Mr. Waddington of Wyck

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MR. WADDINGTON OF WYCK

BY MAY SINCLAIR

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MR. WADDINGTON OF WYCK

I

1

Barbara wished she would come back. For the last hour Fanny Waddington had kept on passing in and out of the room through the open door into the garden, bringing in tulips, white, pink, and red tulips, for the flowered Lowestoft bowls, hovering over them, caressing them with her delicate butterfly fingers, humming some sort of song to herself.

The song mixes itself up with the Stores list Barbara was making: "Two dozen glass towels. Twelve pounds of Spratt's puppy biscuits. One dozen gent.'s all-silk pyjamas, extra large size" ... "A-hoom--hoom, a-hoom--hoom" (that _Impromptu_ of Schubert's), and with the notes Barbara was writing: "Mrs. Waddington has pleasure in enclosing...." Fanny Waddington would always have pleasure in enclosing something.... "A ho-om--boom, hoom, hee." A sound so light that it hardly stirred the quiet of the room. If a butterfly could hum it would hum like Fanny Waddington.

Barbara Madden had not been two days at Lower Wyck Manor, and already she was at home there; she knew by heart Fanny's drawing-room with the low stretch of the Tudor windows at each end, their lattices panelled by the heavy mullions, the back one looking out on to the green garden bordered with wallflowers and tulips; the front one on to the round grass-plot and the sundial, the drive and the shrubbery beyond, down the broad walk that cut through it into the clear reaches of the park. She liked the interior, the Persian carpet faded to patches of grey and fawn and old rose, the port-wine mahogany furniture, the tables thrusting out the brass claws of their legs, the latticed cabinets and bookcases, the chintz curtains and chair-covers, all red dahlias and powder-blue parrots on a cream-coloured ground. But when Fanny wasn't there you could feel the room ache with the emptiness she left.

Barbara ached. She caught herself listening for Fanny Waddington's feet on the flagged path and the sound of her humming. As she waited she looked up at the picture over the bureau in the recess of the fireplace, the portrait in oils of Horatio Bysshe Waddington, Fanny's husband.

He was seated, heavily seated with his spread width and folded height, in one of the brown-leather chairs of his library, dressed in a tweed coat, putty-coloured riding breeches, a buff waistcoat, and a grey-blue tie. The handsome, florid face was lifted in a noble pose above the stiff white collar; you could see the full, slightly drooping lower lip under the shaggy black moustache. There was solemnity in the thick, rounded salient of the Roman nose, in the slightly bulging eyes, and in the almost imperceptible line that sagged from each nostril down the long curve of the cheeks. This figure, one great thigh crossed on the

other, was extraordinarily solid against the smoky background where the clipped black hair made a watery light. His eyes were not looking at anything in particular. Horatio Bysshe Waddington seemed to be absorbed in some solemn thought.

His wife's portrait hung over the card-table in the other recess.

Barbara hoped he would be nice; she hoped he would be interesting, since she had to be his secretary. But, of course, he would be. Anybody so enchanting as Fanny could never have married him if he wasn't. She wondered how she, Barbara Madden, would play her double part of secretary to him and companion to her. She had been secretary to other men before; all through the war she had been secretary to somebody, but she had never had to be companion to their wives. Perhaps it was a good thing that Fanny, as she kept on reminding her, had "secured" her first. She was glad he wasn't there when she arrived and wouldn't be till the day after to-morrow (he had wired that morning to tell them); so that for two days more she would have Fanny to herself.

2

"Well, what do you think of him?"

Fanny had come back into the room; she was hovering behind her.

"I--I think he's jolly good-looking."

"Well, you see, that was painted seventeen years ago. He was young then."

"Has he changed much since?"

"Dear me, no," said Fanny. "He hasn't changed at all."

"No more have you, I think."

"Oh, _me_--in seventeen years!"

She was still absurdly like her portrait, after seventeen years, with her light, slender body, poised for one of her flights, her quick movements of butterfly and bird, with her small white face, the terrier nose lifted on the moth-wing shadows of her nostrils, her dark-blue eyes, that gazed at you, close under the low black eyebrows, her brown hair that sprang in two sickles from the peak on her forehead, raking up to the backward curve of the chignon, a profile of cyclamen. And her mouth, the fine lips drawn finer by her enchanting smile. All these features set in such strange, sensitive unity that her mouth looked at you and her eyes said things. No matter how long she lived she would always be young.

"Oh, my dear child," she said, "you are so like your mother."

"Am I? Were you afraid I wouldn't be?"

"A little, just a little afraid. I thought you'd be modern."

"So I am. So was mother."

"Not when I knew her."

"Afterwards then." A sudden thought came to Barbara. "Mrs. Waddington, if mother was your dearest friend why haven't you known me all this time?"

"Your mother and I lost sight of each other before you were born."

"Mother didn't want to."

"Nor I."

"Mother would have hated you to think she did."

"I never thought it. She must have known I didn't."

"Then why--"

"Did we lose sight?"

"Yes, why? People don't, if they can help it, if they care enough. And mother cared."

"You're a persistent little thing, aren't you? Are you trying to make out that I didn't care?"

"I'm trying to make you see that mother did."

"Well, my dear, we both cared, but we _couldn't_ help it. We married, and our husbands didn't hit it off."

"Didn't they? And daddy was so nice. Didn't you know how nice he was?"

"Oh, yes. I knew. My husband was nice, too, Barbara; though you mightn't think it."

"Oh, but I do. I'm sure he is. Only I haven't seen him yet."

"So nice. But," said Fanny, pursuing her own thought, "he never made a joke in his life, and your father never _made_ anything else."

"Daddy didn't 'make' jokes. They came to him."

"I've seen them come. He never sent any of them away, no matter how naughty they were, or how expensive. I used to adore his jokes.... But Horatio didn't. He didn't like my adoring them, so you see--"

"I see. I wonder," said Barbara, looking up at the portrait again, "what he's thinking about?"

"I used to wonder."

"But you know now?"

"Yes, I know now," Fanny said.

"What'll happen," said Barbara, "if _I_ make jokes?"

"Nothing. He'll never see them."

"If he saw daddy's--"

"Oh, but he didn't. That was me."

Barbara was thoughtful. "I daresay," she said, "you won't keep me long. Supposing I can't do the work?"

"The _work_?" Fanny's eyes were interrogative and a little surprised, as though they were saying, "Who said work? What work?"

"Well, Mr. Waddington's work. I've got to help him with his book, haven't I?"

"Oh, his book, yes. _When_ he's writing it. He isn't always. Does he look," said Fanny, "like a man who'd always be writing a book?"

"No. I can't say he does, exactly." (What _did_ he look like?)

"Well, then, it'll be all right. I mean _we_ shall be."

"I only wondered whether I could really do what he wants."

"If Ralph could," said Fanny, "you can."

"Who's Ralph?"

"Ralph is my cousin. He _was_ Horatio's secretary."

"_Was_." Barbara considered it. "Did _he_ make jokes, then?"

"Lots. But that wasn't why he left.... It was an awful pity, too; because he's most dreadfully hard up."

"If he's hard up," Barbara said, "I couldn't bear to think I've done him out of a job."

"You haven't. He had to go."

Fanny turned again to her flowers and Barbara to her Stores list.

"Are you sure," Fanny said suddenly, "you put 'striped'?"

"Striped? The pyjamas? No, I haven't."

"Then, for goodness' sake, put it. Supposing they sent those awful Futurist things; why, he'd frighten me into fits. Can't you see Horatio stalking in out of his dressing-room, all magenta blobs and forked lightning?"

"I haven't seen him at all yet," said Barbara.

"Well, you wait.... Does my humming annoy you?"

"Not a bit. I like it. It's such a happy sound."

"I always do it," said Fanny, "when I'm happy."

You could hear feet, feet in heavy soled boots, clanking on the drive

that ringed the grass-plot and the sundial; the eager feet of a young man. Fanny turned her head, listening.

"There _is_ Ralph," she said. "Come in, Ralph!"

The young man stood in the low, narrow doorway, filling it with his slender height and breadth. He looked past Fanny, warily, into the far corner of the room, and when his eyes found Barbara at her bureau they smiled.

"Oh, _come_ in," Fanny said. "He isn't here. He won't be till Friday. This is Ralph Bevan, Barbara; and this is Barbara Madden, Ralph."

He bowed, still smiling, as if he saw something irrepressibly amusing in her presence there.

"Yes," said Fanny to the smile. "Your successor."

"I congratulate you, Miss Madden."

"Don't be an ironical beast. She's just said she couldn't bear to think she'd done you out of your job."

"Well, I couldn't," said Barbara.

"That's very nice of you. But you didn't do me out of anything. It was the act of God."

"It was Horatio's act. Not that Miss Madden meant any reflection on his justice and his mercy."

"I don't know about his justice," Ralph said. "But he was absolutely merciful when he fired me out."

"Is it so awfully hard then?" said Barbara.

"You may not find it so."

"Oh, but I'm going to be Mrs. Waddington's companion, too."

"You'll be all right then. They wouldn't let _me_ be that."

"He means you'll be safe, dear. You won't be fired out whatever happens."

"Whatever sort of secretary I am?"

"Yes. She can be any sort she likes, in reason, can't she?"

"She can't be a worse one than I was, anyhow."

Barbara was aware that he had looked at her, a long look, half thoughtful, half amused, as if he were going to say something different, something that would give her a curious light on herself, and had thought better of it.

Fanny Waddington was protesting. "My dear boy, it wasn't for incompetence. She's simply dying to know what you _did_ do."

"You can tell her."

"He wanted to write Horatio's book for him, and Horatio wouldn't let him. That was all."

"Oh, well, _I_ shan't want to write it," Barbara said.

"We thought perhaps you wouldn't," said Fanny.

But Barbara had turned to her bureau, affecting a discreet absorption in her list. And presently Ralph Bevan went out into the garden with Fanny to gather more tulips.

II

1

She _had_ been dying to know what he had done, but now, after Ralph had stayed to lunch and tea and dinner that first day, after he had spent all yesterday at the Manor, and after he had turned up to-day at ten o'clock in the morning, Barbara thought she had made out the history, though they had been very discreet and Fanny had insisted on reading "Tono-Bungay" out loud half the time.

Ralph, of course, was in love with his cousin Fanny. To be sure, she must be at least ten years older than he was, but that wouldn't matter. And, of course, it was rather naughty of him, but then again, very likely he couldn't help it. It had just come on him when he wasn't thinking; and who could help being in love with Fanny? You could be in love with people quite innocently and hopelessly. There was no sin where there wasn't any hope.

And perhaps Fanny was innocently, ever so innocently, in love with him; or, if she wasn't, Horatio thought she was, which came to much the same thing; so that anyhow poor Ralph had to go. The explanation they had given, Barbara thought, was rather thin, not quite worthy of their admirable intelligence.

It was Friday, Barbara's fifth day. She was walking home with Ralph Bevan through the Waddingtons' park, down the main drive that led from Wyck-on-the-Hill to Lower Wyck Manor.

It wouldn't be surprising, she thought, if Fanny were in love with her cousin; he was, as she put it to herself, so distinctly "fallable-in-love-with." She could see Fanny surrendering, first to his sudden laughter, his quick, delighted mind, his innocent, engaging frankness. He would, she thought, be endlessly amusing, endlessly interesting, because he was so interested, so amused. There was something that pleased her in the way he walked, hatless, his head thrown back, his shoulders squared, his hands thrust into his coat pockets, safe from gesture; something in the way he spun round in his path to face her with his laughter. He had Fanny's terrier nose with the ghost of a kink in it; his dark hair grew back in a sickle on each temple; it wouldn't lie level and smooth like other people's, but sprang up, curled from the clipping. His eyes were his own, dappled eyes, green

and grey, black and brown, sparkling; so was his mouth, which was neither too thin nor too thick--determination in the thrusting curve of that lower lip--and his chin, which was just a shade too big for it, a shade too big for his face. His cheeks were sunburnt, and a little shower of ochreish freckles spread from the sunburn and peppered the slopes of his nose. She wanted to sketch him.

"Doesn't Mrs. Waddington ever go for walks?" she said.

"Fanny? No. She's too lazy."

"Lazy?"

"Too active, if you like, in other ways.... How long have you known her?"

"Just five days."

"Five _days_?"

"Yes; but, you see, years ago she was my mother's dearest friend. That's how I came to be their secretary. When she saw my name in the advertisement she thought it must be me. And it was me. They hadn't seen each other for years and years. My father and Mr. Waddington didn't hit it off together, I believe."

"You haven't seen him yet?"

"No. There seems to be some mystery about him."

"Mystery?"

"Yes. What is it? Or mayn't you tell?"

"I _won't_ tell. It wouldn't be kind."

"Then don't--don't. I didn't know it was that sort of thing."

Ralph laughed. "It isn't. I meant it wouldn't be kind to you. I don't want to spoil him for you."

"Then there _is_--tell me one thing: Shall I get on with him all right?"

"Don't ask me _that_."

"I mean, will he be awfully difficult to work with?"

"Because he sacked me? No. Only you mustn't let on that you know better than he does. And if you want to keep your job, you mustn't contradict him."

"Now you've made me want to contradict him. Whatever he says I shall have to say the other thing whether I agree with him or not."

"Don't you think you could temporize a bit? For her sake."

"Did _you_ temporize?"

"Rather. I was as meek and servile as I knew how."

"As you knew how. Do you think I shall know better?"

"Yes, you're a woman. You can get on the right side of him. Will you try to, because of Fanny? I'm most awfully glad she's got you, and I want you to stay. Between you and me she has a very thin time with Waddington."

"There it is. I know--I know--I _know_ I'm going to hate him."

"Oh, no, you're not. You can't _hate_ Waddington."

"_You_ don't?"

"Oh, Lord, no. I wouldn't mind him a bit, poor old thing, if he wasn't Fanny's husband."

He had almost as good as owned it, almost put her in possession of their secret. She conceived it--his secret, Fanny's secret--as all innocence on her part, all chivalry on his; tender and hopeless and pure.

2

They had come to the white gate that led between the shrubberies and the grass-plot with the yellow-grey stone house behind it.

It was nice, she thought, of Fanny to make Mr. Bevan take her for these long walks when she couldn't go with them; but Barbara felt all the time that she ought to apologize to the young man for not being Fanny, especially when Mr. Waddington was coming back to-day by the three-forty train and this afternoon would be their last for goodness knew how long. And as they talked--about Ralph's life before the war and the jobs he had lost because of it (he had been a journalist), and about Barbara's job at the War Office, and air raids and the games they both went in for, and their favourite authors and the room he had in the White Hart Inn at Wyck--as they talked, fluently, with the ease of old acquaintances, almost of old friends, Barbara admired the beauty of Mr. Bevan's manners; you would have supposed that instead of suffering, as he must be suffering, agonies of impatience and irritation, he had never enjoyed anything in his life so much as this adventure that was just coming to an end.

He had opened the gate for her and now stood with his back to it, holding out his hand, saying "Good-bye."

"Aren't you coming in?" she said. "Mrs. Waddington expects you for tea."

"No," he said, "she doesn't. She knows I can't come if he's there."

He paused. "By the way, that book of his, it's in an appalling muddle. I hadn't time to do much to it before I left. If you can't get it straight you must come to me and I'll help you."

"That's very good of you."

"Rather not. It _was_ my job, you know."

He was backing through the gate, saluting as he went. And now he had

turned and was running with raking, athletic paces up the grass border of the park.

III

1

"Tea is in the library, miss."

This announcement, together with Partridge's extraordinary increase of importance, would have told her that the master had returned, even if she had not seen, through the half-open door of the cloak-room, Mr. Waddington's overcoat hanging by its shoulders and surmounted by his grey slouch hat.

With a rapid, furtive movement the butler closed the door on these sanctities; and she noted the subdued quiet of his footsteps as he led the way down the dark oak-panelled corridor, through the smoke-room, and into the library beyond. She also caught a surprising sight of her own face in the glass over the smoke-room chimneypiece, her dark eyes shining, the cool, wind-beaten flush on her young cheeks, the curled mouth flowering, geranium red on rose white.

This Barbara of the looking-glass smiled at her in passing with such gay, irresponsible amusement that it fairly took her breath away. Its origin became clear to her as Ralph Bevan's words shot into her mind: "I don't want to spoil him for you." She foresaw a possible intimacy in which Horatio Bysshe Waddington would become the unique though unofficial tie between them. She was aware that it pleased her to share a secret jest with Ralph Bevan.

She found Fanny established behind her tea-table in the low room, dim with its oak panelling above the long lines of the bookcases, where Fanny's fluttering smile made movement and a sort of light.

Her husband sat facing her in his brown leather chair and in the pose, the wonderful pose of his portrait; only the sobriety of his navy-blue serge had fined it down, giving him a factitious slenderness. He hadn't seen her come in. He sat there in innocence and unawareness; and afterwards it gave her a little pang of remorse remembering how innocent he had then seemed to her and unaware.

"This is my husband, Barbara. Horatio, you haven't met Miss Madden."

His eyes bulged with the startled innocence of a creature taken unaware. He had just lifted his face, with its dripping moustache, from his teacup, and though he carried off this awkwardness with an unabashed sweep of his pocket-handkerchief, you could see that he was sensitive; he hated you to catch him in any gesture that was less than noble. All his gestures were noble and his attitudes. He was noble as he got up, slowly, unfolding his great height, tightening by a movement of his shoulders his great breadth. He looked down at her superbly and held out his hand; it closed on hers in a large genial clasp.

"So this is my secretary, is it?"

"Yes. And don't forget she's my companion as well as your secretary."

"I never forget anything that you wish me to remember." (Only he said "nevah" and "remembah"; he bowed as he said it in a very courtly way.)

Barbara noticed that his black hair and moustache were lightly grizzled, there was loose flesh about his eyelids, his chin had doubled, and his cheeks were sagging from the bone, otherwise he was exactly like his portrait; these changes made him look, if anything, more incorruptibly dignified and more solemn. He had remained on his feet (for his breeding was perfect), moving between the tea-table and Barbara, bringing her tea, milk and sugar, and things to eat. Altogether he was so simple, so genial and unmysterious that Barbara could only suppose that Ralph had been making fun of her, of her wonder, her curiosity.

"My dear, what a colour you've got!"

Fanny put up her hands to her own cheeks to draw attention to Barbara's. "You _are_ growing a country girl, aren't you? You should have seen her white face when she came, Horatio."

"What has she been doing to herself?" He had settled again into his chair and his attitude.

"She's been out walking with Ralph."

"With Ralph? Is _he_ here still?"

"Why shouldn't he be?"

Mr. Waddington shrugged his immense shoulders. "It's a question of taste. If he _likes_ to hang about the place after his behaviour--"

"Poor boy! whatever has he done? 'Behaviour' makes it sound as if it had been something awful."

"We needn't go into it, I think."

"But you _are_ going into it, darling, all the time. Do you mean to keep it up against him for ever?"

"I'm not keeping anything up. What Ralph Bevan does is no concern of mine. Since I'm not to be inconvenienced by it--since Miss Madden has come to my rescue so charmingly--I shall not give it another thought."

He turned to Barbara as to a change of subject. "Had you any difficulty"--(his voice was measured and important)--"in finding your way here?"

"None at all."

"Ah, that one-thirty train is excellent. Excellent. But if you had not told the guard to stop at the Hill you would have been carried on to Cheltenham. Which would have been very awkward for you. Very awkward indeed."

"My dear Horatio, what did you suppose she _would_ do?"

"My dear Fanny, there are many things she might have done. She might have got into the wrong coach at Paddington and been carried on to Worcester."

"And that," said Barbara, "would have been much worse than Cheltenham."

"The very thought of it," said Fanny, "makes me shudder. But thank God, Barbara, you didn't do any of those things."

Mr. Waddington shifted the crossing of his legs as a big dog shifts his paws when you laugh at him; the more Fanny laughed the more dignified and solemn he became.

"You haven't told me yet, Horatio, what you did in London."

"I was just going to tell you when Miss Madden--so delightfully--came in."

At that Barbara thought it discreet to dismiss herself, but Fanny called her back. "What are you running away for? He didn't do anything in London he wouldn't like you to hear about."

"On the contrary, I particularly wish Miss Madden to hear about it. I am starting a branch of the National League of Liberty in Wyck. You may have heard of it?"

"Yes. I've _heard_ of it. I've even seen the prospectus."

"Good. Well, Fanny, I lunched yesterday with Sir Maurice Gedge, and he's as keen as mustard. He agrees with me that the League will be no good, no good at all, until it's taken up strong in the provinces. He wants me to start at once. Just as soon as I can get my Committee."

"My dear, if you've got to have a Committee first you'll never start."

"It depends altogether on who I get. And it'll be _my_ Committee. Sir Maurice was very emphatic about that. He agrees with me that if you want a thing done, and done well, you must do it yourself. There can only be _one_ moving spirit. The Committee will have nothing to do but carry out my ideas."

"Then be sure you get a Committee that hasn't any of its own."

"That will not be difficult," said Mr. Waddington, "in Wyck.... The first thing is the prospectus. That's where you come in, Miss Madden."

"You mean the first thing is that Barbara draws up the prospectus."

"Under my supervision."

"The next thing," Fanny said, "is to conceal your prospectus from your Committee till it's in print. You come to your Committee with your prospectus. You don't offer it for discussion."

"Supposing," Barbara said, "they insist on discussing it?"

"They won't," said Fanny, "once it's printed, especially if it's paid for. You must get Pyecraft to send in his bill at once. And if they _do_ start discussing you can put them off with the date and place of the

meeting and the wording of the posters. That'll give them something to talk about. I suppose you'll be chairman."

"Well, I think, in the circumstances, they could hardly appoint anybody else."

"I don't know. Somebody might suggest Sir John Corbett."

Mr. Waddington's face sagged with dismay as Fanny presented this unpleasant possibility.

"I don't think Sir John would care about it. I shall suggest it to him myself; but I don't think--."

After all, Sir John Corbett was a lazy man.

"When you've roused Sir John, if you ever _do_ rouse him, then you'll have to round up all the towns and villages for twenty miles. It's a pity you can't have Ralph; he would have rounded them for you in no time on his motor-bike."

"I am quite capable of rounding them all up myself, thank you."

"Well, dear," said Fanny placably, "it'll keep you busy for the next six months, and that'll be nice. You won't miss the war then so much, will you?"

"_Miss the war_?"

"Yes, you do miss it, darling. He was a special constable, Barbara; and he sat on tribunals; and he drove his motor-car like mad on government service. He had no end of a time. It's no use your saying you didn't enjoy it, Horatio, for you did."

"I was glad to be of service to my country as much as any soldier, but to say that I enjoyed the war--"

"If there hadn't been a war there wouldn't have been any service to be glad about."

"My dear Fanny, it's a perfectly horrible suggestion. Do you mean to say that I would have brought about that--that infamous tragedy, that I would have sent thousands and thousands of our lads to their deaths to get a job for myself? If I thought for one moment that you were serious--"

"You don't like me to be anything else, dear."

"I certainly don't like you to joke about such subjects."

"Oh, come," said Fanny, "we all enjoyed our war jobs except poor Ralph, who got gassed first thing, and _then_ concussed with a shell-burst."

"Oh, did he?" said Barbara.

"He did. And don't you think, Horatio, considering the rotten time he's had, and that he lost a lucrative job through the war, and that you've done him out of his secretaryship, don't you think you might forgive him?"

"Of course," said Horatio, "I forgive him."

He had got up to go and had reached the door when Fanny called him back. "And I can write and ask him to come and dine to-morrow night, can't I? I want to be quite sure that he _does_ dine."

"I have never said or implied," said Horatio, "that he was not to come and dine."

With that he left them.

"The beautiful thing about Horatio," said Fanny, "is that he never bears a grudge against people, no matter what he's done to them. I've no doubt that Ralph was excessively provoking and put him in the wrong, and yet, though he was in the wrong, and knows he was in it, he doesn't resent it. He doesn't resent it the least little bit."

2

Barbara wondered how and where she would be expected to spend her evenings now that Fanny's husband had come home. Being secretary to Mr. Waddington and companion to Fanny wouldn't mean being companion to both of them at once. So when Horatio appeared in the drawing-room after coffee, she asked if she might sit in the morning-room and write letters.

"Do you want to sit in the morning-room?" said Fanny.

"Well, I ought to write those letters."

"There's a fire in the library. You can write there. Can't she, Horatio?"

Mr. Waddington looked up with the benign expression he had had when he came on Barbara alone in the drawing-room before dinner, a look so directed to her neck and shoulders that it told her how well her low-cut evening frock became her.

"She shall sit anywhere she likes. The library is hers whenever she wants to use it."

Barbara thought she would rather like the library. As she went she couldn't help seeing a look on Fanny's face that pleaded, that would have kept her with her. She thought: She doesn't want to be alone with him.

She judged it better to ignore that look.

She had been about an hour in the library; she had written her letters and chosen a book and curled herself up in the big leather chair and was reading when Mr. Waddington came in. He took no notice of her at first, but established himself at the writing-table with his back to her. He would, of course, want her to go. She uncurled herself and went quietly to the door.

Mr. Waddington looked up.

"You needn't go," he said.

Something in his face made her wonder whether she ought to stay. She remembered that she was Mrs. Waddington's companion.

"Mrs. Waddington may want me."

"Mrs. Waddington has gone to bed.... Don't go--unless you're tired. I'm getting my thoughts on paper and I may want you."

She remembered that she was Mr. Waddington's secretary.

She went back to her chair. It was only his face that had made her wonder. His great back, bent to his task, was like another person there; absorbed and unmoved, it chaperoned them. From time to time she heard brief scratches of his pen as he got a thought down. It was ten o'clock.

When the half-hour struck Mr. Waddington gave a thick "Ha!" of irritation and got up.

"It's no use," he said. "I'm not in form to-night. I suppose it's the journey."

He came to the fireplace and sat down heavily in the opposite chair. Barbara was aware of his eyes, considering, appraising her.

"My wife tells me she has had a delightful time with you."

"I've had a delightful time with her."

"I'm glad. My wife is a very delightful woman; but, you know, you mustn't take everything she says too seriously."

"I won't. I'm not a very serious person myself."

"Don't say that. Don't say that."

"Very well. I think, if you don't want me, I'll say good night."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously."

He had risen as she rose and went to open the door for her. He escorted her through the smoke-room and stood there at the further door, holding out his hand, benignant and superbly solemn.

"Good night, then," he said.

She told herself that she was wrong, quite wrong about his poor old face. There was nothing in it, nothing but that grave and unadventurous benignity. His mood had been, she judged, purely paternal. Paternal and childlike, too; pathetic, if you came to think of it, in his clinging to her presence, her companionship. "It must have been my little evil mind," she thought.

As she went along the corridor she remembered she had left her knitting in the drawing-room. She turned to fetch it and found Fanny still there, wide awake with her feet on the fender, and reading "Tono-Bungay."

"Oh, Mrs. Waddington, I thought you'd gone to bed."

"So did I, dear. But I changed my mind when I found myself alone with Wells. He's too heavenly for words."

Barbara saw it in a flash, then. She knew what she, the companion and secretary, was there for. She was there to keep him off her, so that Fanny might have more time to find herself alone in.

She saw it all.

"'Tono-Bungay,'" she said. "Was _that_ what you sent me out with Mr. Bevan for?"

"It was. How clever of you, Barbara."

IV

1

Mr. Waddington closed the door on Miss Madden slowly and gently so that the action should not strike her as dismissive. He then turned on the lights by the chimneypiece and stood there, looking at himself in the glass. He wanted to know exactly how his face had presented itself to Miss Madden. It would not be altogether as it appeared to himself; for the glass, unlike the young girl's clear eyes, was an exaggerating and distorting medium; he had noticed that his wife's face in the smoke-room glass looked a good ten years older than the face he knew; he calculated, therefore, that this faint greenish tint, this slightly lop-sided elderly grimace were not truthful renderings of his complexion and his smile. And as (in spite of these defects, which you could put down to the account of the glass) the face Mr. Waddington saw was still the face of a handsome man, he formed a very favourable opinion of the face Miss Madden had seen. Handsome, and if not in his first youth, then still in his second. Experience is itself a fascination, and if a man has any charm at all his second youth should be more charming, more irresistibly fascinating than his first.

And the child had been conscious of him. She had betrayed uneasiness, a sense of danger, when she had found herself alone with him. He recalled her first tentative flight, her hesitation. He would have liked to have kept her there with him a little longer, to have talked to her about his League, to have tested by a few shrewd questions her ability.

Better not. Better not. The child was wise and right. Her wisdom and rectitude were delicious to Mr. Waddington, still more so was the thought that she had felt him to be dangerous.

He went back into his library and sat again in his chair and meditated: This experiment of Fanny's now; he wondered how it would turn out, especially if Fanny really wanted to adopt the girl, Frank Madden's

daughter. That impudent social comedian had been so offensive to Mr. Waddington in his life-time that there was something alluring in the idea of keeping his daughter now that he was dead, seeing the exquisite little thing dependent on him for everything, for food and frocks and pocket-money. But no doubt they had been wise in giving her the secretaryship before committing themselves to the irrecoverable step; thus testing her in a relation that could be easily terminated if by any chance it proved embarrassing.

But the relation in itself was, as Mr. Waddington put it to himself, a little difficult and delicate. It involved an intimacy, a closer intimacy than adoption: having her there in his library at all hours to work with him; and always that little uneasy consciousness of hers.

Well, well, he had set the tone to-night for all their future intercourse; he had in the most delicate way possible let her see. It seemed to him, looking back on it, that he had exercised a perfect tact, parting from her with that air of gaiety and light badinage which his own instinct of self-preservation so happily suggested. Yet he smiled when he recalled her look as she went from him, backing, backing, to the door; it made him feel very tender and chivalrous; virtuous too, as if somehow he had overcome some unforeseen and ruinous impulse. And all the time he hadn't had any impulse beyond the craving to talk to an intelligent and attractive stranger, to talk about his League.

Mr. Waddington went to bed thinking about it. He even woke his wife up out of her sleep with the request that she would remind him to call at Underwoods first thing in the morning.

2

As soon as he was awake he thought of Underwoods. Underwoods was important. He had to round up the county, and he couldn't do that without first consulting Sir John Corbett, of Underwoods. As a matter of form, a mere matter of form, of course, he would have to consult him.

But the more he thought about it the less he liked the idea of consulting anybody. He was desperately afraid that, if he once began letting people into it, his scheme, his League, would be taken away from him; and that the proper thing, the graceful thing, the thing to which he would be impelled by all his instincts and traditions, would be to stand modestly back and see it go. Probably into Sir John Corbett's hands. And he couldn't. He couldn't. Yet it was clear that the League, just because it was a League, must have members; even if he had been prepared to contribute all the funds himself and carry on the whole business of it single-handed, it couldn't consist solely of Mr. Waddington of Wyck. His problem was a subtle and difficult one: How to identify himself with the League, himself alone, in a unique and indissoluble manner, and yet draw to it the necessary supporters? How to control every detail of its intricate working (there would be endless wheels within wheels), and at the same time give proper powers to the inevitable Committee? If he did not put it quite so crudely as Fanny in her disagreeable irony, his problem resolved itself into this: How to divide the work and yet rake in all the credit?

He was saved from its immediate pressure by the sight of the envelope that waited for him on the breakfast-table, addressed in a familiar hand.

"Mrs. Levitt--" His emotion betrayed itself to Barbara in a peculiar furtive yet triumphant smile.

"Again?" said Fanny. (There was no end to the woman and her letters.)

Mrs. Levitt requested Mr. Waddington to call on her that morning at eleven. There was a matter on which she desired to consult him. The brevity of the note revealed her trust in his compliance, trust that implied again a certain intimacy. Mr. Waddington read it out loud to show how harmless and open was his communion with Mrs. Levitt.

"Is there any matter on which she has not consulted you?"

"There seems to have been one. And, as you see, she is repairing the omission."

A light air, a light air, to carry off Mrs. Levitt. The light air that had carried off Barbara, that had made Barbara carry herself off the night before. (It had done good. This morning the young girl was all ease and innocent unconsciousness again.)

"And I suppose you're going?" Fanny said.

"I suppose I shall have to go."

"Then I shall have Barbara to myself all morning?"

"You will have Barbara to yourself all day."

He tried thus jocosely to convey, for Barbara's good, his indifference to having her. All the same, it gave him pleasure to say her name like that: "Barbara."

He was not sure that he wanted to go and see Mrs. Levitt with all this business of the League on hand. It meant putting off Sir John. You couldn't do Sir John _and_ Mrs. Levitt in one morning. Besides, he thought he knew what Mrs. Levitt wanted, and he said to himself that this time he would be obliged, for once, to refuse her.

But it was not in him to refuse to go and see her. So he went.

As he walked up the park drive to the town he recalled with distinctly pleasurable emotion the first time he had encountered Mrs. Levitt, the vision of the smart little lady who had stood there by the inner gate, the gate that led from the park into the grounds, waiting for his approach with happy confidence. He remembered her smile, an affair of milk-white teeth in an ivory-white face, and her frank attack: "Forgive me if I'm trespassing. They told me there was a right of way." He remembered her charming diffidence, the naive reverence for his "grounds" which had compelled him to escort her personally through them; her attitudes of admiration as the Manor burst on her from its bay in the beech trees; the interest she had shown in its date and architecture; and how, spinning out the agreeable interview, he had gone with her all the way to the farther gate that led into Lower Wyck village; and how she had challenged him there with her "You must be Mr. Waddington of Wyck," and capped his admission with "I'm Mrs. Levitt." To which he had replied that he was delighted.

And the time after that--Partridge had discreetly shown her into the library--when she had called to implore him to obtain exemption for her son Toby; her black eyes, bright and large behind tears; and her cry: "I'm a war widow, Mr. Waddington, and he's my only child;" the flattery of her belief that he, Mr. Waddington of Wyck, had the chief power on the tribunal (and indeed it would have been folly to pretend that he had not power, that he could not "work it" if he chose). And the third time, after he had "worked it," and she had come to thank him. Tears again; the pressure of a plump, ivory-white hand; a tingling, delicious memory.

After that, his untiring efforts to get a war job for Toby. There had been difficulties, entailing many visits to Mrs. Levitt in the little house in the Market Square of Wyck-on-the-Hill; but in the end he had had the same intoxicating experience of his power, all obstructions going down before Mr. Waddington of Wyck.

And this year, when Toby was finally demobilized, it was only natural that she should draw on Mr. Waddington's influence again to get him a permanent peace job. He had got it; and that meant more visits and more gratitude; till here he was, attached to Mrs. Levitt by the unbreakable tie of his benefactions. He was even attached to her son Toby, whose continued existence, to say nothing of his activity in Mr. Bostock's Bank at Wyck, was a perpetual tribute to his power. Mr. Waddington had nothing like the same complacence in thinking of his own son Horace; but then Horace's existence and his activity were not a tribute but a menace, a standing danger, not only to his power but to his fascination, his sense of himself as a still young, still brilliant and effective personality. (Horace inherited his mother's deplorable lack of seriousness.) And it was in Mrs. Levitt's society that Mr. Waddington was most conscious of his youth, his brilliance and effect. With an agreeable sense of anticipation he climbed up the slopes of Sheep Street and Park Street, and so into the Square.

The house, muffled in ivy, hid discreetly in the far corner, behind the two tall elms on the Green. Mrs. Trinder, the landlady, had a sidelong bend of the head and a smile that acknowledged him as Mr. Waddington of Wyck and Mrs. Levitt's benefactor.

And as he waited in the low, mullion-darkened room he reminded himself that he had come to refuse her request. If, as he suspected, it was the Ballingers' cottage that she wanted. To be sure, the Ballingers had notice to quit in June, but he couldn't very well turn the Ballingers out if they wanted to stay, when there wasn't a decent house in the place to turn them into. He would have to make this very clear to Mrs. Levitt.

Not that he approved of Ballinger. The fellow, one of his best farm hands, had behaved infamously, first of all demanding preposterous wages, and then, just because Mr. Waddington had refused to be brow-beaten, leaving his service for Colonel Grainger's. Colonel Grainger had behaved infamously, buying Foss Bank with the money he had made in high explosives, and then letting fly his confounded Socialism all over the county. Knowing nothing, mind you, about local conditions, and actually raising the rate of wages without consulting anybody, and upsetting the farm labourers for miles round. At a time when the prosperity of the entire country depended on the farmers. Still, Mr. Waddington was not the man to take a petty revenge on his inferiors. He didn't blame Ballinger; he blamed Colonel Grainger. He would like to see Grainger boycotted by the whole county.

The door opened. He strode forward and found himself holding out a sudden, fervid hand to a lady who was not Mrs. Levitt. He drew up, turning his gesture into a bow, rather unnecessarily ceremonious; but he could not annihilate instantaneously all that fervour.

"I am Mrs. Levitt's sister, Mrs. Rickards. Mr. Waddington, is it not? I'll tell Elise you're here. I know she'll be glad to see you. She has been very much upset."

She remained standing before him long enough for him to be aware of a projecting bust, of white serge, of smartness, of purplish copper hair, a raking panama's white brim, of eyebrows, a rouged smile, and a smell of orris root. Before he could grasp its connexion with Mrs. Levitt this amazing figure had disappeared and given place to a tapping of heels and a furtive, scuffling laugh on the stairs outside. A shriller laugh--that must be Mrs. Rickards--a long Sh-sh-sh! Then the bang of the front door covering the lady's retreat, and Mrs. Levitt came in, stifling merriment under a minute pocket-handkerchief.

He took it in then. They were sisters, Mrs. Rickards and Elise Levitt. Elise, if you cared to be critical, had the same defects: short legs, loose hips; the same exaggerations: the toppling breasts underpinned by the shafts of her stays. Not Mr. Waddington's taste. And yet--and yet Elise had contrived a charming and handsome effect out of black eyes and the milk-white teeth in the ivory-white face. The play of the black eyebrows distracted you from the equine bend of the nose that sprang between them; the movements of her mouth, the white flash of its smile, made you forget its thinness and hardness and the slight heaviness of its jaw. Something foreign about her. Something French. Piquant. And then, her clothes. Mrs. Levitt wore a coat and skirt, her sister's white serge with a distinction, a greyish stripe or something; clean straightness that stiffened and fined down her exuberance. One jewel, one bit of gold, and she might have been vulgar. But no. He thought: she knows what becomes her. Immaculate purity of white gloves, white shoes, white panama; and the black points of the ribbon, of her eyebrows, her eyes and hair. After all, the sort of woman Mr. Waddington liked to be seen out walking with. She made him feel slender.

"My _dear_ Mr. Waddington, how good of you!"

"My dear Mrs. Levitt--always delighted--when it's possible--to do anything."

As she covered him with her brilliant eyes he tightened his shoulders and stood firm, while his spirit braced itself against persuasion. If it was the Ballingers' cottage--

"I really am ashamed of myself. I never seem to send for you unless I'm in trouble."

"Isn't that the time?" His voice thickened. "So long as you do send--" He thought: It isn't the Ballingers' cottage then.

"It's your own fault. You've always been so good, so kind. To my poor Toby."

"Nothing to do with Toby, I hope, the trouble?"

"Oh, no. No. And yet in a way it has. I'm afraid, Mr. Waddington, I may have to leave."

"To leave? Leave Wyck?"

"Leave dear Wyck."

"Not seriously?"

He wasn't prepared for that. The idea hit him hard in a place that he hadn't thought was tender.

"Quite seriously."

"Dear me. This is very distressing. Very distressing indeed. But you would not take such a step without consulting your friends?"

"I _am_ consulting you."

"Yes, yes. But have you thought it well over?"

"Thinking isn't any use. I shall have to, unless something can be done."

He thought: "Financial difficulties. Debts. An expensive lady. Unless something could be done?" He didn't know that he was exactly prepared to do it. But his tongue answered in spite of him.

"Something must be done. We can't let you go like this, my dear lady."

"That's it. I don't see how I _can_ go, with dear Toby here. Nor yet how I'm to stay."

"Won't you tell me what the trouble is?"

"The trouble is that Mrs. Trinder's son's just been demobilized, and she wants our rooms for his wife and family."

"Come--surely we can find other rooms."

"All the best ones are taken. There's nothing left that I'd care to live in.... Besides, it isn't rooms I want, Mr. Waddington, it's a house."

It was, of course, the Ballingers' cottage. But she couldn't have it. She couldn't have it.

"I wouldn't mind how small it was. If only I had a little home of my own. You don't know, Mr. Waddington, what it is to be without a home of your own. I haven't had a home for years. Five years. Not since the war."

"I'm afraid," said Mr. Waddington, "at present there isn't a house for you in Wyck."

He brooded earnestly, as though he were trying to conjure up, to create out of nothing, a house for her and a home.

"No. But I understand that the Ballingers will be leaving in June. You said that at any time, if you had a house, I should have it."

"I said a house, Mrs. Levitt, not a cottage."

"It's all the same to me. The Ballingers' cottage could be made into an adorable little house."

"It could. With a few hundred pounds spent on it."

"Well, you'd be improving your property, wouldn't you? And you'd get it back in the higher rent."

"I'm not thinking about getting anything back. And nothing would please me better. Only, you see, I can't very well turn Ballinger out as long as he behaves himself."

"I wouldn't have him turned out for the world.... But do you consider that Ballinger _has_ behaved himself?"

"Well, he played me a dirty trick, perhaps, when he went to Grainger; but if Grainger can afford to pay for him I've no right to object to his being bought. It isn't a reason for turning the man out."

"I don't see how he can expect you to refuse a good tenant for him."

"I must if I haven't a good house to put him into."

"He doesn't expect it, Mr. Waddington. Didn't you give him notice in December?"

"A mere matter of form. He knows he can stay on if there's nowhere else for him to go to."

"Then why," said Mrs. Levitt, "does he go about saying that he dares you to let the cottage over his head?"

"Does he? Does he say that?"

"He says he'll pay you out. He'll summons you. He was most abusive."

Mr. Waddington's face positively swelled with the choleric flush that swamped its genial fatuity.

"It seems somebody told him you were going to do up the cottage and let it for more rent."

"I don't know who could have spread that story."

"I assure you, Mr. Waddington, it wasn't me!"

"My dear Mrs. Levitt, of course.... I won't say I wasn't thinking of it, and that I wouldn't have done it, if I could have got rid of Ballinger...." He meditated.

"I don't see why I shouldn't get rid of him. If he dares me, the scoundrel, he's simply asking for it. And he shall have it."

"Oh, but I wouldn't for worlds have him turned into the street. With his wife and babies."

"My dear lady, I shan't turn them into the street. I shouldn't be

allowed to. There's a cottage at Lower Wyck they can go into. The one he had when he first came to me."

He wondered why he hadn't thought of it before. It wasn't, as it stood, a decent cottage; but if he was prepared to spend fifty pounds or so on it, it could be made habitable; and, by George, he _was_ prepared, if it was only to teach Ballinger a lesson. For it meant that Ballinger would have to walk an extra mile up hill to his work every day. Serve him right, the impudent rascal.

"Poor thing, he won't," said Mrs. Levitt, "have his nice garden."

"He won't. Ballinger must learn," said Mr. Waddington with magisterial severity, "that he can't have everything. He certainly can't have it both ways. Abuse and threaten me and expect favours. He may go ... to Colonel Grainger."

"If it really _must_ happen," said Mrs. Levitt, "do you mean that I may have the house?"

"I shall be only too delighted to have such a charming tenant."

"Well, I shan't threaten and abuse you and call you every nasty name under the sun. And you won't, you _won't_ turn me out when my lease is up?"

He bowed over the hand she held out to him.

"You shall never be turned out as long as you want to stay."

By twelve o'clock they had arranged the details; Mr. Waddington was to put in a bathroom; to throw the two rooms on the ground floor into one; to build out a new sitting-room with a bedroom over it; and to paint and distemper the place, in cream white, throughout. And it was to be called the White House. By the time they had finished with it Ballinger's cottage had become the house Mrs. Levitt had dreamed of all her life, and not unlike the house Mr. Waddington had dreamed of that minute (while he planned the bathroom); the little bijou house where an adorable but not too rigorously moral lady--He stopped with a mental jerk, ashamed. He had no reason to suppose that Elise was or would become such a lady.

And the poor innocent woman was saying, "Just one thing, Mr. Waddington, the rent?"

(No earthly reason.) "We can talk about that another time. I shan't be hard on you."

No. He wouldn't be hard on her. But in that other case there wouldn't have been any rent at all.

As he left the house he could see Mrs. Rickards hurrying towards it across the square.

"She waddles like a duck," he thought. The movement suggested a plebeian excitement and curiosity that displeased him. He recalled her face. Her extraordinary face. "Quite enough," he thought, "to put all that into my head. Poor Elise"

He liked to think of her. It made him feel what he had felt last night over Barbara Madden--virtuous--as though he had struggled and got the better of an impetuous passion. He was so touched by his own beautiful renunciation that when he found Fanny working in the garden he felt a sudden tenderness for her as the cause of it. She looked up at him from her pansy bed and laughed. "What are you looking so sentimental for, old thing?"

3

Mrs. Levitt's affair settled, he could now give his whole time to the serious business of the day.

He was exceedingly anxious to get it over. Nothing could be more disturbing than Fanny's suggestion that the name of Sir John Corbett might carry more weight with his Committee than his own. The Waddingtons of Wyck had ancestry. Waddingtons had held Lower Wyck Manor for ten generations, whereas Sir John Corbett's father had bought Underwoods and rebuilt it somewhere in the 'seventies. On the other hand Sir John was the largest and richest landowner in the place. He could buy up Wyck--on--the--Hill to--morrow and thrive on the transaction. He therefore represented the larger vested interest And as the whole object of the League was the safeguarding of vested interests, in other words, of liberty, that British liberty which is bound up with law and order, with private property in general and landownership in particular; as the principle of its very being was the preservation of precisely such an institution as Sir John himself, the Committee of the Wyck Branch of the League could hardly avoid inviting him to be its president. There was no blinking the fact, and Fanny hadn't blinked it, that Sir John was the proper person. Most of Fanny's suggestions had a strong but unpleasant element of common sense.

But the more interest he took in the League, the more passionately he flung himself into the business of its creation, the more abhorrent to Mr. Waddington was the thought that the chief place in it, the presidency, would pass over his head to Sir John.

His only hope was in Sir John's well-known indolence and irresponsibility. Sir John was the exhausted reaction from the efforts of a self-made grandfather and of a father spendthrift in energy; he had had everything done for him ever since he was a baby, and consequently was now unable or unwilling to do anything for himself or other people. You couldn't see him taking an active part in the management of the League, and Mr. Waddington couldn't see himself doing all the work and handing over all the glory to Sir John. Still, between Mr. Waddington and the glory there was only this supine figure of Sir John, and Sir John once out of the running he could count without immodesty on the unanimous vote of any committee he formed in Wyck.

It was possible that even a Sir John Corbett would not really carry it over a Waddington of Wyck, but Mr. Waddington wasn't taking any risks. What he had to do was to suggest the presidency to Sir John in such a way that he would be certain to refuse it.

He had the good luck to find Sir John alone in his library at tea-time, eating hot buttered toast.

There was hope for Mr. Waddington in Sir John's attitude, lying back and

nursing his little round stomach, hope in the hot, buttery gleam of his cheeks, in his wide mouth, lazy under the jutting grey moustache, and in the scrabbling of his little legs as he exerted himself to stand upright.

"Well, Waddington, glad to see you."

He was in his chair again. With another prodigious effort he leaned forward and rang for more tea and more toast.

"Did you walk?" said Sir John. His little round eyes expressed horror at the possibility.

"No, I just ran over in my car."

"Drove yourself?"

"No. Too much effort of attention. I find it interferes with my thinking."

"Interferes with everything," said Sir John. "'Spect you drove enough during the war to last you for the rest of your life."

"Ah, Government service. A very different thing. That reminds me; I've come to-day to consult you on a matter of public business."

"Business?" (He noted Sir John's uneasy pout.) "Better have some tea first." Sir John took another piece of buttered toast.

If only Sir John would go on eating. Nothing like buttered toast for sustaining that mood of voluptuous inertia.

When Mr. Waddington judged the moment propitious he began. "While I was up in London I had the pleasure of lunching with Sir Maurice Gedge. He wants me to start a branch of the National League of Liberty here."

"Liberty? Shouldn't have thought that was much in your line. Didn't expect to see you waving the red flag, what? Why didn't you put him on to our friend Grainger?"

"My dear Corbett, what are you thinking of? The object of the League is to put down all that sort of thing--Socialism--Bolshevism--to rouse the whole country and get it to stand solid for order and good government."

"H'm. Is it? Queer sort of title for a thing of that sort--League of Liberty, what?"

Mr. Waddington raised a clenched fist. Already in spirit he was on his platform. "Exactly the title that's needed. The people want liberty, always have wanted it. We'll let 'em have it. True liberty. British liberty. I tell you, Corbett, we're out against the tyranny of Labour minorities. You and I and every man that's got any standing and any influence, we've got to see to it that we don't have a revolution and Communism and a Soviet Government here."

"Come, you don't think the Bolshies are as strong as all that, do you?"

Mr. Waddington brought his fist down on the arm of his chair. "I _know_ they are," he said. "And look here--if they get the upper hand, it's the

great capitalists, the great property holders, the great _land_owners like you and me, Corbett, who'll be the first to suffer.... Why, we're suffering as it is, here in Wyck, with just the little that fellow Grainger can do. The time'll come, mark my words, when we shan't be able to get a single labourer to work for us for a fair wage. They'll bleed us white, Corbett, before they've done with us, if we don't make a stand, and make it now.

"That's what the League's for, to set up a standard, something we can point to and say: These are the principles we stand for. Something you can rally the whole country round. We shall want your support--"

"I shall be very glad--anything I can do--"

Mr. Waddington was a little disturbed by this ready acquiescence.

"Mind you, it isn't going to end here, in Wyck. I shall start it in Wyck first; then I shall take it straight to the big towns, Gloucester, Cheltenham, Cirencester, Nailsworth, Stroud. We'll set 'em going till we've got a branch in every town and every village in the county."

He thought: "That ought to settle him." He had created a vision of intolerable activity.

"Bless me," said Sir John, "you've got your work cut out for you."

"Of course I shall have to get a local committee first. I can't take a step like that without consulting you."

Sir John muttered something that sounded like "Very good of you, I'm sure."

"No more than my duty to the League. Now, the point is, Sir Maurice was anxious that _I_ should be president of this local branch. It needs somebody with energy and determination--the president's work, certainly, will be cut out for him--and I feel very strongly, and I think that my Committee will feel that _you_, Corbett, are the proper person."

"H'm--m."

"I didn't think I should be justified in going further without first obtaining your consent."

"We-ell--"

Mr. Waddington's anxiety was almost unbearable. The programme had evidently appealed to Sir John. Supposing, after all, he accepted?

"I wouldn't ask you to undertake anything so--so arduous, but that it'll strengthen my hands with my Committee; in fact, I may get a much stronger and more influential Committee if I can come to them, and tell them beforehand that you have consented to be president."

"I don't mind being president," said Sir John, "if I haven't got to do anything."

"I'm afraid--I'm _afraid_ we couldn't allow you to be a mere figurehead."

"But presidents always are figureheads, aren't they?"

There was a bantering gleam in Sir John's eyes that irritated Mr. Waddington. That was the worst of Corbett; you couldn't get him to take a serious thing seriously.

"'T any rate," Sir John went on, "there's always some secretary johnnie who runs round and does the work."

So that was Corbett's idea: to sit in his armchair and bag all the prestige, while he, Waddington of Wyck, ran round and did the work.

"Not in this case. In these small local affairs you can't delegate business. Everything depends on the personal activity of the president."

"The deuce it does. How do you mean?"

"I mean this. If Sir John Corbett asks for a subscription he gets it. We've got to round up the whole county and all the townspeople and villagers. It's no use shooting pamphlets at 'em from a motor-car. They like being personally interviewed. If Sir John Corbett comes and talk to them and tells them they must join, ten to one they will join.

"And there isn't any time to be lost if we want to get in first before other places take it up. It'll mean pretty sharp work, day in and day out, rounding them all up."

"Oh, Lord, Waddington, _don't_. I'm tired already with the bare idea of it."

"Come, we can't have you tired, Corbett. Why, it won't be worse, it won't be half as bad as a season's hunting. You're just the man for it. Fit as fit."

"Not half as fit as I look, Waddington."

"There's another thing--the meetings. If the posters say Sir John Corbett will address the meeting people'll come. If Sir John Corbett speaks they'll listen."

"My dear fellow, that settles it. I can't speak for nuts. You _know_ I can't. I can introduce a speaker and move a vote of thanks, and that's about all I _can_ do. It's your show, not mine. _You_ ought to be president, Waddington. You'll enjoy it and I shan't."

"I don't know at all about enjoying it. It'll be infernally hard work."

"Precisely."

"You don't mean, Corbett, that you won't come in with us? That you won't come on the Committee?"

"I'll come on all right if I haven't got to speak, and if I haven't got to do anything. I shan't be much good, but I could at least propose you as president. You couldn't very well propose yourself."

"It's very good of you."

Mr. Waddington made his voice sound casual and indifferent, so that he

might appear to be entertaining the suggestion provisionally and under protest. "There'll have to be one big meeting before the Committee's formed or anything. If I let you off the presidency," he said playfully, "will you take the chair?"

"For that one evening?"

"That one evening only."

"You'll do all the talking?"

"I shall have to."

"All right, my dear fellow. I daresay I can get my wife to come on your committee, too. That'll help you to rope in the townspeople.... And now, supposing we drop it and have a quiet smoke."

He roused himself to one more effort. "Of course, we'll send you a subscription, both of us."

Mr. Waddington drove off from Underwoods in a state of pleasurable elation. He had got what he wanted without appearing--without appearing at all to be playing for it. Corbett had never spotted him.

There he was wrong. At that very moment Sir John was relating the incident to Lady Corbett.

"And you could see all the time the fellow wanted it himself. I put him in an awful funk, pretending I was going to take it."

All the same, he admitted very handsomely that the idea of the League was "topping," and that Waddington was the man for it. And the subscription that he and Lady Corbett sent was very handsome, too. Unfortunately it obliged Mr. Waddington to contribute a slightly larger sum, by way of maintaining his ascendancy.

4

On his way home he called at the Old Dower House in the Square to see his mother. He had arranged to meet Fanny and Barbara Madden there and drive them home.

The old lady was sitting in her chair, handsome, with dark eyes still brilliant in her white Roman face, a small imperious face, yet soft, soft in its network of fine grooves and pittings. An exquisite old lady in a black satin gown and white embroidered shawl, with a white Chantilly scarf binding rolled masses of white hair. She had been a Miss Postlethwaite, of Medlicott.

"My dear boy--so you've got back?"

She turned to her son with a soft moan of joy, lifting up her hands to hold his face as he stooped to kiss her.

"How well you look," she said. "Is that London or coming back to Fanny?"

"It's coming back to you."

"Ah, she hasn't spoilt you. You know how to say nice things to your old mother."

She looked up at him, at his solemn face that simmered with excited egoism. Barbara could see that he was playing--playing in his ponderous, fatuous way, at being her young, her not more than twenty-five years old son. He turned with a sudden, sportive, caracoling movement, to find a chair for himself. He was sitting on it now, close beside his mother, and she was holding one of his big, fleshy hands in her fragile bird claws and patting it.

From her study of the ancestral portraits in the Manor dining-room Barbara gathered that he owed to his mother the handsome Roman structure that held up his face, after all, so proudly through its layers of Waddington flesh. He had the Postlethwaite nose. The old lady looked at her, gratified by the grave attention of her eyes.

"Miss Madden can't believe that a little woman like me could have such a great big son," she said. "But, you see, he isn't big to me. He'll never be any older than thirteen."

You could see it. If he wasn't really thirteen to her he wasn't a day older than twenty-five; he was her young grown-up son whose caresses flattered her.

"She spoils me, Miss Madden."

You could see that it pleased him to sit close to her knees, to have his hand patted and be spoilt.

"Nonsense. Now tell me what happened at Underwoods. Is it to be John Corbett or you?"

"Corbett says it's to be me."

"I'm glad he's had that much sense. Well--and now tell me all about this League of yours."

He told her all about it, and she sat very quietly, listening, nodding her proud old head in approval. He talked about it till it was time to go. Then the old lady became agitated.

"My dear boy, you mustn't let Kimber drive you too fast down that hill. Fanny, will you tell Kimber to be careful?"

Her face trembled with anxiety as she held it to him to be kissed. At that moment he was her child, escaping from her, going out rashly into the dangerous world.

"I like going to see Granny," said Fanny as Kimber tucked them up together in the car. "She makes me feel young."

"You may very well feel it," said Mr. Waddington. "It's only my mother's white hair, Miss Madden, that makes her look old."

"I thought," said Barbara, "she looked ever so much younger"--she was going to say, "than she is"--"than most people's mothers."

"You will have noticed," Fanny said, "that my husband is younger than

most people."

Barbara noticed that he had drawn himself up with an offended air, unnaturally straight. He didn't like it, this discussion about ages.

They were running out of the Square when Fanny remembered and cried out, "Oh, stop him, Horatio. We must go back and see if Ralph's coming to dinner."

But at the White Hart they were told that Mr. Bevan had "gone to Oxford on his motor-bike" and was not expected to return before ten o'clock.

"Sorry, Barbara."

"I don't see why you should apologize to Miss Madden, my dear. I've no doubt she can get on very well without him."

"She may want something rather more exciting than you and me, sometimes."

"I'm quite happy," Barbara said.

"Of course you're happy. It isn't everybody who enjoys Ralph Bevan's society. I daresay you're like me; you find him a great hindrance to serious conversation."

"That's why _I_ enjoy him," Fanny said. "We'll ask him for to-morrow night."

Barbara tucked her chin into the collar of her coat. The car was running down Sheep Street into Lower Wyck. She stared out abstractedly at the eastern valley, the delicate green cornfields and pink fallows, the muffling of dim trees, all washed in the pale eastern blue, rolling out and up to the blue ridge.

It made her happy to look at it. It made her happy to think of Ralph Bevan coming to-morrow. If it had been to-night it would have been all over in three hours. And something--she was not sure what, but felt that it might be Mr. Waddington--something would have cut in to spoil the happiness of it. But now she had it to think about, and her thoughts were safe. "What are you thinking about, Barbara?"

"The view," said Barbara. "I want to sketch it."

V

1

Mr. Waddington was in his library, drawing up his prospectus while Fanny and Barbara Madden looked on. At Fanny's suggestion (he owned magnanimously that it was a good one) he had decided to "sail in," as she called it, with the prospectus first, not only before he formed his Committee, but before he held his big meeting. (They had fixed the date of it for that day month, Saturday, June the twenty-first.)

"You come before them from the beginning," she said, "with something fixed and definite that they can't go back on." And by signing the prospectus, Horatio Bysshe Waddington, he identified it beyond all contention with himself.

It was at this point that Barbara had blundered.

"Why," she had said, "should we go to all that bother and expense? Why can't we send out the original prospectus?"

"My dear Barbara, the original prospectus isn't any good."

"Why isn't it?"

"Because it isn't Horatio's prospectus."

Barbara looked down and away from the dangerous light in Fanny's eyes.

"But it expresses his views, doesn't it?"

"That's no good when he wants to express them himself."

And so far from being any good, the original prospectus was a positive hindrance to Mr. Waddington. It took all the wind out of his sails; it took, as he justly complained, the very words out of his mouth and the ideas out of his head; it got in his way and upset him at every turn. Somehow or other he had got to stamp his personality upon this thing. "It's no good," he said; "if they can't recognize it as a personal appeal from ME." And here it was, stamped all over, and indelibly, with the personalities of Sir Maurice Gedge and his London Committee. And he couldn't depart radically from the lines they had laid down; there were just so many things to be said, and Sir Maurice and his Committee had contrived to say them all.

But, though the matter was given him, Mr. Waddington, before he actually tackled his prospectus, had conceived himself as supplying his own fresh and inimitable manner; the happy touch, the sudden, arresting turn. But somehow it wasn't working out that way. Try as he would, he couldn't get away from the turns and touches supplied by Sir Maurice Gedge.

"It would have been easy enough," he said, "to draw up the original prospectus. I'd a thousand times rather do that than write one on the top of it."

Fanny agreed. "It's got to _look_ different," she said, "without _being_ different."

"Couldn't we," said Barbara, "turn it upside down?"

"Upside down?" He stared at her with great owl's eyes, offended, suspecting her this time of an outrageous levity.

"Yes. Really upside down. You see, the heads go in this order--Defence of Private Property; Defence of Capital; Defence of Liberty; Defence of Government; Defence of the Empire; Danger of Revolution, Communism and Bolshevism; Every Man's Duty. Why not reverse them? Every Man's Duty; Danger of Bolshevism, Communism and Revolution; Defence of the Empire; Defence of Government; Defence of Liberty; Defence of Capital; Defence of Private Property."

"That's an idea," said Fanny.

"Not at all a bad idea," said Mr. Waddington. "You might take down the heads in that order."

Barbara took them down, and it was agreed that they presented a very original appearance thus reversed; and, as Barbara pointed out, the one order was every bit as logical as the other; and though Mr. Waddington objected that he would have preferred to close on the note of Government and Empire, he was open to the suggestion that, while this might appeal more to the county, with the farmers and townspeople, capital and private property would strike further home. And by the time he had changed "combat the forces of disorder" to "take a stand against anarchy and disruption," and "spirit of freedom in this country" to "British genius for liberty," and "darkest hour in England's history" to "blackest period in the history of England," he was persuaded that the prospectus was now entirely and absolutely his own.

"But I think we must sound the note of hope to end up with. My own message. How about 'We must remember that the darkest hour comes before dawn'?"

"My dear Horatio, if you inflate yourself so over your prospectus, you'll have no wind left when you come to speak. Be as wildly original as you please, but _don't_ be wasteful and extravagant."

"All right, Fanny. I will reserve the dawn. Please make a note of that, Miss Madden. Speech. 'Blackest'--or did I say 'darkest'?--'hour before dawn.'"

"You'd better reserve all you can," said Fanny.

When Barbara had typed the prospectus, Mr. Waddington insisted on taking it to Pyecraft himself. He wanted to insure its being printed without delay, and to arrange for the posters and handbills; he also wanted to see the impression it would make on Pyecraft and on the young lady in Pyecraft's shop. He liked to think of the stir in the composing room when it was handed in, and of the importance he was conferring on Pyecraft.

"You haven't said what you think of the prospectus," said Fanny, as they watched him go.

"I haven't said what I think of the League of Liberty."

"What _do_ you think of it?"

"I think it looks as if somebody was in an awful funk; and I don't see that there's going to be much liberty about it."

"That," said Fanny, "is how it struck me. But it'll keep Horatio quiet for the next six months."

"_Quiet_? And afterwards?"

"Oh, afterwards there'll be his book."

"I'd forgotten his book."

"That'll keep him quieter than anything else; if you can get him to settle down to it."

2

That evening Barbara witnessed the reconciliation of Mr. Waddington and Ralph Bevan. Mr. Waddington made a spectacle of it, standing, majestic and immovable, by his hearth and holding out his hand long before Ralph had got near enough to take it.

"Good evening, Ralph. Glad to see you here again."

"Good of you to ask me, sir."

Barbara thought he winced a little at the "sir." He had a distaste for those forms of deference which implied his seniority. You could see he didn't like Ralph. His voice was genial, but there was no light in his bulging stare; the heavy lines of his face never lifted. She wondered: Was it Ralph's brilliant youth that had offended him, reminding him, even when he refused to recognize his fascination? For you could see that he did refuse, that he regarded Ralph Bevan as an inferior, insignificant personality. Barbara had to revise her theory. He wasn't jealous of him. It would never occur to him that Fanny, or Barbara for that matter, could find Ralph interesting. Nothing could disturb for a moment his immense satisfaction with himself. He conducted dinner with a superb detachment, confining his attention to Fanny and Barbara, as if he were pretending that Ralph wasn't there, until suddenly he heard Fanny asking him if he knew anything about the National League of Liberty and what he thought of it.

"Mr. Waddington doesn't want to know what I think of it."

"No, but we want to."

"My dear Fanny, any opinion, any honest opinion--"

"Oh, Ralph's opinion will be honest enough."

"Honest, I daresay," said Mr. Waddington.

"Well, if you really want to know, I think it's a pathological symptom."

"A what?" said Mr. Waddington, startled into a show of interest.

"Pathological symptom. It's all funk. Blue funk. True blue funk."

"That's what Barbara says."

The young man looked at Barbara as much as to say, "I knew I could trust you to take the only intelligent view."

"It's run," he said, "by a few imbeciles, like Sir Maurice Gedge. They're scared out of their lives of Bolshevism."

"Do you mean to say that Bolshevism isn't dangerous?"

"Not in this country."

"Perhaps, then, you'd like to see a Soviet Government in this country?"

"I didn't say so."

"But I understand that you uphold Bolshevism?"

"I don't uphold funk. But," said Ralph, "there's rather more in it than that. It's being engineered. It's a deliberate, dishonest, and malicious attempt to discredit Labour."

"Absurd," said Mr. Waddington. "You show that you are ignorant of the very principles of the League."

If he recognized Ralph's youth, it was only to despise it as crude and uninformed.

"It is--the--National--League--of Liberty."

"Well, that's about all the liberty there is in it--liberty to suppress liberty."

"You may not know that I'm starting a branch of the League in Wyck."

"I'm sorry, sir. I did not know. Fanny, why did you lay that trap for me?"

"Because I wanted your real opinion."

"Before you set up an opinion, you had better come to my meeting on the twenty-first. Then perhaps you'll learn something about it."

Fanny changed the subject to Sir John Corbett's laziness.

"A man," said Mr. Waddington, "without any seriousness, any sense of responsibility."

After coffee Mr. Waddington removed Fanny to the library to consult with him about the formation of his Committee, leaving Barbara and Ralph Bevan alone. Fanny waved her hand to them from the doorway, signalling her blessing on their unrestrained communion.

"It's deplorable," said Ralph, "to see a woman of Fanny's intelligence mixing herself up with a rotten scheme like that."

"Poor darling, she only does it to keep him quiet."

"Oh, yes, I admit there's every excuse for her."

They looked at each other and smiled. A smile of delicious and secret understanding.

"Isn't he wonderful?" she said.

"I thought you'd like him.... I say, you know, I _must_ come to his meeting. He'll be more wonderful than ever there. Can't you see him?"

"I can. It's almost _too_ much--to think that I should be allowed to know him, to live in the same house with him, to have him turning

himself on by the hour together. What have I done to deserve it?"

"I see," he said, "you _have_ got it."

"Got what?"

"The taste for him. The genuine passion. I had it when I was here. I couldn't have stood it if I hadn't."

"I know. You must have had it. You've got it now."

"And I don't suppose I've seen him anything like at his best. You'll get more out of him than I did."

"Oh, do you think I shall?"

"Yes. He may rise to greater heights."

"You mean he may go to greater lengths?"

"Perhaps. I don't know. You'd have, of course, to stop his lengths, which would he a pity. I think of him mostly in heights. There's no reason why you shouldn't let him soar.... But I mustn't discuss him. I've just eaten his dinner."

"No, we mustn't," Barbara agreed. "That's the worst of dinners."

"I say, though, can't we meet somewhere?"

"Where we _can?_"

"Yes. Where we can let ourselves rip? Couldn't we go for more walks together?"

"I'm afraid there won't be time."

"There'll be loads of time. When he's off in his car 'rounding up the county.'"

"When he's 'off,' I'm 'on' as Mrs. Waddington's companion."

"Fanny won't mind. She'll let you do anything you like. At any rate, she'll let _me_ do anything _I_ like."

"Will you ask her?"

"Of course I shall."

So they settled it.

3

When Barbara said to herself that Mr. Waddington would spoil her evening with Ralph Bevan, she had judged by the change that had come over the house since the return of its master. You felt it first in the depressed faces of the servants, of Partridge and Annie Trinder. A thoughtful gloom had settled even on Kimber. Worse than all, Fanny Waddington had left off humming. Barbara missed that spontaneous expression of her

happiness.

She thought: "What is it he does to them?" And yet it was clear that he didn't do anything. They were simply crushed by the sheer mass and weight of his egoism. He imposed on them somehow his incredible consciousness of himself. He left an atmosphere of uneasiness. You felt it when he wasn't there; even when Fanny had settled down in the drawing-room with "Tono-Bungay" you felt her fear that at any minute the door would open and Horatio would come in.

But Barbara wasn't depressed. She enjoyed the perpetual spectacle he made. She enjoyed his very indifference to Ralph, his refusal to see that he could command attention, his conviction of his own superior fascination. She knew now what Ralph meant when he said it would be unkind to spoil him for her. He was to burst on her without preparation or description. She was to discover him first of all herself. First of all. But she could see the time coming when her chief joy would be their making him out, bit by bit, together. She even discerned a merry devil in Fanny that amused itself at Horatio's expense; that was aware of Barbara's amusement and condoned it. There were ultimate decencies that prevented any open communion with Fanny. But beyond that refusal to smile at Horatio after eating his dinner, she could see no decencies restraining Ralph. She could count on him when her private delight became intolerable and must be shared.

But there were obstacles to their intercourse. Mr. Waddington couldn't very well start on what he called his "campaign" until he was armed with his prospectus, and Pyecraft took more than a week to print it. And while she sat idle, thinking of her salary, the fiend of conscience prompted Barbara to ask him for work. Wasn't there his book?

"My book? My Cotswold book?" He pretended he had forgotten all about it. He waved it away. "The book is only a recreation, an amusement. Plenty of time for that when I've got my League going. Still, I shall be glad when I can settle down to it, again."... He was considering it now with reminiscent affection.... "If it would amuse you to look at it--"

He began a fussy search in his bureau.

"Ah, here we are!"

He unearthed two piles of manuscript, one typed, the other written, both scored with erasures, with almost illegible corrections and insertions.

"It's in a terrible mess," he said.

She saw what her work would be: to cut a way through the jungle, to make clearings.

"If I were to type it all over again, you'd have a clean copy to work on when you were ready."

"If you _would_ be so good. It's that young rascal Ralph. He'd no business to leave it in that state."

Her scruple came again to Barbara.

"Mr. Waddington, you'd take him on again for your secretary if he'd come back?"

"He'd come back all right. Trust him."

"And you'd take him?"

"My dear young lady, why should I? I don't want _him_; I want _you_."

"And _I_ don't want to stand in his way."

"You needn't worry about that."

"I can't help worrying about it. You'd take him back if I wasn't here."

"You _are_ here."

"But if I weren't?"

"Come, come. You mustn't talk to me like that."

She went away and talked to Fanny.

"I can't bear doing him out of his job. If he'll come back--"

"My dear, you don't know Ralph. He'd die rather than come back. They've made it impossible between them."

"Mr. Waddington says he'd take him back if I wasn't here."

"He wouldn't. He only thinks he would, because it makes him feel magnanimous. He offered Ralph half a year's salary if he'd go at once. And Ralph went at once and wouldn't touch the salary. That made him come out top dog, and Horatio didn't like it. Not that he supposed he could score off Ralph with money. He isn't vulgar."

No. He wasn't vulgar. But she wondered how he would camouflage it to himself--that insult to his pride. And there was Ralph's pride that was so fiery and so clean. Yet--

"Yet Mr. Bevan comes and dines," she said.

"Yes, he comes and dines. He'll always be my cousin, though he won't be Horatio's secretary. He's got a very sweet nature and he keeps the issues clear."

"But what will he _do_? He can't live on his sweet nature."

"Oh, he's got enough to live on, though not enough to--to do what he wants on. But he'll get a job all right. You needn't bother your dear little head about Ralph."

Fanny said to herself: "I'll tell him, then he'll adore her more than ever. If only he adores her _enough_ he'll buck up and get something to do."

VI

1

Mr. Waddington did not approve of Mrs. Levitt's intimacy with her sister, Bertha Rickards.

He would have approved of it still less if he had heard the conversation which Mrs. Trinder heard and reported to Miss Gregg, the governess at the rectory, who told the Rector's wife, who told the Rector, who told Colonel Grainger, who told Ralph Sevan, who kept it to himself.

"What did you say to the old boy, Elise?"

"Don't ask me what I _said_!"

"Well--have you got the cottage?"

"Of course I've got it, silly cuckoo. I can get anything out of him I like. He wasn't going to turn those Ballingers out, but I made him."

"Did he say when Mrs. Waddington was going to call?"

Bertha couldn't resist the temptation of pinching where she knew the flesh was tender.

"I didn't ask him."

"She can't very well be off it, now he's your landlord."

That was what Mrs. Levitt thought. And if Mrs. Waddington called, Lady Corbett couldn't very well be off it either. They were the only ones in Wyck who had not called; but it would be futile to pretend that they didn't matter, that they were not the ones who mattered more than anybody.

The net she had drawn round Mr. Waddington was tightening, though he was as yet unaware of his entanglement. First of all, the Lower Wyck cottage was put into thorough repair; and if the plaster was not quite dry when the Ballingers moved into it, that was not Mr. Waddington's concern. He had provided them with a house, which was all that the law could reasonably require him to do. Clearly it was Hitchin, the builder, who should be held responsible for the plaster, not he. As for the rheumatism Mrs. Ballinger got, supposing it could be put down to the damp plaster and not to some inherent defect in Mrs. Ballinger's constitution, clearly that was not Mr. Waddington's concern either. If anybody was responsible for Mrs. Ballinger's rheumatism, it was Hitchin.

Mr. Waddington did not approve of Hitchin. Hitchin was a Socialist who followed Colonel Grainger's lead in overpaying his workmen, with disastrous consequences to other people; for over and above the general upsetting caused by this gratuitous interference with the prevailing economic system, Mr. Hitchin was in the habit of recouping himself by monstrous overcharges. And Mr. Hitchin was not only the best builder in the neighbourhood, but the only builder and stonemason in Wyck-on-the-Hill, so that he had you practically at his mercy.

And operations at the Sheep Street cottage were suspended while Mr. Waddington disputed Mr. Hitchin's estimate bit by bit, from the total cost of building the new rooms down to the last pot of enamel paint and

his charge per foot for lead piping. June was slipping away while they contended, and there seemed little chance of Mrs. Levitt's getting into her house before Michaelmas, if then.

So that on the morning of the nineteenth, two days before the meeting, Mr. Waddington found another letter waiting for him on the breakfast-table.

Fanny was looking at him, and he sought protection in an affectation of annoyance.

"Now what can Mrs. Levitt find to write to me about?"

"I wouldn't set any limits to her invention," Fanny said.

"And what do you know about Mrs. Levitt?"

"Nothing. I only gather from what you say yourself that she is--fertile in resource."

"Resource?"

"Well, in creating opportunities."

"Opportunities, now, for what?"

"For you to exercise your Christian charity, my dear. When are you going to let me call on her?"

"I am not going to let you call on her at all."

"Is that Christian charity?"

"It's anything you please." He was absorbed in his letter. Mrs. Levitt had been obliged to move from Mrs. Trinder's in the Square to inferior rooms in Sheep Street, and she was sorry for herself.

"But surely, when you're always calling on her yourself--"

"I am not always calling on her. And if I were, there are some things which are perfectly proper for me to do which would not be proper for you."

"It sounds as if Mrs. Levitt wasn't."

He looked up as sharply as his facial curves permitted. "Nothing of the sort. She's simply not the sort of person you _do_ call on; and I don't mean you to begin."

"Why not?"

"Because you're my wife and you have a certain position in the county. That's why."

"Rather a snobby reason, isn't it? You said I might call on anybody I liked."

"So you may, in reason, provided you don't begin with Mrs. Levitt."

"I may have to end with her," said Fanny.

Mr. Waddington had many reasons for not wishing Fanny to call on Mrs. Levitt. He wanted to keep his wife, because she was his wife, in a place apart from Mrs. Levitt and above her, to mark the distance and distinction that there was between them. He wanted to keep himself, as Fanny's husband, apart and distant, by way of enhancing his male attraction. And he wanted to keep Mrs. Levitt apart, to keep her to himself, as the hidden woman of passionate adventure. Hitherto their intercourse had had the charm, the unique, irreplaceable charm of things unacknowledged and clandestine. Mrs. Levitt was unique; irreplaceable. He couldn't think of any other woman who would be a suitable substitute. There was little Barbara Madden; she had been afraid of him; but his passions were still too young to be stirred by the crudity of a girl's fright; if it came to that, he preferred the reassuring ease of Mrs. Levitt.

And he didn't mean it to come to that.

But though Mr. Waddington did not actually look forward to a time when he would be Mrs. Levitt's lover, he had visions of the pure fancy in which he saw himself standing on Mrs. Levitt's doorstep after dark; say, once a fortnight, on her servant's night out; he would sound a muffled signal on the knocker and the door would he half-opened by Elise. Elise! He would slip through in a slender and mysterious manner; he would go on tip-toe up and down her stairs, recapturing a youthful thrill out of the very risks they ran, yet managing the affair with a consummate delicacy and discretion.

At this point Mr. Waddington's fancy heard another door open down the street; somebody came out and saw him in the light of the passage; somebody went by with a lantern; somebody timed his comings and goings. He felt the palpitation, the cold nausea of detection. No. You couldn't do these things in a little place like Wyck-on-the-Hill, where everybody knew everybody else's business. And there was Toby, too.

Sometimes, perhaps, on a Sunday afternoon, when Toby and the servant would be out. Yes. Sunday afternoon between tea-time and church-time.

Or he could meet her in Oxford or Cheltenham or in London. Wiser. Week-ends. More satisfactory. Risk of being seen there too, but you must take some risks. Surprising how these things _were_ kept secret.

Birmingham now. Birmingham would be safer because more unlikely. He didn't know anybody in Birmingham. But the very thought of Mrs. Levitt calling at the Manor on the same commonplace footing, say, as Mrs. Grainger, was destruction to all this romantic secrecy.

Also he was afraid that if Mrs. Levitt were really that sort of woman, Fanny's admirable instinct would find her out and scent the imminent affair. Or if Fanny remained unsuspicious and showed plainly her sense of security, Elise might become possessive and from sheer jealousy give herself away. Mr. Waddington said to himself that he knew women, and that if he were a wise man, and he _was_ a wise man, he would arrange matters so that the two should never meet. Fanny was docile, and if he said flatly that she was not to call on Mrs. Levitt, she wouldn't.

There was another thing that Mr. Waddington dreaded even more than that dangerous encounter: Fanny's knowing that he had turned the Ballingers out. As he would have been very unwilling to admit that Mrs. Levitt had forced his hand there, he took the whole of the responsibility for that action. But, inevitable and justifiable as it was, he couldn't hope to carry it off triumphantly with Fanny. It was just, but it was not magnanimous. Therefore, without making any positively untruthful statement, he had let her think that Ballinger had given notice of his own accord. The chances, he thought, were all against Fanny ever hearing the truth of the matter.

If only the rascal hadn't had a wife and children, and if only his wife--but, unfortunately for Mr. Waddington, his wife was Susan Trinder, Mrs. Trinder's husband's niece, and Susan Trinder had been Horace's nurse; and though they all considered that she had done for herself when she married that pig-headed Ballinger, Fanny and Horace still called her Susan-Nanna. And Susan-Nanna's niece, Annie Trinder, was parlourmaid at the Manor. So Mr. Waddington had a nasty qualm when Annie, clearing away breakfast, asked if she might have a day off to look after her aunt, Mrs. Ballinger, who was in bed with the rheumatics.

To his horror he heard Fanny saying: "She wouldn't have had the rheumatics if they'd stayed in Sheep Street."

"No, ma'am."

Annie's eyes were clear and mendacious.

"He never ought to have left it," said Fanny.

"No, ma'am. No more he oughtn't."

"Isn't she very sorry about it?"

(Why couldn't Fanny leave it alone?)

"Yes, m'm. She's frettin' something awful. You see, 'tesn't so much the house, though 'tes a better one than the one they're in, 'tes the garden. All that fruit and vegetable what uncle he put in himself, and them lavender bushes. Aunt, she's so fond of a bit of lavender. I dunnow I'm sure how she'll get along."

Annie knew. He could tell by her eyes that she knew. There was nothing but Annie's loyalty between him and that exposure that he dreaded. He heard Fanny say that she would go and see Susan to-morrow. There would be nothing but Susan's loyalty and Ballinger's magnanimity. It would amount to that if they spared him for Fanny's sake. He had been absolutely right, and Ballinger had brought the whole trouble on himself; but you could never make Fanny see that. And Ballinger contrived to put him still further in the wrong. The next day when Fanny called at the cottage she found it empty. Ballinger had removed himself and his wife and family to Susan's father's farm at Medlicott, a good two and a half miles from his work on Colonel Grainger's land, thus providing himself with a genuine grievance.

And Fanny would keep on talking about it at dinner.

"Those poor Ballingers! It's an awful pity he gave up the Sheep Street

cottage. Didn't you tell him he was a fool, Horatio?"

Mercifully Annie Trinder had left the room. But there was Partridge by the sideboard, listening.

"I'm not responsible for Ballinger's folly. If he finds himself inconvenienced by it, that's no concern of mine."

"Well, Ballinger's folly has been very convenient for Mrs. Levitt."

Mr. Waddington tried to look as if Mrs. Levitt's convenience were no concern of his either.

VII

1

The handbills and posters had been out for the last week. Their headlines were very delightful to the eye with their enormous capitals staring at you in Pyecraft's royal blue print.

NATIONAL LEAGUE OF LIBERTY.

* * * * *

A MEETING
IN AID OF THE ABOVE LEAGUE
WILL BE HELD IN THE
TOWN HALL, WYCK-ON-THE-HILL,
Saturday, June 21st, 8 p.m.

* * * * *

Chairman: SIR JOHN CORBETT,
OF
UNDERWOODS, WYCK-ON-THE-HILL.
Speaker:
HORATIO BYSSHE WADDINGTON, ESQ.,
OF THE
MANOR HOUSE, LOWER WYCK.

* * * * *

YOU ARE EARNESTLY REQUESTED TO
ATTEND.

* * * * *

GOD SAVE THE KING!

Only one thing threatened Mr. Waddington's intense enjoyment of his meeting: his son Horace would be there. Young Horace had insisted on coming over from Cheltenham College for the night, expressly to attend the meeting. And though Mr. Waddington had pointed out that the meeting could very well take place without him, Fanny appeared to be backing

young Horace up in his impudent opinion that it couldn't. This he found excessively annoying; for, though for worlds he wouldn't have owned it, Mr. Waddington was afraid of his son. He was never the same man when he was about. The presence of young Horace--tall for sixteen and developing rapidly--was fatal to the illusion of his youth. And Horace had a way of commenting disadvantageously on everything his father said or did; he had a perfect genius for humorous depreciation. At any rate, he and his mother behaved as if they thought it was humorous, and many of his remarks seemed to strike other people--Sir John and Lady Corbett, for example, and Ralph Bevan--in the same light. Over and over again young Horace would keep the whole table listening to him with unreasoning and unreasonable delight, while his father's efforts to converse received only a polite and perfunctory attention. And the prospect of having young Horace's humour let loose on his meeting and on his speech at the meeting was distinctly disagreeable. Fanny oughtn't to have allowed it to happen. He oughtn't to have allowed it himself. But short of writing to his Head Master to forbid it, they couldn't stop young Horace coming. He had only to get on his motor-bicycle and come.

Barbara came on him in the drawing-room before dinner, sitting in an easy chair and giggling over the prospectus.

He jumped up and stood by the hearth, smiling at her.

"I say, did my guv'nor really write this himself?"

"More or less. Did you really come over for the meeting?"

"Rather."

His smile was wilful and engaging.

"You _are_ enthusiastic about the League."

"Enthusiastic? We-ell, I can't say I know much about it. Of course, I know the sort of putrid tosh he'll sling at them, but what I want is to _see_ him doing it."

He had got it too, that passion of interest and amusement, hers and Ralph's. Only it wasn't decent of him to show it; she mustn't let him see she had it. She answered soberly:

"Yes, he's awfully keen."

"_Is_ he? I've never seen him really excited, worked up, except once or twice during the war."

As he stood there, looking down, smiling pensively, he seemed to brood over it, to anticipate the joy of the spectacle.

He had an impudent, happy face, turned and coloured like his mother's; he had Fanny's blue eyes and brown hair. All that the Waddingtons and Postlethwaites had done to him was to raise the bridge of his nose, and to thicken his lips slightly without altering their wide, vivacious twirl. He considered Barbara.

"You're going to help him to write his book, aren't you?"

"I hope so," said Barbara.

"You've got a nerve. He pretty well did for Ralph Bevan. He's worse than shell-shock when he once gets going."

"I expect I can stand him. He can't be worse than the War Office."

"Oh, isn't he? You wait."

At that moment his father came in, late, and betraying the first symptoms of excitement. Barbara saw that the boy's eyes took them in. As they sat down to dinner Mr. Waddington pretended to ignore Horace. But Horace wouldn't be ignored. He drew attention instantly to himself.

"Don't you think it's jolly decent of me, pater, to come over for your meeting?"

"I shouldn't have thought," said Mr. Waddington, "that politics were much in your line. Not worth spoiling a half-holiday for."

"I don't suppose I shall care two fags about your old League. What I've come for is to see you, pater, getting up on your hind legs and giving it them. I wouldn't miss that for a million half-holidays."

"If that's all you've come for you might have saved yourself the trouble."

"Trouble? My dear father, I'd have taken _any_ trouble."

You could see he was laughing at him. And he was talking at Barbara, attracting her attention the whole time; with every phrase he shot a look at her across the table. Evidently he was afraid she might think he didn't know how funny his father was, and he had to show her. It wasn't decent of him. Barbara didn't approve of young Horace; yet she couldn't resist him; his eyes and mouth were full, like Ralph's, of such intelligent yet irresponsible joy. He wanted her to share it. He was an egoist like his father; but he had something of his mother's charm, something of Ralph Bevan's.

"Nothing," he was saying, "nothing would have kept me away."

"You're very good, sir." Horace could appreciate that biting sarcasm.

"Not at all. I say, I wish you'd let me come on the platform."

"What for? You don't propose yourself as a speaker, do you?"

"Rather not. I simply want to be somewhere where I can see your face and old Grainger's at the same time, and Hitchin's, when you're going for their Socialism."

"You shall certainly not come on the platform. And wherever you sit I must request you to behave yourself--if you can. You may not realize it, but this is going to be a serious meeting."

"I know _that_. It's just the--the seriousness that gets me." He giggled.

Mr. Waddington shrugged his shoulders. "Of course, if you've no sense of responsibility--if you choose to go on like an ill-bred schoolboy--but

don't be surprised if you're reprimanded from the chair."

"What? Old Corbett? I should like to see him.... Don't you worry, pater, I'll behave a jolly sight better than anybody else will. You see if I don't."

"How did you suppose he'd behave, Horatio?" said Fanny. "When he's come all that way and given up a picnic to hear you."

"Pater'll be a picnic, if you like," said Horace.

Mr. Waddington waved him away with a gesture as if he flicked a teasing fly, and went out to collect his papers.

Fanny turned to her son. "Horry dear, you mustn't rag your father like that. You mustn't laugh at him. He doesn't like it."

"I can't help it," Horry said. "He's so furiously funny. He _makes_ me giggle."

"Well, whatever you do, don't giggle at the meeting, or you'll give him away."

"I won't, mater. Honour bright, I won't. I'll hold myself in like--like anything. Only you mustn't mind if I burst."

2

Mr. Waddington had spoken for half an hour, expounding, with some necessary repetitions, the principles and objects of the League.

He was supported on the platform by his Chairman, Sir John Corbett, and by the other members of his projected Committee: by Lady Corbett, by Fanny, by the Rector, by Mr. Thurston of the Elms, Wyck-on-the-Hill; by Mr. Bostock of Parson's Bank; Mr. Jackson, of Messrs. Jackson, Cleaver and Co., solicitors; Major Markham of Wyck Wold, Mr. Temple of Norton-in-Mark, and Mr. Hawtrey of Medlicott; and by his secretary, Miss Barbara Madden. The body of the hall was packed. Beneath him, in the front row, he had the wives and daughters of his committeemen; in its centre, right under his nose, he was painfully aware of the presence of young Horace and Ralph Bevan. Colonel Grainger sat behind them, conspicuous and, Mr. Waddington fancied, a little truculent, with his great square face and square-clipped red moustache, and on each side of Colonel Grainger and behind him were the neighbouring gentry and the townspeople of Wyck, the two grocers, the two butchers, the drapers and hotel keeper, and behind them again the servants of the Manor and a crowd of shop assistants; and further and further back, farm labourers and artisans; among these he recognized Ballinger with several of Colonel Grainger's and Hitchin's men. A pretty compact group they made, and Mr. Waddington was gratified by their appearance there.

And well in the centre of the hall, above the women's hats, he could see Mr. Hitchin's bush of hair, his shrewd, round, clean-shaven and rosy face, his grey check shoulders and red tie. Mr. Hitchin had the air of being supported by the entire body of his workmen. Mr. Waddington was gratified by Mr. Hitchin's appearance, too, and he thought he would insert some expression of that feeling in his peroration.

He was also profoundly aware of Mrs. Levitt sitting all by herself in an empty space about the middle of the third row.

From time to time Ralph Bevan and young Horace fixed on Fanny Waddington and Barbara delighted eyes in faces of a supernatural gravity. Young Horace was looking odd and unlike himself, with his jaws clamped together in his prodigious effort not to giggle. Whenever Barbara's eyes met his and Ralph's, a faint smile quivered on her face and flickered and went out.

Once Horace whispered to Ralph Bevan: "Isn't he going it?" And Ralph whispered back: "He's immense."

He was. He felt immense. He felt that he was carrying his audience with him. The sound of his own voice excited him and whipped him on. It was a sort of intoxication. He was soaring now, up and up, into his peroration.

"It is a gratification to me to see so many working men and women here to-night. They are specially welcome. We want to have them with us. Do not distrust the working man. The working man is sound at heart. Sound at head too, when he is let alone and not carried away by the treacherous arguments of ignorant agitators. We--myself and the founders of this League--have not that bad opinion of the working man which his leaders--his misleaders, I may call them--appear to have. We believe in him, we know that, if he were only let alone, there is no section of the community that would stand more solid for order and good government than he."

"Hear! Hear!" from Colonel Grainger. Ralph whispered, "Camouflage!" to Horace, who nodded.

"There is nothing in the aims of this League contrary to the interests of Labour. On the contrary"--he heard, as if somebody else had perpetrated it, the horrible repetition--"I mean to say--" His brain fought for another phrase madly and in vain. "On the contrary, it exists in order to safeguard the true interests, the best interests, of every working man and woman in the country."

"Hear! Hear!" from Sir John Corbett. Mr. Waddington smiled.

"President Wilson"--he became agitated and drank water--"President Wilson talked about making the world safe for democracy. Well, if we, you and I, all of us, don't take care, the world won't be safe for anything else. It certainly won't be safe for the middle classes, for the great business and professional classes, for the class to which I, for one, belong: the class of English gentlemen. It won't be safe for _us_.

"Not that I propose to make a class question of it. To make a class question of it would be more than wrong. It would be foolish. It would be a challenge to revolution, the first step towards letting loose, unchaining against us, those forces of disorder and destruction which we are seeking to keep down. I am not here to insist on class differences, to foment class hatred. Those differences exist, they always will exist; but they are immaterial to our big purpose. This is a question of principle, the great principle of British liberty. Are we going to submit to the tyranny of one class over all other classes, of one interest over all other interests in the country? Are we going to knock

under, I say, to a minority, whether it is a Labour minority or any other?

"Are--we--going--to tolerate Bolshevism and a Soviet Government here? If there are any persons present who think that that is our attitude and our intention, I tell them now plainly--it is _not_. In their own language, in our good old county proverb: 'As sure as God's in Gloucester,' it is not and never will be. The sooner they understand that the better. I do not say that there are any persons present who would be guilty of so gross an error. I do not believe there are. I do not believe that there is any intelligent person in this room who will not agree with me when I say that, though it is just and right that Labour should have a voice in the government, it is not just and it is not right that it should be the only voice.

"It has been the only voice heard in Russia for two years, and what is the consequence? Bloodshed. Anarchy and bloodshed. I don't _say_ that we should have anarchy and bloodshed here; England, thank God, is not Russia. But I do not say that we shall _not_ have them. And I _do_ say that it rests with us, with you and me, ladies and gentlemen, to decide whether we shall or shall not have them. It depends on the action we take to-night with regard to this National League of Liberty, on the action taken on--on other nights at similar meetings, all over this England of ours; it depends, in two words, on our _united action_, whether we shall have anarchy or stable government, whether this England of ours shall or shall not continue to be a free country.

"Remember two things: the League is National, and it is a League of Liberty. It would not be one if it were not the other.

"You will say, perhaps many of you _are_ saying: 'This League is all very well, but what can _I_ do?' Perhaps you will even say: 'What can Wyck do? After all, Wyck is a small place. It isn't the capital of the county.'"

"Well, I can tell you what Wyck can do. It can be--it _is_ the first town in Gloucestershire, the first provincial town in England to start a National League of Liberty. They've got a League in London, the parent League; they may have another branch League anywhere any day, but I hope that--thanks to the very noble efforts of those ladies and gentlemen who have kindly consented to serve on my Committee--I hope that before long we shall have started Leagues in Gloucester, Cheltenham, Cirencester, Nailsworth and Stroud; in every town, village and hamlet in the county. I hope, thanks to your decision to-night, ladies and gentlemen, to be able to say that Wyck--little Wyck--has got in first. All round us, for fifteen--twenty miles round, there are hamlets, villages and towns that haven't got a League, that know nothing about the League. Wyck-on-the-Hill will be the centre of the League for this part of the Cotswolds.

"It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the principle at stake. Impossible, therefore, to exaggerate the importance of this League, therefore impossible to exaggerate the importance of this meeting, of every man and woman who has come here to-night. And when you rise from your seats and step up to this platform to enroll your names as members of the National League of Liberty, I want you to feel, every one of you, that you will be doing an important thing, a thing necessary to the nation, a thing in its way every bit as necessary and important as the thing the soldier does when he rises up out of his

trench and goes over the top."

It was then, and then only, that young Horace giggled. But he covered his collapse with a shout of "Hear! Hear!" that caused Fanny and Barbara to blow their noses simultaneously. As for Ralph, he hid his face in his hands.

"Like him," said Mr. Waddington, "you will be helping to save England. And what can any of us do more?"

He sat down suddenly in a perfect uproar of applause, and drank water. In spite of the applause he was haunted by a sense of incompleteness. There was something he had left out of his speech, something he had particularly wanted to say. It seemed to him more vital, more important, than anything he _had_ said.

A solitary pair of hands, Mrs. Levitt's hands, conspicuously lifted, were still clapping when Mr. Hitchin's face rose like a red moon behind and a little to the left of her; followed by the grey check shoulders and red tie. He threw back his head, stuck a thumb in each armhole of his waistcoat, and spoke. "Ladies and gentlemen. The speaker has quoted President Wilson about the world being made safe for democracy. He seems to be concerned about the future, to be, if I may say so, in a bit of a funk about the future. But has he paid any attention to the past? Has he considered the position of the working man in the past? Has he even considered the condition of many working men at the present time, for instance, of the farm labourer now in this country? If he had, if he knew the facts, if he cared about the facts, he might admit that, whether he's going to like it or not, it's the working man's turn. Just about his turn.

"I needn't ask Mr. Waddington if he knows the parable of Dives and Lazarus. But I should like to say to him what Abraham said to the rich man: 'Remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted and thou art tormented.'

"I don't want Mr. Waddington to be tormented. To be tormented too much. Not more than is reasonable. A little torment--say, his finger scorched for the fraction of a second in that hot, unpleasant place--would be good for him if it made him think. I say I don't want to torment him, but I'll just ask him one question: Does he think that a world where it's possible for a working man, just because he _is_ a working man and not an English gentleman, a world where it's still possible for him, and his wife and his children, to be turned out of house and home to suit the whim of an English gentleman; does he think that a world where things like that can happen is a safe place for anybody?

"I can tell him it isn't safe. It isn't safe for you and me. And if it isn't safe for you and me, it isn't safe for the people who make these things happen; and it isn't any safer for the people who stand by and let them happen.

"And if the Socialist--if the Bolshevist is the man who's going to see to it that they don't happen, if a Soviet Government is the only Government that'll see to that, then the Socialist, or the Bolshevist, is the man for my money, and a Soviet Government is the Government for my vote. I don't say, mind you, that it _is_ the only Government--I say, if it were.

"Mr. Waddington doesn't like Bolshevism. None of us like it. He doesn't like Socialism. I think he's got some wrong ideas about that. But he's dead right when he tells you, if you're afraid of Bolshevism and a Soviet Government, that the remedy lies in your own hands. If there ever is a day of reckoning, what Mr. Waddington would call a revolution in this country, you, we, ay, everyone of us sitting here, will be done with according as we do."

He sat down, and Mr. Waddington rose again on his platform, solemn and a little pale. He looked round the hall, to show that there was no person there whom he was afraid to face. It might have been the look of some bold and successful statesman turning on a turbulent House, confident in his power to hold it.

"Unless I have misheard him, what Mr. Hitchin has just said, ladies and gentlemen, sounded very like a threat. If that is so, we may congratulate Mr. Hitchin on providing an unanswerable proof of the need for a National League of Liberty."

There were cries of "Hear! Hear!" from Sir John Corbett and from Mr. Hawtrey of Medlicott.

Then a horrible thing happened. Slight and rustling at first, then gathering volume, there came a hissing from the back rows packed with Colonel Grainger's and Mr. Hitchin's men. Then a booing. Then a booing and hissing together.

Sir John scrabbled on to his little legs and cried: "Ordah, there! Ordah!" Mr. Waddington maintained an indomitably supercilious air while Sir John brought his fist down on the table (probably the most energetic thing he had ever done in his life), with a loud shout of "Ordah!" Colonel Grainger and Mr. Hitchin were seen to turn round in their places and make a sign to their men, and the demonstration ceased.

Mr. Waddington then rose as if nothing at all had happened and said, "Any ladies and gentlemen wishing to join the League will please come up to the platform and give their names to Miss Madden. Any persons wishing to subscribe at once, may pay their subscriptions to Miss Madden.

"I will now call your attention to the last item on the programme, and ask you all to join with me very heartily in singing 'God Save the King.'"

Everybody, except Colonel Grainger and Mr. Hitchin, rose, and everybody, except the extremists of the opposition, sang. One voice--it was Mrs. Levitt's voice--was lifted arrogantly high and clear above the rest.

"Send--him--vic-torious,
Hap-py--and--glorious.
Long--to-oo rei-eign overious
Gaw-aw-awd--Save--ther King."

Mr. Waddington waited beside Barbara Madden at the table; he waited in a superb confidence. After all, the demonstration engineered by Colonel Grainger had had no effect. The front and middle rows had risen to their feet and a very considerable procession was beginning to file towards the platform.

Mr. Waddington was so intent on this procession, Barbara was so busy taking down names and entering subscriptions and making out receipts, Sir John and Lady Corbett and the rest of the proposed Committee were talking to each other so loud and fast, Ralph and Horace were so absorbed in looking at Barbara that none of them saw what was happening in the body of the hall. Only Fanny caught the signals that passed between Colonel Grainger and Mr. Hitchin, and between Mr. Hitchin and his men.

Then Colonel Grainger stood up and shouted, "I protest!"

Mr. Hitchin stood up and shouted, "I protest!"

They shouted together, "We protest!"

Sir John Corbett rushed back to his chair and shouted "Ordah!" and the back rows, the ranks of Hitchin's men, stood up and shouted, "We won't sign!" "We won't sign!" "We won't sign!"

And then young Horace did an unsuspected thing, a thing that surprised himself. He leaped on to the front bench and faced the insurgent back rows. His face was red with excitement, and with the shame and anger and resentment inspired by his father's eloquence. But he was shouting in his hoarse, breaking, adolescent voice:

"Look here, you blackguards there at the back. If you don't stop that row this minute, I'll jolly well chuck you all out."

Only one voice, the voice of Mr. Hitchin's biggest and brawniest quarryman, replied: "Come on, sir!"

Young Horace vaulted lightly over the bench, followed by Ralph, and the two were steeplechasing down the hall when Mr. Hitchin made another of his mysterious signals and the men filed out, obediently, one by one.

Ralph and Horace found themselves in the middle of the empty benches laughing into each other's faces. Colonel Grainger and Mr. Hitchin stood beside them, smiling with intolerable benevolence.

Mr. Hitchin was saying: "The men are all right, Mr. Bevan. They don't mean any harm. They just got a bit out of hand."

Horace saw that they were being magnanimous, and the thought maddened him. "I don't blame the men," he said, "and I don't blame you, Hitchin. You don't know any better. But Colonel Grainger ought to be damned well ashamed of himself, and I hope he is."

Colonel Grainger laughed. So did Mr. Hitchin, throwing himself back and swaying from side to side as his mirth shook him.

"Look here, Mr. Hitchin--"

"That'll do, Horry," said Ralph. He led him gently down a side aisle and through a swing door into the concealed corridor beside the platform. There they waited.

"Don't imagine for one moment," said young Horry, "that I agree with all that tosh he talked. But, after all, he's got a perfect right to make a fool of himself if he chooses. And he's _my_ father."

"I know. From first to last, Horry, you behaved beautifully."

"Well, what would _you_ do if your father made an unholy ass of himself in public?"

"My father doesn't."

"No, but if he did?"

"I'd do what you did. Sit tight and try and look as if he didn't."

"Then," said Horace, "you look as big a fool yourself."

"Not quite. You don't say anything. Besides, your father isn't as big a fool as those London Leaguers who started the silly show. Sir Maurice Gedge and all that crowd. He didn't invent the beastly thing."

"No," said Horace mournfully, "he hasn't even the merit of originality."

He meditated, still mournful.

"Look here, Ralph, what did that blackguard Hitchin mean?"

"He isn't a blackguard. He's a ripping good sort. I can tell you, if every employer in this confounded commercial country was as honest as old Hitchin, there wouldn't be any labour question worth talking about."

"Damn his honesty. What did he _mean_? Was it true what he said?"

"Was what true?"

"Why, that my father turned the Ballingers out?"

"Yes; I'm afraid it was."

"I say, how disgusting of him. You know I always thought he was a bit of a fool, my father; but I didn't know he was that beastly kind of fool."

"He isn't," said Ralph. "He's just--a fool."

"I know. Did you ever hear such putrid rot as he talked?"

"I don't know. For the kind of silly thing it was, his speech wasn't half bad."

"What? About going over the top? Oh, Lord! And after turning the Ballingers out, too."

Ralph was silent.

"What's happened to him? He didn't use to be like that. He must be mad, or something."

Ralph thought of Mrs. Levitt.

"He's getting old and he doesn't like it. That's what's the matter with him."

"But hang it all, Ralph, that's no excuse. It really isn't."

"I believe Ballinger gave him some provocation."

"I don't care what he gave him. He'd no earthly business to take advantage of it. Not with that sort of person. Besides, it wouldn't matter about Ballinger so much, but there's old Susan and the kiddies.... He doesn't see how perfectly sickening it is for _me_."

"It isn't very nice for your mother."

"No; it's jolly hard on the poor mater.... Well, I can't stick it much longer. I'm just about fed up with Horatio Bysshe. I shall clear out first thing in the morning before he's down. I don't care if I never see him or speak to him again."

"I say, I say, how about the midsummer holidays?"

"Oh, damn the midsummer holidays!"

"Isn't it rather rotten to take a line you can't possibly keep up?"

"That's all right. Whatever I may do in the future," said young Horace magnificently, "I've got to give him his punishment _now_."

Ralph laughed. Young Horace was as big an egoist as his father, but with these differences: his blood was hot instead of cold, he had his mother's humour, and he was not a fool. Ralph wondered how he would have felt if he had realized Mrs. Levitt's part in the Ballinger affair.

3

Mr. Waddington remained standing on his platform. They were coming round him now, grasping him by the hand, congratulating him: Sir John Corbett, the Rector, Major Markham of Wyck Wold and Mr. Hawtrey of Medlicott.

"Capital speech, Waddington, capital."

"Best speech made in the Town Hall since they built it."

"Splendid. You landed them one every time."

"No wonder you drew them down on to you."

"That was a disgraceful business," said Sir John. "Disgraceful."

"Nothing of the sort ever happened in Wyck before," said the Rector.

"Nobody ever made a speech like Waddington's before," said Major Markham of Wyck Wold.

"Oh, you always get a row if you drag in politics," Mr. Hawtrey said.

"I don't know," said Sir John. "That was a put-up job between Hitchin and Grainger."

"Struck me it had every appearance of a spontaneous outburst," Major

Markham said.

"I've no doubt the rowdy element was brought in from the outside," said the Rector. "Hardly one of Hitchin's workpeople is a Wyck man. Otherwise I should have to apologize to Waddington for my parishioners."

"You needn't. There was nothing personal to me in it. Nothing personal at all. Even Hitchin wouldn't have had the impudence to oppose me on my own platform. It was the League they were going for. Bit too big for 'em. If you come out with a large, important thing like that there's sure to be some opposition just at first till it gets hold of 'em."

"Glad you can see it that way," said Sir John.

"My dear fellow, that's the way to see it. It's the right way; the big impersonal way."

"You've taken it in the proper spirit, Waddington," said the Rector. "None of those fellows meant any real harm. All good fellows.... By the way, is it true that the Ballingers have moved to Lower Wyck?"

"I believe so."

"Dear me, what on earth possessed them?"

"Some fad of Ballinger's, I fancy."

"That reminds me, I must go and see Mrs. Ballinger."

"You won't find them there, sir. They've moved again to her father's at Medlicott."

"You don't say so. I wonder now what they've done that for."

"They complained of the house being damp for one thing. If it was, that was Hitchin's fault, not mine."

Was everybody in a plot to badger him about those wretched Ballingers? He was getting sick of it. And he wanted to speak a word to Mrs. Levitt.

Mrs. Levitt had come up in the tail of the procession. She had given in her name and her subscription to Barbara Madden; but she lingered, waiting no doubt for a word with him. If only Corbett and the rest of them would go.

"Of course. Of course it was Hitchin's fault," said the Rector, with imperishable geniality. "Well.... Good night, Waddington, and thank you for a most--a most stimulating evening."

They had gone now, all but Sir John and Lady Corbett. (He could hear her talking to Fanny at the back of the platform.) Mrs. Levitt was gathering her scarf round her; in another minute she would be gone. And Corbett wouldn't go.

"I say, Waddington, that's a splendid young cub of yours. See him go over the top? He'd have taken them all on. Licked 'em, too, I shouldn't wonder."

Mr. Waddington resented this diversion of the stream of admiration. And

he was acutely aware of Mrs. Levitt standing there, detached but waiting.

"Was I really all right, Corbett?" He wasn't satisfied with his speech. If only he could remember what he had left out of it.

"Absolutely, my dear chap. Absolutely top-hole. You ought to make that boy a soldier."

He wished that young Horace could be a soldier at that moment, stationed in a remote part of the Empire, without any likelihood of leave for the next five years. He wanted--he wanted intolerably to speak to Mrs. Levitt, to spread himself voluptuously in her rejuvenating smile.

Sir John retreated before his manifest indifference. He could hear him at the back of the platform, congratulating Fanny.

Mrs. Levitt advanced towards him.

"At last," she said, "I may add my congratulations. That speech was magnificent."

"Nothing, my dear lady, nothing but a little necessary plain speaking."

"Oh, but you were wonderful. You carried us off our feet."

"I hope," he said, "we've enrolled you as a member?" (He knew they had.)

"Of course I'm enrolled. And I've paid in my poor little guinea to that delightful Miss Madden."

"Ah, that is _too_ good of you."

It was. The amount of the subscription was purely a matter of individual fancy.

"It's the least I could do in such a splendid cause."

"Well, dear Mrs. Levitt, we're delighted to have you with us. Delighted."

There was a pause. He was looking down at her from the height of his six feet. The faint, sweet scent of orris root rose up from her warm skin. She was very attractive, dressed in a low-necked gown of that dull, satiny stuff women were wearing now. A thin band of white net was stretched across the top of her breasts; through it he could see the shadowy, arrow-headed groove between; her pendant--pearl bistre and paste--pointed, pointed down to it.

He was wrong about Elise and jewellery. That was a throat for pearls and for diamonds. Emeralds. She would be all black and white and sparkling green. A necklace, he thought, wouldn't hang on her; it would be laid out, exposed on that white breast as on a cushion. You could never tell what a woman was really like till you'd seen her in a low-necked gown. It made Mrs. Levitt ten times more alluring. He smiled at her, a tender, brooding, rather fatuous smile.

Mrs. Levitt saw that her moment had come. It would be now or never. She must risk it.

"I wish," she said, "you'd introduce me to your wife."

It was a shock, a horrid blow. It showed plainly that Elise had interests beyond him, that she was not, like him, all for the secret, solitary adventure.

Yet perhaps--perhaps--she had planned it; she thought it would be safer for them, more discreet.

She looked up at him with the old, irrefutable smile.

"Will you?" she pleaded.

"Well--I'm not sure that I know where my wife _is_. She was here a minute ago, talking to Lady Corbett."

He looked round. A wide screen guarded the door on to the platform. He could see Lady Corbett and Fanny disappearing behind it.

"I--I'll go and look for her," he said. He meditated treachery. Treachery to poor Elise.

He followed them through the door and down the steps into the concealed corridor. He found Ralph Bevan there. Horace had gone.

"I say, Ralph, I wish you'd take Fanny home. She's tired. Get her out of this. I shall be here quite half an hour longer; settling up accounts. You might tell Kimber to come back for me and Miss Madden."

Now to get to the entrance you had to pass through the swing door into the hall and down the side aisle to the bottom, so that Mrs. Levitt witnessed Mrs. Waddington's exit with Ralph Bevan. Mr. Waddington. waited till the hall doors had closed on them before he returned.

"I can't find my wife anywhere," he said. "She wasn't in the cloak-room, so I think she must have gone back with Horace."

Mrs. Levitt would think that Fanny had disappeared while he was looking for her, honourably, in the cloak-room.

"I saw her go out," said Mrs. Levitt coldly, "with Mr. Bevan."

"I suppose he's taking her home," he said vaguely. His best policy was vagueness. "And now, my dear lady, I wish I could take _you_ home. But I shall be detained here some little time. Still, if you don't mind waiting a minute or two till Kimber comes back with the car, he shall drive you."

"Thank you, Mr. Waddington, I'm afraid I've waited quite long enough. It isn't worth while troubling Kimber to drive me a hundred yards."

It gave her pleasure to inflict that snub on Mr. Waddington in return for his manoeuvre. As the meeting had now broken up, and there wouldn't be anybody to witness her departure in the Waddingtons' car, Mrs. Levitt calculated that she could afford that little gratification of her feelings. They were intensified by Mr. Waddington's very evident distress. He would have walked home with her the hundred yards to Sheep Street, but she wouldn't hear of it. She was perfectly capable of seeing

herself home. Miss Madden was waiting for him. Good night.

4

Eleven o'clock. In the library where Mr. Waddington was drinking his whisky and water, Fanny had been crying. Horry had stalked off to his bedroom without saying good night to anybody. Barbara had retired discreetly. Ralph Bevan had gone. And when Fanny thought of the lavender bags Susan-Nanna sent every year at Christmas, she had cried.

"How could you _do_ it, Horatio? How _could_ you?"

"There was nothing else to be done. You can't expect me to take your sentimental, view of Ballinger."

"It isn't Ballinger. It's poor Susan-Nanna and the babies, and the lavender bags."

Mr. Waddington swayed placably up and down on the tips of his toes. "It serves poor Susan-Nanna right for marrying Ballinger."

"Oh--I suppose it serves _me_ right, too--"

Though she clenched her hands tight, tight, she couldn't keep back that little spurt of anger.

He was smiling his peculiar, voluptuous smile. "Serves you right? For spoiling everybody in the village? It does indeed."

"You don't in the least see what I mean," said Fanny.

But, after all, she was glad he hadn't seen it.

He hadn't seen anything. He hadn't seen that she had been crying. It had never dawned on him that she might care about Susan-Nanna, or that the Ballingers might love their home, their garden and their lavender bushes. He was like that. He didn't see things, and he didn't care.

He was back in his triumph of the evening, going over the compliments and congratulations, again and again--"Best speech ever made in the Town Hall--" But there was something--something he had left out.

"Did it never dawn on you--" said Fanny.

Ah, _now_ he had it.

"There!" he said. "I knew I'd forgotten something. I never put in that bit about the darkest hour before dawn."

Fanny's mind had wandered from what she had been going to say. "Did you see what Horry did?" she said instead.

"Everybody could see it. It was most unnecessary."

"I don't care. Think, Horatio. Think of his sticking up for you like that. He was going to fight them, the dear thing, all those great rough men. To fight them for _you_. He said he'd behave better than anybody else, and he did."

"Yes, yes. He behaved very well." Now that she put it to him that way he was touched by Horace's behaviour. He could always be touched by the thought of anything you did for _him_.

But Ralph Bevan could have told Fanny she was mistaken. Young Horace didn't do it altogether for his father; he did it for himself, for an ideal of conduct, an ideal of honour that he had, to let off steam, to make a sensation in the Town Hall, to feel himself magnificent and brave; because he, too, was an egoist, though a delightful one.

Mr. Waddington returned to his speech. "I can't think what made me leave out that bit about the dawn."

"Oh, bother your old dawn," said Fanny. "I'm going to bed."

She went, consoled. "Dear Horry," she thought, "I'm glad he did that."

VIII

1

The Ballinger affair did not end with the demonstration in the Town Hall. It had unforeseen and far-reaching consequences.

The first of these appeared in a letter which Mr. Waddington received from Mr. Hitchin:

"DEAR SIR,--

"_Re_ my estimate for decoration and additional building to Mrs. Levitt's house, I beg to inform you that recent circumstances have rendered it impossible for me to take up the contract. I must therefore request you to transfer your esteemed order to some other firm.

"Faithfully yours,

"THOMAS HITCHIN."

Mr. Hitchin expressed his attitude even more clearly to the foreman of his works. "I'm not going to build bathrooms and boudoirs and bedrooms for that--" the word he chose completed the alliteration. So that Mr. Waddington was compelled to employ a Cheltenham builder whose estimate exceeded Mr. Hitchin's estimate by thirty pounds.

And Mr. Hitchin's refusal was felt, even by people who resented his estimates, to be a moral protest that did him credit. It impressed the popular imagination. In the popular imagination Mrs. Levitt was now inextricably mixed up with the Ballinger affair. Public sympathy was all with Ballinger, turned out of his house and forced to take refuge with his wife's father at Medlicott, forced to trudge two and a half miles every day to his work and back again. The Rector and Major Markham of Wyck Wold, meditating on the Ballinger affair as they walked back that night from the Town Hall, pronounced it a mystery.

"It wasn't likely," Major Markham said, "that Ballinger, of his own initiative, would leave a comfortable house in Sheep Street for a damp cottage in Lower Wyck."

"Was it likely," the Rector said, "that Waddington would turn him out?" He couldn't believe that old Waddington would do anything of the sort.

"Unless," Major Markham suggested, "he's been got at. Mrs. Levitt may have got at him." He was a good sort, old Waddy, but he would be very weak in the hands of a clever, unscrupulous woman.

The Rector said he thought there was no harm in Mrs. Levitt, and Major Markham replied that he didn't like the look of her.

A vague scandal rose in Wyck-on-the-Hill. It went from mouth to mouth in bar parlours and back shops; Major Markham transported it in his motor-car from Wyck Wold to the Halls and Manors of Winchway and Chipping Kingdon and Norton-in-Mark. It got an even firmer footing in the county than in Wyck, with the consequence that one old lady withdrew her subscription to the League, and that when Mr. Waddington started on his campaign of rounding up the county the county refused to be rounded up. And the big towns, Gloucester, Cheltenham and Cirencester, were singularly apathetic. It was intimated to Mr. Waddington that if the local authorities saw fit to take the matter up no doubt something would be done, but the big towns were not anxious for a National League of Liberty imposed on them from Wyck-on-the-Hill.

The League did not die of Mrs. Levitt all at once. Very soon after the inaugural meeting the Committee sat at Lower Wyck Manor and appointed Mr. Waddington president. It arranged a series of monthly meetings in the Town Hall at which Mr. Waddington would speak ("That," said Fanny, "will give you something to look forward to every month.") Thus, on Saturday, the nineteenth of July, he would speak on "The Truth about Bolshevism." It was also decided that the League could be made very useful during by-elections in the county, if there ever were any, and Mr. Waddington prepared in fancy a great speech which he could use for electioneering purposes.

On July the nineteenth, seventeen people, counting Fanny and Barbara, came to the meeting: Sir John Corbett (Lady Corbett was unfortunately unable to attend), the Rector without his wife, Major Markham of Wyck Wold, Mr. Bostock of Parson's Bank, Kimber and Partridge and Annie Trinder from the Manor, the landlady of the White Hart, the butcher, the grocer and the fishmonger with whom Mr. Waddington dealt, three farmers who approved of his determination to keep down wages, and Mrs. Levitt. When he sat down and drank water there was a feeble clapping led by Mrs. Levitt, Sir John and the Rector. On August the sixteenth, the audience had shrunk to Mrs. Levitt, Kimber and Partridge, the butcher, one of the three farmers, and a visitor staying at the White Hart. Mr. Waddington spoke on "What the League Can Do." Owing to a sudden unforeseen shortage in his ideas he was obliged to fall back on his electioneering speech and show how useful the League would be if at any time there were a by-election in the county. The pop-popping of Mrs. Levitt's hands burst into a silent space. Nobody, not even Kimber or Partridge, was going to follow Mrs. Levitt's lead.

"You'll have to give it up," Fanny said. "Next time there won't be anybody but Mrs. Levitt." And with the vision before him of all those foolish, empty benches and Mrs. Levitt, pop-popping, dear brave woman,

all by herself, Mr. Waddington admitted that he would have to give it up. Not that he owned himself beaten; not that he gave up his opinion of the League.

"It's a bit too big for 'em," he said. "They can't grasp it. Sleepy minds. You can't rouse 'em if they won't be roused."

He emerged from his defeat with an unbroken sense of intellectual superiority.

2

Thus the League languished and died out; and Mr. Waddington, in the absence of this field for personal activity, languished too. In spite of his intellectual superiority, perhaps because of it, he languished till Barbara pointed out to him that the situation had its advantages. At last he could go on with his book.

"If you can only start him on it and keep him at it," Fanny said, "I'll bless you for ever."

But it was not easy either to start him or to keep him at it. To begin with, as Ralph had warned her, the work itself, _Ramblings Through the Cotswolds_, was in an appalling mess, and Mr. Waddington seemed to have exhausted his original impetus in getting it into that mess. He had set out on his ramblings without any settled plan. "A rambler," he said, "shouldn't have a settled plan." So that you would find Mr. Waddington, starting from Wyck-on-the-Hill and arriving at Lechford in the Thames valley, turning up in the valley of the Windlode or the Speed. You would find him on page twenty-seven drinking ale at the Lygon Arms in Chipping Kingdon, and on page twenty-eight looking down on the Evesham plain from the heights south of Cheltenham. He would turn from this prospect and, without traversing any intermediate ground, be back again, where you least expected him, in his Manor under Wyck-on-the-Hill. For though he had no fixed plan, he had a fixed idea, and however far he rambled he returned invariably to Wyck. To Mr. Waddington Wyck-on-the-Hill was the one stable, the one certain spot on the earth's surface, and this led to his treating the map of Gloucestershire entirely with reference to Wyck-on-the-Hill, so that all his ramblings were complicated by the necessity laid on him of starting from and getting back to it.

So much Barbara made out after she had copied the first forty pages, making the first clearing in Mr. Waddington's jungle. The clearings, she explained to Ralph, broke your heart. It wasn't till you'd got the thing all clean and tidy that you realized the deep spiritual confusion that lay behind it.

After that fortieth page the Ramblings piled and mixed themselves in three interpenetrating layers. First there was the original layer of Waddington, then a layer of Ralph superimposed on Waddington and striking down into him; then a top layer of Waddington, striking down into Ralph. First, the primeval chaos of Waddington; then Ralph's spirit moving over it and bringing in light and order; then Waddington again, invading it and beating it all back to darkness and confusion. From the moment Ralph came into it the progress of the book was a struggle between these two principles, and Waddington could never let Ralph be, so determined was he to stamp the book with his own personality.

"After all," Ralph said, "it _is_ his book."

"If he could only get away from Wyck, so that you could see where the other places _are_," she moaned.

"He can't get away from it because he can't get away from himself. His mind is egocentric and his ego lives in Wyck."

Barbara had had to ask Ralph to help her. They were in the library together now, working on the Ramblings during one of Mr. Waddington's periodical flights to London.

"He thinks he's rambling round the country but he's really rambling round and round himself. All the time he's thinking about nothing but his blessed self."

"Oh, come, he thought a lot about his old League."

"No, the League was only an extension of his ego."

"That must have been what Fanny meant. We were looking at his portrait and I said I wondered what he was thinking about, and she said she used to wonder and now she knew. Of course, it's Himself. That's what makes him look so absurdly solemn."

"Yes, but think of it. Think. That man hasn't ever cared about anything or anybody but himself."

"Oh--he cares about Fanny."

"No. No, he doesn't. He cares about his wife. A very different thing."

"Well--he cares about his old mother. He really cares."

"Yes, and you know why? It's only because she makes him feel young. He hates Horry because he can't feel young when he's there."

"Why, oh why, did that angel Fanny marry him?"

"Because she isn't an angel. She's a mortal woman and she wanted a husband and children."

"Wasn't there anybody else?"

"I believe not--available. The man she ought to have married was married already."

"Did my mother marry him?"

"Yes. And _my_ mother married the next best one.... It was as plain and simple as all that. And you see, the plainer and simpler it was, the more she realized why she was marrying Horatio, the more she idealized him. It wanted camouflage."

"I see."

"Then you must remember her people were badly off and he helped them. He was always doing things for them. He managed all Fanny's affairs for her before he married her."

"Then--he does kind things."

"Lots. When he wants to get something. He wanted to get Fanny.... Besides, he does them to get power, to get a hold on you. It's really for himself all the time. It gives him a certain simplicity and purity. He isn't a snob. He doesn't think about his money or his property, or his ancestors--he's got heaps--quite good ones. They don't matter. Nothing matters but himself."

"How about his book? Doesn't that matter?"

"It does and yet again it doesn't. He pretends he's only doing it to amuse himself, but it's really a projection of his ego into the Cotswolds. On the other hand, he'd hate it if you took him for a writing man when he's Horatio Bysshe Waddington. That's how he's got it into such a mess, because he can't get away from himself and his Manor."

"Proud of his Manor, anyhow."

"Oh, yes. Not, mind you, because it's perfect Tudor of the sixteenth century, _nor_ because the Earl of Warwick gave it to his great-grandfather's great-great-grandfather, but because it's his Manor. Horatio Bysshe Waddington's Manor. Of course, it's got to be what it is because any other sort of Manor wouldn't be good enough for Bysshe."

"It's an extension of his ego, too?"

"Yes. Horatio's ego spreading itself in wings and bursting into ball-topped gables and overflowing into a lovely garden and a park. There isn't a tree, there isn't a flower that hasn't got bits of Horatio in it."

"If I thought that I should never want to see roses and larkspurs again."

"It only happens in Horatio's mind. But it does happen."

So, between them, bit by bit, they made him out.

And they made out the book. Here and there, on separate slips, were great outlying tracts of light, contributed by Ralph, to be inserted, and sketches of dark, undeveloped stuff, sprung from Waddington, to be inserted too. Neither Ralph nor Barbara could make them fit. The only thing was to copy it out clear as it stood and arrange it afterwards. And presently it appeared that two pages were missing.

One evening, the evening of Mr. Waddington's return, looking for the lost pages, Barbara made her great discovery: a sheaf of manuscript, a hundred and twenty pages in Ralph's handwriting, hidden away at the back of the bureau, crumpled as if an inimical hand had thrust it out of sight. She took it up to bed and read it there.

A hundred and twenty pages of pure Ralph without any taint of Waddington. It seemed to be part of Mr. Waddington's book, and yet no part of it, for it was inconceivable that it should belong to anything but itself. Ralph didn't ramble; he went straight for the things he had seen. He saw the Cotswolds round Wyck-on-the-Hill, he made you see them, as they were: the high curves of the hills, multiplied, thrown off, one

after another; the squares and oblongs and vandykes and spread fans of the fields; and their many colours; grass green of the pastures, emerald green of the young wheat, white green of the barley; shining, metallic green of the turnips; the pink, the brown, the purple fallows, the sharp canary yellow of the charlock. And the trees, the long processions of trees by the great grass-bordered roads; trees furring the flanks and groins of the parted hills, dark combs topping their edges.

Ralph knew what he was doing. He went about with the farmers and farm hands; he followed the ploughing and sowing and the reaping, the feeding and milking of the cattle, the care of the ewes in labour and of the young lambs. He went at night to the upland folds with the shepherds; he could tell you about shepherds. He sat with the village women by their firesides and listened to their talk; he could tell you about village women. Mr. Waddington did not tell you about anything that mattered.

She took the manuscript to Ralph at the White Hart with a note to say how she had found it. He came running out to walk home with her.

"Did you know it was there?" she said.

"No. I thought I'd lost it. You see what it is?"

"Part of your book."

"Horatio's book."

"But you wrote it."

"Yes. That's what he fired me out for. He got tired of the thing and asked me to go on with it. He called it working up his material. I went on with it like that, and he wouldn't have it. He said it was badly written--jerky, short sentences--he'd have to re-write it. Well--I wouldn't let him do that, and he wouldn't have it as it stood."

"But--it's beautiful--alive and real. What more does he want?"

"The stamp of his personality."

"Oh, he'd _stamp_ on it all right."

"I'm glad you like it."

"_Like_ it. Don't you?"

Ralph said he thought he'd liked it when he wrote it, but now he didn't know.

"You'll know when you've finished it."

"I don't suppose I shall finish it," he said.

"But you must. You can't _not_ finish a thing like that."

"I own I'd like to. But I can't publish it."

"Why ever not?"

"Oh, it wouldn't be fair to poor old Waddy. After all, I wrote it for

him."

"What on earth does that matter? If he doesn't want it. Of course you'll finish it, and of course you'll publish it."

"Well, but it's all Cotswold, you see. And _he's_ Cotswold. If it _is_ any good, you know, I shouldn't like to--to well, get in his way. It's his game. At least he began it."

"It's a game two can play, writing Cotswold books."

"No. No. It isn't. And he got in first."

"Well, then, let him get in first. You can bring your book out after."

"And dish his?"

"No, let it have a run first. Perhaps it won't have any run."

"Perhaps mine won't."

"_Yours_. That heavenly book? And his tosh--Don't you see that you _can't_ get in his way? If anybody reads him they won't be the same people who read you."

"I hope not. All the same it would be rather beastly to cut him out; I mean to come in and do it better, show how bad he is, how frightful. It would rub it in, you know."

"Not with him. You couldn't."

"You don't know. Some brute might get up and hurt him with it."

"Oh, you _are_ tender to him."

"Well, you see, I did let him down when I left him. Besides, it isn't altogether him. There's Fanny."

"Fanny? She'd love you to write your book."

"I know she'd think she would. But she wouldn't like it if it made Horatio look a fool."

"But he's bound to look a fool in any case."

"True. I might give him a year, or two years."

"Well, then, _my_ work's cut out for me. I shall have to make Horatio go on and finish quick, so as not to keep you waiting."

"He'll get sick of it. He'll make you go on with it."

"_Me?_"

"Practically, and quarrel with every word you write. Unless you can write so like Horatio that he'll think he's done it himself. And then, you know, he won't have a word of mine left in. You'll have to take me out. And we're so mixed up together that I don't believe even he could sort us. You see, in order to appease him, I got into the way of giving

my sentences a Waddingtonian twist. If only I could have kept it up--"

"I'll have to lick the thing into shape somehow."

"There's only one thing you'll have to do. You must make him steer a proper course. This is to be _the_ Guide to the Cotswolds. You can't have him sending people back to Lower Wyck Manor all the time. You'll have to know all the places and all the ways."

"And I don't."

"No. But I do. Supposing I took you on my motor-bike? Would you awfully mind sitting on the carrier?"

"Do you think," she said, "he'd let me go?"

"Fanny will."

"I _could_, I think. I work so hard in the mornings and evenings that they've given me all the afternoons."

"We might go every afternoon while the weather holds out," he said. And then: "I say, he _does_ bring us together."

That was how Barbara's happy life began.

3

He did bring them together.

In the terrible months that followed, while she struggled for order and clarity against Mr. Waddington, who strove to reinstate himself in his obscure confusion, Barbara was sustained by the thought that in working for Mr. Waddington she was working for Ralph Bevan. The harder she worked for him the harder she worked for Ralph. With all her cunning and her little indomitable will she urged and drove him to get on and make way for Ralph. Mr. Waddington interposed all sorts of irritating obstructions and delays. He would sit for hours, brooding solemnly, equally unable to finish and to abandon any paragraph he had once begun. He had left the high roads and was rambling now in bye-ways of such intricacy that he was unable to give any clear account of himself. When Barbara had made a clean copy of it Mr. Waddington's part didn't always make sense. The only bits that could stand by themselves were Ralph's bits, and they were the bits that Mr. Waddington wouldn't let stand. The very clearness of the copy was a light flaring on the hopeless mess it was. Even Mr. Waddington could see it.

"Do you think," she said, "we've got it all down in the right order?" She pointed.

"_What's_ that?" She could see his hands twitching with annoyance. His loose cheeks hung shaking as he brooded.

"That's not as _I_, wrote it," he said at last. "That's Ralph Bevan. He wasn't a bit of good to me. There's--there's no end to the harm he's done. Conceited fellow, full of himself and his own ideas. Now I shall have to go over every line he's written and write it again. I'd rather write a dozen books myself than patch up another fellow's bad work....

We've got to overhaul the whole thing and take out whatever he's done."

"But you're so mixed up you can't always tell."

He looked at her. "You may be sure that if any passage is obscure or confused or badly written it isn't mine. The one you've shown me, for example."

Then Barbara had another of her ideas. Since they were so mixed up together that Mr. Waddington couldn't tell which was which, and since he wanted to give the impression that Ralph was responsible for all the bad bits, and insisted on the complete elimination of Ralph, she had only got to eliminate the bad bits and give such a Waddingtonian turn to the good ones that he would be persuaded that he had written them himself.

The great thing was, he said, that the book should be written by himself. And once fairly extricated from his own entanglements and set going on a clear path, with Barbara to pull him out of all the awkward places, Mr. Waddington rambled along through the Cotswolds at a smooth, easy pace. Barbara had contrived to break him of his wasteful and expensive habit of returning from everywhere to Wyck. All through August he kept a steady course northeast, north, northwest; by September he had turned due south; he would be beating up east again by October; November would find him in the valleys; there was no reason why he shouldn't finish in December and come out in March.

Mr. Waddington himself was surprised at the progress he had made.

"It shows," he said, "what we can do without Ralph Bevan."

And Barbara, seated on Ralph's carrier, explored the countryside and mapped out Mr. Waddington's course for him.

"She's worth a dozen Ralph Bevins," he would say.

And he would go to the door with her and see her start.

"You mustn't let yourself be victimized by Ralph," he said. He glanced at the carrier. "Do you think it's safe?"

"Quite safe. If it isn't it'll only be a bit more thrilling."

"Much better to come in the car with me."

But Barbara wouldn't go in the car with him. When he talked about it she looked frightened and embarrassed.

Her fright and her embarrassment were delicious to Mr. Waddington. He said to himself: "She doesn't think _that's_ safe, anyhow."

And as he watched her rushing away, swaying exquisitely over a series of terrific explosions, he gave a little skip and a half turn, light and youthful, in the porch of his Manor.

IX

1

Sir John Corbett had called in the morning. He had exerted himself to that extent out of friendship, pure friendship for Waddington, and he had chosen an early hour for his visit to mark it as a serious and extraordinary occasion. He sat now in the brown leather armchair which was twin to the one Mr. Waddington had sat in when he had his portrait painted. His jolly, rosy face was subdued to something serious and extraordinary. He had come to warn Mr. Waddington that scandal was beginning to attach itself to his acquaintance--he was going to say "relations," but remembered just in time that "relations" was a question-begging word--to his acquaintance with a certain lady.

To which Mr. Waddington replied, haughtily, that he had a perfect right to choose his--er--acquaintance. His acquaintance was, pre-eminently, his own affair.

"Quite so, my dear fellow, quite so. But, strictly between ourselves, is it a good thing to choose acquaintances of the sort that give rise to scandal? As a man of the world, now, between ourselves, doesn't it strike you that the lady in question may be that sort?"

"It does not strike me," said Mr. Waddington, "and I see no reason why it should strike you."

"I don't like the look of her," said Sir John, quoting Major Markham.

"If you're trying to suggest that she's not straight, you're reading something into her look that isn't there."

"Come, Waddington, you know as well as I do that when a man's knocked about the world like you and me, he gets an instinct; he can tell pretty well by looking at her whether a woman's that sort or not."

"My dear Corbett, my instinct is at least as good as yours. I've known Mrs. Levitt for three years, and I can assure she's as straight, as innocent, as your wife or mine."

"Clever--clever and a bit unscrupulous." Again Sir John quoted Major Markham. "A woman like that can get round simple fellows like you and me, Waddington, in no time, if she gives her mind to it. That's why I won't have anything to do with her. She may be as straight and innocent as you please; but somehow or other she's causing a great deal of unpleasant talk, and if I were you I'd drop her. Drop her."

"I shall do nothing of the sort."

"My dear fellow, that's all very well, but when everybody knows your wife hasn't called on her--"

"There was no need for Fanny to call on her. My relations with Mrs. Levitt were on a purely business footing--"

"Well, I'd leave them there, and not too much footing either."

"What can I do? Here she is, a war widow with nobody but me to look after her interests. She's got into the way of coming to me, and I'm not going back on the poor woman, Corbett, because of your absurd

insinuations."

"Not _my_ insinuations."

"Anybody's insinuations then. Nobody has a right to insinuate anything about _me_. As for Fanny, she'll make a point of calling on her now. We were talking about it not long ago."

"A bit hard on Mrs. Waddington to be let in for that."

"You needn't worry. Fanny can afford to do pretty well what she likes."

He had him there. Sir John knew that this was true of Fanny Waddington, as it was not true of Lady Corbett. He could remember the time when nobody called on his father and mother; and Lady Corbett could not, yet, afford to call on Mrs. Levitt before anybody else did.

"Well," he said, "so long as Mrs. Levitt doesn't expect my wife to follow suit."

"Mrs. Levitt's experience can't have led her to expect much in the way of kindness here."

"Well, don't be too kind. You don't know how you may be landed. You don't know," said Sir John fatally, "what ideas you may have put into the poor woman's head."

"I should be very sorry," said Mr. Waddington, "if I thought for one moment I had roused any warmer feelings--"

But he wasn't sorry. He tried hard to make his face express a chivalrous regret, and it wouldn't. It was positively smiling, so agreeable was the idea conveyed by Sir John. He turned it over and over, drawing out its delicious flavour, while Sir John's little laughing eyes observed his enjoyment.

"You don't know," he said, "_what_ you may have roused."

There was something very irritating in his fat chuckle.

"You needn't disturb yourself. These things will happen. A woman may be carried away by her feelings, but if a man has any tact and any delicacy he can always show her very well--without breaking off all relations. That would be clumsy."

"Of course, if you want to keep up with her, keep up with her. Only take care you don't get landed, that's all."

"You may be quite sure that for the lady's own sake I shall take care."

They rose; Mr. Waddington stood looking down at Sir John and his little round stomach and his little round eyes with their obscene twinkle. And for the life of him he couldn't feel the indignation he would like to have felt. As his eyes encountered Sir John's something secret and primitive in Mr. Waddington responded to that obscene twinkle; something reminiscent and anticipating; something mischievous and subtle and delightful, subversive of dignity. It came up in his solemn face and simmered there. Here was Corbett, a thorough-paced man of the world, and he took it for granted that Mrs. Levitt's feelings had been roused; he

acknowledged, handsomely, as male to male, the fascination that had roused them. He, Corbett, knew what he was talking about. He saw the whole possibility of romantic adventure with such flattering certitude that it was impossible to feel any resentment.

At the same time his interference was a piece of abominable impertinence, and Mr. Waddington resented that. It made him more than ever determined to pursue his relations with Mrs. Levitt, just to show he wasn't going to be dictated to, while the very fact that Corbett saw him as a figure of romantic adventure intensified the excitement of the pursuit. And though Elise, seen with certainty in the light of Corbett's intimations, was not quite so enthralling to the fancy as the Elise of his doubt, she made a more positive and formidable appeal to his desire. He loved his desire because it made him feel young, and, loving it, he thought he loved Elise.

And what Corbett was thinking, Markham and Thurston, and Hawtrey and young Hawtrey, and Grainger, would be thinking too. They would all see him as the still young, romantic adventurer, the inspirer of passion.

And Bevan--But no, he didn't want Bevan to see him like that. Or rather, he did, and yet again he didn't. He had scruples when it came to Bevan, because of Fanny. And because of Fanny, while he rioted in visions of the possible, he dreaded more than anything an actual detection, the raking eyes and furtive tongues of the townspeople. If Fanny called on Mrs. Levitt it would stop all the talking.

That was how Fanny came to know Mrs. Levitt, and how Mrs. Levitt (and Toby) came to be asked to the September garden party at Lower Wyck Manor.

2

Mrs. Levitt, of the White House, Wyck-on-the-Hill, Gloucestershire.

She thought it sounded very well. She had been out, that is to say, she had judged it more becoming to her dignity not to be at home when Fanny called; and Fanny had been actually out when Mrs. Levitt called, so that they met for the first time at the garden party.

"It's absurd our not knowing each other," Fanny said, "when my husband knows you so well."

"I've always felt, Mrs. Waddington, that I ought to know you, if it's only to tell you how good he's been to me. But, of course, you know it."

"I know it quite well. He's always being good to people. He likes it. You must take off some of the credit for that."

She thought: "She has really very beautiful eyes." A lot of credit would have to be taken off for her eyes, too.

"But isn't that," said Mrs. Levitt, "what being good _is_? To like being it? Only I suppose that's just what lays him open--"

She lowered the eyes whose brilliance had blazed a moment ago on Fanny; she toyed with her handbag, smiling a little secret, roguish smile.

"That lays him open?"

Mrs. Levitt looked up, smiling. "To the attacks of unscrupulous people like me."

It was risky, but it showed a masterly boldness and presence of mind. It was as if she and Fanny Waddington had had their eyes fixed on a live scorpion approaching them over the lawn, and Mrs. Levitt had stooped down and grasped it by its tail and tossed it into the lavender bushes. As if Mrs. Levitt had said, "My dear Mrs. Waddington, we both know that this horrible creature exists, but we aren't going to let it sting us." As if she knew why Fanny had called on her and was grateful to her.

Perhaps if Mrs. Levitt had never appeared at that garden party, or if, having appeared, she had never been introduced, at their own request, to Major Markham, Mr. Thurston, Mr. Hawtrey and young Hawtrey and Sir John Corbett, Mr. Waddington might never have realized the full extent of her fascination.

She had made herself the centre of the party by her sheer power to seize attention and to hold it. You couldn't help looking at her, again and again, where she sat in a clearing of the lawn, playing the clever, pointed play of her black and white, black satin frock, black satin cloak lined with white silk, furred with ermine; white stockings and long white gloves, the close black satin hat clipping her head; the vivid contrast and stress repeated in white skin, black hair, black eyes; black eyes and fine mouth and white teeth making a charming and perpetual movement.

She had been talking to Major Markham for the last ten minutes, displaying herself as the absurdly youthful mother of a grown-up son. Toby Levitt, a tall and slender likeness of his mother, was playing tennis with distinction, ignoring young Horace, his partner, standing well up to the net and repeating the alternate smashing and sliding strokes that kept Ralph and Barbara bounding from one end of the court to the other. Mrs. Levitt was trying to reconcile the proficiency of Toby's play with his immunity from conscription in the late war. The war led straight to Major Markham's battery, and Major Markham's battery to the battery once commanded by Toby's father, which led to Poona and the great discovery.

"You don't mean Frank Levitt, captain in the gunners?"

"I do."

"Was he by any chance stationed at Poona in nineteen-ten, eleven?"

"He was."

"But, bless my soul--_he_ was my brother-in-law Dick--Dick Benham's best friend."

The Major's slightly ironical homage had given place to a serious excitement, a respectful interest.

"Oh--Dicky Benham--is _he_--?"

"Rather. I've heard him talk about Frank Levitt scores of times. Do you hear that, Waddington? Mrs. Levitt knows all my sister's people. Why on

earth haven't we met before?"

Mr. Waddington writhed, while between them they reeled off a long series of names, people and places, each a link joining up Major Markham and Mrs. Levitt. The Major was so excited about it that he went round the garden telling Thurston and Hawtrey and Corbett, so that presently all these gentlemen formed round Mrs. Levitt an interested and animated group. Mr. Waddington hovered miserably on the edge of it; short of thrusting Markham aside with his elbow (Markham for choice) he couldn't have broken through. He would give it up and go away, and be drawn back again and again; but though Mrs. Levitt could see him plainly, no summons from her beautiful eyes invited his approach.

His behaviour became noticeable. It was observed chiefly by his son Horry.

Horry took Barbara apart. "I say, have you seen my guv'nor?"

"No. What? Where?"

She could see by his face that he was drawing her into some iniquitous, secret by-path of diversion.

"There, just behind you. Turn round--this way--but don't look as if you'd spotted him.... Did you ever see anything like him? He's like a Newfoundland dog trying to look over a gate. It wouldn't be half so funny if he wasn't so dignified all the time."

She didn't approve of Horry. He wasn't decent. But the dignity--it _was_ wonderful.

Horry went on. "What on earth did the mater ask that woman for? She might have known he'd make a fool of himself."

"Oh, Horry, you mustn't. It's awful of you. You really _are_ a little beast."

"I'm not. Fancy doing it at his own garden party. He never thinks of _us_. Look at the dear little mater, there, pretending she doesn't see him. _That's_ what makes me mad, Barbara."

"Well, you ought to pretend you don't see it, too."

"I've been pretending the whole blessed afternoon. But it's no good pretending with _you_. You jolly well see everything."

"I don't go and draw other people's attention to it."

"Oh, come, how about Ralph? You know you wouldn't let him miss him."

"Ralph? Oh, Ralph's different. I shouldn't point him out to Lady Corbett."

"No more should I. _You_'re different, too. You and Ralph and me are the only people capable of appreciating him. Though I wouldn't swear that the mater doesn't, sometimes."

"Yes. But you go too far, Horry. You're cruel to him, and we're not."

"It's all very well for you. He isn't your father.... Oh, Lord, he's craning his neck over Markham's shoulder now. What his face must look like from the other side--"

"If you found your father drunk under a lilac bush I believe you'd go and fetch me to look at him."

"I would, if he was as funny as he is now.... But I say, you know, I can't have him going on like that. I've got to stop it, somehow. What would you do if you were me?"

"Do? I think I should ask him to go and take Lady Corbett in to tea."

"Good."

Horry strode up to his father. "I say, pater, aren't you going to take Lady Corbett in to tea?"

At the sheer sound of his son's voice Mr. Waddington's dignity stood firm. But he went off to find Lady Corbett all the same.

When it was all over the garden party was pronounced a great success, and Mr. Waddington was very agreeably rallied on his discovery, taxed with trying to keep it to himself, and warned that, he wasn't going to have it all his own way.

"It's our turn now," said Major Markham, "to have a look in."

And their turn was constantly coming round again; they were always looking in at the White House. First, Major Markham called. Then Sir John Corbett of Underwoods, Mr. Thurston of The Elms, and Mr. Hawtrey of Medlicott called and brought their wives. These ladies, however, didn't like Mrs. Levitt, and they were not at home when she returned their calls. Mrs. Levitt's visiting card had its place in three collections and there the matter ended. But Mr. Thurston and Mr. Hawtrey continued to call with a delightful sense of doing something that their wives considered improper. Major Markham--as a bachelor his movements were more untrammelled--declared it his ambition to "cut Waddy out." _He_ was everlastingly calling at the White House. His fastidious correctness, the correctness that hadn't "liked the look of her," excused this intensive culture of Mrs. Levitt on the grounds that she was "well connected"; she knew all his sister's people.

And Mrs. Levitt took good care to let Mr. Waddington know of these visits, and of her little bridge parties in the evening. "Just Mr. Thurston and Mr. Hawtrey and Major Markham and me." He was teased and worried by his visions of Elise perpetually surrounded by Thurston and Hawtrey and the Major. Supposing--only supposing that--driven by despair, of course--she married that fellow Markham? For the first time in his life Mr. Waddington experienced jealousy. Elise had ceased to be the subject of dreamy, doubtful speculation and had become the object of an uneasy passion. He could give her passion, if it was passion that she wanted; but, because of Fanny, he could not give her a position in the county, and it was just possible that Elise might prefer a position.

And Elise was happy, happy in her communion with Mr. Thurston and Mr. Hawtrey and in the thought that their wives detested her; happy in her increasing intimacy with Major Markham and in her consciousness of being well connected; above all, happy in Mr. Waddington's uneasiness.

Meanwhile Fanny Waddington kept on calling. "If I don't," she said, "the poor woman will be done for."

She couldn't see any harm in Mrs. Levitt.

3

Barbara and Ralph Bevan had been for one of their long walks. They were coming back down the Park when they met, first, Henry, the gardener's boy, carrying a basket of fat, golden pears.

"Where are you going with those lovely pears, Henry?"

"Mrs. Levitt's, miss." The boy grinned and twinkled; you could almost have fancied that he knew.

Farther on, near the white gate, they could see Mr. Waddington and two ladies. He had evidently gone out to open the gate, and was walking on with them, unable to tear himself away. The ladies were Mrs. Rickards and Mrs. Levitt.

They stopped. You could see the flutter of their hands and faces, suggesting a final triangular exchange of playfulness.

Then Mr. Waddington, executing a complicated movement of farewell, a bow and a half turn, a gambolling skip, the gesture of his ungovernable youth.

Then, as he went from them, the abandonment of Mrs. Rickards and Mrs. Levitt to disgraceful laughter.

Mrs. Levitt clutched her sister's arm and clung to it, almost perceptibly reeling, as if she said: "Hold me up or I shall collapse. It's too much. Too--too--too--too much." They came on with a peculiar rolling, helpless walk, rocked by the intolerable explosions of their mirth, dabbing their mouths and eyes with their pocket-handkerchiefs in a tortured struggle for control.

They recovered sufficiently to pass Ralph and Barbara with serious, sidelong bows. And then there was a sound, a thin, wheezing, soaring yet stifled sound, the cry of a conquered hysteria.

"Did you see that, Ralph?"

"I did. I heard it."

"_He_ couldn't, could he?"

"Oh, Lord, no.... They appreciate him, too, Barbara."

"That isn't the way," she said. "We don't want him appreciated that way. That rich, gross way."

"No. It isn't nearly subtle enough. Any fool could see that his caracoling was funny. They don't know him as we know him. They don't know what he really is."

"It was an outrage. It's like taking a fine thing and vulgarizing it. They'd no _business_. And it was cruel, too, to laugh at him like that before his back was turned. When they're going to eat his pears, too."

"The fact is, Barbara, nobody _does_ appreciate him as you and I do."

"Horry?"

"No. Not Horry. He goes too far. Horry's indecent. Fanny, perhaps, sometimes."

"Fanny doesn't see one half of him. She doesn't see his Mrs. Levitt side."

"Have _you_ seen it, Barbara?"

"Of course I have."

"You never told me. It isn't fair to go discovering things on your own and not telling me. We must make a compact. To tell each other the very instant we see a thing. We might keep count and give points to which of us sees most. Mrs. Levitt ought to have been a hundred to your score."

"I'm afraid I can't score with Mrs. Levitt. You saw that, too."

"It'll be a game for gods, Barbara."

"But, Ralph, there might be things we _couldn't_ tell each other. It mightn't be fair to him."

"Telling each other isn't like telling other people. Hang it all, if we're making a study of him we're making a study. Science is science. We've no right to suppress anything. At any moment one of us might see something absolutely vital."

"Whatever we do we musn't be unfair to him."

"But he's ours, isn't he? We can't be unfair to him. And we've got to be fair to each other. Think of the frightful advantage you might have over me. You're bound to see more things than I do."

"I might see more, but you'll understand more."

"Well, then, you can't do without me. It's a compact, isn't it, that we don't keep things back?"

As for Mrs. Levitt's handling of their theme they resented it as an abominable profanation.

"Do you think he's in love with her?" Barbara said.

"What _he_ would call being in love and we shouldn't."

"Do you think he's like that--he's always been like that?"

"I think he was probably 'like that' when he was young."

"Before he married Fanny?"

"Before he married Fanny."

"And after?"

"After, I should imagine he went pretty straight. It was only the way he had when he was young. Now he's middle-aged he's gone back to it, just to prove to himself that he's young still. I take it the poor old thing got scared when he found himself past fifty, and he _had_ to start a proof. It's his egoism all over again. I don't suppose he really cares a rap for Mrs. Levitt."

"You don't think his heart beats faster when he sees her coming?"

"I don't. Horatio's heart beats faster when he sees himself making love to her."

"I see. It's just middle age."

"Just middle age."

"Don't you think, perhaps, Fanny does see it?"

"No. Not that. Not that. At least I hope not."

X

1

Mr. Waddington's _Ramblings Through the Cotswolds_ were to be profusely illustrated. The question was: photographs or original drawings? And he had decided, after much consideration, on photographs taken by Pyecraft's man. For a book of such capital importance the work of an inferior or obscure illustrator was not to be thought of for an instant. But there were grave disadvantages in employing a distinguished artist. It would entail not only heavy expenses, but a disastrous rivalry. The illustrations, so far from drawing attention to the text and fixing it firmly there, would inevitably distract it. And the artist's celebrated name would have to figure conspicuously, in exact proportion to his celebrity, on the title page and in all the reviews and advertisements where, properly speaking, Horatio Bysshe Waddington should stand alone. It was even possible, as Fanny very intelligently pointed out, that a sufficiently distinguished illustrator might succeed in capturing the enthusiasm of the critics to the utter extinction of the author, who might consider himself lucky if he was mentioned at all.

But Fanny had shown rather less intelligence in using this argument to support her suggestion that Barbara Madden should illustrate the book. She had more than once come upon the child, sitting on a camp-stool above Mrs. Levitt's house, making a sketch of the steep street, all cream white and pink and grey, opening out on to the many-coloured fields and the blue eastern air. And she had conceived a preposterous admiration for Barbara Madden's work.

"It'll be an enchanting book if she illustrates it, Horatio."

"_If_ she illustrates it!"

But when he tried to show Fanny the absurdity of the idea--Horatio Bysshe Waddington illustrated by Barbara Madden--she laughed in his face and told him he was a conceited old thing. To which he replied, with dignified self-restraint, that he was writing a serious and important book. It would be foolish to pretend that it was not serious and important. He hoped he had no overweening opinion of its merits, but one must preserve some sense of proportion and propriety--some sanity.

"Poor little Barbara!"

"It isn't poor little Barbara's book, my dear."

"No," said Fanny. "It isn't."

Meanwhile, if the book was to be ready for publication in the spring, the photographs would have to be taken at once, before the light and the leaves were gone.

So Pyecraft and Pyecraft's man came with their best camera, and photographed and photographed, as long as the fine weather lasted. They photographed the Market Square, Wyck-on-the-Hill; they photographed the church; they photographed Lower Wyck village and the Manor House, the residence--corrected to seat--of Mr. Horatio Bysshe Waddington, the author. They photographed the Tudor porch, showing the figures of the author and of Mrs. Waddington, his wife, and Miss Barbara Madden, his secretary. They photographed the author sitting in his garden; they photographed him in his park, mounted on his mare, Speedwell; and they photographed him in his motor-car. Then they came in and looked at the library and photographed that, with Mr. Waddington sitting in it at his writing-table.

"I suppose, sir," Mr. Pyecraft said, "you'd wish it taken from one end to show the proportions?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Waddington.

And when Pyecraft came the next day with the proofs he said, "I think, sir, we've got the proportions very well."

Mr. Waddington stared at the proofs, holding them in a hand that trembled slightly with emotion. With a just annoyance. For though Pyecraft had certainly got the proportions of the library, Mr. Waddington's head was reduced to a mere black spot in the far corner.

If _that_ was what Pyecraft meant by proportion--

"I think," he said, "the--er--the figure is not quite satisfactory."

"The--? I see, sir. I did not understand, sir, that you wished the figure."

"We-ell--" Mr. Waddington didn't like to appear as having wished the figure so ardently as he did indeed wish it. "If I'm to be there at all--"

"Quite so, sir. But if you wish the size of the library to be shown, I am afraid the figure must be sacrificed. We can't do you it both ways.

But how would you think, sir, of being photographed yourself, somewhat larger, seated at your writing-table? We could do you that."

"I hadn't thought of it, Pyecraft."

As a matter of fact, he had thought of nothing else. He had the title of the picture in his mind: "The Author at Work in the Library, Lower Wyck Manor."

Pyecraft waited in deference to Mr. Waddington's hesitation. His man, less delicate but more discerning, was already preparing to adjust the camera.

Mr. Waddington turned, like a man torn between personal distaste and public duty, to Barbara.

"What do _you_ think, Miss Madden?"

"I think the book would hardly be complete without you."

"Very well. You hear, Pyecraft, Miss Madden says I am to be photographed."

"Very good, sir."

He wheeled sportively. "Now how am I to sit?"

"If you would set yourself so, sir. With your papers before you, spread careless, so. And your pen in your hand, so.... A little nearer, Bateman. The figure is important this time.... _Now_, sir, if you would be so good as to look up."

Mr. Waddington looked up with a face of such extraordinary solemnity that Mr. Pyecraft smiled in spite of his deference.

"A leetle brighter expression. As if you had just got an idea."

Mr. Waddington imagined himself getting an idea and tried to look like it.

"Perfect--perfect." Mr. Pyecraft almost danced with excitement. "Keep that look on your face, sir, half a moment.... Now, Bateman."

A click.

"_That's_ over, thank goodness," said Mr. Waddington, reluctant victim of Pyecraft's and Barbara's importunity.

After that Mr. Pyecraft and his man were driven about the country taking photographs. In one of them Mr. Waddington appeared standing outside the mediaeval Market Hall of Chipping Kingdon. In another, wearing fishing boots, and holding a fishing-rod in his hand, he waded knee deep in the trout stream between Upper and Lower Speed.

And after that he said firmly, "I will not be photographed any more. They've got enough of me."

In November, when the photographing was done, Fanny went away to London for a fortnight, leaving Barbara, as she said, to take care of Horatio, and Ralph Bevan to take care of Barbara.

It was then, in consequence of letters he received from Mrs. Levitt, that Mr. Waddington's visits in Sheep Street became noticeably frequent. Barbara, sitting on her camp-stool above the White House, noticed them.

She noticed, too, the singular abstraction of Mr. Waddington's manner in these days. There were even moments when he ceased to take any interest in his Ramblings, and left Barbara to continue them, as Ralph had continued them, alone, reserving to himself the authority of supervision. She had long stretches of time to herself, when she had reason to suspect that Mr. Waddington was driving Mrs. Leavitt to Cheltenham or Stratford-on-Avon in his car, while Ralph Bevan obeyed Fanny's parting charge to look after Barbara.

Every time Barbara did a piece of the Ramblings she showed it to Ralph Bevan. They would ride off together into the open country, and Barbara would read aloud to Ralph, sitting by the roadside where they lunched, or in some inn parlour where they had tea. They had decided that, though it would be dishonourable of Barbara to show him the bits that Mr. Waddington had written, there could be no earthly harm in trusting him with the bits she had done herself.

Not that you could tell the difference. Barbara had worked hard, knowing that the sooner Mr. Waddington's book was finished the sooner Ralph's book would come out; and under this agreeable stimulus she had developed into the perfect parodist of Waddington. She had wallowed in Waddington's style till she was saturated with it and wrote automatically about "bold escarpments" and "the rosy flush on the high forehead of Cleeve Cloud"; about "ivy-mantled houses resting in the shade of immemorial elms"; about the vale of the Windlode, "awash with the golden light of even," and "grey villages nestling in the beech-clad hollows of the hills."

"'Come with me,'" said Barbara, "'into the little sheltered valley of the Speed; let us follow the brown trout stream that goes purling--'"

"Barbara, it's priceless. What made you think of purling?"

"_He'd_ have thought of it. 'Purling through the lush green grass of the meadows.'"

Or, "'Let us away along the great high road that runs across the uplands that divide the valleys of the Windlode and the Thames. Let us rest a moment halfway and drink--no, quaff--a mug of good Gloucestershire ale with mine host of the Merry Mouth.'"

Not that Mr. Waddington had ever done such a thing in his life. But all the other ramblers through the Cotswolds did it, or said they did it; and he was saturated with their spirit, as Barbara was saturated with his. He could see them, robust and genial young men in tweed knickerbocker suits, tramping their thirty miles a day and quaffing mugs of ale in every tavern; and he desired to present himself, like those young men, as genial and robust. He couldn't get away from them and their books any more than he had got away from Sir Maurice Gedge and his prospectus.

And Barbara had invented all sorts of robust and genial things for him to do. She dressed him in pink, and mounted him on his mare Speedwell, and sent him flying over the stone walls and five-barred gates to the baying of "Ranter and Ranger and Bellman and True." He fished and he tramped and he quaffed and he tramped again. He did his thirty miles a day easily. She set down long conversations between Mr. Waddington and old Billy, the Cotswold shepherd, all about the good old Cotswold ways, in the good old days when the good old Squire, Mr. Waddington's father--no, his grandfather--was alive.

"'I do call to mind, zur, what old Squire did use to zay to me: "Billy," 'e zays, "your grandchildren won't be fed, nor they won't 'ave the cottages, nor yet the clothes as you 'ave and your children. As zure as God's in Gloucester" 'e zays. They was rare old times, zur, and they be gawn.'"

"_What_ made you think of it, Barbara? I don't suppose he ever said two words to old Billy in his life."

"Of course he didn't. 'But it's the sort of thing he'd like to think he did."

"Has he passed it?"

"Rather. He's as pleased as Punch. He thinks he's forming my style."

3

Mr. Waddington was rapidly acquiring the habit of going round to Sheep Street after dinner. But in those evenings that he did not devote to Mrs. Levitt he applied himself to his task of supervision.

On the whole he was delighted with his secretary. There could be no doubt that the little thing was deeply attached to him. You could tell that by the way she worked, by her ardour and eagerness to please him. There could be only one explanation of the ease with which she had received the stamp of his personality.

Therefore he used tact. He used tact.

"I'm giving you a great deal of work, Barbara," he would say. "But you must look on it as part of your training. You're learning to write good English. There's nothing like clear, easy, flowing sentences. You can't have literature without 'em. I might have written those passages myself. In fact, I can hardly distinguish--" His face shook over it; she noticed the tremor of imminent revision. "Still, I _think_ I should prefer 'babbling streams' here to 'purling streams.' Shakespearean."

"I _had_ 'babbling' first," said Barbara, "but I thought 'purling' would be nearer to what you'd have written yourself. I forgot about Shakespeare. And babbling isn't exactly purling, is it?"

"True--true. Babbling is _not_ purling. We want the exact word. Purling let it be....

"And 'lush.' Good girl. You remembered that 'lush' was one of my words?"

"I thought it _would_ be."

"Good. You see," said Mr. Waddington, "how you learn. You're getting the sense, the _flair_ for style. I shall always be glad to think I trained you, Barbara.... And you may be very thankful it _is_ I and not Ralph Bevan. Of all the jerky--eccentric--incoherent--"

XI

1

It was Monday, the twenty-fourth day of November, in the last week of Fanny's fortnight in London.

Barbara had been busy all morning with Mr. Waddington's correspondence and accounts. And now, for the first time, she found herself definitely on the track of Mrs. Levitt. In checking Palmer and Hoskins's, the Cheltenham builders, bill for the White House she had come across two substantial items not included in their original estimate: no less than fifteen by eight feet of trellis for the garden and a hot water pipe rail for the bathroom. It turned out that Mrs. Levitt, desiring the comfort of hot towels, and objecting to the view of the kitchen yard as seen from the lawn, had incontinently ordered the hot water rail and the trellis.

There was that letter from Messrs. Jackson and Cleaver, Mr. Waddington's agents, informing him that his tenant, Mrs. Levitt, of the White House, Wyck-on-the-Hill, had not yet paid her rent due on the twenty-fifth of September. Did Mr. Waddington wish them to apply again?

And there were other letters of which Barbara was requested to make copies from his dictation. Thus:

"My Dear Mrs. Levitt" (only he had written "My dear Elise"),--"With reference to your investments I do not recommend the purchase, at the present moment, of Government Housing Bonds.

"I shall be very glad to loan you the fifty pounds you require to make up the five hundred for the purchase of Parson's Provincial and London Bank Shares. But I am afraid I cannot definitely promise an advance of five hundred on the securities you name. That promise was conditional, and you must give me a little time to consider the matter. Meanwhile I will make inquiries; but, speaking off-hand, I should say that, owing to the present general depreciation of stock, it would be highly unadvisable for you to sell out, and my advice to you would be: Hold on to everything you've got.

"I am very glad you are pleased with your little house. We will let the matter of the rent stand over till your affairs are rather more in order than they are at present.--With kindest regards, very sincerely yours,

"HORATIO BYSSHE WADDINGTON.

"P.S.--I have settled with Palmer and Hoskins for the trellis and hot water rail."

"_To_ Messrs. Lawson & Rutherford, Solicitors,

"9, Bedford Row, London, W.C.

"Dear Sirs,--Will you kindly advise me as to the current value of the following shares--namely:

"Fifty L5 5 per cent. New South American Rubber Syndicate;

"Fifty L10 10 per cent. B Preference Addison Railway, Nicaragua;

"One hundred L1 4 per cent. Welbeck Mutual Assurance Society.

"Would you recommend the holder to sell out at present prices? And should I be justified in accepting these shares as security for an immediate loan of five hundred?--Faithfully yours,

"HORATIO BYSSHE WADDINGTON."

He was expecting Elise for tea at four o'clock on Wednesday, and Messrs. Lawson and Rutherford's reply reached him very opportunely that afternoon.

"Dear Sir,--_Re_ your inquiry in your letter of the twenty-fifth instant, as to the current value of 5 per cent. New South American Rubber Syndicate Shares, 10 per cent. B Preference Addison Railway, and 4 per cent. Welbeck Mutual Assurance Society, respectively, we beg to inform you that these stocks are seriously depreciated, and we doubt whether at the present moment the holder would find a purchaser. We certainly cannot advise you to accept them as security for the sum you name.--We are, faithfully,

"Lawson & Rutherford."

It was clear that poor Elise--who could never have had any head for business--was deceived as to the value of her securities. It might even be that with regard to all three of them she might have to cut her losses and estimate her income minus the dividends accruing from this source. But that only made it the more imperative that she should have at least a thousand pounds tucked snugly away in some safe investment. Nothing short of the addition of fifty pounds to her yearly income would enable Elise to pay her way. The dear woman's affairs ought to stand on a sound financial basis; and Mr. Waddington asked himself this question: Was he prepared to put them there? All that Elise could offer him, failing her depreciated securities, was the reversion of a legacy of five hundred pounds promised to her in her aunt's will. She had spoken very hopefully of this legacy. Was he prepared to fork out a whole five hundred pounds on the offchance of Elise's aunt dying within a reasonable time and making no alteration in her will? In a certain contingency he _was_ prepared. He was prepared to do all that and more for Elise. But it was not possible, it was not decent to state his conditions to Elise beforehand, and in any case Mr. Waddington did not state them openly as conditions to himself. He allowed his mind to be muzzy on this point. He had no doubt whatever about his passion, but he preferred to contemplate the possibility of its satisfaction through a decent veil of muzziness. When he said to himself that he would like to know where he stood before committing himself, it was as near as he could get to clarity and candour.

And when he wrote to Elise that his promise was conditional he really did mean that the loan would depend on the value of the securities offered; a condition that his integrity could face, a condition that, as things stood, he had a perfect right to make. While, all the time, deep inside him was the knowledge that, if Elise gave herself to him, he would not ask for security--he would not make any conditions at all. He saw Elise, tender and yielding, in his arms; he saw himself, tender and powerful, stooping over her, and he thought, with a qualm of disgust: "I wouldn't touch her poor little legacy."

Meanwhile he judged it well to let the correspondence pass, like any other business correspondence, through his secretary's hands. It was well to let Barbara see that his relations with Mrs. Levitt were on a strictly business footing, that he had nothing to hide. It was well to have copies of the letters. It was well--Mr. Waddington's instinct, not his reason, told him it WA well--to have a trustworthy witness to all these transactions. A witness who understood the precise nature of his conditions, in the event, the highly unlikely event, of trouble with Elise later on. (It was almost as if, secretl

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