CHAPTER IX

THE REFORMATION OF RONALD

Miss Pengelley did not at once put Doctor Grier’s advice to the test, but, as the difficulties of her position in nowise lessened, she started to work upon the third morning with the private resolution to follow his suggestions, at least as far as Ronald was concerned. She was determined not to let that young man continue to bully her, or, if he did so, to show him plainly that she was not inclined to put her services at his disposal unless he accepted them courteously. To-day Hornblow laid the Daily Telegraph at the corner of the breakfast-table.

“I don’t fancy that Mr Ronald will require it yet, miss,” he said. “Mr Ronald has a good many other papers to read.”

“I will take it up to him myself,” said Miss Pengelley, inwardly deciding that Master Ronald should wait for the Daily Telegraph until she had finished with it.

By-and-by she sat down to her typewriter, and worked very busily during the early part of the morning. Mrs Jacobs came into the room for a minute or two on her way from interviewing the cook, and they had a little conversation about the chapters Miss Pengelley was typing. “Spiridia,” when she got into the vein of her work, seemed so different a person from the conventional Mrs Jacobs that Susan realised with surprise how many-sided the woman was.
The Reformation of Ronald

"I mean to shut myself up and be busy to-day," she said. "I shall not drive, as we are going out this evening. Doctor Grier scolds me if I undertake too much. You will come with us, Miss Pengelley?"

The tone suggested a command rather than an invitation.

"Where to?" asked Susan, doubtfully, resenting this way of being taken so much for granted.

"To Mr Koenigsen's party—the opening of the St Helgan Gallery," returned Mrs Jacobs, her tone implying that Miss Pengelley should not have forgotten an occasion so important.

"Oh, but I am not asked," said Susan.

"That does not matter. You will be one of our party," replied Mrs Jacobs.

"But I don't think I should care to go, thank you," said Susan, rather stiffly. "I shouldn't know anybody; and besides, I only met Mr Koenigsen last night, and he did not mention it to me."

"He would have supposed, naturally, that you would be with us. It must be as you please, of course. But I should have liked you to come. The fact is, I was relying on your help with Ronald. The dear boy scarcely ever goes out—he has to be in his chair, you know—but he is so fond of Karl Koenigsen, and he has been looking forward to this party."

"I did not understand that you expected me to go out in the evenings," said Susan. "But if that is so, I will do as you wish."

"Oh, I couldn't press the point against your inclinations," said Mrs Jacobs. Her manner plainly showed that she had not anticipated being met with a refusal, and that she was somewhat annoyed. She had counted upon her companion rather too freely, and now saw that it would be necessary to give Susan some individual consideration. Miss Pengelley, on the other hand, felt that she had gained a point, and, that being so, was willing to concede it. She did not, however, say anything more at the time,
and Mrs Jacobs left the room, merely remarking, "You will go up to Ron at eleven, won't you?"

"Oh, certainly," returned Miss Pengelley, cheerfully. "I find he likes my reading, and I'm so well accustomed to reading aloud that it is no exertion."

She spoke rather as though she conferred the favour upon Ronald in reading to him, and Mrs Jacobs went away, wondering at the hitherto undiscovered strain of self-assertiveness which she now found in her small, shy companion. She little guessed that the same influence which so strongly affected her own life had been at work here.

"Spiridia" went upstairs to her study, and soon became immersed in the history of her latest heroine, while Susan diligently struggled to reproduce a clean copy of the somewhat illegible handwriting. At eleven o'clock she shovelled her papers together and went briskly upstairs. Ronald answered her tap at his door with "Come in," and then said perversely,—

"I didn't send for you."

"No, but your mother asked me to come up at eleven, so I am here."

"You're too soon this morning," growled Ronald.

"Oh! Aren't you ready for me? Never mind. I can amuse myself looking round your room." She turned her back upon him and began studying the bookcases and pictures on the wall. Ronald regarded her with astonishment as he finished his beef-tea. Presently Hornblow, who had been arranging various small details for his comfort, took the tray and left the room.

"I say, Miss— Here, what's your name?" exclaimed Ronald.

"Pengelley," returned Susan, calmly, turning round.

"It's just as easy to remember as any other name. Suppose you try to call me by it."

"Suppose I don't," replied the boy, rudely. "What's the good of worrying? I never exert myself needlessly."
The Reformation of Ronald

“You won’t find this exertion needless,” answered Susan, sitting down. “You’ll see that unless you remember my name, I sha’n’t be able to answer to it.”

“You can answer to anything else just as well, I suppose?”

“I daresay we can all do that,” said Susan, smiling. “Suppose I call you Thing-um-bob to begin with?” A small answering smile broke on Ronald’s lips, but he checked it. It was too great condescension to smile upon this flippant young person. Susan, who was reading him from a new point of view, promptly changed the subject. “I do pity you,” she said, leaning back comfortably in her chair and picking up the book which she knew that he wanted read to him.

“Pity me!” growled Ronald, fiercely. “Because I am a cripple, I suppose—for the same reason that everyone else pities me.”

“Oh, not at all—not at all,” said Susan, cheerfully. “I pity you because your disagreeable manners must lose you so many friends and give you such a bad time in life.”

Ronald was too much astonished for the moment to rebuke her for this unwonted liberty. Miss Pengelley took advantage of his silence to go on, “It must be so unpleasant to be always turning the worst side of you to everybody, as you do, and of course getting the worst side back again. There’s nothing in the world to pity you for otherwise that I can see. It seems to me that that you’re an uncommonly lucky boy.”

Ronald recovered himself.

“I say Miss—” he began.

“Yes,” said Susan, alertly. “Miss—who did you say?”

“Pengelley,” grumbled Ronald. “You’re speaking pretty straight to a fellow, you know.”

“I should think I am. That’s what I’m here for.
You don't imagine, do you, that I came to talk twaddle to you?"

"You came to make yourself useful," said Ronald, rudely.

"So I did," was Susan's quiet reply. "Tremendously useful, I hope, to your mother. And I mean to be useful to you, if you're nice to me. If you're not, well, of course, I sha'n't bother myself about you."

"I like that! What do you get paid for?" sneered Ronald.

"For work that I'm perfectly ready and willing to do, but I can't do it, you know, if other people won't let me."

"If you don't do it there's no good in your staying," said Ronald.

"That," replied Miss Pengelley, with dignity, "will be for your mother and for me to decide. Now, suppose that instead of discussing how long I'm going to remain here we make the best of our time together, and enjoy ourselves as well as we can, while I am here. What a delightful room you have!"

Ronald looked round him with satisfaction.

"Yes, it is rather nice," he admitted. "It's all my own taste, of course."

"So I thought," replied Susan, and the boy did not detect any sarcasm in her voice. "With some assistance from Mr Koenigsen, perhaps?"

"Oh, well, Karl's taste is more matured than mine—that's only to be expected," said the boy, unwilling to give credit to anyone else, even his beloved Karl. "He has helped me a little in the details. We've talked things over together. But the main idea is my own."

"I thought it must be so," said Susan. "Most artists would dislike such a mixture of brilliant colours, I should think. It's very evident that you want about you as much warmth as you can get together."
"I yearn for it," said the boy. "It's the only thing that makes me feel alive. I can't stand these London fogs and the dull, dark days, and all that's so horrible in an English climate."

"Which place do you like best of those you've been to?" said Miss Pengelley, thoughtlessly, and repented of her indiscretion when she saw the blank look of despair on Ronald's face.

"I've never been anywhere since I was a baby, except a few miles in the country, where I could be driven to. They won't let me go in railway trains—it brings on the pain."

"Is that very bad?" asked Susan, sympathetically. The boy twisted his face as though the mere thought were enough to frighten him.

"You wouldn't want it again if you'd had it once. They inject stuff, you know, and that stills it; but it's pretty bad. If it wasn't for that I could travel where I so long to go."

"To St Helga?" asked Susan.

"St Helga! No. It's my mother who yearns after St Helga. She can't go there because of leaving me; but I believe she's really homesick sometimes for that bleak little place, with its cliffs and the wild birds and the sea. She's often described it to me, and so has Karl Koenigsen, who's booming it now, but I've got no leanings towards St Helga."

"You'd like Italy, perhaps, and Greece, or even the south of France. They're very beautiful."

"Yes, I know—olives and vineyards and old ruins. But you've never been there, Miss Pengelley?"

"Not to Italy or Greece, but I've stayed a good deal in Mentone with my mother. She died of consumption. It's some years ago now."

"Oh, I didn't know you'd ever been out of Devonshire." Ronald looked at Susan with increased respect.

"But it isn't anywhere this side of the Mediterranean that I long to go. I want blinding sunshine and bright blue skies and palms. I'd enjoy a bit of desert,
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dry and hot, with camels and Arabs, and the afterglow, like Goodall's Egyptian paintings. The colour of a real tropical afterglow must be perfectly glorious."

"Yes, it's very fine," said Susan. I just remember seeing it at Galle—the beautiful pink glow behind cocoanut palms."

Ronald stared at her.
"What, you—you’ve seen the East?"
"Not much of it. But my old dad was an army chaplain in India, and I was born there. I didn't come home either till I was older than most Indian children, for we elders had to wait for the younger ones to go with us. There wasn't much money for us to do as we liked, though I daresay you wouldn't understand that."

"Money!" repeated Ronald, with a contemptuous inflexion. "Oh! money doesn't help one much."

"I think it does—a good deal," returned Miss Pengelley, frankly. "If it wasn't for money—or rather the lack of it—I shouldn't be here now."

"I shouldn't care how poor I was," said Ronald, "if I had grown up in India—if I'd even gone there as a tourist. Tell me," he asked suddenly, "have you ever seen the Taj?"

"I was born at Agra," replied Miss Pengelley. "We lived there several years. Yes, I remember the Taj."

Ronald was silent, too deeply impressed for words. Presently he pointed to a small, brilliant picture on an easel.
"That's the Taj at sunset. Koenigsen painted that."

Susan examined it critically.
"It's good in its way," she said. "It seems to me what you'd call a vivid bit of colour. But it's rather like a tinted photograph."

"Oh!" Ronald was agape. "You mustn't say that to Koenigsen. But I don't suppose you know
much about it. It's considered splendid. My father paid a lot for that."

"I daresay. But everyone has a right to an opinion—don't you think so? Now I think that Mr Koenigsen has missed the poetry of the Taj. It's just the poetry that makes it what it is—the most perfect monument a great king could build to the memory of the dead woman whom he loved."

"I hadn't thought about that," said Ronald.

"No, you wouldn't," retorted Susan. "A boy doesn't think of such things. Apparently Mr Koenigsen didn't either. He only saw a fine bit of form and colour."

Again Ronald meditated in silence. Then,—

"I say, Miss Pengelley, tell me some more about India."

"Oh, I haven't any more. It's my eldest brother who could tell you interesting things. He loves the East—like you. He's living in Ceylon—in the centre of it—where the old dead cities are that belonged to that wonderful civilisation long before Christ. The natives still go up in thousands to worship there. Most people would think it a dreadful place—so hot and full of fever; but he just loves it. He doesn't come to England very often, but when he does he growls at the climate almost as much as you do, and pines for his jungle and his steamy heat, and snakes and wild elephants, and all that sort of thing."

Ronald's dark, peaky face was stretched forward, and he no longer looked supercilious and discontented.

"I didn't know you'd got any brothers," he blurted.

"You never asked me," smiled Miss Pengelley. "Of course I've got brothers—plenty of them. That was one reason why Mrs Jacobs engaged me," she said frankly. "I'm used to boys."

"How many of them are there? And what do they do all day?"
The Other Mrs Jacobs

“They’ve got to work, all of them; they’re not so fortunate as you are,” laughed Miss Pengelley. “Two are at school still; one is in Australia; and the eldest, who is in Ceylon, is a missionary.”

“Oh! A missionary!” Ronald’s tone said that he didn’t think much of that. “It must be a precious dull life.”

“It isn’t dull at all. He’s got to do a good many things in the intervals of converting black men,” laughed Susan. “He rides all over the country among the native villages. And he’s obliged to be a very good sportsman, because there’s lots of big game about, and it’s just as well to know how to shoot in a country like that, for it might be dangerous if one didn’t. He goes into all sorts of out-of-the-way places, and has heaps of exciting adventures. I have a lot of his letters upstairs telling me about them—not at all the kind of things you read about in books.”

Ronald wriggled among his cushions. “I—I suppose they’re private letters.”

“Not particularly. You see, we’re a large family, and our letters go the rounds, so Jack’s adventures are common property. But you’re ready now, aren’t you, to get on with this book about the East?” She turned over the pages and prepared to begin. Ronald, however, had evidently something to say. He cleared his throat once or twice, and at last interrupted her as she plunged into a chapter.

“I say, Miss—er—Pengelley, if those letters aren’t private, couldn’t you read me a bit or two out of them? I get so tired of made-up travel books. I’d like to get hold of something real and fresh. You might bring some down, mightn’t you?”

“I certainly might, some day, perhaps—when you’ve been particularly nice to me, you know.” Miss Pengelley laughed at the boy in an unembarrassed fashion, and immediately began to read. Ronald did not pay much attention at first. He was
The Reformation of Ronald

vexed to feel that somehow she had got the better of him. But very soon the soothing inflexions of her voice allayed his annoyance and invited his attention. Miss Pengelley read for three-quarters of an hour without stopping, then put down the book. "Now, as you haven't asked me if I'm tired," she said, "I'll take the liberty of mentioning that I am. Suppose you tell me something for a change."

"I've got nothing to tell. How should I know interesting things—a cooped-up cripple without a chance of seeing or doing anything?" growled Ronald.

"Well, I should have said that you had plenty to interest you; but of course that's a matter of opinion. You've lots of things to look at anyhow, and you might tell me something about the insides of those book or stories of the pictures. I'm sure you know them."

"They're mostly Koenigsen's sketches in Java and places like that. He's got a story to tell about every one of them. A delightful chap is Karl Koenigsen."

"That, too, is a matter of opinion," said Susan, who was mischievously endeavouring to hold her own at all points. "I don't know anything about Java. Do let me hear some of his stories. That's an odd bit." She pointed to a rough drawing of what was evidently an extinct crater.

"That's a volcano," explained Ron, "and he rode through miles and miles of primeval forest to look at it. There was a rebellion going on, and those fellows in the foreground are warriors, and they nearly did for Koenigsen."

He touched up the tale of an exciting adventure in which Karl Koenigsen had on his own showing performed prodigies of valour. Miss Pengelley's shrewd wit discerned some flaws in the narrative, and, moreover, she took leave to doubt that Karl Koenigsen—except as an after-dinner speaker—had ever recklessly exposed himself to danger. She was
arguing the question with Ronald when Mrs Jacobs came in and was surprised to find her son so animated.

"Ron, dear! I hope you're not overtiring yourself. You mustn't let him talk too much, Miss Pengelley."

"Oh! mother, I wish you wouldn't be always fussing over me," exclaimed Ronald, crossly. "It's the only fault you have," he explained, with some compunction, seeing a shade cross her face. He made an awkward grab at her hand and laid it caressingly against his cheek with what was for him an unusual show of affection. Mrs Jacobs stooped to kiss him.

"As long as you're happy, dear," she said. "I should like you to do always just as you like—if only it were not bad for you."

She stayed a few minutes, talking lightly, but with a preoccupied air, which was evident by her having asked no question about the subject of mirth between Ronald and Miss Pengelley cut short by her entrance. Susan, shrewdly perceptive, took note of this and wondered, but was enlightened when, in reply to Ronald's question, "What's the matter, mum? You don't seem quite in form somehow," Mrs Jacobs replied,—

"I'm worried about your father, Ron. He hasn't been like himself the last day or two, and this morning I really thought he must be ill."

"Oh! he's all right," returned Ronald, cheerfully. "There couldn't possibly be anything wrong with the Universal Agent—there never is. What would all the advertising people do if such a calamity happened? Besides, if he was ill he'd know it himself and send for old Grier."

"That's just it. Doctor Grier told me the day before yesterday that your father had been to see him, and it never occurred to me that it might have been on any other account than yours and mine."

"He's all right, you may be sure," repeated Ronald. "It's 'Spiridia's' imagination that's at fault, mother.
The Reformation of Ronald

It makes you always on the lookout for things. Go and work it off in the book.”

“Yes, I will,” said Mrs Jacobs. Pausing as she went, she said, “I’m trusting Miss Pengelley, Ron, not to let you over-exert yourself.”

When the door had closed behind her, Ronald turned to Susan.

“Now, Miss Pengelley. Hullo! What are you thinking of?”

“I was thinking about your mother—how gifted and charming she is, and yet with so many claims upon her how devoted to her crippled son!”

Ronald had never considered the matter in that light.

“Why, she’s my mother,” he said.

“Exactly. And not like most other people’s mothers.”

“Oh!” returned Ronald, dubiously, “I thought—”

“That all mothers were the same. You’d find the difference, my young friend, if you’d seen as much of the world even as I have. I can tell you that you’d better make the most of such a mother when you’ve got her.”

“Well, of course I do,” answered Ronald. “We get on very well together.”

“Very well indeed,” returned Miss Pengelley. “Only I notice that she’s everlastingly considering what she can do to give you pleasure; and really, Ronald, you do remind me sometimes of a bear with a sore head.”

Susan looked at the boy to see if she had gone too far. But apparently Ronald found plain speaking salutary.

“I say, Miss Pengelley, you’re coming it rather strong. You’re as bad as old Grier. That’s the sort of thing he’s always stuffing down my throat.”

“And quite right too. Somebody’s got to do it, unless you mend your ways and save one the trouble.”
"But what can a fellow do? I think the world of my mother, of course. But what chance have I—a cripple, tied to a chair and a crutch—of doing anything for her?"

"It seems to me that you have got more chance of that than ordinary boys who are away at school or out in the world could possibly have. You might, for instance, show her a pleasant face when she does things for you instead of finding fault with her for looking after you."

"Come, I say, Miss Pengelley—"

"Well?"

"How long is it since you arrived?"

Susan consulted her watch.

"This is Friday morning—fifteen minutes to twelve. I arrived on Tuesday just about 4.45, I should say. That makes about sixty-six hours and some odd minutes."

Ronald smiled.

"Seems to me that you've taken us in, and turned us round, and settled in your own mind pretty freely what stuff we're made of."

"I never was considered slow," admitted Susan, complacently. "And when you've come to a place for a special purpose it's as well not to waste time in setting about it. I came here to help your mother—and you. I can't do one without the other."

Ronald grinned sardonically.

"So you begin helping by preaching at me?"

"Not a bit of it. I hate sermons—except my Dad's—and anyway, I don't expect you to listen to one from me. Still, I don't see why you shouldn't do what you can for your mother."

Ronald leaned back amid his cushions with that curious old-man air which sat so strangely on his shrivelled boyish form.

"Well, then, you might mention a thing I could do for her, and I'll do it."
The Reformation of Ronald

"Done!" cried Susan, merrily. "She's going to a party this evening. Get her some flowers. She'd like them, wouldn't she?"

The boy looked pleased.

"I daresay she would. I never thought of it. Look here—we might find out from Julie—that's her maid, you know—what she's going to wear to-night, and get them to match her dress. The workroom is on your floor, Miss Pengelley."

"All right," said Susan. "I'll look in and find out if I can."

"But I don't know how I'm to get them," said the boy. "We must go to a good florist's, you know."

"I can't help you there—though I'll go and forage for one, if you like. Or—don't you get sick of trundling round the garden? Why shouldn't you go in your chair and find the florist yourself?"

"Not a bad idea! I will. There's a good one in the Bayswater Road, I know. Ring the bell, Miss Pengelley—do you mind?"

"Not when I'm asked politely," said Susan—who was beginning to feel proud of herself—doing as he desired, and then making for the door.

"But you are coming too? Oh, I say, Miss Pengelley, you must! I can't stand that stable-help who wheels me going in to choose flowers."

"I'll come if you like," said Susan. "I shall enjoy a walk."

"That's right. I say—a little diffidently—we might get a bunch for you too. What are you going to wear?"

"I'm not going," said Susan.

"Not going!"

"That needn't prevent me from helping you to choose your mother's flowers."

"But you are going! Here, Hornblow"—to the butler, who was respectfully waiting—"telephone round to the stables for my chair—at once,
The Other Mrs Jacobs

and then you can come and get me my coat and hat."

"Very good, sir," and Hornblow departed.

Ronald turned again to Susan.

"You must come to-night. The show will be fun to you, even if it's dull to me." His face drooped pathetically. Susan felt a pang of sympathy for the boy—the first it had been possible for her to feel. "Mother will have people like flies buzzing round her. She's going to help Karl receive, too. I shall only be able to stick to my chair in a corner all the time. You might come, Miss Pengelley."

Susan considered for a moment.

"I didn't intend to, because, you see, I wasn't asked by Mr Kœnigsen, and I sha'n't know a soul, and didn't particularly care to go. But if you'd like me to keep you company—well, that makes a difference."

"I should like it immensely," said Ronald, brightening. "We could have some fun together. You've been awfully rough on a fellow, Miss Pengelley. Make up for it. I shouldn't wonder if you're right in what you've been saying, but if you come along with us to-night you'll be able to judge of the effect of the slating you've given me. I daresay I deserved it. I'm a selfish beggar, but being driven to think so much about oneself is apt to spoil one's temper."

"I'm sure it is," said Susan, brightly. "All right, I'll come this evening."

Miss Pengelley trotted upstairs, past "Spiridia's" sanctum, which was closed, and to her own floor, where she found the workroom, and a French maid busily employed upon a gown which was the one, she informed Susan, that her mistress was to wear that evening. It was of white satin, made in somewhat mediæval fashion, an outer robe opening over an under dress, and close-fitting sleeves of soft, thin stuff, embroidered, as the maid said, in St Helgan colours.
The Reformation of Ronald
—greenish blue and pinkish yellow—a conventional design of lilies outlined in seed pearls. The dress was very beautiful, and Miss Pengelley pictured to herself how well it and Mrs Jacobs would become each other. She hastened back, after putting on her hat and jacket, to find Ronald ready for his outing.
CHAPTER XI

A QUESTION OF CONDITIONS

But neither Ronald, nor Miss Pengelley, nor perhaps Mrs Jacobs herself, had calculated upon the Covent Garden bouquet of La France roses and smilax sent by Koenigsen, which arrived almost simultaneously with Ronald's offering. The boy's bouquet was the choicest in its way. It had been chosen with much deliberation by himself and Miss Pengelley, and was composed of blue lilies of varying shades and flesh-coloured orchids, bound by trails of palest green—the nearest match Susan could suggest to Mrs Jacobs's lovely St Helgan dress.

Koenigsen's flowers were brought up at tea-time, accompanied by a note, which Mrs Jacobs read with a surprised look, the faint flush deepening on her face. Ronald was annoyed at being forestalled.

"Let's see, mum."

But Mrs Jacobs withheld the missive.

"No, no, it's nonsense. An ebullition of Karl's artistic temperament. I shall have to make it clear to him that I'm much too old to have adoring notes sent to me—even in fun."

"Why, Karl's taking a new line," said Ronald. "I don't believe he ever bothered to send you flowers before. And as for adoring notes! This St Helga boom has turned his head, mum."

"That's it," replied Mrs Jacobs. "It's all because I'm a St Helgan woman. But Karl should have
remembered that there's blue in the St Helgan colours. I've had my gown embroidered on purpose," she added regretfully, as she laid the bouquet upon a table. Hornblow had carried off the florist's box. Ronald exchanged a triumphant glance with Miss Pengelley.

"Never mind, mum. You wait and see. Somebody else remembered you and knew exactly what you were going to wear to-night. I'll bet you a bob, Miss Pengelley, that those roses won't see the St Helga Gallery."

Mrs Jacobs looked sufficiently mystified to please the boy, but she had no time to inquire further what he meant, for at that moment Hornblow reappeared, bearing another box, from which he extracted the bouquet of blue lilies and orchids. Mrs Jacobs exclaimed, in surprise and delight,—

"Why, these really are St Helgan colours, and it's a perfect match for my gown. Who could have thought of it? Ron! I believe it's you."

"I'm striking out a new line too, mother — like Karl. But you'll wear mine, won't you?"

"Of course I will. They are charming. Dear, dearest boy, thank you so very much."

Mrs Jacobs lifted the flowers to her face. Her blue-green eyes, which matched the lilies, filled with a sudden rush of tears. The bouquet was indeed lovely, and it would add the finishing effect to her costume; but it was the unselfish thought in her usually selfish darling that touched her. Meanwhile, Hornblow had taken from the bottom of the box a spray of violets and camellias.

"There's this too, ma'am."

"Oh! Give 'em to me!" cried Ronald, and immediately handed the spray to Susan. "You must wear 'em, Miss Pengelley. I settled with the shop-girl when you weren't looking."

Susan, highly gratified, accepted the peace-offering.

"But Miss Pengelley isn't going," said his mother.
"Oh, yes, she is," replied Ronald. "I've persuaded her."

"If it doesn't make any difference to you," said Susan, demurely.

Mrs Jacobs acquiesced somewhat stiffly, though she was glad that matters had so arranged themselves. She saw with some surprise the more friendly footing established between Ronald and Miss Pengelley, but though it was a relief to her, she was too much absorbed in her own thoughts to pay much attention to outside conditions.

Hornblow came back at the moment, the bearer of a telephone message.

"Mr Jacobs is afraid he can't get back in time to go with you this evening, ma'am. He desires me to say that he'll dine in the City and follow you to Mr Koenigsen's Gallery."

"There, you see," said Ronald, when the butler had gone, "there can't be much wrong with the Universal Agent. I know what's upsetting him. He's hot on an American deal; and you've got to be pretty sharp to get the better of Stars and Stripes."

To Miss Pengelley's susceptible fancy, "Spiridia" appeared the very embodiment of romance, when she came down to dinner in her mediaeval-looking gown, with its front of pearl-outlined pink and blue lilies, its wide hanging sleeves, showing inside ones clinging closely, and its straight embroidered corselet ending in a girdle of quaintly-set greenish stones and pearls, while a coronet of similar stones, tipped with pearls, was set on her luxuriant fair hair, and a double row of pearls encircled her neck. She carried Ronald's lilies, and so fair and youthful did she look that it was difficult to realise that she could be the boy's mother.

Miss Pengelley, a Puritan figure in a grey and white gown, with Ronald's violets and camellias at her breast, ventured on a timid appreciation of Mrs Jacobs's costume and jewels.
A Question of Conditions

"They are St Helga pearls, and this"—touching her girdle—"is a kind of malachite found only in St Helga. I'm glad you like me," responded "Spiridia," simply.

The St Helga Gallery was in a quiet side street between Bond Street and Regent Street. They arrived there before ten o'clock, for Mrs Jacobs had promised to be early. Already, however, two or three carriages were drawing up at the kerb, and policemen were guarding the awning and crimson-carpeted footway.

A carrying-chair had been provided for Ronald, and he was borne safely by Hornblow and an assistant up the broad flight of stairs, and through the palms on the landing to a convenient position in the Gallery, where he would have the best view of what was going on.

It was a long room, with pictures set at intervals along the walls—not too many of them—the chief ones specially illuminated. These were mostly paintings of wild landscapes—bold headlands jutting out into a northern sea, with white gulls circling round the cliffs; sunrise, sunset and moonlight effects upon the waves—Kœnigsen excelled in these; bits of moor and stony waste, cotters' dwellings and fishing villages; while placed among the larger pictures were portraits of St Helgan old men and old women in the picturesque head-dress of the peasantry, lads, girls and children—a representative display of St Helgan types. In the centre of one wall, draped with the St Helgan flag, was the portrait of a fine-looking, white-haired man in whose features Miss Pengelley discerned a likeness to Mrs Jacobs, and was not surprised to have pointed out to her as the late President Brack. This was stated to be copied by Kœnigsen from an original picture in the Assembly House at St Helga. It was certainly not in Kœnigsen's style, though at first, on looking round the Gallery, Miss Pengelley was struck by the
painter's versatility. She learned later, however, from the conversation of a group of people studying the pictures, that Koenigsen was not responsible for the entire contents of the Gallery, but that he was in reality the founder of a St Helgan School, numbering various young modern painters among its members.

At one end of the Gallery were some fine specimens of the famous St Helgan tapestry, and of the carving and silver work of that curious island. Ronald solved the doubt in her mind.

"You'd never think, would you, Miss Pengelley, that an artist could hit upon such a scheme as this for making money. There isn't a sharper business man in London than Karl Koenigsen, nor a better painter into the bargain."

"What is the scheme exactly?" asked Susan.

"Why, he started it first by running his St Helga pictures for all he was worth. Then by getting the tapestry and things cheap and on commission in St Helga, and persuading swells that they couldn't be truly artistic unless they bought them. And now he's got this place, which he calls the St Helgan Studio, to exhibit his pictures in as well, and some by other chaps who aren't big enough to interfere with him. Of course they pay for the privilege. I shouldn't wonder if he made his fortune out of St Helga before he's done."

"Nor I," returned Miss Pengelley.

She was stationed by Ronald's chair, watching, with interest and amusement, the scene in which her own part was that of humble spectator. And indeed it was quite a brilliant one. London evening parties in the circles of Upper Bohemia are all pretty much the same, and the crowd which frequents them does not greatly vary. As at private views, there are always certain well-known celebrities—politicians, aristocratic cranks, great ladies with artistic sympathies, literary big guns, celebrated actors and
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actresses, and the inevitable sprinkling of wealthy patrons and fashionable journalists. Karl Koenigsen's gathering did not differ particularly from such assemblies. The royal duchess, hailing by birth from that particular northern kingdom which holds a protectorate on St Helga, did not appear, in spite of Mr Koenigsen's professed expectations. Susan wondered whether there had ever been any real grounds for supposing that she would do so. At all events, her name was not printed on the invitation cards, an opportunity which—had it been authorised—the enterprising painter would certainly not have let slip. But there were, as he had announced, two ordinary duchesses, and a number of less important personages recorded in the Peerage; indeed, the list of names duly given in The Morning Post the next morning must have stirred with envy the hearts of many an ambitious hostess.

These people did not stay very long, for it happened that a charity ball under distinguished patronage, the first of the winter season, was taking place that evening, and most of them were going on to it, but their fine dresses and diamonds lent lustre to the assembly and dazzled Miss Pengelley's countrified vision. She had never seen anything like this before, and was genuinely glad that she had not yielded to her first impulse and stayed at home. But wherever her eyes wandered they invariably returned, when a rift in the throng permitted it, to "Spiridia," who, though not ostensibly receiving the guests, was yet near enough to Mr Koenigsen to shake hands with everyone she knew, and to be introduced to several strangers as the daughter of St Helga's famous, if unfortunate, President.

There was music presently—a small string band of male performers, and a few women singers, all in the St Helgan costume, singing and playing St Helgan airs. The buzz of talk almost drowned the musicians' performance, but perhaps it was only designed to
promote conversation. By-and-by, curtains were thrown back from a doorway leading out of the Gallery, so that a flower-decked refreshment-room, with attendants in St Helgan dress, could be seen, and the congested crowd began to circulate a little more freely.

"Well, young lady, is this your first experience of a London party?" asked a deep voice presently at Susan's elbow.

She turned hastily and saw Doctor Grier. He looked taller than ever, she thought, and immensely distinguished, in spite of his somewhat gruff manner. His clean-shaven face, with its clear-cut, distinctive features, towered above the heads of the men. His paleness, and a certain rigidity of expression, gave the suggestion of grey marble, which, however, was belied by the flashing eyes bent now upon her. Susan met the piercing look straight.

"Good evening, Doctor Grier. I've been scolding Ronald for not remembering my name; but I don't fancy you even know it."

"Oh, yes, I do—it's Pengelley—good old Cornish appellation. Miss Pengelley, will you allow me to take you into the refreshment-room?"

He offered his arm with an old-world courtesy that was an odd contrast to his former brusqueness. She glanced at the boy in the chair.

"I'm in charge of Ronald."

"Never mind. Young man, it won't hurt you to stay by yourself for ten minutes. Why doesn't your friend the painter come and look after you?"

"I'm not a lord or a lady, or even a rich art con-noisseur," returned Ronald, who, when good-tempered, was not without some sense of humour.

"You've about sized it," said Doctor Grier, "but the grandees are already beginning to melt away. What will you have in the way of supper, boy? I'll sample the grub and liquor for you and send you
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along whatever I think is most wholesome. That'll be the best way."

"Oh, Doctor Grier, how kind of you!"

It was Mrs Jacobs's voice. "Ron, dear, I've been trying to get at you. How have you been enjoying yourself?" She did not wait for an answer, her face looked a little troubled as her eyes sought those of the doctor. "You have not seen my husband, have you, Doctor Grier? He was late. He said he would follow us."

"No, I haven't seen him. I'm just going to take Miss Pengelley to have some supper. May I come back for you? Will you do me that honour?"

"I should be very pleased," began Helga, vaguely, but just at that moment Mr Koenigsen appeared. He had evidently followed her.

"How are you, Ron? Lend me your mother for ten minutes." He swept off Mrs Jacobs, taking no notice of Doctor Grier and Miss Pengelley, towards a miniature palm grove at a corner of the Gallery, which was in reality a photographic studio utilised temporarily as a conservatory.

Mrs Jacobs appeared to have scarcely heard the last words that Doctor Grier addressed to her. She had taken the artist's arm without protest, and the two were already disappearing in the crowd. Ronald looked annoyed.

Doctor Grier watched the retreating figures, a curious expression on his face. He might have been a Roman emperor unexpectedly affronted, thought Miss Pengelley. He caught her eye and gave a queer laugh.

"All right! We'll join the beasts feeding, Miss Pengelley. Just you wait in patience, young man. Your turn's coming, and I can tell you that you've got the best of it in one respect. You have a seat, and it can't be taken from you. I doubt if we shall be as lucky. Allow me, Miss Pengelley." Doctor Grier was magnificent when he wore his best.
manners. He seemed in no particular hurry, however, but first made a round of the room, passing by the conservatory, and calling Susan's attention to the arrangement of it in cunning corners, each small nook with its couches and chairs being screened from the other by an abutting stand of flowers, the whole dimly lighted by one thickly-shaded electric globe. In the furthest recess Miss Pengelley fancied that she saw the gleam of Mrs Jacobs's white brocaded dress and fair hair, but was not certain. Doctor Grier led her along.

"I'm very pleased with you," he said abruptly. "I see that you're doing what I told you."

"I have endeavoured to follow your advice," answered Miss Pengelley, with mock meekness.

"You'll find I didn't give it without having weighed my words. I suppose that you stood up to Ronald," he went on. "Otherwise that young man wouldn't regard you so amiably as he apparently does. I congratulate you upon your victory."

"He didn't want much standing up to," replied Susan. "After all, Ronald's not such a bad boy."

"He's an utterly spoilt one," said the doctor. There was a short silence as the pair perambulated the Gallery. Then he said abruptly,—

"Has there been anything wrong with Ahasuerus-Jacobs?"

Susan was puzzled for a minute or two.

"The firm, do you mean, or the man?"

"No, I mean the man."

"Oh! Mr Jacobs! I don't know. Mrs Jacobs was a little uneasy about him, but there didn't seem much the matter."

"There's a great deal the matter. Wait a minute—" They had reached the supper-tables and he was making a way to find her standing-room. "What will you have? Quails in aspic—lobster salad? Turkey? And champagne, or hock cup?"

"Quails in aspic and hock cup, please."
“That’s right. I like a woman to answer promptly, and to know her own mind, even if it’s only about food.”

He attended solicitously to her various wants; then, when she was fairly started, he foraged for a substantial plate of turkey and tongue, which he held in one hand while he poured out some hock cup with the other. Suddenly perceiving Hornblow among the waiters, he beckoned to the man across the table.

“Mr Ronald’s by himself and wants his supper. You take this along, and if you can get hold of a sweet that’s light and digestible — no pastry kick-shaws — and no lobster salad, mind — so much the better. A good supper may stave off bad consequences. You understand?”

“Yes, sir,” returned Hornblow, and went on his mission.

Susan greatly enjoyed her small repast, and decided that Doctor Grier when not, so to speak, on the professional rampage was a very pleasant companion. He was in no haste to get back to Ronald now that Koenigsen had appropriated Mrs Jacobs, but pointed out to Susan various celebrities, and then took her on a tour of inspection among the pictures. They stopped before a painting by Koenigsen of a long, lone promontory stretching out into the sea, cleft, as it seemed, in the middle, so that a great bare cliff — the home of nesting birds — reared itself above a shelving landslip, from which the earth débris had been washed away, leaving only granite ribs and strange mounds of rock that, at the outlying point, took shape of strange primeval monsters. In the curve of the cape lay a stretch of sand, and over this the waves crept, licking it lovingly, and dashing themselves against the lower cliff. Poised above the little beach one white gull appeared to be waiting for the advance of a foam-crested billow, in order that it might swoop down and lose itself in the mysterious green hollow of the embracing wave.
The Other Mrs Jacobs

"Oh! that reminds me of Mrs Jacobs," exclaimed Miss Pengelley.

Doctor Grier shook his great shoulders as if roused from a dream.

"What! The lonely white bird crying to the sea, as it scents storm, shipwreck and disaster! You have a poetic imagination, Miss Pengelley."

"I did not mean that at all," returned Susan, "but if you like to think so, I'm not sure that the bird does not remind me of Mrs Jacobs."

Glancing along, she had caught sight of "Spiridia," her gleaming white brocade dress floating behind her, and with its breast of soft-hued embroidery making her look not unlike a bird, as she moved swiftly along the room towards where Ronald was stationed. She had evidently been intercepted in her course by some people who had detained her in conversation, but she seemed to have come from the conservatory, and Miss Pengelley wondered what had become of Koenigsen. For Mrs Jacobs was alone, and moreover, now that her conventional smile claimed by the little group detaining her had faded away from her face, Susan fancied that she showed signs of discomposure.

Doctor Grier also was watching the stately figure which had its head erect, the face tilted a little, with an expression upon it faintly tinged with alarm, yet resolute.

"The wild bird driven back to her nest," he said.

Miss Pengelley turned to him.

"What did you mean," she asked, moved to the question by something in his tone, "when you said that there was a great deal the matter?"

"That—no more nor less. But it's best that she should not apprehend trouble. Only if there should come a time when something unexpected happens, you'll remember that I've told you this, Miss Pengelley, so that you may feel perfect confidence in sending for me as speedily as possible."
"Yes," replied Susan, wondering, yet strangely impressed. She had the feeling that, no matter what disaster might bode, she could rely on this man's support.

Just then she perceived Kœnigsen. He, too, was coming from the direction of the conservatory, but in company of a woman who seemed the direct opposite of Mrs Jacobs. Miss Pengelley attracted Doctor Grier's attention to the two.

"You have been pointing out all sorts of people to me. Tell me who is that extremely pretty lady in the wonderful crimson dress with the diamond lizards and things in front, and the snake round her neck. She must have a fancy for uncanny reptiles. I mean the lady walking across with Mr Kœnigsen."

"That's—Mrs Grier," answered the doctor. "Yes, she has a fancy for reptiles." His glance at Kœnigsen seemed to Miss Pengelley's mind to point the remark. She laughed, feeling that she had made an inadvertant speech.

"Well, I don't think there's much of the reptile about you, Doctor Grier, and I conclude that Mrs Grier likes you!"

"It is to be assumed that she does," said Doctor Grier in his most measured manner. "But you are not quite right, Miss Pengelley. I have a good deal in common with certain snakes. There's a brown one, for instance, called in some places the piora, which when molested becomes so fierce that it will pursue its enemy for miles. I can be fierce in certain conditions."

"Perhaps. But not treacherous, I am certain."

"Morality is also a question of conditions. It's allowable to fight a foe with his own weapon."

The red lady with the dark hair, in which reposed a drowsy poppy sprinkled with diamond dewdrops, glided past a little in advance of them. At the sound of Doctor Grier's voice she turned a mocking face towards him over her shoulder. Kœnigsen did
not notice either the doctor or Miss Pengelley. He looked cross and slightly agitated. The two were making straight for Mrs Jacobs, now standing by her son's chair.

At that moment, standing at the entrance and gazing round, no doubt in search of his wife, Miss Pengelley perceived Mr Jacobs. He was not able to advance for a minute or so, owing to the pressure of a number of people suddenly emerging from the supper-room on their way to the staircase.
CHAPTER XII

THE EAVESDROPPER

MRS GRIER'S highly-decorated personality was, upon the night of Kœnigsen's party, a battle-ground of conflicting emotions not of the most elevated order. She was an ill-regulated little lady, in spite of her natural shrewdness and acquisitive tendencies. She certainly liked money, but she liked Kœnigsen even better. He was perhaps the only person in the world who had the power to sway what might be called Clarice Grier's heart. Her further weakness was a revengeful and occasionally miscalculating temper. That impulsive temper had all her life weighed down the scale against the more politic and self-interested part of her. Just now it was upsetting the balance altogether.

She was intensely jealous of Helga, and proportionately furious with her. She was jealous of her for three reasons—because she was Judah Jacobs's wife—this was the first, but least powerful reason—and because she was enjoying the money which Clarice knew would have been her own had she not deserted her first husband. Secondly, she was jealous because Andrew Grier preferred Helga to herself. She was heartily tired of Grier, and disliked him now, but he had attracted her immensely at one time, and she did not care to see, as she did plainly, that he had not only become entirely indifferent to her, but was, moreover, she shrewdly guessed, deeply attached to another woman, and that
The Other Mrs Jacobs

woman the one who stood in the place that might have been her own. But the strongest reason of all was that Koenigsen, for whom she had an unreasoning infatuation, and whom she considered her own property, was also, she suspected, in love with Helga Jacobs. She felt that Helga was supplanting her all round, and the exact truth of how matters stood she was determined to ascertain for herself, as far as possible, that evening.

Therefore she watched every movement of Helga's and Koenigsen's; and when, as the evening went on, and the strain of his duties as host was somewhat relieved, he led Helga into the conservatory with the evident intention of securing a tête-à-tête, Clarice seized her opportunity and slipped in after them, sheltering herself behind a stand of plants which partitioned the nook in which they sat from that where she was ensconced, within earshot of their conversation.

The beginning of it was lost to her. They seemed to be discussing some moot point. Koenigsen was gently upbraiding Mrs Jacobs for neglect she had shown him.

"If it had been anyone else in the world," Clarice heard him say, "do you suppose I should have cared? But you—you who are the one woman in the world to me. You who have inspired all that is best in my work—all that is highest in myself. And on this evening above all others! Helga—you'll not be angry with me for calling you Helga? I can't help going back in memory to the time when we were playmates on the beach together in our own beloved island."

Mrs Jacobs's voice, calm, faintly rebuking, interrupted him.

"Do you really care so very much for St Helga, Karl? For itself, I mean, not for what it has meant to you in your career."

"The one means the other," he answered. "Yes, I
The Eavesdropper

do care for St Helga, not because it is my birthplace—but because it is yours. I love St Helga—and Helga"—he paused dramatically—"Helga, I love you. Now you can understand how I felt the slight to my devotion in your rejection of my poor roses."

Mrs Jacobs laughed again, now rather nervously. "Really, Karl, the last day or two you have quite embarrassed me by your romantic way of being devoted. Luckily I’m not vain, or you might make me forget that I’m thirty-five and the mother of a boy of sixteen. Just think how Lion and Ron would laugh if they heard you talking like that to me. My good friend, it’s a mistake."

"No, it is not a mistake. It’s serious truth, and some day you will realise it."

Helga’s manner became more distant. "I don’t understand you this evening. And now I think I should like to go back and see if Lion has come."

"Oh! not yet. Give me just a little longer. Have I offended you? And I would be anything—I would do anything rather than lose your friendship. Only let me come to you as before, and time shall prove the strength and loyalty of my affection."

"That’s right." Helga’s tone became warmer. She seemed relieved. "You know that ever since we have found ourselves together in London, Karl, I have treated you almost as a brother, in memory of the old St Helgan days. Of course you shall come to us whenever you like. Ron would be miserable if you stayed away. But you mustn’t talk nonsense, my friend."

"I know that I should not have spoken. But I was mad at the sight of you carrying another man’s flowers, and my jealousy got the better of me."

"My dear Karl, your jealousy is too absurd! If you hadn’t been so dreadfully tragic I would have told you that the giver of this bouquet was Ron."
The Other Mrs Jacobs

Wasn't it sweet of the boy to find out from Julie what I was going to wear, and then to contrive the St Helgan colours in his flowers?"

"Ron! I didn't know he ever got you flowers."

"It's the first time, and that's what makes it so dear."

"I didn't think of the St Helgan colours," said the painter, regretfully. "I thought only of what would suit you—of the flowers which were sweetest and most like you, and so I chose La France roses."

"They're perfectly lovely, and I've got them in water at home. Now, will you take me back, please. I'm wondering what can have become of my husband. And besides, I've just remembered that I promised to go in to supper with Doctor Grier."

She got up, and as she did so dropped her fan. While he looked for it she moved, struck by an arrangement of flowers in front of her.

"Why, I believe those are white chrysanthemums trained over a shape!" she explained. "I have been thinking all the time that there was a marble statue hidden among the palms."

"A Japanese man did it," he said, and at that moment saw the fan, which had fallen into a pot of flowers at the end of the stand behind which Clarice was sitting. Picking it up, he caught a glimpse of red drapery among the plants, and, rising abruptly, confronted Mrs Grier, who had got up and was advancing towards him.

Her eyes flashed with fury, and the snake's head dropping forward on her chest was lifted by her spasmodic breathing. She looked a beautiful virago, and startled Mrs Jacobs, who was returning from her examination of the distorted chrysanthemum plant. Helga's hand was outstretched for her fan, when she saw from the expression of both faces that something was wrong. She could not have doubted it when Clarice, who had absolutely lost control over herself, spoke to Koenigsen in meaning tones,—
The Eavesdropper

"I have been waiting for you to keep your engagement with me, but you seem already too well occupied."

Koenigsen shrank and paled. That also was evident to Helga. She moved swiftly by, not taking her fan, and merely saying, "Please, don't mind me, I can find my own way back," went out of the conservatory.

Clarice, left alone with her companion, burst into a soft, vindictive laugh, not unlike, he thought, the hissing of an angry snake.

"You serpent!" he exclaimed.

She laughed on.

"So that is the other Mrs Jacobs!"

"The other Mrs Jacobs! What do you mean?"

She pulled herself up, but the curb was not effectual.

"Nothing. She is Mrs Jacobs, isn't she? Can't there be two Mrs Jacobs in the world? Helga Jacobs! She's the woman you're trying to throw me over for? She is the woman you love better than any other woman in the world. Dieu! The perfidy of men! But it was a bit forced, my Karl! I've heard you put more passion than that into 'I love you!'" She poked her chin forward a little as if jeering at him. "'I love you, Clarice!' 'I love you, Helga!' All the same, is it? No, it is not all the same. You'll find more fire here to warm you than in that iceberg." She struck her bosom lightly with her gloved hand, and her face, changing, suddenly appealed to him in all its old seductiveness. He wavered, and her eyes lured him.

"You love me—you love me!" she cried with almost infantile delight. "And you shall marry me, my Viking. I shall advertise you better than all your St Helgas. I've a scheme for it." She put her hand upon his arm. He shook it off. Her manner of proprietorship goaded him to brutality.

"No, I don't love you. You'd better know the
The Other Mrs Jacobs

truth. You're all very well for — what you are! But to marry you! To go through the divorce court for you! No! It's Helga Jacobs that I mean to marry—by-and-by, when her husband is dead."

"Oh! You know he's going to die — do you? So do I. He'll be dead before the year's out. Isn't that what you're calculating upon?"

She threw her ball at random. He caught it, reckless, like many a crafty man in a moment of excitement.

"Come! I see your husband isn't particular in what they call professional honour. He's told you what he knows himself. The man has an aneurism of the heart and may die any day. It's the money I'm going for, Clarice, and I mean to have it, so don't you stand in my light or it'll be the worse for you. I'll make it worth your while to play into my hands. Let us cry 'quits' and be friends."

"Thanks. Have you forgotten," said she, with a stiffening back of her neck and a malign gleam in her eyes, "that my husband is in love with Mrs Jacobs too?"

"Pshaw! I'm not afraid of him. He's got to get rid of you, my dear, and that won't be so easy. I shall be first in the field. Take care!" as a suburban-looking man and two young ladies in limp draperies sauntered in. "We haven't got the place to ourselves. Come and have some supper."

"No supper, thank you. What you've got to do first is to take me up and introduce me to Mrs Jacobs — the other Mrs Jacobs, you know."

"I don't understand in the least what you're driving at."

"Never mind. You may some day. Some day, Karl Koenigsen, you'll have reason to regret that you ever met Mrs Jacobs — not the other Mrs Jacobs."

"You're getting mixed," he laughed, and she, taking his arm, laughed too.

"Perhaps I am. Perhaps things are a little mixed.
The Eavesdropper

Only remember what I say. Now, here's your humble slave, Karl Kœnigsen." She made him a mock salute. "There's nothing I enjoy so much as a game of wits, especially when there's a good stake in question. Oh, yes, I'll play into your hands if you make it worth my while. And the first thing I shall do to show how humble I am will be to apologise to Mrs Jacobs for having taken you from her so rudely. Of course I did not know that she was in your charge. Do you see? Now, present me nicely, as an old friend of yours and the wife of her esteemed medical attendant."

He hesitated.

"I don't see what your object is in wanting to know Mrs Jacobs."

"Don't you? Heavens! How dense men are. A woman would understand in a moment. Can't you give me credit for a little feminine desire to judge for myself as to the charms that have captivated both my lover and my husband. In fact, I might put the last word in the plural," and she gave again her derisive laugh, which made Kœnigsen somewhat uneasy, for it had a meaning behind it that he could not fathom. He began to feel that he had been a fool to show his hand. But he knew Clarice's weak point—greed of money—and he decided that he would pay her off handsomely as soon as possible.

Mrs Jacobs, bending over her boy as she talked to him, was not aware of the approach of Kœnigsen and Mrs Grier till they were close upon her. Miss Pengelley, loitering along the opposite line of pictures with Doctor Grier, who, strangely enough, in spite of his half engagement to take Mrs Jacobs in to supper, did not seem inclined to hasten the moment, was watching the wearer of the red dress, as with sinuous gait she proceeded up the room on Kœnigsen's arm. Susan marvelled within herself at the sensuous attraction—she was sure it could be no other—that had drawn this grey, steel-like man to such a creature as
that. Miss Pengelley’s intuitive faculty enabled her to gauge fairly correctly the chief features in Mrs Grier’s temperament and character. She could understand that there might exist an affinity between the painter and his present companion, but that Doctor Grier could have been enchained by such a type seemed incredible to Susan, till she remembered how, in their progress down the Gallery, he had shown a frank appreciation of female beauty. It was Mrs Grier’s beauty, no doubt, that had cast its spell upon him. She was still—even in her maturity—a most fascinating woman. What, then, must she have been in youth?

Miss Pengelley, glancing round, saw that Mr Jacobs, released from the block at the entrance, was now making his way towards his wife. Susan was suddenly struck by the expression of his face as he came up quickly through the now thinning throng. It was eager and indignant, but through the anxiety and indignation she seemed to discern a sign of fear. What did it mean? She saw that Mr Jacobs’s eyes were also upon the woman in red, who, with her small dark head and brilliant malign face protruding slightly, was nearing “Spiridia.” Mr Jacobs seemed to be pressing forward in order to frustrate their meeting. And now Susan heard a muffled throat sound—an inarticulate oath—from her own cavalier. The doctor was craning his lean neck over the fashionably-dressed heads of two ladies in front of him which somewhat impeded his view of the woman in red.

He was obviously aware of the converging forces, for he had noticed Mr Jacobs’s entrance, and Susan felt certain that he likewise would have frustrated the introduction between the two women had it been possible for him to do so.

But it was not possible. And Miss Pengelley, watching him with deep interest, saw the effort he made at self-restraint, as with iron face and arms
folded he awaited the result. Miss Pengelley turned her eyes upon Mrs Jacobs, who looked up over Ronald's chair at a word from the boy calling her attention to Koenigsen. A slightly-puzzled and slightly-relieved expression came over her face as Koenigsen made the presentation, and Mrs Grier, holding out her hand, said a sentence or two, inaudible to Susan, but giving an impression of apologetic but keenly-pointed adulation. Mrs Jacobs at first bowed stiffly, then with the rearing of her fair head and the straight gaze of her blue eyes, which was a peculiarity of her manner when she felt at a loss, she accepted the situation and said a few formal words in reply. Before she could touch Mrs Grier's fingers, however, a heavy hand fell on her own shoulder, which made her start backward. She looked round and saw her husband's face, dark and angry, strangely agitated, his look fixed not upon herself but on the lady who stood by Koenigsen.

"Why—Lion!" she faltered.

Mr Jacobs drew her sharply to his side. He made a visible effort to recover his composure.

"Helga! I beg your pardon for disturbing you so abruptly, but, my dear, I want you. I wish to take you home at once."

"But, Lion! Mr Koenigsen has just introduced—"

Jacobs broke in, not allowing her to pronounce the name.

"Mr Koenigsen will excuse you. I regret that the introduction cannot be made. I am obliged to take you away. Come."

She obeyed instantly, placing her hand upon her husband's coat sleeve with perfect confidence, though she was evidently surprised. So swiftly did he bear her away that she had not time for the slightest recognition of either Koenigsen or Clarice. One of her husband's arms was extended before her, as if to make a way; there was something fiercely protective in the attitude. With the other he held hers closely.
to him. Kœnigsen had dropped back in astonishment a pace or two. Clarice stood alone. Her face was distorted with passion; the eyes blazed, and the little protruding head more than ever suggested an enraged snake. Mr Jacobs's glance had swept her furiously for a second as he turned away with Helga.

The result was marked. Several people noticed it. Kœnigsen looked amazed and even a little abashed. Ronald was dumbfounded. Clarice stood helpless, quivering from head to foot as though she had been struck. For once her rage was too deep to find expression. Doctor Grier took in every detail of the scene. If he did not actually hear the words that passed, he understood perfectly what had been said, and his face grew grimmer than its wont. With a formal bow to Miss Pengelley, whom he left standing where she was, he marched forward and took his place beside Mrs Grier. He offered her his arm with punctilious politeness.

"I believe, Clarice, that your carriage has been waiting for some time," he said. "Good-night, Mr Kœnigsen. My wife and I have to thank you for an interesting evening."
CHAPTER XIII

A LONG FAREWELL

Mr Jacobs led his wife downstairs, got her cloak for her, and put her into the brougham which, fortunately, was first on the rank, almost without a word. He took a seat beside her, and, except for a question as to the opening of the window, made no remark. She sat cold, pained, a wild thought darting through her mind that he might possibly have been an unseen auditor of Koenigsen's declaration, and had taken seriously what Helga herself interpreted as merely an aberration of the artistic temperament—that excuse for so many vagaries. If this were so, she felt scornful of her husband's mood, supposing the cause of it to be so explainable. Surely he might know her better than to imagine her capable of being moved by Koenigsen's raptures. That was not the kind of man, she thought bitterly, who could stir her soul. There was only one man living who could. Alas! her husband had failed to do so.

And now a little live thing, deep in Helga's breast, seemed to uncoil and drain her heart's blood—a live thing the existence of which she had first owned to herself two nights back, the night following her interview with Doctor Grier, when her pain and her shame had kept her awake, weeping, through the long hours. She had crushed down the thing—killed it, she believed—but it had awakened again at sight of the woman in red, who was Doctor Grier's wife. He did not love the woman, Helga knew, but she was his
wife; and for herself, the man beside her was her husband of seventeen years, and the father of her almost grown-up son. Truly that revelation of her own passion which had come to Helga was torture and humiliation unutterable. For she had always been a simple-hearted, loyal woman, this daughter of St Helga. With the poetry of her northern ancestry, she had inherited much of the brave simplicity of seaford men and women. It was not her way to whine over a lot that she herself had made, nor to be otherwise than sincere and dutiful in the natural relations of life. To be false to those obligations—to requite the kindness of so many years by unfaithfulness even in thought—seemed to Helga Jacobs despicable. She had suffered silently, but intensely, over the disillusionment of her girlish dreams, the sacrifice of romantic hopes, the renunciation of an ideal love, which in youth she had claimed as her right from fate. It seemed, indeed, a cruel wrong that this love should come to her now, when she was, as she told herself, almost an old woman, in a guise she could never have pictured to herself, and under such conditions that the slightest indulgence of it would be, according to her code of honour, a heinous sin.

Till now, Helga's interests—with the exception of that part of them which she gave to her work—and her heart throes also, had been confined within the circle of her own home—these last born of sorrow on account of her son's infirmity, and yearning regret that she was unable to give the best of herself to her husband who adored her, and whom she respected but could not love. From the beginning of her married life she had stifled the natural cravings for a love to which she could respond, at bitter cost to herself. Later on, she gave them vent in "Spiridia's" dreamy romances, which were a delight to the few but caviare to the general. Upon Ronald she had lavished the pent-up store of passion, which took shape in maternal devotion. To her husband she
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invariably gave appreciative, even tender, consideration. So her married life had flowed on through the years, and no opportunity for budding had been given to those latent capacities which, in different circumstances, might have blossomed to an almost tropical luxuriance. She had got to the stage of content or apathy—she hardly knew which—as to the lack in her destiny of woman’s keener emotions. No man had ever stirred her to more than kindly friendship till eight months ago when Doctor Grier had been called in to an acute development of Ronald’s malady, which had been greatly relieved by his skilful treatment. And during those eight months a new desire, sweet, troublous, and latterly full of pain, had been born in Helga Jacobs’s breast. The anguish of it now made her shudder.

"Are you cold, Helga?" Mr Jacobs asked in a heavy, spiritless tone. "Shall I put up this window?"

"No, thank you."

They had reached the Marble Arch, and there was a momentary stoppage caused by traffic coming from the Edgware Road. Helga leaned forward and looked out towards the shadowy Park on one side and the converging vista of lights ahead. A faint mist blurred outlines, heightening the mystery and giving a sense of unreality to the roar and movement of the night City. That very feeling of mystery quickened Helga’s pulses, the flashing lights excited her. She had a sudden longing to break through the limitations of her life, to know herself better, to know the man beside her as she had never quite known him, and, firstly, to escape from the vague distress of uncertainty which intensified with every moment of silence. She turned to her husband. "Will you explain why you took me away in that sudden manner, just as Mr Koenigsen was introducing Doctor Grier's wife to me? It was a strange thing to do. She might almost have thought it an insult."
The Other Mrs Jacobs

Mr Jacobs did not at first answer. It was evident that he scarcely heard her.

"Why did you bring me home?" she repeated gently.

He merely answered in a dull tone, "It doesn't matter."

"But it does matter. The one thing I have always felt quite unnecessary is being rude to people."

A huge market waggon rattled past at the moment, making a great noise, and coming so close that it almost grazed the wheel of the brougham. Mrs Jacobs started. She was in a nervous, highly-strung condition to-night. Mr Jacobs put his head out of the window, and, contrary to his wont, swore at the coachman.

"Damn you! keep more to your left," he cried.

"Copley is never careless. It wasn't his fault, Lion," exclaimed Mrs Jacobs.

"Yes, it was his fault. He could have steered clear. He's always getting within an ace of an accident."

Mr Jacobs spoke in unreasoning irritation. He was in reality proud of the coachman, who had come from a great house, and was, his master often said, one of the best drivers in London. It was very unlike Mr Jacobs to complain of the man in this way, and Helga saw that he must be very much upset about something, or he would not have done so. She refrained, therefore, from further inquiries, and there was silence again. Presently they turned up Westbourne Terrace and into Branxton Gardens. The footman opened the door and Jacobs helped his wife to alight.

"The carriage had better go back at once," she said, "for Miss Pengelley and Ronald. Hornblow is there, and you need not go with it," she added to the footman.

The man touched his hat, and gave the order. The brougham drove off while Mr Jacobs opened the hall.
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door with his latchkey and let his wife in. She followed him into the hall and to the smoking-room, pausing to say to the footman,—

"When the carriage comes back let Hornblow know that Mr Ronald should go at once to bed. I shall not come up to him this evening."

Mr Jacobs closed the door. There was a fire burning on the hearth, and in front of it a small table with decanters and glasses, syphons, cigars and biscuits. Mr Jacobs at once poured out some brandy, putting in a small quantity of soda water, and drank it straight off.

His wife looked at him in wonder, remarking the pallor of his face, which contrasted with his heavy dark moustache.

"What time did you get home, Lion?"

"I don't know. About half-past ten." He seated himself in a big leather-covered chair.

"You had dined, of course?"

"I had a chop—yes." And he added, "It was a heavy day for me in the City. There was an unexpected turn of work at Birmingham."

"Oh! I suppose you waited for telegrams?"

"Yes. It's a big amalgamation affair of Davis's—our old friend, you know. I've got to see him early to-morrow."

"How are you going to manage that?"

"I shall take the 2 a.m. train from Euston."

"What! To-night?"

"This morning." He had his watch out. "It's half-past twelve."

"Oh! You should have told the carriage to wait." She rang the bell.

Jacobs gave the order to the footman, adding, "I want my Gladstone bag packed with a change, and my day clothes. I shall go as I am."

The servant went out.

"Do you mean to stay over to-morrow, Lion?"

"I must. I've got to talk things over with Davis
to work out figures. I've misled him a bit. He thinks I'm going into this concern, but I've changed my mind, and I shall stay over Sunday with him and explain my reasons."

"Then you won't be back till Monday?"

"I shall get to the office on Monday forenoon. You won't see me till the evening."

He became moodily silent again. She warmed herself for a few minutes at the fire; then she said,—

"Will you give me a glass of port wine, Lion, and a biscuit?"

He roused himself.

"I beg your pardon, Helga. I hadn't thought of it."

She daintily sipped the wine and nibbled a biscuit.

"I'm a little hungry, Lion. I have had nothing to eat since dinner. I was to have gone in to supper with Doctor Grier, but you came and carried me off without rhyme or reason, making me appear extremely ill-mannered. Will you tell me why you did so? It almost seemed as if you hadn't wanted me to know Mrs Grier."

"To know whom?" he cried. "Who did you say?"

"Mrs Grier. Doctor Grier's wife."

Helga had sufficiently aroused her husband now. He stared at her aghast.

"So that's who she is! Grier's wife! Are you sure of that, Helga?"

"Quite sure. Why do you ask? But I'd better tell you, Lion—for I can see you must have heard something about Mrs Grier, though I don't understand why you should question her marriage—that I know her story."

"You know her story? That I'm sure you don't," he said abruptly.

"Indeed I do. Doctor Grier himself told me.
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Why do you look so horrified? Men are always hard on poor women who make the one mistake of loving too much."

"How on earth did Doctor Grier come to speak to you about—his wife?"

Helga looked into her husband's face straightly.

"I had heard that he was married, and I suggested to him that I should like to make Mrs Grier's acquaintance. He has been so kind—it seemed only friendly."

"You won't do it," exclaimed Jacobs, sharply. "Do you hear, Helga? I forbid you to know that woman."

"Very well, Lion; I have no desire to do so, especially as Doctor Grier himself does not wish it. But I can't think why you should judge her so harshly."

"What makes you think I judge her harshly—eh?"

"Because he himself told me the story. It was in confidence, but that ought not to matter between you and me. I am sure you would understand and respect his motives."

"So he did not want you to know her? And what was his version of the affair?"

"I understood from him that she had been unhappily married. I do not think her husband could have been at all a nice man to leave her in such a position—ill, alone and unprotected."

"Ah! Precisely. The husband no doubt was not a nice man."

"Then Doctor Grier told me that peculiar circumstances came about—I did not glean them clearly—and it is likely that he was to blame. But they loved each other, and they were young. Need we condemn them, Lion? He took her away, it is true, but it was from conditions in which she must always have been miserable. And, directly her husband died, he married her."
Jacobs burst into a cynical laugh.

"So that was the story he told you! And you defend him?"

"I would defend him, if it were necessary, through much worse," she replied, her eyes lightening with the gleam that her husband knew betokened strong feeling. He was watching her closely—almost hungrily.

"Then, my wife, you will not like obeying another command I am going to put upon you. I have never before laid a command on you, Helga," he added wistfully.

"No, but I am ready to obey. What is this one?"

"That you never again receive that man Grier in this house."

She turned pale, and the light in her eyes deepened. The tall figure swayed slightly. She was forced to put her hand to the mantelpiece to steady herself.

"I can't do that."

"Why not? What is he to you? There are plenty of other doctors in London."

"None like him. I owe him Ronald's life. And, besides, he is my friend. You must give me a better reason than you have given me, Lion, before I can do this thing."

"You refuse?"

"If you enforce your authority I must obey you. You are my husband, and I have sworn to do so, but it would be against my will and my judgment. I trust that you will not enforce your authority."

"I have a very good reason, Helga—a very strong reason for cutting off all connection between ourselves and that man and woman."

"Then tell it me before I promise."

"I cannot."

"Your reason must have to do with the woman, for till you saw her this evening you had no objection to raise against Doctor Grier. Personally, I think you are Puritanical, but I have said that I don't care to
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know her and there's an end of the matter in her case. It does not affect Doctor Grier in so far as he is professionally concerned."

The door bell tinkled as she finished speaking, and there came the sound of the footman hurrying across the hall, of Ronald's and Miss Pengelley's voices, and of the message about the carriage given to the coachman.

Mrs Jacobs, glad of the respite, moved.

"I will speak to Ronald," she said, and went into the hall.

"You are here soon."

"Hullo, mother! We were in a cab and met the carriage—luck, wasn't it, that Copley saw us and called out? What's all the fuss about?" cried the boy.

"Nothing, dear. Your father has to catch a train presently. He is going to Birmingham."

"Oh, that's it, is it? But why make such a scene? It regularly gave Karl the hump. Old Grier stalked up like a turkey cock in the bloomingest rage you ever saw and carried his pretty wife off under his arm. It was rough on her."

"Hush, Ronald; it was all a mistake. Now go to bed. I just came out to say good-night." She kissed him, more hurriedly than usual. "Good-night, Miss Pengelley."

The sense of tragedy in the air was still heavy on Susan. She seemed to see it written in Mrs Jacobs's white face and large eyes.

"Can't I take anything up for you?" she asked. "Shall I send Julie down?"

"No, no; I'll be up presently, when Mr Jacobs has gone. Hornblow, you'll see that your master's bag is put into the carriage, and fill his flask with brandy. And—the fur-lined coat, Hornblow."

She went back, closing the door after her. Mr Jacobs was sitting forward in his armchair, his elbows on his knees, his face supported on his hands. He
The Other Mrs Jacobs

had been touched by his wife's solicitude, and he looked up as she came back.

"That's good of you, Helga—to think of those things."

"What else should I be? You've always been good to me, Lion."

She came close to him, and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Lion!" he repeated, as though the name pleased him. His thoughts seemed to veer oddly. He muttered bits of the biblical text. "The old lion stooped down. . . . And when the old lion is couched who shall rouse him up? But there's strength, in him yet, my Helga, for the sceptre shall not depart from Judah. . . . And your old Lion has power to protect you, if you will let him. No one shall hurt you as long as I live, my wife—my one true wife—nor after."

Helga was deeply touched. She knelt beside him, covering his hands, which were cold, with her own. Her voice rang with genuine anxiety.

"You're not well, Lion. I know it, though you've been trying to hide it from me. You haven't been yourself for the last few days, and more. Tell me what's the matter. If it's money trouble—things wrong in the business, you know I don't mind that."

He released one hand, and stroked her hair softly—an unwonted caress, for Jacobs was shy of caressing his beautiful wife. He looked at her tenderly, but his eyes were bloodshot, and the worried look in them did not ease her mind.

"There's nothing wrong in the business. Ahasuerus-Jacobs stands firm. There's plenty of money which shall be yours, my Helga—no one else's. It shall be tied up safely to come to you. I'll see to it without delay, so that there shall be no mischance."

"You know that I don't care about that," she repeated. "But I can't feel that you ought to take this journey. Do wait till to-morrow."
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“No, I cannot. It’s important. There’s an early consultation of vendors before the board meeting. You wouldn’t understand—but Davis mustn’t be let in. He relies on me.”

She urged him no more. A constraint fell between them. She did not want to go back to the subject which Ronald’s return had interrupted, and she was afraid of his re-opening it. She slowly rose from her crouching posture beside him and stood again by the mantelpiece, gazing thoughtfully into the fire. Presently she knew that he was looking at her again; his look seemed burning into her. Turning her face, she almost shrank before the imploring expression in his eyes.

“You are very beautiful in that dress,” he said. “And the coronet becomes you. You are like a queen, Helga. I have always felt towards you as a man might to his queen—I feel it still. It’s hard for me to realise that you’ve lived in my house and been my wife for seventeen years.”

“For seventeen years!” she repeated gently.

“You have never grown tired of doing your duty by me, Helga? I know that it has only been duty from the first, my dear.”

“Oh, no, no,” she said faintly.

He slowly shook his head.

“I know, my dear—I understand. You have never even allowed yourself the luxury of rebelling against our unequal marriage. Hush! yes, it was unequal. You wouldn’t have married me if I had not worried you into it. And I blame myself now—when it is too late—I blame myself.”

“Oh, don’t, don’t, Lion!” she cried distressfully.

“I have no right to do it. You were a princess—as I say, a queen.”

“A dethroned princess!” she said, trying to laugh, but her voice quavered. She moved impulsively and stood by his chair, her hand hanging down the back of it till it touched his shoulder.
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"And what was I? Not even Ahasuerus-Jacobs then. Merely a junior partner in the firm of an old Jew money-lender—just a Jew myself, common of my kind. I should have remembered what I was—what I had been."

"But that's all past, Lion. I did marry you, gratefully. And you have prospered and have given me comfort, luxury, and oh! not least, an affection that I value most deeply and that I can never repay you for."

He snatched at her hand with a sudden outburst of feeling.

"You have repaid me—repaid me a thousand times, Helga. But I like you to say that. Thank you, my dear. Bon sang ne peut mentir, you know. I've always felt that about you. But I want you to understand that I've not been blind, Helga. I have realised the disparity between us, and the wrong—yes, it's true—the wrong I've done you. Yet I want you to know, too, that all through my life—the rough and tumble and the push of business, you have been the mainspring of every venture. From the first day I knew you till this very night nothing has weighed in comparison with you. At any time, I'd have counted heaven well lost so long as I held you."

He pressed her hand passionately, almost fiercely, and pulled her down so that he might gaze into her face.

"Say that you believe it, Helga."

"I do believe it, Lion—I believe every word of it," she murmured brokenly.

"I have wronged you, I know," he went on. "Now that it is too late, I see what a fool I must have been. But as God is above me, I had no thought of harming you—remember that. I meant only to shield and protect you against the world—to make your life happier if I could."

"And you have done it. Dear Lion, don't—don't think I have not been happy with you. I should
have been lonely and miserable indeed at Helsing­
kraad if you had not taken pity upon me. No words
of mine can prove how much I feel about your
tenderness, your devotion. Indeed, my dear, you
exaggerate that disparity, as you call it. There
was not any real disparity between us. But never
mind. Try not to think of it. We have been
husband and wife for seventeen years. Can we not
forget—everything else?"

She spoke with an evident effort, of which he was
painfully conscious. Yet her heart yearned to com­
fort him. Her arm stole round his neck. Just then
there came a discreet rattling of the door handle, and
Hornblow entered.

"If you please, sir, Copley says he ought to allow
a good half-hour for getting to Euston. The
Marylebone Road is up, sir."

Mr Jacobs rose, looking at his watch. It was half­
past one.

"I must go."

Helga still stood behind her husband's chair. She
seemed loth to leave him.

"You have everything ready, Hornblow?"

"Yes, ma'am. Here is your coat, sir. I've filled
the cigar-case."

Mr Jacobs was helped into the heavy furred
garment. Then Hornblow bustled forth. And
then her husband turned to Helga. He took her
into his arms and kissed her very gently, very
tenderly, holding her to his heart as though he could
not bear to let her go.

"You have been the best wife woman ever was to
man. May God bless you for it. Remember, Helga,
whatever happens, how much you were to me."

His tone had in it all the sadness of a long
farewell.

"But you are coming back on Monday, Lion?" she asked, surprised at his manner, and still disturbed
about him.
"On Monday—yes. And now good-night—good­­bye, until I see you again."
"Till Monday," she repeated. "Monday evening, I suppose. You will be home to dinner?"
He nodded, and she followed him into the hall, where the door stood open.
"Remember me to Mr Davis," she called out, as she watched him get into the brougham and drive off. Then, putting her hand to her head, and feeling a little dazed and very weary, she went slowly up­stairs, where the French maid, who had been craning over the balusters to see what was going on, retired adroitly to the bedroom to receive her mistress.
CHAPTER XIV

QUITS!

EARLY on the following afternoon, Mrs Jacobs was at home entertaining a casual visitor. This happened to be a poetess well known in literary circles, who had penetrated that "luminous obscurity"—as a clever journalist phrased it—which surrounded the pseudonym of "Spiridia," and who now proclaimed herself as ardently devoted to the authoress of The Chameleon Maid. It was at this point of the poetess's monologue that Hornblow threw open the drawing-room door, and announced "Mrs Grier."

The poetess declared later among her fellow-admirers of The Chameleon Maid at a certain club dedicated to the cult of genius, which had achieved a literary—in contradistinction to a commercial—success as the Trade puts it, that "Spiridia" paled, and, like the much-hymned sensitive plant, shrank at slightest contact with this specimen of fashionable Philistinism.

Mrs Grier might certainly have been supposed by the uninitiated to represent all that was fashionable and Philistine. Nothing of the high-souled stamped her personality. She looked a Bond Street model of the latest Parisian fashion, except that her face was by no means insipid. Indeed, she seemed braced by some daring resolution, and gave out an electric force that was almost irresistible.

She advanced, her skirts rustling with each balanced movement of the hips; her sable overwrap suggest-
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ing opulence, her laces and the violets at her breast exhauling an odour both natural and artificial; her small head reared with the chin slightly protruded—her favourite trick—and a toque, cunning in its simplicity, perched upon her elaborately-dressed hair, while a piece of spotted net, pinned at just the right angle with a diamond and enamel ladybird, veiled the carefully-made-up face—a perfect exemplar of the art which defies nature.

She took one hand out of her muff—a concoction of fur, lace and violets—and extended it to her hostess. Mrs Jacobs, startled out of her ordinary self-possession, stood staring blankly at her guest.

"You don't remember me, perhaps," said Mrs Grier. "Our introduction was cut short last night. I told Karl that I should certainly come to-day, and renew it on my own account. He said that probably Mr Jacobs felt ill. I trust there was nothing serious the matter?"

"Oh, no. My husband had to leave for Birmingham last night on business," said Helga, recovering herself and accepting Mrs Grier's proffered hand.

"Ah! I'm glad that was all. Of course I am accustomed to having my husband called out suddenly at inconvenient moments. You know Andrew, I think, very well, Mrs Jacobs?"

"I am indebted to Doctor Grier for most kind care of my invalid son," said Helga, stiffly.

"Yes. I saw your son last night. How very sad for you."

Mrs Jacobs gave no response beyond the formal indication of a chair.

The lady rattled on,—

"Karl's party was very successful—don't you think?"

"Oh, very."

Mrs Jacobs's polite glance sideways included her first visitor, who joined in the conversation. The poetess had also been at the opening of the St Helgan
Quits!

Gallery, and concurred in Mrs Grier's remark that it was such a pity the royalties had failed Mr Koenigsen—also that the big ball had caused the party to break up so early.

"But nobody ever does stay late at such things," said the poetess, with a superior air.

The talk fluttered round Mr Koenigsen's pictures, and Mrs Grier remarked to her hostess,—

"Do you know one reason why I have been so very anxious to make your acquaintance?"

Helga started, and recovered herself, meeting an indefinable look in the bright eyes of Clarice.

"Not in the least."

"Karl is making a picture out of your Chameleon Maid, as of course he must have told you, and he has asked me to be his model."

"For The Chameleon Maid?" Helga repeated mechanically.

"Yes. May I flatter my vanity with your approval?"

"It would be difficult for me to judge," said Helga, coldly, "unless I knew you better."

"I trust that condition may be fulfilled," answered Mrs Grier.

The poetess now took her leave, and Clarice waited while pleasant nothings were said at the door. When Mrs Jacobs returned, Clarice at once opened the attack.

"I am glad now to take the advantage of finding you alone, for I have something of importance, that you may prefer should be private, to say to you."

Mrs Jacobs straightened herself.

"I hardly see how there could be anything of that sort."

"Perhaps not. But you will presently. You are extremely intimate with Doctor Grier."

Helga looked at her visitor without flinching.

"Of course you are aware," she said, "that Doctor Grier is my own and my husband's medical adviser, in regard to our son's unhappy condition of health.
We are naturally intimate with him—in his professional capacity."

"Ah! I should have supposed that your intimacy with Doctor Grier was much more personal. However, that is not the point. I didn't come here to pose as the jealous wife. I am far from feeling any foolish sentiments of that sort. Don't be afraid. I shall not upbraid you. I merely came to make you aware of your position."

"My position! I do not understand you, Mrs Grier."

"I am going to explain myself. Perhaps you would be surprised to hear that I have been extremely intimate with the man you call your husband?"

"Certainly I should. But really I think that this is a subject which need not be discussed."

Mrs Grier laughed.

"It's got to be discussed between Judah and me before we've done with it. He was silly to insult me as he did last night. He didn't bargain for the consequences, though he might have known that mine isn't the kind of temper which it's safe to rouse. All he cares for is that you should live safely in your fool's paradise. I don't mind telling you that you're all that Andrew cares for either. As for Koenigsen, he cares for nobody but himself. But of the two of us he likes me best, so I've got the pull there. But he wants your money and Spiridia's influence. And that's why he's counting on marrying you when Judah Jacobs has left you, as he will do, a rich widow."

The woman flung out her words. She had passed the point of self-control, and it was characteristic of Clarice that when she had ruthlessly started on a course, she did not stop to consider how far she might be endangering her own interests in pursuing it. She had come to the house to-day a pent tornado of emotions—fury against Jacobs, fury against Grier,
fury against Helga, and, strongest of all, fury against Koenigsen — in which was a blending of wounded pride, baulked love, and yet a reluctant appreciation of his astuteness. Among the four, she really resented least the attitude of Grier. He had, at any rate, she said to herself, behaved like a gentleman in the way in which he had carried her off, and the marked courtesy with which he had wrapped her up and put her into the brougham. But that had been only while people were looking on. His contemptuous silence during the drive home, and his subsequent indifferent avoidance of her, galled inexpressibly. There had been moments in that day when her dull dislike of him culminated into active hatred, and she had felt that liberty to quit his house and his presence would be worth purchasing at any price. Added to these various motive forces, there was that impulsive tendency in the woman which had wrecked her before, to bring things to a crisis and to cut a tangle, even prematurely. The threads of thought made a maze in her mind in a briefer space than it has taken to write them.

There had been silence for a few moments. Helga, indignation and amazement in her face, had risen, incapable of finding words. At last she said,—

"Mrs Grier, you must be mad to speak to me in this way. I don't know what you mean. My husband, please God, will live for many years—as long as I myself live, I hope. As for Mr Koenigsen, it's absurd and infamous to suppose that he could have any such ideas."

Clarice nodded mockingly.

"Wait and see. Next time that he makes love to you, remember what I have said."

"You must be mad," repeated Helga. "Besides, what can you have to do with my husband? He never saw you before last night."

But even as she answered Clarice a sudden doubt assailed her. If he had known nothing of the woman,
why should Judah have prohibited so strenuously any
acquaintanceship between her and his wife? Helga
reflected that she was now involuntarily transgressing
that prohibition.

"Mrs Grier," she said quietly, "you will understand
how unwilling I am to be discourteous, but I ought
to tell you that my husband would not consider you
a welcome visitor in his house. He has better reason,
perhaps, than I know of for his objection to my
receiving you."

Clarice shrugged with a gesture of infinite scorn.

"Oh, yes, that's certainly true. But his is not
exactly a prudish objection. Judah Jacobs can't
forbid me his house. I have more right here than
you have," she added, with sublime effrontery.

Helga made a movement towards the bell.

"It is time," she said, "that this interview ended."

But Clarice got up hastily, interposing herself
between Helga and the fireplace.

"Stop! You want to have me turned out, but I
shall not go before I've told you the truth. You
wouldn't like me to say it in front of your butler, I'll
warrant. Heavens! What are you that you should
show me such magnificent airs? Listen! You are
not Judah Jacobs's wife. I am his wife!"

"You!" Helga shrank as if she had been struck.

"Yes. Seems queer, doesn't it? But it's true,
nevertheless. I suppose we've both committed
bigamy—quite innocently, of course—but that
doesn't alter the facts of the case. I'm Mrs Jacobs.
He married me in Brussels, got tired of me, and was
glad enough to believe that I was dead—never took
the trouble, in short, to investigate a little mistake
that was made about my decease. I daresay he had
fallen in love with you already at that time. You may
have been in Helsingkräd then, for all I know."

"Helsingkräd!"

"Yes; a nice cosmopolitan seaside resort for shady
characters, political refugees, Jew sharpers, and the
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scum of the earth generally. It wasn't surprising that I wanted to get out of Helsingkräad."

Helga stood motionless, her face bloodless, her eyes staring as though some horror transfixed them. She had put her hands out in front of her, in an instinctive gesture of self-protection.

"Well, what do you think of it?" cried Clarice, shrilly. "A pleasant little matrimonial complication, isn't it? You might turn it into a story, only some people would think it rather shocking. I shouldn't wonder if it were boycotted on the bookstalls. You don't seem to see the humour of the situation."

"You are an evil woman," returned Helga, slowly, "and it may be that you have come here only to frighten and torment me. But if that is so, I cannot imagine your motive in bringing trouble and disgrace upon a good man whom you've married, and who does not deserve this of you."

"Mercy! What beautifully unselfish sentiments! You seem to think more of Andrew Grier's disgrace than you do of your own. He'll survive it, I assure you."

Helga made a movement, dropping her arms to her side, but said nothing.

"I daresay I'm doing you both a good turn," continued Clarice. "Disinterested of me, isn't it? But I'll let you into a secret that may astonish you, since you hold different opinions, no doubt. I'm heartily sick of my grey wolf. He can snarl sometimes, I tell you."

"Will you please leave the house?" said Helga, goaded beyond endurance. "When my husband comes back he will tell me whether your story is true or false, but you and I can never again have anything to say to each other."

"Would you like to see a proof of my story?" asked Clarice. "I have brought one with me." She opened the little chain reticule at her side, and handed Helga a folded paper.
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"You will see that it is a letter from Judah. It was written a great many years ago, but you may perhaps recognise his handwriting—though I daresay that has altered, like all the rest of him."

She held the paper out to Helga, who took it reluctantly, and glanced at the heading, "Dearest Clarice." Helga turned the sheet sharply over, and read the signature, "Your affectionate Husband, Judah Jacobs."

The letter dropped from Helga's fingers. Clarice moved to pick it up; then pointedly refrained.

"No, you may keep it, to show Judah. I have others—as well as more important evidence if there's to be any question of going to law about it. You see now that you're not Mrs Jacobs, since I—the original Mrs Jacobs—am here alive before you. And, of course, you understand, too, that your son is—"

"Ah!"

Helga, wounded in her most vulnerable point, uttered a gasping cry, which reached the ears of Miss Pengelley, who was at that moment in the act of opening the drawing-room door, where she was coming on an errand to Mrs Jacobs.

She halted at sight of the two women facing each other—Mrs Grier, vindictive, uncontrolled, the woman of the people showing through her outside veneer; Helga, shaken, supporting herself by one hand on the high back of a chair, her face white and changed, her whole appearance giving the suggestion that she had been mentally stricken in some severe way. Miss Pengelley was taken aback. She hesitated, then, moving a step forward, she explained her errand—

"I came to tell you, Mrs Jacobs, that Ronald is not well."

There was a short silence. Susan realised now how heavy the blow to Mrs Jacobs must have been, for she scarcely seemed to hear what had been said. Susan did not repeat her announcement. She waited. And the next moment she was astonished at Mrs
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Grier’s extraordinary bad manners, for she broke out, with a jeering laugh,—

“So, it will be Andrew’s turn now to console! You have my leave to tell him all I’ve said to you. It will come as a pleasing surprise.”

“Mrs Grier!”

Miss Pengelley’s voice sounded menacing as she walked straight up to the visitor. Her advance and her astonished, rebuking gaze disconcerted Clarice. She knew that she had allowed her jealous rage to carry her too far, and now she felt afraid of what she had done. Susan had no idea of what had really occurred, but saw that it must be something seriously distressing to Mrs Jacobs, and she felt sure that the visitor was responsible for it, whatever it might be. Her own sense of devotion to Helga made her doubly indignant with the woman who had wounded her. Susan remembered Doctor Grier’s injunction to her to protect Mrs Jacobs, and determined to obey it even though she were forced to eject his own wife. Helga still stood perfectly motionless; indeed, her consciousness might have been elsewhere but for her look of mute appeal to Miss Pengelley, which seemed in Susan’s eyes sufficient authority for what she was about to do. The determined little figure passed resolutely between the other two women and pressed the electric bell so firmly that the ting of it came echoing back from below. Hornblow, she knew, was hovering about the smoking-room, where Ronald was, and would answer the summons at once.

“Excuse me,” said Miss Pengelley, addressing Mrs Grier, “but I must ask you to leave Mrs Jacobs now. Her son is ill.”

Clarice had not time to make any reply, for Hornblow appeared at the moment.

“Show this lady out,” said Miss Pengelley, in a tone that brooked no delay, adding hurriedly, “You have not left Mr Ronald alone?”
“William is with Mr Ronald, miss. Mr Ronald is asking for Mrs Jacobs.”

“We will come at once,” said Miss Pengelley. She put herself in front of Helga, who she saw was quite incapable of dismissing her visitor.

“You must pardon my hurrying you away without any more words,” said the irate little person, adroitly conveying Mrs Grier across the room, and not permitting her even a glance at Helga. “Mrs Jacobs is going to her son. Nothing else can be thought of when Ronald is ill. Pray don’t trouble to say goodbye. I don’t know whether you have a carriage, but I must ask you not to wait for a cab to be called, as Ronald is on the ground floor just now, and the least sound is disturbing to him.”

Miss Pengelley literally forced the enemy to retreat, closing the door behind her with a fierce snap. An instantaneous exchange of glances with the invaluable Hornblow had assured Susan that she was now safe. She could rely upon the butler to carry out any injunction to the letter. The door shut upon the pair, Susan flew swiftly to Mrs Jacobs’s side.

“I knew that was what you would wish. You don’t think I took too much upon myself?”

Helga shook her head, and held out her hand in dumb gratitude. With Mrs Grier’s departure the tension had slackened, but her poor brain still felt in a whirl.

“I’m only doing what Doctor Grier told me,” Susan went on. “He said I must prevent your being worried if I could. You don’t mind—do you?”

“No, no,” said Helga, feebly. “You did quite right. I thank you.”

“I could see that she had annoyed you, and I felt I must get rid of her. There!” exclaimed Susan, “the woman has gone.” A muffled sound arose; it was the closing of the hall door, the manner of which gave token of imperative measures on the part of Hornblow.
Helga shuddered.
"She must never come here again."
"She shall not," said Susan, comfortingly. "I'll see to that. Now," she added, "you'll come to Ronald. He's asking for you. That's what I wanted to say. He isn't very well. He's in the smoking-room, for I didn't know whether I ought to let him come upstairs. The pain came on while we were in the garden. It's not very bad, but you know it may get worse. You'll come, won't you?"

Helga put her hand to her forehead. The words beat upon her brain in a dull way. She could think of nothing but the surf beating upon the shores of St Helga.

"Do come at once," said Miss Pengelley, persuasively. "I want to know about the morphia. Ronald says he must have some—he is afraid of an attack if he doesn't. Shall I send for the doctor, or are you accustomed to inject it?"

"Ronald! Oh, Ronald!" broke piteously from his mother's lips. "And I can do nothing—nothing."

"You can come to him—he wants you," pleaded Miss Pengelley.

She coaxed Mrs Jacobs a step or two. Then Helga's eyes fell suddenly, and she stood as if fascinated looking at the letter she had dropped on the floor. Miss Pengelley picked it up and held it out to her, but she refused to touch it.

"Put it away, please," she faltered.

Susan carried it to the writing-table—an old French escritoire—and placed it in a drawer.

"Now," she said, "we'll go to Ronald," and with her arm through Helga's she led her gently downstairs.

She let the mother go into the room alone, and, turning back, caught Hornblow in the hall.

"About the morphia, Hornblow—who injects it?"

"Doctor Grier, miss."
Then it would be best to send William off at once in a cab to Hyde Park Street. Let him find out where the doctor has gone and follow him, so that he can bring him back.

Hornblow agreed deferentially. He was becoming impressed by Miss Pengelley's capacity for management. The footman was dispatched immediately. Ronald still lay on the sofa in the smoking-room, pale and drawn, holding his mother's hand. Mrs Jacobs continued to seem dazed still, but she spoke to him tenderly from time to time. The boy was not suffering much as yet, but the state of apprehension he was in was pitiful to see. Susan awaited the doctor's arrival with anxiety, for she could not tell whether or no a bad attack was impending, and she felt that the very sight of the grim, grey face would give her a sense of support. She watched the clock eagerly, but as it was extremely doubtful where William would succeed in picking up the doctor's brougham, she had no idea how long he might be.

Meanwhile Ronald and his mother were the best company for each other, and Susan flitted between the dining-room window and the hall, waiting with what patience she could summon. Fortunately Doctor Grier was found not far from Hyde Park Street, and in a little more than half an hour he had arrived, and was preparing the morphia injection.

"Have you ever done this?" he asked gruffly of Susan.

"Never," she answered.

"Then you'd better come here and watch me do it. You may have to give it for the next day or two. I can't be here again anyway before ten o'clock tomorrow morning. I'm giving a quarter of a grain now, and I don't anticipate any increase of pain after that. But should it recur any time after twelve o'clock to-night, you'll inject a sixth—this tube. Use hot water; it melts the tabloid quicker than cold. I
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shall leave the syringe with you. Mind you keep it properly clean, and boil your needle. Now come and see."

Susan had looked at the tube he indicated, and studied attentively every movement he made. She followed him as he went to the sofa, on one side of which Mrs Jacobs sat, her hand in Ronald's. Miss Pengelley noticed that she had not spoken to Doctor Grier. The merest bend of the head when he entered was the only salutation she gave him. Now she scarcely seemed to recognise his presence, except by rising and moving away from the sofa as he approached. There was something very strange about her, thought Susan, and she observed, too, that Doctor Grier saw it, though he took no apparent notice of her manner.

"Now look here, young woman—watch," he said; and Susan watched while he picked up the skin of the boy's wrist, and with a deft motion of his finger and thumb drove the blood from it before he slipped in the needle. "Eye downwards, of course, but don't drive the point too deep—lengthways under the skin—see. You can do that, if it's necessary?"

"I think so," replied Miss Pengelley.

Relief was almost instantaneous. The terror and creases of pain seemed to smooth out in Ronald's forehead, and he lost the drawn, pinched look.

"He'd better be got to his bedroom at once," said Doctor Grier, "and be put to bed. Keep him as quiet as possible." He looked towards Mrs Jacobs, who again bent her head but said nothing. It seemed to Miss Pengelley that the doctor's grey eyes gleamed like diamonds between their half-shut lids, and his thin, flexible mouth twitched slightly. He said no more, but all the while his look was upon Helga as she mechanically helped Ronald into the carrying-chair, which was brought by Hornblow and the footman. Then the little procession left the room, and Helga went with it. Miss Pengelley was
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following, fancying she might be wanted, when the doctor detained her.

"Wait. I've something to say to you."

He went to the door and deliberately closed it. Then he came back, and gave her some fuller instructions as to the preparation of the injection and the proper care of the needle. Finally, he put the tiny tube of tabloids and the case containing the syringe into her hand.

"Now," he said, "what has happened?"

"It was just after coming in from the drive in his chair that Ronald felt—"

"I'm not speaking of Ronald. Friday's affair was quite enough to upset him. It is Mrs Jacobs that I want to know about. Something has happened to her."

Then Miss Pengelley told how she had gone to Mrs Jacobs in the drawing-room, and how she had found a visitor there who had evidently been saying something of a nature distressing to Mrs Jacobs, and how —remembering her conversation with Doctor Grier the day after her arrival in Branxton Gardens—Susan had taken upon herself to summarily dismiss the offending visitor.

"Quite right. I see that I didn't make a mistake in trusting you. Who was the woman?"

Miss Pengelley hesitated.

"I don't know that I ought to tell you."

"Ought!" he blazed out. "There can be no oughts between a physician and his patient. Of course you ought to tell me. Who was the woman?"

"It was Mrs Grier," replied Susan.

If ever the man deserved his wife's epithet of "grey wolf," Doctor Grier did so now. His upper lip was drawn sharply back, showing the white, even teeth. His eyes looked dangerous. He remained quite silent, but walked straight to the window and stood there fully a minute with his back turned to
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Susan before he came back. Then his face was steel again.

"You did perfectly right," he said. "I am very much obliged to you."

He seized her hand in a grip which was painful in its pressure, and without another word he left the room. She heard the hall door shut after him and his carriage drive away. Susan stood bewildered. She had expected that he would go up to see Ronald comfortably settled and to confer with Ronald’s mother. But his sudden departure made her feel that he had some other intention in his mind.
CHAPTER XV

AFTER SEVENTEEN YEARS

That night Miss Pengelley’s attention was divided between Ronald and Mrs Jacobs, and, indeed, it seemed to her that the mother needed more care than the son. Some great blow had evidently fallen upon Mrs Jacobs. Of this Susan felt assured, but it was impossible for her to conjecture its nature. "Spiridia" had seemingly lost entirely her easy self-reliance, her indifferent pride, and the conventional mannerisms which she seldom put off in the presence of any person.

Susan naturally associated the change in her with Mrs Grier’s visit, though how that could have caused it was inexplicable. Ronald’s condition luckily did not call for any special anxiety. As Susan knew, he was subject to such attacks of pain in the head. Excitement or late hours were liable to bring them on, but this, so far, was not a severe turn. So the attentive Hornblow informed Miss Pengelley as she ate a hurried dinner downstairs. She had been unwilling to have the formal meal served for herself alone. Mrs Jacobs refused to eat, and would not leave Ronald’s quarters, but the boy was now sleeping quietly after the morphia, and Miss Pengelley wisely reflected that she gained nothing by mortifying the flesh, and had best husband her strength against further demands upon it.

Her dinner, however, was but a short affair, and she went up again to find Julie the maid with a basin
After Seventeen Years

of soup and a pint bottle of champagne imploring her mistress to take nourishment. Mrs Jacobs waved away the soup but sipped a glass of champagne. She could not be persuaded to go upstairs to bed, insisting that she would remain that night upon the sitting sofa in Ronald's sitting-room. But Miss Pengelley noticed that she did not go into his bedroom nor show any deep concern about the boy, which she thought was very unlike Ronald's mother, and which bore out her notion that Mrs Jacobs had sustained some mental shock. By-and-by Julie brought down a dressing-gown in which she robed her mistress, who submitted unprotestingly, and Miss Pengelley also made preparations for a vigil. She settled in the drawing-room, waiting for Ronald's awakening to see if a further dose of morphia would be required. The hours passed on. It was midnight. She ventured to tap at the door across the landing.

There was no answer, and she went in. The room was in darkness, Ronald's Oriental decorations making a shadowy blur in the feeble gleam which came from a screened light in the boy's bedroom, the door of which opened into his sitting-room. The fire was dying down, and Susan went to put on more coal, lifting each lump and placing it with noiseless precision. But she paused in her task at the sound of low, gasping sobs which came from the next room, mingled with broken ejaculations. Moving softly to the bedroom door, with a confused idea that it might be Ronald in pain, Susan peeped round the screen. But it was not Ronald; the boy seemed still asleep. It was his mother, who half crouched, half knelt, at the head of the bed, her face pressed against the bolster, only the fair curls of her hair visible in the feeble light. She was whispering to herself between the dry, long-drawn sobs that shook her frame.

"My boy! My boy! As though I had not injured you enough without this cruellest thing of
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all. But I did not know—Ronald!—I did not know. Oh! I can’t bear it! The shame of it—to you—and to me. After seventeen years—seventeen years of servitude! No, I am wrong—I ought not to take it so; he has always been kind to me. And he did not know—Ronald, do you hear—your father did not know, at least, till last night. He could not have known, or he never would have done it. Now I understand what he meant when he spoke so strangely—what it was that upset him so. Oh! I must not blame him, but it is difficult—difficult. What shall I do? What shall I do? Where shall we go?—my son—my son!"

At length there came silence, except for the long-drawn sobs. Susan waited and watched, deeply pitiful. If she could have gone and put her arms round the unhappy woman, assuring her of, at least, her own sympathy and loyal devotion through any crisis! But this she dared not do. Presently there came again low whispers, wrung as from a soul in agony.

"Ah! Dear God! Did he know—he whom I thought so good and true—so different from everyone else in the world. Was it for this that he was so kind to me—only because he pitied me, only because he knew of the wrong? Surely he must have known whose wife she had been, and that the man was not dead. Ah! How shall I bear it?"

Miss Pengelley stole back through Ronald’s sitting-room to the drawing-room. She felt that it was sacrilege to intrude on grief such as this. Something terrible had happened. What could it be? She wondered whether Mr Jacobs ought not to be telegraphed for. But this responsibility she dared not take upon herself; and in any case it would be impossible until the morning. She consoled herself with the thought that at ten o’clock Doctor Grier would come. He would know what to do.

Miss Pengelley walked restlessly up and down the
room, listening to the French clock on the mantelpiece as it ticked and chimed the quarters. An hour passed. She had replenished the fire; her little arrangements were made, in case of need—a wineglass, the syringe, the tube of tabloids, and a kettle of hot water simmering inside the fender. Twice she went to the door of Ronald’s sitting-room and listened, but there was no sound, and she came back, leaving the door ajar. But presently she heard voices—Ronald’s in fretful expostulation and Mrs Jacobs’s exhausted, grief-wrung accents. Miss Pengelley’s heart went out in a gush of frightened pity for the sorrow she could neither understand nor assuage. She, however, determined to ignore it, for she guessed how Mrs Jacobs would suffer later at the thought that a stranger had witnessed her abasement. Accordingly Susan stood in uncertainty, her hands twisting nervously in front of her as she waited at the drawing-room door, her eyes piercing the obscurity of the landing. Then Ronald’s door opened wider, and Mrs Jacobs approached her.

“Miss Pengelley,” she said in a shaky voice, “I don’t know what to do. Ronald’s in pain again, I can’t get him to take food, nor the medicine he has in these attacks.”

“I’m going to give him another injection of morphia. Doctor Grier explained it to me. Will you tell him so while I get it ready?” said Susan. But Mrs Jacobs sank helplessly into a chair.

“I can’t. I think I’ve made him worse. I oughtn’t to be near him.”

Miss Pengelley had poured some hot water into the wine-glass, and was filling the syringe.

“Never mind. It’ll be ready in a minute. I’ll take it to him. He’ll go to sleep, and then you should rest too.”

“I can’t rest.”

Susan had put the tabloid into the syringe, and screwed on the needle.
"I wish I had Doctor Grier's orders to dose you too," she said. "It's your nerves that are shaken, and I can't do anything for you. I wish I could."

"It's my nerves," repeated Mrs Jacobs. "The weakness is inherited," she added in a dull, forced way. "I break down under strain—sometimes. I can't help it."

"We're all liable to that," said Susan, with a cheerfulness she was far from feeling. "I'm going in to Ronald now, Mrs Jacobs. Will you trust me to give him this, or would you like to see me do it?"

"Oh, I trust you," said Mrs Jacobs, and Susan went at once into the boy's room.

Ronald was moving his head restlessly on the pillow, and groaned slightly. His face seemed to have aged, and to look smaller. It was cadaverous and lined by pain. He opened his eyes when Susan addressed him, and they brightened at sight of the syringe.

"Hullo! Old Grier is not such a brute after all. I thought it was cruel of him to leave me like this without anybody. I had a nurse before to give me that."

"I'm your nurse for to-night," said Susan. "I don't believe you'll need one at all to-morrow. You'll be ever so much better—you'll see."

The boy put out his lean wrist, and she picked up the skin quite dexterously, considering that it was her first attempt at doing so. She was somewhat nervous, but she was careful not to let the boy see that, and in a moment the dose was injected. She was glad to notice how soon the drug began to work; it was pleasant to watch the creases smooth out of Ronald's face and to hear his sigh of relief as he nestled down into the pillows.

"That's jolly. You're a brick, Miss Pengelley. I say, what's the matter with mum?" he asked suddenly.
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"I don't know of anything the matter," replied Susan, evasively.

"Oh, yes, there is. When I woke she was kicking up no end of a shindy, crying, and going on like one o'clock. I couldn't make it out. I'm not very bad, am I?"

"No, you're not at all bad. Hornblow says it's a very slight turn."

"And he ought to know—good old Hornblow," murmured the boy. "That's what I thought. If I was bad, Grier wouldn't have left me like this—he never does. He's a chap you can rely on, is Grier. But mother's got shaky nerves—because of her wonderful imagination, I've heard. I suppose they go together. Once or twice all of a sudden she's kind of gone to pieces, but it doesn't happen very often. You'll look after her, won't you?"

"Of course I will—as well as I possibly can," said Susan.

She smoothed the bed-clothes and set the pillows straight, then raised him, putting her arms behind them.

"You've got to take this milk, Ronald, before you go off again."

He swallowed the draught with a wry face.

"It's got brandy in it. I wouldn't have it before. What a fellow you are, Miss Pengelley, to get your own way. I say," as she laid him gently down again, "I'm sorry I didn't mind my manners better at first. You're worth it."

She smiled at the apology.

"That's all right, Ron. Go to sleep now. We mustn't talk any more. Trot off to dreamland, and I'll look after your mother."

He turned his head obediently over, and closed his eyes, while she found the champagne, and took it in with a biscuit to Mrs Jacobs.

"You're very kind, I'm sure," said Helga, sitting up meekly. "Really, I don't know what I should..."
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have done without you. It's a comfort to feel you're here. I think you are trustworthy, Miss Pengelley."

Quick tears rose to Susan's eyes.

"I'd make any sacrifice sooner than betray a trust you placed in me," she exclaimed impulsively.

"Thank you, my dear," said Helga. "I'm sure you would be faithful—a quality one does not often meet with. And I have done nothing to make you faithful to me."

"You are yourself," said Susan, simply. "That is enough."

"Is it? Well, I'm glad. Miss Pengelley, you must have seen that I'm in trouble. I don't know how it will end."

"Would you like me to telegraph for Mr Jacobs," suggested Susan, "the first thing in the morning?"

Helga shuddered violently.

"No, no, on no account. I do not want him summoned home. I must have time to think things out—to prepare myself. Promise me that you will not let Mr Jacobs be sent for."

Susan duly promised, asking no further questions. She spoke reassuringly of Ronald's condition, and of his readiness to accept her ministrations, and finally, after saying that she would herself watch in his sitting-room the rest of the night, she succeeded in persuading Mrs Jacobs to go up to her own room, where she delivered her into the charge of Julie, who was drowsing by the fire.

The next morning Ronald seemed almost well. He was free from pain, and apparently the threatened attack had passed off. Mrs Jacobs, when she heard the news from Miss Pengelley, said that since he was so much better she would not go down to him, but would remain in her study till later in the day. Susan marvelled at her unusual reluctance to be with the boy, but the discreet young person made no comment.

"I will leave him to you," Mrs Jacobs repeated in
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her most reserved tones. Yet Susan felt sure that
the restraint was self-imposed to prevent a break
down. Mrs Jacobs looked terribly ill—a mere ghost
of herself—and though her face and speech were
calm, the trembling of her hands told how great was
the strain under which she laboured.

"I will let you know when the doctor comes," said
Susan. "He said he would be here at ten."

"You need not trouble. I shall not see him unless
it is necessary. Please take his directions, and let me
know afterwards what he says."

A sudden spasm had crossed Mrs Jacobs's face.
She seemed to shrink from seeing Doctor Grier
almost as much as she had done at the suggestion
of sending for her husband. Susan wondered still
more, and she felt dismayed. It was as though her
sheet anchor had given way. But there was no
encouragement for her to speak. Marble could not
have been colder than Mrs Jacobs in her present
mood. Just now, at all events, it was impossible to
get below the surface with her. So Susan retired to
the next floor to read aloud to Ronald until Doctor
Grier should arrive. It was Sunday morning. The
bell of a Roman Catholic church near was calling
devout servant-maids and others, ill-disposed for the
longer and later ceremonial, to ten o'clock mass.
There was no traffic in the street, and this morning,
children were not playing in the gardens. A sense
of Sabbatical hush, oddly incongruous to Susan
Pengelley, who was keenly conscious of the drama
within these four walls, pervaded the outside atmo-
sphere. Yet it was soothing too, in its way, and
carried her mind off to the Devonshire Vicarage near
Tavistock. In actual speech she was led thither by
way of Lafcadió Hearn and Buddhist rites, and the
missionary brother about whom Ronald began to ask
questions. So the book was dropped and they talked
instead, becoming better friends as they did so.

Doctor Grier was punctual almost to the minute,
from which Miss Pengelley divined that he must have come straight from his own house. He marched up to Ronald’s quarters, not waiting to be announced, and shook hands at the bedroom door with Miss Pengelley, who had risen to meet him. He drew her back into the sitting-room. He too, she thought, looked ill, and grimmer and greyer than ever. His eyes went piercingly round in one sweeping glance that penetrated to every corner, and, failing to find what they sought, came back, and fixedly searched those of Miss Pengelley.

“Well, how have things been?” he asked abruptly.

“Ronald has done well,” she answered, and began to give her report on the previous night, but he interrupted her almost rudely.

“I don’t want to be told about Ronald. I can see him for myself.”

He did not, however, push his questioning as to the things about which he did want to know any further just then, for Ronald called out, and he went straight in to where the boy was lying. Then with a short, “Now, youngster,” he proceeded, in grave silence, to count the pulse and make other medical investigations.

When he had finished he walked back into the next room, where Miss Pengelley was awaiting him, carefully closing the door upon Ronald. Somehow, Miss Pengelley felt a little afraid of him. His manner was portentous; it certainly boded ill to someone. There was a barely-repressed ferocity about him that was quite formidable. He stood on the hearthrug, one arm over the chimneypiece, the long deft hand dangling, the other in his pocket.

“Is she ill?” he asked, without preamble.

Miss Pengelley knew that he was alluding to Mrs Jacobs.

“She seems upset.”

Doctor Grier gave a low sound that was something like an animal’s growl.

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"Where is she?"
"In her study. Shall I tell her you are here?"
"No, she wouldn't see me," he answered, smiling queerly. "I'll go up by myself and take the risk."
So saying he strode to the door, but stopped before he went out.
"That young shaver will do all right. You needn't worry over him. See that he's fed up, and kept quiet—that's all."
Miss Pengelley listened to the masterful footstep mounting the stairs, and thought that Mrs Jacobs would have small difficulty in guessing who was the presumptuous intruder upon her solitude.
CHAPTER XVI

EXILED

DOCTOR GRIER knocked at Helga's door. The answer was inaudible, but he took it for granted, and went in. She had risen, and was standing quite still by the writing-table, her face set and very white. She had perfect command over herself now, however, and held out her hand in the most conventional manner. The effect upon him of her attitude and bearing was remarkable. The man who a few minutes before had appeared so masterful seemed now stricken with shyness. He took her hand without speaking.

"Won't you sit down?" she said stiffly, and added, with what struck him as extraordinary indifference, when he remembered her former wild anxiety at the least mishap that befell her son, "I hope you found Ronald better."

Her manner was so strange and repellent, and she was so wholly unlike her usual self, that he stared at her with surprised reproachful eyes, not understanding her mood; for even the truth, as he divined it, did not, he felt, account for this change in her. He had believed that even though she must have been annoyed at his wife's mad jealousy—he suspected no other motive for Clarice's visit—at least she would not misjudge him, nor cancel their friendship.

She had seated herself, but he remained standing, his head bent down to her, his eyes searching her...
face. She kept her own eyes lowered, and persistently avoided his gaze, while she fidgeted mechanically with the lace and fur on her loose morning gown.

The silence was painful, but much more eloquent than speech could have been. It was as if the space between them were filled by a little army of thoughts—impalpable yet definite things—fighting against each other. The battle went to the strongest. She had to look up at last.

"Ronald is better?" she said faintly.

"Yes, he'll do. You can trust him to that girl downstairs. She's a good sort. I'm not going to waste force on talking about Ronald. It's you I'm troubling over."

She made a shrinking gesture.

"No, no—never mind me."

"I do mind you. I mind about you more than about anything else in the world. I'm a rough, blunt-spoken, ill-mannered brute, but I had a fancy that you understood me."

"I don't understand—anything," she replied, with a despairing intonation.

"I mean that you shall understand me. Rightly or wrongly—conventions or no conventions—you've got to understand me. Afterwards you may turn me out of doors if you choose."

He deliberately looked round, and put himself upon a high, straight chair which stood in front of the typewriter. It was nearer that in which she sat than the armchair opposite, which she had indicated to him. He was a good deal higher than she was, and stooped forward, his two hands on his knees, looking straight at her face. Her gaze, which moved upward for a second, was fascinated and caught by his, but when he presently put one hand upon the arm of her chair, it dropped again. He did not touch her, but began to speak in a curt, expressionless way.
The Other Mrs Jacobs

"I want to tell you first that I know my wife was here yesterday. I don't know what passed between you. I have not seen her since. When I got home last night I found that she had gone to stay with friends of hers at Brighton. There's nothing unusual in that, she often goes there; but this time I concluded that it was because she wanted to avoid me. You see, I am quite in the dark as to her motive in coming to you—except this. She affects jealousy of me. It is unfounded and unreasonable; the terms on which we have lived for some years are not of that close nature which permits jealousy as a right. However, the sight of your photograph—the one you gave me the other day—made her suspect that I—cared for you."

He paused in the utterance of the last words, and after them, as if for a sign of some sort from her, but she gave none. So he went on,—

"I told you roughly a few days ago the story of my marriage. You know in part the reason why I did not wish you to make my wife's acquaintance. Not the whole of it. That comes into the revelation of myself, which I'm going to make you. But it became clear to me on Friday night that your husband also has reasons for preferring that you should not know my wife. This complicates things. I foresee that it may lead to a stopping short of professional relations. Therefore, to my thinking, it's the more necessary that you should understand me. I intend to protect my wife while she and I remain under the same roof, though I have no respect for her, and though I curse the day that I bound myself to her. Do you see? It's plain speaking, Heaven knows."

Helga merely bent her head. She could not trust herself to answer.

"I don't want to pretend to you that there's an iota of justification for me in my early relations with my wife. It was a passion of the flesh—nothing of
the soul in it. I took the bit in my teeth, and let it
drive me blindly forward. I don't mean that I wasn't
prepared to pay the cost. I've paid it—pretty heavily.
The mistake I made was in myself—in thinking for a
second that that sort of woman could satisfy me. In
less than two years I knew what I'd done. Since
then I've lived only for science. I've scoffed at
happiness. I've become almost an ascetic—perhaps
something of an idealist. Can you understand
that?"

"I think so," said Helga, slowly. "Idealism is the
balm for disappointed souls."

"As well as the intoxicant for foolish ones. Mine
has been a practical sort of idealism though—daring
dreams of discoveries for the alleviation of human
sufferings. Nothing more—until lately."

"Lately?" she questioned.

"You spoke to me once of your real dreams. I have
real dreams too."

"But my real dreams are unrealisable," she said
sadly.

"So are mine. But they are none the less real."

There was silence. Then he said abruptly in a
harsher tone,—

"I've gone away from what I was speaking about.
Part of the price I must pay is the upholding of my
wife, even though I may lose by it what is intensely
dear. The point is, that your husband put upon her
a public affront—at least he appeared to do so. I
must have the matter out with him. If the affront
was intentional, I see nothing for it but that I shall
cease to be your medical attendant."

"That is true," she replied. "I had better tell you
that Mr Jacobs does not wish you to continue your
visits here."

"Do you know the cause of this?" he asked
quietly.

"Do not you know?" she exclaimed feverishly.
"Has not—" She stopped awkwardly.
"You mean has not my wife enlightened me? No. I never question her on any subject more than seems absolutely necessary. The interview I purpose obtaining with your husband in regard to his action the other night would explain matters more satisfactorily than any information I could get from Clarice. However, after I heard from Miss Pen-gelley that she had been here yesterday, I went home with the intention of asking my wife what she had come for, and, if possible, getting a further clue to the whole situation; but, as I told you, she had gone to Brighton, and I have had no opportunity for finding out anything. Cannot you throw any light on the matter?"

Helga's lips parted, but no sound came. She was watching his face with an anxiety so evident that it made him press his question.

"I feel sure that you can tell me something. Think," he said.

She shook her head.

"I cannot. If you do not know already—there is nothing I can tell you. But"—as his eyes still urged her—"do you not think of a possible cause?"

"I have thought of a possibility which had not occurred to me till recently—the possibility that Mr Jacobs may be a connection of my wife's first husband—the surname is the same—and that he recognised her. If that were the case, surely he would have told you."

She was silent, her eyes averted.

"Did he give you that explanation?" pursued Doctor Grier.

"He gave me no explanation," she answered slowly.

"Nevertheless, there's something in your mind," he exclaimed—"something that's poisoning you against me—that has altogether changed you towards me. I see it in your face. I hear it in your voice. Your eyes can't lie, Helga—your voice cannot either. Both
Exiled

were true that day when you and I talked alone in the little room downstairs. We stood soul to soul that day, as it might have been if we were on one of your own wild headlands, with the cleansing ocean at our feet, and the winds of heaven sweeping around us. Why can't we be so now—true heart friends—each one of us knowing the secret misery and the secret yearning of the other. There's no shame in such heart's truth. For God's sake, let us have it between us."

She turned at his appeal, like a creature at bay.

"Oh! How I wish it might be! I do so need a friend. Everything seems crumbling round me. I don't know what to think or where to turn. I only know one thing—and that is that we mustn't see each other any more."

He bent closer to her, and his gruff voice deepened and softened.

"Is that because you know that I love you, Helga?"

She cowered away from him in the big armchair, putting up her hand to screen her face.

"Oh! Hush! You must not say that. It is wrong—it is impossible."

"It's the truth," he answered firmly, "and there are conditions in which the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, is owed from one human being to another. I made up my mind when I came into this room that you should have the truth from me in its entirety. Why not? We aren't children, you and I, to be frightened by a bogie. If the thing is there in us, and we own up to it, that doesn't mean cringing to be whipped by Mrs Grundy. Let us be proud of it. Renounce it, if need be, but never deny it."

Helga dropped her hand from her face and gazed up at him.

"I don't deny it," she said very low. "If we had
death in front of us I'd own it, and, after all, it's as good as death for us now."

"As good!"

He gave that pathetic yet radiant smile which at rare times illumined his stern countenance. Then he rose, and, bending over the back of her chair, reverently kissed a golden tress that lay lightly on her forehead.

"You have likened a doctor to a priest," he said. "The man who loves nobly is a guardian, too, of holy mysteries. My love for you is no ignoble thing, Helga. I kiss your hair as a priest might kiss the altar."

A rush of emotion overswept Helga. She caught his hand and laid her cheek against it with the confiding gesture of a child. For in truth, notwithstanding her thirty-five years, Helga had kept the unsophisticated heart which a girl of seventeen might have taken to her lover. In spite of her fears the world seemed no longer a cold, empty shell. One of her illusions at least had not failed. Then in sharp contrast came the remembrance of Clarice's mocking words, and of the terrible situation she must now face. And the lightning thought followed—"If she is Judah Jacobs's wife we are both free."

But Helga shrank in horror from the bare mental suggestion, as though it were a prompting of evil. A sudden revulsion seized her. She rose to her feet, struggling for calmness. She was neither shame-faced nor frightened now, and her marble reserve had melted, for had she not frankly avowed her love to him? But though the confession had passed her lips, honour demanded one course only. She prayed him, if his love were indeed noble, to leave her; to breathe it no more, but to help her by silence and absence to meet the difficulties that assailed her. Trouble was threatening, she owned—trouble of which she could not speak. Indeed, it had already come, and she had not met it in the strength she would have wished.
Exiled

This must be her sole thought now. She had Ronald to think for as well. She must shield him as far as she was able, for upon him too the blow would fall severely.

Drops dimmed her blue eyes as she pleaded. Grier listened and wondered. He could only suppose that her husband, in spite of his protestations to the contrary, had told her of the fatal disease which must soon kill him. This appeared to the doctor the most natural meaning of her words. Thus misconception arose in the minds of both.

"I know all about your trouble," he said. "Of course, you would guess that. But I had almost forgotten it for the moment. I confess that I ought to have remembered the peculiar conditions you are in. Perhaps, if I had done so, I should not have urged so freely my feeling for you."

Helga stared at him blankly.

"You know my trouble," she said, "and yet—you could come to me—like this? Oh! how could you?"

"It was ill-timed, I admit. Forgive me for being such a blundering fool. I thought only of you, and I couldn't bear to see you suffer. I wanted to make you sure of my love for you—whatever came between us. I didn't recollect that perhaps you might not care to be told of it—just now. Yet I can't be altogether sorry I spoke, for it has shown you that at least you can count upon one loyal friend."

"If you know," she cried passionately, "you must understand how impossible it is that there should ever be any word of love between us."

"Impossible now," he answered, "but time focusses events and feelings so that we get to see them in their right proportion. Who knows? The grief of to-day may become the gain of to-morrow. After all, there is a universal law of justice."

"If there is," she cried, "it has left me and my son out in its workings. Justice there may be for others, but to us—nothing, nothing can atone."
He gazed at her in some surprise.

"If you feel it so deeply," he said, "there is no more for me to say. Mere formal consolations are out of the question. It was presumptuous of me, I know, to suppose that any regard of mine could compensate, but I imagined—"

Helga sank back into her chair. Her bosom was shaken with the violence of the emotion she was striving to suppress. She interrupted him, putting out her hand again, and snatching his to her lips.

"Oh! don't," she cried. "You are all the world to me—have I not acknowledged it? Whenever I can free myself in thought from the conditions of my actual life I feel you as a part of me. You belong to my sea world. You must have been there from the beginning, for I knew that you loved me long before your eyes told me so. And your love has seemed to me like the sea—strange and strong."

"But all-embracing," he muttered hoarsely. "And strong enough to cradle you to the day of doom."

For a moment she leaned against his shoulder. Her breath came and went in fluttering gasps. The nearness of his presence, that from a weaker man would have brought forth weakness, gave her strength. Then she drew herself deliberately away.

"I had a kingdom of my own once," she said tenderly, "in which I might have dared to bid you welcome. Together we would have reigned over a measureless ocean of love, as the sea-gods of old ruled the sea. But that cannot be now. I exiled myself from my kingdom seventeen long years ago, and I must abide in the path that I have chosen and do my duty there. And you too, my friend, have your duty to think of, and the lot you have made for yourself to fulfil. So we must think no more of that sea kingdom, except in dreams. It may be that some day hereafter the dream world will become the real, and we shall meet there at last with no shadow of wrong between us. But now—now—"
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Her voice broke.  
"Now, the only thing I can do for you is to leave you. Is that what you would say?"

"Yes, go," she answered, "go. I shall remember, but—you must go."

He made no pretence at farewell, but silently left her.
MRS GRIER'S trip to Brighton had not been wholly unpremeditated. She knew that Koenigsen was also going there, to proceed, on Saturday afternoon, with his portrait of a lady dwelling in Hove and to indulge in Sunday boating and sea breezes which, from force of early associations, were peculiarly agreeable to him. It had indeed been informally arranged between him and Clarice that she should take advantage of having friends at Brighton as a pretext for Saturday to Monday trips, and she had done so fairly often.

Notwithstanding Koenigsen's involuntary revelation of his mercenary motives, and her fixed determination to revenge this slight on his part, Clarice's infatuation for him remained undiminished. The sordid elements in her own nature recognised their counterpart in that of Koenigsen, and pitted themselves against him. It was, as she had phrased it, a game of wits. The woman meant to play her hand to the best advantage, one desire all the time ruling her mind—the desire to maintain at any cost her hold over the man who, of all men she had ever known, most strongly enchained her volatile fancy. This dominant feeling had actuated her in her flight from London even more definitely than the present impulse to avoid disagreeable explanations with Doctor Grier on the subject of her visit to Mrs Jacobs—about which she felt instinctively he would have heard from Miss Pengelley.
Clarice was thoroughly sick of Grier; he both bored and frightened her, and she liked neither sensation. In fact, she really did not care how soon she was released from him, provided always that the release did not jeopardise her relations with Kœnigsen. Clarice fully intended to marry Kœnigsen herself; she had an audacious project in the back of her mind for doing so, but threads were complicated and needed deft handling. Everything depended upon when Mr Jacobs should die, and upon how collateral events might work towards the main issue. Clarice counted a good deal upon her personal influence over Kœnigsen. Whatever might be Helga's attraction for him, from the matrimonial point of view he was somewhat in the position of a pilgrim trying to warm himself at a star, and he would be liable, under irresponsible conditions, to be tempted by the ruddy glow and comforting warmth of a more earthly fire.

So in that Sunday intercourse with the painter, Clarice practised with considerable effect her tricks of fascination which, to be candid, were not of a highly-refined order. It is a common saw that familiarity breeds contempt, and in this instance it was justified, for unfortunately Clarice was not restrained by any nice scruples as to language and conduct becoming to angelic woman, and undoubtedly Kœnigsen was lacking in the gentlemanly instinct which prescribes a chivalric attitude in all circumstances and moods. Things, however, went trippingly till the journey back on Monday afternoon in a coupé compartment, with privacy secured by a tip to the guard. Then some small accidents and an ill-timed remark ruffled the temper of both, and led to recriminations and even positive declarations best not chronicled. A situation like this was the kind in which Clarice always wrecked herself, and on the present occasion she was true to the traditions of her temperament. The pair roundly abused each other until the train stopped at Clapham Junction, when
Kœnigsen, with a Parthian charge that for a moment annihilated Clarice, jumped out with his Gladstone bag and hailed a porter; mindful, notwithstanding his emotional perturbation, of a lucrative appointment at Sydenham to lunch with the ex-mayoress, and to make a tentative sketch of one of her children, which might lead to a further commission.

Clarice watched him disappear, her little hands clenched, her features convulsed with impotent rage, her inner being in somewhat the same volcanic condition as when, in defiance of politic considerations, she had invaded Helga's territory. She was again in the mood to commit an imprudence, but had not even sufficient judgment to decide in what form her jealous animosity should manifest itself.

At Victoria she took a hansom, and drove, not to her own house in Hyde Park Street, but to a ladies' club near Piccadilly, of which she was a member. There she partook of a dainty luncheon, with a small bottle of Burgundy to wash it down, smoked a cigarette and restlessly read the papers in the reading-room, picking them up one after the other, and devouring the Society columns, most of which contained some reference to Karl Kœnigsen's party in the St Helgan Gallery, and a flattering allusion to Mrs Jacobs, the beautiful daughter of the late deposed President Brack—so the paragraph ran—well known in the literary world under her pseudonym of "Spiridia," who was also the inspiring influence which had directed the St Helgan painter's highest efforts.

Clarice glowered over the notices, her small chin protruded and a demure smile round her full, red mouth. Presently she sat down by a writing-table, dashed off a note or two cancelling engagements, and, after a glance at the clock, got herself ready for the warpath, and made her way Citywards, arriving soon after four at the office of Ahasuerus Jacobs.

She was considerably before her time, and was
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kept for half an hour in a luxuriously-furnished waiting-room, where were bookcases mostly containing splendidly-bound catalogues of various firms that had employed Mr Jacobs's agency; while on the walls were chromo-lithographs and engravings of certain works of art purchased through Mr Jacobs for advertising purposes, clever designs for posters, and the original black and white drawings of well-known advertisements. There were also portraits of celebrities whom Mr Jacobs had helped on in the road to success. Clarice eyed these through her pince-nez, and appraised the furnishings of the room, judging therefrom that Ahasuerus-Jacobs was a flourishing concern.

At last she heard steps in the corridor outside, a voice which she recognised as that of Mr Jacobs asking some questions of his clerk, and a door shut close by. The clerk came in a minute or two and ushered her through another door to Mr Jacobs's private room. It too was extremely well furnished; massive chairs with castors embedded in a rich Turkey carpet; a fine fireplace, in which the best coal burned briskly; on the walls, the gems of Mr Jacobs's collection of advertisement designs; in the centre of the room, beneath a handsome electric light pendant, a carved American roller desk, strewn with documents of different kinds.

Mr Jacobs laid aside a legal-looking parchment, which he had been perusing, and rose as Clarice entered. She had not given her name, merely saying that she had an appointment on business with Mr Jacobs, but he had evidently guessed the identity of his visitor. He looked ill, worried, and certainly not in a pleasant humour. She advanced with her undulating gait, her hand extended, and he took it unwillingly and awkwardly.

There was no awkwardness about Clarice. She beamed on him enticingly when she had seated herself in an armchair at the end of the writing-table,
after having taken off a long grey gauze veil that had shrouded her becoming French toque. She folded it carefully, pinning it together with a little paste monstrosity, by which it had been fastened beneath her chin, and remarked casually,—

"I came up from Brighton this morning, and I always tie up my face in the train, because I like facing the engine. It's just as well, too, to wear a veil when one is paying compromising visits to gentlemen in the City."

Her little airs and graces irritated him. He hated her for her cool, inquisitive way of peering round the room, and looking at the papers and things on his writing-table. He saw her eyes upon a miniature of Helga, in a gold and enamel case, with doors that now stood open. He was vexed with himself for not having closed them, and he did so now with an angry snap. Then he leaned forward, one elbow on the desk supporting his chin as he stared at Clarice. She was struck by his unhealthy pallor, his sharpened features and the lines beneath his eyes.

"You're not looking over fit," she said. "What's the matter, Jude? Has my coming upset you?"

"I'm not well. I've had a longish railway journey. Let's get to business, and be done with it."

"Oh, you needn't be in such a hurry. I've a great deal to talk to you about. You shouldn't take things to heart so, old man—that's what's the matter with you. You should get all the fun you can out of life—as I do. I call it great fun coming to call on you like this."

"It is fun that I beg you will not repeat."

"Well, we'll see what inducement you offer me to keep away. You seem to forget that I came here in fulfilment of our bargain. I hope you're ready to keep your part of it?"

"You must realise that you have already broken the bargain by attempting as you did to get introduced to my wife."
Death the Claimant

"Gracious! So the poor little cat mustn't even look at the queen if it happens to find itself in the same room with her most gracious majesty. Pussie must tuck in her tail and trot away. Poor Pussie! I'd like to see her do it—that's all. Do you remember, Jude, in the old days when we were spooning, how you used to call me 'little cat'? Nobody has ever called me 'Pussie' since. You really used to be quite a dear, Jude, just at the beginning, before you took to scolding me for my frivolities."

Her voice had grown plaintive and purring. She could not resist putting forth her feline fascinations, even to this man who, she knew, despised her. She half rose, and leaned over the writing-table, stroking his arm in a caressing way of hers that she knew he would remember; but he flung off her hand fiercely.

"Drop it. I'm not going to stand that kind of thing from you now."

Clarice, wholly unabashed, sank gracefully into her chair, and contemplated her beautifully-fitting suède glove.

"Really, Jude, one wouldn't imagine that I'd ever been married to you," she observed in an injured tone.

"Look here," he said roughly, "our bargain was that you were to keep silence for a year, and not to go near my wife."

Clarice looked up sharply. She scented an uncalculated complication. She had relied upon his absence from home during the last few days, and there had been some method after all in her mad visit to Helga—an invasion which she had since repented of. The proverb anent well-laid plans came into her head.

"Have you been home since Friday night?" she asked innocently.

"No. What do you want to know for?"

"Oh, nothing particular. But listen to me, Jude. 215"
The Other Mrs Jacobs

You insulted me abominably that night, and for no reason. How could I help Karl Koenigsen insisting upon introducing me to his friend when I'm a great friend of his too? It was the most natural thing in the world. Nothing would have come of it if you hadn't stalked off like a sort of avenging male Nemesis, setting all the world talking, and making unnecessary difficulties all round, and, I don't mind telling you, raising the devil in me. I've taken my own measures to prevent myself from being injured by your atrocious conduct—that was only to be expected. You may like them or not—I can't help that. But if you don't, just remember that you upset your own apple cart—not I."

"What on earth do you mean?" he exclaimed anxiously. "What have you been doing?"

"Oh, nothing in especial. Only you should have made some allowance for my impulsive nature. You ought to know me pretty well by this time. I always had a temper, as you're well aware, and it hasn't improved, so you'd better look out. If Mrs Jacobs—the other Mrs Jacobs—asks inconvenient questions, you have my leave to tell her any fibs that seem to suit the circumstances. That is, of course, supposing that you've squared me as we arranged."

"I was a fool to agree to such terms. They are monstrous. Besides, as I've said, you've broken the bargain."

"Judah Jacobs, no one could ever labour under a mistake concerning your nationality," imperturbably remarked Clarice. "You were always the same—never did like parting. I shouldn't have run away from you if you'd shown yourself less stingy. But unless your memory's failed you, I think you must remember that I said our bargain was to date from to-day. Therefore I haven't broken the conditions. I promised you that from the time you handed me over that three thousand pounds, I'd not betray you to the other Mrs Jacobs for a whole year. I'm ready
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to swear to it on the Good Book, if you've got one handy, but I suppose you haven't."

He made no show of resenting the gibe, but opened a drawer in a weary manner, and produced a Bible.

"Here!" he said, "I fancied this would come in useful. Even unscrupulous women consider an oath to some extent binding. I know that the spoken word represents small value to you."

Clarice's eyes flashed fire.

"I must say, Jude, that you don't compliment my sense of honour. I've no objection to swearing, and I don't want to cast any aspersions on your moral character, but you'll excuse my suggesting that it would look more business-like if the stakes were put on the table."

"As you please."

He took a bunch of keys hanging at the end of a chain from his trouser pocket and selected one. She had got up from her chair, and was fussily clearing a space on the table at the side of the slanting desk in the centre, moving the documents that lay there, and among them that one which he had been perusing before her entrance, and over which he had hastily shuffled a bundle of letters. Clarice saw that it was folded in three, and that the middle fold was docketed on the outside in a scrollly caligraphy, "Will of Judah Jacobs, Esquire, of 59 Branxton Gardens, W., and 3 Chesham Buildings, E.C." Clarice softly turned the document over, and saw that its length was less than one side of the parchment sheet. It was evidently drawn up in an extremely simple manner. She glanced at it swiftly. Mr Jacobs had moved away, and was standing with his back to her, in the act of opening an iron safe set in the opposite corner of the wall, and so placed that even were he to look round the high back of the escritoire would shield her from observation. Clarice, who was short-sighted, bent her head close to the table, and, running her eyes
The Other Mrs Jacobs

comprehensively down the page, took in the sense of
the document. One name had caught her eye. It
was that of Karl Koenigsen. She saw that he was a
legatee to the extent of five thousand pounds, also
that he was appointed executor jointly with “my
wife,” to whom the whole of Judah Jacobs’s fortune
was left absolutely unreservedly. There was no
mention of his son.

Clarice had just time, before Mr Jacobs came back
from the safe, to thrust the document under her muff,
which, with its decoration of lace and violets, com­
pletely covered the paper, and looked as though it
had been carelessly thrown there in some impetuous
movement of its owner.

Clarice’s keen wits were rapidly working. But she
sat down, presenting a guileless and unabashed face
to Mr Jacobs as he approached and laid on the
writing-table a bundle of crisp banknotes. He
counted them, turning the corner of each with the
practised hand of one accustomed to giving and
receiving large sums.

“Thirty hundreds, in three packets of ten,” he said.

“Thank you. I’m not sure that I shouldn’t have
preferred fifties. Still, this will do quite nicely.
Now!” she put on a business-like air, “please tell
me what to do, and exactly what I’ve got to say. I
don’t think I ever swore to anything in my life before.”

“You must stand up. Hold this”—he gave her the
Book—“and repeat after me.”

He said the words of the oath over to her, and she
repeated them, kissing the volume solemnly in con­
clusion.

“There! That’s done,” she exclaimed in a tone of
relief. “Hand over the oof. Why, you must be
simply rolling, Jude. Don’t I wish I’d insisted on
five thou.”

Mr Jacobs put the Book back in the drawer, and
pushed over the bundle of notes.

“Heavens! What a prey for thieves!” She took
Death the Claimant

it up greedily. "Where shall I put them for safety?" She reflected a moment; then throwing back her sable cape she unfastened the bodice of her dress, and placed the packet of banknotes inside her bosom, triumphantly rebuttoned the bodice, and again brought forward her cape, carefully replacing the jabot of old Genoese point which she had dis­arranged.

Mr Jacobs watched her with ill-concealed im­patience. When she had finished he said emphatic­ally,—

"You will now understand that from me and from my household you and yours are absolutely divided."

"Really, Judah, you are not civil, to say the least of it. Perhaps the division may not be quite so easy to accomplish as you imagine—social threads in the way, and little predilections you might not have bargained for! Karl Kœnigsen isn't the only close mutual friend we have—I, and—the other Mrs Jacobs."

He turned livid.

"I insist upon you speaking of my wife with proper respect."

"Well, I'll call her 'Mrs Jacobs,' if it makes you any happier. We'll concede her that point for the present. How are you going to get the lady to send her devoted and trustworthy physician to the right about?"

"That is already done. Doctor Grier will not again enter my house."

"Don't you be too sure about that. To the best of my knowledge he was sent for last Saturday. You'll find Andrew a hard nut to crack. He'll want to know the reason why, I can tell you; and if he means to see—Mrs Jacobs, he'll do it. Mind he hasn't a suspicion that Ahasuerus-Jacobs and my late lamented are one and the same, and I'd be just as well pleased that he hadn't—just yet."

"Do you intend to imply that he's ignorant of
The Other Mrs Jacobs

your former history? That's impossible. You went into the hospital as Mrs Jacobs."

"Certainly I did. And I also bought this the other day"—she touched a pin with a fantastic jewelled head, which held together the folds of her lace—"pretty, isn't it?—from Mr Jacobs, jeweller, in the Edgware Road. And I occasionally employ an upholstering woman who calls herself Mrs Jacobs. There are plenty of us in the world. Andrew has never been unduly curious about my matrimonial antecedents. I will say for him, that he's only inquisitive about microbes, and that sort of beastly thing. He's utterly devoid of healthy human interests in the ordinary way. Really, I should never have thought that Andrew, who has been a woman-hater ever since he fell out of love with me, would have lost his head over—the other Mrs Jacobs."

"What do you mean? Explain yourself," said Jacobs, hoarsely, ignoring the taunt.

"Simply that he's in love with her—that's all. I taxed him with it myself. Haven't I seen the signs in him before? And it isn't all on one side either, I fancy. Doctors have plenty of chances for ingratiating themselves, you know. I wouldn't mind betting one of these"—she touched the notes in her breast—"that they've done some billing and cooing while you've been away. You thought you had put your foot down, my clever Jude, but I think I may safely assure you that it wasn't to much purpose."

"How dare you?" Mr Jacobs gripped Clarice's shoulder with a force that made her stagger. "I forbid you to speak of my wife."

"But she isn't your wife, my dear Jude." Clarice's tinkling laugh rang out exasperatingly. "Don't press so hard—you hurt me. She's only—the other Mrs Jacobs. And what's more, she won't long be even that. As soon as you're dead, my friend, there'll be a lovely set out—a race for the Jacobs Stakes—entries, Andrew Grier and Karl Koenigsen.
Death the Claimant

They both know that you’ve got an aneurism of the heart, and may die any day, so they’ve started the running already. It will be a pity if you can’t look down from aloft and see which wins.”

Mr Jacobs’s hand suddenly relaxed its grasp of Clarice’s shoulder. He lurched back, and dropped heavily into the swivel chair in front of his desk.

“You’d better take care of yourself, Jude,” Clarice went on mockingly. “Excitement’s bad for you. And you’ll need all your wits to manage the rival claimants for the hand of the other Mrs J.—with your money in it. They’re a smart pair. But just you keep an eye on Karl Kœnigsen—that’s my advice to you. Andrew’s in earnest fast enough—only, you see, he’s got me to look after him. Now Karl Kœnigsen wants a wife for practical purposes, and he means to have your Helga.”

“Kœnigsen!” repeated Jacobs, in a dull tone. “That’s a lie, at all events.”

“Oh, is it? Find out. Anyway, don’t leave your shoes ready for him to step into. He thinks they’d just fit him. It’s the money he wants mostly, but he manages to throw in a bit of love-making. You can prove what I say if you like to catch your ‘wife’ unawares. Ask her what became of the fan she dropped near the Japanese chrysanthemums in the conservatory on Friday night, just after Karl Kœnigsen had told her that he adored her. I heard him say it, but you can pretend that you did, too.”

Mr Jacobs said not a word. He sat huddled in the chair, his shoulders hunched, his head falling forward on his breast.

Clarice got up and went softly behind him, whispering in his ear,—

“Think it over, Jude, and if you want any more suggestions you can let me know. But keep friends with me, Jude. You never did get the better of the little cat, and you’re not going to now. A cat has claws, mind, that might scratch when you were not
The Other Mrs Jacobs

looking. But she has nice little soft paws too, and she only puts the paws out if you play with her prettily. You read your Bible, I hope, Jude. There's a line in it you might remember with advantage—'Where the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.' I shouldn't wonder if I see something of that sort, by-and-by."

He took no notice of her, but sat still, his head bowed upon his breast. Tired of taunting, and deciding that she had said enough, Clarice moved, and caught up her muff, leaving the will visible, with its endorsement uppermost. Then, with a parting wave of her hand, and a light "So long, Jude!" she left the room, not knowing that Death stood behind the chair in which Judah Jacobs was seated, having come to claim his victim.
CHAPTER XVIII

BY TELEPHONE

Miss Pengelley went down to the dining-room late on Monday afternoon with the intention of typing a letter to her brother in Ceylon. The duty had been neglected, for in fact her mind during the last few days had been filled with “Spiridia” and the intricacies of the Jacobs household, leaving no room for her own concerns. Even now, after typing a few lines she let her hands drop, and her thoughts wandered over the events of the past few days. She was not needed upstairs just now, for Ronald was sleeping, and Mrs Jacobs had established herself in his sitting-room, her embroidery frame—which Miss Pengelley had brought—before her, while she drew her needle to and fro in a mechanical almost vacuous manner, which showed that her attention was by no means fixed upon her task.

Miss Pengelley was distressed at the change in Mrs Jacobs—the deep depression, alternating with fits of feverish activity in which she descended and remounted the stairs, paced the drawing-room, settling to nothing, and went in and out of Ronald’s room asking questions as to his health which were wholly unnecessary; for, beyond a certain lassitude—the after effects of his bout of pain—the boy was in almost his normal condition.

It was about midday when Mrs Jacobs had issued from her study, dressed in ordinary day attire. Doctor Grier had not come that day. On Sunday
Miss Pengelley had waited to see him after his interview with Mrs Jacobs, keeping the door of Ronald's sitting-room ajar in case he had any further directions to give. She had heard him leave the study, and go past the landing, not pausing a moment; but when she ran out to intercept him, she had only caught sight of the forbidding outline of his shoulders, and of the grim profile as he let himself out at the hall door.

Later in that day, Miss Pengelley had surprised Mrs Jacobs's eyes fixed upon her with a strained, inquiring expression. Venturing to ask what was in her mind, Susan received the reply,—

"I was thinking of something Doctor Grier had said. He told me he was sure you could be trusted, if you would, to take care—good care—of Ronald. I am glad of that, because it makes me feel that he would be safe with you if—if ever I left him."

"Are you going away then, Mrs Jacobs?" asked Miss Pengelley.

"I never do leave him," said Helga, seemingly answering her own thoughts as much as Susan's. "But the time might come when perhaps I'd have to. One can never tell. I sometimes feel as if I must get away. I don't encourage the feeling, but it becomes too strong for me occasionally."

"It would do you good to have a change," said Susan, seriously, "and indeed you may trust me to take every care of Ronald. We are very good friends, and I am sure I could look after him, if Doctor Grier came in now and then and told me what to do."

"Yes," said Mrs Jacobs. "Of course if he were here, that would be all right; but one cannot be sure of always having the same doctor. However, we'll see. I am not going away just yet—I could not, in any case. But if—if ever I am obliged to go, Miss Pengelley, may I rely on your kind care of my boy?"
By Telephone

"Undoubtedly," said Susan, sympathetically. "I will look after him to the very best of my ability. And I hope you will consider the idea of taking a change, Mrs Jacobs. I feel sure you would enjoy it."

"I don't want a change in the ordinary sense of the word," returned Helga, sadly; "but there are times, I confess, when I want to get right away by myself—when I feel as if I could not bear the restrictions of London life any longer. I am not town born nor bred, you know, Miss Pengelley. I was born and brought up in St Helga. I lived there till I was sixteen, until my father was deposed, and we went to Helsingkrâad. I loved the island so, and I have never seen it since. I have a tiny property, a little cottage on a wild headland that belonged to my mother, where my foster-mother is now living. She is a St Helgan fisherwoman. If I could but go there again for a few weeks, I think my spirit would be strengthened, and I should be better able to face life as it is."

"Why shouldn't you go up there?" replied Miss Pengelley. "It is a very good thought. I should certainly go."

"Well, I will think of it," said Helga, and relapsed into silence.

Soon after that Miss Pengelley went downstairs to write her letter, leaving the mother and son alone. The letter proceeded briskly for the first page. It was easy enough to give an interesting description of her first impressions of 59 Branxton Gardens and its inmates. Susan went on to describe Karl Kœnigsen, and her first experience of the gaieties of Upper Bohemia, as seen at the St Helgan Gallery. But after that she flagged, and was now sitting ruminating upon her later experiences in this memorable week.

Suddenly the telephone bell rang in the little room where Mrs Jacobs interviewed her cook. It tinged
peremptorily, and for so long that Miss Pengelley was feeling half inclined to go and hear what was the matter when the shambling footsteps of the awkward footman sounded on the basement stairs. She knew by this that Hornblow, who was usually the officiant in the telephone-room, must have gone out for an after-tea constitutional. The footman was not accustomed to taking telephone messages, and the nature of this must have considerably upset him, for he appeared presently at the dining-room door showing a distraught countenance and appealing to Miss Pengelley.

"Please, miss, there's something happened at the telephone, and Mr Hornblow is out. If you please, miss, would you mind coming—the gentleman at the other end he asked if there wasn't somebody in the house as was responsible, and on no account to call Mrs Jacobs."

The bell was going on all the time, persistently tinging. Miss Pengelley rose at once from her typewriter and followed the affrighted footman to the instrument. The man bent over the mouthpiece, and, during a brief pause in the rattle, called, "'Ello! Sir! Are you there?"

He put the tube to his ear and listened a moment or two, then answered back, "Yessir, the lady's come, sir."

There was a short reply, and William relinquished the ear-tube with a shaking hand.

"Will you please come, miss. The gentleman's waiting to speak to you."

Susan advanced with some trepidation, and held the tube to her own ear. There sounded a sharp, assured voice, "Are you there? Who are you?"

"I'm Susan Pengelley,"

"Who? Speak up, please."

"Miss Pengelley. Mrs Jacobs's companion."

"All right. Can I rely upon you not to alarm Mrs Jacobs?"
By Telephone

"Certainly."
"Very good. "I'm Radstock—*Rad-stock*—junior partner of Jacobs's, you know. Can you hear?"
"Yes, pretty well."
"Got strong nerves and a head on your shoulders—eh?"
"Yes. Please say what's the matter."
"Well, I've got bad news—very bad news. Are you there?"

There was a buzz in the instrument; the connection seemed imperfect, and the junior partner's voice had become distant and indistinct.

A break followed, which seemed to Susan interminable. Then the bell rang again. Once more, "Hello! Are you there?"
"Yes—yes. What is the bad news? Please speak louder."
"Wait a minute. Doctor Grier's here. We sent for him at once. He'll speak to you."

There came another voice along the wire, resonant, deliberate.
"Miss Pengelley! Are you there?"
"Yes, I'm here. Do tell me what has happened."
"I'm sorry to say Mr Jacobs died suddenly about five o'clock."
"What!" Susan let fall the ear-piece in her horror. A faint, thin whispering came from the telephone which recalled her. She collected herself with an effort.
"Say it again, please."
"Can you hear? Mr Jacobs died of heart disease in his office this afternoon. He was found dead in his chair at five o'clock. . . . Are you there? Do you understand?"
"O—o—oh!" Susan could give nothing but the long-drawn monosyllable.
"I want you to break it to Mrs Jacobs. First tell me—do you know what I've said to you?"
"Yes. Mr Jacobs died. . . . I cannot believe it."
"It is unfortunately true. We are bringing the body home. Will you prepare the servants? Can I depend on your judgment and sympathy in breaking it to Mrs Jacobs?"

"I will do my best."

Miss Pengelley staggered away from the instrument, which was rung off again. William had left the room, and she stood trying to collect her faculties for the task before her. She began to ask herself whether she had heard aright; she had one wild impulse to ring up the junior partner and get corroboration of the terrible news. But a minute's reflection told her that there could be no mistake. She had recognised Doctor Grier's voice, and his announcement had been sufficiently positive. Besides, she remembered his prognostications of approaching disaster, and felt sure that this was what he had meant. She went back to her typewriter, and stared stupidly at the lines, which danced before her eyes. It seemed incredible that only a few minutes back she had been writing an ordinary chatty letter to her brother describing her new surroundings. It was barely a week since she had arrived in Branxton Gardens. How much had happened in that time! She knew that since Saturday she had felt oppressed by a vague sense of something painful in the background, but she had never dreamed of calamity so swift and dire as this. Mr Jacobs dead! Her mind leaped back to the first evening, and his strangely-uttered quotation concerning "Judah — the lion's whelp." Truly now was he couched down, and none should ever raise him up. Mr Jacobs dead! She had to hammer the fact upon her dull brain before she could realise it.

And now it was her duty to go up and break the tidings to his widow, as Doctor Grier had bidden her. She never thought of disobeying, although it occurred to her that he might more naturally have undertaken the task himself. How would Mrs Jacobs bear it?
By Telephone

Would she be stunned by the sudden misfortune? Would she faint? Would she weep? Or would the intensity of her grief dry up the fountain of tears?

Susan wondered whether she ought not first to summon the servants, but she did not know for which of them to send. Hornblow's entrance solved the doubt. He looked scared, having just come in from his walk, to be met with the footman's incoherent version of what he had gleaned at the telephone. Hornblow was deeply moved when Miss Pengelley told him the truth regarding it, as was perhaps natural, from his own point of view.

"Dear! Dear! Dear! What a misfortune! I'm truly grieved, miss, as will be every one of us—upper and under—downstairs. As fine a gentleman, was Mr Jacobs, as ever stepped, in spite of being in business, and him with a drop of Jewish blood in him. Never could I wish to have a better master, all the same. Though when I come here first, Miss Pengelley, me having always lived in the best English families, I fancied it something of a come down. But I can honestly say, I've never regretted it; and I've been here now five years come the 15th of January. Not a word of unpleasantness, but once, between us, and that altogether on account of Mr Jacobs preferring to engage inexperienced footmen—young men as he knew something about, and wanted to give a chance to, he said. He never would realise that it put a deal on me." Hornb'ow heaved a deep sigh. "Well, well, 'in the midst of life'—that is a true saying, miss. And how will my poor mistress bear it? And who is to tell her?"

"I've got to do it, Hornblow," said Miss Pengelley, resolutely. "They are bringing—him home. Doctor Grier told me to say that you must be prepared."

"The smoking-room, miss," said Hornblow, in awe-stricken accents. "I'll see to it. Mrs Jacobs can depend on me. I understand all that is usual
when there's a death in the house. I'd best inform Mam'selle Julie. She's in the housekeeper's room."

Miss Pengelley dragged herself upstairs, endeavouring as best she could to compose her face, so that it might not at once convey the evil news, should Ronald be awake, and his mother still with him. But it happened that Mrs Jacobs, seized with restlessness, had gone into the drawing-room, and was in the act of pulling out drawer after drawer in a Boule cabinet which stood near the window. She half turned at Miss Pengelley's entrance.

="I am looking for a letter," she said. "I dropped it the day—on Saturday afternoon."

Susan knew she must be referring to the letter which was lying on the floor when Mrs Grier had been hustled so unceremoniously out of the house. She went to the escritoire, and, taking the folded paper from where she had then placed it, handed it to Mrs Jacobs.

="I think," she said, "that this is what you want."

Helga looked at it, her brows contracting as if with pain, and hastily thrust it into a little velvet bag which hung from her waist.

="Yes, that's it." She walked about the room for a minute or two, and, as she neared the door, freakishly turned on a cluster of electric lights in the centre of the ceiling, which made a sudden illumination, and caused Susan to shrink, afraid of her own betraying countenance.

="I hate dimness," Mrs Jacobs cried. "I want as much light as I can get—light in all dark holes and shadowy corners—lights for one's poor soul to see its way by when it's walking along a difficult path in life." She stopped abruptly in front of Susan, and the girl's manner arrests her attention.

="What is it? You look as if something had happened. Isn't Ronald all right?"

="Ronald's all right," Miss Pengelley faltered, "but there is—I have something to tell you."
By Telephone

"Yes? I thought I heard the telephone bell a little while ago. Hornblow ought to have brought up the message."

"Hornblow was out. He's only just come back. I was sent for to speak with someone through the telephone."

"With whom? It was from the office, I suppose?"

"Yes, the message was from the office."

"Well, can't you tell me what it was?" Mrs Jacobs spoke impatiently, yet not with keen anxiety. She had the manner of one preoccupied by some secret absorbing interest, to whom all outside tidings are comparatively unimportant. "Is there anything wrong? Why don't you say who was at the telephone?"

"It was Doctor Grier," said Susan, taking courage at the mere mention of his name.

"Doctor Grier!" Mrs Jacobs, who had continued to move restlessly to and fro, stopped again in sheer amazement.

"Do you mean that Doctor Grier spoke to you from the office—Mr Jacobs's office?"

"Yes," said Susan, outwardly sedate but inwardly trembling.

"What was he doing there?" Sudden fear looked out of Helga's eyes.

"He had been sent for," said Susan.

"Sent for? Why?"

"There was someone who had been taken ill."

"Someone!" Helga came closer and caught Susan's arm. "Miss Pengelley, speak out. I'm not a child or a fool. Who was taken ill?"

"Mr Jacobs," said Susan, gently. "He was taken ill suddenly—very ill!" Helga's eyes devoured her face as she went on, her voice thrilling with intense pity. "There was something the matter with him that no one knew of except, I think, Doctor Grier. It was his heart."
The Other Mrs Jacobs

"Except Doctor Grier! Oh! my God!" exclaimed Helga, adding stormily, "Why do you say was?"

"Because—oh! Mrs Jacobs, I don’t know how to tell you."

Tears rushed into Susan’s eyes. She held out her arms in an impulse of compassionate protection. "Can you understand? He is not suffering now."

"Do you mean that he is—dead?" asked Helga, in a hushed voice.

Susan simply nodded.

Helga stood motionless, her face the pallid colour of old marble.

"Heaven has been very merciful. May his soul rest in peace," were the first words that broke from her lips.

To Susan’s astonishment there came an expression of quietude, almost of relief, over her face. The tortured look which had been upon it for the last two days seemed now to have suddenly melted away. She clasped her hands upon her bosom, and stood with her face uplifted, in the attitude, Susan thought, of some pictured saint. Great drops filled her eyes, and coursed slowly down her cheeks. She was safe now, Susan knew. There was no further need to apprehend terrible consequences from the shock. Helga was looking at her again with the sorrowful simplicity of a child.

"I am thanking God," she said, "that he has been spared trouble and pain. Now I can always think of him as my husband who, through all our life together, cared only to make me happy. I am glad he is at rest, where no harm can touch him."

Susan wondered, not understanding what she meant, and fancying that perhaps the suddenness of the shock had turned her mind a little astray. Mrs Jacobs’s calmness, though her grief was evidently deep and genuine, puzzled the girl, who sensed behind it some darker tragedy, at which she could not
even dimly guess. The only clue she had was that it held some relation to Helga's dead husband, but what that relation was she could not conjecture.

Being a practical little person, Miss Pengelley did not disdain material aids in her ministrations, and when Mrs Jacobs, who, like most neurotic, highly-strung women, was subject to quick reactions, sobbed and shivered, Susan made her sip champagne, which she took at the door from Julie. It was of the finest brand, which Hornblow had thoughtfully got out of the cellar, and sent up by "Mam'selle Julie," a black-eyed, sallow-faced, well-dressed young person, who hung about the landing in the hope of being called to the succour of her madame, whom she adored. Susan bade the girl go upstairs and prepare her mistress's rooms in case Mrs Jacobs would wish to retire thither, which seemed likely. Julie flew to light the fires there—the blinds were already drawn down—and to have in readiness the nearest approach that madame's wardrobe furnished to the garb of woe.

Helga's vivid imagination had at once conjured up a dramatic picture of the dead man being borne in silence to his home on the day, and almost at the hour, which he had fixed for his return in such different fashion. All her thoughts seemed to be of her husband; she only remembered her son, as, with Miss Pengelley's arm in hers, she slowly mounted the stairs.

"I can't go back to Ronald," she said plaintively, her hand at her side. "He might want to talk about his father, and I don't think I could bear it—just now. I wonder if you would mind telling him, Miss Pengelley, what has happened. Do you think you could? I know you will do it in a kind way."

"Indeed I will," replied Susan, fervently. She was anxious to get Mrs Jacobs out of sight and hearing of the arrival of the dead master of the house, for whom preparations were being made below. "Doctor
The Other Mrs Jacobs

Grier is coming himself," Susan added. "Shall he go upstairs to you?"

But Mrs Jacobs shook her head. She trembled from head to foot and was forced to put out her hand suddenly and cling to the balusters for support.

"No, no, not now. I don't want to see him. Ask him to look after Ronald, but please don't let him come near me. I want to be alone. I must be alone—quite alone."

Susan agreed, thinking that, after all, it was but natural that the new-made widow should shrink from seeing anyone, even her friend the doctor. They had reached the upper landing by this time and went into the little study. The curtains were drawn and the shaded light above the typewriter shed but a feeble glow on the sanctum of "Spiridia." Somehow Susan felt that, once inside this little room, the woman she was tending was much more "Spiridia" than Mrs Jacobs, for she fully realised the gulf between the two sides of Helga. Susan looked to the accustomed inspirational atmosphere of the room to afford such consolation as it might. Instinctively, she felt that it would soothe and comfort. So Mrs Jacobs remained silent and solitary. Even Julie was refused admittance. "I want to be alone," was all Helga's desire.

It was an easier task to break to Ronald the news that he had lost his father. The youth had never felt any profound affection for the Universal Agent, as he had been used to style the head of Ahasuerus-Jacobs, and his death was not likely to make any immediate blank in Ronald's existence. The father's prevailing sentiments towards his crippled son had been at best a compassionate toleration, at worst something akin to contempt, and, mingled with this, a faint resentment of Helga's injudicious devotion to the boy. Perhaps the only practical point on which there had been dissidence between Judah Jacobs and Helga was the management of their son; and it must be confessed that the father's view of the matter was
By Telephone

the soundest, and could it have been carried out would probably have made a better man of Ronald. The boy himself was perfectly aware of his father's attitude, and this knowledge on his part had not contributed to harmony between them, but Ronald, for all his priggish old-mannishness, was but a boy in years and understanding. On the present occasion, his sudden throwing off of selfish egotism, a few natural tears that he shed, and his real concern for his mother, raised him considerably in Miss Pengelley's opinion. The bond between these two was welding itself in a curious way.

Miss Pengelley was still sitting with Ronald, telling him again such meagre particulars as Doctor Grier had given her through the telephone, when the sound of a carriage and a cab driving up, of the hall door opening and closing, and of the tread of men's feet in the hall, disturbed the heavy hush which had fallen upon the house. Ronald raised himself nervously upon his couch and looked at Miss Pengelley, tears starting to his eyes again, for the boy was still weak, and, though he had not cared much for his father, he had felt the shock more than she guessed. Susan turned rather pale and listened silently.

Presently the sound of footsteps and of muffled voices ceased. The door of the smoking-room fell to with a dull thud. Ronald and Miss Pengelley both knew that the burden had been laid there upon the couch, which Susan remembered, with a little shiver, was long, narrow, without arms, and bier-like.

By-and-by a message came up that Mr Radstock, the junior partner, was below. With an audacity which, in the circumstances, was perhaps commendable, he desired to see Mrs Jacobs. Miss Pengelley, who had descended on Hornblow's intimation of Mr Radstock's wishes, stood warder of Helga's privacy.

The junior partner was a gentleman of florid manners and vulpine countenance, who, Susan had already gleaned, was no favourite with Mrs Jacobs. Mr
Radstock thought that Mrs Jacobs would wish to know the particulars of her husband's last hours, and he had an idea that she might throw some light on the identity of a lady unknown to the clerk admitting her, who had not given her name, but who came, she said, by appointment, to see Mr Jacobs. She had made her own way out, for no one had been summoned by Mr Jacobs, according to his custom when dismissing a client, to show the way to the door. That lady was the last person who had seen Mr Jacobs alive. After her departure the clerk, knocking and receiving no answer, had entered the private room of the senior partner to find him sitting in front of the writing-table, stone dead. It was a question whether the interview with the unknown lady had accelerated his end.

It flashed into Susan's mind that this lady visitor might prove to be one of the elements of tragedy which she had sensed. Nevertheless Miss Pengelley was unwilling that Mrs Jacobs should be disturbed.

"No, no," she cried. "Mrs Jacobs told me especially that she wished to be alone. I am sure that she would rather not see you. And even if she would, why trouble her with this story of a woman she probably knows nothing of, and who could have had nothing to do with Mr Jacobs's death?"

Mr Radstock's manner conveyed clearly that he did not consider Mrs Jacobs's companion as a person authorised to give any opinion on the subject. Luckily Doctor Grier came in at the moment—he had been engaged upon superintending some last offices for the dead. He at once settled the point under discussion.

It was quite out of the question that Mrs Jacobs should be disturbed. Nothing must be referred to her—to-day at all events. The junior partner altered his tone and submitted with a fairly good grace. Miss Pengelley could not help admiring the doctor as he stood, tall and commanding, his back to the fire.
By Telephone

"Miss Pengelley," he said, with formal courtesy that was in marked contrast to Radstock's rather insolent manner, "I should inform you that I took upon myself, as medical attendant to the family, the responsibility of sending for Mr Jacobs's solicitor. As Mr Radstock knows"—and he glanced at the junior partner—"a document, purporting to be Mr Jacobs's will, was lying on the table before which the dead body was seated. The endorsement gave the name of the lawyer who had drawn it up, and I sent for him and handed the will into his keeping. He will probably be here shortly, and will advise as to the proper steps to be taken."

Susan made some suitable reply, and then the junior partner took his leave, and Doctor Grier and Miss Pengelley remained alone together in the dining-room.

"Well!" he said grimly. "This is a bad business and you've got your work cut out before you."

"What am I to do?" asked Susan, diffidently.

"Do? Why, prove that you are what I've summed you up at—no fool. Keep your wits about you and protect that poor woman upstairs as far as lies in your power."

"Of course. That's all I'm caring about," said Susan. "I'll do my best."

"You can't do more," he rejoined gruffly. "At all events, don't get scared. There may be other complications ahead, I don't exactly know of what sort; but you take my advice"—he flung up his chin determinedly—"Go straight—and chuck the consequences."

"I'm not afraid of consequences," said Susan, simply. "They don't concern me."

"No, they don't. And be thankful for it."

"Won't you go up to Mrs Jacobs?" suggested Susan. "She said that she wouldn't see anyone, but you're different."

"Oh! Ay! I'm different, in a sense; but if she
The Other Mrs Jacobs
didn't say so I won't chance it. No, thanks, I'm not going up. Tell me how she took it."

He sat down by the table and questioned Susan minutely. The girl gave the history of the last twenty-four hours, and of Mrs Jacobs's moods. The doctor sat for several moments gazing blankly into space, deep in thought. Then he shook himself as though he had come to some conclusion.

"No. I can't do anything now. She's best alone. The lawyer man will see to things. If she seems restless again—excited, you understand—give her this."

He took out his stylograph and a small pad and dashed off a prescription.

"Bromide," he said, "and cannabis indica. You'll send it out at once to be made up; and let her take it, if necessary. And"—he had advanced a step and halted in front of Susan, his hand outstretched—"if anything goes wrong—anything, mind—you will send for me."

His grey eyes, steely discs, the pupils of which seemed to have contracted into pin-points of concentrated light, revealed to Susan a look which she had never seen in them before. In that look she beheld the man's soul naked. She had surprised his secret. She knew that he loved Mrs Jacobs, and he knew that she knew it; but the greatness and strength of the man was such that he did not care. It was characteristic of him that he only gave a harsh laugh.

"You seem taken aback, young woman," he said. "Didn't suppose I was built that way, did you? Well, it doesn't matter much. I think we understand each other. We'll both of us do for her the best that we know how—eh? But I'm not going near her at present. The lawyer man will come and tell her all she needs to know. I'm not on in this act. Only—I'm there, you understand, just as any other ordinary doctor might be—to give bromide and that sort of
thing when it’s wanted. So you send for me if you require me—I sha’n’t be long in coming. Mind, I trust you, young woman.”

And Miss Pengelley knew by the ring of his voice that Doctor Grier trusted her absolutely in the care of the woman he loved.

The iron grip of his hand as he held hers before leaving the room was a physical impression and a mental memory. He had not been long gone when the solicitor arrived, a typical man of law, whom Mrs Jacobs consented to see, and who was accordingly admitted to her study. The interview was not a long one, and the lawyer presently departed in time for his own family dinner in a street behind Lancaster Gate.

There was no family dinner served that evening at 59 Branxton Gardens. Julie took up a tray to Mrs Jacobs. Miss Pengelley and Ronald ate in a scrappy fashion together, while footsteps, muffled by the thick carpet, passed to and fro below, and lights burned in the death chamber. Already the heavy scent of Roman hyacinths, white roses and Eucharist lilies floated up from the lower storey. Mam’selle Julie, actuated by an emotional impulse and anxious to please her mistress, had gone forth to the florist’s where Ronald had purchased his blue lilies and pink orchids, and had returned laden with offerings, which she humbly laid at the shrine of death.

Later on in the evening, when Ronald had been put to bed and all seemed still, Susan crept softly down to the ground floor, where the King of Terrors held court with the silent dead. The women whom Doctor Grier had brought to perform what was required were at supper, and Susan supposed the room would be otherwise tenantless. She turned the door handle noislessly, and was about to enter, when she shrunk back again, seeing that she must not intrude, for a dark figure knelt beside the white-draped couch.
The Other Mrs Jacobs

No sound of weeping disturbed the solemnity of that last long sleep. Helga's grief was voiceless, but none the less sincere. Her long, thin fingers held closely one of the dead hands—hands that, since she had held them at the marriage altar, had been raised only in tender offices and kindly deeds for her. Judah Jacobs would have been glad had he read her thoughts of him and seen how closely she clung to him now that he was about to be taken from her. All that night she remained beside him.