CHAPTER THE NINTH

DISCORDS

Part 1

One afternoon, soon after Ann Veronica's great discovery, a telegram came into the laboratory for her. It ran:

Bored	and	nothing	to	do
will	you	dine	with	me
to-night	somewhere	and	talk	I
shall	be	grateful	Ramage	

Ann Veronica was rather pleased by this. She had not seen Ramage for ten or eleven days, and she was quite ready for a gossip with him. And now her mind was so full of the thought that she was in love--in love!--that marvellous state! that I really believe she had some dim idea of talking to him about it. At any rate, it would be good to hear him saying the sort of things he did--perhaps now she would grasp them better--with this world--shaking secret brandishing itself about inside her head

within a yard of him.

She was sorry to find Ramage a little disposed to be melancholy.

"I have made over seven hundred pounds in the last week," he said.

"That's exhilarating," said Ann Veronica.

"Not a bit of it," he said; "it's only a score in a game."

"It's a score you can buy all sorts of things with."

"Nothing that one wants."

He turned to the waiter, who held a wine-card. "Nothing can cheer me," he said, "except champagne." He meditated. "This," he said, and then: "No! Is this sweeter? Very well."

"Everything goes well with me," he said, folding his arms under him and regarding Ann Veronica with the slightly projecting eyes wide open. "And I'm not happy. I believe I'm in love."

He leaned back for his soup.

Presently he resumed: "I believe I must be in love."

"You can't be that," said Ann Veronica, wisely.

"How do you know?"

"Well, it isn't exactly a depressing state, is it?"

"YOU don't know."

"One has theories," said Ann Veronica, radiantly.

"Oh, theories! Being in love is a fact."

"It ought to make one happy."

"It's an unrest--a longing--What's that?" The waiter had intervened. "Parmesan--take it away!"

He glanced at Ann Veronica's face, and it seemed to him that she really was exceptionally radiant. He wondered why she thought love made people happy, and began to talk of the smilax and pinks that adorned the table. He filled her glass with champagne. "You MUST," he said, "because of my depression."

They were eating quails when they returned to the topic of love. "What made you think" he said, abruptly, with the gleam of avidity in his face, "that love makes people happy?"

"I know it must."

"But how?"

He was, she thought, a little too insistent. "Women know these things by instinct," she answered.

"I wonder," he said, "if women do know things by instinct? I have my doubts about feminine instinct. It's one of our conventional superstitions. A woman is supposed to know when a man is in love with her. Do you think she does?"

Ann Veronica picked among her salad with a judicial expression of face. "I think she would," she decided.

"Ah!" said Ramage, impressively.

Ann Veronica looked up at him and found him regarding her with eyes that were almost woebegone, and into which, indeed, he was trying to throw much more expression than they could carry. There was a little pause between them, full for Ann Veronica of rapid elusive suspicions and intimations.

"Perhaps one talks nonsense about a woman's instinct," she said. "It's a way of avoiding explanations. And girls and women, perhaps, are

different. I don't know. I don't suppose a girl can tell if a man is in love with her or not in love with her." Her mind went off to Capes. Her thoughts took words for themselves. "She can't. I suppose it depends on her own state of mind. If one wants a thing very much, perhaps one is inclined to think one can't have it. I suppose if one were to love some one, one would feel doubtful. And if one were to love some one very much, it's just so that one would be blindest, just when one wanted most to see."

She stopped abruptly, afraid that Ramage might be able to infer Capes from the things she had said, and indeed his face was very eager.

"Yes?" he said.

Ann Veronica blushed. "That's all," she said "I'm afraid I'm a little confused about these things."

Ramage looked at her, and then fell into deep reflection as the waiter came to paragraph their talk again.

"Have you ever been to the opera, Ann Veronica?" said Ramage.

"Once or twice."

"Shall we go now?"

"I think I would like to listen to music. What is there?"

"Tristan."

"I've never heard Tristan and Isolde."

"That settles it. We'll go. There's sure to be a place somewhere."

"It's rather jolly of you," said Ann Veronica.

"It's jolly of you to come," said Ramage.

So presently they got into a hansom together, and Ann Veronica sat back feeling very luxurious and pleasant, and looked at the light and stir and misty glitter of the street traffic from under slightly drooping eyelids, while Ramage sat closer to her than he need have done, and glanced ever and again at her face, and made to speak and said nothing. And when they got to Covent Garden Ramage secured one of the little upper boxes, and they came into it as the overture began.

Ann Veronica took off her jacket and sat down in the corner chair, and leaned forward to look into the great hazy warm brown cavity of the house, and Ramage placed his chair to sit beside her and near her, facing the stage. The music took hold of her slowly as her eyes wandered from the indistinct still ranks of the audience to the little busy orchestra with its quivering violins, its methodical movements of brown

and silver instruments, its brightly lit scores and shaded lights. She had never been to the opera before except as one of a congested mass of people in the cheaper seats, and with backs and heads and women's hats for the frame of the spectacle; there was by contrast a fine large sense of space and ease in her present position. The curtain rose out of the concluding bars of the overture and revealed Isolde on the prow of the barbaric ship. The voice of the young seaman came floating down from the masthead, and the story of the immortal lovers had begun. She knew the story only imperfectly, and followed it now with a passionate and deepening interest. The splendid voices sang on from phase to phase of love's unfolding, the ship drove across the sea to the beating rhythm of the rowers. The lovers broke into passionate knowledge of themselves and each other, and then, a jarring intervention, came King Mark amidst the shouts of the sailormen, and stood beside them.

The curtain came festooning slowly down, the music ceased, the lights in the auditorium glowed out, and Ann Veronica woke out of her confused dream of involuntary and commanding love in a glory of sound and colors to discover that Ramage was sitting close beside her with one hand resting lightly on her waist. She made a quick movement, and the hand fell away.

"By God! Ann Veronica," he said, sighing deeply. "This stirs one."

She sat quite still looking at him.

"I wish you and I had drunk that love potion," he said.

She found no ready reply to that, and he went on: "This music is the food of love. It makes me desire life beyond measure. Life! Life and love! It makes me want to be always young, always strong, always devoting my life--and dying splendidly."

"It is very beautiful," said Ann Veronica in a low tone.

They said no more for a moment, and each was now acutely aware of the other. Ann Veronica was excited and puzzled, with a sense of a strange and disconcerting new light breaking over her relations with Ramage. She had never thought of him at all in that way before. It did not shock her; it amazed her, interested her beyond measure. But also this must not go on. She felt he was going to say something more--something still more personal and intimate. She was curious, and at the same time clearly resolved she must not hear it. She felt she must get him talking upon some impersonal theme at any cost. She snatched about in her mind. "What is the exact force of a motif?" she asked at random. "Before I heard much Wagnerian music I heard enthusiastic descriptions of it from a mistress I didn't like at school. She gave me an impression of a sort of patched quilt; little bits of patterned stuff coming up again and again."

She stopped with an air of interrogation.

Ramage looked at her for a long and discriminating interval without speaking. He seemed to be hesitating between two courses of action. "I don't know much about the technique of music," he said at last, with his eyes upon her. "It's a matter of feeling with me."

He contradicted himself by plunging into an exposition of motifs.

By a tacit agreement they ignored the significant thing between them, ignored the slipping away of the ground on which they had stood together hitherto....

All through the love music of the second act, until the hunting horns of Mark break in upon the dream, Ann Veronica's consciousness was flooded with the perception of a man close beside her, preparing some new thing to say to her, preparing, perhaps, to touch her, stretching hungry invisible tentacles about her. She tried to think what she should do in this eventuality or that. Her mind had been and was full of the thought of Capes, a huge generalized Capes-lover. And in some incomprehensible way, Ramage was confused with Capes; she had a grotesque disposition to persuade herself that this was really Capes who surrounded her, as it were, with wings of desire. The fact that it was her trusted friend making illicit love to her remained, in spite of all her effort, an insignificant thing in her mind. The music confused and distracted her, and made her struggle against a feeling of intoxication. Her head swam. That was the inconvenience of it; her head was swimming. The music throbbed into the warnings that preceded the king's irruption.

Abruptly he gripped her wrist. "I love you, Ann Veronica. I love you--with all my heart and soul."

She put her face closer to his. She felt the warm nearness of his. "DON'T!" she said, and wrenched her wrist from his retaining hand.

"My God! Ann Veronica," he said, struggling to keep his hold upon her; "my God! Tell me--tell me now--tell me you love me!"

His expression was as it were rapaciously furtive. She answered in whispers, for there was the white arm of a woman in the next box peeping beyond the partition within a yard of him.

"My hand! This isn't the place."

He released her hand and talked in eager undertones against an auditory background of urgency and distress.

"Ann Veronica," he said, "I tell you this is love. I love the soles of your feet. I love your very breath. I have tried not to tell you--tried to be simply your friend. It is no good. I want you. I worship you. I would do anything--I would give anything to make you mine.... Do you hear me? Do you hear what I am saying?... Love!"

He held her arm and abandoned it again at her quick defensive movement.

For a long time neither spoke again.

She sat drawn together in her chair in the corner of the box, at a loss what to say or do--afraid, curious, perplexed. It seemed to her that it was her duty to get up and clamor to go home to her room, to protest against his advances as an insult. But she did not in the least want to do that. These sweeping dignities were not within the compass of her will; she remembered she liked Ramage, and owed things to him, and she was interested--she was profoundly interested. He was in love with her! She tried to grasp all the welter of values in the situation simultaneously, and draw some conclusion from their disorder.

He began to talk again in quick undertones that she could not clearly hear.

"I have loved you," he was saying, "ever since you sat on that gate and talked. I have always loved you. I don't care what divides us. I don't care what else there is in the world. I want you beyond measure or reckoning...."

His voice rose and fell amidst the music and the singing of Tristan and King Mark, like a voice heard in a badly connected telephone. She stared at his pleading face.

She turned to the stage, and Tristan was wounded in Kurvenal's arms, with Isolde at his feet, and King Mark, the incarnation of masculine

force and obligation, the masculine creditor of love and beauty, stood over him, and the second climax was ending in wreaths and reek of melodies; and then the curtain was coming down in a series of short rushes, the music had ended, and the people were stirring and breaking out into applause, and the lights of the auditorium were resuming. The lighting-up pierced the obscurity of the box, and Ramage stopped his urgent flow of words abruptly and sat back. This helped to restore Ann Veronica's self-command.

She turned her eyes to him again, and saw her late friend and pleasant and trusted companion, who had seen fit suddenly to change into a lover, babbling interesting inacceptable things. He looked eager and flushed and troubled. His eyes caught at hers with passionate inquiries. "Tell me," he said; "speak to me." She realized it was possible to be sorry for him--acutely sorry for the situation. Of course this thing was absolutely impossible. But she was disturbed, mysteriously disturbed. She remembered abruptly that she was really living upon his money. She leaned forward and addressed him.

"Mr. Ramage," she said, "please don't talk like this."

He made to speak and did not.

"I don't want you to do it, to go on talking to me. I don't want to hear you. If I had known that you had meant to talk like this I wouldn't have come here."

"But how can I help it? How can I keep silence?"

"Please!" she insisted. "Please not now."

"I MUST talk with you. I must say what I have to say!"

"But not now--not here."

"It came," he said. "I never planned it--And now I have begun--"

She felt acutely that he was entitled to explanations, and as acutely that explanations were impossible that night. She wanted to think.

"Mr. Ramage," she said, "I can't--Not now. Will you please--Not now, or I must go."

He stared at her, trying to guess at the mystery of her thoughts.

"You don't want to go?"

"No. But I must--I ought--"

"I MUST talk about this. Indeed I must."

"Not now."

"But I love you. I love you--unendurably."

"Then don't talk to me now. I don't want you to talk to me now. There is a place--This isn't the place. You have misunderstood. I can't explain--"

They regarded one another, each blinded to the other. "Forgive me," he decided to say at last, and his voice had a little quiver of emotion, and he laid his hand on hers upon her knee. "I am the most foolish of men. I was stupid--stupid and impulsive beyond measure to burst upon you in this way. I--I am a love-sick idiot, and not accountable for my actions. Will you forgive me--if I say no more?"

She looked at him with perplexed, earnest eyes.

"Pretend," he said, "that all I have said hasn't been said. And let us go on with our evening. Why not? Imagine I've had a fit of hysteria--and that I've come round."

"Yes," she said, and abruptly she liked him enormously. She felt this was the sensible way out of this oddly sinister situation.

He still watched her and questioned her.

"And let us have a talk about this--some other time. Somewhere, where we can talk without interruption. Will you?"

She thought, and it seemed to him she had never looked so self-disciplined and deliberate and beautiful. "Yes," she said, "that is what we ought to do." But now she doubted again of the quality of the armistice they had just made.

He had a wild impulse to shout. "Agreed," he said with queer exaltation, and his grip tightened on her hand. "And to-night we are friends?"

"We are friends," said Ann Veronica, and drew her hand quickly away from him.

"To-night we are as we have always been. Except that this music we have been swimming in is divine. While I have been pestering you, have you heard it? At least, you heard the first act. And all the third act is love-sick music. Tristan dying and Isolde coming to crown his death. Wagner had just been in love when he wrote it all. It begins with that queer piccolo solo. Now I shall never hear it but what this evening will come pouring back over me."

The lights sank, the prelude to the third act was beginning, the music rose and fell in crowded intimations of lovers separated--lovers separated with scars and memories between them, and the curtain went reefing up to display Tristan lying wounded on his couch and the shepherd crouching with his pipe.

Part 2

They had their explanations the next evening, but they were explanations in quite other terms than Ann Veronica had anticipated, quite other and much more startling and illuminating terms. Ramage came for her at her lodgings, and she met him graciously and kindly as a queen who knows she must needs give sorrow to a faithful liege. She was unusually soft and gentle in her manner to him. He was wearing a new silk hat, with a slightly more generous brim than its predecessor, and it suited his type of face, robbed his dark eyes a little of their aggressiveness and gave him a solid and dignified and benevolent air. A faint anticipation of triumph showed in his manner and a subdued excitement.

"We'll go to a place where we can have a private room," he said. "Then--then we can talk things out."

So they went this time to the Rococo, in Germain Street, and up-stairs to a landing upon which stood a bald-headed waiter with whiskers like a French admiral and discretion beyond all limits in his manner. He seemed to have expected them. He ushered them with an amiable flat hand into a minute apartment with a little gas-stove, a silk crimson-covered sofa, and a bright little table, gay with napery and hot-house flowers.

"Odd little room," said Ann Veronica, dimly apprehending that obtrusive sofa.

"One can talk without undertones, so to speak," said Ramage. "It's--private." He stood looking at the preparations before them with an unusual preoccupation of manner, then roused himself to take her jacket, a little awkwardly, and hand it to the waiter who hung it in the corner of the room. It appeared he had already ordered dinner and wine, and the whiskered waiter waved in his subordinate with the soup forthwith.

"I'm going to talk of indifferent themes," said Ramage, a little fussily, "until these interruptions of the service are over. Then--then we shall be together.... How did you like Tristan?"

Ann Veronica paused the fraction of a second before her reply came.

"I thought much of it amazingly beautiful."

"Isn't it. And to think that man got it all out of the poorest little love-story for a respectable titled lady! Have you read of it?"

"Never."

"It gives in a nutshell the miracle of art and the imagination. You get this queer irascible musician quite impossibly and unfortunately in

love with a wealthy patroness, and then out of his brain comes THIS, a tapestry of glorious music, setting out love to lovers, lovers who love in spite of all that is wise and respectable and right."

Ann Veronica thought. She did not want to seem to shrink from conversation, but all sorts of odd questions were running through her mind. "I wonder why people in love are so defiant, so careless of other considerations?"

"The very hares grow brave. I suppose because it IS the chief thing in life." He stopped and said earnestly: "It is the chief thing in life, and everything else goes down before it. Everything, my dear, everything!... But we have got to talk upon indifferent themes until we have done with this blond young gentleman from Bavaria...."

The dinner came to an end at last, and the whiskered waiter presented his bill and evacuated the apartment and closed the door behind him with an almost ostentatious discretion. Ramage stood up, and suddenly turned the key in the door in an off-hand manner. "Now," he said, "no one can blunder in upon us. We are alone and we can say and do what we please. We two." He stood still, looking at her.

Ann Veronica tried to seem absolutely unconcerned. The turning of the key startled her, but she did not see how she could make an objection. She felt she had stepped into a world of unknown usages.

"I have waited for this," he said, and stood quite still, looking at her until the silence became oppressive.

"Won't you sit down," she said, "and tell me what you want to say?" Her voice was flat and faint. Suddenly she had become afraid. She struggled not to be afraid. After all, what could happen?

He was looking at her very hard and earnestly. "Ann Veronica," he said.

Then before she could say a word to arrest him he was at her side. "Don't!" she said, weakly, as he had bent down and put one arm about her and seized her hands with his disengaged hand and kissed her--kissed her almost upon her lips. He seemed to do ten things before she could think to do one, to leap upon her and take possession.

Ann Veronica's universe, which had never been altogether so respectful to her as she could have wished, gave a shout and whirled head over heels. Everything in the world had changed for her. If hate could kill, Ramage would have been killed by a flash of hate. "Mr. Ramage!" she cried, and struggled to her feet.

"My darling!" he said, clasping her resolutely in his arms, "my dearest!"

"Mr. Ramage!" she began, and his mouth sealed hers and his breath was mixed with her breath. Her eye met his four inches away, and his was

glaring, immense, and full of resolution, a stupendous monster of an eye.

She shut her lips hard, her jaw hardened, and she set herself to struggle with him. She wrenched her head away from his grip and got her arm between his chest and hers. They began to wrestle fiercely. Each became frightfully aware of the other as a plastic energetic body, of the strong muscles of neck against cheek, of hands gripping shoulder-blade and waist. "How dare you!" she panted, with her world screaming and grimacing insult at her. "How dare you!"

They were both astonished at the other's strength. Perhaps Ramage was the more astonished. Ann Veronica had been an ardent hockey player and had had a course of jiu-jitsu in the High School. Her defence ceased rapidly to be in any sense ladylike, and became vigorous and effective; a strand of black hair that had escaped its hairpins came athwart Ramage's eyes, and then the knuckles of a small but very hardly clinched fist had thrust itself with extreme effectiveness and painfulness under his jawbone and ear.

"Let go!" said Ann Veronica, through her teeth, strenuously inflicting agony, and he cried out sharply and let go and receded a pace.

"NOW!" said Ann Veronica. "Why did you dare to do that?"

Part 3

Each of them stared at the other, set in a universe that had changed its system of values with kaleidoscopic completeness. She was flushed, and her eyes were bright and angry; her breath came sobbing, and her hair was all abroad in wandering strands of black. He too was flushed and ruffled; one side of his collar had slipped from its stud and he held a hand to the corner of his jaw.

"You vixen!" said Mr. Ramage, speaking the simplest first thought of his heart.

"You had no right--" panted Ann Veronica.

"Why on earth," he asked, "did you hurt me like that?"

Ann Veronica did her best to think she had not deliberately attempted to cause him pain. She ignored his question.

"I never dreamt!" she said.

"What on earth did you expect me to do, then?" he asked.

Part 4

Interpretation came pouring down upon her almost blindingly; she understood now the room, the waiter, the whole situation. She understood. She leaped to a world of shabby knowledge, of furtive base realizations. She wanted to cry out upon herself for the uttermost fool in existence.

"I thought you wanted to have a talk to me," she said.

"I wanted to make love to you.

"You knew it," he added, in her momentary silence.

"You said you were in love with me," said Ann Veronica; "I wanted to explain--"

"I said I loved and wanted you." The brutality of his first astonishment was evaporating. "I am in love with you. You know I am in love with you. And then you go--and half throttle me.... I believe you've crushed a gland or something. It feels like it."

"I am sorry," said Ann Veronica. "What else was I to do?"

For some seconds she stood watching him and both were thinking very quickly. Her state of mind would have seemed altogether discreditable to her grandmother. She ought to have been disposed to faint and scream at all these happenings; she ought to have maintained a front of outraged dignity to veil the sinking of her heart. I would like to have to tell it so. But indeed that is not at all a good description of her attitude. She was an indignant queen, no doubt she was alarmed and disgusted within limits; but she was highly excited, and there was something, some low adventurous strain in her being, some element, subtle at least if base, going about the rioting ways and crowded insurgent meeting-places of her mind declaring that the whole affair was after all--they are the only words that express it--a very great lark indeed. At the bottom of her heart she was not a bit afraid of Ramage. She had unaccountable gleams of sympathy with and liking for him. And the grotesquest fact was that she did not so much loathe, as experience with a quite critical condemnation this strange sensation of being kissed. Never before had any human being kissed her lips....

It was only some hours after that these ambiguous elements evaporated and vanished and loathing came, and she really began to be thoroughly sick and ashamed of the whole disgraceful quarrel and scuffle.

He, for his part, was trying to grasp the series of unexpected reactions that had so wrecked their tete-a-tete. He had meant to be master of his fate that evening and it had escaped him altogether. It had, as it were, blown up at the concussion of his first step. It dawned upon him that he

had been abominably used by Ann Veronica.

"Look here," he said, "I brought you here to make love to you."

"I didn't understand--your idea of making love. You had better let me go again."

"Not yet," he said. "I do love you. I love you all the more for the streak of sheer devil in you.... You are the most beautiful, the most desirable thing I have ever met in this world. It was good to kiss you, even at the price. But, by Jove! you are fierce! You are like those Roman women who carry stilettos in their hair."

"I came here to talk reasonably, Mr. Ramage. It is abominable--"

"What is the use of keeping up this note of indignation, Ann Veronica? Here I am! I am your lover, burning for you. I mean to have you! Don't frown me off now. Don't go back into Victorian respectability and pretend you don't know and you can't think and all the rest of it. One comes at last to the step from dreams to reality. This is your moment. No one will ever love you as I love you now. I have been dreaming of your body and you night after night. I have been imaging--"

"Mr. Ramage, I came here--I didn't suppose for one moment you would dare--"

"Nonsense! That is your mistake! You are too intellectual. You want to do everything with your mind. You are afraid of kisses. You are afraid of the warmth in your blood. It's just because all that side of your life hasn't fairly begun."

He made a step toward her.

"Mr. Ramage," she said, sharply, "I have to make it plain to you. I don't think you understand. I don't love you. I don't. I can't love you. I love some one else. It is repulsive. It disgusts me that you should touch me."

He stared in amazement at this new aspect of the situation. "You love some one else?" he repeated.

"I love some one else. I could not dream of loving you."

And then he flashed his whole conception of the relations of men and women upon her in one astonishing question. His hand went with an almost instinctive inquiry to his jawbone again. "Then why the devil," he demanded, "do you let me stand you dinners and the opera--and why do you come to a cabinet particuliar with me?"

He became radiant with anger. "You mean to tell me" he said, "that you have a lover? While I have been keeping you! Yes--keeping you!"

This view of life he hurled at her as if it were an offensive missile. It stunned her. She felt she must fly before it and could no longer do so. She did not think for one moment what interpretation he might put upon the word "lover."

"Mr. Ramage," she said, clinging to her one point, "I want to get out of this horrible little room. It has all been a mistake. I have been stupid and foolish. Will you unlock that door?"

"Never!" he said. "Confound your lover! Look here! Do you really think I am going to run you while he makes love to you? No fear! I never heard of anything so cool. If he wants you, let him get you. You're mine. I've paid for you and helped you, and I'm going to conquer you somehow--if I have to break you to do it. Hitherto you've seen only my easy, kindly side. But now confound it! how can you prevent it? I will kiss you."

"You won't!" said Ann Veronica; with the clearest note of determination.

He seemed to be about to move toward her. She stepped back quickly, and her hand knocked a wine-glass from the table to smash noisily on the floor. She caught at the idea. "If you come a step nearer to me," she said, "I will smash every glass on this table."

"Then, by God!" he said, "you'll be locked up!"

Ann Veronica was disconcerted for a moment. She had a vision of

policemen, reproving magistrates, a crowded court, public disgrace. She saw her aunt in tears, her father white-faced and hard hit. "Don't come nearer!" she said.

There was a discreet knocking at the door, and Ramage's face changed.

"No," she said, under her breath, "you can't face it." And she knew that she was safe.

He went to the door. "It's all right," he said, reassuringly to the inquirer without.

Ann Veronica glanced at the mirror to discover a flushed and dishevelled disorder. She began at once a hasty readjustment of her hair, while Ramage parleyed with inaudible interrogations. "A glass slipped from the table," he explained.... "Non. Fas du tout. Non.... Niente.... Bitte!... Oui, dans la note.... Presently. Presently." That conversation ended and he turned to her again.

"I am going," she said grimly, with three hairpins in her mouth.

She took her hat from the peg in the corner and began to put it on. He regarded that perennial miracle of pinning with wrathful eyes.

"Look here, Ann Veronica," he began. "I want a plain word with you about all this. Do you mean to tell me you didn't understand why I wanted you

to come here?"

"Not a bit of it," said Ann Veronica stoutly.

"You didn't expect that I should kiss you?"

"How was I to know that a man would--would think it was possible--when there was nothing--no love?"

"How did I know there wasn't love?"

That silenced her for a moment. "And what on earth," he said, "do you think the world is made of? Why do you think I have been doing things for you? The abstract pleasure of goodness? Are you one of the members of that great white sisterhood that takes and does not give? The good accepting woman! Do you really suppose a girl is entitled to live at free quarters on any man she meets without giving any return?"

"I thought," said Ann Veronica, "you were my friend."

"Friend! What have a man and a girl in common to make them friends? Ask that lover of yours! And even with friends, would you have it all Give on one side and all Take on the other?... Does HE know I keep you?... You won't have a man's lips near you, but you'll eat out of his hand fast enough."

Ann Veronica was stung to helpless anger.

"Mr. Ramage," she cried, "you are outrageous! You understand nothing. You are--horrible. Will you let me go out of this room?"

"No," cried Ramage; "hear me out! I'll have that satisfaction, anyhow. You women, with your tricks of evasion, you're a sex of swindlers. You have all the instinctive dexterity of parasites. You make yourself charming for help. You climb by disappointing men. This lover of yours--"

"He doesn't know!" cried Ann Veronica.

"Well, you know."

Ann Veronica could have wept with vexation. Indeed, a note of weeping broke her voice for a moment as she burst out, "You know as well as I do that money was a loan!"

"Loan!"

"You yourself called it a loan!"

"Euphuism. We both understood that."

"You shall have every penny of it back."

"I'll frame it--when I get it."

"I'll pay you if I have to work at shirt-making at threepence an hour."

"You'll never pay me. You think you will. It's your way of glossing over the ethical position. It's the sort of way a woman always does gloss over her ethical positions. You're all dependents--all of you. By instinct. Only you good ones--shirk. You shirk a straightforward and decent return for what you get from us--taking refuge in purity and delicacy and such-like when it comes to payment."

"Mr. Ramage," said Ann Veronica, "I want to go--NOW!"

Part 5

But she did not get away just then.

Ramage's bitterness passed as abruptly as his aggression. "Oh, Ann Veronica!" he cried, "I cannot let you go like this! You don't understand. You can't possibly understand!"

He began a confused explanation, a perplexing contradictory apology for

his urgency and wrath. He loved Ann Veronica, he said; he was so mad to have her that he defeated himself, and did crude and alarming and senseless things. His vicious abusiveness vanished. He suddenly became eloquent and plausible. He did make her perceive something of the acute, tormenting desire for her that had arisen in him and possessed him. She stood, as it were, directed doorward, with her eyes watching every movement, listening to him, repelled by him and yet dimly understanding.

At any rate he made it very clear that night that there was an ineradicable discord in life, a jarring something that must shatter all her dreams of a way of living for women that would enable them to be free and spacious and friendly with men, and that was the passionate predisposition of men to believe that the love of women can be earned and won and controlled and compelled.

He flung aside all his talk of help and disinterested friendship as though it had never been even a disguise between them, as though from the first it was no more than a fancy dress they had put quite understandingly upon their relationship. He had set out to win her, and she had let him start. And at the thought of that other lover--he was convinced that that beloved person was a lover, and she found herself unable to say a word to explain to him that this other person, the person she loved, did not even know of her love--Ramage grew angry and savage once more, and returned suddenly to gibe and insult. Men do services for the love of women, and the woman who takes must pay. Such was the simple code that displayed itself in all his thoughts. He left

that arid rule clear of the least mist of refinement or delicacy.

That he should pay forty pounds to help this girl who preferred another man was no less in his eyes than a fraud and mockery that made her denial a maddening and outrageous disgrace to him. And this though he was evidently passionately in love with her.

For a while he threatened her. "You have put all your life in my hands," he declared. "Think of that check you endorsed. There it is--against you. I defy you to explain it away. What do you think people will make of that? What will this lover of yours make of that?"

At intervals Ann Veronica demanded to go, declaring her undying resolve to repay him at any cost, and made short movements doorward.

But at last this ordeal was over, and Ramage opened the door. She emerged with a white face and wide-open eyes upon a little, red-lit landing. She went past three keenly observant and ostentatiously preoccupied waiters down the thick-carpeted staircase and out of the Hotel Rococo, that remarkable laboratory of relationships, past a tall porter in blue and crimson, into a cool, clear night.

Part 6

When Ann Veronica reached her little bed-sitting-room again, every nerve in her body was quivering with shame and self-disgust.

She threw hat and coat on the bed and sat down before the fire.

"And now," she said, splintering the surviving piece of coal into indignant flame-spurting fragments with one dexterous blow, "what am I to do?

"I'm in a hole!--mess is a better word, expresses it better. I'm in a mess--a nasty mess! a filthy mess! Oh, no end of a mess!

"Do you hear, Ann Veronica?--you're in a nasty, filthy, unforgivable mess!

"Haven't I just made a silly mess of things?

"Forty pounds! I haven't got twenty!"

She got up, stamped with her foot, and then, suddenly remembering the lodger below, sat down and wrenched off her boots.

"This is what comes of being a young woman up to date. By Jove! I'm beginning to have my doubts about freedom!

"You silly young woman, Ann Veronica! You silly young woman! The smeariness of the thing!

"The smeariness of this sort of thing!... Mauled about!"

She fell to rubbing her insulted lips savagely with the back of her hand. "Ugh!" she said.

"The young women of Jane Austen's time didn't get into this sort of scrape! At least--one thinks so.... I wonder if some of them did--and it didn't get reported. Aunt Jane had her quiet moments. Most of them didn't, anyhow. They were properly brought up, and sat still and straight, and took the luck fate brought them as gentlewomen should. And they had an idea of what men were like behind all their nicety. They knew they were all Bogey in disguise. I didn't! I didn't! After all--"

For a time her mind ran on daintiness and its defensive restraints as though it was the one desirable thing. That world of fine printed cambrics and escorted maidens, of delicate secondary meanings and refined allusiveness, presented itself to her imagination with the brightness of a lost paradise, as indeed for many women it is a lost paradise.

"I wonder if there is anything wrong with my manners," she said. "I wonder if I've been properly brought up. If I had been quite quiet and white and dignified, wouldn't it have been different? Would he have

dared?..."

For some creditable moments in her life Ann Veronica was utterly disgusted with herself; she was wrung with a passionate and belated desire to move gently, to speak softly and ambiguously--to be, in effect, prim.

Horrible details recurred to her.

"Why, among other things, did I put my knuckles in his neck--deliberately to hurt him?"

She tried to sound the humorous note.

"Are you aware, Ann Veronica, you nearly throttled that gentleman?"

Then she reviled her own foolish way of putting it.

"You ass and imbecile, Ann Veronica! You female cad! Cad! Cad!... Why aren't you folded up clean in lavender--as every young woman ought to be? What have you been doing with yourself?..."

She raked into the fire with the poker.

"All of which doesn't help me in the slightest degree to pay back that money."

That night was the most intolerable one that Ann Veronica had ever spent. She washed her face with unwonted elaboration before she went to bed. This time, there was no doubt, she did not sleep. The more she disentangled the lines of her situation the deeper grew her self-disgust. Occasionally the mere fact of lying in bed became unendurable, and she rolled out and marched about her room and whispered abuse of herself--usually until she hit against some article of furniture.

Then she would have quiet times, in which she would say to herself, "Now look here! Let me think it all out!"

For the first time, it seemed to her, she faced the facts of a woman's position in the world--the meagre realities of such freedom as it permitted her, the almost unavoidable obligation to some individual man under which she must labor for even a foothold in the world. She had flung away from her father's support with the finest assumption of personal independence. And here she was--in a mess because it had been impossible for her to avoid leaning upon another man. She had thought--What had she thought? That this dependence of women was but an illusion which needed only to be denied to vanish. She had denied it with vigor, and here she was!

She did not so much exhaust this general question as pass from it to her insoluble individual problem again: "What am I to do?"

She wanted first of all to fling the forty pounds back into Ramage's face. But she had spent nearly half of it, and had no conception of how such a sum could be made good again. She thought of all sorts of odd and desperate expedients, and with passionate petulance rejected them all.

She took refuge in beating her pillow and inventing insulting epithets for herself. She got up, drew up her blind, and stared out of window at a dawn-cold vision of chimneys for a time, and then went and sat on the edge of her bed. What was the alternative to going home? No alternative appeared in that darkness.

It seemed intolerable that she should go home and admit herself beaten. She did most urgently desire to save her face in Morningside Park, and for long hours she could think of no way of putting it that would not be in the nature of unconditional admission of defeat.

"I'd rather go as a chorus-girl," she said.

She was not very clear about the position and duties of a chorus-girl, but it certainly had the air of being a last desperate resort.
There sprang from that a vague hope that perhaps she might extort a capitulation from her father by a threat to seek that position, and then with overwhelming clearness it came to her that whatever happened she would never be able to tell her father about her debt. The completest capitulation would not wipe out that trouble. And she felt that if she

went home it was imperative to pay. She would always be going to and fro up the Avenue, getting glimpses of Ramage, seeing him in trains....

For a time she promenaded the room.

"Why did I ever take that loan? An idiot girl in an asylum would have known better than that!

"Vulgarity of soul and innocence of mind--the worst of all conceivable combinations. I wish some one would kill Ramage by accident!...

"But then they would find that check endorsed in his bureau....

"I wonder what he will do?" She tried to imagine situations that might arise out of Ramage's antagonism, for he had been so bitter and savage that she could not believe that he would leave things as they were.

The next morning she went out with her post-office savings bank-book, and telegraphed for a warrant to draw out all the money she had in the world. It amounted to two-and-twenty pounds. She addressed an envelope to Ramage, and scrawled on a half-sheet of paper, "The rest shall follow." The money would be available in the afternoon, and she would send him four five-pound notes. The rest she meant to keep for her immediate necessities. A little relieved by this step toward reinstatement, she went on to the Imperial College to forget her muddle of problems for a time, if she could, in the presence of Capes.

Part 7

For a time the biological laboratory was full of healing virtue. Her sleepless night had left her languid but not stupefied, and for an hour or so the work distracted her altogether from her troubles.

Then, after Capes had been through her work and had gone on, it came to her that the fabric of this life of hers was doomed to almost immediate collapse; that in a little while these studies would cease, and perhaps she would never set eyes on him again. After that consolations fled.

The overnight nervous strain began to tell; she became inattentive to the work before her, and it did not get on. She felt sleepy and unusually irritable. She lunched at a creamery in Great Portland Street, and as the day was full of wintry sunshine, spent the rest of the lunch-hour in a drowsy gloom, which she imagined to be thought upon the problems of her position, on a seat in Regent's Park. A girl of fifteen or sixteen gave her a handbill that she regarded as a tract until she saw "Votes for Women" at the top. That turned her mind to the more generalized aspects of her perplexities again. She had never been so disposed to agree that the position of women in the modern world is intolerable.

Capes joined the students at tea, and displayed himself in an impish mood that sometimes possessed him. He did not notice that Ann Veronica was preoccupied and heavy-eyed. Miss Klegg raised the question of women's suffrage, and he set himself to provoke a duel between her and Miss Garvice. The youth with the hair brushed back and the spectacled Scotchman joined in the fray for and against the women's vote.

Ever and again Capes appealed to Ann Veronica. He liked to draw her in, and she did her best to talk. But she did not talk readily, and in order to say something she plunged a little, and felt she plunged. Capes scored back with an uncompromising vigor that was his way of complimenting her intelligence. But this afternoon it discovered an unusual vein of irritability in her. He had been reading Belfort Bax, and declared himself a convert. He contrasted the lot of women in general with the lot of men, presented men as patient, self-immolating martyrs, and women as the pampered favorites of Nature. A vein of conviction mingled with his burlesque.

For a time he and Miss Klegg contradicted one another.

The question ceased to be a tea-table talk, and became suddenly tragically real for Ann Veronica. There he sat, cheerfully friendly in his sex's freedom--the man she loved, the one man she cared should unlock the way to the wide world for her imprisoned feminine possibilities, and he seemed regardless that she stifled under his eyes;

he made a jest of all this passionate insurgence of the souls of women against the fate of their conditions.

Miss Garvice repeated again, and almost in the same words she used at every discussion, her contribution to the great question.

She thought that women were not made for the struggle and turmoil of life--their place was the little world, the home; that their power lay not in votes but in influence over men and in making the minds of their children fine and splendid.

"Women should understand men's affairs, perhaps," said Miss Garvice, "but to mingle in them is just to sacrifice that power of influencing they can exercise now."

"There IS something sound in that position," said Capes, intervening as if to defend Miss Garvice against a possible attack from Ann Veronica. "It may not be just and so forth, but, after all, it is how things are. Women are not in the world in the same sense that men are--fighting individuals in a scramble. I don't see how they can be. Every home is a little recess, a niche, out of the world of business and competition, in which women and the future shelter."

"A little pit!" said Ann Veronica; "a little prison!"

"It's just as often a little refuge. Anyhow, that is how things are."

"And the man stands as the master at the mouth of the den."

"As sentinel. You forget all the mass of training and tradition and instinct that go to make him a tolerable master. Nature is a mother; her sympathies have always been feminist, and she has tempered the man to the shorn woman."

"I wish," said Ann Veronica, with sudden anger, "that you could know what it is to live in a pit!"

She stood up as she spoke, and put down her cup beside Miss Garvice's. She addressed Capes as though she spoke to him alone.

"I can't endure it," she said.

Every one turned to her in astonishment.

She felt she had to go on. "No man can realize," she said, "what that pit can be. The way--the way we are led on! We are taught to believe we are free in the world, to think we are queens.... Then we find out. We find out no man will treat a woman fairly as man to man--no man. He wants you--or he doesn't; and then he helps some other woman against you.... What you say is probably all true and necessary.... But think of the disillusionment! Except for our sex we have minds like men, desires like men. We come out into the world, some of us--"

She paused. Her words, as she said them, seemed to her to mean nothing, and there was so much that struggled for expression. "Women are mocked," she said. "Whenever they try to take hold of life a man intervenes."

She felt, with a sudden horror, that she might weep. She wished she had not stood up. She wondered wildly why she had stood up. No one spoke, and she was impelled to flounder on. "Think of the mockery!" she said. "Think how dumb we find ourselves and stifled! I know we seem to have a sort of freedom.... Have you ever tried to run and jump in petticoats, Mr. Capes? Well, think what it must be to live in them--soul and mind and body! It's fun for a man to jest at our position."

"I wasn't jesting," said Capes, abruptly.

She stood face to face with him, and his voice cut across her speech and made her stop abruptly. She was sore and overstrung, and it was intolerable to her that he should stand within three yards of her unsuspectingly, with an incalculably vast power over her happiness. She was sore with the perplexities of her preposterous position. She was sick of herself, of her life, of everything but him; and for him all her masked and hidden being was crying out.

She stopped abruptly at the sound of his voice, and lost the thread of what she was saying. In the pause she realized the attention of the others converged upon her, and that the tears were brimming over her

eyes. She felt a storm of emotion surging up within her. She became aware of the Scotch student regarding her with stupendous amazement, a tea-cup poised in one hairy hand and his faceted glasses showing a various enlargement of segments of his eye.

The door into the passage offered itself with an irresistible invitation--the one alternative to a public, inexplicable passion of weeping.

Capes flashed to an understanding of her intention, sprang to his feet, and opened the door for her retreat.

Part 8

"Why should I ever come back?" she said to herself, as she went down the staircase.

She went to the post-office and drew out and sent off her money to Ramage. And then she came out into the street, sure only of one thing--that she could not return directly to her lodgings. She wanted air--and the distraction of having moving and changing things about her. The evenings were beginning to draw out, and it would not be dark for an hour. She resolved to walk across the Park to the Zoological gardens,

and so on by way of Primrose Hill to Hampstead Heath. There she would wander about in the kindly darkness. And think things out....

Presently she became aware of footsteps hurrying after her, and glanced back to find Miss Klegg, a little out of breath, in pursuit.

Ann Veronica halted a pace, and Miss Klegg came alongside.

"Do YOU go across the Park?"

"Not usually. But I'm going to-day. I want a walk."

"I'm not surprised at it. I thought Mr. Capes most trying."

"Oh, it wasn't that. I've had a headache all day."

"I thought Mr. Capes most unfair," Miss Klegg went on in a small, even voice; "MOST unfair! I'm glad you spoke out as you did."

"I didn't mind that little argument."

"You gave it him well. What you said wanted saying. After you went he got up and took refuge in the preparation-room. Or else I would have finished him."

Ann Veronica said nothing, and Miss Klegg went on: "He very often

IS--most unfair. He has a way of sitting on people. He wouldn't like it if people did it to him. He jumps the words out of your mouth; he takes hold of what you have to say before you have had time to express it properly."

Pause.

"I suppose he's frightfully clever," said Miss Klegg.

"He's a Fellow of the Royal Society, and he can't be much over thirty," said Miss Klegg.

"He writes very well," said Ann Veronica.

"He can't be more than thirty. He must have married when he was quite a young man."

"Married?" said Ann Veronica.

"Didn't you know he was married?" asked Miss Klegg, and was struck by a thought that made her glance quickly at her companion.

Ann Veronica had no answer for a moment. She turned her head away sharply. Some automaton within her produced in a quite unfamiliar voice the remark, "They're playing football."

"It's too far for the ball to reach us," said Miss Klegg.

"I didn't know Mr. Capes was married," said Ann Veronica, resuming the conversation with an entire disappearance of her former lassitude.

"Oh yes," said Miss Klegg; "I thought every one knew."

"No," said Ann Veronica, offhandedly. "Never heard anything of it."

"I thought every one knew. I thought every one had heard about it."

"But why?"

"He's married--and, I believe, living separated from his wife. There was a case, or something, some years ago."

"What case?"

"A divorce--or something--I don't know. But I have heard that he almost had to leave the schools. If it hadn't been for Professor Russell standing up for him, they say he would have had to leave."

"Was he divorced, do you mean?"

"No, but he got himself mixed up in a divorce case. I forget the particulars, but I know it was something very disagreeable. It was among

artistic people."

Ann Veronica was silent for a while.

"I thought every one had heard," said Miss Klegg. "Or I wouldn't have said anything about it."

"I suppose all men," said Ann Veronica, in a tone of detached criticism, "get some such entanglement. And, anyhow, it doesn't matter to us." She turned abruptly at right angles to the path they followed. "This is my way back to my side of the Park," she said.

"I thought you were coming right across the Park."

"Oh no," said Ann Veronica; "I have some work to do. I just wanted a breath of air. And they'll shut the gates presently. It's not far from twilight."

Part 9

She was sitting brooding over her fire about ten o'clock that night when a sealed and registered envelope was brought up to her.

She opened it and drew out a letter, and folded within it were the notes she had sent off to Ramage that day. The letter began:

"MY DEAREST GIRL,--I cannot let you do this foolish thing--"

She crumpled notes and letter together in her hand, and then with a passionate gesture flung them into the fire. Instantly she seized the poker and made a desperate effort to get them out again. But she was only able to save a corner of the letter. The twenty pounds burned with avidity.

She remained for some seconds crouching at the fender, poker in hand.

"By Jove!" she said, standing up at last, "that about finishes it, Ann Veronica!"