

Chapter IV - The Garden of the God

Diana Duke seemed inexplicably irritated at the abrupt entrance and utterance of the other girl.

"Well," she said shortly, "I suppose Miss Gray can decline him if she doesn't want to marry him."

"But she DOES want to marry him!" cried Rosamund in exasperation. "She's a wild, wicked fool, and I won't be parted from her."

"Perhaps," said Diana icily, "but I really don't see what we can do."

"But the man's balmy, Diana," reasoned her friend angrily. "I can't let my nice governess marry a man that's balmy! You or somebody MUST stop it!--Mr. Inglewood, you're a man; go and tell them they simply can't."

"Unfortunately, it seems to me they simply can," said Inglewood, with a depressed air. "I have far less right of intervention than Miss Duke, besides having, of course, far less moral force than she."

"You haven't either of you got much," cried Rosamund, the last stays of her formidable temper giving way; "I think I'll go somewhere else for a little sense and pluck. I think I know some one who will help me more than you do, at any rate... he's a cantankerous beast, but he's a man, and has a mind, and knows it..." And she flung out into the garden, with cheeks aflame, and the parasol whirling like a Catherine wheel.

She found Michael Moon standing under the garden tree, looking over the hedge; hunched like a bird of prey, with his large pipe hanging down his long blue chin. The very hardness of his expression pleased her, after the nonsense of the new engagement and the shilly-shallying of her other friends.

"I am sorry I was cross, Mr. Moon," she said frankly. "I hated you for being a cynic; but I've been well punished, for I want a cynic just now. I've had my fill of sentiment--I'm fed up with it. The world's gone mad, Mr. Moon--all except the cynics, I think. That maniac Smith wants to marry my old friend Mary, and she--and she--doesn't seem to mind."

Seeing his attentive face still undisturbedly smoking, she added smartly, "I'm not joking; that's Mr. Smith's cab outside. He swears he'll take her off now to his

aunt's, and go for a special licence. Do give me some practical advice, Mr. Moon."

Mr. Moon took his pipe out of his mouth, held it in his hand for an instant reflectively, and then tossed it to the other side of the garden. "My practical advice to you is this," he said: "Let him go for his special licence, and ask him to get another one for you and me."

"Is that one of your jokes?" asked the young lady. "Do say what you really mean."

"I mean that Innocent Smith is a man of business," said Moon with ponderous precision--"a plain, practical man: a man of affairs; a man of facts and the daylight. He has let down twenty ton of good building bricks suddenly on my head, and I am glad to say they have woken me up. We went to sleep a little while ago on this very lawn, in this very sunlight. We have had a little nap for five years or so, but now we're going to be married, Rosamund, and I can't see why that cab..."

"Really," said Rosamund stoutly, "I don't know what you mean."

"What a lie!" cried Michael, advancing on her with brightening eyes. "I'm all for lies in an ordinary way; but don't you see that to-night they won't do? We've wandered into a world of facts, old girl. That grass growing, and that sun going down, and that cab at the door, are facts. You used to torment and excuse yourself by saying I was after your money, and didn't really love you. But if I stood here now and told you I didn't love you--you wouldn't believe me: for truth is in this garden to-night."

"Really, Mr. Moon..." said Rosamund, rather more faintly.

He kept two big blue magnetic eyes fixed on her face. "Is my name Moon?" he asked. "Is your name Hunt? On my honour, they sound to me as quaint and as distant as Red Indian names. It's as if your name was 'Swim' and my name was 'Sunrise.' But our real names are Husband and Wife, as they were when we fell asleep."

"It is no good," said Rosamund, with real tears in her eyes; "one can never go back."

"I can go where I damn please," said Michael, "and I can carry you on my shoulder."

"But really, Michael, really, you must stop and think!" cried the girl earnestly. "You could carry me off my feet, I dare say, soul and body, but it may be bitter

bad business for all that. These things done in that romantic rush, like Mr. Smith's, they-- they do attract women, I don't deny it. As you say, we're all telling the truth to-night. They've attracted poor Mary, for one. They attract me, Michael. But the cold fact remains: imprudent marriages do lead to long unhappiness and disappointment-- you've got used to your drinks and things--I shan't be pretty much longer--"

"Imprudent marriages!" roared Michael. "And pray where in earth or heaven are there any prudent marriages? Might as well talk about prudent suicides. You and I have dawdled round each other long enough, and are we any safer than Smith and Mary Gray, who met last night? You never know a husband till you marry him. Unhappy! of course you'll be unhappy. Who the devil are you that you shouldn't be unhappy, like the mother that bore you? Disappointed! of course we'll be disappointed. I, for one, don't expect till I die to be so good a man as I am at this minute-- a tower with all the trumpets shouting."

"You see all this," said Rosamund, with a grand sincerity in her solid face, "and do you really want to marry me?"

"My darling, what else is there to do?" reasoned the Irishman. "What other occupation is there for an active man on this earth, except to marry you? What's the alternative to marriage, barring sleep? It's not liberty, Rosamund. Unless you marry God, as our nuns do in Ireland, you must marry Man--that is Me. The only third thing is to marry yourself-- yourself, yourself, yourself--the only companion that is never satisfied-- and never satisfactory."

"Michael," said Miss Hunt, in a very soft voice, "if you won't talk so much, I'll marry you."

"It's no time for talking," cried Michael Moon; "singing is the only thing. Can't you find that mandoline of yours, Rosamund?"

"Go and fetch it for me," said Rosamund, with crisp and sharp authority.

The lounging Mr. Moon stood for one split second astonished; then he shot away across the lawn, as if shod with the feathered shoes out of the Greek fairy tale. He cleared three yards and fifteen daisies at a leap, out of mere bodily levity; but when he came within a yard or two of the open parlour windows, his flying feet fell in their old manner like lead; he twisted round and came back slowly, whistling. The events of that enchanted evening were not at an end.

Inside the dark sitting-room of which Moon had caught a glimpse a curious thing had happened, almost an instant after the intemperate exit of Rosamund. It was

something which, occurring in that obscure parlour, seemed to Arthur Inglewood like heaven and earth turning head over heels, the sea being the ceiling and the stars the floor. No words can express how it astonished him, as it astonishes all simple men when it happens. Yet the stiffest female stoicism seems separated from it only by a sheet of paper or a sheet of steel. It indicates no surrender, far less any sympathy. The most rigid and ruthless woman can begin to cry, just as the most effeminate man can grow a beard. It is a separate sexual power, and proves nothing one way or the other about force of character. But to young men ignorant of women, like Arthur Inglewood, to see Diana Duke crying was like seeing a motor-car shedding tears of petrol.

He could never have given (even if his really manly modesty had permitted it) any vaguest vision of what he did when he saw that portent. He acted as men do when a theatre catches fire--very differently from how they would have conceived themselves as acting, whether for better or worse. He had a faint memory of certain half-stifled explanations, that the heiress was the one really paying guest, and she would go, and the bailiffs (in consequence) would come; but after that he knew nothing of his own conduct except by the protests it evoked.

"Leave me alone, Mr. Inglewood--leave me alone; that's not the way to help."

"But I can help you," said Arthur, with grinding certainty; "I can, I can, I can..."

"Why, you said," cried the girl, "that you were much weaker than me."

"So I am weaker than you," said Arthur, in a voice that went vibrating through everything, "but not just now."

"Let go my hands!" cried Diana. "I won't be bullied."

In one element he was much stronger than she--the matter of humour. This leapt up in him suddenly, and he laughed, saying: "Well, you are mean. You know quite well you'll bully me all the rest of my life. You might allow a man the one minute of his life when he's allowed to bully."

It was as extraordinary for him to laugh as for her to cry, and for the first time since her childhood Diana was entirely off her guard.

"Do you mean you want to marry me?" she said.

"Why, there's a cab at the door!" cried Inglewood, springing up with an unconscious energy and bursting open the glass doors that led into the garden.

As he led her out by the hand they realized somehow for the first time that the house and garden were on a steep height over London. And yet, though they felt the place to be uplifted, they felt it also to be secret: it was like some round walled garden on the top of one of the turrets of heaven.

Inglewood looked around dreamily, his brown eyes devouring all sorts of details with a senseless delight. He noticed for the first time that the railings of the gate beyond the garden bushes were moulded like little spearheads and painted blue. He noticed that one of the blue spears was loosened in its place, and hung sideways; and this almost made him laugh. He thought it somehow exquisitely harmless and funny that the railing should be crooked; he thought he should like to know how it happened, who did it, and how the man was getting on.

When they were gone a few feet across that fiery grass they realized that they were not alone. Rosamund Hunt and the eccentric Mr. Moon, both of whom they had last seen in the blackest temper of detachment, were standing together on the lawn. They were standing in quite an ordinary manner, and yet they looked somehow like people in a book.

"Oh," said Diana, "what lovely air!"

"I know," called out Rosamund, with a pleasure so positive that it rang out like a complaint. "It's just like that horrid, beastly fizzy stuff they gave me that made me feel happy."

"Oh, it isn't like anything but itself!" answered Diana, breathing deeply. "Why, it's all cold, and yet it feels like fire."

"Balmy is the word we use in Fleet Street," said Mr. Moon. "Balmy--especially on the crumpet." And he fanned himself quite unnecessarily with his straw hat. They were all full of little leaps and pulsations of objectless and airy energy. Diana stirred and stretched her long arms rigidly, as if crucified, in a sort of excruciating restfulness; Michael stood still for long intervals, with gathered muscles, then spun round like a teetotum, and stood still again; Rosamund did not trip, for women never trip, except when they fall on their noses, but she struck the ground with her foot as she moved, as if to some inaudible dance tune; and Inglewood, leaning quite quietly against a tree, had unconsciously clutched a branch and shaken it with a creative violence. Those giant gestures of Man, that made the high statues and the strokes of war, tossed and tormented all their limbs. Silently as they strolled and stood they were bursting like batteries with an animal magnetism.

"And now," cried Moon quite suddenly, stretching out a hand on each side, "let's

dance round that bush!"

"Why, what bush do you mean?" asked Rosamund, looking round with a sort of radiant rudeness.

"The bush that isn't there," said Michael--"the Mulberry Bush."

They had taken each other's hands, half laughing and quite ritually; and before they could disconnect again Michael spun them all round, like a demon spinning the world for a top. Diana felt, as the circle of the horizon flew instantaneously around her, a far aerial sense of the ring of heights beyond London and corners where she had climbed as a child; she seemed almost to hear the rooks cawing about the old pines on Highgate, or to see the glowworms gathering and kindling in the woods of Box Hill.

The circle broke--as all such perfect circles of levity must break-- and sent its author, Michael, flying, as by centrifugal force, far away against the blue rails of the gate. When reeling there he suddenly raised shout after shout of a new and quite dramatic character.

"Why, it's Warner!" he shouted, waving his arms. "It's jolly old Warner-- with a new silk hat and the old silk moustache!"

"Is that Dr. Warner?" cried Rosamund, bounding forward in a burst of memory, amusement, and distress. "Oh, I'm so sorry! Oh, do tell him it's all right!"

"Let's take hands and tell him," said Michael Moon. For indeed, while they were talking, another hansom cab had dashed up behind the one already waiting, and Dr. Herbert Warner, leaving a companion in the cab, had carefully deposited himself on the pavement.

Now, when you are an eminent physician and are wired for by an heiress to come to a case of dangerous mania, and when, as you come in through the garden to the house, the heiress and her landlady and two of the gentlemen boarders join hands and dance round you in a ring, calling out, "It's all right! it's all right!" you are apt to be flustered and even displeased. Dr. Warner was a placid but hardly a placable person. The two things are by no means the same; and even when Moon explained to him that he, Warner, with his high hat and tall, solid figure, was just such a classic figure as OUGHT to be danced round by a ring of laughing maidens on some old golden Greek seashore-- even then he seemed to miss the point of the general rejoicing.

"Inglewood!" cried Dr. Warner, fixing his former disciple with a stare, "are you

mad?"

Arthur flushed to the roots of his brown hair, but he answered, easily and quietly enough, "Not now. The truth is, Warner, I've just made a rather important medical discovery--quite in your line."

"What do you mean?" asked the great doctor stiffly--"what discovery?"

"I've discovered that health really is catching, like disease," answered Arthur.

"Yes; sanity has broken out, and is spreading," said Michael, performing a *pas seul* with a thoughtful expression. "Twenty thousand more cases taken to the hospitals; nurses employed night and day."

Dr. Warner studied Michael's grave face and lightly moving legs with an unfathomed wonder. "And is THIS, may I ask," he said, "the sanity that is spreading?"

"You must forgive me, Dr. Warner," cried Rosamund Hunt heartily. "I know I've treated you badly; but indeed it was all a mistake. I was in a frightfully bad temper when I sent for you, but now it all seems like a dream--and and Mr. Smith is the sweetest, most sensible, most delightful old thing that ever existed, and he may marry any one he likes--except me."

"I should suggest Mrs. Duke," said Michael.

The gravity of Dr. Warner's face increased. He took a slip of pink paper from his waistcoat pocket, with his pale blue eyes quietly fixed on Rosamund's face all the time. He spoke with a not inexcusable frigidity.

"Really, Miss Hunt," he said, "you are not yet very reassuring. You sent me this wire only half an hour ago: 'Come at once, if possible, with another doctor. Man-Innocent Smith--gone mad on premises, and doing dreadful things. Do you know anything of him?' I went round at once to a distinguished colleague of mine, a doctor who is also a private detective and an authority on criminal lunacy; he has come round with me, and is waiting in the cab. Now you calmly tell me that this criminal madman is a highly sweet and sane old thing, with accompaniments that set me speculating on your own definition of sanity. I hardly comprehend the change."

"Oh, how can one explain a change in sun and moon and everybody's soul?" cried Rosamund, in despair. "Must I confess we had got so morbid as to think him mad merely because he wanted to get married; and that we didn't even know it

was only because we wanted to get married ourselves? We'll humiliate ourselves, if you like, doctor; we're happy enough."

"Where is Mr. Smith?" asked Warner of Inglewood very sharply.

Arthur started; he had forgotten all about the central figure of their farce, who had not been visible for an hour or more.

"I--I think he's on the other side of the house, by the dustbin," he said.

"He may be on the road to Russia," said Warner, "but he must be found." And he strode away and disappeared round a corner of the house by the sunflowers.

"I hope," said Rosamund, "he won't really interfere with Mr. Smith."

"Interfere with the daisies!" said Michael with a snort. "A man can't be locked up for falling in love--at least I hope not."

"No; I think even a doctor couldn't make a disease out of him. He'd throw off the doctor like the disease, don't you know? I believe it's a case of a sort of holy well. I believe Innocent Smith is simply innocent, and that is why he is so extraordinary."

It was Rosamund who spoke, restlessly tracing circles in the grass with the point of her white shoe.

"I think," said Inglewood, "that Smith is not extraordinary at all. He's comic just because he's so startlingly commonplace. Don't you know what it is to be all one family circle, with aunts and uncles, when a schoolboy comes home for the holidays? That bag there on the cab is only a schoolboy's hamper. This tree here in the garden is only the sort of tree that any schoolboy would have climbed. Yes, that's the thing that has haunted us all about him, the thing we could never fit a word to. Whether he is my old schoolfellow or no, at least he is all my old schoolfellows. He is the endless bun-eating, ball-throwing animal that we have all been."

"That is only you absurd boys," said Diana. "I don't believe any girl was ever so silly, and I'm sure no girl was ever so happy, except--" and she stopped.

"I will tell you the truth about Innocent Smith," said Michael Moon in a low voice. "Dr. Warner has gone to look for him in vain. He is not there. Haven't you noticed that we never saw him since we found ourselves? He was an astral baby born on all four of us; he was only our own youth returned. Long before poor old Warner

had clambered out of his cab, the thing we called Smith had dissolved into dew and light on this lawn. Once or twice more, by the mercy of God, we may feel the thing, but the man we shall never see. In a spring garden before breakfast we shall smell the smell called Smith. In the snapping of brisk twigs in tiny fires we shall hear a noise named Smith. Everything insatiable and innocent in the grasses that gobble up the earth like babies at a bun feast, in the white mornings that split the sky as a boy splits up white firwood, we may feel for one instant the presence of an impetuous purity; but his innocence was too close to the unconsciousness of inanimate things not to melt back at a mere touch into the mild hedges and heavens; he--"

He was interrupted from behind the house by a bang like that of a bomb. Almost at the same instant the stranger in the cab sprang out of it, leaving it rocking upon the stones of the road. He clutched the blue railings of the garden, and peered eagerly over them in the direction of the noise. He was a small, loose, yet alert man, very thin, with a face that seemed made out of fish bones, and a silk hat quite as rigid and resplendent as Warner's, but thrust back recklessly on the hinder part of his head.

"Murder!" he shrieked, in a high and feminine but very penetrating voice. "Stop that murderer there!"

Even as he shrieked a second shot shook the lower windows of the house, and with the noise of it Dr. Herbert Warner came flying round the corner like a leaping rabbit. Yet before he had reached the group a third discharge had deafened them, and they saw with their own eyes two spots of white sky drilled through the second of the unhappy Herbert's high hats. The next moment the fugitive physician fell over a flowerpot, and came down on all fours, staring like a cow. The hat with the two shot-holes in it rolled upon the gravel path before him, and Innocent Smith came round the corner like a railway train. He was looking twice his proper size--a giant clad in green, the big revolver still smoking in his hand, his face sanguine and in shadow, his eyes blazing like all stars, and his yellow hair standing out all ways like Struwelpeter's.

Though this startling scene hung but an instant in stillness, Inglewood had time to feel once more what he had felt when he saw the other lovers standing on the lawn--the sensation of a certain cut and coloured clearness that belongs rather to the things of art than to the things of experience. The broken flowerpot with its red-hot geraniums, the green bulk of Smith and the black bulk of Warner, the blue-spiked railings behind, clutched by the stranger's yellow vulture claws and peered over by his long vulture neck, the silk hat on the gravel, and the little cloudlet of smoke floating across the garden as innocently as the puff of a cigarette-- all these seemed unnaturally distinct and definite. They existed, like

symbols, in an ecstasy of separation. Indeed, every object grew more and more particular and precious because the whole picture was breaking up. Things look so bright just before they burst.

Long before his fancies had begun, let alone ceased, Arthur had stepped across and taken one of Smith's arms. Simultaneously the little stranger had run up the steps and taken the other. Smith went into peals of laughter, and surrendered his pistol with perfect willingness. Moon raised the doctor to his feet, and then went and leaned sullenly on the garden gate. The girls were quiet and vigilant, as good women mostly are in instants of catastrophe, but their faces showed that, somehow or other, a light had been dashed out of the sky. The doctor himself, when he had risen, collected his hat and wits, and dusting himself down with an air of great disgust, turned to them in brief apology. He was very white with his recent panic, but he spoke with perfect self-control.

"You will excuse us, ladies," he said; "my friend and Mr. Inglewood are both scientists in their several ways. I think we had better all take Mr. Smith indoors, and communicate with you later."

And under the guard of the three natural philosophers the disarmed Smith was led tactfully into the house, still roaring with laughter.

From time to time during the next twenty minutes his distant boom of mirth could again be heard through the half-open window; but there came no echo of the quiet voices of the physicians. The girls walked about the garden together, rubbing up each other's spirits as best they might; Michael Moon still hung heavily against the gate. Somewhere about the expiration of that time Dr. Warner came out of the house with a face less pale but even more stern, and the little man with the fish-bone face advanced gravely in his rear. And if the face of Warner in the sunlight was that of a hanging judge, the face of the little man behind was more like a death's head.

"Miss Hunt," said Dr. Herbert Warner, "I only wish to offer you my warm thanks and admiration. By your prompt courage and wisdom in sending for us by wire this evening, you have enabled us to capture and put out of mischief one of the most cruel and terrible of the enemies of humanity-- a criminal whose plausibility and pitilessness have never been before combined in flesh."

Rosamund looked across at him with a white, blank face and blinking eyes. "What do you mean?" she asked. "You can't mean Mr. Smith?"

"He has gone by many other names," said the doctor gravely, "and not one he did not leave to be cursed behind him. That man, Miss Hunt, has left a track of

blood and tears across the world. Whether he is mad as well as wicked, we are trying, in the interests of science, to discover. In any case, we shall have to take him to a magistrate first, even if only on the road to a lunatic asylum. But the lunatic asylum in which he is confined will have to be sealed with wall within wall, and ringed with guns like a fortress, or he will break out again to bring forth carnage and darkness on the earth."

Rosamund looked at the two doctors, her face growing paler and paler. Then her eyes strayed to Michael, who was leaning on the gate; but he continued to lean on it without moving, with his face turned away towards the darkening road.