CHAPTER THE SECOND.

THE GIANT LOVERS.

I.

Now it chanced in the days when Caterham was campaigning against the Boom-children before the General Election that was--amidst the most tragic and terrible circumstances--to bring him into power, that the giant Princess, that Serene Highness whose early nutrition had played so great a part in the brilliant career of Doctor Winkles, had come from the kingdom of her father to England, on an occasion that was deemed important. She was affianced for reasons of state to a certain Prince--and the wedding was to be made an event of international significance. There had arisen mysterious delays. Rumour and Imagination collaborated in the story and many things were said. There were suggestions of a recalcitrant Prince who declared he would not be made to look like a fool--at least to this extent. People sympathised with him. That is the most significant aspect of the affair.

Now it may seem a strange thing, but it is a fact that the giant Princess, when she came to England, knew of no other giants whatever. She had lived in a world where tact is almost a passion and reservations the air of one's life. They had kept the thing from her; they had hedged her about from sight or suspicion of any gigantic form, until her

appointed coming to England was due. Until she met young Redwood she had no inkling that there was such a thing as another giant in the world.

In the kingdom of the father of the Princess there were wild wastes of upland and mountains where she had been accustomed to roam freely. She loved the sunrise and the sunset and all the great drama of the open heavens more than anything else in the world, but among a people at once so democratic and so vehemently loyal as the English her freedom was much restricted. People came in brakes, in excursion trains, in organised multitudes to see her; they would cycle long distances to stare at her, and it was necessary to rise betimes if she would walk in peace. It was still near the dawn that morning when young Redwood came upon her.

The Great Park near the Palace where she lodged stretched, for a score of miles and more, west and south of the western palace gates. The chestnut trees of its avenues reached high above her head. Each one as she passed it seemed to proffer a more abundant wealth of blossom. For a time she was content with sight and scent, but at last she was won over by these offers, and set herself so busily to choose and pick that she did not perceive young Redwood until he was close upon her.

She moved among the chestnut trees, with the destined lover drawing near to her, unanticipated, unsuspected. She thrust her hands in among the branches, breaking them and gathering them. She was alone in the world. Then---

She looked up, and in that moment she was mated.

We must needs put our imaginations to his stature to see the beauty he saw. That unapproachable greatness that prevents our immediate sympathy with her did not exist for him. There she stood, a gracious girl, the first created being that had ever seemed a mate for him, light and slender, lightly clad, the fresh breeze of the dawn moulding the subtly folding robe upon her against the soft strong lines of her form, and with a great mass of blossoming chestnut branches in her hands. The collar of her robe opened to show the whiteness of her neck and a soft shadowed roundness that passed out of sight towards her shoulders. The breeze had stolen a strand or so of her hair too, and strained its red-tipped brown across her cheek. Her eyes were open blue, and her lips rested always in the promise of a smile as she reached among the branches.

She turned upon him with a start, saw him, and for a space they regarded one another. For her, the sight of him was so amazing, so incredible, as to be, for some moments at least, terrible. He came to her with the shock of a supernatural apparition; he broke all the established law of her world. He was a youth of one-and-twenty then, slenderly built, with his father's darkness and his father's gravity. He was clad in a sober soft brown leather, close-fitting easy garments, and in brown hose, that shaped him bravely. His head went uncovered in all weathers. They stood regarding one another--she incredulously amazed, and he with his heart

beating fast. It was a moment without a prelude, the cardinal meeting of their lives.

For him there was less surprise. He had been seeking her, and yet his heart beat fast. He came towards her, slowly, with his eyes upon her face.

"You are the Princess," he said. "My father has told me. You are the Princess who was given the Food of the Gods."

"I am the Princess--yes," she said, with eyes of wonder. "But--what are you?"

"I am the son of the man who made the Food of the Gods."

"The Food of the Gods!"

"Yes, the Food of the Gods."

"But--"

Her face expressed infinite perplexity.

"What? I don't understand. The Food of the Gods?"

"You have not heard?"

"The Food of the Gods! No!"

She found herself trembling violently. The colour left her face. "I did not know," she said. "Do you mean--?"

He waited for her.

"Do you mean there are other--giants?"

He repeated, "Did you not know?"

And she answered, with the growing amazement of realisation, "No!"

The whole world and all the meaning of the world was changing for her. A branch of chestnut slipped from her hand. "Do you mean to say," she repeated stupidly, "that there are other giants in the world? That some food--?"

He caught her amazement.

"You know nothing?" he cried. "You have never heard of us? You, whom the Food has made akin to us!"

There was terror still in the eyes that stared at him. Her hand rose towards her throat and fell again. She whispered, "No."

It seemed to her that she must weep or faint. Then in a moment she had rule over herself and she was speaking and thinking clearly. "All this has been kept from me," she said. "It is like a dream. I have dreamt--have dreamt such things. But waking--No. Tell me! Tell me! What are you? What is this Food of the Gods? Tell me slowly--and clearly. Why have they kept it from me, that I am not alone?"

II.

"Tell me," she said, and young Redwood, tremulous and excited, set himself to tell her--it was poor and broken telling for a time--of the Food of the Gods and the giant children who were scattered over the world.

You must figure them both, flushed and startled in their bearing; getting at one another's meaning through endless half-heard, half-spoken phrases, repeating, making perplexing breaks and new departures--a wonderful talk, in which she awakened from the ignorance of all her life. And very slowly it became clear to her that she was no exception to the order of mankind, but one of a scattered brotherhood, who had all eaten the Food and grown for ever out of the little limits of the folk beneath their feet. Young Redwood spoke of his father, of Cossar, of the Brothers scattered throughout the country, of the great dawn of wider meaning that had come at last into the history of the world. "We are in

the beginning of a beginning," he said; "this world of theirs is only the prelude to the world the Food will make.

"My father believes--and I also believe--that a time will come when littleness will have passed altogether out of the world of man,--when giants shall go freely about this earth--their earth--doing continually greater and more splendid things. But that--that is to come. We are not even the first generation of that--we are the first experiments."

"And of these things," she said, "I knew nothing!"

"There are times when it seems to me almost as if we had come too soon. Some one, I suppose, had to come first. But the world was all unprepared for our coming and for the coming of all the lesser great things that drew their greatness from the Food. There have been blunders; there have been conflicts. The little people hate our kind....

"They are hard towards us because they are so little.... And because our feet are heavy on the things that make their lives. But at any rate they hate us now; they will have none of us--only if we could shrink back to the common size of them would they begin to forgive....

"They are happy in houses that are prison cells to us; their cities are too small for us; we go in misery along their narrow ways; we cannot worship in their churches....

"We see over their walls and over their protections; we look inadvertently into their upper windows; we look over their customs; their laws are no more than a net about our feet....

"Every time we stumble we hear them shouting; every time we blunder against their limits or stretch out to any spacious act....

"Our easy paces are wild flights to them, and all they deem great and wonderful no more than dolls' pyramids to us. Their pettiness of method and appliance and imagination hampers and defeats our powers. There are no machines to the power of our hands, no helps to fit our needs. They hold our greatness in servitude by a thousand invisible bands. We are stronger, man for man, a hundred times, but we are disarmed; our very greatness makes us debtors; they claim the land we stand upon; they tax our ampler need of food and shelter, and for all these things we must toil with the tools these dwarfs can make us--and to satisfy their dwarfish fancies ...

"They pen us in, in every way. Even to live one must cross their boundaries. Even to meet you here to-day I have passed a limit. All that is reasonable and desirable in life they make out of bounds for us. We may not go into the towns; we may not cross the bridges; we may not step on their ploughed fields or into the harbours of the game they kill. I am cut off now from all our Brethren except the three sons of Cossar, and even that way the passage narrows day by day. One could think they sought occasion against us to do some more evil thing ..."

"But we are strong," she said.

"We should be strong--yes. We feel, all of us--you too I know must feel--that we have power, power to do great things, power insurgent in us. But before we can do anything--"

He flung out a hand that seemed to sweep away a world.

"Though I thought I was alone in the world," she said, after a pause, "I have thought of these things. They have taught me always that strength was almost a sin, that it was better to be little than great, that all true religion was to shelter the weak and little, encourage the weak and little, help them to multiply and multiply until at last they crawled over one another, to sacrifice all our strength in their cause. But ... always I have doubted the thing they taught."

"This life," he said, "these bodies of ours, are not for dying."

"No."

"Nor to live in futility. But if we would not do that, it is already plain to all our Brethren a conflict must come. I know not what bitterness of conflict must presently come, before the little folks will suffer us to live as we need to live. All the Brethren have thought of that. Cossar, of whom I told you: he too has thought of that."

"They are very little and weak."

"In their way. But you know all the means of death are in their hands, and made for their hands. For hundreds of thousands of years these little people, whose world we invade, have been learning how to kill one another. They are very able at that. They are able in many ways. And besides, they can deceive and change suddenly.... I do not know.... There comes a conflict. You--you perhaps are different from us. For us, assuredly, the conflict comes.... The thing they call War. We know it. In a way we prepare for it. But you know--those little people!--we do not know how to kill, at least we do not want to kill--"

"Look," she interrupted, and he heard a yelping horn.

He turned at the direction of her eyes, and found a bright yellow motor car, with dark goggled driver and fur-clad passengers, whooping, throbbing, and buzzing resentfully at his heel. He moved his foot, and the mechanism, with three angry snorts, resumed its fussy way towards the town. "Filling up the roadway!" floated up to him.

Then some one said, "Look! Did you see? There is the monster Princess over beyond the trees!" and all their goggled faces came round to stare.

"I say," said another. "That won't do ..."

"All this," she said, "is more amazing than I can tell."

"That they should not have told you," he said, and left his sentence incomplete.

"Until you came upon me, I had lived in a world where I was great--alone. I had made myself a life--for that. I had thought I was the victim of some strange freak of nature. And now my world has crumbled down, in half an hour, and I see another world, other conditions, wider possibilities--fellowship--"

"Fellowship," he answered.

"I want you to tell me more yet, and much more," she said. "You know this passes through my mind like a tale that is told. You even ... In a day perhaps, or after several days, I shall believe in you. Now--Now I am dreaming.... Listen!"

The first stroke of a clock above the palace offices far away had penetrated to them. Each counted mechanically "Seven."

"This," she said, "should be the hour of my return. They will be taking the bowl of my coffee into the hall where I sleep. The little officials and servants--you cannot dream how grave they are--will be stirring about their little duties."

"They will wonder ... But I want to talk to you."

She thought. "But I want to think too. I want now to think alone, and think out this change in things, think away the old solitude, and think you and those others into my world.... I shall go. I shall go back to-day to my place in the castle, and to-morrow, as the dawn comes, I shall come again--here."

"I shall be here waiting for you."

"All day I shall dream and dream of this new world you have given me. Even now, I can scarcely believe--"

She took a step back and surveyed him from the feet to the face. Their eyes met and locked for a moment.

"Yes," she said, with a little laugh that was half a sob. "You are real. But it is very wonderful! Do you think--indeed--? Suppose to-morrow I come and find you--a pigmy like the others... Yes, I must think. And so for to-day--as the little people do--"

She held out her hand, and for the first time they touched one another. Their hands clasped firmly and their eyes met again.

"Good-bye," she said, "for to-day. Good-bye! Good-bye, Brother Giant!"

He hesitated with some unspoken thing, and at last he answered her simply, "Good-bye."

For a space they held each other's hands, studying each the other's face. And many times after they had parted, she looked back half doubtfully at him, standing still in the place where they had met....

She walked into her apartments across the great yard of the Palace like one who walks in a dream, with a vast branch of chestnut trailing from her hand.

III.

These two met altogether fourteen times before the beginning of the end. They met in the Great Park or on the heights and among the gorges of the rusty-roaded, heathery moorland, set with dusky pine-woods, that stretched to the south-west. Twice they met in the great avenue of chestnuts, and five times near the broad ornamental water the king, her great-grandfather, had made. There was a place where a great trim lawn, set with tall conifers, sloped graciously to the water's edge, and there she would sit, and he would lie at her knees and look up in her face and talk, telling of all the things that had been, and of the work his father had set before him, and of the great and spacious dream of what the giant people should one day be. Commonly they met in the early dawn, but once they met there in the afternoon, and found presently a

multitude of peering eavesdroppers about them, cyclists, pedestrians, peeping from the bushes, rustling (as sparrows will rustle about one in the London parks) amidst the dead leaves in the woods behind, gliding down the lake in boats towards a point of view, trying to get nearer to them and hear.

It was the first hint that offered of the enormous interest the countryside was taking in their meetings. And once--it was the seventh time, and it precipitated the scandal--they met out upon the breezy moorland under a clear moonlight, and talked in whispers there, for the night was warm and still.

Very soon they had passed from the realisation that in them and through them a new world of giantry shaped itself in the earth, from the contemplation of the great struggle between big and little, in which they were clearly destined to participate, to interests at once more personal and more spacious. Each time they met and talked and looked on one another, it crept a little more out of their subconscious being towards recognition, that something more dear and wonderful than friendship was between them, and walked between them and drew their hands together. And in a little while they came to the word itself and found themselves lovers, the Adam and Eve of a new race in the world.

They set foot side by side into the wonderful valley of love, with its deep and quiet places. The world changed about them with their changing mood, until presently it had become, as it were, a tabernacular beauty

about their meetings, and the stars were no more than flowers of light beneath the feet of their love, and the dawn and sunset the coloured hangings by the way. They ceased to be beings of flesh and blood to one another and themselves; they passed into a bodily texture of tenderness and desire. They gave it first whispers and then silence, and drew close and looked into one another's moonlit and shadowy faces under the infinite arch of the sky. And the still black pine-trees stood about them like sentinels.

The beating steps of time were hushed into silence, and it seemed to them the universe hung still. Only their hearts were audible, beating. They seemed to be living together in a world where there is no death, and indeed so it was with them then. It seemed to them that they sounded, and indeed they sounded, such hidden splendours in the very heart of things as none have ever reached before. Even for mean and little souls, love is the revelation of splendours. And these were giant lovers who had eaten the Food of the Gods ...

* * * * *

You may imagine the spreading consternation in this ordered world when it became known that the Princess who was affianced to the Prince, the Princess, Her Serene Highness! with royal blood in her veins! met,--frequently met,--the hypertrophied offspring of a common professor of chemistry, a creature of no rank, no position, no wealth, and talked to him as though there were no Kings and Princes, no order, no

reverence--nothing but Giants and Pigmies in the world, talked to him and, it was only too certain, held him as her lover.

"If those newspaper fellows get hold of it!" gasped Sir Arthur Poodle Bootlick ...

"I am told--" whispered the old Bishop of Frumps.

"New story upstairs," said the first footman, as he nibbled among the dessert things. "So far as I can make out this here giant Princess--"

"They say--" said the lady who kept the stationer's shop by the main entrance to the Palace, where the little Americans get their tickets for the State Apartments ...

And then:

"We are authorised to deny--" said "Picaroon" in Gossip.

And so the whole trouble came out.

IV.

"They say that we must part," the Princess said to her lover.

"But why?" he cried. "What new folly have these people got into their heads?"

"Do you know," she asked, "that to love me--is high treason?"

"My dear," he cried; "but does it matter? What is their right--right without a shadow of reason--and their treason and their loyalty to us?"

"You shall hear," she said, and told him of the things that had been told to her.

"It was the queerest little man who came to me with a soft, beautifully modulated voice, a softly moving little gentleman who sidled into the room like a cat and put his pretty white hand up so, whenever he had anything significant to say. He is bald, but not of course nakedly bald, and his nose and face are chubby rosy little things, and his beard is trimmed to a point in quite the loveliest way. He pretended to have emotions several times and made his eyes shine. You know he is quite a friend of the real royal family here, and he called me his dear young lady and was perfectly sympathetic even from the beginning. 'My dear young lady,' he said, 'you know--you mustn't,' several times, and then, 'You owe a duty.'"

"Where do they make such men?"

"He likes it," she said.

"But I don't see--"

"He told me serious things."

"You don't think," he said, turning on her abruptly, "that there's anything in the sort of thing he said?"

"There's something in it quite certainly," said she.

"You mean--?"

"I mean that without knowing it we have been trampling on the most sacred conceptions of the little folks. We who are royal are a class apart. We are worshipped prisoners, processional toys. We pay for worship by losing--our elementary freedom. And I was to have married that Prince--You know nothing of him though. Well, a pigmy Prince. He doesn't matter.... It seems it would have strengthened the bonds between my country and another. And this country also was to profit. Imagine it!--strengthening the bonds!"

"And now?"

"They want me to go on with it--as though there was nothing between us two."

"Nothing!"

"Yes. But that isn't all. He said--"

"Your specialist in Tact?"

"Yes. He said it would be better for you, better for all the giants, if we two--abstained from conversation. That was how he put it."

"But what can they do if we don't?"

"He said you might have your freedom."

"I!"

"He said, with a stress, 'My dear young lady, it would be better, it would be more dignified, if you parted, willingly.' That was all he said. With a stress on willingly."

"But--! What business is it of these little wretches, where we love, how we love? What have they and their world to do with us?"

"They do not think that."

"Of course," he said, "you disregard all this."

"It seems utterly foolish to me."

"That their laws should fetter us! That we, at the first spring of life, should be tripped by their old engagements, their aimless institutions! Oh--! We disregard it."

"I am yours. So far--yes."

"So far? Isn't that all?"

"But they--If they want to part us--"

"What can they do?"

"I don't know. What can they do?"

"Who cares what they can do, or what they will do? I am yours and you are mine. What is there more than that? I am yours and you are mine--for ever. Do you think I will stop for their little rules, for their little prohibitions, their scarlet boards indeed!--and keep from you?"

"Yes. But still, what can they do?"

"You mean," he said, "what are we to do?"

"Yes."

"We? We can go on."

"But if they seek to prevent us?"

He clenched his hands. He looked round as if the little people were already coming to prevent them. Then turned away from her and looked about the world. "Yes," he said. "Your question was the right one. What can they do?"

"Here in this little land," she said, and stopped.
He seemed to survey it all. "They are everywhere."

"But we might--"

"Whither?"

"We could go. We could swim the seas together. Beyond the seas--"

"I have never been beyond the seas."

"There are great and desolate mountains amidst which we should seem no more than little people, there are remote and deserted valleys, there are hidden lakes and snow-girdled uplands untrodden by the feet of men. There--"

"But to get there we must fight our way day after day through millions and millions of mankind."

"It is our only hope. In this crowded land there is no fastness, no shelter. What place is there for us among these multitudes? They who are little can hide from one another, but where are we to hide? There is no place where we could eat, no place where we could sleep. If we fled--night and day they would pursue our footsteps."

A thought came to him.

"There is one place," he said, "even in this island."

"Where?"

"The place our Brothers have made over beyond there. They have made great banks about their house, north and south and east and west; they have made deep pits and hidden places, and even now--one came over to me quite recently. He said--I did not altogether heed what he said then. But he spoke of arms. It may be--there--we should find shelter....

"For many days," he said, after a pause, "I have not seen our Brothers... Dear! I have been dreaming, I have been forgetting! The days have passed, and I have done nothing but look to see you again ... I must go to them and talk to them, and tell them of you and of all the things that hang over us. If they will help us, they can help us. Then

indeed we might hope. I do not know how strong their place is, but certainly Cossar will have made it strong. Before all this--before you came to me, I remember now--there was trouble brewing. There was an election--when all the little people settle things, by counting heads. It must be over now. There were threats against all our race--against all our race, that is, but you. I must see our Brothers. I must tell them all that has happened between us, and all that threatens now."

V.

He did not come to their next meeting until she had waited some time. They were to meet that day about midday in a great space of park that fitted into a bend of the river, and as she waited, looking ever southward under her hand, it came to her that the world was very still, that indeed it was broodingly still. And then she perceived that, spite of the lateness of the hour, her customary retinue of voluntary spies had failed her. Left and right, when she came to look, there was no one in sight, and there was never a boat upon the silver curve of the Thames. She tried to find a reason for this strange stillness in the world....

Then, a grateful sight for her, she saw young Redwood far away over a gap in the tree masses that bounded her view.

Immediately the trees hid him, and presently he was thrusting through them and in sight again. She could see there was something different,

and then she saw that he was hurrying unusually and then that he limped. He gestured to her, and she walked towards him. His face became clearer, and she saw with infinite concern that he winced at every stride.

She ran towards him, her mind full of questions and vague fear. He drew near to her and spoke without a greeting.

"Are we to part?" he panted.

"No," she answered. "Why? What is the matter?"

"But if we do not part--! It is now."

"What is the matter?"

"I do not want to part," he said. "Only--" He broke off abruptly to ask, "You will not part from me?"

She met his eyes with a steadfast look. "What has happened?" she pressed.

"Not for a time?"

"What time?"

"Years perhaps."

"Part! No!"

"You have thought?" he insisted.

"I will not part." She took his hand. "If this meant death, now, I would not let you go."

"If it meant death," he said, and she felt his grip upon her fingers.

He looked about him as if he feared to see the little people coming as he spoke. And then: "It may mean death."

"Now tell me," she said.

"They tried to stop my coming."

"How?"

"And as I came out of my workshop where I make the Food of the Gods for the Cossars to store in their camp, I found a little officer of police--a man in blue with white clean gloves--who beckoned me to stop. 'This way is closed!' said he. I thought little of that; I went round my workshop to where another road runs west, and there was another officer. 'This road is closed!' he said, and added: 'All the roads are closed!'"

"And then?"

"I argued with him a little. 'They are public roads!' I said.

"'That's it,' said he. 'You spoil them for the public.'

"'Very well,' said I, 'I'll take the fields,' and then, up leapt others from behind a hedge and said, 'These fields are private.'

"'Curse your public and private,' I said, 'I'm going to my Princess,' and I stooped down and picked him up very gently--kicking and shouting--and put him out of my way. In a minute all the fields about me seemed alive with running men. I saw one on horseback galloping beside me and reading something as he rode--shouting it. He finished and turned and galloped away from me--head down. I couldn't make it out. And then behind me I heard the crack of guns."

"Guns!"

"Guns--just as they shoot at the rats. The bullets came through the air with a sound like things tearing: one stung me in the leg."

"And you?"

"Came on to you here and left them shouting and running and shooting behind me. And now--"

"Now?"

"It is only the beginning. They mean that we shall part. Even now they are coming after me."

"We will not."

"No. But if we will not part--then you must come with me to our Brothers."

"Which way?" she said.

"To the east. Yonder is the way my pursuers will be coming. This then is the way we must go. Along this avenue of trees. Let me go first, so that if they are waiting--"

He made a stride, but she had seized his arm.

"No," cried she. "I come close to you, holding you. Perhaps I am royal, perhaps I am sacred. If I hold you--Would God we could fly with my arms about you!--it may be, they will not shoot at you--"

She clasped his shoulder and seized his hand as she spoke; she pressed herself nearer to him. "It may be they will not shoot you," she repeated, and with a sudden passion of tenderness he took her into his

arms and kissed her cheek. For a space he held her.

"Even if it is death," she whispered.

She put her hands about his neck and lifted her face to his.

"Dearest, kiss me once more."

He drew her to him. Silently they kissed one another on the lips, and for another moment clung to one another. Then hand in hand, and she striving always to keep her body near to his, they set forward if haply they might reach the camp of refuge the sons of Cossar had made, before the pursuit of the little people overtook them.

And as they crossed the great spaces of the park behind the castle there came horsemen galloping out from among the trees and vainly seeking to keep pace with their giant strides. And presently ahead of them were houses, and men with guns running out of the houses. At the sight of that, though he sought to go on and was even disposed to fight and push through, she made him turn aside towards the south.

As they fled a bullet whipped by them overhead.