave me away there. He banks with them; they're his trustees. Their suspicions were aroused by the way in which his account fluctuated. They asked questions, and then the lad gabbled of my goodness to him, my loans to him! And I was the husband of their precious cousin!" He roared with laughter. Then went on quietly. "You gave me warning of tonight's raid, which you no doubt learned about when you were with your cousins at the Belgian Embassy. And thank you very much for nothing, I knew of it already! I have my spies, too, you know. Well, I've made a good harvest, you'll be glad to hear. Friar's Court has paid me very well. My best investment so far. And now it's time to cut loose and get

away again — get away for good, from the Barings, and the Belgian barons, and thwarted heirs, and fast maids of honor, and perhaps settle down in some pleasant continental resort to enjoy my fortune. It will take you, too, out of temptation's way — permanently!”

I was shocked and stunned at the news. I covered my face to shut out his malevolent smile, and to shut in my torrent of feeling. I had made my choice that night to stay with my husband in all good faith, with no doubt at all that, though difficult, it was right. But I realized now how much I had depended on all my friends. I saw that my slender hope for a better life, and for the ultimate winning of my husband, had depended on being either here, or back in Philadelphia, where surrounding influences would help me. I had not thought of being whirled off into the unknown, into a country where I not only had no friends but could not speak the language! I had enjoyed, certainly, being on the continent during my honeymoon, but in a holiday spirit, and I had had Patsy with me there as a cushion and a refuge. A fear of the future such as I had never known rose up within me. I remembered that my husband was a man of incredible violence.

He watched me for a while, as a cat watches a mouse. But I could not control myself. I trembled and shook. I could only just manage not to break into hysterical weeping. After a moment or two he spoke again.

"I shall be ready in about an hour," he said. "If there's any little thing you want to take, you may pick it up and get it ready. I will lend you a cloak. All we shall have to do is to walk down the dark garden — you know your way there well! — out of the little door in the wall — you know the little door! — and across the Thames Embankment, and down the steps to the river, where our rowboat is already waiting us with two sturdy boatmen. Two of what the Duke of Riversholme so descriptively called 'my toughs.' They are also coming with me to France. . . . But before you and I start collecting our papers and final odds and ends, we have just one more thing to do — we must go and say good-by to my old nurse, Tabitha. She, much as she mourns it, is too old for such a trip. We shall have to leave her behind. But the gardener and the gardener's boy and a diminished domestic staff will take good care both of her and of the place as long as is needed; paid for, my dear, by your money! Come along then, let's go now and bid her good-by."

Every drop of my blood cried, No.

"I'll go to my boudoir and get my papers first," said I, praying for time.

"You can get them afterward," said my husband.

He stood up, waiting for me.

What was I afraid of? A feeble old woman? My own husband? Yet my trembling legs would not obey me. I felt the unreasoning panic a person feels when lost in a dark

forest. I was too alone! I felt forsaken by God and man. The panic-stricken traveler begins to run wildly about, falls into ravines, injures himself in the undergrowth, or climbs up the trees and dies of thirst, when his only hope is to keep a steady mind and steer himself by the heavens — the stars at night, the sun by day. All of a sudden I saw that Ahmed had come in unperceived, and was standing in the shadow behind my husband's chair. His dark lustrous eyes were raised and were fixed on mine. They shone in the candlelight like the eyes of a faithful dog — no, they were full of human intelligence. It came to me suddenly that Ahmed had *heard* what my husband had said. Had heard! In the fairy stories, the lost traveler sees a tiny light far off. I felt as if Ahmed were my tiny light. Ahmed would go with us across the Channel, I was certain. So I should not be, even from the beginning, without a friend! . . . I was in possession of myself again. I looked up at my husband's face.

“Very well,” I said.

But at that moment John came hurrying in. I had not known he was in the house, and that again, for some reason, gave me fresh heart.

“There's someone at the front gate, sir!” John was flustered.

My husband turned round sharply.

“Who is it?”

“I think it's that Sir Samuel Coburn, sir.”



"We're not showing a light, are we?" said my husband, looking around at the curtained windows.

"No, sir. And I took away the lantern from the front. I didn't unlock the gate, either. But he's making a fair noise, him and his coachman. Seems he won a bet at a cock fight, and came straight round to pay a debt to you, sir."

"Drunk?" said my husband.

"Roaring drunk, sir."

My husband hesitated. He was evidently in a very fretted state of indecision, such as I had never seen him in. He moved from one foot to the other, pulled his hands in and out of his pockets, twisted at his lower lip.

"I'd best get rid of him," he said. As he left the room he turned round to me. "You go on up to Tabitha, Rose. I'll be there in five minutes."

I went upstairs. I thought if I were quick I could take this moment to write a note to give to Ahmed to tell Cain of the plan to flit. I went to my boudoir first, therefore. But the door was locked. Ahmed was close behind me. I went along to my bedroom. That door was also locked. Every door that I tried upstairs was locked. The feeling of panic reasserted itself. It was dark. I was cut off from all writing materials. But I remembered my new secret. Ahmed could hear! Was I mistaken? I stooped down to his ear and whispered.

"Take a message for me to Red Cain. Tell him the plans and where I am!"

Ahmed touched my hand, as quick and light as a butterfly. Whether that meant that he heard me and gave assent I could not tell. But he did not move from my side. I understood at any rate that he was unable to go with my message now. In fact, I knew myself that the house was thoroughly locked up, and my husband and John could be heard even now treading over the gravel coming back to the front door. I went along the passage to Tabitha's room.

There was a candle at the head of the stairs and another at the turn of the passage. But the little corner outside her room with the little twisted stair that went up to her door was as pitch dark as usual. I tapped lightly and went in, leaving the door open behind me because I heard my husband coming up the stairs. He did not follow me along directly, however, but turned the other way toward the bedroom. I heard a coin drop and ring against the banisters, so I guessed he was carrying money to put away for the journey.

Tabitha's room was not so bright as usual. The fire had died down to a bed of red coals, and there was only one lamp alight. Tabitha's big shadow on the wall went right up to the ceiling. The room had always looked to me like a witch's den, and it looked so more than ever. Also, perhaps to counteract other bad smells, Tabitha laid a fresh stick of incense on the fire just as I came in. The odor was to me sickening and overpowering.

"Why, Tabitha," said I, "I think you ought to be in bed! Do you sit up so late?"

"Tonight's a special night, mistress," said Tabitha with a peculiar tone.

"Yes, my husband has just told me that this is to be good-by!" said I.

"Ay, mistress, ay, mistress," said Tabitha, "it's good-by. This is the last time poor old Tabitha will see her pretty young mistress, and this is the last time the pretty young mistress will see poor old Tabitha!"

She said it like a chant, like something she had learned by heart — I tried not to let myself think — like an incantation.

I made an effort to be natural.

"It's a great surprise to me," said I, "not to say a shock."

"Yes, it kind of upsets your plans, don't it, madam?" said old Tabitha. "Lady Diana, and the Duke of Riversholme, and that handsome Honorable Walter Rayle, they'll be mighty surprised and upset when they comes round to-morrow and finds you gone!"

She burst into her never-pleasant-sounding laughter.

"They'll come and see *me*, they will, I expect," she said, "and I shall have to tell 'em she's gone to France, she's gone to France, she's gone to France!"

She seemed to find this very humorous and was overcome with glee.

I heard the faint click of the door closing and looked round. I gave a violent start. It seemed to me that myself stood there. Certainly a Quaker apparently stood there — a young woman dressed from top to toe in old-fashioned

## THE QUAKER BRIDE

Quaker garb, the dainty gauze cap, fichu, buff-colored dress, well fitted over her shapely figure. She took a step nearer, and I saw it was Matilda. Her black hair under the cap was carefully crimped, and smoothly parted. Little black corkscrew curls hung down each side. She looked very handsome. She had never looked more evil.

"I'm to impersonate you, madam!" she said. "How do I look?"

I thought she meant impersonate me in the house, to delay knowledge of my departure to early visitors. Red Cain or Lady Diana or the Duke of Riversholme might see this figure moving about the garden at a little distance, perhaps, and be deceived. I imagined what excuses might be given for my not coming to speak to them. But since discovery could not be long delayed, would it be worth the trouble? And that's what I said.

"Is it worth the trouble?"

"Oh, well worth it, ma'am!" said Matilda. "You see I'm going to travel as Mrs. Ashton, and everybody knows as Mrs. Ashton is a Quaker! Anybody who sees me go aboard or get off at Calais will think as it's *you*, ma'am. The newspapers will put in a note as 'Mr. and Mrs. Ashton has arrived from England. Mrs. Ashton looked handsome as usual in her quaint Quaker garb. Her husband is obviously very proud of his Quaker bride!'"

I denied the chilling of my blood.

"What do you mean?" I said.

They both laughed heartily. Matilda quite doubled over with laughter. Then pulled herself straight again.

"What do you mean?" she said, mimicking my accent. "Oh, what do you mean, Matilda? And I'll excuse you now, Matilda! And, you may leave that, Matilda! And, well, if I's to wear my cap that'll mean lots of extra laundry for you, Matilda!"

I sat down in the armchair beside the fire, opposite Tabitha. I sat down because I would not let them see that I was trembling.

"It's time to tell her straight," said old Tabitha. "It was most unlucky for you, dear, that your Patsy went nosing about and found them clock weights missing."

As if her words were a signal, Luke came in, and shut and locked the door. The face he turned to me was a face of stone.

It came to me then, as clear as light, that it was their intention that I should not leave that room alive.

For an instant I was choked with fear.

Then I cried out inwardly to Heaven to help and save me, and I became icy calm. My senses had never been so alert and acute. Tabitha's unguarded eyes warned me of crisis by the direction of their look and their intensity.

"Don't get behind me, Matilda!" I said without turning. "I've something to say to you. Come out here where I can see you."

"I'm the only one who gives orders here!" said Luke.

They were all still, all looking at me.

"Luke," I said, "it is my last duty as a wife to tell you that the Queen knows about Lydia. I understand that now. You'd be wiser not to try to kill me. Your stories of my disappearance won't go down with anybody."

They all leaned toward me at Lydia's name, as if moved by a spring.

I gave up hope of rescue, they had caught me. I was in the middle of the web, the spider had me. Not Tabitha, but my husband! Oh, God, take from me the horror. Forgive me my sin of hate. Help me to be brave to die.

So I stood up to meet them.

And the movement saved me.

The heavy iron poker that was to crash down on my head fell harmlessly on the arm of the chair, splintering the heavy wood. And before Matilda could recover herself — falling forward over the chairback out of balance — or my husband seize me — as he stood, legs apart, knees bent, hands out to finish the expected work — Tabitha burst into flames.

Her horrible screech seemed part of an act, as if she had willed herself into spontaneous combustion, but while she drew all eyes in paralyzed consternation, I pulled up the hearth rug and rolled it round her. Luke was at my side in an instant, aiding me with his greater strength and the huge tough patchwork quilt seized from the bed. He en-

veloped Tabitha completely, and carried her to the bed like a mummy. He shouted:

“Matilda, get the ewer! Pour water on the fire!”

But Matilda was petrified.

I ran to the washstand in the dark recess, took the heavy, brimful ewer in both hands, and splashed water on the flaming chair. The fire hissed out, and stifling acrid billows of smoke filled the close shut-up room. We should probably all have died of suffocation, but aid was at hand.

Running feet — the door broke in with hatchet blows — Red Cain burst into the room.

“Rose!” said Cain. He did not wait for an answer but attacked the curtained window with his axe. Life-giving air rushed in.

“Rose!” said Cain, again, groping for me.

He had me in his arms, close against his breast.

“I saw you just now in the garden!” he said, murmuring in my hair. “Your ghost was out there. I thought you went toward the Thames door, followed you, lost you in the maze of paths. . . . You came back *here*?”

Ah, Matilda’s masquerade had paid. . . .

I clung to him a moment silently, smoke-stifled, eyes streaming with smoke-induced tears, but my heart was filled with the joy of safety and life. Then I turned to the poor old woman on the bed. There was still some water in the ewer. But I saw it was terribly useless, as Cain held up the lamp. An awful sight is death by fire. Her inflam-

mable lace, her billowing skirts, had given the leaping flame quick fuel and draft.

I shuddered, and turned away, stumbled at something on the floor at my feet — and fell on my knees beside my husband.

“Quick, a doctor!”

His face was purple, and his breath came in hard, agonizing gasps. His staring eyes looked consciously, desperately into mine for succor. I loosened his cravat, unbuttoned his coat. Someone passed me scissors and I slit his shirt. I put my ear to his bared chest.

“It’s his heart!” I said. “Water, quick! Aromatic spirits of ammonia — The corner cupboard has medicines. Brandy . . .”

They ran, they fetched, they helped.

The first terrible agony of the attack eased a little.

Luke gave a wry smile.

“Thanks, Rose,” he said. “It’s no use. I’ve had one before . . . in India. They said . . . a second would finish me. . . . Cards aren’t heavy. . . . I thought I could cheat death too!”

He gave one sharp sigh and stiffened in death.

No one wanted to speak.

Luke had fallen with his hands flung out in front of him, palms up. I suppose his last attempted gesture. I took his hands upon my knee. Painfully burned and disfigured by the one good action of his life; and the one action in



which he and I had worked as comrades together in the same good cause. My tears fell, not for Luke's death — that I could not pretend — but for Luke's life. I thought how queer it was that those same hands, guilty of cruel acts, and ready, I believed, a few moments ago to strangle the life out of me, had given themselves in active good will to save the life of his old nurse. The one person who had ever — he thought — shown him kindness, who had been his partner in blackest crime for his sake, and in whom he had developed an infant-unshakable confidence that was his only anchor still. . . .

Red Cain lifted me up tenderly and took me out.

Afterward they found Ahmed's body under the heavy skirts of the charred chair, untouched by fire, but suffocated by the smoke. His face wore an ecstatic triumphant smile. His one good hand was clasped round the slender handle of a long wrought-iron shovel, and in the shovel were a few burned-out cinders. What had happened was clear. Lying hidden under the tent of the chair he had pushed the shovel gently into the bottom of the grate, gently pulled it back — The chair was so close to the fender. And no one was looking that way. . . .



Walter Cain Rayle and I were married in the spring from my cousin's lovely house at East Sheen. Even the Queen agreed (and sent unofficial word by Madame Van De Weyer) that in my case the customary year's mourning would be not only unnecessary but even insincere. Apart from the Queen, however — who was told everything except what involved Lady Diana — none of the story of Friar's Court got out to the public. The inquest and the newspapers reported merely the orgy of revenge of an ill-treated Hindu slave, who had hidden underneath an old woman's chair with a shovelful of hot coals, and so the valance of the chair and the old woman herself caught fire; and in the resulting confusion the Hindu himself had perished. The master, overexerting himself in a heroic effort to save his old nurse, had died of a heart attack. Such a story was not even a nine days' wonder, appearing as a small item in newspapers which were carrying the terrible news of the Indian Mutiny, the massacre of Cawnpore, the siege of Lucknow.

Cruelty and hate seem to find such ready instruments in mankind that my husband says he sometimes wonders if God does not prefer the vegetable creation! Such an amount of creative affection seems to him to be expressed in the mysteries of the flowers and plants that he himself skillfully cares for. The Queen has given him an appointment at Kew, where he is one of the directors of a marvelous botanical garden.

I look to returning before long to Philadelphia, but as Cain says, human beings, like plants, must not be too often uprooted. We must settle a while and nourish our roots, put forth green shoots of hope and faith, and maybe produce flower and fruit. If sometimes in dreams I visit a moment of darkness and terror at Friar's Court, I wake always to this strange assurance — that I cannot find it in my heart to regret any course of events, however terrible in themselves to experience, which brought me to the haven of my husband's arms. The doctrine of purgatory has much to recommend it. May Luke's time there (if he be there) be shortened by the fact that Walter Rayle, coming from the penal colony of Botany Bay, and I, an ignorant girl, coming from Philadelphia, would never but for him have met and found our happiness together.









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