CHAPTER THE FIFTH

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO SIR ISAAC

§1

Her marriage had carried Ellen out of the narrow world of home and school into another that had seemed at first vastly larger, if only on account of its freedom from the perpetual achievement of small economies. Hitherto the urgent necessity of these had filled life with irksome precautions and clipped the wings of every dream. This new life into which Sir Isaac led her by the hand promised not only that release but more light, more colour, more movement, more people. There was to be at any rate so much in the way of rewards and compensation for her pity of him.

She found the establishment at Putney ready for her. Sir Isaac had not consulted her about it, it had been his secret, he had prepared it for her with meticulous care as a surprise. They returned from a honeymoon in Skye in which the attentions of Sir Isaac and the comforts of a first-class hotel had obscured a marvellous background of sombre mountain and wide stretches of shining sea. Sir Isaac had been very fond and insistent and inseparable, and she was doing her best to conceal a strange distressful jangling of her nerves which she now feared might presently dispose her to scream. Sir Isaac had been goodness itself, but

how she craved now for solitude! She was under the impression now that they were going to his mother's house in Highbury. Then she thought he would have to go away to business for part of the day at any rate, and she could creep into some corner and begin to think of all that had happened to her in these short summer months.

They were met at Euston by his motor-car. "Home," said Sir Isaac, with a little gleam of excitement, when the more immediate luggage was aboard.

As they hummed through the West-End afternoon Ellen became aware that he was whistling through his teeth. It was his invariable indication of mental activity, and her attention came drifting back from her idle contemplation of the shoppers and strollers of Piccadilly to link this already alarming symptom with the perplexing fact that they were manifestly travelling west.

"But this," she said presently, "is Knightsbridge."

"Goes to Kensington," he replied with attempted indifference.

"But your mother doesn't live this way."

"We do," said Sir Isaac, shining at every point of his face.

"But," she halted. "Isaac!--where are we going?"

"Home," he said.

"You've not taken a house?"

"Bought it."

"But,--it won't be ready!"

"I've seen to that."

"Servants!" she cried in dismay.

"That's all right." His face broke into an excited smile. His little eyes danced and shone. "Everything," he said.

"But the servants!" she said.

"You'll see," he said. "There's a butler--and everything."

"A butler!" He could now no longer restrain himself. "I was weeks," he said, "getting it ready. Weeks and weeks.... It's a house.... I'd had my eye on it before ever I met you. It's a real good house, Elly...."

The fortunate girl-wife went on through Brompton to Walham Green with a stunned feeling. So women have felt in tumbrils. A nightmare of butlers,

a galaxy of possible butlers, filled her soul.

No one was quite so big and formidable as Snagsby, towering up to receive her, upon the steps of the home her husband was so amazingly giving her.

The reader has already been privileged to see something of this house in the company of Lady Beach-Mandarin. At the top of the steps stood Mrs. Crumble, the new and highly recommended cook-housekeeper in her best black silk flounced and expanded, and behind her peeped several neat maids in caps and aprons. A little valet-like under-butler appeared and tried to balance Snagsby by hovering two steps above him on the opposite side of the Victorian mediæval porch.

Assisted officiously by Snagsby and amidst the deferential unhelpful gestures of the under-butler, Sir Isaac handed his wife out of the car. "Everything all right, Snagsby?" he asked brusquely if a little breathless.

"Everything in order, Sir Isaac."

"And here;--this is her ladyship."

"I 'ope her ladyship 'ad a pleasent journey to 'er new 'ome. I'm sure if I may presume, Sir Isaac, we shall all be very glad to serve her ladyship."

(Like all well-trained English servants, Snagsby always dropped as many h's as he could when conversing with his superiors. He did this as a mark of respect and to prevent social confusion, just as he was always careful to wear a slightly misfitting dress coat and fold his trousers so that they creased at the sides and had a wide flat effect in front.)

Lady Harman bowed a little shyly to his good wishes and was then led up to Mrs. Crumble, in a stiff black silk, who curtseyed with a submissive amiability to her new mistress. "I'm sure, me lady," she said. "I'm sure----"

There was a little pause. "Here they are, you see, right and ready," said Sir Isaac, and then with an inspiration, "Got any tea for us, Snagsby?"

Snagsby addressing his mistress inquired if he should serve tea in the garden or the drawing-room, and Sir Isaac decided for the garden.

"There's another hall beyond this," he said, and took his wife's arm, leaving Mrs. Crumble still bowing amiably before the hall table. And every time she bowed she rustled richly....

"It's quite a big garden," said Sir Isaac.

§2

And so the woman who had been a girl three weeks ago, this tall, dark-eyed, slightly perplexed and very young-looking lady, was introduced to the home that had been made for her. She went about it with an alarmed sense of strange responsibilities, not in the least feeling that anything was being given to her. And Sir Isaac led her from point to point full of the pride and joy of new possession--for it was his first own house as well as hers--rejoicing over it and exacting gratitude.

"It's all right, isn't it?" he asked looking up at her.

"It's wonderful. I'd no idea."

"See," he said, indicating a great brass bowl of perennial sunflowers on the landing, "your favourite flower!"

"My favourite flower?"

"You said it was--in that book. Perennial sunflower."

She was perplexed and then remembered.

She understood now why he had said downstairs, when she had glanced at a big photographic enlargement of a portrait of Doctor Barnardo, "your

favourite hero in real life."

He had brought her at Hythe one day a popular Victorian device, a confession album, in which she had had to write down on a neat rose-tinted page, her favourite author, her favourite flower, her favourite colour, her favourite hero in real life, her "pet aversion," and quite a number of such particulars of her subjective existence. She had filled this page in a haphazard manner late one night, and she was disconcerted to find how thoroughly her careless replies had come home to roost. She had put down "pink" as her favourite colour because the page she was writing upon suggested it, and the paper of the room was pale pink, the curtains strong pink with a pattern of paler pink and tied with large pink bows, and the lamp shades, the bedspread, the pillow-cases, the carpet, the chairs, the very crockery--everything but the omnipresent perennial sunflowers--was pink. Confronted with this realization, she understood that pink was the least agreeable of all possible hues for a bedroom. She perceived she had to live now in a chromatic range between rather underdone mutton and salmon. She had said that her favourite musical composers were Bach and Beethoven; she really meant it, and a bust of Beethoven materialized that statement, but she had made Doctor Barnardo her favourite hero in real life because his name also began with a B and she had heard someone say somewhere that he was a very good man. The predominance of George Eliot's pensive rather than delightful countenance in her bedroom and the array of all that lady's works in a lusciously tooled pink leather, was due to her equally reckless choice of a favourite author. She had said too that Nelson was

her favourite historical character, but Sir Isaac with a delicate jealousy had preferred to have this heroic but regrettably immoral personality represented in his home only by an engraving of the Battle of Copenhagen....

She stood surveying this room, and her husband watched her eagerly. She was, he felt, impressed at last!...

Certainly she had never seen such a bedroom in her life. By comparison even with the largest of the hotel apartments they had occupied it was vast; it had writing-tables and a dainty bookcase and a blushing sofa, and dressing-tables and a bureau and a rose-red screen and three large windows. Her thoughts went back to the narrow little bedroom at Penge with which she had hitherto been so entirely content. Her own few little books, a photograph or so,--they'd never dare to come here, even if she dared to bring them.

"Here," said Sir Isaac, flinging open a white door, "is your dressing-room."

She was chiefly aware of a huge white bath standing on a marble slab under a window of crinkled pink-stained glass, and of a wide space of tiled floor with white fur rugs.

"And here," he said, opening a panel that was covered by wall paper, "is my door."

"Yes," he said to the question in her eyes, "that's my room. You got this one--for your own. It's how people do now. People of our position.... There's no lock."

He shut the door slowly again and surveyed the splendours he had made with infinite satisfaction.

"All right?" he said, "isn't it?"... He turned to the pearl for which the casket was made, and slipped an arm about her waist. His arm tightened.

"Got a kiss for me, Elly?" he whispered.

At this moment, a gong almost worthy of Snagsby summoned them to tea. It came booming in to them with a vast officious arrogance that brooked no denial. It made one understand the imperatives of the Last Trump, albeit with a greater dignity.... There was a little awkward pause.

"I'm so dirty and trainy," she said, disengaging herself from his arm. "And we ought to go to tea."

§3

The same exceptional aptitude of Sir Isaac for detailed administration

that had relieved his wife from the need of furnishing and arranging a home, made the birth of her children and the organization of her nursery an almost detached affair for her. Sir Isaac went about in a preoccupied way, whistling between his teeth and planning with expert advice the equipment of an ideal nursery, and her mother and his mother became as it were voluminous clouds of uncommunicative wisdom and precaution. In addition the conversation of Miss Crump, the extremely skilled and costly nurse, who arrived a full Advent before the child, fresh from the birth of a viscount, did much to generalize whatever had remained individual of this thing that was happening. With so much intelligence focussed, there seemed to Lady Harman no particular reason why she should not do her best to think as little as possible about the impending affair, which meant for her, she now understood quite clearly, more and more discomfort culminating in an agony. The summer promised to be warm, and Sir Isaac took a furnished house for the great event in the hills behind Torquay. The maternal instinct is not a magic thing, it has to be evoked and developed, and I decline to believe it is indicative of any peculiar unwomanliness in Lady Harman that when at last she beheld her newly-born daughter in the hands of the experts, she moaned druggishly, "Oh! please take it away. Oh! Take it--away. Anywhere--anywhere."

It was very red and wrinkled and aged-looking and, except when it opened its mouth to cry, extraordinarily like its father. This resemblance disappeared--along with a crop of darkish red hair--in the course of a day or two, but it left a lurking dislike to its proximity in her mind

long after it had become an entirely infantile and engaging baby.

§4

Those early years of their marriage were the happiest period of Sir Isaac's life.

He seemed to have everything that man could desire. He was still only just forty at his marriage; he had made for himself a position altogether dominant in the world of confectionery and popular refreshment, he had won a title, he had a home after his own heart, a beautiful young wife, and presently delightful children in his own image, and it was only after some years of contentment and serenity and with a certain incredulity that he discovered that something in his wife, something almost in the nature of discontent with her lot, was undermining and threatening all the comfort and beauty of his life.

Sir Isaac was one of those men whom modern England delights to honour, a man of unpretentious acquisitiveness, devoted to business and distracted by no æsthetic or intellectual interests. He was the only son of his mother, the widow of a bankrupt steam-miller, and he had been a delicate child to rear. He left Mr. Gambard's college at Ealing after passing the second-class examination of the College of Preceptors at the age of sixteen, to go into a tea-office as clerk without a salary, a post he presently abandoned for a clerkship in the office of a large refreshment

catering firm. He attracted the attention of his employers by suggesting various administrative economies, and he was already drawing a salary of two hundred and fifty pounds a year when he was twenty-one. Many young men would have rested satisfied with so rapid an advancement, and would have devoted themselves to the amusements that are now considered so permissible to youth, but young Harman was made of sterner stuff, and it only spurred him to further efforts. He contrived to save a considerable proportion of his salary for some years, and at the age of twenty-seven he started, in association with a firm of flour millers, the International Bread and Cake Stores, which spread rapidly over the country. They were not in any sense of the word "International," but in a search for inflated and inflating adjectives this word attracted him most, and the success of the enterprise justified his choice. Originally conceived as a syndicated system of baker's shops running a specially gritty and nutritious line of bread, the Staminal Bread, in addition to the ordinary descriptions, it rapidly developed a catering side, and in a little time there were few centres of clerkly employment in London or the Midlands where an International could not be found supplying the midday scone or poached egg, washed down by a cup of tea, or coffee, or lemonade. It meant hard work for Isaac Harman. It drew lines on his cheeks, sharpened his always rather pointed nose to an extreme efficiency, greyed his hair, and gave an acquired firmness to his rather retreating mouth. All his time was given to the details of this development; always he was inspecting premises, selecting and dismissing managers, making codes of rules and fines for his growing army of employees, organizing and reorganizing his central offices and his

central bakeries, hunting up cheaper and cheaper supplies of eggs and flour, and milk and ham, devising advertisements and agency developments. He had something of an artist's passion in these things; he went about, a little bent and peaky, calculating and planning and hissing through his teeth, and feeling not only that he was getting on, but that he was getting on in the most exemplary way. Manifestly, anybody in his line of business who wanted to be leisurely, or to be generous, who possessed any broader interests than the shop, who troubled to think about the nation or the race or any of the deeper mysteries of life, was bound to go down before him. He dealt privately with every appetite--until his marriage no human being could have suspected him of any appetite but business--he disposed of every distracting impulse with unobtrusive decision; and even his political inclination towards Radicalism sprang chiefly from an irritation with the legal advantages of landlordism natural to a man who is frequently leasing shops.

At school Sir Isaac had not been a particularly prominent figure; his disposition at cricket to block and to bowl "sneaks" and "twisters" under-arm had raised his average rather than his reputation; he had evaded fights and dramatic situations, and protected himself upon occasions of unavoidable violence by punching with his white knuckles held in a peculiar and vicious manner. He had always been a little insensitive to those graces of style, in action if not in art, which appeal so strongly to the commoner sort of English mind; he played first for safety, and that assured, for the uttermost advantage. These

tendencies became more marked with maturity. When he took up tennis for his health's sake he developed at once an ungracious service that had to be killed like vermin; he developed an instinct for the deadest ball available, and his returns close up to the net were like assassinations. Indeed, he was inherently incapable of any vision beyond the express prohibitions and permissions of the rules of the games he played, or beyond the laws and institutions under which he lived. His idea of generosity was the undocumented and unqualified purchase of a person by payments made in the form of a gift.

And this being the quality of Sir Isaac's mind, it followed that his interpretations of the relationship of marriage were simple and strict. A woman, he knew, had to be wooed to be won, but when she was won, she was won. He did not understand wooing after that was settled. There was the bargain and her surrender. He on his side had to keep her, dress her, be kind to her, give her the appearances of pride and authority, and in return he had his rights and his privileges and undefined powers of control. That you know, by the existing rules, is the reality of marriage where there are no settlements and no private property of the wife's. That is to say, it is the reality of marriage in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred. And it would have shocked Sir Isaac extremely, and as a matter of fact it did shock him, for any one to suggest the slightest revision of so entirely advantageous an arrangement. He was confident of his good intentions, and resolved to the best of his ability to make his wife the happiest of living creatures, subject only to reasonable acquiescences and general good behaviour.

Never before had he cared for anything so much as he did for her--not even for the International Bread and Cake Stores. He gloated upon her. She distracted him from business. He resolved from the outset to surround her with every luxury and permit her no desire that he had not already anticipated. Even her mother and Georgina, whom he thought extremely unnecessary persons, were frequent visitors to his house. His solicitude for her was so great that she found it difficult even to see her doctor except in his presence. And he bought her a pearl necklace that cost six hundred pounds. He was, in fact, one of those complete husbands who grow rare in these decadent days.

The social circle to which Sir Isaac introduced his wife was not a very extensive one. The business misadventures of his father had naturally deprived his mother of most of her friends; he had made only acquaintances at school, and his subsequent concentration upon business had permitted very few intimacies. Renewed prosperity had produced a certain revival of cousins, but Mrs. Harman, established in a pleasant house at Highbury, had received their attentions with a well-merited stiffness. His chief associates were his various business allies, and these and their wives and families formed the nucleus of the new world to which Ellen was gradually and temperately introduced. There were a few local callers, but Putney is now too deeply merged with London for this practice of the countryside to have any great effect upon a new-comer's visiting circle.

Perhaps Mr. Charterson might claim to be Sir Isaac's chief friend at the time of that gentleman's marriage. Transactions in sugar had brought them together originally. He was Sir Isaac's best man, and the new knight entertained a feeling of something very like admiration for him. Moreover, Mr. Charterson had very large ears, more particularly was the left one large, extraordinarily large and projecting upper teeth, which he sought vainly to hide beneath an extravagant moustache, and a harsh voice, characteristics that did much to allay the anxieties natural to a newly married man. Mr. Charterson was moreover adequately married to a large, attentive, enterprising, swarthy wife, and possessed a splendid house in Belgravia. Not quite so self-made as Sir Isaac, he was still sufficiently self-made to take a very keen interest in his own social advancement and in social advancement generally, and it was through him that Sir Isaac's attention had been first directed to those developing relations with politics that arise as a business grows to greatness.
"I'm for Parliament," said Charterson. "Sugar's in politics, and I'm after it. You'd better come too, Harman. Those chaps up there, they'll play jiggery-pokery with sugar if we aren't careful. And it won't be only sugar, Harman!"

Pressed to expand this latter sentence, he pointed out to his friend that "any amount of interfering with employment" was in the air--"any amount."

"And besides," said Mr. Charterson, "men like us have a stake in the country, Harman. We're getting biggish people. We ought to do our

share. I don't see the fun of leaving everything to the landlords and the lawyers. Men of our sort have got to make ourselves felt. We want a business government. Of course--one pays. So long as I get a voice in calling the tune I don't mind paying the piper a bit. There's going to be a lot of interference with trade. All this social legislation. And there's what you were saying the other day about these leases...."

"I'm not much of a talker," said Harman. "I don't see myself gassing in the House."

"Oh! I don't mean going into Parliament," said Charterson. "That's for some of us, perhaps.... But come into the party, make yourself felt."

Under Charterson's stimulation it was that Harman joined the National Liberal Club, and presently went on to the Climax, and through him he came to know something of that inner traffic of arrangements and bargains which does so much to keep a great historical party together and maintain its vitality. For a time he was largely overshadowed by the sturdy Radicalism of Charterson, but presently as he understood this interesting game better, he embarked upon a line of his own. Charterson wanted a seat, and presently got it; his maiden speech on the Sugar Bounties won a compliment from Mr. Evesham; and Harman, who would have piloted a monoplane sooner than address the House, decided to be one of those silent influences that work outside our national assembly. He came to the help of an embarrassed Liberal weekly, and then, in a Fleet Street crisis, undertook the larger share of backing the Old Country

Gazette, that important social and intellectual party organ. His knighthood followed almost automatically.

Such political developments introduced a second element into the intermittent social relations of the Harman household. Before his knighthood and marriage Sir Isaac had participated in various public banquets and private parties and little dinners in the vaults of the House and elsewhere, arising out of his political intentions, and with the appearance of a Lady Harman there came a certain urgency on the part of those who maintain in a state of hectic dullness the social activities of the great Liberal party. Horatio Blenker, Sir Isaac's editor, showed a disposition to be socially very helpful, and after Mrs. Blenker had called in a state of worldly instructiveness, there was a little dinner at the Blenkers' to introduce young Lady Harman to the great political world. It was the first dinner-party of her life, and she found it dazzling rather than really agreeable.

She felt very slender and young and rather unclothed about the arms and neck, in spite of the six hundred pound pearl necklace that had been given to her just as she stood before the mirror in her white-and-gold dinner dress ready to start. She had to look down at that dress ever and again and at her shining arms to remind herself that she wasn't still in schoolgirl clothes, and it seemed to her there was not another woman in the room who was not fairly entitled to send her off to bed at any moment. She had been a little nervous about the details of the dinner, but there was nothing strange or difficult but caviare, and in that case

she waited for some one else to begin. The Chartersons were there, which was very reassuring, and the abundant flowers on the table were a sort of protection. The man on her right was very nice, gently voluble, and evidently quite deaf, so that she had merely to make kind respectful faces at him. He talked to her most of the time, and described the peasant costumes in Marken and Walcheren. And Mr. Blenker, with a fine appreciation of Sir Isaac's watchful temperament and his own magnetism, spoke to her three times and never looked at her once all through the entertainment.

A few weeks later they went to dinner at the Chartersons', and then she gave a dinner, which was arranged very skilfully by Sir Isaac and Snagsby and the cook-housekeeper, with a little outside help, and then came a big party reception at Lady Barleypound's, a multitudinous miscellaneous assembly in which the obviously wealthy rubbed shoulders with the obviously virtuous and the not quite so obviously clever. It was a great orgy of standing about and seeing the various Blenkers and the Cramptons and the Weston Massinghays and the Daytons and Mrs. Millingham with her quivering lorgnette and her last tame genius and Lewis, and indeed all the Tapirs and Tadpoles of Liberalism, being tremendously active and influential and important throughout the evening. The house struck Ellen as being very splendid, the great staircase particularly so, and never before had she seen a great multitude of people in evening dress. Lady Barleypound in the golden parlour at the head of the stairs shook hands automatically, lest it would seem in some amiable dream, Mrs. Blapton and a daughter rustled

across the gathering in a hasty vindictive manner and vanished, and a number of handsome, glittering, dark-eyed, splendidly dressed women kept together in groups and were tremendously but occultly amused. The various Blenkers seemed everywhere, Horatio in particular with his large fluent person and his luminous tenor was like a shop-walker taking customers to the departments: one felt he was weaving all these immiscibles together into one great wise Liberal purpose, and that he deserved quite wonderful things from the party; he even introduced five or six people to Lady Harman, looking sternly over her head and restraining his charm as he did so on account of Sir Isaac's feelings. The people he brought up to her were not very interesting people, she thought, but then that was perhaps due to her own dreadful ignorance of politics.

Lady Harman ceased even to dip into the vortex of London society after March, and in June she went with her mother and a skilled nurse to that beautiful furnished house Sir Isaac had found near Torquay, in preparation for the birth of their first little daughter.

§5

It seemed to her husband that it was both unreasonable and ungrateful of her to become a tearful young woman after their union, and for a phase of some months she certainly was a tearful young woman, but his mother made it clear to him that this was quite a correct and permissible phase

for her, as she was, and so he expressed his impatience with temperance, and presently she was able to pull herself together and begin to readjust herself to a universe that had seemed for a time almost too shattered for endurance. She resumed the process of growing up that her marriage had for a time so vividly interrupted, and if her schooldays were truncated and the college phase omitted, she had at any rate a very considerable amount of fundamental experience to replace these now customary completions.

Three little girls she brought into the world in the first three years of her married life, then after a brief interval of indifferent health she had a fourth girl baby of a physique quite obviously inferior to its predecessors, and then, after--and perhaps as a consequence of--much whispered conversation of the two mothers-in-law, protests and tactful explanation on the part of the elderly and trustworthy family doctor and remarks of an extraordinary breadth (and made at table too, almost before the door had closed on Snagsby!) from Ellen's elder sister, there came a less reproductive phase....

But by that time Lady Harman had acquired the habit of reading and the habit of thinking over what she read, and from that it is an easy step to thinking over oneself and the circumstances of one's own life. The one thing trains for the other.

Now the chief circumstance in the life of Lady Harman was Sir Isaac. Indeed as she grew to a clear consciousness of herself and her position,

it seemed to her he was not so much a circumstance as a circumvallation. There wasn't a direction in which she could turn without immediately running up against him. He had taken possession of her extremely. And from her first resignation to this as an inevitable fact she had come, she hardly knew how, to a renewed disposition to regard this large and various universe beyond him and outside of him, with something of the same slight adventurousness she had felt before he so comprehensively happened to her. After her first phase of despair she had really done her best to honour the bargain she had rather unwittingly made and to love and to devote herself and be a loyal and happy wife to this clutching, hard-breathing little man who had got her, and it was the insatiable excesses of his demands quite as much as any outer influence that made her realize the impossibility of such a concentration.

His was a supremely acquisitive and possessive character, so that he insulted her utmost subjugations by an obtrusive suspicion and jealousy, he was jealous of her childish worship of her dead father, jealous of her disposition to go to church, jealous of the poet Wordsworth because she liked to read his sonnets, jealous because she loved great music, jealous when she wanted to go out; if she seemed passionless and she seemed more and more passionless he was jealous, and the slightest gleam of any warmth of temperament filled him with a vile and furious dread of dishonouring possibilities. And the utmost resolution to believe in him could not hide from her for ever the fact that his love manifested itself almost wholly as a parade of ownership and a desire, without kindliness, without any self-forgetfulness. All his devotion, his

self-abjection, had been the mere qualms of a craving, the flush of eager courtship. Do as she would to overcome these realizations, forces within her stronger than herself, primordial forces with the welfare of all life in their keeping, cried out upon the meanness of his face, the ugly pointed nose and the thin compressed lips, the weak neck, the clammy hands, the ungainly nervous gestures, the tuneless whistling between the clenched teeth. He would not let her forget a single detail. Whenever she tried to look at any created thing, he thrust himself, like one of his own open-air advertisements, athwart the attraction.

As she grew up to an achieved womanhood--and it was even a physical growing-up, for she added more than an inch of stature after her marriage--her life became more and more consciously like a fencing match in which her vision flashed over his head and under his arms and this side of him and that, while with a toiling industry he fought to intercept it. And from the complete acceptance of her matrimonial submission, she passed on by almost insensible degrees towards a conception of her life as a struggle, that seemed at first entirely lonely and unsupported, to exist--against him.

In every novel as in every picture there must be an immense simplification, and so I tell the story of Lady Harman's changing attitude without any of those tangled leapings-forward or harkings-back, those moods and counter moods and relapses which made up the necessary course of her mind. But sometimes she was here and sometimes she was there, sometimes quite back to the beginning an obedient, scrupulously

loyal and up-looking young wife, sometimes a wife concealing the humiliation of an unhappy choice in a spurious satisfaction and affection. And mixed up with widening spaces of criticism and dissatisfaction and hostility there were, you must understand, moments of real liking for this outrageous little man and streaks of an absurd maternal tenderness for him. They had been too close together to avoid that. She had a woman's affection of ownership too, and disliked to see him despised or bettered or untidy; even those ridiculous muddy hands had given her a twinge of solicitude....

And all the while she was trying to see the universe also, the great background of their two little lives, and to think what it might mean for her over and above their too obliterating relationship.

§6

It would be like counting the bacteria of an infection to trace how ideas of insubordination came drifting into Sir Isaac's Paradise. The epidemic is in the air. There is no Tempter nowadays, no definitive apple. The disturbing force has grown subtler, blows in now like a draught, creeps and gathers like the dust,--a disseminated serpent. Sir Isaac brought home his young, beautiful and rather crumpled and astonished Eve and by all his standards he was entitled to be happy ever afterwards. He knew of one danger, but against that he was very watchful. Never once for six long years did she have a private duologue

with another male. But Mudie and Sir Jesse Boot sent parcels to the house unchecked, the newspaper drifted in not even censored: the nurses who guided Ellen through the essential incidents of a feminine career talked of something called a "movement." And there was Georgina....

The thing they wanted they called the Vote, but that demand so hollow, so eyeless, had all the terrifying effect of a mask. Behind that mask was a formless invincible discontent with the lot of womanhood. It wanted,--it was not clear what it wanted, but whatever it wanted, all the domestic instincts of mankind were against admitting there was anything it could want. That remarkable agitation had already worked up to the thunderous pitch, there had been demonstrations at Public Meetings, scenes in the Ladies' Gallery and something like rioting in Parliament Square before ever it occurred to Sir Isaac that this was a disturbance that touched his home. He had supposed suffragettes were ladies of all too certain an age with red noses and spectacles and a masculine style of costume, who wished to be hugged by policemen. He said as much rather knowingly and wickedly to Charterson. He could not understand any woman not coveting the privileges of Lady Harman. And then one day while Georgina and her mother were visiting them, as he was looking over the letters at the breakfast table according to his custom before giving them out, he discovered two identical newspaper packets addressed to his wife and his sister-in-law, and upon them were these words printed very plainly, "Votes for Women."

"Good Lord!" he cried. "What's this? It oughtn't to be allowed." And he

pitched the papers at the wastepaper basket under the sideboard.

"I'll thank you," said Georgina, "not to throw away our Votes for Women. We subscribe to that."

"Eh?" cried Sir Isaac.

"We're subscribers. Snagsby, just give us those papers." (A difficult moment for Snagsby.) He picked up the papers and looked at Sir Isaac.

"Put 'em down there," said Sir Isaac, waving to the sideboard and then in an ensuing silence handed two letters of no importance to his mother-in-law. His face was pale and he was breathless. Snagsby with an obvious tactfulness retired.

Sir Isaac watched the door close.

His remark pointedly ignored Georgina.

"What you been thinking about, Elly," he asked, "subscribing to that thing?"

"I wanted to read it."

"But you don't hold with all that Rubbish----"

"Rubbish!" said Georgina, helping herself to marmalade.

"Well, rot then, if you like," said Sir Isaac, unamiably and panting.

With that as Snagsby afterwards put it--for the battle raged so fiercely as to go on even when he presently returned to the room--"the fat was in the fire." The Harman breakfast-table was caught up into the Great Controversy with heat and fury like a tree that is overtaken by a forest fire. It burnt for weeks, and smouldered still when the first white heats had abated. I will not record the arguments of either side, they were abominably bad and you have heard them all time after time; I do not think that whatever side you have taken in this matter you would find much to please you in Sir Isaac's goadings or Georgina's repartees. Sir Isaac would ask if women were prepared to go as soldiers and Georgina would enquire how many years of service he had done or horrify her mother by manifest allusion to the agonies and dangers of maternity,--things like that. It gave a new interest to breakfast for Snagsby; and the peculiarly lady-like qualities of Mrs. Sawbridge, a gift for silent, pallid stiffness, a disposition, tactful but unsuccessful, to "change the subject," an air of being about to leave the room in disdain, had never shone with such baleful splendour. Our interest here is rather with the effect of these remarkable disputes, which echoed in Sir Isaac's private talk long after Georgina had gone again, upon Lady Harman. He could not leave this topic of feminine emancipation alone, once it had been set going, and though Ellen would always preface her remarks by, "Of course Georgina goes too far," he

worried her slowly into a series of definite insurgent positions. Sir Isaac's attacks on Georgina certainly brought out a good deal of absurdity in her positions, and Georgina at times left Sir Isaac without a leg to stand on, and the net result of their disputes as of most human controversies was not conviction for the hearer but release. Her mind escaped between them, and went exploring for itself through the great gaps they had made in the simple obedient assumptions of her girlhood. That question originally put in Paradise, "Why shouldn't we?" came into her mind and stayed there. It is a question that marks a definite stage in the departure from innocence. Things that had seemed opaque and immutable appeared translucent and questionable. She began to read more and more in order to learn things and get a light upon things, and less and less to pass the time. Ideas came to her that seemed at first strange altogether and then grotesquely justifiable and then crept to a sort of acceptance by familiarity. And a disturbing intermittent sense of a general responsibility increased and increased in her.

You will understand this sense of responsibility which was growing up in Lady Harman's mind if you have felt it yourself, but if you have not then you may find it a little difficult to understand. You see it comes, when it comes at all, out of a phase of disillusionment. All children, I suppose, begin by taking for granted the rightness of things in general, the soundness of accepted standards, and many people are at least so happy that they never really grow out of this assumption. They go to the grave with an unbroken confidence that somewhere behind all the immediate injustices and disorders of life, behind the antics of

politics, the rigidities of institutions, the pressure of custom and the vagaries of law, there is wisdom and purpose and adequate provision, they never lose that faith in the human household they acquired amongst the directed securities of home. But for more of us and more there comes a dissolution of these assurances; there comes illumination as the day comes into a candle-lit uncurtained room. The warm lights that once rounded off our world so completely are betrayed for what they are, smoky and guttering candles. Beyond what once seemed a casket of dutiful security is now a limitless and indifferent universe. Ours is the wisdom or there is no wisdom; ours is the decision or there is no decision. That burthen is upon each of us in the measure of our capacity. The talent has been given us and we may not bury it.

§7

And as we reckon up the disturbing influences that were stirring Lady Harman out of that life of acquiescences to which women are perhaps even more naturally disposed than men, we may pick out the conversation of Susan Burnet as something a little apart from the others, as something with a peculiar barbed pointedness of its own that was yet in other respects very representative of a multitude of nudges and nips and pricks and indications that life was giving Lady Harman's awaking mind. Susan Burnet was a woman who came to renovate and generally do up the Putney curtains and furniture and loose covers every spring; she was Mrs. Crumble's discovery, she was sturdy and short and she had open blue

eyes and an engaging simplicity of manner that attracted Lady Harman from the outset. She was stuck away in one of the spare bedrooms and there she was available for any one, so long, she explained, as they didn't fluster her when she was cutting out, with a flow of conversation that not even a mouth full of pins seemed to interrupt. And Lady Harman would go and watch Susan Burnet by the hour together and think what an enviably independent young woman she was, and listen with interest and something between horror and admiration to the various impressions of life she had gathered during a hardy and adventurous career.

Their early conversations were about Susan Burnet's business and the general condition of things in that world of upholsterers' young women in which Susan had lived until she perceived the possibilities of a "connexion," and set up for herself. And the condition of things in that world, as Susan described it, brought home to Lady Harman just how sheltered and limited her own upbringing had been. "It isn't right," said Susan, "the way they send girls out with fellers into empty houses. Naturally the men get persecuting them. They don't seem hardly able to help it, some of them, and I will say this for them, that a lot of the girls go more than half way with them, leading them on. Still there's a sort of man won't leave you alone. One I used to be sent out with and a married man too he was, Oh!--he used to give me a time. Why I've bit his hands before now, bit hard, before he'd leave go of me. It's my opinion the married men are worse than the single. Bolder they are. I pushed him over a scuttle once and he hit his head against a bookcase. I was fair frightened of him. 'You little devil,' he says; 'I'll be even with you

yet....' Oh! I've been called worse things than that.... Of course a respectable girl gets through with it, but it's trying and to some it's a sort of temptation...."

"I should have thought," reflected Lady Harman, "you could have told someone."

"It's queer," said Susan; "but it never seemed to me the sort of thing a girl ought to go telling. It's a kind of private thing. And besides, it isn't exactly easy to tell.... I suppose the Firm didn't want to be worried by complaints and disputes about that sort of thing. And it isn't always easy to say just which of the two is to blame."

"But how old are the girls they send out?" asked Lady Harman.

"Some's as young as seventeen or eighteen. It all depends on the sort of work that's wanted to be done...."

"Of course a lot of them have to marry...."

This lurid little picture of vivid happenings in unoccupied houses and particularly of the prim, industrious, capable Susan Burnet, biting aggressive wrists, stuck in Lady Harman's imagination. She seemed to be looking into hitherto unsuspected pits of simple and violent living just beneath her feet. Susan told some upholsteress love tales, real love tales, with a warmth and honesty of passion in them that seemed at once

dreadful and fine to Lady Harman's underfed imagination. Under encouragement Susan expanded the picture, beyond these mere glimpses of workshop and piece-work and furtive lust. It appeared that she was practically the head of her family; there was a mother who had specialized in ill-health, a sister of defective ability who stayed at home, a brother in South Africa who was very good and sent home money, and three younger sisters growing up. And father,--she evaded the subject of father at first. Then presently Lady Harman had some glimpses of an earlier phase in Susan Burnet's life "before any of us were earning money." Father appeared as a kindly, ineffectual, insolvent figure struggling to conduct a baker's and confectioner's business in Walthamstow, mother was already specializing, there were various brothers and sisters being born and dying. "How many were there of you altogether?" asked Lady Harman.

"Thirteen there was. Father always used to laugh and say he'd had a fair baker's dozen. There was Luke to begin with----"

Susan began to count on her fingers and recite braces of scriptural names.

She could only make up her tale to twelve. She became perplexed. Then she remembered. "Of course!" she cried: "there was Nicodemus. He was still-born. I always forget Nicodemus, poor little chap! But he came--was it sixth or seventh?--seventh after Anna."

She gave some glimpses of her father and then there was a collapse of which she fought shy. Lady Harman was too delicate to press her to talk of that.

But one day in the afternoon Susan's tongue ran.

She was telling how first she went to work before she was twelve.

"But I thought the board schools----" said Lady Harman.

"I had to go before the committee," said Susan. "I had to go before the committee and ask to be let go to work. There they was, sitting round a table in a great big room, and they was as kind as anything, one old gentleman with a great white beard, he was as kind as could be. 'Don't you be frightened, my dear,' he says. 'You tell us why you want to go out working.' 'Well,' I says, 'somebody's got to earn something,' and that made them laugh in a sort of fatherly way, and after that there wasn't any difficulty. You see it was after Father's Inquest, and everybody was disposed to be kind to us. 'Pity they can't all go instead of this educational Tommy Rot,' the old gentleman says. 'You learn to work, my dear'--and I did...."

She paused.

"Father's inquest?" said Lady Harman.

Susan seemed to brace herself to the occasion. "Father," she said, "was drowned. I know--I hadn't told you that before. He was drowned in the Lea. It's always been a distress and humiliation to us there had to be an Inquest. And they threw out things.... It's why we moved to Haggerston. It's the worst that ever happened to us in all our lives. Far worse. Worse than having the things sold or the children with scarlet fever and having to burn everything.... I don't like to talk about it. I can't help it but I don't....

"I don't know why I talk to you as I do, Lady Harman, but I don't seem to mind talking to you. I don't suppose I've opened my mouth to anyone about it, not for years--except to one dear friend I've got--her who persuaded me to be a church member. But what I've always said and what I will always say is this, that I don't believe any evil of Father, I don't believe, I won't ever believe he took his life. I won't even believe he was in drink. I don't know how he got in the river, but I'm certain it wasn't so. He was a weak man, was Father, I've never denied he was a weak man. But a harder working man than he was never lived. He worried, anyone would have worried seeing the worries he had. The shop wasn't paying as it was; often we never tasted meat for weeks together, and then there came one of these Internationals, giving overweight and underselling...."

"One of these Internationals?"

"Yes, I don't suppose you've ever heard of them. They're in the poorer

neighbourhoods chiefly. They sell teas and things mostly now but they began as bakers' shops and what they did was to come into a place and undersell until all the old shops were ruined and shut up. That was what they tried to do and Father hadn't no more chance amongst them than a mouse in a trap.... It was just like being run over. All the trade that stayed with us after a bit was Bad Debts. You can't blame people I suppose for going where they get more and pay less, and it wasn't till we'd all gone right away to Haggerston that they altered things and put the prices up again. Of course Father lost heart and all that. He didn't know what to do, he'd sunk all he had in the shop; he just sat and moped about. Really,--he was pitiful. He wasn't able to sleep; he used to get up at nights and go about downstairs. Mother says she found him once sweeping out the bakehouse at two o'clock in the morning. He got it into his head that getting up like that would help him. But I don't believe and I won't believe he wouldn't have seen it through if he could. Not to my dying day will I believe that...."

Lady Harman reflected. "But couldn't he have got work again--as a baker?"

"It's hard after you've had a shop. You see all the younger men've come on. They know the new ways. And a man who's had a shop and failed, he's lost heart. And these stores setting up make everything drivinger. They do things a different way. They make it harder for everyone."

Both Lady Harman and Susan Burnet reflected in silence for a few seconds

upon the International Stores. The sewing woman was the first to speak.

"Things like that," she said, "didn't ought to be. One shop didn't ought to be allowed to set out to ruin another. It isn't fair trading, it's a sort of murder. It oughtn't to be allowed. How was father to know?..."

"There's got to be competition," said Lady Harman.

"I don't call that competition," said Susan Burnet.

"But,--I suppose they give people cheaper bread."

"They do for a time. Then when they've killed you they do what they like.... Luke--he's one of those who'll say anything--well, he used to say it was a regular Monopoly. But it's hard on people who've set out to live honest and respectable and bring up a family plain and decent to be pushed out of the way like that."

"I suppose it is," said Lady Harman.

"What was father to do?" said Susan, and turned to Sir Isaac's armchair from which this discourse had distracted her.

And then suddenly, in a voice thick with rage, she burst out: "And then Alice must needs go and take their money. That's what sticks in my throat."

Still on her knees she faced about to Lady Harman.

"Alice goes into one of their Ho'burn branches as a waitress, do what I could to prevent her. It makes one mad to think of it. Time after time I've said to her, 'Alice,' I've said, 'sooner than touch their dirty money I'd starve in the street.' And she goes! She says it's all nonsense of me to bear a spite. Laughs at me! 'Alice,' I told her, 'it's a wonder the spirit of poor father don't rise up against you.' And she laughs. Calls that bearing a spite.... Of course she was little when it happened. She can't remember, not as I remember...."

Lady Harman reflected for a time. "I suppose you don't know," she began, addressing Susan's industrious back; "you don't know who--who owns these International Stores?"

"I suppose it's some company," said Susan. "I don't see that it lets them off--being in a company."

§8

We have done much in the last few years to destroy the severe limitations of Victorian delicacy, and all of us, from princesses and prime-ministers' wives downward, talk of topics that would have been considered quite gravely improper in the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, some topics have, if anything, become more indelicate than they were, and this is especially true of the discussion of income, of any discussion that tends, however remotely, to inquire, Who is it at the base of everything who really pays in blood and muscle and involuntary submissions for your freedom and magnificence? This, indeed, is almost the ultimate surviving indecency. So that it was with considerable private shame and discomfort that Lady Harman pursued even in her privacy the train of thought that Susan Burnet had set going. It had been conveyed into her mind long ago, and it had settled down there and grown into a sort of security, that the International Bread and Cake Stores were a very important contribution to Progress, and that Sir Isaac, outside the gates of his home, was a very useful and beneficial personage, and richly meriting a baronetcy. She hadn't particularly analyzed this persuasion, but she supposed him engaged in a kind of daily repetition, but upon modern scientific lines, of the miracle of the loaves and fishes, feeding a great multitude that would otherwise have gone hungry. She knew, too, from the advertisements that flowered about her path through life, that this bread in question was exceptionally clean and hygienic; whole front pages of the Daily Messenger, headed the "Fauna of Small Bakehouses," and adorned with a bordering of Blatta orientalis, the common cockroach, had taught her that, and she knew that Sir Isaac's passion for purity had also led to the Old Country Gazette's spirited and successful campaign for a non-party measure securing additional bakehouse regulation and inspection. And her impression had been that the growing and developing refreshment side of the concern was almost a public charity; Sir Isaac

gave, he said, a larger, heavier scone, a bigger pat of butter, a more elegant teapot, ham more finely cut and less questionable pork-pies than any other system of syndicated tea-shops. She supposed that whenever he sat late at night going over schemes and papers, or when he went off for days together to Cardiff or Glasgow or Dublin, or such-like centres, or when he became preoccupied at dinner and whistled thoughtfully through his teeth, he was planning to increase the amount or diminish the cost of tea and cocoa-drenched farinaceous food in the stomachs of that section of our national adolescence which goes out daily into the streets of our great cities to be fed. And she knew his vans and catering were indispensable to the British Army upon its manoeuvres....

Now the smashing up of the Burnet family by the International Stores was disagreeably not in the picture of these suppositions. And the remarkable thing is that this one little tragedy wouldn't for a moment allow itself to be regarded as an exceptional accident in an otherwise fair vast development. It remained obstinately a specimen--of the other side of the great syndication.

It was just as if she had been doubting subconsciously all along.... In the silence of the night she lay awake and tried to make herself believe that the Burnet case was just a unique overlooked disaster, that it needed only to come to Sir Isaac's attention to be met by the fullest reparation....

After all she did not bring it to Sir Isaac's attention.

But one morning, while this phase of new doubts was still lively in her mind, Sir Isaac told her he was going down to Brighton, and then along the coast road in a car to Portsmouth, to pay a few surprise visits, and see how the machine was working. He would be away a night, an unusual breach in his habits.

"Are you thinking of any new branches, Isaac?"

"I may have a look at Arundel."

"Isaac." She paused to frame her question carefully. "I suppose there are some shops at Arundel now."

"I've got to see to that."

"If you open----I suppose the old shops get hurt. What becomes of the people if they do get hurt?"

"That's their look-out," said Sir Isaac.

"Isn't it bad for them?"

"Progress is Progress, Elly."

"It is bad for them. I suppose----Wouldn't it be sometimes kinder if you took over the old shop--made a sort of partner of him, or something?"

Sir Isaac shook his head. "I want younger men," he said. "You can't get a move on the older hands."

"But, then, it's rather bad----I suppose these little men you shut up,--some of them must have families."

"You're theorizing a bit this morning, Elly," said Sir Isaac, looking up over his coffee cup.

"I've been thinking--about these little people."

"Someone's been talking to you about my shops," said Sir Isaac, and stuck out an index finger. "If that's Georgina----"

"It isn't Georgina," said Lady Harman, but she had it very clear in her mind that she must not say who it was.

"You can't make a business without squeezing somebody," said Sir Isaac. "It's easy enough to make a row about any concern that grows a bit. Some people would like to have every business tied down to a maximum turnover and so much a year profit. I dare say you've been hearing of these articles in the London Lion. Pretty stuff it is, too. This fuss about

the little shopkeepers; that's a new racket. I've had all that row about the waitresses before, and the yarn about the Normandy eggs, and all that, but I don't see that you need go reading it against me, and bringing it up at the breakfast-table. A business is a business, it isn't a charity, and I'd like to know where you and I would be if we didn't run the concern on business lines.... Why, that London Lion fellow came to me with the first two of those articles before the thing began. I could have had the whole thing stopped if I liked, if I'd chosen to take the back page of his beastly cover. That shows the stuff the whole thing is made of. That shows you. Why!--he's just a blackmailer, that's what he is. Much he cares for my waitresses if he can get the dibs. Little shopkeepers, indeed! I know 'em! Nice martyrs they are! There isn't one wouldn't skin all the others if he got half a chance...."

Sir Isaac gave way to an extraordinary fit of nagging anger. He got up and stood upon the hearthrug to deliver his soul the better. It was an altogether unexpected and illuminating outbreak. He was flushed with guilt. The more angry and eloquent he became, the more profoundly thoughtful grew the attentive lady at the head of his table....

When at last Sir Isaac had gone off in the car to Victoria, Lady Harman rang for Snagsby. "Isn't there a paper," she asked, "called the London Lion?"

"It isn't one I think your ladyship would like," said Snagsby, gently

but firmly.

"I know. But I want to see it. I want copies of all the issues in which there have been articles upon the International Stores."

"They're thoroughly volgar, me lady," said Snagsby, with a large dissuasive smile.

"I want you to go out into London and get them now."

Snagsby hesitated and went. Within five minutes he reappeared with a handful of buff-covered papers.

"There 'appened to be copies in the pantry, me lady," he said. "We can't imagine 'ow they got there; someone must have brought them in, but 'ere they are quite at your service, me lady." He paused for a discreet moment. Something indescribably confidential came into his manner. "I doubt if Sir Isaac will quite like to 'ave them left about, me lady--after you done with them."

She was in a mood of discovery. She sat in the room that was all furnished in pink (her favourite colour) and read a bitter, malicious, coarsely written and yet insidiously credible account of her husband's business methods. Something within herself seemed to answer, "But didn't you know this all along?" That large conviction that her wealth and position were but the culmination of a great and honourable social

service, a conviction that had been her tacit comfort during much distasteful loyalty seemed to shrivel and fade. No doubt the writer was a thwarted blackmailer; even her accustomed mind could distinguish a twang of some such vicious quality in his sentences; but that did not alter the realities he exhibited and exaggerated. There was a description of how Sir Isaac pounced on his managers that was manifestly derived from a manager he had dismissed. It was dreadfully like him. Convincingly like him. There was a statement of the wages he paid his girl assistants and long extracts from his codes of rules and schedules of fines....

When she put down the paper she was suddenly afflicted by a vivid vision of Susan Burnet's father, losing heart and not knowing what to do. She had an unreasonable feeling that Susan Burnet's father must have been a small, kindly, furry, bunnyish, little man. Of course there had to be progress and the survival of the fittest. She found herself weighing what she imagined Susan Burnet's father to be like, against the ferrety face, stooping shoulders and scheming whistle of Sir Isaac.

There were times now when she saw her husband with an extreme distinctness.

§9

As this cold and bracing realization that all was not right with her

position, with Sir Isaac's business procedure and the world generally, took possession of Lady Harman's thoughts there came also with it and arising out of it quite a series of new moods and dispositions. At times she was very full of the desire "to do something," something that would, as it were, satisfy and assuage this growing uneasiness of responsibility in her mind. At times her consuming wish was not to assuage but escape from this urgency. It worried her and made her feel helpless, and she wanted beyond anything else to get back to that child's world where all experiences are adventurous and everything is finally right. She felt, I think, that it was a little unfair to her that this something within her should be calling upon her to take all sorts of things gravely--hadn't she been a good wife and brought four children into the world...?

I am setting down here as clearly as possible what wasn't by any means clear in Lady Harman's mind. I am giving you side by side phases that never came side by side in her thoughts but which followed and ousted and obliterated one another. She had moods of triviality. She had moods of magnificence. She had moods of intense secret hostility to her urgent little husband, and moods of genial tolerance for everything there was in her life. She had moods, and don't we all have moods?--of scepticism and cynicism, much profounder than the conventions and limitations of novel-writing permit us to tell here. And for hardly any of these moods had she terms and recognitions....

It isn't a natural thing to keep on worrying about the morality of

one's material prosperity. These are proclivities superinduced by modern conditions of the conscience. There is a natural resistance in every healthy human being to such distressful heart-searchings. Strong instincts battled in Lady Harman against this intermittent sense of responsibility that was beginning to worry her. An immense lot of her was for simply running away from these troublesome considerations, for covering herself up from them, for distraction.

And about this time she happened upon "Elizabeth and her German Garden," and was very greatly delighted and stimulated by that little sister of Montaigne. She was charmed by the book's fresh gaiety, by its gallant resolve to set off all the good things there are in this world, the sunshine and flowers and laughter, against the limitations and thwartings and disappointments of life. For a time it seemed to her that these brave consolations were solutions, and she was stirred by an imitative passion. How stupid had she not been to let life and Sir Isaac overcome her! She felt that she must make herself like Elizabeth, exactly like Elizabeth; she tried forthwith, and a certain difficulty she found, a certain deadness, she ascribed to the square modernity of her house and something in the Putney air. The house was too large, it dominated the garden and controlled her. She felt she must get away to some place that was chiefly exterior, in the sunshine, far from towns and struggling, straining, angry and despairing humanity, from syndicated shops and all the embarrassing challenges of life. Somehow there it would be possible to keep Sir Isaac at arm's length; and the ghost of Susan Burnet's father could be left behind to haunt the square

rooms of the London house. And there she would live, horticultural, bookish, whimsical, witty, defiant, happily careless.

And it was this particular conception of evasion that had set her careering about the countryside in her car, looking for conceivable houses of refuge from this dark novelty of social and personal care, and that had driven her into the low long room of Black Strand and the presence of Mr. Brumley.

Of what ensued and the appearance and influence of Lady Beach-Mandarin and how it led among other things to a lunch invitation from that lady the reader has already been informed.