

Lunch was in the great dining-room. There was a big table and two smaller ones; we sat down anyhow, but the first comers had grouped themselves about Lady Ladislaw and Evesham and Justin and Mary in a central orb, and I had to drift perforce to one of the satellites. I secured a seat whence I could get a glimpse ever and again over Justin's assiduous shoulders of a delicate profile, and I found myself immediately engaged in answering the innumerable impossible questions of Lady Viping, the widow of terrible old Sir Joshua, that devastating divorce court judge who didn't believe in divorces. His domestic confidences had I think corrupted her mind altogether. She cared for nothing but evidence. She was a rustling, incessant, sandy, peering woman with a lorgnette and rapid, confidential lispings, and she wanted to know who everybody was and how they were related. This kept us turning towards the other tables--and when my information failed she would call upon Sir Godfrey Klavier, who was explaining, rather testily on account of her interruptions, to Philip Christian and a little lady in black and the elder Fawney girl just why he didn't believe Lady Ladislaw's new golf course would succeed. There were two or three other casual people at our table; one of the Roden girls, a young guardsman and, I think, some other man whom I don't clearly remember.

"And so that's the great Mr. Justin," rustled Lady Viping and stared across me.

(I saw Evesham, leaning rather over the table to point some remark at Mary, and noted her lips part to reply.)

"What is the word?" insisted Lady Viping like a fly in my ear.

I turned on her guiltily.

"Whether it's brachy," said Lady Viping, "or whether it's dolly--I can never remember?"

I guessed she was talking of Justin's head. "Oh!--brachycephalic," I said.

I had lost Mary's answer.

"They say he's a woman hater," said Lady Viping. "It hardly looks like it now, does it?"

"Who?" I asked. "What?--oh!--Justin."

"The great financial cannibal. Suppose she turned him into a philanthropist! Stranger things have happened. Look!--now. The man's face is positively tender."

I hated looking, and I could not help but look. It was as if this detestable old woman was dragging me down and down, down far below all

dignity to her own level of a peeping observer. Justin was saying something to Mary in an undertone, something that made her glance up swiftly and at me before she answered, and there I was with my head side by side with those quivering dyed curls, that flighty black bonnet, that remorseless observant lorgnette. I could have sworn aloud at the hopeless indignity of my pose.

I saw Mary color quickly before I looked away.

"Charming, isn't she?" said Lady Viping, and I discovered those infernal glasses were for a moment honoring me. They shut with a click. "Ham," said Lady Viping. "I told him no ham--and now I remember--I like ham. Or rather I like spinach. I forgot the spinach. One has the ham for the spinach,--don't you think? Yes,--tell him. She's a perfect Dresden ornament, Mr. Stratton. She's adorable ... (lorgnette and search for fresh topics). Who is the dark lady with the slight moustache--sitting there next to Guy? Sir Godfrey, who is the dark lady? No, I don't mean Mary Fitton. Over there! Mrs. Roperstone. Ooh. The Mrs. Roperstone. (Renewed lorgnette and click.) Yes--ham. With spinach. A lot of spinach. There's Mr. Evesham laughing again. He's greatly amused. Unusual for him to laugh twice. At least, aloud. (Rustle and adjustment of lorgnette.) Mr. Stratton, don't you think?--exactly like a little shepherdess. Only I can't say I think Mr. Justin is like a shepherd. On the whole, more like a large cloisonné jar. Now Guy would do. As a pair they're beautiful. Pity they're brother and sister. Curious how that boy manages to be big and yet delicate. H'm. Mixed mantel ornaments. Sir Godfrey,

how old is Mrs. Roperstone?... You never know on principle. I think I shall make Mr. Stratton guess. What do you think, Mr. Stratton?... You never guess on principle! Well, we're all very high principled. (Fresh exploratory movements of the lorgnette.) Mr. Stratton, tell me; is that little peaked man near Lady Ladislaw Mr. Roperstone? I thought as much!"

All this chatter is mixed up in my mind with an unusual sense of hovering attentive menservants, who seemed all of them to my heated imagination to be watching me (and particularly one clean-shaven, reddish-haired, full-faced young man) lest I looked too much at the Lady Mary Christian. Of course they were merely watching our plates and glasses, but my nerves and temper were now in such a state that if my man went off to the buffet to get Sir Godfrey the pickled walnuts, I fancied he went to report the progress of my infatuation, and if a strange face appeared with the cider cup, that this was a new observer come to mark the revelation of my behavior. My food embarrassed me. I found hidden meanings in the talk of the Roden girl and her guardsman, and an ironical discovery in Sir Godfrey's eye....

I felt indignant with Mary. I felt she disowned me and deserted me and repudiated me, that she ought in some manner to have recognized me. I gave her no credit for her speech to me before the lunch, or her promise to measure against me again. I blinded myself to all her frank friendliness. I felt she ought not to notice Justin, ought not to answer him....

Clearly she liked those men to flatter her, she liked it....

I remember too, so that I must have noted it and felt it then as a thing perceived for the first time, the large dignity of the room, the tall windows and splendid rich curtains, the darkened Hoppners upon the walls. I noted too the quality and abundance of the table things, and there were grapes and peaches, strawberries, cherries and green almonds, piled lavishly above the waiting dessert plates with the golden knives and forks, upon a table in the sunshine of the great bay. The very sunshine filtered through the tall narrow panes from the great chestnut trees without, seemed of a different quality from the common light of day....

I felt like a poor relation. I sympathized with Anarchists. We had come out of the Park now finally, both Mary and I--into this....

"Mr. Stratton I am sure agrees with me."

For a time I had been marooned conversationally, and Lady Viping had engaged Sir Godfrey. Evidently he was refractory and she was back at me.

"Look at it now in profile," she said, and directed me once more to that unendurable grouping. Justin again!

"It's a heavy face," I said.

"It's a powerful face. I wouldn't care anyhow to be up against it--as people say." And the lorgnette shut with a click. "What is this? Peaches!--Yes, and give me some cream." ...

I hovered long for that measuring I had been promised on the steps, but either Mary had forgotten or she deemed it wiser to forget.