

SUSAN

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Title: Susan

Author: Ernest Oldmeadow

Release Date: March 05, 2015 [eBook #48418]

Language: English

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Produced by Al Haines.

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Susan

SUSAN

By
ERNEST OLDMEADOW

Frontispiece by
FRANK HAVILAND

NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

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LA VILLA DE LA MER

BOOK I
TRAXELBY

BOOK I

Wednesday, September 5, 1906.

What on earth is the matter with Susan? Up to yesterday morning I have hardly had to find fault with her more than twice or thrice in four years. Yet, since last night, she has richly deserved a dozen sharp scoldings at the very least.

After all, poor Grandmamma must have been right. "My pet," grannie used to say whenever I told her that Susan was a treasure of pure gold; "My pet, I have had thirty or forty treasures myself, and I give you my word that even the best of them are only plated. Off the worst ones the plating wears soon. Off the better ones it wears late. But wait long enough, and sooner or later you shall see the copper or the pewter."

No doubt I ought to be grateful that Susan has lasted so well. All the same, it is maddening that the gilding should choose to come off just as I'm on the eve of starting for Sainte Véronique-sur-mer. Susan says everything is packed: but I can't risk it. Probably she has filled a trunk with opera-glasses and fans, and forgotten towels and soap. First thing in the morning she must unpack, and we must both go through everything with a list. But it's tiresome beyond words.

Thursday, September 6.

Susan is worse than ever. Instead of toast, she brought me this morning two chunks of bread hardly browned, and, instead of tea, a tepid potion as black as night. I have asked her if she is ill, but she says she isn't. And, certainly, I never saw her look better in her life. The worst of it is that she keeps coming and going with such an air of—how shall I describe it? Not insolence: not even indifference. It is hard to find the word. When I blame her for some blunder, she looks, for the moment, duly meek and sorry; and when I send her off on some

errand she departs as if she really wants to do her best in her old way. And in less than half an hour I am scolding her again.

On one point I've made up my mind. No starting for Sainte Véronique till Susan's either mended or ended. I'll wire Dupoirier not to expect us till Monday. Gibson shall take the telegram to the village at once. And, if there's no change for the better before post-time to-night, I'll write to Alice and borrow that pale little slip of a French maid of hers for the time I shall be in Sainte Véronique. Alice said something last week about sending her back to France for a change. Perhaps I'll take Susan too. Or perhaps I'll let her go to her friends till I come home again. She's been too good a girl all these years for me to part with her just because of what may be no more than a passing slackness and staleness. Besides, Susan is the only creature I really like to have about me. She is as wholesome and sweet as country cream and rosy-cheeked apples.

The word I couldn't think of has flashed upon me all of a sudden. It's a simple enough word and an obvious; and it would have come to me at once if I had had the grace to remember sooner that Susan, after all, is a human being.

Susan is merely preoccupied. I ought to have divined it hours ago, if I hadn't been so disgustingly devoted to my own right worshipful ease and comfort. I've never thought about it before: but, without doubt, Susan's cousins and uncles and aunts are as much to Susan as my own cousins and uncles and aunts are to me. Indeed, I hope and expect that they are vastly more. I wonder what is wrong? Is Susan's cousin going to be married? Or has her aunt joined the Salvation Army? Or has her uncle tumbled off a hayrick? Perhaps it's something far worse. Anyhow, the poor soul must think me adorably sympathetic when I reward her admirable reticence by shrewing her for every insignificant lapse. And, after the loving fidelity with which she has served me and cherished me so much over and above the best-paid hireling's duty, she must find me most consolingly grateful.

I will make her tell me. Probably it is something wherein I can give a bit of practical help.

Later.

I've tackled Susan.

She didn't make it too easy. While she was brushing my hair, I said abruptly, but quite cordially:

"By the way, Susan, I sha'n't go to Sainte Véronique to-night. Gibson's gone to the village with a telegram. I've told Monsieur Dupoirier to meet me on Monday."

By peeping through my hair I could see Susan's face in the glass, although she couldn't see mine.

"Very well, Miss Gertrude," Susan answered.

She called me "Miss Gertrude" in precisely the tone she has always used ever since she first came to Traxelby, before Alice was married and when Grandmamma was still alive; and she went on brushing my hair without a pause. But I noticed that her cheeks, reflected in the glass, first paled and then flamed. I flung my hair from my eyes and looked up at Susan without ado.

"Susan," I said, "you are unhappy about something. You ought to have told me. Perhaps I could have helped you. In any case I would have been less exacting in my wants and less sharp in my complaints."

"Thank you, Miss," said Susan unsarcastically and thankfully. But she only went on brushing my hair.

"You are unhappy?" I asked again.

"Oh, no, Miss, no," Susan answered quickly and warmly. And she brushed my hair harder than ever.

Looking at her once more in the glass, I saw that she was speaking the truth. Her face was still the playground of contending emotions, but, through her pretty, blue eyes, her spirit gazed out radiantly at the genial tourney. Altogether, Susan looked bewitching. In her country print, and with her yellow hair and rosy-red cheeks, she was just the sort of sweet, shy, rustic English beauty to fall head over ears in love with at first sight. The truth blazed upon me like a flash of lightning.

It was a few moments before I found my tongue. That some young man or other should begin to plague my bright-eyed Susan was the most natural thing in the world; and yet I had no more taken such a thing into my calculations than I had speculated as to what I should do if a burglar broke in by night and walked off with my silver combs and brushes. At last I said, rather lamely and stiffly:

"At any rate, Susan, you've got something on your mind."

Susan did not reply.

"What is it?" I asked. "Or rather, who is it?"

Susan's breath came and went more quickly. But still she did not answer.

I turned over the possibilities in my mind, and then put a question point-blank.

"Is it Gibson?"

"Oh, no, Miss, not Gibson." Her response was prompt, decisive, almost reproachful.

"I'm rather sorry," I said. "Gibson's a thoroughly decent, steady young fellow, and he will get on. I hope it's nobody worse than Gibson."

"Oh, no, Miss," said Susan swiftly and softly, "Not worse than Gibson."

As she did not offer the swain's name, or an account of his person, or any further information whatsoever, I sat dumb and began to feel a bit sulky. Apart from my personal loss of the best maid a woman ever had, I was aggrieved on

Susan's own account. No doubt some small farmer's son had turned her silly little head and won her unguarded little heart. And after the rude delights of a rural courtship, my neat-handed, dainty pink-and-white Susan would have to settle down for forty years to drudge among kine and swine and turnips, and, most likely, a pack of lusty and highly dislikable children. The prospect so revolted me that I decided to do my whole duty.

"Susan."

"Yes, Miss?"

"Have you told your people—your relations—about all this?"

"No, Miss."

"Why not?"

"There's only my aunt, Miss," said Susan dutifully, "and she doesn't care. I've wrote—"

"Written. Not wrote. Say written."

"Yes, Miss. I've written to her twice since Christmas, not to speak of sending a coloured post-card from Malvern, and she hasn't answered never so much as a word."

This pricked me. I had heard it before; and, knowing as I did that Susan had neither father nor mother, nor brother nor sister, I ought to have put two and two together, and deduced the fact that Susan was alone in the world. But I had not been interested or unselfish enough to work it out.

"Of course, of course," I said. "I'd forgotten. But, Susan, why have you not spoken about it to me? When I found you had no parents, didn't I tell you that if you were in any doubt or trouble you were always to come to me?"

"Yes, Miss," answered Susan as dutifully as before. And she went on brushing my hair. I got up impatiently, and went and sat in my big chair by the window.

"No," I said. "Never mind my hair for a minute. Susan, I'm very much disappointed and put out. You are not treating either me or yourself fairly. With things as they are, I feel responsible for you. All this is very serious. You are young, and you have no experience."

Susan standing three feet away with lowered head, heard me out deferentially, although she knows quite well that I am six months her junior, and that it is hardly a year since I began to look after my own affairs. She simply said:

"Yes, Miss."

"Susan, look at me. Don't hang your head. Is this man respectable?"

"Oh, yes, Miss!"

"He says so himself, no doubt. But the world's full of very strange people. Who is he? Where does he come from? What is his name?"

Susan hung her head again, and did not answer. I saw that she had something to hide, so I tried another way.

"How far has it gone?"

"Well, Miss," she faltered after a pause. "He—he's asked me."

"When?"

"Yesterday, Miss."

"What did you say?"

"I didn't say anything, Miss."

"Susan, don't be ridiculous. You mean, you didn't say 'No.' You encouraged him?"

"Oh, no, Miss."

"Susan, I won't be trifled with. Either you encouraged him or you didn't. Which was it? You surely don't expect me to believe that, after he'd asked you, he was content to walk away again without any kind of an answer?"

"Please, Miss, he didn't ask me that way. It was in a letter."

"A letter! Susan, I hope you've said 'No.' Have nothing at all to do with him. A letter, indeed! Why didn't he speak out like a man to your face?"

"Please, Miss, he couldn't."

"Couldn't? Why not?"

"Because I've never seen him."

I burst out laughing. The affair was a trifle after all. At the most and worst it was some village moon-calf's clumsy wooing; at the least (and likeliest) it was a practical joke. But Susan thought otherwise. I stopped laughing at the sight of her proud flush and pain.

"Come, Susan," I coaxed, "be a sensible girl. It's some stupid joke."

"No, Miss," said Susan firmly.

"Then what have you done? Have you sent a reply?"

"Yes, Miss. No, Miss; I mean, no. That is, I've written the answer, but I haven't posted it."

"That's a good thing. What have you said?"

Susan was silent quite a long time. At length she looked at me plaintively, and answered:

"I've wrote--"

"Written."

"I've written two letters and torn them up again. I think the third one is the best. But somehow, Miss, it doesn't seem quite right. I'm wondering, Miss--"

"Yes."

"I'm wondering whether ... if I brought you his letter, Miss...?"

"Of course I will, Susan. If it's a letter that ought to be answered, I'll do whatever I can. Bring it me after lunch."

"Thank you, Miss," said Susan warmly. But her face darkened again as quickly as it had brightened. I could see that a great doubt or fear had her in its

grip.

It was unkind of me; but I had had enough of the whole business for one morning. "Finish my hair, Susan," I said; and I sat down again before the glass.

Susan resumed the work. But she had hardly taken one of my tresses into her hand before she flung it from her almost madly, and fell on her knees at my feet.

"Miss Gertrude," she cried. "Promise! Swear before God that you will not take him away from me!"

I was thunderstruck. But she was still crouched at my side, gripping my knees.

"Susan," I said sternly, "you are forgetting yourself. Get up. You are not well. Go to your room. I shall manage my hair somehow. Go to your room and lie down."

She gripped me fiercelier than before. "Before God, Miss Gertrude," she repeated. "Promise! Swear! Swear you won't drive him away."

"Drive" was a more endurable word. Besides, her fear and anguish were so sincere that my mere dignity shrivelled away like scorched paper in their blaze. For a second or two it was impossible to be mistress and maid. We were two women.

"Susan," I said very kindly, "if I must swear anything I will swear this. Like you, I am fatherless and motherless. And I swear that I will do my whole duty by you. If I honestly fear that there is misery lurking for you in this offer of marriage, I'll work and fight against it even if you kneel here weeping and praying all day for a year. But if I can honestly believe that it is for your happiness, there's nothing in reason that I won't do to bring it to pass. Now go to your room."

She has gone.

I must take care not to be dragged into any ridiculous positions. If Susan were a novelette-reader, it would be a different thing. No doubt a weekly orgy of sentiment by proxy is generally effective in making the average young woman immune. But Susan is still a child of nature; and if this letter-writing suitor is a scoundrel (as I expect he is), the poor child has some bad hours ahead. I wish most heartily it hadn't happened! And to think that by this time to-morrow I was to have been settled down cosily at Sainte Véronique!

Two o'clock.

How lovely lurching alone once again! Somehow a visitor always begins to send my spirits down and down and down after the first two or three days. When I saw her off yesterday I felt I couldn't have stood even Alice much longer. How different we are! If Alice knew that I wasn't going to France till Monday,

she would worry about my loneliness just as she would worry over my neuralgia or my influenza. I expect that at this very moment she is writing a long letter to Sainte Véronique on the old text—begging me to go into a smaller house, and to look out for a companion, or to spend the winter with them. And I would make a large bet that she'll redeliver her solemn warning about my solitariness making me morbid. Yet there may be a little in it. Who knows? If Susan doesn't stay, I may be awfully glad to go to Alice's for a month or two after all.

Now for Susan and her precious letter.

After dinner.

Alice is right. Solitude is a mistake. If I hadn't the diary-habit, I should explode like a shell into little bits.

Still, for Susan's sake and her incredible adorer's, it's a good thing there's no one here, not even Alice. If there was anybody at hand to listen, I don't see how I could contrive to hold my tongue. As it is, it only relieves me a very little to scribble it all down in this book.

No wonder Susan under-toasted the toast and over-brewed the tea! I don't wonder any longer even at her heroics and melodramatics while she was doing my hair.

When she brought me her letter, addressed in a strong and distinguished hand to Miss Susan Briggs, The Grange, Traxelby, I saw at a glance that we hadn't to deal with a village bumpkin. Indeed, when I took the sheet of thick, good paper from the envelope and saw that it was embossed with the heading "Ruddington Towers," I wasn't surprised. I concluded instantly that Susan's pursuer was one of the three young artists of whom I've heard till I'm tired to death of them—the artists Lord Ruddington is said to have found starving in a Chelsea studio. I forget whether they've come down here to paint the hall or the chapel.

"Susan," I said, meaning to let her down gently, "I hope it isn't one of those young artists from London? An artist is interesting; but he's too impulsive, too vain, too unreliable. I hope—"

"Oh, no, Miss," said Susan hurriedly. "It isn't any of the young gentlemen that's doing the painting and decorating."

"Whoever he is," I answered, "he makes himself at home with Lord Ruddington's best stationery. Let me see."

I turned over the sheet and looked for the signature. Half-way down the third page I found it. The writer had signed himself with the single word "Ruddington."

"Susan," I demanded almost roughly, "why didn't you tell me about this at once?"

"If you please, Miss—"

"There's no if you please about it. Why, this creature, whoever he may be, is pretending to be Lord Ruddington."

Susan burst out crying, suddenly and copiously.

"Oh, Miss Gertrude," she sobbed; "I—I never thought it was pretending. I never dreamed any one could be so cruel. I thought it was real."

As I had begun to read the letter, I didn't take much notice. But Susan sobbed and talked on.

"Oh, Miss," she moaned, "to think I was nearly going to post the answer! I should never have been able to look the parish in the face again."

"Keep quiet, Susan," I said irritably. "Let me read it through."

And while Susan cried to herself softly, I read it straight through; turned back again and again to sentences here and there; and at last read it from beginning to end once more. This is what I read:—

RUDDINGTON TOWERS, September 4, 1906.

I discard the ordinary forms of beginning because this is an extraordinary letter.

Since I came to Ruddington last Wednesday, I have seen you three times. For the second and for the third times, I am thankful; but the first sufficed to open my eyes to the truth. There is not now, and cannot ever be anywhere, any woman in the world save you whom I shall seek for a wife.

Although I did not need to ponder this step for more than a moment on my own account, I have considered it long and well on yours. I recognize the many and great difficulties in the way; but not one of them is insurmountable.

The person from whom I have learned your name and address has not the faintest notion of what is in my mind.

If your answer must be that I am too late, or that you feel you could not establish my happiness without losing your own, no third party need ever know that this has passed between us. But if your affection is still yours to give, then I shall beg for the earliest possibility of trying to convince you that, in bestowing it upon me, you would at least not be throwing it away on some one fickle or ungrateful, or wilfully unworthy.

Until you give me leave, I must not say more.

RUDDINGTON.

When I finally laid the letter down, I became aware of the abundance of Susan's

tears and the heartiness of her sobs. A plan occurred to me. I got up and gave Susan a key.

"Don't be silly, Susan," I said. "See. Take this key. Go to the library. Unlock the deep drawer in the cabinet by the window. Bring me that violet leather scrap-book with all the letters and cuttings about Lady Traxelby's funeral."

Susan dried her eyes and went.

While she was away, I tried to think. Of course the letter would prove to be a forgery. But, fortunately, there was a quick way of making assurance sure. The week after Grandmother died, Lord Ruddington, who had only just come of age, wrote his condolences to Alice from Oxford. He knew Grandmamma rather well as a boy, and he had met Alice once in town. I felt sure we had kept the letter. What I meant to do was, first, to make poor Susan look at the real Lord Ruddington's handwriting with her own eyes; and, second, to tease or soothe her into a good humour till she could laugh at the practical joke. At the same time I made up my mind that if I could identify the joker, who was clearly a person of sufficient education to know better, he should smart for his insolence and cruelty.

Susan came back hugging the great violet book. I opened it in my lap and turned the leaves, hating the practical joker more bitterly than ever for reviving these sad and sacred memories in a connection so contemptible. Susan watched me eagerly. She had divined that I was searching for something that bore upon her rosy hopes and ashen disappointment. At last I found it. There was the heading, "Christ Church."

My heart almost stood still. The bold, stylish, interesting handwriting was unmistakable. The real Lord Ruddington and Susan's were one and the same man.

It was Susan who broke the silence.

"Oh, Miss," she murmured in awestruck tones, "I believe it's real after all!"

"Yes, Susan," I answered slowly; "it is real. I'm sorry, truly sorry, that I hurt you by my doubts. But it is so very extraordinary. And it's so very serious and important. Surely it was best to suspect it till we were certain."

"Oh, yes, Miss," protested Susan gratefully. And when I did not speak, she glanced coyly towards a second loaded envelope which had been lying on the table beside Lord Ruddington's.

"What!" I said. "Surely there isn't another letter, is there?"

"No, Miss. It's only mine—the letter I nearly posted in answer."

"Show it to me—that is, of course, if you want me to see it."

Susan pulled out a folded sheet, opened it, and laid it on my knee.

The first thing about the document that struck me was the fact that it represented a prodigal consumption of ink. In the ordinary course, Susan doesn't write very badly. But, in answering Lord Ruddington, she had formed the char-

acters slowly and hugely and singly, as a child does at school. In two places it was evident that sandpaper or a penknife had removed blots. Altogether it was the sort of handwriting in which one might have expected the milkman to declare to the kitchen-maid,

"The rose is red, the violet's blue,
Honey is sweet, and so are you."

Susan's answer ran:—

Care of the Honourable Miss Langley,
THE GRANGE,
TRAXELBY, September 6, 1906.

SIR,—It was with the most various and lively emotions that I perused your Letter to which I am now endeavouring, though imperfectly, to reply.

I will have you know, Sir, that the first sentiment provoked in my bosom by your Epistle was one of Humiliation and Chagrin. "Better die," I cried, "a thousand deaths, than have lived to forget that Modesty which is the ornament of my Sex!" But I protest that after diligently examining my Conscience and ransacking my Memory, I cannot recall a single occasion in our casual intercourse when I have so far fallen from my duty as to offer you encouragement or to invite your present Advances.

Nevertheless, Sir, I am not blind to my woman's frailty; and, at the risk of forfeiting your Esteem, I will to-day indulge a boldness which I have never practised in the past, and will confess (shameless that I am!) that your conversation and person have not been distasteful to me. I perceive that my weakness has discovered to you the secret which I fondly hoped to conceal; and that I have succeeded but ill in my attempts to dissemble my Partiality from eyes and an Understanding, alas! too well accustomed to the sensibility of the female Heart.

You entreat me to despatch my answer by the hand of your courier, or, at the latest, by to-morrow's coach; and you affirm, Sir, that in the meantime you are consumed by the arduous of Impatience, and that you will partake neither refreshment nor rest. Far be it from me to prolong Sufferings which do me so much Honour, especially when they are endured by one for whom I have Regard and Esteem. But, Sir, I will have you bear with me while I remind you that this is a Business too weighty for haste; and that your present protestations of undying Fidelity and Adoration will be dearly purchased if I must endure in the future the

bitter frosts of Indifference or the icy blasts of Reproach and Scorn.

I beseech you, Sir, to temper Passion with Patience, and not to increase by your Importunity the insupportable Distraction of happy, thrice unhappy

SUSAN.

"Goodness gracious, Susan!" I said, after I had got to the end of this amazing document; "in the name of everything, what on earth is all this?"

"It is my answer to his Lordship, Miss," Susan answered penitently.

"But, Susan, I don't understand. What is this about a courier and to-morrow's coach? And what do you mean by saying that his person and conversation are not distasteful to you? Didn't you assure me this morning that you'd never even seen him? Yet here you are writing to him about 'occasions in your casual intercourse.' Susan, I don't like to say it, but I'm very much afraid that--"

I pulled myself up. What I had been on the point of saying was that Susan had grossly deceived me, and that her case confirmed all I had ever heard as to the deepness of still waters and the duplicity that invariably underlies an appearance of baby innocence. But I remembered just in time that, with all the duplicity in the world to help her, the letter she had shown me would still be beyond Susan's powers. So I screwed a new tail to my unfinished speech and said:

"I'm afraid this won't do."

"I thought it didn't seem quite right, Miss," said Susan meekly. "More especially the piece about the coach. That was why I didn't post it."

"Susan, don't prevaricate," I said sternly. "It isn't like you, and I won't put up with it. If I am to have any more to do with this affair, you must really begin to treat me with perfect candour. Why did you tell me you had never seen Lord Ruddington?"

"If you please, Miss, I never *have* seen him."

"Never?"

"Not that I know of. I've seen--"

Susan paused and blushed.

"Go on, go on," I said impatiently. "You have seen--whom?"

"Please, Miss, there was a young gentleman in a dark green suit when we were at the post-office on Saturday. He stared at me as we went in; and when we came out he followed us as far as the Golden Eagle, looking at me all the time."

"It was very wrong of you to encourage him, Susan. But how do you know it was Lord Ruddington?"

"I don't, Miss. Maybe it's only my fancy."

"Susan, look here. Look at your own letter. Goodness knows where you got all this grand old-fashioned language from. It's the sort of language they used when Lord Ruddington's great-grandmother wasn't a day older than you are now. But that isn't my point. What I want to know is why you write to Lord Ruddington in this letter about 'occasions' when you have met?"

"I know it sounds wrong, Miss," replied Susan, more humbly than ever. "But that was just the way it was in the book. Those were the very words."

"The book?" I echoed, bewildered.

"Yes, Miss. I copied it out of the old book that's been lying in the lumber-room ever since I came to Traxelby. Perhaps you haven't seen it, Miss?"

Light was breaking over me, but I couldn't make out the full truth till Susan went on:

"The back is torn off, Miss. It has a picture of a young lady in a short-waisted muslin frock looking very sad and writing at a table. There's a wicked little boy in the corner of the room with nothing on but wings, and a and arrow, just going to shoot the young lady. The book's called *The Complete Letter-Writer*."

It took all my self-control and all my solicitude for poor worried Susan to restrain me from laughing loud and long. But, after the first shock of comicality, I was soon steadied again by the hard facts which still rose up before me. At another time this clearing up of the mystery of Susan's Late Georgian grammar and Johnsonian vocabulary would have been droll past resistance. But Lord Ruddington's letter was lying on the table.

Happily the beckoning hands of Fortune had not spoiled Susan yet. The prospect of wealth and rank had confused her brains, but it had not dazzled her inmost, sound self or altered her sterling principles or shaken her out of her well-worn ways. The mistress-elect of Ruddington Towers and my social superior of the near future still addressed me with the simple, respectful openness for which I have always liked her so well. After I had sat I don't know how long, silently trying to work out a solution, she said for the third time:

"I knew it didn't sound right, Miss. I will tear it up and burn it. And perhaps ... when you're not too busy ... perhaps, Miss Gertrude, you would tell me what I ought to say."

"Of course, Susan, of course," I answered. "I've promised you already. But it isn't easy."

Susan accepted the situation, and stood patiently awaiting the end of my meditations.

"Sit down, Susan," I said at last.

She sat down.

"I am obliged to ask you a few plain questions."

"Yes, Miss."

"If it turns out that he is really in earnest, do you wish to marry Lord Ruddington?"

"Oh yes, Miss, please!"

"You don't understand. In his letter he asks if you are free—if your affection is still yours to give. Now, is there anybody else that you're promised to already?"

"Oh no, Miss!"

"Not Gibson?"

Susan looked troubled. When she answered, it was falteringly, and without her usual openness.

"No, Miss." And she added uneasily, "I have never promised to be engaged to Gibson."

"But does Gibson expect that some day you will?"

"He oughtn't to, Miss," rejoined Susan, making shockingly quick progress in cunning.

"I mean, has Gibson talked to you in that way? And have you listened? Come, Susan, don't be silly. I am forced to ask these things. I've never seen Lord Ruddington, but from all I've heard of him he isn't the sort that would want to make himself happy by making another man miserable for life—not even if the other man is only Gibson. Lord Ruddington's letter is strange. For instance, it's rather stiff and dry, and like the letter of a much older man. But it rings true; it rings honourable. You must be honourable too. Otherwise the whole business will end in misery for everybody. Come, Susan. I don't want to preach a sermon, but you know as well as I do that if you and Gibson truly care for one another you will be a happier and better woman in a four-roomed cottage with Gibson than with Lord Ruddington at the Towers. Tell me how things stand."

After a struggle Susan blurted out:

"Yes, Miss, Gibson *has* asked me."

"When?"

"Well, Miss, the last time was last week."

"You didn't accept him. I've gathered that already. But did you give him a plain refusal?"

"Well, Miss—"

"Answer Yes or No, Susan, straight out. Have you let Gibson think that, if he gets on, some day you will marry him?"

Susan's eyes filled with tears. Her cheeks burned red.

"Come, Susan, tell me."

She broke into weeping.

"Oh, no, Miss, no!" she moaned between her sobs. "Not Gibson. Truly, Miss. I've never said a single word to encourage Gibson."

"Very good," I said. "But don't go on like that. There's nothing to cry about. If you can't be sensible, we must talk about it some other time."

I confess that, for a minute or two, I had indulged a hope that Gibson would prove to be Susan's favoured lover, and that, accordingly, Lord Ruddington's monstrous infatuation could be nipped in the bud. And when my hope was found to be groundless, I felt more than a little nettled. I foresee endless annoyance and inestimable losses of time and temper over this unheard-of madness of my preposterous young neighbour. We've been told for years that we shall see wonders when Lord Ruddington comes to live at the Towers; and, seeing he's only been here a week, I must admit he hasn't lost much time.

When Susan stopped crying she was less tractable. I suppose she resented my catechising her about Gibson. After all, I shouldn't have liked it myself. As soon as she was dry-eyed, she became a little more dry-hearted, and a good deal more dry-witted as well. She was more defiant, less dependent: much more the prospective lady of the Towers and much less the actual lady's-maid at the Grange. I noticed this in her answer to my first remark after her tears had ceased to flow.

"Susan," I said, "this is a matter which won't be any the worse of a night's delay. I will sleep on it, and so must you. Understand, I say *sleep*. I don't mean that you're to lie awake and let it worry you. We shall write Lord Ruddington a better answer to-morrow than we can to-day. Meanwhile, it won't do him any harm to be kept waiting a few hours longer."

"No," said Susan, "it won't. I've always heard it said that it does them no good to throw yourself at their heads."

For once she did not call me "Miss," and both the matter and the manner of her speech jarred on me. From Susan it sounded hard and vulgar. It was as if my rare and sweet Susan had suddenly descended to live a moment of her life two or three planes lower down.

I sent her off with some messages about dinner, and with enough plain work to occupy her for the rest of the day. And, now that I have put the whole thing down in black and white, I begin to understand how cordially I dislike it.

Friday, September 7, 5 a.m.

Such a wretched night! I hope Lord Ruddington has had a still worse one. He deserves it, and I don't. Besides, he has something to gain (or thinks he has), while I only have something to lose. Even if he rushes out of his infatuation as precipitately as he rushed into it, Susan can never be the same nice girl again.

I have thought about it all the many hours of this blessed night that I have been awake; and I have dreamt about it all the few nightmarish minutes I have

been asleep—twisty, scary, jumpy dreams that I can't half remember.

Heaven knows I was vexed enough when Alice would persist in teasing me last Sunday about Lord Ruddington. What would Alice not have said if she had known that he was hardly three miles away at the very time she was plaguing me? On Wednesday, at the station, her last words were, "Gertie, don't be a fool." From Alice's point of view, Gertie will be a fool if Gertie doesn't so play her cards as to become Lady Ruddington.

I did so hate it. If I am happy, why can't people leave me alone? Alice will be dreadfully indignant if ever she finds out that I knew Lord Ruddington was coming at once to the Towers. But if I had told her, she would only have fought against me going off to Sainte Véronique. Yet, why in the world should I be going to a place like Sainte Véronique at the fag-end of the season? I'm going simply and solely because I was determined not to give the tiniest scrap of opportunity to the gossips and matchmakers who would have been so ready to connect the young spinster of Traxelby Grange with the young bachelor of Ruddington Towers.

But I'm wandering away from my own point. I say, Alice's chaff and hints and coaxings were bad enough; but this farce of Susan's is a million times worse. I admit I'm weak enough to care what people say and think; and what sort of a position will it be when all the world knows that his noble lordship of Ruddington is come to the Grange a-wooing, not me but my maid? It's perfectly hateful.

Noon.

Susan is herself again. I don't mean that she isn't still burdened with the worries and anxieties of her amazing good luck. Indeed, she confesses that she has had a wakeful night. But in her work and her behaviour she's once more as good as gold.

After all, it was lean and ungenerous of me yesterday to be jarred by her one low-class remark. We are none of us at our best every single minute of our lives.

When I'd written in this diary, with my teeth chattering, at five o'clock this morning, I crawled back into bed in a very sour temper; and if Susan had come in sulky with a second lot of weak toast and strong tea, it would have finished me off. As it was, I lay trying to get warm, and wondering whether it mightn't be better to leave Susan and Ruddington to patch up their ridiculous match in their own unthinkable way.

At a quarter to seven Susan brought me three perfect square inches of toast, and a perfect tablespoonful of China tea in that sweet little thin birds'-egg-coloured porcelain cup which I thought was broken. She saw at once that

I hadn't slept; and, in her quiet, untoadying, genuine old way, she was ever so much concerned. But I didn't let her begin talking.

I must do my duty by Susan.

Haven't I often felt inwardly virtuous on the strength of my compassion (more sentimental than practical!) for Susan's motherlessness? How do I know that the poor good creature has not consciously pitied me on the same account? It isn't too much to say that Susan has been almost a mother to me over and over again. Surely, then, it is my duty to be a mother to her in this big, sudden strain on her simple wits.

Rumour says that Ruddington is all right. But Rumour sometimes has a lying tongue even when she speaks in a man's praise. I have no guarantee whatever that Lord Ruddington intends to treat Susan honourably. If he doesn't, I know I shall be a poor defender of Susan, and that I can't hope to be his match in worldly knowledge and cunning. But I don't mean to fail for want of doing my best.

This is the reply I have drafted:—

THE GRANGE,
TRAXELBY, Friday.

Your letter of Tuesday was not one to be answered, or even acknowledged, in a hurry.

Indeed, it is only after hesitation that I decide to answer it at all. How do I know that this unaccountable flame of passion has not died down as quickly as it sprang up?

But there is a reason why, if I am to reply at all, I ought to do so to-day. To-morrow we are going to France. We shall be away a month.

You ask me if I am free to bestow my affection where I will. The answer is—Yes.

Deeply disturbed though I am by your surprising letter, I will not make a difficult situation more difficult still by anything like coyness. In fairness to both of us, I will speak as plainly and shortly and practically as I can.

There is only one direct question in your letter, and I have answered it above. But there is an indirect question also. You want to know if the affection which I have not given elsewhere can be given to Lord Ruddington. The answer is—I do not know.

You have seen *me*, but I have not seen *you*. Again, if I consent, you will remain in your old rank and station, while I must make a great and exacting and perilous change. Above all, you declare that you have the fullest possible

inward light on this matter, whereas I have nothing of the kind. Thus you have a threefold advantage over me.

Reading your letter as an offer of marriage, the most I can say to-day is that, for the present, I do not refuse it.

Will you write to me once a week (not more) while I am at Sainte Véronique? Our address will be at the Hôtel du Dauphin.

Meanwhile, I beg most earnestly that you will not try to see me before we leave to-morrow. This journey to France is surely providential, and we must not throw its advantages away.

I am going to be very frank indeed. To a poor girl, with her living to earn, your offer is so tempting and marvellous that, if you pressed it immediately and in person, I fear I might be swept off my feet into acceptance long before I could be sure that love will exist on both sides. For your own sake, if not for mine, do not put me to such proof. What would my consent be worth if you won it solely through the powers of your wealth and birth to dazzle my eyes and confuse my brain?

My month abroad will serve two ends. By correspondence we shall know one another better; and our first meeting will thereby be made less embarrassing and formidable—especially to me. Again (and you must forgive me for saying it), time and absence may reveal to you more of your own heart and mind. Perhaps you will repent most bitterly of your letter which I am now answering, and, if so, it will surely be better to admit that you have been the victim of a passing madness rather than to fasten life-long unhappiness upon us both.

SUSAN BRIGGS.

I can hardly say I am proud of this production. Quite the contrary. Both in matter and style, it's altogether too un-Susanish. Indeed, now that I've tried and failed, I'm beginning to have more respect for the effusion of the young lady in the short-waisted muslin frock. Perhaps if I'd taken out the bits about the coach and the casual intercourse her letter would have been better than mine.

Heaven knows what Susan will make of it! I'm positively nery every time I hear her on the stairs.

All the same, I've said the best thing to Lord Ruddington, even if I've said it in the worst way. Going to Sainte Véronique bright and early to-morrow morning is quite a good scheme. If the noble lord comes hot-foot after us, I can certainly manage him better at Sainte Véronique than here at the Grange. Besides, I'm half persuaded that the poor boy's paroxysm won't last long. If needs be, we'll go to Alice's when we come back to England.

I think we'll travel by Dieppe. It means more train-journey on the other side, but he's less likely to track us and bother us that way. Of course, if he did anything of the kind, it would be abominable. But one never knows where a madman will draw the line.

Before dinner.

Susan isn't happy.

I can see she doesn't like my draft. But she's docile, and she's going to use it.

I made the poor thing sit beside me at my desk while we went through it together. At the end she said:

"Thank you, Miss. But I hate to think I've caused so much trouble."

"That's nothing, Susan," I said. "Just tell me plainly if you think it'll do."

"It's beautiful, Miss," said Susan. "Only..."

"Only what?"

"Well, Miss, very likely I'm wrong. But it seems to leave him a way of backing out again."

I was prepared for this. So I said, severely:

"Susan, what do you mean?"

"About going away," answered Susan doggedly. "About being a month in France, and not saying Good-bye, and only having him write once a week. It seems to give him a chance of changing his mind."

"Very well, Susan. Shall we tear this up? How will it be to write and tell Lord Ruddington that you will be disengaged to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock?"

"Oh no, Miss, please no!" gasped Susan, turning pale. "I couldn't, really I couldn't. I could never face him."

"Why not?"

Tears came into Susan's eyes.

"I should be as dumb as a fish, Miss. I should just sit and sit and never be able to say a word—and then he'd think I was stupid and he'd go away."

"So I think myself," I said. "That's why this letter is sensible. After he's written to you two or three times, you'll feel less strange and more able to meet him."

"Yes, Miss. But it's such a long way and such a long time. He might change his mind."

"Susan," I began, with all the grown-up, worldly-wise solemnity I could muster, "listen to me. If he's going to change his mind as easy as that, won't you be better without him?"

Susan looked dubious. "I don't think I would go as far as that, Miss," she said candidly.

Evidently it was necessary to rub the truth well in.

"Susan," I said, "I admit that lords don't marry lady's-maids every day. This case is unusual. But it isn't the first. Before we were born, dukes have married dairy-maids and earls have married their cooks. A few of them have been happy all their lives long. Most of them have been miserable before the end of the honeymoon."

Susan began to pout. I piled it on thicker.

"I won't mention names," I said. "But I know a case myself. The son of a duke took a fancy to a poor governess, and married her for her looks. He was infatuated with her at first sight, he followed her everywhere, he wouldn't take her refusal, he quarrelled with his father for her sake: and at last he got her. What happened? Although she was as well educated as he was, he tired of her in a year."

"But I suppose, Miss, she has all she wants?" said Susan, pouting harder than ever.

"She has all she wants," I replied scornfully, "in the way of house and clothes and food. But, Susan, think. What if she wants *him*?"

Susan was silent. I drove it home.

"What if she wants *him*? And what if she hardly ever sees him? Susan, I don't care to talk to you about such things; but this affair of Lord Ruddington is too serious for mincing words. The reason why the woman I'm telling you about never sees her husband is that he's the slave of another woman—a woman neither so pretty nor so clever nor so good-tempered nor even so well-born as his poor wife. Susan, would you like a life like that, even if you could live it in silks and old laces amidst all the luxury of Ruddington Towers?"

Susan was blushing hotly, as I had intended and hoped she would.

"Oh no, Miss," she said eagerly, all her honest blood and good training coming to the rescue. "But I don't think Lord Ruddington would do those sort of things."

"You think. But you don't know. Susan, I'm going to put you an old-fashioned question. Do you think it would be right to marry a man—never mind whether it's Lord Ruddington, or Gibson, or any other man—if you didn't love him?"

I was trying my poor, honest Susan too searchingly. Tears again shone in her blue eyes. Her colour came and went. She turned away her head.

"Never mind, Susan," I said, very much more kindly. "I can guess your answer. And I can read your mind. You don't love Lord Ruddington. It isn't possible you should, at present. But you think it will be so lovely to be Lady

Ruddington that you mean to make yourself love him whatever happens.”

”Yes. That’s it, Miss,” sobbed Susan. ”I don’t deserve that you should be so kind to me, Miss.”

”The danger is, Susan, that we can’t depend on Love coming whenever we beckon to it. Perhaps Lord Ruddington is cold and unlovable. Perhaps he’s too passionate to be affectionate. Unless you can love him in return, his love will only torture you. Susan, make quite sure of your ground. You are not like other girls. A mistake of this kind would first sour you and then kill you. Think of it all in this light, and you will understand my answer to Lord Ruddington better.”

”I do, Miss,” said Susan urgently. ”I understand it quite well now. And I know it’s best. Please, Miss Gertrude, if you’ll show me how to address it I’ll send it to-night.”

I took up an envelope and addressed it to Lord Ruddington.

”You know best, Miss,” said Susan, glancing at the draft once more. ”But ... but oughtn’t a girl like me to say ’your lordship’? Besides—-”

She checked herself. It was a new thing for Susan to question my judgment on any point, however small.

”Besides what?” I asked.

”Well, Miss, it seems to look strange beginning the letter without anything to start off, like.”

”Lord Ruddington set us the example,” I explained. ”I thought it was rather clever and delicate of him. He couldn’t write in the third person, could he? And he couldn’t very well call you ’Madam,’ or ’Dear Miss Briggs,’ or ’Dear Susan.’ No. It’s far better for both the letters to be as they are.”

”Thank you, Miss,” said Susan, as humbly and teachably as she had ever spoken in her life.

She has gone to her own room. I do hope she won’t write it out in that frightful, blotty school-girl hand. I ought to have told her to write more quickly and freely, and less as if she’s doing it with a paint-brush. Still, I’m deeply thankful we’re getting on so nicely.

To-morrow, the glorious sea, and the cider, and dear old Sainte Véronique!

9.30 *p.m.*

More worry and tangle. I feel all bruised and weak, as if I’d been battered about in the surf on a stony beach.

While I was walking in the garden after dinner, Gibson came across from the stables and began hanging about. I had a presentiment as to what he wanted, and I nearly bolted back into the house. Susan had been quite enough for one day. But, although it was dusk, I could see his trouble sitting, so to speak, on

Gibson's shoulders. There was nothing for it but to face it out.

"Good-evening, Gibson," I said. "Do you want to speak to me?"

"I do, Ma'am," Gibson answered. His manner was perfectly respectful, but his tone was almost imperative.

"What is the matter?"

"You told me, Ma'am, I could have a holiday, beginning Monday. Hughes is well able now to look after the horses. If I couldn't trust him, I wouldn't go."

"But, Gibson, we talked over all this on Tuesday, and it was settled you should go. Why do you want me to discuss it again?"

Gibson looked awkward; shifted his cap from one hand to the other; shifted it back again. Suddenly he demanded bluntly:

"Will you mind, Ma'am, if I go to France?"

"To France?" I said, bewildered. "Why France?"

Gibson floundered through an unconvincing explanation. He affected to have doubts as to the Future of the Horse. He declared that, until lately, he had clung to a belief that "these here motor-cars would die out, same as the bicycles did;" but, tardily and bitterly, he has changed his mind. It seems the Horse will not become extinct. There will always be a few horses in the country, just as there will always be a few bows and arrows. But the number of horse-owners in the near future as compared with the horse-owners of the near past is to be in pretty much the same proportion as the archery-club amateurs of to-day in comparison with the English bowmen at Crécy and Agincourt. Gibson didn't put it exactly in this way, but his point is that the Horse, as the Psalmist says, is a vain thing for safety when a young man is looking well ahead for his bread and butter. Gibson wants to stay at Traxelby as long as I will keep him: but, "begging pardon, Ma'am, with a single lady one never knows," and therefore he thinks it is high time he should put himself in the way of qualifying as a chauffeur. Hence France.

"You do right to improve yourself, Gibson," I said. "But why France? Nowadays you can learn to be a chauffeur far better in England."

His face darkened.

"Asking pardon, Ma'am," he said obstinately, "I have a fancy for learning in France."

"Very well," I said. "It's your holiday, and you can spend it wherever you like. If you can manage the language, go to France by all means."

"Then you haven't any objection, Ma'am?"

"Why should I?"

Gibson hesitated. Then he stammered:

"I was afraid, Ma'am, that ... that me goin' to France the same time as you, Ma'am, wouldn't be ... I mean, it would look like taking a liberty."

I perceived that Gibson, like many others of his class, conceives France as a territory about the size of the Isle of Wight, with Paris in the middle.

"But France is a very big country, Gibson," I said. "Far larger than England. Even if I did object to you, we shouldn't be likely to meet. You couldn't learn to be a chauffeur at Saint Véronique. It's the last place in the world. That's why I go there."

Gibson looked at me narrowly.

"I thank you, Ma'am," he said curtly and proudly. And he made room for me to pass.

In his own fashion, Gibson is as good and as likable as Susan. Never till this week has either of them caused me the slightest anxiety. I saw in a flash how matters stood; and I felt in my heart that Gibson deserved the more sympathy of the two. He was deeper-natured than Susan: prouder and capable of a grand passion which my sweeter and shallower Susan could neither receive nor return. His clean-shaven face was almost as handsome as Susan's was pretty; and if he had enjoyed Susan's advantages instead of being brought up among grooms and stable-boys, he might have been as refined. Rather rashly, I let myself go and said:

"No, Gibson, I'm not going in yet. You have not told me what it is that is really troubling you. There is something on your mind."

He stood stock-still at the path-side and vouchsafed no answer for a long time. At last he said abruptly:

"Then you won't prevent me, Ma'am, coming to France?"

"How could I stop you? France is a free country. I couldn't make the French army shoot you, or the French police lock you up. But I'd better say plainly, Gibson, that I object to you coming to Sainte Véronique unless I send for you."

The colour mounted to Gibson's cheeks. He drew himself up and seemed to take some sudden decision. He was about to speak, when the clatter of buckets at the pump, where Hughes was gone for water, drew his gaze to the beloved stables. I followed his eyes as they ranged over the red roofs which had sheltered him at work and at play, at bed and at board, both in Grandma's time and mine, ever since he came to Traxelby as a half-fed boy of fourteen. He heard Nero's neighing and Boxer's answering bark; and I could see that he suffered. But these dear old sights and sounds did not soften his face for long. He pulled himself together again, and began decisively:

"Then if you please, Ma'am, with all respect—"

"No, Gibson," I said, like lightning; "don't finish. Let me finish for you. You were going to say that you give me notice, that you will leave this old place, that you'll give up everything, just to be a free man. No. Don't interrupt. Above all, do have just a little bit of common sense. For instance, instead of giving up

Traxelby simply so that you can come to Sainte Véronique, how would it be if you told me like a sensible man what you want to come to Sainte Véronique for?"

He struggled hard with his pride. I helped him out.

"Surely you can trust me, Gibson?"

"I don't say I can't, Ma'am."

"Very well, Gibson," I answered shortly "I've done my best. Good-night."

"No!" cried Gibson, springing across my path. "Miss Gertrude, I ask your pardon It would break my heart to leave this place. But ... good God, this is too hard for me to bear!"

"Speak less loudly," I said. "Now, tell me. Is it about Susan?"

He bent his head.

"You mean," I said, "you've fallen in love with Susan." And then, although my spirit was quailing and failing at the desperate sight of the poor lad's agony, I actually forced myself to try and laugh him out of it, as if it had been no more than a mild attack of calf-love.

"Really, Gibson," I said, as banteringly and gaily as I could, "I'm surprised at you. You're behaving as if Susan's going to Siberia for life instead of to France for a month. No doubt it's very painful and upsetting to be head over ears in love, though I confess I don't know much about it. But surely, Gibson, you can manage to exist without seeing Susan for four little weeks? Be more of a man."

"It's because I'm a man, Ma'am," he rejoined firmly, "that my right place is at Sinn Veeronik. You talk of four little weeks, Ma'am. When them four little weeks are over, shall I see the same Susan as went away?"

His earnestness was so terrible that I could not maintain my hollow banter, and I was silent.

"I put it plain, Ma'am. When them four little weeks are over, shall I ever see Susan any more?"

I couldn't answer. Worse still, I guessed that his next move would be to ask me how much I knew. So I clung fast to the one hope that buoys me up in all this outrageous business—the hope that Time and Separation will restore Lord Ruddington to such senses as he may possess, and that Susan, like a ruffled dove, will home back to Gibson's faithful heart after all.

"You can't answer, Ma'am," he said almost fiercely.

"Of course I can't, you foolish fellow," I said, recovering my wits and making a show of irritation. "I can't answer for Susan any more than I can for you. How do I know that, when we come back in four weeks' time, poor Susan won't find you consoling yourself with somebody else?"

He brushed my trifling aside.

"Then I'll tell you, Ma'am, something you don't know," he almost hissed in my ear. "God knows who it is: but some one's turned Susan's head. She doesn't

do no more than give me hints. It's driving me mad. She doesn't name the party: but it's somebody richer'n a lord."

Gibson flung down his cap and lifted his right hand.

"Hark ye, Miss Gertrude," he said harshly and chokily. "Hark ye while I swear. This is my Bible oath. If he touches a hair on Susan's head, saving what's honest, I'll break every bone in his body! Don't matter to me if it's the king himself. Whoever he is, I'll wring his neck, and swing for it gladly. If I don't, may I be struck dead!"

"Silence, Gibson!" I said sternly. "Don't speak like this to me."

"Then how shall I speak, Ma'am? Answer me that. Me that's worshipped every inch of ground that Susan's trod on for years and years! Me that would go through fire and water and hell—"

"Gibson, listen. You think you've told me what I don't know. What if I knew it already?"

He faced me, startled.

"I say, what if I knew it already? I've never seen this man; but what if I can give you my word that Susan has only written to him once in her life? What if her only letter was to say that she does not love this man, and that she does not know she ever can or will, and that, if she cannot, all the money in the world won't bribe her into marrying him? What if she has told him that she is glad she is going to France? What if she has forbidden him to try and see her till she comes back to England? What if she will see you again, Gibson, before she sees him? Most important of all, what if I tell you that I have made up my mind to look after Susan in this affair as if she were my own younger sister? What if I promise you that she shall not come to harm?"

Gibson drank in my words with greedy ears and devoured me with searching eyes.

"God bless you, Miss Gertrude, God bless you!" he faltered; "and God grant it may be true!"

"So you think I would tell you lies, Gibson?"

"No, Ma'am, no. You're dealing with me fair. But how long will you be able to manage Susan if her head gets any more turned? And oh, Miss Gertrude ... I ask pardon—but this isn't no job for a young lady like you, as pure as an angel, that doesn't know this wicked world. Ma'am, if he's a scoundrel, he'll deceive Susan and he'll deceive you, Ma'am, as easy as looking at you! Oh, Ma'am, you don't understand! I can put up with losing Susan, though it'll kill me. I can put up with her being took away honest. But—"

He brought his lips to my ear and finished his sentence:

"If there's any devil's work, it'll be murder for him and hanging for me. Miss Gertrude, may I come to France?"

I drew a step away.

"No, Gibson," I answered, assuming a calmness and a mastery which I did not feel. "You can't come to France. There is no need. I am sorry for you—deeply sorry—and I respect you for some of the things you have said. But you are excited. You have been brooding. You've got morbid, exaggerated fears."

He came towards me again.

"Gibson, wait till I've finished. You stopped me saying something that ought to satisfy you. It is this. At Sainte Véronique, Susan will be under my eye all the time. If this man follows her, I shall know. And I pledge you my word that, if he comes, I will write to you—no, I will telegraph—and then you can do whatever you please."

"You pledge me your word, Ma'am?"

"I said so."

For at least five seconds he scrutinized my face. Then he stooped down low, as if he was going to kneel at my feet, and began hunting for the cap which he had thrown down among the nasturtiums. He was a long time finding it. When he got up again, he said in clear, low, sad tones:

"Miss Gertrude, I pray to God that I may live to do one half as much for you as you have done this night for me."

"Cheer up, Gibson," I said; "things are hardly ever as bad as they look. Enjoy your holiday all you can. Write down your address and give it me in the morning. It's getting chilly. Good-night."

I hadn't moved twenty yards before he was at my heels once more.

"I beg your pardon, Ma'am," he said breathlessly, "but there's just one other thing."

"Yes?"

"I'm thinking, Ma'am, perhaps you won't name it to Susan that I've spoke like this to-night?"

"You may be easy in mind, Gibson, I'm not likely to say a word about it. And be careful that you never name it to her yourself that we've had this talk."

"Never, Ma'am, as long as I live," said Gibson fervently. And so I managed to get away. On the whole, the Gibson part of this drama of ours has tried me more than Susan's. That Susan should marry a lord, and become mistress of Ruddington Towers, is no more than an oddity, an awkwardness. But it is a very different thing to look on while an honest lad like Gibson sees the girl he worships bribed away from him with money.

To say that I feel like a bather banged about on the stones by the breakers is to put it too weakly. My brains feel like a battlefield, where Greeks and Trojans, Hector and Achilles, have been trampling, and slashing, and charging all the long day. And for Helen and Paris, I have a lady's-maid and a groom!

Bed-time.

Another thunderbolt—the loudest and horriblest and most abominable yet! Susan must be stark mad.

Instead of copying out my draft, she has simply tucked it inside the specimen envelope I addressed, and has posted it to Ruddington!

I'm too utterly sick and tired and disgusted to write down in this diary all that Susan said—which wasn't much—and all that I said—which was even less, but entirely to the point. Susan has gone off, crying—as if she's the one with the grievance!

Thank God for bed!

BOOK II DIEPPE

BOOK II

Saturday night.

The sight, and smell, and sound of the glittering, tumbling sea must have done me good. After last night's and Thursday night's bad dreams and worse wakings, I ought to be as sleepy as a dormouse. Yet I feel quite fresh and keen.

Not that to-day has been any great improvement on yesterday and the day before. To begin with, it put me quite out of temper, at Traxelby station, to see how Susan was far too nasty to Gibson, and how Gibson was far too nice to Susan. And Gibson couldn't possibly have been clumsier in his attempt to give me his address on the sly. It was a miracle that Susan didn't see.

I kept Susan beside me all the way to Newhaven, and also on the boat. It was a turbine steamer, and the sea was smooth, and I ought to have enjoyed the crossing immensely. But I didn't.

Of course, the reason was Susan. We hadn't fairly lost sight of that blinding, towering white cliff above Seaford before Susan said tragically in my ear:

"Oh, Miss, I have such a dreadful feeling!"

Never before have I been cruel to the sea-sick. But it was altogether too much that Susan, who has always been the best sailor in the world, should begin

to work up a squeamishness on a turbine, with the sun shining and the sea as calm as a pond, and no one ill, not even the trippers in ready-made yachting-suits. I felt she was doing it just to be important, and interesting, and difficult.

"Nonsense, Susan!" I said, quite roughly: "it's perfectly ridiculous. Don't think about it, and you'll be all right."

"I don't mean that I'm took bad, Miss," said Susan. And she looked ag-grieved. Probably it was my fancy; but, in her injured dignity, there seemed to be a blend of Susan Briggs with the future Lady Ruddington.

"What do you mean, then?" I asked grudgingly.

She did not answer at once. When she did, she said mysteriously:

"I've got the feeling, Miss, that ... that it's him!"

"Him?"

"Yes, Miss. He's kept looking at me ever since we landed on the ship."

Susan shot a swift glance to her right, and then, with a modest blush, re-sumed her scrutiny of the pattern on the rug across her knees. I affected to take an interest in a fishing-smack which was fast dropping astern of us; and, in this way, I was able to examine the part of the boat whither Susan's glance had winged its coy flight.

No doubt, ever so many people have stayed in town for the Harvard and Cambridge Boat-race. Anyhow, there weren't many crossing this morning. We were sitting abaft the funnel, and there was hardly anybody between our two chairs and the gate leading to the second-class.

The second-class deck was fairly full. There the poor "seconds" sat, like animals in a zoo, behind a bar, for us superior mortals to stare at. They were seated oddly, on bags or undersized stools, so that they looked like wrong-doers in the stocks. The very funnel (which soared up from the midst of the first-class deck) showed its contempt by visiting them with a copious and increasing plague of large black grits, until they were sootier than the damned in hell. And after all, had not each and every one of them committed the deadly sin of being either unwilling or unable to pay the extra half-crown or so which would have made them, for three or four glorious hours, the equals of such notables as myself and the future Lady Ruddington? They had the air of accepting their punishment as just.

I picked out two unabashed and unassociated males, either of whom might be Susan's "Him." Keeping my eyes still on the second-class deck, but directing my voice towards Susan's cheek, I asked:

"Which?"

"The gentleman that's staring so, Miss."

"Can't you see there are two staring?" I said. "Which do you mean? Is it the one with the peaked cap and the gilt buttons—the one that's rubbing the back

of his head against the side of the life-boat?"

"Oh, no, Miss! It's the gentleman with the cigar and the thick stockings."

The fact that the puffer of the cigar was staring at us without the slightest attempt at dissimulation made it easier for me to take him in from top to toe. The top was hidden in a grey cloth cap, and the toe in a brown boot of a large size. The creature was large-handed, large-featured, and (as I afterwards found) large-laughed and large-voiced. He wore a grey Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers, continued downwards by the thick grey stockings which had vied with the cigar in Susan's regard. There was a bold ring on the little (or, rather, on the smallest) finger of his left hand. His whole port and mien were idle and evil; and never in my life have I seen more horrid legs.

At a first glance his coarseness was so evidently the coarseness of a low-bred shopman or bookie, that I nearly turned on Susan to rebuke her sharply for wasting my time. But, at a second glance, I became conscious of a sickening doubt. Had I not seen this identical coarseness before, in very high places?

Apart from his one unilluminating letter to Susan, all my meagre knowledge of Lord Ruddington has been collected at second or third hand. Both Alice and I have heard that he is reticent, aloof, rather studious; and the stray reports of him which have reached Traxelby have been pretty much to the same effect. But our informants may have been wrong. Or, as our information is a year old, Lord Ruddington may have changed for the worse. If so, he has galloped downhill at the devil's own pace.

When I had seen a good deal more than enough, I turned my back on him pointedly, and said to Susan:

"Move your chair a little—the way the boat's going. The wind can't hurt you."

Visibly loth, Susan shifted her chair.

"What makes you think it is he, Susan?" I demanded.

"I don't know, Miss," said Susan.

"Come, now. There must be something."

"No, Miss," answered Susan. "It's just a dreadful feeling that keeps coming over me."

"Then the sooner you put the dreadful feeling on one side, the better," I said unpleasantly. "I hardly call it complimentary to Lord Ruddington that you should mistake him for a man like that."

Susan began her new pout—the bride-elect pout that was never in Susan's world till last Thursday. It annoyed me.

"Why," I said, "if that's Lord Ruddington, all I can say is that poor Gibson is fit to be a duke or a prince beside him."

Susan was touched in a raw place. She pouted worse than ever. I couldn't

help saying:

"One has only to look at his legs!"

"I was thinking, Miss," said the bride-elect, "that they was rather nice."

She actually turned her head, and had begun to take quite a deliberate peep at the rather nice legs, when I addressed her sharply.

"Susan," I said, "so long as you're with me, you'll be so good as to behave yourself properly. I'm surprised."

She recalled her wanton glance at once, and blushed suitably and sufficiently. Gibson is only partly right about Susan's head being turned. If it were turned more than a very, very little, she wouldn't be able to obey so fully and promptly and shamefacedly when I whistle her straying fancy back to heel.

"What have you done with those two magazines?" I asked. "Why don't you read them? If you don't look at him, he won't look at you."

My dutiful Susan did her best. So did I. But my best was no better than Susan's. Try as I would, I couldn't restrain myself from darting an occasional glance at the brute in grey to see if he was still staring; and, try as I might, I couldn't ignore the fact that Susan was doing the same. At the end of about ten minutes, we did it at the same moment.

"You're looking again, Susan," I snapped angrily. It was mean of me and dishonest, I know. Besides, it was taking an ungenerous advantage of my powers as Susan's mistress. But I had to save my dignity. And Susan would have done the same in my place.

Susan hung her head.

"I'm very sorry, Miss," she said. "I was really trying not to, Miss. But it's such a dreadful feeling. I feel as if I *must* look."

"Susan," I said ingeniously, "we will suppose, just for a moment, that the creature is Lord Ruddington. For your sake, and his own sake, and everybody's sake, I hope and believe he isn't. But let us suppose he is."

"Yes, Miss," said Susan patiently.

"Susan, I put it to you. If he *is* Lord Ruddington, what will he think of you for casting sheep's eyes at him, and looking up and looking down, and blushing, and all the rest of it?"

"I don't think it's him as ought to complain, Miss," said Susan, "seeing it's him that's making me do it."

"You don't see what I mean. If he's Lord Ruddington, he knows that you're Susan, and he can hardly help looking at you, though I must say he isn't treating you as he would a lady. But when it's a case of *you* looking at him, it's different. You see, you're not supposed to have any idea it's Lord Ruddington. All you've got to go by is 'a dreadful feeling'—which is nothing at all. So what must he think of you, when he sees you making eyes at a perfect stranger? He must think

you've got glances and blushes for every man who chooses to stare at you."

Susan did not see my point clearly. Indeed, the more I laboured it, the less clearly I saw it myself. Besides, if this was really and truly Lord Ruddington, my attempt at crediting him with superfine feelings was either hypothetical or ludicrous.

"I'm very sorry, Miss," said Susan from the depths of her immeasurable docility. And then we got through another half-hour of pretending to look at magazines, while we were cunningly looking at the creature who was fixedly looking at us.

When it became intolerable, I said to Susan:

"I'm determined not to move. One mustn't even seem to be beaten by such rudeness. But do, for goodness' sake, put it out of your head that it can possibly be Lord Ruddington. What would Lord Ruddington be doing, travelling second-class?"

"I suppose, Miss," answered Susan, so promptly that she must have already thought it out, "he's come after Me. And he thought we shouldn't guess it was him if he rode in the second-class."

I suddenly felt that I had had heaps more than enough of the whole sordid business. I had felt for an hour that Susan knew a little more than she cared to admit. Probably she was right, and this was indeed Lord Ruddington. If so, everything was plain. This coarse-grained young rake's desire of Susan's country freshness and innocence was something even more detestable than the familiar infatuation of some weedy young lordling with a dressy and exuberant and altogether outrageous chorus-girl in town. I felt as if a rosy veil of illusion had been drawn away from life, and it almost turned me faint and sick. The worst of the affair was that Susan, with her wholesome instincts, was not revolted as she ought to have been, even by that which she did not understand.

"Susan," I said abruptly, "I'm not at all satisfied. You keep talking about a dreadful feeling, which is all sheer nonsense. I feel perfectly certain you know something about that man down there that you haven't told me."

"The only thing, Miss--"

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I didn't think there was anything much in it, Miss."

"What? In what?"

"Only that he came out through that little gate when you were downstairs, Miss, changing the money. It was before they locked the gate--before the guard looked at the tickets, just after the boat started."

"What did he say to you?"

"He didn't say anything, Miss," replied Susan regretfully. "All he did was he looked at these bags, Miss, and stood over them till he'd read the names on the

labels enough to learn them by heart, and where we were going as well. It was that that gave me such a dreadful feeling. Then the guard came and asked him what he was doing in the first-class, and looked at his ticket, and said it would be four-and-six more; and, with that, he went back again through the gate."

"Susan," I said, "I am really very angry. You ought to have told me this at once. Help me to put these things together. You know how I hate it; but we are going below."

We didn't go below; but we went as far forward as we could, and sat gazing southward until a little low moan of joy from a French-woman at my side told me that she had caught sight of the faint white ramparts of France.

As the cliffs rose higher from the sea and spread widelier to the east and west, my spirits rose and expanded with them. If Lord Ruddington was following us, there was his insult to me as well as his designs upon Susan to be dealt with. So long as we were cramped up on a ship, he had the advantage of us; but with the hugeness of France unfolding before me, I felt myself his match, and began spoiling for a fight.

I didn't have to wait long. As we entered Dieppe harbour, a sailor unlocked the gate of the second-class pen, and the inmates streamed out all over the main deck. Susan was for hurrying to swell the serried mass of Britons who invariably fight like Bushmen to be first on the gangway. But I kept her in her place, and we were among the last to disembark.

Ruddington—if it's truly he—was waiting for us at the Customs. He had got his own bag passed and chalk-marked already. I was prepared for developments, but not for what actually followed. Ignoring me, with the coolest insolence, he marched straight up to Susan, clawed carelessly at his cloth cap, and said:

"Can I be of any assistance?"

Susan shrank under my wing, all crimson confusion. I turned on him sharply.

"What is it you want?" I demanded.

He coloured up; having, I suppose, some poor remnant of shame after all. Then he stammered:

"I thought I might be of some assistance."

"Thank you," I said. "None is needed." And I turned my back.

When we had got everything through, we went into the buffet, and drank thin tea out of thick cups, while He stood at the bar with a long glass of something-and-soda. Susan had been so thoroughly cowed into speechlessness and good behaviour that I was able to take counsel with myself in peace.

We had deposited the trunks in the *consigne* until Monday, the day I had intended to resume the journey to Sainte Véronique. The bags were piled up at Susan's feet, labelled with the labels He had so coolly looked at. I wished my

writing wasn't so legible. No doubt he had memorized the address—Hôtel du Cheval d'Or, Dieppe.

All the way to Newhaven in the train, my poor little week-end time-table had seemed so lovely. Saturday, 4 P.M., arrive at the Cheval d'Or; 4.15 P.M., a bath and change; 5 P.M., a peep into St. Jacques and *une petite promenade* along the front; 6.30 P.M., a short and early dinner, with a *sole Normande*, a *caneton Rouennais*, a bit of Neufchatel cheese, some wild strawberries, and a broad-based, high-soaring, unemptiable carafe of cider; 8 P.M., this diary (with, I devoutly hoped, not a word in it about Susan); 9 P.M., bed; Sunday, a little dash upon Rouen, a run round the churches, and back for seven-o'clock dinner at the Cheval d'Or; Monday, 8.30 A.M., depart for Sainte Véronique. But now the dream was shattered. The gilt was off the Cheval d'Or, and he was the one horse in all France that I might not mount.

I sat and debated whether it would be best to go to one of the other Dieppe hotels, sending the Cheval d'Or the price of the rooms by post, or to climb straight into the Paris train and spend the night in Rouen. At last I decided that we had better stick to Dieppe and go to the Astor, where their idea of welcoming you to Normandy is to try and make you believe you're at the Carlton, and where you can't drink cider without feeling that you're a perfect monster of parsimony. It was maddening. But it had to be faced.

He drained the last drop of his something-and-soda and strode out quickly with his bag—doubtless to entrench himself in good time at the Cheval d'Or. When He was safely off the premises, I went to the platform door to find a porter. Behind the excited crowd of officials who implore you to take your seat for Paris, I espied their rivals—that silent band, with the names of hotels gilt-lettered on their caps, whose dumb eloquence pleads with you to remain in Dieppe. I had almost caught the "Astor" man's eye, when a face I dimly remembered pushed itself into sight. The face looked at me from under a cap inscribed "Hôtel du Cheval d'Or." It was Pierre, that best of porters. He knew me. I was too late.

I've learned a lesson and drawn a moral. Whenever I've forgotten, or been too lazy, to write beforehand to an hotel, I never once remember coming to the smallest harm. But whenever I've been a paragon of methodicalness and have given two or three days' notice, how often haven't I found myself shoved away into a back room or an annexe? If only I hadn't wired to the Cheval d'Or last night, I could have tossed Pierre a pleasant look and have gone off to the Astor, leaving Ruddington all alone in his glory.

Pierre had us and our bags in his omnibus in a twinkling; and, five minutes later, we were in the very muzzle of the Cheval d'Or. Out flew Madame Legendre, all smiles and hearty welcomes, and it is the simple-literal truth that, at the same moment, Justine was haling a perfectly adorable new-plucked *caneton* into her

kitchen by his neck.

Something forced me to glance up to the sunny stuccoed walls and snowy-curtained casements of the main hotel building on the left-hand side of the court. A man was leaning out of a second-floor window. When he caught sight of me, he swiftly drew in his head. It was He!

My mind made itself up in a moment. I plunged boldly into an extensive and variegated falsehood. I declared that when I telegraphed last night, I didn't know that some great friends of mine were at the Astor. It was the greatest disappointment to me not to stay, as arranged, at the Cheval d'Or. On my way back to England from Sainte Véronique, I would be sure to pay Madame Legendre at least a week's visit. Meanwhile, could Madame, as an exceptional favour, allow Pierre to carry us round to the Astor?

The long and short of it is that, so far, I have outwitted him; and here I am, spending my first French night in an English hotel. As one might as well be damned for fifty fibs as for one, I have told Madame Legendre that I want to pass all my time with my friends here at the Astor; and that if any one who knows me inquires, ever so pressingly, she isn't to acknowledge that she has the faintest idea where I've gone. She's promised. As for Pierre, I have bought him body and soul for ten francs, cash down; and if Ruddington begins asking questions he'll be told that the English lady and her maid have changed their minds and gone on to Paris.

Alas, poor dreams! I have just eaten a Paris dinner and have sent it down with London claret. And I'm going to sleep in an English bedroom, instead of in a French one. I did so want a French one, with a curtained bed and a pudgy quilt, and an Empire mirror over the mantelpiece, to say nothing of a gilt clock, and two bronze horses, and four or five nice pious pictures of martyrs all stuck full of arrows. But one can't have everything; and it's enough for me that I've beaten Ruddington to-day, as I shall beat him to-morrow and every other day until I can believe that he's something better than a libertine cad.

He's done me one good turn, at any rate. Scribbling down all this has made me deliciously drowsy. So now to make up all those arrears of sleep.

Sunday, 9 a.m.

I've slept like baby twins.

Such a sweet morning! I got up at seven and took Susan with me to Low Mass. The sunlight streaming through the windows of the choir was divine.

How different this Latin mass in France from last Sunday morning's service in Traxelby church! At Traxelby we are always so orderly, so dignified. Here at Dieppe the people grab each a chair and put it down where they like, so that

they're all higgledy-piggledy instead of sitting in decorous ranks and rows. And, except for the Gospel and Credo and the Canon, they make no pretence at sitting and standing and kneeling according to any fixed usage or principle. Some seem to be following the Proper in their missals, while others just pray, or think, or finger their beads. Susan says they behaved dreadfully, and that it didn't seem a bit like proper Church.

I felt differently. The roughness and freedom and individuality were less soothing than our elegant orderliness at Traxelby; but the realities that underlie religion seemed nearer and warmer. These faithful Dieppois looked more like the men and women of old who thronged the hillsides of Palestine and sat down entranced upon the grass; and they looked less like that chilly, respectable, dull-souled thing-- How shall I put it? Perhaps it's this. They looked more like "the multitude" of the Gospels, and less like "a congregation."

If I were not already an excommunicate heretic and schismatic, I should have surely lost my soul for my inattention to Mass. I couldn't help comparing this Sunday with last. Last Sunday, Alice was with me as in the old days. And Susan hadn't had her letter. And Gibson hadn't talked to me in the garden. Everything was orderly, dignified, low-pulsed, soothing, like last Sunday's matins in Traxelby church. But to-day, Susan's letter is a fact. So is Gibson's oath. And Ruddington is at the Cheval d'Or. My life is suddenly disordered--just as Traxelby church would be if these Dieppois were suddenly turned loose among the chairs. Yet I'm not sure that last Sunday was better. Realities, glowing human realities, have suddenly began to crowd, living and breathing, all around me--just as I felt reality, warm and near, in the rough and unpunctiliously celebrated Mass.

I couldn't help thinking some odd thoughts as I looked at one little panel of a stained window over my head. It showed a kneeling girlish figure, in white, with long yellow hair. On her right was a Bishop, coped and mitred, extending his hand; and on her left was a loutish leering fellow with a steel cap and a sword. I'm not ecclesiologist enough to know what it was all about. Possibly it meant the Soul being strengthened by the Sacraments against the onslaughts of the World. More probably it was in praise of some virgin martyr. But the odd thing was that if the yellow-haired, rather insipid damsel had had more colour in her cheeks she would have been the image of Susan. The large-mouthed, large-eared, large-limbed brute who was tempting or threatening her was not wholly unlike the cur at the Cheval d'Or. Most amazing and haunting of all, the Bishop, with his youthful, keen, honest, manly, wholesome, clean-shaven face, was simply a coped and mitred--Gibson!

Here they are, bringing the coffee in cups! Never mind. On Tuesday I shall be drinking it with a big Normandy soup-spoon out of a little Normandy bowl.

Noon.

He has tracked us down.

Coming away from High Mass at St. Rémi, we walked slap into him in the Grande Rue.

I could have boxed Susan's ears for her ridiculous goings-on. Such flushings and flutterings and scurryings can't possibly have been seen in the town before. Yet, as we came back to the Astor by the zigzaggest route I could find, she positively turned her head twice. Of course he was following.

I'm quite prepared to find he's secured the next table to mine for lunch.

What worries me isn't so much to-day's meetings. It's to-morrow's. If we can't dodge him at Dieppe, how shall we manage at Sainte Véronique? Then there's my ridiculous promise to our poor young Bishop Gibson.

I'm forced to acknowledge that Alice is right. I'm neither old enough nor wise enough to keep up Traxelby and go travelling abroad with no companion save Susan. It looks strange, and it doesn't work.

If this creature is indeed Lord Ruddington, I don't trust him to deal honestly by Susan. In that case, Gibson is just the man for the job. Once let me be sure that it's Ruddington and Gibson shall have his telegram within half an hour.

Half-past three.

I've laughed and I've cried.

To think that all last night and all this morning I fully believed we were deep in Act III. of a tragedy (Act I.: Miss Langley's Boudoir at Traxelby Grange. Act II.: The Grange Garden); and that when I walked into the *salle-à-manger* for *déjeuner* and saw the Brute in Grey at a corner table, my mind was so prepared for an ultimate Act V., that the only uncertainty was as to whether Gibson would do it with a revolver or with a knife!

It isn't Act III., and there isn't any tragedy. It turns out to be merely the comic relief of a melodrama.

He was already lurching when I sat down with Susan at my table. Of course I placed Susan with her back to him; but I didn't notice at first that I had also placed her opposite a mirror wherein she could look at him far better than I could myself.

He was too far off for me to hear him clearly; but I made out that he insistently addressed his English waiter in lamentable French. I hung my head for my country and its aristocracy, and thought more meanly than ever of its public schools. He consumed a succession of expensive dishes, and his plate was ostentatiously flanked by a bottle of champagne.

"It's a whole bottle, Miss," whispered Susan, regarding it with reverence in

the mirror; "not one of those little ones."

"If you can see him, he can see you, Susan," I said severely. "Whoever he is, he can be no gentleman to follow you like this. Eat your cutlet, and keep your eyes on your plate. And don't dawdle. I want to go upstairs again as quick as we can."

For one nasty moment, Susan hung on the very brink of rebellion. But habit or coquetry, or self-interest or pure obedience, or genuine modesty, prevailed; and she answered with perfect meekness:

"Very well, Miss, I'm ready now."

It spoiled my lunch; but I got up and we both went out. I asked for coffee and the French time-table to be brought into the drawing-room, where he wasn't likely to come. There, I sat down to work out plans in quiet.

But the quiet didn't last. Within five minutes, his large voice broke out angrily in the hall. Susan shivered on the lounge beside me. His clamour was like the vicious baying of an extra-sized wolf newly cheated of a nice young lamb.

"Oh, Miss!" moaned Susan, as white as a sheet. "He's coming in here! Whatever shall I do?"

"Sit still," I snapped. "Hold your tongue. Let us listen."

Straining my ears, I discerned that the noise was a composite one, and that the three chief contributors were the Brute in Grey, the waiter, and some third party—probably the manager.

"It's a [—] swindle!" roared the Grey One. (The blank stands for something far worse than "damned.")

"I told the gentleman it was *à la carte*," put in the waiter.

"You're a common impostor!" said the manager.

I edged along the lounge and peeped through the half-open door. The Grey One was standing with his legs apart, like the Colossus of Rhodes. Too much meat and drink had combined with anger and fear to turn his evil face nearly purple. At a safe distance stood the waiter, pale and excited, with the Grey One's bill on a silver salver. Two other waiters and the porter were massed across the doorway in case the Grey One should take to his long, horrid legs. The manager, implacable and contemptuous, leaned against his office door.

"What's all this beastly row about?" asked one of the guests of the hotel, a young Englishman, coming irritably out of the *salle-à-manger*.

"I'm deeply sorry, sir. This ... gentleman," said the manager, with a withering look at the Grey One, "has eaten his luncheon and doesn't want to pay for it."

"He won't pay," echoed the waiter feebly.

"It's a [—] lie," bellowed the Grey One. "I *will* pay. I want to pay. But I'm not going to be [—] well swindled. It's the same as knocking me down and going

through my [---] pockets, and I'll see you in hell before I stand it!"

Another young Englishman came out and joined the first.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Dunno exactly," answered his friend. "Waiter says this chap's trying on a bilk. Chap himself says they've rooked him on his lunch."

"The gentleman *would* talk French," said the pale waiter, gaining courage. "I don't know French, nor 'e don't neither. I told 'im it was *à la carte* as soon as 'e pointed to the canteloup."

"It's a barefaced robbery," cried the Grey One, swearing dreadfully. "But it's no use trying it on *me*. My uncle knows France as well as he knows Battersea Park. And what did he tell me? That you don't pay more than three or four francs in France for a dinner fit for a lord! Why, even in the French resteronts in Soho, you don't pay more than eighteenpence for five courses."

The manager made a gesture of scorn and despair.

"Perhaps you'll tell us why you ordered a cigar and a whole bottle of *Veuve Clicquot*?" he asked.

"Don't go cross-examining *me*," roared the Grey One. "I know the ropes, so don't you forget it. Everybody knows that, in France, wine's cheaper than beer."

"That's it!" chuckled one of the young Englishmen gaily. "Wine's cheaper than beer, and therefore fizz is cheaper than bottled ale!"

"There you are!" cried the Grey One in triumph. "And as for your [---] old cigar, you don't have me there either. One of the fellows at our place came back from France only last week. At least, it was Holland he'd been to, but it's all the same. And what did he pay for the cigars he smuggled back? Three for tuppence! Beauties! Yet here it is in your [---] bill, 'Cigars, one franc.' I say it's--"

"You've said all I'm willing to listen to," retorted the manager, as the two young Englishmen went back to their feeding. "For the last time, are you going to pay?"

"I'll pay six francs and not a penny more," muttered the Grey One, distinctly frightened.

"You'll pay your bill," said the manager decidedly. "The total is thirty-one francs, seventy-five centimes. I can't have our guests annoyed by a minute's further argument. I recommend you to save yourself from very unpleasant consequences."

All the fight went out of the Grey One suddenly. He gazed wistfully at the door, which was still held in force by the menials. Then he fumbled in his pockets.

"I can't," he muttered sulkily. "I haven't got the money. I've only got twenty-four francs. And there'll be my bill at the Shevvle Daw."

"The Cheval d'Or!" echoed the manager. "If you're at the Cheval d'Or, what

the deuce have you come lunching here for?"

"To meet some friends," said the Grey One brazenly. "They're staying in the hotel."

The manager was perturbed.

"What friends?" he asked.

"Two ladies," the Grey One replied.

Within the next minute the two ladies' names would have been asked for, and, no doubt, the hard-pressed brute would have given mine. I pulled the door open wide, and stepped into the hall.

"I can't help hearing," I said. "You talk so loud. What ladies do you mean?"

He jumped. Then he stood stark, as if he had been struck by lightning.

"Perhaps Madame knows something of this affair," the manager began in French.

"Only a little," I replied in English. "All I know is that this-- By the way, hadn't you better ask his name and address?"

"My name," he said wretchedly, "is Lamb--John Lamb. I'm head clerk at Phipps Brothers, the timber-merchants, Amelia Road, Shepherd's Bush. You'll have heard of Phipps Brothers?" he added imploringly.

"All I know of Mr. John Lamb," I went on, "is this. He stared at us all the way from Newhaven. He spied about, reading the names on our labels. He pushed himself on us at the Customs. He followed us to the Cheval d'Or, and practically drove us out of the rooms we had taken. He has dogged us through half the streets in Dieppe this morning. Lastly, he has given us the honour of his company at lunch."

The manager was about to work up, for my benefit, a polite adequacy of fiery indignation. But Mr. John Lamb forestalled him. Plucking up courage, he retorted impudently:

"Well, and what if it's true? We aren't in England, are we? Everybody knows they're more free-and-easy in France."

The manager was loaded and primed for an explosion. But I got in another word.

"Didn't I give you a broad enough hint at the Customs?" I asked.

"Yes," he said coarsely. "You did. But what about the other young lady? Let her come out here, fair and square, and say if she didn't egg me on. 'Tisn't my fault for thinking I was in for a soft thing. *You're* not to blame, of course. *You've* snubbed me right enough all along, no error. To tell the truth, Ma'am, I thought you were sick because it was the other young lady I was struck with, and not *you*."

What possessed him to add this insult to injury, when he was actually in the lion's mouth, only himself knows. It wasn't courage; for he had suddenly

gone paler and shakier than before. Probably he was clinging in desperation to a last mad hope that he had indeed made a conquest of "the other young lady," and that she would rush out in my wake to intercede for him, and to set him free.

As I turned round and took my first step back to the drawing-room, the manager exploded like a thousand bombs. How the Grey One managed to stand unconsumed amidst those lightnings of wrath and thunderings of menace, I can't conceive. As to his past, the Grey One learned that he was directly descended from a long line of cads, rogues, gaol-birds, and impostors; and as to his future, it appeared that the greater part of it (after he had been soundly kicked, thrashed, and horse-whipped) was to be spent in a French prison. While this fiery storm was blazing and smashing around his grey cloth cap, I neither saw Mr. John Lamb, of Phipps Brothers, nor heard him. He took it lying down.

In the end, it turned out that Mr. Lamb was possessed of an English sovereign and the return half of a week-end ticket as well as his twenty-four francs. He paid; and was flung forth into the sunshine with just enough to face Madame Legendre and to keep himself alive until the boat starts for England, in the dark and the cold, a little after midnight.

From his final and ardent, but fruitless, plea that the manager should accept the deposit of his watch and ring, and allow him to send a post-office order from England to redeem them, I gathered that this was Mr. Lamb's first visit to France; that he has got leave from Phipps Brothers till Wednesday morning; and that Mrs. Lamb doesn't expect him back to Amelia Road until Tuesday night.

I'm sick of writing about the creature, so I'll stop. Yet, if I chance to wake up about three o'clock to-morrow morning, with the air nipping and the wind blustery and the moon overcast, I'm not sure that I sha'n't think of Mr. John Lamb, and feel just a tiny, wee bit sorry for him.

BOOK III

SAINTE VÉRONIQUE

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

Some of the Letters printed in Book III. are found in the MS. of the

Diary only in abridgments, and one is missing altogether. The Transcriber has copied them from the originals *in extenso*, and has inserted them in their proper places.

BOOK III

Monday, 4 p.m.

At last!

It's like coming home. I'm in my dear old room; with the front window looking over the beck and the willows to the sea, and the side window opening on the orchard. The trees have grown since last year; and, if I leaned out far enough, there are three rosy apples that I could pluck straight from the branch as it sways in the soft wind.

The Dupoiriers are delighted I've come. Poor things, considering the gorgeous summer, they haven't been doing over well. Yet the hotel is sweeter than ever. Those stuffy velvet curtains, that I always loathed, have been taken out of the salon. It was a bit of a shock to see the summer-house stripped of creepers and painted white: but, if it's less picturesque, it is also more possible. Last year I didn't dare to sit in it because of the earwigs.

There's a new Marie. The old Marie, with the red hair, who wouldn't more than half-fill my water-jugs, left only last week. The new Marie is a black-haired, black-eyed one, and far nicer. There's a letter for me from Alice. And, of course, there's a letter for Susan from the regrettable Ruddington. But I'm not going to bother with either of them till I've had a peep at the path that winds along the beck to the sea.

In the summer-house.

I do wish Alice wouldn't!

She's found out somehow that Ruddington was at the Towers all through the last week of her visit. She's quite vicious about my running away. According to her first three pages, I "must get married some day," and Lord Ruddington has been, so to speak, restored to the county by Divine Providence for the express purpose of taking pity on my old-maidhood. To scamper off to Sainte Véronique is, therefore, to fly in Providence's face. Yet, according to Alice's fourth page, my flight to France looks "far more pointed" than if I'd stolidly stuck at home.

If a mere logical triumph were worth a single drop of ink, I might twit Alice with the inconsistency. If it's true that the calculating coyness of my maiden flight has already put it into His Highness's head that I am one of the candidates, I might fairly claim Alice's praise instead of her blame.

I shouldn't care so much if Alice weren't so insistently practical. She positively wants me to race back next week; and she says she can even manage Hugh, so that he'll bring her with him, and do his bird-slaughtering at Traxelby instead of at Maxfield. No doubt she is confident that, by October the 2d, the bag will be twenty pheasants, a dozen partridges, and one Lord.

I wonder what Alice would say if I wrote straight off and told her that Lord Ruddington, to my certain knowledge, has already disposed of his charms elsewhere? I wish I could tell her. It would be such hollow, tiresome work arguing with her on every ground save the solid fact.

Monday night.

The Lamb in Wolf's Clothing gave me a bad twenty-four hours on the boat and in Dieppe; but he has certainly done a power of good to Susan. She hasn't got over her surprise at my not giving her a lecture and a mighty scolding; and she's brimming over with silent gratitude.

Ruddington's letter is irritating, but, in a sense, rather nice. I didn't ask Susan to show it to me. I thought it would keep very well till to-morrow. But Susan has laid it inside my blotting-case. Rather graceful of her—unless she's afraid that a personal delivery of it would remind me of Mr. John Lamb, and wake up a dormant volcano! Here is the letter:—

RUDDINGTON TOWERS,

Saturday, September 8, 1906.

MY DEAR SUSAN,—I may begin this way, may I not?

Your letter this morning has brought me unspeakable relief and happiness. When Thursday's and Friday's posts were blank, I hardly restrained myself from waylaying you at Traxelby.

As it's utterly beyond me to thank you enough for your letter, I'll try a little grumbling instead. Is it not rather cruel to say that I must not write more than once a week? Once a week for a month means only four letters in all. Sha'n't we be almost as much strangers when you come back as when you went away?

When you come back! The words make my blood, run faster. They're like

the refrain of a song. When you come back! They're the music I shall march by, and live my life by, till you come.

I enter into all you say about giving you a quiet month to think and to decide. I understand, and I admire it. And yet it's almost more than I can stand. To know where you are, to have the power to join you in a few hours, and yet to be forced to serve a month's imprisonment in England, is well-nigh too much for flesh and blood. As I laid down your letter this morning, I realized that by riding hard across Ruddington Heath I could have caught you for a moment at the station. But I set your sovereign command before my eyes ... and stayed at home! Ought you not to be very nice to me for being so good and obedient? For example, don't I deserve a long letter on Tuesday?

Till you come back, and for ever, RUDDINGTON.

P.S.—Do not be angry with me for what I am going to say. Although I put it in a postscript, it is uppermost in my thoughts.

Pray don't think I'm about to try and coax you out of your month's reflection. Long and hard though I shall find it, I say. Have the month by all means. But is it necessary that you should pass the month in your present conditions?

It tortures me to know that while I will live this month in comfort and leisure, you will often find it difficult even to snatch the time for one weekly letter. Now that I know that no one else has won you, take my word for it, dearest, that no one else ever shall! Susan is going to be *my* Susan, even if I've to take her by storm.

What follows? This. From the moment of reading your letter, I promoted myself to be your protector to our lives' end. How then can I tolerate you remaining for another hour in a servile position for which you were never born—into which some hateful freak of Fate has thrust you, and out of which it is the greatest honour of my life to rescue you? It maddens me that, perhaps at this very moment, you are being ordered about, and made to fetch and carry for somebody who isn't fit to lace your shoes.

Reading this, you can easily be angry. But bear with me. There are so many ways in which a thing like this could be arranged without unseemliness. And, surely, nothing can be more unfitting than that you should be distracted from so solemn a decision by a fussy pressure of petty tasks. I entreat you to give me the great happiness of setting you free.

R.

His gentle Lordship does not condescend to state whether, in the event of Susan being "set free," he will forthwith send me, carriage paid, a new maid as fanciable and wholesome as Susan, with feet that move about, like Susan's, as quietly as two mice. But, of course, as I'm merely "somebody not fit to lace Susan's shoes," I don't count.

To-morrow there'll be the worry of sending off an answer. What will he say when he sees Susan's own handwriting? And how shall we explain the first letter being in mine? I suppose Susan had better make a clean breast of it. I expect his infatuation is proof even against Susan's blots and pot-hooks.

Now for bed.

Mardi; midi moins quart.

I have drunk coffee, with a big bright soup-spoon, out of a little white bowl with pink rosebuds inside and out. Also, I have eaten four *croissants* and a shameful quantity of Normandy butter. This was at eight o'clock. Since then I have followed the beck all the way to the sea; have bathed; have climbed the cliff; and have been to the post-office for stamps. Through the window I can see Georgette placing a blinding cut-glass decanter of fresh-drawn, foamy cider, full in the sun, on my table in the orchard. As Susan would say, "a feeling came over me" where the beck runs past the poplars. I couldn't help stamping my heel on the ground and saying, "It is true that I am back in Normandy."

After lunch, there'll be my letter to Alice. I sha'n't say anything about Ruddington, except that she mustn't go on being a tease. Then there'll be Susan's letter to the Lord of Burleigh. It would be inhuman to make him wait for it any longer.

Georgette has just brought out a melon. Its minutes are numbered. I haven't felt so hungry for ages.

I wonder what Mr. Lamb is doing, and what yarn he has spun at Amelia Road? Poor Gibson, too! If I were Susan, I think I'd send him just a Sainte Véronique post-card.

Deo gratias! "C'est servi!"

Tuesday night.

I am like a bird in a net.

After lunch, Susan came to me and begged pardon for asking if I "hadn't forgotten the post."

"No," I answered, "it doesn't go out for five hours. By the way, Susan, what are you going to say to Lord Ruddington?"

Her face fell.

"Please, Miss," she said, "I was thinking ... perhaps you would write the letter for me."

"No, Susan," I replied promptly, "I can't do that. If talking it over will help you, I'm willing. I don't mind even scribbling something out in pencil. But I can't write it. Surely it's bad enough that he's had one letter in my handwriting. I wouldn't have had it happen for the world. Besides, you'll have to write the letters yourself before long, so why not face it at once? We shall need to think out some way of explaining to him why the other handwriting was different."

While I was speaking, Susan was becoming more and more agitated; and when I ceased, she didn't answer.

"Come, Susan," I said kindly.

She began to weep.

"Oh, Miss!" she sobbed, "on Friday I told you a lie. I told you that I didn't copy it out in my own writing because I didn't think—"

She stopped.

"Well?" I said, after I had waited long enough.

"I thought, Miss," sobbed Susan, "I thought ... I was afraid, if he saw my writing, he might give me up. And what you'd wrote looked so beautiful and ladylike, Miss, that—"

She couldn't go on.

"Susan," I said, "you've acted very wrongly. You've done wrong to me, and you've deceived Lord Ruddington. Worse still, you've done wrong to yourself. If he really cared for you, he wouldn't have been turned away by bad writing. But he won't admire deceit. You've taken the first step on the wrong path, and you don't know what will be the end."

I am getting to be a practised preacher. Since last Thursday, I've laid down more of the moral law than in all the rest of my life. Susan heard me in meekness.

"I know it was wicked," she said; "but oh, Miss, do please, *please* write the letter to-day! It won't be many times more."

"If I do it one time more, I expect I shall have to do it fifty."

Susan looked mysterious.

"No, Miss," she said with assurance, "not fifty."

"Why not?" I asked. And, after some pressing, Susan confessed that she has snatched five hours from sleep since Friday for the express purpose of conforming her penmanship to the pattern of mine. She showed me some specimens, and I was astonished at the advance she had made.

"Well, Susan," I said at last, "I don't like it at all, and I'm very angry with you. But if there's any prospect of your going on improving like this in your writing, perhaps it will be as well for me to write your next two or three letters.

Then I sha'n't need to be brought into the affair, so far as Lord Ruddington is concerned, at all."

Susan's gratitude was touching.

"I'll never forget how good you've been to me, Miss," she said, choking down a sob.

"Find Georgette," I said. "While she's clearing the table, bring down my writing-case. We'll do it under the trees."

Susan danced off with a skittishness that surprised me. When she came back, I asked her what she had decided to say.

"I was thinking, Miss," she said, "we might say how nice it would have been if he'd galloped over the Heath to the station. And don't you think, Miss, he would like to hear how we thought he was Mr. Lamb?"

"Never a word to him about Mr. Lamb as long as you live, Susan," I said peremptorily. "As for the Heath, it would have been very wrong of him. But how are you going to answer his postscript—this long bit at the end, all about your leaving me at once?"

"Leaving *you*, Miss?" asked Susan, mystified.

"Yes," I said, looking at her. "Don't you see? Lord Ruddington wants you to leave me at once."

Her face flushed with such genuine trouble that I forgave Susan everything, and took her back to my heart.

"Oh, no, Miss!" she cried. "I didn't understand he meant that. I wouldn't ever do that."

What Susan had taken the postscript to mean I have no notion. Nor do I know yet whether, in the near future, I shall be expected to give Susan and her spouse a suite of rooms at Traxelby, or whether she will offer me a housekeeper's place at the Towers. It is plain that she does not entertain the idea of our being parted.

I said:

"Lord Ruddington doesn't like to think that you are ... well, in any sense a servant. To put it plainly, he wants to find you money, so that you can begin to lead a lady's life at once. It does him credit. But, Susan, of course you can't take money from him. Have you saved anything?"

Susan says she has saved thirty pounds. And nothing could be sounder than the quickness and firmness with which she decided that cash transactions with Lord Ruddington just now are unthinkable. Nor can anything be more indisputable than her unweakened devotion to myself.

"You can go upstairs and practise handwriting," I told her. "Come down in about half an hour, and I shall have some sort of a letter ready."

But two half-hours passed in vain attempts to produce an epistle proper to

Susan's temperament and intellect. I've realized this afternoon that I can never write a play. I tried hard to think and feel as Susan must think and feel; but I could only think and feel on my own account. At the end of an hour and a half, the best I had been able to achieve was this:—

SAINTE VÉRONIQUE, *Tuesday.*

Yes. You may call me "Dear Susan." But you must not say "My," until it is true.

You say it was good of you not to ride over the Heath to the station. If you had done it, I should have been grieved.

We had a smooth crossing from Newhaven, and we stayed till Monday morning in Dieppe. I like Sainte Véronique, and do not want to spend my month anywhere else.

I am not angry with you for saying what you do about setting me free. How could I be anything but grateful for an offer that is so kindly meant and so delicately made?

To ease you of your kind fears on my account, let me tell you that I have always been happy with Miss Langley; and that, during this month, I shall have little work and plenty of leisure.

I look forward to receiving another letter from you on Monday.

SUSAN BRIGGS.

"It's beautiful, Miss!" said Susan dejectedly, after she had perused my effort. And she sat looking up into the sky, the picture of disappointment and indecision. I went to the rescue.

"Say what's in your mind, Susan. There's a 'but,' isn't there? It's beautiful, but ... what?"

"I was thinking," confessed Susan blushfully, "that it isn't..."

"Isn't what?"

"It isn't ... very loving."

"Loving?" I said. "What do you mean? Why, here you are, spending a month deciding whether you can try to care for Lord Ruddington or not. It isn't time yet to be 'loving.'"

"No," persisted Susan. "But I mean, Miss, won't he be disappointed?"

"You can't help that. You might as well say that he's disappointed because you don't pack your box and go straight off to Ruddington Towers."

Susan was unconvinced.

"What did you say yourself, Susan, last week? Didn't you say that it wouldn't be good for him to throw yourself at his head?"

When Susan first used it, the expression had irritated me; but it came in handily. Susan, however, thought otherwise. A spirit of revolt entered her soul, and I perceived the beginnings of her new pout.

"Do as you like, Susan, of course," I said. "It's your affair, not mine. But don't go and make another muddle as you did with Mr. John Lamb."

It went home. Indeed, I'm not sure that Mr. John Lamb wasn't, so to speak, a wolf with a silver lining. The merest whisper of his soft and innocent name is enough to scare Susan into the extreme of docility.

"Oh, no, Miss!" she said hurriedly. "The letter's beautiful. But don't you think...?"

"What?"

"Don't you think, Miss, it would be nice to ask for his photograph and a lock of his hair?"

While I was fighting down an impulse to laugh outright, it struck me that the photograph was rather a happy thought. With his photograph to study, I should at least be spared panicky announcements and "dreadful feelings" whenever Susan saw a strange Englishman at Sainte Véronique. Besides, I had no little curiosity to see what this mad Lord Ruddington might be like.

"A lock of hair is ridiculous," I said. "You must have been reading some trashy novelette. But a photograph's different. I'm glad you've thought of it. After all, Susan, you mightn't care to marry even Lord Ruddington if you found he was dreadfully ugly. Give me back the letter, and I'll add a postscript."

I wrote:-

P.S.—I feel that I haven't written you much of a letter; but there is so little to lay hold of. As I said before, you have seen me, but I have never seen you.

Will you not send me your photograph? When it comes, perhaps I shall remember that I have seen you, after all.

Where was it that you saw me?

Taking a little more liberty than was her wont, Susan peeped shyly over my shoulder while I wrote. As I put down the pen, she heaved a deep sigh of unaffected satisfaction.

"It's lovely, Miss!" she said fervently. "That's just what I must have meant—that part about wondering where he saw me—only I couldn't explain it. And it's put so short and ladylike."

"Don't say 'ladylike,' Susan," I said. "Give me an envelope."

I wrote out Lord Ruddington's name and address in the style of handwriting I had used throughout the letter. It was my own writing; but a little bigger, inkier, and slower than usual.

"You see, Susan," I explained, "I'm meeting you halfway. By the time he's had a letter or two from me written like this, you ought to be able to do something pretty near it yourself. Now go upstairs and bring down those French stamps. They're in my green bag."

While Susan was upstairs I took the letter out of the envelope and glanced through it once more. When I got as far as "I have always been happy with Miss Langley," the oddity struck me irresistibly. It was quite too comically reminiscent of the letters which girls used to write, under the governess's eye and at the governess's dictation, protesting their ideal happiness at school.

There was just time. I picked up the pen and wrote sideways along the margin of the letter:—

I suppose you think my mistress calls me "Briggs."

When Susan arrived with the stamps, the letter was back in its envelope, the flap was gummed down, and I was blinking peacefully at the sunlight on the sea.

Wednesday, noon.

I suppose it's true that every country gets the Government it deserves. But the maxim, like nearly all the maxims I've ever heard, is a heartless one.

Without doubt, France just now has got the Government which France deserves, as a whole. But the whole is made up of parts; and, unless my travels have misled me, there must be thousands of parts of France like Sainte Véronique. I have seen a dozen myself—rural communities, working hard and living decently, with the slated spire of their hoary parish church looking down upon them, as it looked down ages ago on their direct ancestors who first drained the valleys and set vines upon the hillsides. Here live and toil the men, and, more remarkable still, here live and toil and suffer the women, whose hard earnings are the war-chest of France when the professional politicians of Paris wantonly thrust the nation into some vainglorious adventure. Here was made and saved the treasure with which the invader was bought out when his armies were everywhere masters of French soil. And here are bred the supplies of sound human stuff—the healthy bodies, the healthy souls—to redress the awful balance of the towns, and

to save France from becoming a ruin amid stinging weeds and insolent poppies.

Even an atheist statesman, if he's as truly a statesman as he's truly an atheist, ought to know that, in striking at the village churches, he is striking at the heart of French rural life; and that, in wounding French rural life in a vital spot, he will be severing arteries where Bismarck and Von Moltke only lanced small veins.

This morning has made me so sad. The sweet little white convent is shut up, the garden is full of nettles, two of the chapel windows are broken, the nuns are in England, and the lawyers have grown fat on the pickings. At the church, the statue of St. Veronica, over the west door, has a broken arm—snapped off on the day of the inventory. Meanwhile the weeks are drifting by; and, for all the old curé knows, he will be saying Mass in a barn before the winter is half over.

I mean to say, now and again, what France's million officials, from the President of their so free Republic down to the Saint Véronique postman, daren't say publicly and aloud in this land of liberty. I mean to say: "God save France!"

Thursday afternoon.

I wish Master Ruddle's photograph would come.

This morning, about eleven, a young Englishman suddenly walked in with a knapsack. The funny thing was that he didn't come by the road. He marched here straight from the beach, as if he'd just been thrown up by Jonah's whale.

He was a nice boy, and quite all right. Not another Mr. John Lamb. It seems he's tramping a hundred miles along the coast by the cliff-paths and the sands. He was dying to talk to me at lunch. Indeed, he looked even hungrier and thirstier for human companionship than for his omelette and roast chicken and cider, which is saying a very great deal. Now that it's too late, I'm sorry I didn't let him talk.

All the time he was here, Susan was nearly as silly as she was on the boat. She got it into her head that, as Ruddington wrote here on Saturday (thinking we were coming straight through), he must have been upset when Tuesday morning came without a letter; and that therefore the pretty boy with the knapsack was certainly he.

I was obliged to be very sharp with her. Heaven send the photograph soon! Because I will admit to this diary, when Susan has "a feeling" I can't help catching the complaint.

Before dinner.

It's just come. The photograph and a letter as well.

He says the photograph was only taken yesterday morning. It's a local thing, not retouched: so I suppose we can depend on it as a faithful likeness. If so, I must say I like him tremendously.

Susan is disappointed that he has no moustache. He looks like a young and fresh version of some handsome and benevolent Judge or Cardinal. He isn't the least bit flabby or silly-looking, as I expected. He has a scholar's head, but he's evidently a man of energy as well as of thought. I should say he has a tremendous will of his own. He doesn't look the sort to have fallen over ears in love with a china shepherdess like Susan at first sight. But there's the fact. And, although the stupid girl can't see it, and "never thought he would be like that, Miss," I don't know many women that wouldn't feel it a compliment to have him in love with them, either at the first sight, or the second, or the fiftieth. He looks handsome without being dandified, and brainy without being dry.

His letter this time is less old-fashioned and more easy. He says:-

MA CHÈRE SUZANNE,-You have commanded me not to say "My dear Susan," and behold! I obey.

I'm sorry to say it: but my dear Susan-I mean ma chère Suzanne-has a hard heart. Her letter to tell me that she's landed safe in Normandy without being shipwrecked or run over by a motor-car, only reached me this (Wednesday) morning: and, if I hadn't ridden into Derlingham and fished it up out of the post-office, I shouldn't have got it till to-morrow. If Suzanne were kind, she would have sent one line on Sunday.

It is an enormous relief to know that you are not hard-worked or unhappy. When I saw Miss Langley with you (once outside Traxelby Church, and twice in the street), I thought she seemed rather nice-though, to tell the truth, I didn't waste time looking at Miss Langley, when I could spend it looking at Suzanne.

Now about this horrible photograph. I've always hated photography and always shall. But your commands must be obeyed. So I went into the "studio" of the Derlingham "artist." The "artist" was a pasty-faced youth in a velvet coat with Byronic curls that must take hours every night. He wanted to do his worst, and to turn out something elaborate that wouldn't be ready for a week: but I gave him a maximum of three hours, and he has handed me the enclosed.

I expect a long answer to this, telling me all your doings, by return of post. And I shall be the most injured man in all England if Suzanne's own photograph is not enclosed with her long letter. More than ever, I am your RUDDINGTON.

"I like this letter, Susan," I said, putting it down again on the table.

"Yes, Miss," said Susan, without enthusiasm. And, after a pause, she added, "But don't you think, Miss, it begins rather funny?"

"No," I answered. "I think the beginning is rather neat. You've forgotten. In our last letter we told him he might call you Dear Susan, but he mustn't call you My. So, instead of calling you 'My,' he says he's going to call you 'Ma.'"

"Is that it?" asked Susan, pouting. "Well, I don't think I like it. That's what my uncle Bob used to call my aunt Martha."

"Your uncle Bob?" I echoed, stupefied.

"Yes, Miss. He called my aunt 'Ma,' and she called him 'Pa.' I don't like it, Miss. It sounds common."

When I had recovered enough gravity, I tried, for the twentieth time, to give Susan a rudimentary lesson in French. She endured my efforts with deference; but, underneath, I could see that her rustic British prejudice against France and all things French is unshaken. I honestly believe that, in Susan's opinion, to have set foot in France at all is a slight lapse from propriety, and a loss of the finest bloom from the soft cheek of one's maiden virtue. In France, the silly creature won't even touch beef, just because of some stupid tale of Gibson's about a roast horse. She firmly believes that out-and-out Frenchmen eat bullfrogs toasted whole on a fork; and that the French language is a ludicrous disability imposed on the natives by a strictly Protestant Deity as a just punishment for being papists and foreigners. Susan doesn't intend to lower herself by learning French any more than by learning to stammer, or to swear.

"What about your photograph, Susan?" I inquired, changing the subject. "You see he wants one. Did you happen to bring one with you?"

"No, Miss. It's two years since I had it took."

"Taken. Not took. Then what are you going to do?"

"I don't know, Miss."

"You ought to oblige him," I said. "Don't be so limp. Look at the trouble he took to get you his own portrait the very same day. I'm almost sure there's a photographer at Grandpont. Madame will know. It's only three miles. We'll go in the morning."

"Oh no, Miss!" gasped Susan, fluttering suddenly into liveliness. "Not in France, Miss!"

"Why not in France?"

"I shouldn't like to be photographed in France, Miss," said Susan decidedly. For a moment I almost felt as if I had proposed mixed bathing to the rector's virgin aunt. To be photographed in France sounded a degree or two worse than going to church *décolletée*. But a moment later I felt impatient and annoyed.

"Very well, Susan," I said shortly. "You may be sure I don't want to drag myself to Grandpont. Do whatever you please."

As usual, she became immediately and amply and sincerely penitent.

"It was very kind of you, Miss," she said humbly. "You're always too good to me. But I feel I couldn't go and be photographed in France."

"Then don't go and be photographed in France," I said, still ruffled. "So far as I'm concerned, it's settled and done with. Now I want to read the newspaper."

I could see with half an eye that there were uncountable things which Susan was yearning to talk over; but I was nearly at the end of my good-nature. With the little that remained, I tried to let Susan down gently. I picked up Lord Ruddington's photograph again and said:

"At any rate, you can't find much fault with his looks."

"No, Miss," responded Susan tepidly, "but I did think he would have a moustache."

Friday, sunrise.

An apple-branch has tapped at my window, and a lark is singing eagerly in the near sky.

This shall be a good day—as rosy as the apple's cheeks, as blithe as the lark's song. I hereby register a vow against Ruddington and all his words and works. We needn't send him his answer till to-morrow. So, to-day, Susan sha'n't mention him and I won't even think of him.

Somebody's left a clean, new, cheap copy of *Les Chouans* here. How I shall love reading it again. Except while I'm bathing and eating and sleeping, I mean to sit and read it on the cliffs all day.

After breakfast.

After all, Susan is awfully sweet. One can't stand aloof from her long.

While she was downstairs before breakfast allowing Georgette to practise on her in broken English, I went into her room to find a pair of scissors. As usual, it was as neat and nice as if it hadn't been slept in. But the thing that struck me was a leather photograph-frame on the mantelpiece.

I recognized the frame. It was a double one, which I had given Susan because I hated the colour. In the left-hand compartment Susan had placed the newly arrived photograph of Lord Ruddington. And facing him, on the right hand, was—Me!

It was that thing I got done last Easter. Until this morning, I'd forgotten that Susan had pleaded for a copy and that I had let her have one for her album. Suddenly to catch sight of myself beaming affectionately across the hinges of the frame at an equally affectionate-looking Lord Ruddington, was certainly a

shock. But that Susan should have brought me all the way from England and have stuck me on her mantelpiece was another proof, though none was needed, of her genuine devotion.

I took the frame down and held it open in my hands. It was too comical. Ruddington and I are placed in ovals, like the August Young Personages in a Royal Wedding Supplement to an illustrated paper; and we are looking at one another with the most absurd happy-couple air imaginable. "Though I say it as shouldn't," we make an amazingly pretty pair. If Alice could see it, she would begin to cry.

I think I sha'n't tell Susan that I've seen it.

Noon.

I haven't read much of the *Chouans*. After my bathe, I kept Susan with me on the cliff. The grass was green, the sky was blue, and the sea was both. It was lovely to loll on the flowers and to listen to the sea—its deep speech at the cliff's foot, its soft murmurs in the sunlit distance.

Susan thinks Ruddington ought to tell her more about himself, and his conditions of life, both at the Towers and in town. I think she's right. Now that she's getting used to her good fortune, her talk has suddenly improved. She's dropping that raw and childish way of hers, and some of the things she said were quite sensible. If she goes on improving like this, she ought to be tolerably presentable at the month's end. No doubt it will take years to fill the gaping breaches in her knowledge; and her mind can never, from its very nature, expand enough to make her an all-round companion for such a man as Ruddington seems to be. But I take it that a grain or two of common-sense will be found mixed with his infatuation; and, if so, he will be prepared for a good deal of disenchantment. As for Susan, she'll always be pretty, and restful, and docile, and sweet: which means that if he is losing some things he is gaining others.

Alas, poor Gibson! I'm afraid his dreams are standing a poor chance of coming true. It's selfish of me not to have sent him a prudent line. I'll do it today. I'll tell him simply that all's well with Susan; and perhaps he will guess that all's up with himself.

Eight o'clock.

I walked alone this afternoon to Bérigny. The hamlet was deserted—or, at least, it looked so. The thatched black-and-white barns stood out sturdily in the bright, strong light, and Bérigny wore all its old prosperous air. But there wasn't a single body to be seen. I suppose every one was in the fields, or gone to market.

The church was open. I sat in it a few minutes: it was so cool and quiet. If I had felt suddenly tempted to steal an image, or to rob the box of Peter's Pence, there was none to say me nay.

The Bérigny churchyard looked sweeter than ever. I like it better than any other I have seen in France, because it is full of natural shrubs and flowers. There are hardly any of those frightful wire crosses and tin immortelles and iron wreaths, as big as cart-wheels, such as you see in dozens everywhere else. And the Bérigny churchyard isn't *triste*. As you sit on the warm stone platform of the Calvary, you look down over the orchards to the facing uplands—pastures of green velvet, wildly embroidered with, a million yellow flowers. Even the graves are not melancholy. It doesn't seem any more dreadful that the men and women of Bérigny should be fast asleep, like children in the bosom of their mother earth, than that last year's beech-leaves and pine-needles should be lying quietly under the ceaseless murmurs of this year's cool and shady green. Cheerful sounds arise from the valley as you sit and look down. There is blue smoke curling from one or two of the chimneys. Between the surges of light wind you can just hear the voice of the beck as it sings on its way down to Sainte Véronique. No, Bérigny churchyard is not melancholy: for in the midst of death you are in life.

There is a strange thing about some of the gravestones which I didn't notice when I was here before. Or, rather, I oughtn't to call them stones. They are woods. Over the humbler tombs stand rude memorials, each consisting of two short, slightly ornamented posts with a short broad plank fastened between. The plank is painted white; and upon it, in black letters, are displayed the name and age and birth-and-death dates of the man or woman asleep below.

At the bottom of each inscription there is an abbreviated formula which puzzled me sorely. It runs: "Un D. P. s. v. p." Not until I had almost given up trying to guess what it might mean, was the riddle solved. Behind the chancel I found a larger and newer grave on which the legend was spelt out at large in full: "Un De Profundis, s'il vous plait."

It filled my eyes so full with sudden tears that the solid world seemed to be wavering and dissolving as I beheld it. And, at the same time, the dim mysterious world beyond seemed suddenly clear and near. It was no longer the wind in the pines that I heard: it was a multitudinous whispering of spirit-voices pleading close to my ear: "If you please!"

I am wondering to-night whether I ever really and truly believed until to-day in the immortality of the soul. I am wondering whether I have ever done more than assent to the doctrine mechanically as a part of my childhood's creed, and as a postulate on which rest many familiar things in our literature and civilization.

Yes and No. In a sense I have believed, in a sense I have not. Until to-day, I have only thought of the disembodied soul in one or other of three different

ways. I have thought of the soul as a cold abstraction, a philosopher's name for an antithesis to the body. Again, after I've listened to ghost-tales, I've thought of it ignobly—as a horror, a scary, frightful spook, a foul shape of night swooping horribly across the short sunlit path of our little life to remind us of the immeasurable cold and unending dark beyond. Last of all, after some stately obsequies, I've thought of the soul as living some supernal, Gothic life in a churchly heaven—a heaven where the sky is not a dome, but a pointed roof resounding for ever and ever and ever with Gregorian chants. That is to say, at the best I have imagined the soul clothed in a mediæval vestment, and living exaltedly, in an incalculable remoteness from to-day's crowded world of living and breathing women and men.

"A De Profundis ... if you please!" I suppose many people would find the "if you please" either ludicrous or irreverent, or both. At one time I might not have found anything in it myself, beyond a charming rustic *naïveté*. But this afternoon the truth rushed over me in a flood. The souls of the faithful departed are not thirteenth-century souls: they are not the shivering, pitiable ghosts such as engaged the fancy of savage men ten thousand years ago, or the still weaker brains of the Spiritualists of yesterday: they are not mere fictions of the philosopher, invented for convenience of argument. They live and rejoice and sorrow in an intensity of present being. To-night, I believe in the Communion of Saints. They exist as truly as the little black-haired child exists who stopped me outside Bérigny and said "s'il vous plait" when she asked me the time: as truly as Georgette when she says "if you please" and lays the cloth: as truly as Susan when she says "Please, do *please*, Miss," over a letter to Ruddington.

This afternoon, I couldn't say a "De Profundis" for the departed faithful of Bérigny because I'm too much of a heathen to have been taught it. But, before Sunday, I mean to buy a *paroissien* containing all these things, in French and Latin.

When I say my "De Profundis," can it do them any good? I don't know. Millions of people say it can't. But more millions of people say it can. And if I make a mistake, I would rather make it in giving than in withholding: just as it is better to say "Yes" to the beggar who may waste your sixpence on beer, than to say "No" to the beggar who may lie down and die for want of bread.

Bedtime.

What an irony!

This is the day when there was to be no Ruddington—the day that was to be as rosy as apples and as blithe as a lark.

As for Ruddington, I have only just finished re-reading his letter, which

Susan has put by way of a hint in my writing-case.

As for rosiness and blitheness, I've spent my afternoon and evening like Hervey—I wonder if anybody ever read any more of his book than the title?—in *Meditations Among the Tombs*. My day has been ghost-wan, tomb-silent.

No. It has been as full of colour and of sound as could be. But the colours have been the grand and solemn hues of autumn, and the sounds have been majestic as organs and trumpets. To-day I have not been gay. But I have been happy. And I can't name any day at Sainte Véronique that I repent of less than this.

Saturday morning.

This is the answer I have written for Susan to send by the early post:—

DEAR LORD RUDDINGTON,—I am so sorry that you were anxious about me. But you must not forget the bargain. And the bargain does not allow of long replies "by return." Indeed, in writing this morning, I am breaking my own rule. When this is posted, I shall have received and answered two letters in one week.

Do not think me grudging or cold-blooded in standing fast to our arrangement. If letters are too frequent they will be short and scrappy, and thus they will fail of their object. For example, nothing could be more devoted and kind than your two notes this week; but they tell me so little about yourself, and hardly anything at all about your daily life, your thoughts, your work, your interests. At present I know no more about you than all Traxelby knew before you came to the Towers.

It is true there is the photograph, which I like very much—though you don't in the least resemble the picture my mind had formed! You were good to take all that trouble in Derlingham so as to get it done so quickly.

Unfortunately, I have no photograph of myself here, and there is no artist, not even a pasty-faced one, in Sainte Véronique. But why should you want my portrait if you have seen me three times?

I sha'n't expect an answer from you "by return;" but I *shall* expect your next week's letter to tell me more about yourself and your life.

Yours sincerely, SUSAN BRIGGS.

Susan thinks my letter is beautiful, as usual. Or, if she doesn't think so, she says she does. But to know that she needn't be photographed in France has lifted such

a weight off her spirits that she is prepared to be delighted with everything. After the first shock and the second explanation, she went up into heaven at finding that it was "proper" to say "Dear Lord Ruddington." Perhaps she expected me to begin the letter by calling him "Pa!"

It's all very amusing. But I must keep a watch on myself lest I take it too prankishly. After the future Lady Ruddington had graciously signified her approval of my reply to her noble owner, she went upstairs for her hat, and, while she was away, a madcap impulse got the better of me, just as it did on Tuesday. I picked up the pen and wrote along the margin:—

I was amused about those Byronic curls. But what do *you* know about them taking hours to do at night?

Now that it's too late, and Susan is on her way to the post-office, I do wish I hadn't said it. For half a dozen reasons, it was a mad thing to do.

His portrait is still facing mine in the leather frame. I took a peep at it just now when I came upstairs for this diary. And we've still got the same sort of a "Good-morning, Dear," honeymoon expression. I positively blushed, and put it down again as if it had been red hot.

I must see that Susan plods away at her handwriting—or, rather, at mine! It's plain now that Ruddington is in love with Susan, and that he means to marry her. Also, it's plain that Susan means to marry Lord Ruddington, whether she succeeds in falling in love with him or not. Up to the present no great harm is done, but I must wriggle out of the affair somehow before his letters become intimate and affectionate.

Poor, poor Gibson! I've written him a line, and shall post it myself.

Sunday, noon.

For the sake of his peace of mind, let us hope that Ruddington is Low Church. If he isn't, Susan will soon be on his nerves. There's precious little kneeling down and standing up at the Sainte Véronique parish Mass; but this morning I had to prod or pluck at Susan half a dozen times. When we came out she made wistful comparisons with Traxelby, and declared that she did so miss "a nice service."

Perhaps Ruddington is neither Low nor High. He says that one of the times when he saw Susan was in church. But Traxelby isn't his parish: so he must have been hunting Susan, not saving his soul.

I've given up wrestling with the *Chouans*. I'd forgotten the early part was so dry. Besides, it's nicer to potter about, and think and dream, not to mention that novel-reading is wicked on a Sunday.

Monday morning.

Susan has been difficult again. I'm sorry for her.

Last night she suddenly developed the liveliest interest in dress. In the past she hasn't been a girl to care excessively about it. That's why she has always looked so nice. But, last night, she said:

"I've been thinking, Miss, what ought I to wear the first time I go to see him?"

"You mean, Susan," I answered, "what ought you to wear the first time he comes to see *you*."

"Yes, Miss," said Susan absently. "I was thinking it would be nice if I had one of those cherry-coloured zephyrs, with elbow sleeves and a white sash."

I smiled.

"Do you think you can depend on yourself not to blush, Susan," I asked, "when he looks at you and speaks to you?"

"Oh no, Miss, I can't," answered Susan in a panic. "I shall be sitting, all the time, wanting the ground to open and swallow me."

"Then I don't think you should go in for anything cherry-coloured," I suggested. And I tried to go on with *Les Chouans*.

"Perhaps blue alpaca would be better, Miss," broke out Susan again, after long reflection. "Blue alpaca, made plain, with a little train. I could wear that lace collar you gave me, Miss, and have my hair done more on the top of my head."

"You'd look very nice, I'm sure, Susan," I replied. "But, if I were you, I shouldn't do anything of the kind. I suppose it will be at the Grange that you'll see him first. Some arrangement will have to be made. If so, it ought to please him best to see you as he saw you at Traxelby church."

I went on again with *Les Chouans*. Or, to be strictly truthful, I fixed my eyes again on the page.

"I beg your pardon, Miss," Susan began humbly, after five minutes of quiet; "but shall we be married in Traxelby church?"

"Most decidedly not," I answered, so emphatically that Susan positively jumped. "I haven't the ghost of a notion where in the world you'll be married. But it mustn't be Traxelby. Lord Ruddington will propose some suitable arrangement, and I shall see that it is satisfactory. Besides, all this can be talked over later on. It will be time enough to choose where you'll be married to Lord Ruddington when you've made up your mind whether you're going to marry him at all."

The bride began to pout.

I decided swiftly that it was high time to bring matters to a head. Traxelby church, indeed!

As likely as not, Susan would expect me to be a bridesmaid, with Uncle Bob giving her away, and Aunt Martha calling him "Pa." So I shut up the *Chouans* with a snap and put the question straight.

"Tell me, Susan. Have you made up your mind? If you've settled it that you mean to marry Lord Ruddington, we shall know where we are."

The pout vanished, and she hung her head. At last she answered:

"Yes, Miss. I mean, I'm not sure yet, Miss. But I'm sure that I shall be sure before long."

"Sure that you'll marry him?"

"Yes, Miss. I mean ... I think I shall."

I could get no more out of her, and in the end I turned surlier and snappier than I care to remember. Susan went to bed looking miserable.

This morning my conscience woke up as early as I did. Earlier: for it was wide awake while I was still half asleep, and I groped out into consciousness with a sense of recent meanness and unkindness to Susan. The more I woke, the clearer I saw how natural it was of Susan, who knows no French and can speak with nobody here save me, to want to talk frocks.

When she came in at seven o'clock to open the curtains, I said in my friendliest tone:

"Well, Susan, I suppose you've decided to be married in white, with orange-blossoms and a veil?"

To my consternation she remained at the window, and did not turn round. Then she plunged for the door into her own room, and as she seized the handle, I heard a sob.

I jumped up and followed her to the threshold.

"Come, come, Susan!" I said. "You mustn't have such a thin skin. I never meant to hurt your feelings."

"You haven't, Miss," sobbed Susan, standing near me, but not showing her face. "It isn't you, Miss. But I can't bear it!"

"You can't bear what?"

"All of it, Miss. None of it. I woke up and thought about it in the night. It's dreadful!"

I couldn't guess what Susan couldn't bear, or what it was that was dreadful, and it didn't seem wise to press her. So I said nothing.

"You'll take cold, Miss," she cried, when she cast her first glance at me. And she bundled me back into bed.

I told her that she needn't have her breakfast with Georgette, and that she

ought to drink chocolate instead of coffee.

"You'd better have a quiet day," I added. "This matter is getting on your brain. Give it a rest. That was one reason why I wanted you to wait a whole month. There's no need to brood over it day and night. The month has still three weeks to run."

She dried her eyes and was ever so grateful. But I am puzzled. Last night she seemed (as she has seemed all along) to take it as a matter of course that she will marry Ruddington. Her attitude has been that of a pretty, honest, modest, prosaic girl with an eye on the main chance. To find her suddenly all sensibility is a surprise.

Probably it isn't sensibility. It's nerves. Too much coffee: not enough sleep. Too much of her own thoughts: not enough human fellowship at a time when she sorely needs it.

Yet I can't overlook that she was disappointed with his photograph. It may well be that, in her better moments, my sweet Susan shrinks from marrying when she cannot love. Or is it that she is cowed by the difficulties of so huge a change in her rank and station? She shall have an easy day.

Tuesday, 10.15 a.m.

The Lord Ruddington would be speaking no more than the truth if he always signed himself Susan's Most Obedient Servant. He has been as prompt with his pen-and-ink *Selbstbildniss* as he was with the pasty-faced artist's photograph. He says:

MA SUZANNE,—It is Monday morning. When I have finished this, I shall have written you once this week; once last week (the Wednesday), and once the week before (on the Saturday). Yet I am scolded for breaking the rules. You must send me an exceptionally kind letter to soothe my wounded feelings.

It was unardonably careless of me not to forward full particulars and references when I first applied for the post of Protector to Suzanne. But I have to-day filled up a form and am enclosing it with this. References are kindly permitted to the Derlingham photographer and to Mrs. Juggins, the housekeeper at Ruddington Towers.

I have taken conscientious pains to fill up the form correctly. For instance, I squandered a whole penny this morning weighing myself on an automatic machine at Derlingham station. To be precise, I have squandered tuppence; because the first machine which I bribed refused to weigh me, and insisted on presenting me with a bar of chocolate cream instead.

The news that you can't send me your portrait is desolating. It is another reason why you must be extra kind.

All your letters are precious. But I like the little bits you write up the sides best. Why can't I have a letter made up of little side-bits only?

RUDDINGTON.

The "enclosed form" is a formidable-looking sheet of blue foolscap divided into columns for questions and answers. It reads:

S. B. No. 999.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Names (Christian and Surname), with Title or Titles, if any. | Henry Reginald Westerton
Assheleigh, Ninth Baron
Ruddington. |
| 2. Address or Addresses. | Ruddington Towers,
Sussex; Assheleigh House,
St. Michael's Square, S.W.;
Ballymore Castle, County
Kerry. |
| 3. Age. | 23 171/365 years. |
| 4. Has applicant had whooping-cough? | He has heard so. |
| 5. Or Measles?
If so, how many? | One. |
| 6. Weight. | 10 st. 8 lb. (Includes 2.1739
oz. of letters from Suzanne,
in left-side breast-pocket
at time of weighing.) |
| 7. Can applicant read? | No need to. Suzanne so
seldom writes. |

8. Can applicant write? Yes. Once a week.
9. What are applicant's politics? Not Tory. Conservative. More liberal than the Liberals, less radical than the Radicals.
10. What are applicant's pursuits? Waiting for Suzanne's letters. Until last month, spent leisure studying Spanish history and literature.
11. Personal appearance. Quite as bad as Derlingham photograph. Probably worse.
12. Hair. Brownish-black; or blackish-brown.
13. Eyes. Blue.
14. Does applicant ride? Every day.
15. Does applicant swim? Yes.
16. Does applicant fish? Yes.
17. Does applicant hunt? Not much.
18. Does applicant swear? Now and then. Is prepared to give it up.
19. Does applicant drink? Half a bottle of claret twice a day.
20. Does applicant smoke? Not before 1.50 p.m. If Suzanne objects, he confesses that he objects to her objecting.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 21. Has applicant a motor-car? | Hates them. But will learn to love them if Suzanne does. |
| 22. Additional remarks. | Is bad-tempered, impatient, obstinate, and self-opinionated. Has no first-hand knowledge of the time it takes to prepare Byronic (or other) curls o' nights. Has not been in love before. Hasn't a Past. And hasn't a Future either, unless it's to be spent with Suzanne. |

I don't know yet what Susan thinks of these documents. She has left them on my table without remark.

At the first glance I didn't like them. They smacked too much of the funny man labouring to be smart. But, after a second reading, I like them. After all, the poor boy couldn't very well sit down with a serious face and write out his own testimonial in cold ink. His wit might be sprightlier: but I begin to discern the gravity underlying it. His way of bringing it in that he has no Past, no entanglements, no old flames, is skilful and considerate. Perhaps this is the very point Susan has been worrying about. Who knows? Perhaps she has been fearing that she isn't the first simple beauty that his lordship has taken by storm. Perhaps she thinks he is an old-style lord, with a pretty taste in milk-maids, and therefore not much better than a new-style lord with a nasty appetite for ladies of the ballet.

Whatever am I to say if Susan asks me what he means by the little bits written up the sides?

Tuesday, 3 p.m.

My bathe made me tired. I sha'n't go out again to-day.

Susan is wooden-headed past belief. I was amused for a few moments at the odd comments she made on Ruddington's letter; but her dulness grows monotonous. She began:

"Don't you think, Miss, that ... that he writes rather strange?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I mean, Miss," whispered Susan mysteriously, "do you think he's ... quite right in his head?"

"Well, Susan," I answered, "when one looks at the way he runs after a girl whom he's never spoken to, I admit it does make one wonder if he isn't a bit mad."

Susan pouted.

"I mean his letter, Miss," she said. "And this big blue paper."

"As for his letters, Susan," I replied, "I don't see much wrong with them. Aren't they bright, and frank, and kind?"

"Why does he say, Miss, that he's named Henry?"

"Simply because Henry is his name."

"But lords don't have any names, Miss, do they? I mean they only have surnames."

I asked for light.

"It was Mrs. Hobbs, the cook, that told me, Miss," Susan explained. "Mrs. Hobbs said that a lord could only have a surname—as it might be Ruddington—and the King could only have a Christian name—as it might be Edward. That's the difference, Miss, between a king and a lord—one can only have a Christian name, and the other can only have a surname. So how can he be named Henry?"

When I had finished laughing, I said:

"Susan, you remember Mrs. Hobbs's dreadful mousseline sauce? Till to-day, I would never have believed that there was any subject in the heavens above or in the earth beneath, about which Mrs. Hobbs knew less than she did about cooking. I was wrong."

"If he's proper Lord Ruddington, Miss, I don't see how he can be named Henry," persisted Susan doggedly. "I wonder, Miss, ought we to write to Mrs. Juggins?"

"Mrs. Juggins?"

"Yes, Miss. He says she's the housekeeper at the Towers."

Positively the stupid creature believed that Lord Ruddington had seriously referred her to an actually existing dame of the name of Juggins. Really, I haven't the patience to set down half the ridiculous things she said. She is certain that her letters don't weigh "all those ounces." She is aghast at the bad temper and obstinacy, which must truly be traits in Ruddington's character, "because he admits it, Miss, himself." She is surprised that he should be brooding so bitterly over his wasted tuppence; "though they do say, Miss, that the richer people are, the meaner they are in little things, and that's why they've got rich." She is not romantically *exaltée* at the news that he has never loved another. But she is grateful that he has got safely over the measles; because "Uncle Bob had them after he was grown up, and I did think, Miss, it looked so silly." And so on, and so on, and

so on.

At last I begged her to stop chattering and sent her away. I can't understand her. Susan has always been unsophisticated, but it's something fresh for her to be vulgarly stupid and thick-headed.

The outlook is disconcerting. My letter-writing on her behalf gives Ruddington a false notion of her knowledge and her mental power. So long as she retains her charming simplicity no great harm will be done; for, after he is disillusionized about her brains, he can easily fall in love afresh with her *naïveté*. But this flat-footed, Hodge-like, charmless stupidity is quite another story.

She's too stupid even to ask about the little side-bits.

Waiting for tea.

It may be that the fears which kept Susan awake last night have frozen her wits. She has the air of dreading close quarters with this affair; of wanting to thrust it off an arm's-length while she gets time to think. I mustn't be too hard on her. The girl is passing through an ordeal; and I am a poor substitute for a mother or even for a bosom friend.

Wednesday morning.

I have taken a resolve.

There's been too much Ruddington. The inroads he makes on my Normandy rest-cure are absurd. I get my sun-bath and sea-bath every day; and that's all. It's time to put down my foot.

Fortunately, Susan agrees with me. She does not tell me why she has so suddenly fallen out of love with the idea of being raised to the peerage. It may be that she quails and shrinks from a destiny that is altogether out of scale with her nature. More probably it is some trifle, such as Ruddington's moustachelessness. But, although she gives no reasons, she agrees with me that it will be best to take the thing less busily for the next fortnight. I've pointed out to her that she knows as much about him now as she needs to know. It isn't as though she has to decide, here at Sainte Véronique, whether she will marry Lord Ruddington. She has only to settle whether she will let him see her next month face to face—whether she will let him press in person a suit which she will still be free to refuse.

We have decided that I shall write him a letter to-day such as will keep him quiet, and stop him bothering us. Then I shall be able to take a deep draught of my Normandy, as I take deep draughts of the cider. I have been here well over a week, and I hardly seem to have had one day free of him.

Later.

Here is my letter to her Henry, and it's going to be posted whether Susan likes it or not:

DEAR LORD RUDDINGTON,—Your letter and the big blue form amused me very much. It is interesting to have such an assortment of fresh facts about you—especially the obstinacy and the bad temper.

It is good news that you hate motor-cars. Nor should we become estranged over tobacco. But these are trifles, aren't they?

I hope you will not think that I am taking myself too seriously, or that I am unthankful for the trouble you take in writing such kind and open and lively letters. But (now that I have your photograph and know so much more about you) I am conscious of a desire for a week or so of detachment from details. I feel that I would like to go about my ordinary life until some light breaks on me suddenly and of its own accord. The more I deliberately seek light, the more it mocks and eludes me. I suppose the reason is that no amount of steadily "making up" one's mind can suffice instead of a free involuntary motion of the heart.

As you wrote to me on Monday, you would not in any case be writing again till Monday next. I like to have your letters; but, if you postpone your reply to this until rather late next week, I shall have the better chance of deciding whether we ought to meet or not.

Yours sincerely, SUSAN BRIGGS.

After lunch.

The letter's gone.

Susan says she likes it.

I liked it too, until it was dropped into the post-box. But, at this moment, I am vainly asking myself what had become of my brains while I was writing it. It's the un-Susanishest letter that even *my* undramatic pen has compassed. Think of Susan being "conscious of a desire for detachment from details!" I can as easily imagine her ordering a grilled ichthyosaurus for breakfast.

Still, it's gone. And now I shall have a week's peace.

It seems the Belgian people who have had Dupoirier's Villa de la Mer for the season left yesterday. Dupoirier is cleaning up the blue-and-white bathing-hut on the beach. He's going to give me the key, and, if I like, I can stay down by the sea all day, so long as the weather's fine.

The Bathing-hut, Thursday afternoon.

This is perfect.

The bright-faced sea is crooning to itself like a happy child. The day is warm. Inland, it must be torrid.

I have had two dips, one snooze, and about three-quarters of a lunch. It would have been a lunch and a half if Georgette hadn't tripped over a stone on the way down and dropped the wing of a chicken into the beck. But the prawns, and the cold veal, with sauce rémoulade, and the great big pear, were quite enough if I hadn't grown so disgustingly greedy.

Off and on, I've read several square yards of French newspapers since ten o'clock. There seems to be a curse resting on all newspapers that are sold for a ha'penny, never mind what country they belong to. I feel as Susan felt when she missed "a nice service" after the parish Mass at Sainte Véronique church.

The best part of everything is to lie full back in the deck-chair and to look up at the larks in the sky. It's nice, too, to gaze over the blue-green water and to know there's a hundred miles of it between us and that worry of a Ruddington. I'm afraid he'll write a dozen pages on Monday. But, until the poor little fellow begins kicking and screaming for his Susan to be given to him at once, I can sit here while the wind and the sun mend my nerves and smooth the past fortnight's wrinkles out of my offended brow.

Friday night.

Henry Reginald has written. The sight of his envelope made me so angry that I nearly tore it open without waiting for Susan. After reading his outpouring I can't altogether blame him; but I am being badly treated by Fate. Things are worse muddled than ever.

He says:

MY DEAR SUSAN,—Seeing my handwriting again so soon, you will think that I am flouting your wishes. Not so. After I have finished this, I promise not to write you another line till you expressly give me leave.

From my own selfish point of view, I have known all along that I was foolish in pleading my cause by post instead of with the living voice. But to write seemed fairer to yourself; though I confess I could not have been easily content with letters had I known you were going to France.

In asking for a week of detachment, you are right. Indeed, I feel you have been most exquisitely right at every turn of my rude assault upon your peace. Therefore I agree, much as I shall miss your letters.

You think your letters have disappointed me; and I can discern that it is a pain to you to write them till they can flow from you more freely. But let me tell you why I prize them far more than I expected.

The day I first saw you with Miss Langley was a Saturday. You simply swept me off my feet. I had no more choice as to whether I should love you all my life or not than a cork has a choice between floating and sinking. It was the Derlingham banker who told me who you were. All that evening I sat alone in the dark, thinking. Or, rather, I didn't think. I just sat and looked, like a man in a trance, at the new world which had unrolled itself suddenly, solidly, splendidly right across the whole field of my vision.

I had always believed that love at first sight was out of my line. Indeed, I had believed that, nowadays, it was out of everybody's line; and I had suspected that, outside the romances, there had never been any such thing in the world. I had even begun to indulge a certain pride in my fastidiousness and self-control as regards women.

Don't be hurt, most dear lady, at the next step in my confession. If I must seem to disparage you for half a moment on paper, it is only that I may show why I shall revere and honour and cherish you for ever.

When I came out of that Saturday night dream or trance, I sank swiftly down, down, down into a pit of humiliation. I had always believed myself free from pride of rank or pride of wealth; but it was with an immense chagrin that I remembered how the banker had answered my off-hand question with the words "Miss Langley's maid." A blinding flash lit up all the opposition, and scorn, and ridicule I should have to undergo.

Not that it entered my mind, even at the zero of my humiliation, that I could ever give you up. The fact that you were my Destiny rose clear of my tumultuous emotions, as radiant and immutable as a virgin peak above the mean rage of a thunderstorm. But I fretted and fumed. You were the rose that I must needs gather; but why had Fate set you behind so huge and sharp and black a thorn? I asked bitterly why Fate could not have contrived that Miss Langley should have been Susan, and that you should have been Miss Langley, so that I could have come to the Grange a-wooing without a thousand maddening lets and hindrances.

Later on, and in a lesser degree, I also felt humiliated because I, who had been so proud of my cool head, suddenly found myself bowled over by mere beauty and grace, like a solitary corn-stalk before an autumn gale.

The next morning I slipped circumspectly into Traxelby church, just before the sermon. If you hold religion sacred and dear (as I feel sure you do), it may shock you to know that I looked at you through the pillars of the Langley monument for a quarter of an hour. But my thoughts were not sacrilegious. Although I

thanked God for your beauty (and how beautiful you were that morning!), I worshipped God most because He had created your soul, your very self. As I watched you, I knew that you alone in all the world could charm away my spirit's restlessness and hunger—the hunger and the restlessness which I had hidden even from my own self. I recalled my loveless life; my boyhood spent among tutors and schoolmasters; my youth and early manhood at two schools and at three universities in three different countries; my last year—the year before I came back to the Towers—spent on cosmopolitan steamships and in unhomey hotels. I thought of the only women I have ever known well—my hard and shallow cousins, who are handsome and elegant only with the sort of handsomeness and elegance that ten thousand other hard and shallow women share with them. Then I looked at you again, and wanted to come home to you as a bird flies home to his nest.

As I walked back from church, I knew that my ignoble chagrin had melted and vanished at the second vision of you. Instead of exclaiming against Fate for placing you, as the word goes, "below me," I rejoiced that there was a sacrifice to be made—a way of proving to you that I was moved by Love alone. I laughed at myself for having wished you had been Miss Langley!

Perhaps I am supersensitive, ultradelicate. But I felt, on that Sunday morning, that if you had been Miss Langley, I might have shrunk from the wooing. The obviousness, the hard-headed, practical common sense of such a match would have put me off it. When every consideration of worldly suitability pointed to a joining of her name and lands and interests with mine, how could I have gone to Miss Langley on a simple errand of Love? I know of one gossip who had already linked her with me. How I should have cursed this rank of mine, which I never wanted, and this wealth of mine, which I never earned, if they had robbed me of the power to convince a woman of my love, and to woo her for herself alone!

I wrote to you on the Tuesday; and you kept me waiting four days. But I knew you would reply; even as I know that, when this month is over, Heaven will not suffer you to wrench your life away from mine. But, while I waited, I kept on schooling myself against every possible turn of events. And one thing for which I prepared my mind (forgive me again, dear lady!) was this. I expected your letter would be ... how shall I say it? Well, I expected a diamond—but a rough one! To be blunt, I knew that Oxford and Heidelberg and Salamanca had made me too punctilious; and I nerved myself for a letter from a sweet Susan, an adorable Susan, a wise Susan ... but a Susan who couldn't spell!

But what has happened? Of course, mere spelling and grammar are less than the dust in the balance; and if you sinned against them unto seventy times seven it would be nothing. But not only are Susan's letters better expressed than my own; they outstrip the utmost I ever dreamed of in the exquisite reverence with which they approach the sacred mystery of Love. Where I was merely su-

perfine and sentimental, you are exalted, mystical. I honour your month of absence and your coming week of silence as I honour the retreats and meditations of a saint. Wealth and ease and rank cannot tempt you. They cannot even hurry you into doing what is right till you are persuaded that it is the right with your whole soul. The Susan I saw that Saturday morning swept me off my feet, robbed me of my free will. But the Susan who has written me four letters is so noble, so deep, so rich of spirit, that even if the spell of her beauty were broken, I should still devote my whole life to winning her, though the obstacles were a thousand times as great.

Why have I written all this? I will tell you. Because you are entering, so to speak, on a week's retreat; and upon your week's retreat hangs my fate. If I did not write this, the most recent letter of mine in your hands would be that schoolboyish blue paper with its long-drawn string of poor jokes. I did not mean it flippantly; but it is hard for a man to write about himself.

In a word, I write to ask that it shall be this present letter and not the other that you will call to mind when you are so good as to think of me.

No. I don't imagine you "take yourself too seriously." I have guessed that, like my own, your mind is more often gay than grave. But there is a time for everything; and I perceive that badinage is not the accompaniment I ought to be playing while you are making the momentous choice which I have so strangely laid upon you.

And now I steal out of your presence on tip-toe, and softly close the door. If you call, I shall be waiting. And if you do not call ... I shall be waiting still.

R.

Susan has been in to know what I think of the letter. I have told her I am busy, and have sent her away.

It's no use blinking the fact that I'm involved, up to the ears, in a very, very serious affair.

Midnight.

I can't sleep.

This is altogether too frightful.

Fortunately Susan was perfectly stolid. If she'd been awkward, goodness knows what I might have said or done. I simply told her that we must have a thorough talk, once for all, in the morning; and she went to bed without a murmur.

Susan a mystic! Susan approaching with exquisite reverence the sacred mystery of Love! Susan in retreat, like a saintly nun!

If I could only laugh and laugh and laugh till I woke up the whole hotel, it wouldn't so much matter. But I can't even smile. Ruddington is too terribly in earnest. And it's my fault.

Some parts of his letter I hate. I would never have believed that he could make so outrageously free with my name. So long as Susan is my maid, I call it abominable taste to drag me in like that. Indeed, I hardly see how I can do otherwise than wash my hands of the entire business forthwith.

But if I do ... what then? If Susan is left to concoct a reply, and to use a teaspoonful of ink to every page, it will be such a shattering bombshell in the golden midst of his dreams. And the man, on the whole, is too likeable for me to wound him deeply if I can help it.

Perhaps what I ought to do is to write by the same post as Susan, and with her full knowledge, a frank confession of my part in the affair. He will be astonished and disappointed and a bit hurt in his dignity, but he can't fairly resent my having helped Susan. After all, it's his fault, not mine, that he's perused my few short and insignificant letters through such rose-coloured glasses that they have seemed like the utterances of a divinity. It's his infatuation, far more than my bungling, which has magnified and idealized Susan into a goddess. Whether he can turn the telescope round, so to speak, and look at Susan through the other end till he sees her in all the tininess of her actual spiritual and mental stature; and whether, when he has seen her as she is, he can still go on worshipping her—all this is more his affair than mine. I'll write the letter now.

A quarter past one.

It's no good.

If I had written before his letter came to-night, I could have managed it. But now that he's brought me in by name, and has even discussed how he would have felt if he had been moved to make love to me...

No. I can't write. And if I could, I wouldn't. And I'm cold, and tired, and insulted, and distracted, and wretched. I'll back to bed.

Saturday, 2 p.m.

On second (or twenty-second) thoughts, I did not choose to have a detailed conference with Susan. I have not so much as told her how vastly it offends me to be discussed with her as Ruddington has done. If I betray annoyance, how can I expect a simple mind like Susan's to interpret my vexation otherwise than as the

acidity of an unsuccessful rival for Lord Ruddington's hand? Lord Ruddington has cheapened me enough, and I will not make myself any cheaper.

Although she was stolid over it last night, the letter has warmed Susan into a remarkable state of expansion this morning, and she was sadly crestfallen when I showed no sign of going through the document chapter and verse. I took care that she should find me deep in my own correspondence, so that my inattention was less pointed.

I simply told her that it would be a good thing if she were able to take over the Ruddington correspondence herself immediately, as Lord Ruddington had already been seriously misled. Failing this, I gave her the following note, and told her to post it or not as she pleased:—

DEAR LORD RUDDINGTON,—I am grateful for your letter. And I am grateful to you for consenting to what you call my "retreat." When the retreat is over I shall not forget that I have a long letter of yours to answer. Meanwhile I will only beg, both for your sake and my own, that you will not form too high an opinion of—Yours very sincerely,

SUSAN BRIGGS.

Susan did not read the note in my presence. I have no idea what she will do.

Sunday: before church.

Half my month is gone. This makes the fifteenth morning since I landed in France, yet I don't remember waking up once with a completely easy mind. From Mr. John Lamb onwards, I have dwelt in the midst of alarms.

To-day shall prove whether I have any will-power or not. Sunday is a day of rest, and I am determined to have twenty-four hours' rest from Ruddington.

Susan is very commendably docile. She sees I have had enough of it, and she hasn't even told me whether she posted my note or not. Fortunately she is making much more of a pal of Georgette. Georgette progresses with her English marvellously. She adores Susan because Susan never tries to utter a single syllable of French.

I mean to hear Mass this morning at Bérigny. Georgette is taking Susan to bewail once more the lack of "a nice service" at Sainte Véronique.

Sunday afternoon.

I like the Bérigny papists better than the papists at Sainte Véronique. Barely sixty people assisted at the Mass; but the faith of these few twentieth-century men and women was as solid as the fifteenth-century piers and vaults that rose above our heads.

Being English, I ought to exclaim against the Bérigny mass-house, and to call its pictures and images and altars gaudy. But I understood this morning that the place was first and foremost a refuge for the simple and the poor. Of course, the austerity of our own church at Traxelby suits my personal ideas of reverence better. But I'm afraid that, in England, there may be some selfishness in our always conforming the insides of our churches to the taste of the Hall or to the taste of the rector's ladies. No doubt it helps the fortunate few to feel religious when they exchange the cosy richness wherein they have snuggled all the week for the big, bare sternness of cold, undissembled stone, and the uncompromising whiteness of twenty surplices. An hour and a half of it once a week corrects luxury and tones up fibres that are becoming enervated through all-day-long indulgence. One even finds a subtle pleasure in the slight discomfort and restraint; just as the man who has dined well and wined well for eleven months enjoys the fashionable hardships of a month's "cure" at a German spa. But I wondered this morning if our church interiors are equally helpful to the poor. If a contrast between the home and the church stimulates devotion, where do the poor come in? The only contrast they get is the contrast between a small bleakness and a big one; the contrast between grey and white; between ashes and snow.

Bérigny church is a spacious, warm, brightly coloured drawing-room for all Bérigny. Not even the drawing-room at Alice's, with its absurd excess of water-colours and prints and screens and embroideries and statuettes and curios, holds such a store of things to look at as the drawing-room at Bérigny. Over and above all the regulation sights of a typical French church, Bérigny has Our Lady of Bérigny, in queenly silver-tissue and with a golden crown on her sorrowful brow. From the bosses of the vaults in the aisles hang five or six fully rigged little ships-votive offerings of mariners snatched from shipwreck. High up on the south wall there are coloured wooden images, carved in the sixteenth century, such as St. Nicolas with a tubful of red-cheeked, chubby, naked babies, and St. Antony with his pig. Bérigny has both the Antonys. Not far from him of the pig, stands a modern statue of St. Antony of Padua, with a face like an angel's, and with the Holy Child seated on St. Antony's open book and nestling against St. Antony's breast.

It would have driven him stark mad if our Traxelby choir-master, with his petty efficiency and trivial thoroughness, could have heard the Bérigny organ pounding and blaring, and the Bérigny faithful bawling "Credo" through their

noses. An untuneful but hearty lad on my left sang the whole creed through in Latin without a book. I wonder, would our Traxelby youths be a shade less loutish, a shade nearer to these courteous villagers of Bérigny, if they too were taught to dip a cup in the main stream of human culture, and to quaff ever so small a draught? I imagine it must be the beginning of a revolution, even in the humblest mind, when it makes room for fifty words of a language other than its own.

Sunday night.

Yes, I have some traces of will-power. I have wanted to ask Susan whether she posted my note; but I haven't asked her. And I have wanted to think about Ruddington's letter—not so much its galling references to myself, as the disclosure it makes of an uncommon personality in the midst of an uncommon situation. I have wanted to think about it all day—even in church. But I haven't yielded. Or, at most, I have yielded only a very little.

Monday morning.

Susan posted the letter.

I asked her after breakfast, in a casual sort of way, what she had done with it; and she answered, almost as casually, that she and Georgette posted it on Saturday afternoon. I could see that, for some reason, Susan didn't want to be cross-questioned.

"Susan," I said, when she came into the room again, "how many people know anything about this affair of Lord Ruddington?"

Susan started.

"Whom have you told?" I asked again. "Did you talk about it at Traxelby?"

"Oh, no, Miss!" said Susan, almost reproachfully. Then, after an awkward pause, she added: "Unless..."

"Unless...?"

"Well, Miss, I *did* say to Gibson that ... that there was *somebody*. But I didn't mention names, Miss, and he could never guess."

"Have you said anything to Georgette?"

Susan hung her head and studied the toe of her shoe a long time before she confessed:

"Georgette asked me, Miss."

"Asked you what?"

"Georgette said: 'Have you got an Ammee?' And when I told her I didn't know what an Ammee was, she said..."

Susan blushed and stopped.

"Go on," I said. "An *ami*. What did Georgette say an *ami* was?"

"It is French for Mister," faltered Susan. "Georgette says it is a Mister with whom one is in love."

"What did you tell her?"

"Nothing, Miss."

"You were very sensible, Susan," I said. "You oughtn't to talk about it to any one."

I picked up a book; but Susan still loitered.

"Well?" I asked at length. "What is it?"

"Please, Miss," began Susan uncomfortably, "I didn't tell Georgette anything."

"So you said before."

"Yes, Miss. But Georgette ... wanted to look at the envelope. I mean the letter to his lordship, Miss."

"But you didn't let her do it?"

"Oh, no, Miss."

"Then what is there to worry about?"

Susan scraped the floor with the point of her shoe, and shifted about. By and by she blurted:

"Georgette wanted to know if the letter was to my Ammee or ... or to yours, Miss."

I shut the book. Susan hurried on.

"So, of course, I said he was mine, Miss."

Ruddington is right. Susan is a wonder, a gem, and five times out of six a born lady. After I had praised her discreetly and had deplored the impertinent prying of Georgette, I took up the book again and told Susan she might go away.

She went, but within five minutes she was back.

"I thought I'd best tell you, Miss," she said when I looked up.

"Yes?"

"I didn't show Georgette the address, Miss. But ... she noticed the envelope wasn't gummed down."

"Yes, yes. Get on."

"I oughtn't to have done it, Miss. But Georgette went into the garden and plucked a flower, and lifted up the flap of the envelope, and laughed, and tucked the flower inside."

"It's a great pity, Susan," I said, "that you didn't take it out again. If you'd make up your mind to marry Lord Ruddington it wouldn't matter. But can't you see how foolish it will look? It simply contradicts the letter asking for a week's grace."

"Yes, Miss," said Susan, going redder than ever. But she showed no sign of departing.

"Is that all, Susan?" I asked, with a sudden fear that there was worse to follow.

"No, Miss," she answered faintly. "After we'd posted the letter, Georgette laughed again and said that the flower had a meaning."

"A meaning?"

"Yes, Miss. The Language of Flowers, Miss. Georgette said the flower meant 'Vang.'"

"Vang?"

"Yes, Miss. That's the French Language of Flowers, Miss. Georgette says that, in English, it means 'Come!'"

Before I could speak, she burst out crying.

"Please, Miss," she wept, "I didn't see any harm on Saturday. But last night, when I went to bed, and thought about it ... oh, Miss Gertrude, I'm so miserable!" And she cried harder than ever.

In the end I sent her away consoled to the extent of my assurance that I didn't blame her in the least, and that the sole offender was Georgette. Also, I promised her that I wouldn't get Georgette into trouble.

At first I felt determined to give Georgette some very plain speaking in private. Yet how can I? How was Georgette to know that Susan hadn't been writing a common country love-letter to some common country sweetheart? What divination could teach Georgette that we had been writing a superfine letter to a milord? Georgette simply indulged her rural playfulness. And if the envelope was open for Georgette to put the flower in, it was also open for Susan to take it out.

That's the devil (I can't help saying it!) of this endless affair. Everybody keeps on giving me shocks and jumps, and yet nobody is ever to blame.

Not that much harm is done this time. I suppose Ruddington will go silly over the flower. He'll kiss it, and wear it next his heart by day, and lay it under his pillow by night, and worship it as a symbol of fresh mysticalities and exquisite-nesses in his divine Susan. But he won't ring for the kitchen-maids and request the kind loan of a Language of Flowers. He won't so much as think of it that way. Even if he does, he will know that it is the letter and not the flower that he must obey.

I wonder what flower it is that means "Viens?"

Monday night.

I have been reading Ruddington's last letter over again. And although I

began it with prejudice (being still nettled by Georgette's prank), it has affected me strangely.

Seen whole, I know the situation is farcical. It is a farce that may end in a tragedy. But as Ruddington sees it, with the wrong notion of Susan that I have helped to give him, it is a most high and sweet romance, all rose and gold.

Life can be most hideously cruel. Better no beautiful dreams at all when there must be such an awakening. And that poor lad Gibson is to be soured for ever in order that Ruddington may go through life with a millstone of disenchantment round his neck. Something is here for tears.

Tuesday, three o'clock.

Ruddington remains quiet, like a good boy; so the flower has done no harm. Susan has been quite brightened up by suddenly remembering that the flower was only a French one.

This morning there was a wedding at Sainte Véronique. I have seen country weddings in France before, but this is the first one that hasn't offended me. The bride was a pink-and-white, almost English looking girl, and the bridegroom was a tanned, honest, handsome young fisherman. When Susan and I saw them, it was after the wedding. They were standing side by side, hand in hand at a door, while the guests were bustling for places at an open-air breakfast-table. You could not say that they were not taking in the scene. Indeed, they laughed more than once at the horse-play of the youths. Yet it was plain that while their eyes recognized friends, and while their minds were lightly engaged with the outer world, their spirits had built a little hidden shrine of peace. Never before have I seen on human faces such a serene yet delicate fulness of perfect happiness. Below the rattle of plates and the shouts and the laughter, my ear caught a rich undersong of love.

In the past I have learned almost to loathe lovers. When Hugh came to see Alice, I used to wonder how she could endure him. I suppose he enjoyed his courtship, just as a budding barrister enjoys his obligatory course of dinners; but he used to turn up more like a man who had come to tune the piano than like a man in love. And I don't think I detest any one in this world more than poor Maude Slaney's Bob. Heaven only knows how many millions of times he has mispronounced the word "fiancée" these last two years; and the way they go on in public is simply horrid. I'd almost rather have the boorishly amorous couples who slouch on Sunday nights along Church Lane, gaping up at the Grange.

But, this month, I've begun to see lovers in a less garish light. The fisherman reminded me of Gibson. I shall be the better all my life long for having stood in the glow of Gibson's splendid manliness when he thought Susan was in

danger. Ruddington, poor man, is quite an endurable lover, too. As for Susan, although she's so simple, I haven't definitely made her out. But, allowing amply for her shyness and for her deference to my guidance, it's rather fine to see how she hangs back from Ruddington's money and rank until she feels sure she can care for him. If the bulk of human love is anything like these samples, I don't wonder that the world goes right round in a night and a day.

Tuesday, bedtime.

Another earthquake.

This afternoon, Madame Dupoirier went to Grandpont station in the hotel omnibus. She has just come back.

Madame says that when the 'bus drew up at the station "a compatriot" of mine stepped alongside and attentively perused the words "Hôtel du Dauphin, Sainte Véronique-sur-mer," painted on the 'bus sides. Apparently he mistook Madame for a guest who was going away; and he asked her (very politely, Madame says) if she knew whether "Mees Langley and Mees Breeggs" were still at the hotel. Madame said "Yes;" and she is quite pleasantly fluttered at the thought of an extra guest fairly on his way hither.

I was too much stunned to do more than thank her for telling me. I didn't even ask her what the man was like, and whether he spoke to her in French or in English. But I've no doubt it is Ruddington.

I call it abominable. If Susan were travelling in France with her parents, or even with some married woman for a mistress, it would be different. But this is outrageous.

I ought to have known that he would hunt up the meaning of Georgette's flower. A man who can read such super-exquisite meanings into the half-dozen notes I have scribbled for Susan, isn't the sort to leave any stone unturned. I can't help despising him. When a full-grown, educated man has such sickly rubbish as the Language of Flowers at his finger ends, a lady's-maid is as much as he deserves.

What will he do? I hardly think he'll descend upon Sainte Véronique till his mystical Susan's sacrosanct week of retreat has expired. I suppose he'll hover ridiculously in the neighbourhood, like a knight keeping vigil outside a woodland oratory where his milk-white ladye kneels at prayer. Probably there will be a mysterious succession of leaves and petals in otherwise empty envelopes—a scarlet-runner to mean "I have come post-haste," a convolvulus to mean "I am still hanging on," a thorny bramble to mean "I suffer."

Even the ardours of a lover ought not to burn out the instincts of a gentleman. I gave Ruddington credit for more decency and restraint.

When the week is over, he will want to come here. It is an intolerable position. I am about to be made a fool of. Everybody will get to hear of it some day.

Ought I to wire for Alice? No, I can't. If it were anybody but Ruddington, I could. I'm like a poor hunted beast in a trap, with no way to turn.

I have more than half a mind to pack up at daybreak and to slip stealthily back to Dieppe for my promised week at the Cheval d'Or.

Wednesday, very early.

I forgot to wind up my watch.

I have decided not to run away.

Three things have become clear as I have turned them over in the night.

First, I'm as good a man as Ruddington. If I stood up to Mr. John Lamb, I can stand up to his successors. He shall either treat me with respect or be taught a lesson. I'm not going to run away from any one. Certainly not from a youth sick with calf-love who babbles the Language of Flowers.

Second, I might as well face the fact that the gods never intended me to have a peaceful September this year. How true it is that the unexpected happens! When I came to Sainte Véronique twelve months ago, I expected to have a lively time. But everybody failed me, and it was the quietest, peacefullest month of my life. This year I came expecting four weeks of vegetable existence; and instead, I am kept running and leaping and turning like a trick-horse in a circus. Wherefore, I do hereby decide not to kick against Destiny a minute longer. Instead of staving off all this comedy, and instead of hating it because it distracts me, I hereby decide that it is well worth looking at, and that it would be foolishness to brush aside such a human drama as I am never likely to see performed again. Norman villages, and carafes of cider, and plunges in the sea, and lobster salads under apple-trees, can be bought for nine or ten francs a day, year after year, as often as I want them. But a handsome, virtuous, learned, stark-mad young lord in love with a pretty, honest, lovable, stupid lady's-maid isn't a sight to be seen at close quarters every week. It shall be the principal pleasure as well as the principal business of my remaining fortnight to see this play played right out.

Third—how do I know that Master Ruddington isn't lying peacefully at this very moment in his little white cot at Ruddington Towers, dreaming of his Susan as good as gold? How do I know that the Grandpont person isn't somebody else? It struck me in the night that it is probably Mr. John Lamb. At the Customs, he looked at the Sainte Véronique labels on my boxes as well as at the Cheval d'Or labels on our bags. I know he tumbled down the steps of the Astor still

believing that he had conquered Susan's maiden heart, and that if he could only have seen her all would have been well. Perhaps he has got together a fresh supply of francs and is proposing to wait on us with some preposterous apologies and explanations. It may be that he wants me to promise that next time I am in Amelia Road, Shepherd's Bush, I won't give him away to Phipps Brothers—and, above all, that I won't give him away to Ma. This morning I shall ask Madame Dupoirier to describe him. If it be indeed Mr. John Lamb, he will find me ready with the mint sauce.

Ten a.m.

It's a good thing that I have decisively renounced all hope of peace and quietness. The postman has brought Susan no flowers from Grandpont, but he has brought me just the sort of letter from Alice that I don't want.

Ruddington, Ruddington, Ruddington—that's Alice's letter from beginning to end.

Alice has "found out all about him." He's richer than Alice thought. And prettier. And nicer. And I am the wickedest, foolishhest, proudest young woman in the world for clinging on at Sainte Véronique.

It seems that Ruddington and I "were made for each other." He has just my tastes! Alice even adds, with splendid candour, that he "isn't the least little bit like Hugh."

I had hardly smoothed my poor fur after Alice's ruffling when Susan chose to begin stroking me backwards again. She said:

"I'm thinking, Miss, about this letter that came on Friday night."

"Yes?" I said.

"Please, Miss, you never told me what you thought of it."

"What did you think yourself, Susan?"

Susan fidgeted about. At last she answered:

"I can't feel that it's right, Miss."

"What isn't right?"

"Him speaking that way, Miss, to a girl ... like me. It doesn't seem right."

"I don't understand, Susan."

She fidgeted again. Then she said:

"I'm afraid you'd be vexed, Miss. It isn't my place to say it."

"To say what?"

"Well, Miss," Susan explained in instalments, "it doesn't seem right, it doesn't seem natural for him to be courting ... *me*. It's what my Aunt Martha used to say, Miss. She used to say, 'More unhappiness comes to them as marries above 'em than to them as marries below 'em.'"

"You mean, Susan," I suggested, "that you're uneasy at the thought of such a great change in your position? So you ought to be. That's why I've always wanted you to look well before you leap. There's a great deal in what your Aunt says."

"Yes, Miss," answered Susan abstractedly. And for a few moments she tried to hold her peace. But it was no use. A sudden torrent of warm words gushed forth and swept all restraint away.

"Oh, Miss Gertrude!" she cried, "I can't help saying it! I can't! It isn't me, Miss, Lord Ruddington ought to be coming after. It's you, Miss Gertrude, it's you!"

I was struck dumb.

"Yes, it's you, Miss, it ought to be," Susan went on. "When I think of what he says in his letter, Miss—how he couldn't go making love to Miss Langley—I could die for shame. I ought to have cut off my hand before I showed you such a thing, Miss."

"Susan," I said, "you mustn't talk to me like this. You did quite right to show me his letter. It isn't your fault that Lord Ruddington wrote things in his letter which it would have been better taste to leave out."

"No, Miss, I know," broke in Susan. "But oh, Miss Gertrude, I'm so miserable! I do so wish he hadn't never seen me. If I don't get married to him, I shall be miserable because I've thrown away all that money, and living in a grand house, and being Your Ladyship. And if I do get married to him, I shall be miserable because ... because it isn't natural, Miss! Oh, Miss Gertrude, how lovely it would have been if he'd liked you instead of me! Then you would have got married and gone to live at the Towers, and we would have come with you, Miss, and we'd have been so happy!"

I noticed Susan's "we." But it was not a time for re-catechizing her about Gibson. I cut her short peremptorily.

"Susan," I said, "be so good as to stop. You are taking a great liberty. If Lord Ruddington has so far forgotten himself as to drag my name into his affairs, that's no excuse for you doing the same. I dislike it most strongly."

"Yes, Miss," said obedient Susan. "But," she added wistfully, speaking more to herself than to me, "it would have been lovely!"

"Am I to take it, Susan," I demanded abruptly, "that you've finally decided not to accept Lord Ruddington?"

She blushed; paled; blushed again. But she did not answer.

"Because," I added, "if you are still thinking it over, you'd better not talk of it, even to me. Lord Ruddington won't expect you to write before Saturday. I've given you all the help and advice I can, but I don't want to influence you either one way or the other. Work it out in your own mind."

Susan promised to try.

As she was going out, something else occurred to me, and I called her back.

"Susan," I said kindly, "I don't wish to refer to it again, but what you have said about myself and Lord Ruddington reminds me of one little point."

"Yes, Miss," said Susan.

"His portrait. One day I went into your room for the scissors. I saw you had put Lord Ruddington's portrait in the same frame as mine."

"Yes, Miss. They went together beautiful."

"I shall be much obliged, Susan, if they don't go together any longer."

Susan shed a tear. But she is going to obey.

Now I've had enough ruffling for one morning. Before I interrogate Madame about the creature at Grandpont, I mean to run down to the bathing-hut and enjoy an hour's basking in the sun.

Before lunch.

I have seen the man from Grandpont. Has the event proved worse than my fears, or better? I can't say. All I know is that the event was different.

Susan didn't go down with me to the bathing-hut. I unlocked it myself, and carried out the deck-chair on to a sunny patch of clean white pebbles. But I had hardly drunk in two draughts of the salt air when I sat up with a start.

A man was watching me.

He had been sprawling on the stones at the foot of the cliff about a quarter of a mile away. At such a distance it was impossible to make out his features, but, as he stood up, I saw it was not Mr. John Lamb. I saw the figure of a man well drilled, a man accustomed to an outdoor life. The man wore a dark blue lounge suit and a straw boater of unmistakably English lines.

For a moment I thought with disgust that he was one of those provincial English tourists (we have had two or three of them off and on at Sainte Véronique) who find some sort of pleasure in lurking about the beaches furtively watching "the ladies" while they bathe. I wished I hadn't left Susan behind. But, as soon as he saw me sit up, the man began to walk towards me in a perfectly open manner.

I couldn't feel sure that it wasn't Ruddington. It flashed across my brain that he was scheming an interview with me as a flank movement upon Susan. Besides, I remembered that a rather fine-tempered man like Ruddington must perceive the unpleasantness of the position in which Susan's acceptance of him would place Susan's mistress, and, in his unconventional ingenuousness, he was just the sort of man to come forward betimes with boyishly candid explanations, and adjustments, and appeals. As he sped towards me over the blinding chalk-stones, there was something in his stride that recalled the eager, masterful love-

making of his present Majesty of Spain.

I got up, relocked the hut door, left the chair outstretched on the shingle, and swung off for home as swiftly as was possible without seeming to run away. I did not choose to grant an audience to Lord Ruddington whenever and wherever it might suit him to claim it.

But his legs were longer than mine and in better training. I had an instinct to run, an instinct to look back, but I mastered them both.

Very soon I could hear the stones crunching or slipping or rolling under his boots. Surely, I told myself angrily, any man who wasn't a bounder or a madman could see that I resented the pursuit. But he came ever quicker on. And, as I gained the path up the beck, he positively broke into a run.

I turned round.

It was Gibson.

"Gibson!" I cried; "Gibson! Is it you?"

"Yes, Ma'am," he answered firmly, pulling off his hat and standing, six feet away, bare-headed in the sun.

"What has brought you here?" I demanded as sternly as I could. But I was too greatly relieved to make a convincing display of indignation.

"I haven't been near the hotel, Ma'am," said Gibson, meeting my eyes.

"Of course you haven't. The idea! But, if you had, you'd have startled me less than by running after me on the beach like this."

"It's about Susan, Ma'am," said Gibson. Gibson is not a man of words, and I could see that he was determined not to be scolded or flurried out of the speech he had been rehearsing.

"Susan's all right," I said; "I told you so in my letter."

"I thank you, Ma'am," said Gibson, less aggressively. "I sha'n't never forget how kind you wrote."

"What's the matter, then? You don't seem to realize, Gibson, that I'm very much annoyed. Didn't I tell you not to come to Sainte Véronique unless I sent for you?"

"You did, Ma'am, you did," answered Gibson, losing his self-control and speaking more and more excitedly; "and I give you my word, Ma'am, I won't come nearer Sinn Verrynick than this bit of ground I'm standing on. Oh, yes, Ma'am! You've wrote right enough, and I thank you. But it's Susan. She hasn't wrote not one line, Ma'am—not so much as a card with a photygraph of the pier on it!"

"You've forgotten the bargain, Gibson. I'm ever so sorry for you; but what did you say at Traxelby? You said you could bear Susan marrying some one else so long as everything was honourable and above-board. You were not to come here unless I found that"—I nearly let slip Lord Ruddington's name—"that Susan's

admirer was not going to play the game.”

”So I did, Ma’am,” broke out Gibson hotly. ”That’s what I said. That’s what I promised. And I’ve cursed myself every day, every minute of every day, since I said it. It was a lie, Ma’am. Whether Susan’s took away from me honest or took away from me dishonest, I can’t stand it, and I won’t. Susan’s mine! I was a dirty hound, Ma’am, ever to say as I would give her up, even if it’s the Emperor of France that comes begging for her with a sack of gold and dymonds. Susan’s mine! She’s the only girl in the world I ever cared about. Yes, Ma’am,” he cried proudly, raising his voice and taking a step forward, ”and Susan’s never cared a straw about any man in the world ’cept me, and she never shall.”

”Susan is a free woman, Gibson,” I said. ”Ever since we left Traxelby she hasn’t mentioned your name. I know nothing about it. But how do you know that Susan ever cared for you? Perhaps she only led you on, as girls do. And, supposing she did care for you, how do you know she hasn’t changed her mind?”

”That’s just the trouble, Ma’am,” said Gibson bitterly. ”I don’t deny they may have changed her mind. If they’ve dangled a lot o’ money before her eyes, and fine clothes and joolry, and motor-cars and going to Egypt, and all that, I don’t deny they may have managed to change her mind. They may have been too strong for a poor girl. Oh, yes, Ma’am, they may have changed Susan’s mind! But ... but they can’t never change her heart, Ma’am. Her heart’ll go on beating true all the same, all the time; and when she’s got tired of the fine things...”

He clenched his fist and finished off the sentence with a gesture between rage and despair. I was forced to turn away from the white heat of his rough eloquence and superb sincerity.

”What is it you want, Gibson?” I asked, as soon as I was able.

”I want to know first, Ma’am, has Susan got herself engaged?”

”No, she has not.”

”Is she going to be, Ma’am?”

”I don’t know. It isn’t my affair. I think she hasn’t made up her mind one way or the other.”

I met Gibson’s eyes. But, this time, it was he who looked away. Apologetically, clumsily, he asked:

”If I may make so bold, Ma’am ... is the party at Sinn Verrynick?”

”The party?”

”I mean, Ma’am, the rich party that’s took a fancy to Susan?”

”No, he is not. I have never so much as seen him. Neither has Susan. But what did I promise? Didn’t I give you my word that, if he came here, I would let you know? That’s why I’m so vexed, Gibson, at your coming like this.”

He accepted the rebuke without a word.

”What are you going to do now?” I asked.

"I suppose, Ma'am," he said slowly and painfully, "I'd better go back to Granpong."

I asked him a few questions. It turns out that he came over on Saturday, *viâ* Southampton and "Lee Harver." He held a letter from a chauffeur he had met in Derlingham to a Havre motor-accessories firm. The Havre people, hearing he wanted to be near Sainte Véronique, gave him a letter to a small cycle and motor jobber in Grandpont who speaks a little English. He boards and lodges Gibson, and teaches him the driving and mending of cars, in return for English conversation, Gibson's labour, and thirty francs a week.

"Of course, if you object to me staying on at Granpong, Ma'am..." said Gibson.

"If I'd known beforehand I should have objected very much, Gibson," I said. "But you've been so lucky in your arrangements, I hardly like to disturb them. Give me your Grandpont address."

Gibson gave me a printed card. He is staying "À la Descente des Automobilistes." The "Descente" announces, on a card adorned with crossed billiard-cues over a foaming bock, that it speaks English, and that it is equal to billiards, coffee, repairs, and beefsteacks *à toute heure*.

"Are you comfortable, Gibson?" I asked.

"Very," he answered. "I never could abide cider, and the beer is shocking, Ma'am. But I'm quite comfortable."

"I'm glad, Gibson," I said. "I won't lose the address. Good-morning."

I record it to my shame that I was heartless enough to begin moving away. Indeed, I had advanced twenty or thirty paces up the beck before Gibson decided on a second pursuit.

"About Susan, Ma'am!" he said, with red cheeks. "Shall you tell Susan, Ma'am, that I'm in these parts?"

"That reminds me, Gibson," I retorted, "you've forgotten so much of the bargain we made at Traxelby that I can't be certain of anything. You promised not to tell Susan that I had ever let you discuss her with me."

"I sha'n't forget, Ma'am. But ... can't I see Susan for a minute?"

"How? Where?"

"I might hang about, Ma'am."

"And frighten her out of her life. No thank you, Gibson! If there's to be any meeting, you'd better write about it from Grandpont."

"It'd take time, Ma'am."

"Surely you can wait a day or two, Gibson?"

He lost his self-command once more.

"No!" he cried, "I can't wait. And if I could wait, I won't. I must see Susan before another sun goes down."

"Don't shout, Gibson," I said; "people will hear you. Even if it isn't against your interest to force yourself on Susan, how do you know she will see you? Perhaps she won't."

He started. Then he turned aside in such sharp trouble, that my hard heart melted.

"The most I can do," I said, "is this. I will tell Susan how you met me on the beach, and that I was very angry. I will say nothing about our talk that night in the garden at Traxelby, and you must not mention it either. All I'm supposed to know is, that you're very keen about Susan, and that you think she encouraged you, and that you're worrying because she doesn't write. In short, if you and Susan meet, you must keep to your own affairs, and not bring me in at all. Above all, never say that I wrote to you. I will tell Susan that you will be on the beach at half-past two. She must please herself whether she meets you or not. But remember, to-day is exceptional. No secret meetings. You can get something to eat in the village at the Café de la Marine. I must go."

I found Susan sitting under an apple-tree with Georgette. Georgette was jabbering over a fearful and wonderful plum-coloured blouse which the two were slashing and altering. It may have been my fancy, but Georgette looked a bit sheepish as she went away. "Mees Breegs" advanced to meet me.

"Susan," I said, "some one whom you know is in the neighbourhood."

Susan's colour fled.

"Is he, Miss?" she asked fearfully.

"At Grandpont," I went on. "Madame Dupoirier told me about it last night. She was at Grandpont station in the 'bus yesterday. He read the name of the hotel, and asked Madame if you were here."

As usual, Susan's colour rushed back, with reinforcements. She began to tremble.

"It's that flower, Miss!" she gasped, "Georgette's flower! Oh, Miss Gertrude, I can't face him yet! I can't, I can't!"

"You don't need to, Susan," I said. "It isn't Lord Ruddington."

Susan moaned a little moan of thankfulness. But her face clouded again as I added:

"It is somebody else."

She searched my eyes. Then she asked, in an agonized whisper:

"Not ... It isn't ... Not Gibson, Miss?"

"Yes," I answered, "Gibson."

Susan turned half round and gazed over the sea. Her pretty country-girl's figure shook with hardly pent feeling. For the first time I saw Susan bitter and angry.

"I'm ashamed of him, Miss," she burst out. "I could never have believed it

of him.”

Not knowing what to say, I refrained from saying it. Susan’s wrath waxed stronger. She turned upon me with something dangerously like active resentment.

”You ... you knew last night, Miss?” she said, almost fiercely.

”Certainly not, Susan,” I replied. ”Madame told me that an Englishman had asked her questions at Grandpont. But she didn’t know who he was, and I never asked her to describe him.”

”Then how do you know it is Gibson?” asked Susan, a very little less pugnaciously.

”Because I’ve just seen him.”

Susan collapsed.

”Where, Miss? where, Miss? ... Oh!” gasped Susan.

”Come, come,” I said, ”I was quite as much annoyed as you are. I told Gibson very plainly what I thought about it. But, Susan, I must admit that there is some little excuse for him. Of course he hasn’t repeated to me a single word that he ever said to you, or that you ever said to him. But it is plain that he’s very fond of you. And he thinks you encouraged him. He says you haven’t sent him even so little as a postcard for a fortnight.”

Susan’s Amazonian ire had died down to a village beauty’s pout.

”I can never forgive him, Miss,” she said. ”I wouldn’t have believed it of Gibson. Not to mention the disrespect to you, Miss Gertrude.”

”Never mind the disrespect to me,” I answered, ”I can look after that myself. No doubt it’s very silly and weak of him; but the point is, that Gibson is so badly in love that he’s madly jealous.”

”Please, Miss, you didn’t tell him about ... Lord Ruddington?” asked Mees Breegs in a fright.

”Susan,” I said, ”I’m surprised. What are you thinking of? Unless you’ve told him yourself, he can’t have the faintest notion that there’s a Lord Ruddington in the case. But I can see he suspects there is somebody. That’s why he couldn’t sit quiet in England while his rival cuts him out in France.”

”I shall never forgive him, Miss,” snapped Susan more conclusively than ever.

”Don’t say that, Susan,” I said; ”or, if you say it, take care you don’t mean it.”

”But I do, Miss.”

”Then it’s nothing to be proud of. Don’t hate a man for merely loving you.”

”He ought to have stopped at home, Miss.”

”He ought. But he hasn’t. You see, Susan, I don’t know how it is, but you seem to have a way of making people do mad things. Gibson cares for you quite

as much as Lord Ruddington does. But he hasn't done anything madder than Lord Ruddington's first letter, has he?"

"No, Miss," said Susan, mollified and visibly flattered. And, after a minute's pleasant meditation on the unsuspected range and power of her charms, she added prettily: "But Lord Ruddington does stop at home when I tell him to, Miss."

"That's true," I granted; "but Lord Ruddington has all the advantages. Poor Gibson is so frightfully handicapped. I suppose he thinks that all's fair in love and war. I'm annoyed with him for coming here, but I admire his spirit. Gibson isn't a muff, Susan."

"Oh, no, Miss," she answered promptly and heartily.

"In fact, this morning I felt quite vexed with Lord Ruddington for stepping between you. But I mustn't say more about that. I will come to the point. I have brought a message."

Susan's agitation began afresh.

"I've told Gibson he mustn't come here. He is lodging at Grandpont. At this minute he's getting something to eat in the village. But he will be on the beach at half-past two."

"To-day, Miss?" she asked faintly.

"Yes, to-day. You can please yourself whether you see him or not. But understand, Susan, I've told him it must be only this once. No meetings on the sly."

"Of course not, Miss," Susan answered, with a touch of indignation, which I ignored.

"If you do go to-day," I added, "you won't mention Lord Ruddington's name. But, Susan, if there has been anything between you and Gibson, I'm bound to say that you have no right to trifle with him. It isn't fair to him, or to yourself, or to Lord Ruddington; or even to me. Perhaps it's still too soon for you to decide whether you will accept Lord Ruddington; but it's high time for you to decide whether you will drop Gibson. If you find you can't drop Gibson, the other matter will settle itself. Be a good girl, and remember that the only way to be happy is to do right. Only, for heaven's sake, don't prolong the agony. I'm not going to grumble, Susan, but you must have seen that, although I came to Sainte Véronique for peace and rest, I've had to spend nearly three weeks worrying my head over people that want to marry you. It's getting to be a bit tiresome."

"You've been awfully good to me, Miss," said Susan with all her usual meekness. "I'll try."

I must stop. Here's Georgette with a litre of cider, and a crisp roll three feet long, and a dish of *raie au beurre noir*.

A quarter past two.

Susan has just started down to the beach.

Three o'clock.

Susan didn't say anything before she went. While she was brushing my hair—it had got all anyhow in the hammock after lunch—she hardly uttered a word.

I have been thinking strange thoughts and wondering at some wonders.

What on earth can it be that has turned a china shepherdess like Susan into a Helen of Troy? Why is she a storm-centre, a battlefield of heroes? I have seen enough of the world to know that both Gibson and Lord Ruddington are exceptional men. What is it in Susan that drives them mad? Susan's is not a case of the Eternal Masculine basely desiring lamb-like innocence and childish beauty. In her case the groom is as good as the lord in native chivalry and honour.

Madame's magnificent old Empire cheval-glass reflected us full-length while Susan was busy with my hair. In the autumnal light, and with the background of bright hangings and bold furniture, we looked less like a mere reflection in a mirror than like one of those vivid modern French pictures. At first the feeling was uncanny; but, by degrees, this full-coloured life-sized, gilt-framed portrait mastered me until I was able to look at it as dispassionately as if it had been on a wall of the Luxembourg. It was then I began to wonder at wonders and think thoughts.

One must not praise oneself up, even in one's diary. But one may, one must, be sincere. And it is the simple truth, that the more I compared the full-length portrait of Susan with the full-length portrait of myself, the deeper and more inscrutable became the mysteries of life. I looked at the two portrayed forms and the two portrayed faces as critically and with as much detachment as if I had never seen the originals in the real world.

Ruddington has seen Susan thrice. But he has seen me thrice also. He says that I was with Susan every one of the three times. Perhaps Susan's brushing jogged my wits; but, face to face with that double portrait, I couldn't help being reminded of what I scolded Susan for saying this morning. As a matter of purely speculative interest, as a curious human problem, I couldn't help saying to myself: "He saw us both. Why didn't he fall in love with me?"

To be immodestly candid, the only answer I could arrive at was: "I don't know!"

Of course, what he says in his letter to Susan about shrinking from making love to Miss Langley is absurd. It is merely a fanciful thought after the event, a pretty conceit, a gossamer compliment partly to Susan and mainly to himself. He

fell wildly, instantly, irresistibly in love with Susan because there is Something in Susan which gave him no choice. He looked at me and was cold, because the Something has been left out.

Never before to-day have I looked at myself in a glass hungrily. But to-day I peered with all the strength of my eyes into the confused depths of the secret. It was no good. I cannot read the riddle.

I will write this page without reserve. It is no more my merit, my own work, that I am beautiful than it would be my fault, my disgrace, if I had been born ugly. I will call a spade a spade, and beauty beautiful. So here goes.

If Susan is pretty, I am beautiful, and I am more beautiful than Susan is pretty. If Susan is as graceful as a nymph, I am as noble as a goddess. If Susan's blue eyes are as blue as the sky, my brown eyes are deeper than the sea. If Susan is curds and cream, I am fire and snow. If Susan can turn plain men into heroes, I ought to raise heroes into gods.

Yes. Although I have a hundred deformities of mind, a thousand uglinesses of conduct and character, which I could help and for which I am to blame, it is the plain truth that God chose to make me beautiful. Has not every one told me so, as long as I can remember? But Heaven knows that, although I have always felt glad, it has never made me puffed up or vain. And I'm thankful it hasn't. If it had, this would have been a bitter day for my pride. For, after all, Ruddington saw us both; and he fell in love with Susan.

I can think of only one answer to the enigma, and I hope it isn't the right one. I suspect that men of abundant manliness, like Lord Ruddington and Gibson, instinctively seek for their opposites in the shape of some passive, clinging femininity like Susan's. They demand that the woman shall be pretty as well as clinging and passive and feminine; because they know that they are brave, and that the brave deserve the fair, I suspect that these strong characters find sweet repose in a simple woman's characterlessness. Their eager spirits recuperate in her placidity.

Conversely, a flabbier man rejoices in a strenuous, all-alive woman. Take poor Alice. She is taller than I am; stronger, quicker, harder, more self-willed. And I suppose that is why Hugh, in his humdrum way, adores her, and is wretched when she's away, like a faithful hound.

If this be the sound theory, I shall never marry. How could I endure a man weaker and pettier than myself? And yet the only kind of man I could ever want ... won't ever want me!

I wish I hadn't begun to think these thoughts. Still more do I wish I hadn't made them become clearer by writing them down. It makes the world seem so mean and lean. There ought to be grander men than Ruddington—men who would spurn honeyed sloth with dolls like Susan—men who would exult at the

challenge of a proud, high-spirited woman as climbers exult at the white blaze of the Jungfrau, as hunters exult at the roaring of a desert lion, as soldiers exult at the sight of a strong city set on a hill. But, alas for this shrunken, sluggish, poverty-stricken time, when I, poor I, who am so far short of being a heroine, must begin to regard myself as a Brynhild doomed to virgin sleep because the Siegfrieds are all too timid and too puny to leap through the small fires of my will and my pride.

Four o'clock.

These worries have been too much for my nerves. I feel all overstrung, as if a little thing would make me break down and cry.

For example, just now I went into Susan's room to make sure that she had taken me out of her frame. I find that, instead of taking me out, she's left me in, and taken out Ruddington. There I am, staring across the hinges at an empty oval.

Last time I saw the frame it had both of us in it, and Susan's room was warm and brilliant with floods of morning sunshine. But, just now, her room was chill and dim. The paper background of the empty oval showed up ghostly white.

I walked to the mantelpiece, and gazed at my own photograph. Instead of looking like one half of a happy honeymoon couple, I looked like a girl-widow staring at a shroud. Outside, in the sunless garden, a gust of wind smote a leafy apple-branch against the window, like a slap of a hand; and at the same moment a great dreariness, an utter loneliness, fell like a blight, like a frost, like a black shadow, on my soul.

I have come back to my own room, where it is more cheerful. But I see that I have written too much to-day in this book. Since sunrise this morning I must have written two or three hours. No wonder I am morbid and dumpy!

I swear an oath. Whatever happens, and whatever Susan may report, not another word will I write to-day.

Thursday morning, in the summer-house.

I hate to think of yesterday. Hitherto I have hugged a fond belief that my nerves were of steel. Yet the trivial shock of Gibson's chase, coming on top of my early rising, bowled me over for the rest of the day.

It is humiliating to read all the stuff I wrote in this book—the feverish retrospects, prospects, introspects. After I had skimmed through it this morning, I nearly vowed to lock it up and not write another word until I am back in England. But, if I don't jot them in a diary, I mix up dates so frightfully.

For example, I was trying the other night to remember the three days when Ruddington saw me with Susan. While Alice was with me, I let this book slide; and the result is I can't recall being with Susan once except at the post-office; and Susan declares that Ruddington's photograph isn't the least like the young man who stared at her in a dark green suit.

I don't even remember where Susan was while he was feasting his eyes on her through the pillars of the monument. Perhaps she sat behind Alice and me. Or did she sit with the servants? It's tantalizing to think that perhaps I've seen him, and perhaps stared back at him, and that it's all slipped out of my mind.

So I sha'n't stop entering things in this journal. But I mean to enter them more curtly.

Luckily there isn't much to write about Susan and Gibson, even if I were disposed to write it. Susan didn't come back till half-past four. Until after dinner she avoided the subject; and it was only when I was mounting to a very early bed that I asked any questions.

"Well, Susan," I said, "and what have you done with poor Gibson?"

"I've sent him home, Miss."

"To England?"

"Oh no, Miss. To Grandpont."

"He had to go to Grandpont whether you sent him there or not," I said. "But didn't you give him an answer?"

Susan had replied to my questions rapidly and defiantly; but, without any warning, she sat down plump on the top stair with the candlestick in her lap, and sobbed the plentifullest and heartiest sobs of all her many sobbings since Ruddington wrote his first letter. Overwrought as I was, I wonder that the unexpectedness and oddity of it did not drive me into hysterical laughter. I controlled myself only by speaking to Susan roughly.

"Get up, you silly creature!" I said. "Georgette will hear you, and Madame! What's the matter?"

"Oh, Miss Gertrude," she sobbed, "I know I oughtn't to have said the things to Gibson that I did say. I oughtn't, I know, I know!"

"Then what did you say them for?"

"It was all his fault, Miss, not mine. I oughtn't to have said the things I did. But why did he say such bitter, cruel, awful things to me?"

"I've no idea, Susan," I said, taking the candlestick from her lap and leaving her to follow.

She did not appear till she had dried her eyes and regained some composure. When she came into my room, her lips were set, and she did not speak.

"Susan," I explained, "I was sorry to cut you short. But we mustn't have scenes on the stairs. Besides, to-night I'm tired out. Gibson upset me this morn-

ing. But I'm sorry if you've quarrelled."

Susan broke down again.

"I hate him, Miss," she cried with a stamp of her pretty foot. "I sha'n't never forgive him for the things he's said to-day! I sha'n't never speak to him again! Not a word, Miss. Not if I live to be a thousand!"

At that I stopped her, and I don't know any more.

Friday, three o'clock.

Susan came to me in the summer-house this morning, and said firmly:

"Please, Miss, I've decided."

Certainly I am out of sorts. As she paused on the verge of her announcement, my heart stood still. No doubt the strain and excitement of these three weeks have sapped me and mined me, and Susan's and Gibson's affairs have been so constantly present to my mind that I suppose they have become affairs of my own. Anyhow, I felt myself chilling ridiculously and going pale as Susan spoke.

"What have you decided?" I asked at last.

"I have decided," replied Susan in her most important manner, "that I will keep company with his Lordship for a month. I mean, Miss, when we're back at Traxelby."

"You'll take him for a month on trial?" I said, jesting feebly.

"Yes, Miss. I don't think I ought to be married to him till I'm sure I can put up with him."

"Of course, Susan," I answered. "But that was settled all along. He isn't expecting you at present to say that you will marry him. He simply asks whether he may come in person and persuade you."

"Yes, Miss," said Susan, colouring charmingly. And after thirty seconds she added, "Please, Miss Gertrude, I beg pardon, ... but when shall we go back to Traxelby?"

The prospect vexed me suddenly and enormously. I foresaw myself enmeshed for another month in ignominious arrangements for the comings and goings of the Lord of the Towers to the lady's-maid at the Grange. The presentiment of inevitable complications and humiliations on my very own territory was too much for my patience, and I answered Susan sharply.

"Really, Susan," I said, "do try to understand that I must think about myself a little as well as you! With all these worries, I feel as if I've hardly had three clear days at Sainte Véronique all these three weeks. You and Lord Ruddington might be the only people in the world!"

"I'm very sorry, Miss," said the bride-elect, completely penitent. "I only

asked, Miss, so that we could..."

"Could what?"

"Put it in the letter, Miss."

"Susan," I enquired, "how have you got on with your writing? This letter will be very short. Don't you think you can manage it yourself? Bring down my writing-case and your own pen, and see what you can do!"

"I'll try, Miss," she said, most deeply disappointed. And she went away.

When she sat down again by my side I admit that Susan astonished me by the speed and the tolerable skill with which she executed a fully-addressed envelope. But my surprise had a short life. It seems that Susan's handwriting exercises have been practically confined to the scribing and rescribing, a hundred times, of the words "Lord Ruddington" and "Ruddington Towers." But, when she sat face to face with a blank sheet of note-paper, ideas, words, and penwomanship alike failed. Susan sighed, moaned, squinted, wriggled, ate the penholder, pouted, and finally adorned the middle of the paper with a big tear.

Doubtless it was my duty to transmit that sheet of paper, tear-drop and all, to the Lord Ruddington so that he might frame it in gold and ivory or treasure it in a casket of bejewelled silver. But I was quite heartless this morning. I snatched the sheet away unkindly, crushed it up profanely, and said:

"You're wasting paper, Susan, and what's worse, you're wasting time. Can you do it or not?"

"No, Miss," whimpered Susan. Her shoulders began to heave, and she shed two more big tears.

"Hand me my own pen, then," I said, less harshly, "and a clean sheet of paper. You may come back in ten minutes to see if what I've written will do."

"I know it will do, Miss," said Susan fervently. "All the letters you write, Miss, are beautiful. I don't always understand them at first; but when I think them over and over after they're posted--"

"Now, run along, Susan," I cut in. "I'll leave the letter inside this case in my room. Your own envelope will do. Post it if you think it is all right."

Here is the letter:

DEAR LORD RUDDINGTON,—Your question is: Do I consent to one or more interviews between us on my return to England?

My answer is: Yes.

After we have met, one or the other or both of us may decide that it is better we should not meet again. I repeat that you have read too much into my letters, and that you have formed expectations concerning me which are bound to be disappointed.

I think our meetings, like this correspondence, ought not to be oftener than once a week, and that we ought to make up our minds once for all at the end of a month. When our return-day is fixed, I must tell all that is in my mind to Miss Langley, and must fall in with her wishes as to the place and time of meeting. Probably she will prefer London to Traxelby.

I hope to hear that you are well.—Yours very sincerely,

SUSAN BRIGGS.

I can't expect Susan to be over-pleased. To use her own old scared phrase, it gives his lordship a chance of backing out. But it makes the only arrangements that are fair and safe all round. Besides, if Susan thinks it is too prudent and cold, she can easily warm it up by getting Georgette to shove in an appropriate collection of sentimentiferous flowers.

Saturday night.

This day have coffee'd, read *Les Chouans*, bathed, lunched, read more *Chouans*, walked to the village, dined, read more *Chouans*, and am just going to bed.

Sunday night.

There was a letter for Susan this morning, with the Grandpont postmark. She regarded Gibson's waiting on the envelope with darkling brows, and thrust the packet unopened into her pocket.

So far as Gibson is concerned, I am not exactly delighted with the situation. He ought to go home. But I can't tell him so. When the new Lady Ruddington begins her reign at the Towers, Gibson will hardly enjoy life at the Grange. I shall feel his going very much. But I'm getting used to Ruddington's wrecking. He's wrecked my holidays, he's stealing Susan, and I suppose I must spend the autumn watching him smash up my whole household. In any case, I mustn't command or persuade Gibson to leave Grandpont so long as he thinks that a smattering of motor-mending will help him in his next place.

I can't guess what the poor lad has written to Susan or how she is going to take it. But love and hate, even the loves and hates of poor and simple people, come home to me so vividly here at Sainte Véronique, that I can't help feeling miserable over Gibson's trouble. With the undimmed sun shining down from a cloudless heaven on the endless waters and the immeasurable uplands, such

elemental verities as love and life and death seem to be at home.

It was to Bérigny that I went for Mass. The curé spoke to me afterwards, as I was sitting under the shadow of the Calvary. He is a simple soul; but he talked with spirit and intelligence about his Church and his country. I found him still smarting under the well-meant fussiness of two old maids from Bournemouth who were at the Hôtel du Dauphin last month. It appears that they distributed Evangelical tracts in French, wherein the present troubles of the Church in France were explained as a divinely appointed punishment of Popery and as a divine call to the French people to embrace Scriptural truth. The curé spoke with fine scorn of that British sectarian animosity which hates the Pope ten times worse than the Devil. And he confirmed what I had learned from the more blatant Paris journals—that the so-called campaign against clericalism is at heart a campaign against Christianity, and not only against Christian dogma, but even against many ancient precepts of Christian morals. More. He confirmed what I have myself read in the speeches of deputies and even of Ministers—that the attack is not merely against Christianity, but against the whole idea of supernatural religion, and that it is avowedly an attempt to establish a lay state, a purely secular community trained from childhood to believe that all religion is superstition and that human science alone can teach men how to live and die.

After the curé went home to break his fast, I still lingered in the churchyard. A new plank-monument had been raised during the week over a new tomb; and its jet-black letters on a snow-white ground reminded me of the resolve I had made to offer a *De Profundis* for the faithful dead.

I found the place in my *paroissien*, and said the opening words aloud. The sound of my own voice in that sunny field of death frightened me, and I stopped. I began again, reading to myself. But it was of no use. I couldn't go on.

When it comes to downright earnest, you can't skip from one religion to another. Lost in a crowd one can coquet with another religion, tolerate it, even enjoy its unfamiliar ancient ritual. But, with my *De Profundis* it was different. I couldn't shed my Protestantism like an old cloak in the twinkling of an eye.

Not that I felt, as I sat down again on the platform of the Calvary, that praying for the dead was false doctrine and superstitious error. I dared not say it was true; but still less dared I say that it was false. I thought of the two old maids from Bournemouth, their half-knowledge, their meddling; and I felt it would be, at the very least, an unpardonable impertinence to offer doubting prayers for needs that I could only half understand.

I ought to have remembered the Ancient Mariner; how, with a heart as dry as dust, seven days, seven nights, he stood alone on a wide, wide sea with Death; how, at last, he watched the water-snakes, coiling and swimming, blue, glossy green, and velvet black, in the shadow of the ship; how a spring of love gushed

from his heart and he blessed them unaware; and how, the self-same moment, he could pray.

With me it was the other way about. At Bérigny this morning I began with faith and ended with unfaith. I went to pray and came away to doubt. Hardly had I clasped my book and resolved that it would be bad taste to pray, before a shadow fell upon all things. The light of the sun was broad and bright; but, within me, there grew a bleak wonder that any one should be able to believe in God.

I mean the Christian's God, of course. If He is truly identical with the eternal Cause of the universe and yet yearns for man's love and worship, how can his heart be content that his right arm should hang idle while puny unbelievers are closing his temples and muzzling his messengers?

I looked along the wooded ravine where the beck chatters down to Sainte Véronique, with Grandpont spire away to the right, and I thought of Susan and Ruddington and Gibson. If God's delight is in the virtuous happiness of men and women, why this hateful tangle? Perhaps it was a blasphemous thought; but the tangle was so cruel, so useless, so cunning, that it seemed to require an omnipotent Devil for its explanation.

The cruelty of it brought tears to my eyes. I thought, for the first time, of a coincidence that deepened the wrong. Susan, Ruddington, and I—we are all orphans. As for Gibson, if he has parents it is fifteen years since they made a sign. Each one of us robbed before we could speak, or think, or remember, of a mother's care and love; and, for compensation, Gibson cheated of love altogether, Susan beloved where she cannot love. Ruddington loving with no love to answer.

I thought of myself. If the Christian's God is one with the Upholder of all things, his was the lightning which struck the old Grange and slew my father and mother as they slept. Where are they to-day? Are they annihilated, body and soul—as dead as stones on the beach? Or do their spirits wander wearily *in profundis* bowed under the burden of new sorrows, awful and unknown?

Yes. I thought of myself. Except grannie, who was fifty years my senior, who has ever loved me dearly, whom have I ever dearly loved? No one. Not even Alice, though we have been good chums.

I resolved on Thursday never again to think the thoughts I thought before the glass. But thoughts will not be denied. In the churchyard this morning, as I sprang up and paced among the graves, a hot, vast, rebellious anger nearly drove me mad. To-day I knew that I was made for love—for a love immense as the sea, ever-lasting as the hills, more splendid than the sun. Why has it been written that love must pass me by?

So I did not say a De Profundis. I know that God exists; but the depths seemed too deep for him to pity and the heights too high for him to hear. I

clanged the churchyard gate behind me harshly; and it was in vain that the jet-black letters on the snow-white plank of the new grave whispered: "If you please."

Monday, 2.45 p.m.

Susan is behaving strangely, and I don't like it.

There is a letter from Ruddington. When it arrived, Susan made no secret of it; but she has neither shown it to me nor mentioned it, although she has been with me all the morning.

In one sense I grant that it is Susan's letter, not mine, and that she is under no obligation to let me read a line. But, in another sense, it is as much mine as hers. The letters Ruddington writes are answers to my letters, not Susan's. The Susan he thinks about and writes to is no longer the palpable Susan with whom he fell in love at Traxelby. He has a new Susan, a composite Susan, a Susan who never was and never will be, a Susan idealized as much from my letters as from his recollections of her face. If Susan, at last, feels competent to compose and write her replies, well and good. But she should say so. To take back the whole affair into her own hands without a word is rather cool. Not that I care one jot about what Ruddington has written. But I do feel rather sick about Susan's uncouthness. After the pains I've taken, it is so monstrously ungrateful.

Bed-time.

Susan drifted down the garden path about three o'clock, and came to anchor beside my chair. She began turning up the gravel with her toe.

"He wrote this morning, Miss," she said suddenly.

"I know, Susan," I said, "I saw the envelope."

Susan went on furrowing the gravel.

"Would you like to read it, Miss?" she asked.

"Perhaps there's no necessity," I answered a little stiffly. "Perhaps you can manage the reply yourself."

"I wish you would read it, Miss," she said, after a very long pause.

"Where is it?"

"Upstairs, Miss."

"Then how can I read it?"

"Please, Miss," said Susan coyly. "I don't like to show it you. It's so loving."

"Indeed," I said. "Then be sure you don't worry me with it unless you find you can't answer it."

"Yes, Miss," said Susan.

She went back to the hotel with a clouded face.

The afternoon dragged. To tell the truth, I wanted to see his letter immensely. Yet how could I? To have read it out of mere curiosity would have been like peeping through a hedge at an unsuspecting pair of sweethearts, or like eavesdropping behind some Lover's Seat. Still, it was terribly tantalizing to have the door of the play-house slammed in my face just as the piece was getting exciting. I tried to read, work, walk about, write; but in vain. All I could do was to think, remember, anticipate, dream, till I felt like the loneliest of lonely outcasts. Ruddington's love-affair, which had been so silly and worrying and tiresome, suddenly became as warm and homely, and bright and cosy as a Christmas hearth; and I felt like a friendless orphan wandering outside in the gloom and the cold.

By six o'clock, I was so deep in the dumps that I positively made some sort of a weather-remark to the enormous, silent Frenchman who has been here a week. I hadn't guessed that he was a mountain of shyness. At my voice he jumped, flushed crimson, knocked over his wine, choked, and nearly frightened me out of my wits before he could utter an intelligible word. Georgette was sulky about the spilt claret; and, from merely feeling solitary, I went on to the knowledge that I was roundly hated. When I came up to my room, an hour ago, I found Susan had left Ruddington's letter under my blotting-pad. Envelope and contents were so flat and uncrumpled that I hardly think they have been cherished next to Susan's wildly-beating heart. Ruddington says:

SUZANNE, ALL MINE,—As ever, I love, honour and obey. Take a month, if you will, before you speak the word. But I have settled it with the stars in their courses what the word must be. For ever, everywhere, you are Suzanne, all mine.

In her neighbourly good-nature and excellent wisdom, Miss Langley may choose for our meeting-place, Traxelby or London, or the Equator or the North Pole, or Sainte Véronique or the New Moon, or the summit of Mont Blanc or Ruddington Towers, or a coral island, or the Bottomless Pit, or the top of the Monument, or any other square yard she pleases. So long as Suzanne is there in the midst, the arid, scorching heat of the Sahara will be Eve's garden refreshed and guarded by the four streams of Paradise.

Suzanne has promised that she will come an inch to meet me. She shall never turn back alone.

But let not Suzanne mistake this perfect confidence of mine for vanity. I believe that Suzanne will run to be all mine, not because she gives herself lightly (for where is there a prouder than Suzanne?) and not because I am handsome, or desirable or magnetic. I am not magnetic, I am not desirable, I am not handsome. No. I believe that Suzanne must be all mine because I am all hers; because it

is unthinkable that she should come close to the blaze of such a love as mine without herself taking fire.

Unless the Devil is torturing the world, such love as mine for Thee implies, requires, compels an equal love of thine for Me.

What a Suzanne this is, who is all mine! When I recall her face as I saw it in Traxelby church, what a wonderful, beautiful Suzanne! But, when I read her letters, I cry again, with threefold gratitude: what a beautiful, wonderful Suzanne! Her pride is as fine as the curl of a rose leaf; but her sweetness, like the rose's perfume, hovers over it all.

Not that Suzanne thinks that she has ever revealed herself in her letters. She believes that she has veiled herself in veils of prudence and reserve. But my eyes have found her out—have found her, more beautiful for her dissembling, like a great bright star hiding in the Milky Way.

Suzanne, it is no use hiding any longer. The hour has come for shining out without a cloud between. Do not wait for our meeting. Write to me, just once, without distrust of yourself or of me. I have obeyed, have I not, in all things? Reward me at last. Pour out your heart, even if it be a-brim with fears.

When she reads this, prudent Suzanne will be moved to answer that I am taking too long and sudden a leap, and that I am skipping over two or three seemly stages. She will say that she has written nothing which I have the right to answer with a love-letter like this.

But this is not an answer to Suzanne's letter. It is an answer to her flower.

RUDDINGTON

In a corner of the envelope I found something which his Lordship's wonderful beautiful Susan has overlooked. It was a petal of a creamy rose. Poor Ruddington! And to think that it is nobody's fault.

Tuesday at sunrise.

How can I write it?

Only because, if I write it not, my brain will turn, my heart will break.

I love Ruddington.

For days and weeks I have lied to myself, I have lied to this book. With my wits I have parried the truth; but in the heart of my heart, ever since the day I took his portrait in my hand, I have known.

As I have looked for his writing by every post, I have known. As I have read his letters, grave or gay, I have known. As I have sat replying, I have known.

Every hour of every day, by the sea, in the garden, in this room, I have known.

When I saw his portrait facing mine, I knew. When I saw his place empty in the frame, I knew—oh, how hungrily! And when I sat on Sunday, bitter-hearted, under the Bérigny Calvary, I knew.

Yet God knows how I have fought it, how I have held it down even out of my own sight. And God knows how, according to my light, I have striven to do my duty by Susan, and by Gibson, and by them all.

My poor wits are too weary. They can parry the truth's bright, cruel thrusts no more.

So, before I tear this book into tatters and burn it till not a letter of his name remains, once for all I will confess. I love Ruddington. I fell asleep last night with his rose-leaf, my stolen rose-leaf, under my pillow. I dreamed a dream of peace—a peace as sweet and strong as death. I dreamed I was at rest within his arms. And I awoke in the loneliness of the rainy daybreak, holding out my hands to him and murmuring his name.

Tuesday, 2 p.m.

I shall burn this book. But not to-day.

The world seems hushed, remote, unreal. To-day, I seem to belong, not to Life, but all to Love and Death.

As soon as the sun had conquered the mist, we went down, Susan and I, to bathe. The tide was high, with warm boisterous waves. Perhaps I went out too far, or breasted the rude buffeting too long.

Without warning, my strength forsook me. I half swooned in the water. The undertow drew my feet away from their hold on the ribbed sand, and, at the same moment, a towering, craggy wave broke with a shattering crash full over me.

Involuntarily, by the animal impulse of a creature clinging to life, I raised a foolish cry which filled my mouth with water; I threw up foolish hands, and straightway began to sink. But, instantly, calm and self-control returned. The great waters were chanting in my ears. I even opened my eyes and looked up through the green crystal at the noon-day sun—a round, moon-like sun, mild and cool and kind.

I believed it was the end. Death was all round me and under me and over me, like the sea. But I was not afraid. Till Death was near, I had not dreamed that he could be so sweet. To sink down, down, down in his arms was not a frightful descent into horror; it was a gentle settling into unutterable peace.

But it was not to be. For the present I belong to Life, who is so niggardly and cruel, not to Love who is so lavish, or to Death who is so kind. Susan had seen

me collapse; and when a thunderous wave swung me towards her she plucked me from its grasp.

Susan does not know that Death has laid his lips on mine and that I have looked into his pitiful eyes. She thinks I merely lost my footing, and she knows nothing of the swoon. But she says I look ill and shaken; and I do believe she has forgotten her own affairs in mine.

At sunset.

Susan won't let me leave my room. She has guessed that this morning's affair was more serious than a mere swallowing of salt water, and she insists that I am an invalid for the rest of the day.

Georgette has made a crackling wood-fire. The logs rest on quaint old iron dogs and, in one sense, the blaze is cheerful. In another sense it is depressing. The sun has set early, and these logs are the funeral-pyre of summer.

Everybody is so kind. Georgette set a table between the hearth and the window, and Madame has sent up such a *poulet en casserole* as I have never tasted before. Dupoirier chose out a Burgundy, dry and bold and strong.

Now that I feel so much better, I know that I was ill. Before dinner, I lay down on my bed and slept two unrestful hours. I dreamed that I was climbing toilsomly up a stony path between ruinous walls and close-grown ancient thorns. I climbed in a light that was neither of the night nor of the day: in the wan and chilly light of a moon-like sun such as I had seen through the water. And, all the time I climbed, I knew that he was near. Thrice I saw him through the briers, and once he called my name: but he was always at the other side of the wall.

I dreamed much more. But though I couldn't help dreaming, I can help recalling it all, I can keep writing it.

Yet what can I do if I don't write? I can't get to close grips with a book. The end of *Les Chouans* is too beautiful, too sorrowful, and I've no one to talk to, save Susan. Susan has been an angel all day: but I couldn't talk to her just now. I will go to bed.

Midnight.

The house is quiet as the grave.

I cannot sleep. Perhaps the fire was too restless and bright.

The room is so warm that I am sitting without even a dressing-gown, just as I slipped out of bed. I have a plan of wooing sleep.

I am going to write to Ruddington. Not a reply on behalf of Susan. Not a letter that will ever be posted. Not a letter that any eye save mine shall ever see.

Once, just this once, because I am sleepless, and shaken, and worn, and unhappy, I will let myself go. For half an hour, he shall be mine. His rose-leaf, my stolen rose-leaf, shall lie by my hand. To-morrow ... the fire for what I write to-night. And for me—to-morrow and all the morrows after it—no looking back to this hour, no brooding, no idle regret, nothing save the quest of forgetfulness.

This is what I write—the first and last love-letter of my life:

SAINT VERONICA'S,
at dead of night.

BELOVED,—You bid me write to you just once without distrust either of myself or of you. You bid me pour out all my heart.

I obey. Once—this once—I will speak to you as I have never spoken before, as I can never speak again.

You have seen me, in the flesh, three times, treading the solid ground, breathing the summer air. Yet you do not love me. I have seen you only in a portrait: and I love you as wildly, as eternally, as immeasurably as you believe you love poor Susan. I know it all through my soul: and, as you wrote in your first letter, there can never be any one in the world for me save you.

Your portrait was the beginning. How I can have been near your own very self those three times in England without turning to you as a flower turns to the sun, without answering you as deep answers deep, I do not know. Perhaps my heart did turn, my soul did answer. But, for my consciousness, the portrait was the beginning. And what your portrait began your letters have carried on.

You say that poor Susan's mind is even more beautiful and wonderful than poor Susan's face. Alas, how cruelly you are deceived, how rudely you must be awakened. But with Thee, beloved, it is thy mind that makes me love Thee most. Although I have wandered only a few steps along its margin, I know that a long lifetime would not suffice me to explore that goodly land with its sunny fields, its merry brooks, its great deeps, its peaks piercing the clouds of heaven.

Yes, Beloved, thy mind is beautiful and wonderful. And yet it has deceived you. At the sight of a pretty face, you bent like a reed under an immense infatuation which you think is love. It is the tragedy of your life and mine, Beloved, that we, whom God made one for another, must go our separate ways, you with your infatuation, I with my love.

Doubtless, before long, we shall meet. You will feel the delicacy of my position, you will be considerate, grateful, kind. And I must sit and smile and put you at your ease, while all the time my heart will be crying: This is the man who should have loved me!

To-morrow all will be changed. This hour of self-revelation will belong to the past, never to have a successor. But to-night I have let myself go. If you were here at this moment, your infatuation should melt and vanish before my love, like hoarfrost before a raging fire. You should go down on your knees, you should prostrate yourself at my feet, imploring pardon for your ignoble truancy and for your treason against love. But I would make haste to forgive you, Beloved, and to raise you up, and to throw myself against your heart into your arms.

I send you back your rose-leaf. It has lain by me as I have written, and I will keep nothing to remind me of this hour. So I send it back—not as it came, for it is heavy with a kiss.

The sand has run out in the glass. My hour is ended. When I have laid down my pen, I shall weep. And, when I have wept, perchance I shall sleep and love you dreaming as you will never love me waking. Farewell.

I laid down my pen five minutes ago. I take it up again to say that I have not wept and that I cannot sleep.

What a letter I have written—what a slow-footed, cold-blooded, low-pulsed, nerveless, schoolgirlish scribble! Will the fire be able to burn it, I wonder, or will it put the fire out like an armful of damp green boughs?

No, I can't sleep. My very contempt for what I have written has awakened me in every fibre.

I am not ill now. I have never been so well before in my life. A moment ago I looked at myself in the glass. The picture enchanted me. I stood with the torch-like brass candlestick held high. My uplifted arm was bare as far as the deep lace at my elbow. My eyes shone, my hair fell all about me, almost to my knees. In contrast, my feet were like two lilies, my neck was like a swan's. And, as I gazed, another veil was withdrawn from the mystery of life. By the light of the candle I saw my own cheeks glow red, as it was revealed to me what it will mean to live without love. What Fate denies me is not only communion with a kindred spirit. I, too, am flesh and blood.

Let Susan and Ruddington thank their stars that I was brought up gently, christianly, instead of wickedly, selfishly, in the passion-fraught air of a worldly home. Let them thank their stars that the devil in me has been laid, that the tigress in me has been tamed. If Ruddington were here to-night, if Susan came running hither through that door, how small a thing could sting me past control and rouse me to overwhelm them under my proud anger and pitiless love! I could dash his china shepherdess into a thousand pieces. I could compel him to forsake all and follow me to the end of the world.

A memory rises up suddenly and makes me laugh bitterly. Susan at Trax-

elby. How I smiled at her melodramatics when she knelt down in an agony of fear and made me swear that I would not take him away from her! But I have sworn, and I may not repent.

Enough, far more than enough, of this. It is mad, it is sickly, it is contemptible. No more of it, to-night or ever. I will get back into bed, and lie snug, and read till morning.

Wednesday, noon: in bed.

I feel bruised all over, strengthless, stunned. Susan woke me at ten o'clock. *Les Chouans* had fallen to the floor and the candle at my bedside had burned down to its socket.

Susan says that she came in at seven with no less noise than usual. But I was sleeping so soundly that she didn't like to wake me before ten.

While she was propping me up with pillows and pouring out the coffee, I looked round the room and my heart stood still.

The letter to Ruddington was gone.

My cheeks turned whiter than the sheets. Susan caught me in her arms.

"Oh, Miss Gertrude, no, no!" she wailed, "I couldn't bear it."

She thought I was going to die. I opened my eyes and tried to speak. But Susan wailed on.

"It's my fault, Miss, all mine. You're so good to me, Miss, I ought to have known. I ought to have said, 'Don't bother about his lordship, Miss, till you're well and strong.' But I didn't think. I'm too selfish, Miss. Oh, Miss Gertrude, to think you were sitting up writing and writing all that, and me snug and warm in bed!"

"Susan," I said feebly, asking the question in terror, "What have you done with it?"

"It's gone, Miss," answered Susan, with the prompt heartiness of one who breaks good news and administers consolation. "So you don't need to worry your head about it any more."

"Gone?" I echoed, in a voice as thin as a ghost's.

"Yes, Miss. Madame was going to Grandpont in the omnibus. She asked me if we had any letters for the early post. And oh, Miss Gertrude, it was perfectly lovely! I can't never thank you enough. I couldn't understand it all through; but it was so lovely, it made me cry."

I lay still with closed eyes. When Susan held the coffee to my lips, I drank. When she drew away the extra pillows and settled the bedclothes cosily round me, I did not resist. Indeed, I did not say another word. Susan thinks I am asleep.

I ought to be up and doing. But doing what? I ought to be hot, angry,

ashamed, full of resolves and plans. But I am lying here, despite the shocks and bruises, subdued, at rest, strangely imperturbable. Can it be that I am happy because, while I have played fair with Susan, I have been suffered once, just once, to speak in his ear and to send him a rose-leaf with a kiss?

I have thought it all out. Did Susan sign the letter? Even if it has gone without her name, it doesn't matter. He cannot guess that it is mine.

At first I shuddered at recollecting the bits about "poor Susan." But, again, it doesn't matter. He will take it that Susan has written "poor Susan" instead of "I," just as he himself writes "prudent Suzanne" instead of you.

He will read it to-morrow morning. It will puzzle him. But the task of interpreting it will delight his fanciful, super-subtle mind. I can predict his reading of the riddle. He will take it that Susan, in her wonderful, beautiful soul, is comparing her angelic love with his very human infatuation. He will picture her more exquisite and spiritual and poetical than ever. But it is my kiss that he will cull from the curling lip of that pale rose.

BOOK IV

LA VILLA DE LA MER

BOOK IV

Thursday night.

I am not Number 3 at Dupoirier's hotel any more. I am a householder; and mistress, until Sunday morning, of the Villa de la Mer.

I am writing in my new bedroom. The French windows open on a broad wooden balcony facing the sea. The furniture is brand new—as new as the villa garden, with its glaring paths of chalk-chippings bordering an oblong of wiry grass and lean, shivery shrubs.

If Ruddington rode into Derlingham, he would get the letter this morning, about a quarter to ten. At half-past two a telegram arrived at the Hôtel du Dauphin, addressed to Susan. Happily, he had the tact to hand it in at Miller's Bridge where Susan isn't known. Susan brought the unopened message to me with a scared face. I took it, and this is what I read aloud:—

TO MISS BRIGGS, HÔTEL DU DAUPHIN, SAINTE VÉRONIQUE,
FRANCE.

I am crossing to-night, and shall reach Sainte Véronique to-morrow at 6 p.m.

RUDDINGTON.

Susan snatched the paper out of my hand with a cry of dismay.

"Oh, Miss!" she moaned, letting it fall on the grass, "whatever shall we do?"

I was struck dumb.

"Whatever shall we do?" she cried again. "Oh, Miss Gertrude, he mustn't come! I can't bear it. I must send him a telegram at once. I must!"

Too much staggered to answer, I looked at her blankly. She collapsed on the rustic seat by my side, covered her face with her pretty new French apron, and went off into an old-fashioned, uncontrollable fit of weeping.

To the sound of her sobs, I tried to decide what course was best. Susan's plan of an immediate telegram commanding him to stop at home seemed good at first. But I glanced at his words again, and all doubt vanished. I knew that Susan might as well tell to-morrow's sun not to rise, to-morrow's tides not to flow, as tell Ruddington that to-morrow he must not invade Sainte Véronique. Nor could I blame him, or wonder at him. With such a letter as mine in his hand, I should have despised him if he had not flown on the wings of the wind.

"Stop crying, Susan," I said. And, with a bitterness which she did not understand, I added, "It is I who should be upset, not you."

"Yes, Miss, I know, Miss," sobbed Susan. "With you so ill and weak, it's horrible, it's dreadful!"

"I don't mean that, Susan," I said. "But do you think I like his coming here? First it was Gibson, and now it's Lord Ruddington."

She turned on me white with terror.

"I know, I know, oh, I know, Miss Gertrude!" she crooned, wringing her hands. "What if Gibson meets him, Miss? They'll fight, and they'll both be killed!"

"Don't talk nonsense," I said irritably; "if they killed each other, at least we should have some peace. As for sending a telegram, what's the good? He's made up his mind. Very likely he has started. If so, no power on earth will turn him back again."

"Do you think, Miss--?" began Susan.

"Think what?"

"Your letter, Miss ... my letter. Do you think that perhaps it was too ... loving?"

"And what if it was?" I retorted. "He's got the letter by now, hasn't he? He's got it, and it can't be altered."

Susan wept afresh.

"Oh, Miss!" she moaned. "If only we was at Traxelby I wouldn't mind. But it's dreadful!"

A plan occurred to me.

"Wait here," I said, "while I go and speak to Madame."

Within a quarter of an hour it was all arranged. I told Madame that an Englishman from the next parish to my own would arrive to-morrow night. Madame is the pink of propriety; and she had nothing but approval for my scheme of taking Susan and Georgette to the Villa de la Mer for the time of Ruddington's stay. I took it upon myself to declare that the newcomer will go away again on Sunday; and I am not sure that I shall allow him to remain so long.

The Dupoiriers had made the villa beautifully sweet and clean in the hope of attracting one more end-of-the-season tenant. There was hardly anything that needed to be done. Madame has sent down a great hamper of linen, and two baskets of provisions, and a pudgy little baby cask of cider. And here we are.

Already the change has done me good. Sitting on the broad balcony, between two tubs of bushy, bright-leaved euonymus, I am so near the sea that, at the top of the tide, the spray kisses my cheeks. To come here was an inspiration, every way. From a house of my own, I can manage to-morrow's happenings. To be mistress of a house helps me to be once more mistress of myself. These wholesome, hearty breezes will blow away the morbid nightmares of yesterday and the days before. I mean to go back to where I stood a week ago. That is to say, having done my duty by Susan, I mean to stand aloof and look on at the last act of the comedy.

All this afternoon I have been healthily awake, and now I am healthily drowsy. To-night I shall be like a child in a cradle, with the big soft sea cooing me to sleep.

Friday morning.

If ever I cross to Sainte Véronique again, I shall come to the Villa and not to the hotel. Last year, I hated the sight of the Villa standing up gaunt and shadeless, with raw red walls, and a cold muddy-blue slate roof. But, once inside, you are cheerfuller than in the hotel.

There's another and a stronger reason. What was it that demoralized me at the hotel and made me such an easy prey to mawkish fancies? It was because

I had nothing to do, nothing to supervise. The Villa is only a big doll's-house; but its toy duties and its miniature responsibilities have stiffened my backbone already.

I have settled everything about Ruddington. When he reaches the hotel, he will find a note from Susan. I can't have him worrying us to-night. He must cool his ardour till to-morrow. And he mustn't stay longer than Sunday, Thirty-six hours of it will be a long enough ordeal for poor Susan. All that is needed at this stage is that they should come face to face, and, as Susan says, decide whether they can put up with one another. If he stays more than one clear day, they'll be getting to explanations and confidences, and it will all come out about my letters.

Unless there is mutual disenchantment (in which event Susan will send him off at once) I will see him to-morrow, after lunch. As Susan's guardian, I shall have to sit in state and give him a gracious audience, while he shyly unfolds his tale of love and proves the honourableness of his intentions.

I am glad that he is coming. It's far better to get it over at Sainte Véronique than to have to go through it all at Traxelby. Besides, it's better that I should meet him without any more delay. Distance and mystery have lent enchantment to my view of him, and they are to blame for my three silly nights and days. If there are any germs of love-sickness still lurking in my veins, I expect a talk with him will kill them. He will be unlike his portrait and far more unlike his letters, he is just an ordinary male person, gone mad over a pretty face. The only uncommon thing about him, is that his letters strive, by an ecstatic *tour de force*, to lift an everyday masculine passion up to supra-mundane regions. Through a sequence of galling accidents, I have bolstered up his illusion. That is why, for a few days, there really was a spiritual bond between us. But to-morrow will snap it. There is sure to be a something. Perhaps he will have a weak voice. I could no more endure him with a weak voice than I could endure Susan with a gruff one. This is the note he will find awaiting him:—

You ought not to come here. But I received your telegram too late to stop you.

I showed the telegram to Miss Langley and she was angry. Not angry because you want me. Indeed, so soon as she is satisfied that all is as it should be, she will help me as much as lies in her power. But she was angry that you should come here.

I have promised to ask you, imperatively, not to remain after Sunday. Until that day we shall be at the Villa de la Mer, a chalet about a mile from here.

Do not try to see me to-night. I agree with Miss Langley that it will be best if we meet to-morrow morning on the beach at eleven o'clock. I shall expect you at the end of the path down from the hotel, where the beck is lost in the shingle.

I can be with you for an hour. If we do not find that we are making a mistake, Miss Langley will be glad to see you at the Villa at half-past two.

S.B.

That is as far ahead as I mean to look. If Susan and he strike a bargain at once, I may have to consider what unbendings I must make, and what little honours I must render to-morrow night, and Sunday, to my noble neighbour, and to my Lady Ruddington of the very near future.

I have kept faith with Gibson. To-morrow morning he will have a discreet letter, telling him that the unknown is coming for a few hours: that he is an honourable man; and that Gibson will best serve himself and everybody else by keeping out of the way.

Noon.

Susan is alternately beaming and weeping like an April day.

Before she carried the note up to the hotel to leave it for Ruddington, she was all bright excitement and chattering importance. We had quite a gay quarter of an hour settling what she should wear on the beach. She is going to meet him in her navy-blue serge which she has hardly worn, with white gloves and quite a Parisian hat which she has taken over from Georgette. It is of soft, fine, blue straw, made cocked-hat-shape, with two downy, snow-white wings.

"What must I do, Miss, when he comes up to me?" she asked.

I didn't ask what she meant. Perhaps she thinks she ought to bob a curtsy.

"You won't do anything," I answered. "He will come up saying he got your note, or how good it is of you to come, or something like that. Don't be too stiff. Hold out your hand simply and easily."

"I was wondering, Miss..." began Susan. But she cut herself short, blushing violently.

"You were wondering...?" I echoed.

"I was wondering, Miss ... will he want to kiss me?"

I blushed with her.

"Really, Susan," I said, "you must look after yourself."

"My last letter was so loving, Miss," said Susan doggedly.

"It was, and it wasn't," I answered with cunning. "The point is this. You've refused Gibson."

Susan winced. But I went on.

"You've refused Gibson. And you've made up your mind that you will

marry Lord Ruddington—if you like the look of him when you see him in real life. It’s your affair, Susan, not mine. But, as for kisses ... well, surely, he won’t offer them and you won’t take them till you are both decided what you are going to do.”

”Then I’ll tell him he mustn’t, Miss,” said dutiful Susan.

Later on, she asked:

”Please, Miss Gertrude, what will he say to me?”

”Dear me, Susan, I might be a witch. How do I know what he’ll say to you?”

She endured my sarcasm. But Susan still believes that I know everything. It has never entered her head why I wrote that fatal love-letter to Ruddington on Tuesday. She accepts it simply as one more proof of my all-round efficiency. She wonders at it no more than she wonders at my writing adequate letters to my solicitor, or banker, or to a tenant. She thinks I know all about love, just as I know about law and business—as part of a liberal education.

”I don’t mean his very words, Miss,” she said. ”I mean, Miss, what will he talk about?”

”For one thing,” I replied, glad of the chance, ”he’ll talk about your letters. And that’s a point I want to mention. Some day a way will be found of making a clean breast of everything. But, until I have seen him, and he is safely back in England, you mustn’t give him the faintest shadow of a hint that any of those letters were mine. If you do, there’ll be such a muddle that I don’t see how we can get out of it.”

”I know, Miss, I know!” said Susan alarmed. ”I sha’n’t breathe a single word.”

”Don’t be too confident,” I answered, warming up to the business. ”You may find it hard work keeping it in. He’s bound to say a lot of things that you won’t very well understand. For instance, take that letter I wrote on Tuesday night—the loving one, as you call it—the one you posted when I was ill. It’s too late to scold you over it now, Susan; but you oughtn’t to have rushed it off. We could have written something much more suitable.”

”But it was lovely, Miss.”

”It was a great deal too lovely,” I said. ”He’ll say all kinds of fanciful, clever, difficult things to you about it. My advice, Susan, is this. Don’t be stiff; but be shy. Don’t go out of your depth in talking to him. So long as he speaks about things you understand, answer him freely. Be as natural and simple as you can. He’ll like you all the better. But, if he goes too deep, don’t try to follow. Just hold your tongue. If he bothers you and presses you, say you would rather talk about it some other time.”

”But he’ll find me out some day, Miss,” said Susan doubtfully.

”How do you know there’s going to be a some day? Perhaps you won’t

like him. If so, you'll part, and there's an end of it. The great thing, Susan, is not to worry yourself into a fright. If you're scared and nervous, you won't look nice. And if you don't look nice, he'll be far more disappointed than if you're not clever. Now run up to the hotel with this note."

She departed in good spirits, treading jauntily. But when she came back she was limp, hopeless, tearful. It has called for all my strategy to elude a scene. I'm so glad Georgette is here! She and Susan get on together like a house on fire. Georgette is all ears and sympathy for every word Susan says, though Susan might as well be talking Coptic five-sixths of the time. At this minute they are laying the table under the balcony, and Susan is in full flow with her tale of hopes and fears.

Sunset.

The gold is tarnishing in the sky, and a cold, bitter wind is blowing from the sea.

It has struck six. He will be just arriving at Madame's.

The Villa is sunnier and freer than the hotel by day. But it is eerie with the fall of night. I will have a fire and an extra lamp.

Oh that it were Monday morning, with it all over, and Ruddington gone! How can I be sure that I have mother-wit, and force, and pride enough to scrape through? What if the sight of him fans Tuesday's flame instead of quenching the embers? What if I do truly love him, after all? What if I break down while he is asking me for Susan?

This useless, restless, shameless pen of mine is my ruin. Why do I never learn? Why did I not burn this book, days ago, to ashes? Even as I have sat writing these so few lines, the truth has darted out of its hiding-place. I can cheat myself no more.

God has marked me down to receive through my heart the sharpest, most venomous arrow of His cruelty. I am the chosen vessel of His wrath. I love Ruddington; and he is close at hand, while the light is dying out of heaven, and I am so cold and lonely. He has sped over land and sea, on fire with love: and the love is not for me.

The last of the red is gone from the sky. Twelve hours before to-morrow's dawn. Twelve hours of sleepless darkness. Twelve hours of solitary vigil to prepare me for meeting him to-morrow in the merry sunlight, and for draining my cup of bitterness to its black dregs.

I could almost laugh—a laugh as hard as iron, as bitter as a black frost. If there be saints in heaven I challenge them to look at me now. Come, good people, I pray you of your charity: a De Profundis, if you please!

Seven o'clock.

No need to wait for to-morrow. It is to be to-night. It is to be now.

I shall write this short page to steady my nerves, to rally my wits, to cool my blood.

Something is in the wind. Twenty minutes ago, when I told Susan that I should not need her again till dinner-time, she made pretence of tidying the room, as I was staring into the fire. She did not know that she was reflected in the glass.

I saw her stand stock still and gaze at my face with the gaze of one who gazes for the last time. She could not have gazed at me more desperately, if there had been a hangman waiting at the door to take one of us away. Suddenly her cheeks shone with a drench of tears. She covered her face with her hands, and stumbled through the doorway.

I was sick of scenes. And, with such an anguish as mine, I felt a contempt for Susan's mere ups and downs. So I pretended not to see or hear, and I didn't follow till ten minutes ago.

Susan is not in the house.

Georgette says she went out as soon as she came downstairs. She thinks Susan has only gone for a breath of sea air before dinner.

It is outrageous, it is unendurable, it is wicked, it is cruel. They are meeting now.

What note or what message did Susan leave this morning at the hotel? Not mine! I am a fool, a simpleton, I have less sense than a little child.

I can guess the place. It will be on the beach between here and the beck. They are meeting now. He is holding her in his arms. She will be like potter's clay in his hands. His ardent masterfulness will flick aside her doubts and fears like grains of sand. Her wits will fly away from her like chaff before the wind. There will be no Susan there save a girlish form for him to hold, a burning face for him to kiss, and a childish voice to tell him about me and my letters. And to-morrow--

Unendurable is the word. Endure it I will not. I refuse to be flouted, and disobeyed, and made a fool of, and shamed.

Susan is my maid. I don't allow followers, whoever they may be. Or, rather, I allow them in honest daylight, and at times appointed. Not on the sly. Not in the dark.

I am going out.

Some time or other.

I am glad I did not burn this book. It shall stand as my golden legend.

The fire is still lively in the grate, and the two lamps are beaming softly. I don't know whether it is Friday night or Saturday morning. Saturday morning, I suppose. But no going to bed till all is written down.

I stepped out of the Villa about a quarter past seven, and began crunching westward along the stones. Rage and hatred were in my heart. I almost understood those men and women who make haste on such errands as mine, grasping pistols or cold steel. The wind was in my face, but I bent into it and sped on. I was not cold. It made me glow to think how I would burst upon them, cover them with shame, fling them apart, humiliate them a thousand times more than they should ever humiliate me.

But rage and hatred did not last. Under the lee of a great black boat drawn up on the shingle, I paused to take breath. It was warm and still in that little patch of shelter, out of the nipping bluster of the wind.

While I was standing there, looking over the faintly gleaming water, a black mantle of cloud fell away from the moon. The sea became a far-spreading shimmer of silver. The little clouds sailed as curly and white as feathers from a great sea-bird's breast across the soft blue heaven. A single chime of the Bérigny church bell fell from the cliff—a single, silvery chime as if the moonlight had spoken.

At that holy call, I was born again. Rage and hatred had been strong, but I had not rage enough or hatred enough to go on standing up stubbornly against all that graciousness and beauty. It melted my heart of stone; and I knew it for an impossibility that God should be otherwise than beautiful and good. For a moment, Ruddington and Susan receded from my mind. Or, rather, I thought of them only along with all the millions of happy lovers upon whom the same sweet moon was smiling. And I blessed them unaware.

My mind came back to my errand. And then I fought the battle. Along the beach I could see the trees which shade the path; and, above the swish of the small waves, I could hear the beck humming loudly in its ravine. I was sure that they were there, under that green roof, close to that music, in this moonlight made for love. The thought burnt me like hot irons, and I could have cried aloud. Then the agony was over. I had resolved to let them be, to leave them alone with their happiness. Rage was tamed, hatred was changed to a sad, world-wide pity. But, as I turned wearily back to the clouded east, I ached and tingled all over like a beaten child.

At the first crunch of my foot on the pebbles as I turned round, some one sprang towards me from the foot of the cliff.

I cried out in terror.

He faced me in the moonlight. We were only a step or two apart. It was Ruddington.

We looked full at one another without speaking. And, as I looked, I knew that, though he could not be mine in this world, I must be his for ever and ever. Then the enormous whiteness of the cliff seemed to rock before my eyes, and the humming of the beck swelled to thunder in my ears. But he caught me before I fell.

"Susan!" he said softly in my ear. His voice was warmer and brighter than gold, as he repeated: "Susan!"

I lay helpless in his arms. All strength had gone from me, just as it had gone when I half swooned in the sea. I could not struggle. I could only let myself sink more wholly against his heart, just as I had so willingly sunk down, down, down through the cool green water to the deep, strong peace of Death. But, though Death's caress had been sweet, it was sweeter to rest against the warm heart of Love.

I don't know how long that perfect happiness endured before a stab of anguish pierced me through. It seemed an hour; it may have been a minute; perhaps it was less than half a second before full consciousness returned. Then a voice within me cried shame. I remembered that, although I had gazed at his face in the broad light of the moon, he had only seen mine in the shadow. Bitterest of all, it was not my name he had murmured in that voice brighter and warmer than gold. He had hailed Susan. I was a cheat, a changeling, lying shameless in Susan's place.

I knew it. But, for a moment longer, I rested at peace in the soft nest of his arms. With all the grey years of the future to be lived through in loveless loneliness, I deliberately gave myself that one long moment. As if he knew that the warmth and sweetness of it must last me all my life long, he held me closer to his heart. I wished, then, that I could have died.

Life, harsh Life, cried aloud. I called up some sudden strength and tore myself free.

"I am not Susan," I said.

He gave the slightest cry, made the slightest retreat in the world. Then, before I knew, he enfolded me once more.

"No," he said proudly. "Not Susan. Suzanne—*ma petite Suzanne*. But I frightened her. She is trembling. Suzanne, forgive me! I must have been mad to leap out upon you like that. But how could she walk along the beach to-night and not expect me to be here?"

I heard him vaguely. He was too strong for me. My will, my moral energy as well as my bodily strength, refused to return at my command. I could hardly open my eyes to look up at the mild moon, so like the cool, round sun which I had seen from under the water.

"Say you forgive me, Suzanne," he murmured. "You are angry with me for

coming to France. How could I wait, Suzanne, when you had confessed that you love me?"

I wrenched myself roughly free. With a frenzied effort of will, I rallied back all my allies of conventionality and of pride.

"You have made a mistake," I said curtly, stepping away two or three paces. "I am not Susan."

This time he started violently. But he recovered himself in an instant and came towards me with outstretched hands. I sprang back.

"Susan," he said gravely, "don't jest. For heaven's sake, not now. This is some quaint fancy. You say you are not Susan, just as you said my infatuation was not love. Forgive me, Susan; but this isn't a time for subtleties. You love me; and you know I love you more than life. Don't refine or jest now. This moment of our first meeting is too great, too sacred. Let us be clear and simple, like the moon and the sea."

"No!" I cried, as he advanced. "How dare you touch me again? It's all a mistake. No doubt, this is Lord Ruddington. You are speaking to Miss Langley."

His arms dropped to his side, and he fell back as if I had struck him in the face. I steadied myself with one hand against the side of the boat. It was a long time before he spoke.

"Miss Langley!" he said at last, in tones as cold and dull as lead. "What can I say?" Then his voice quickened and brightened, and he cried: "No, Susan, you shall elude me no more!"

"Stand back, please," I said icily and decisively. "There has been enough of this. I understand you are to see Susan to-morrow, at eleven o'clock."

Before I could move, he leapt to my side.

"Miss Langley," he said rapidly but firmly. "Miss Langley—if you are truly Miss Langley—if this isn't some ill-timed joke—hear me for one moment. Heaven knows I did not mean to insult you. But this is a terrible thing. I have laid on you one indignity; but I beg you to endure another. You have answered me from the shadow. I ask you—for heaven's sake I implore you—to show me your face one moment in the light."

He had pressed so near that his shoulder touched mine. I leaned against the boat counting the cost. Had I the strength, to stand out sheer in the pitiless light and biting air? To watch his face—its lightning-flash of passionate eagerness, its following gloom of disenchantment and chagrin? To listen to his stammering apologies? To bestow pardons, revise arrangements? And, last of all, to stumble back over the stones alone—I, who had just known the support of his breast? Had I the strength? What if I should break down, as the light of love died out of his eyes, and weep bitterly? But there was no choice. My heart bled as I schooled myself once more to the haughtiness of artificial pride, and I said:

"This is monstrous. But as you please."

He made way for me with old-fashioned reverence as I stepped out into the moonshine. With all that was left of my shattered will, I strove to offer for his scrutiny a face hardened by haughtiness, lips curling with disdain, eyes alight with annoyance. But how could I hate him while I loved him? How could my eyes, that were so hungry, stab him? And how could my lips scorn him when they were aching to tell him all?

The eager lightning flashed in his face. But I waited in vain for the dull thunder of despair, for the fall of the gloom. No, it was not lightning. With my heart standing still, I saw that the light abode in his eyes, that it waxed fuller and more radiant as he gazed intently into mine. But suddenly, he quenched it.

"One second more," he commanded abruptly, dryly, almost harshly. "Simply and literally, without any paradoxes or ruses whatever, are you Susan?"

"I am not Susan," I said, beginning to turn away.

"Simply, and literally and truly, you are indeed Miss Langley?"

"I am Miss Langley."

Something chained me to the spot. I saw him go pale as death, and I heard him groan in anguish:

"Then may God help us all!"

"What do you mean?" I demanded. We seemed to be so mysteriously one, that the strength which deserted him passed into me. "Are you not satisfied?" I added. "I must go."

In a flash, he was master again. He flung himself across my path.

"No!" he cried. "You shall not go! Some meddling idiot has deceived me. There has been a horrible, an unspeakable mistake. Gertrude Langley, it was you I met in Derlingham. It was you I watched in Traxelby church. Gertrude Langley, it is you I love with my whole soul. It is you, it is you, it is you! I shall not let you go!"

His words sang all round me like birds. My battle-worn, enfeebled spirit reeled under such bursts of music, such flashes of glory. I made one last agonizing effort to play the conventional part: to rebuke and repel him, to parade amazement, shame, and a dishonest show of anger. But he was too strong. He dominated me so, that I could not even pause to marvel at the miracle, or to ask myself if it could be true. I could only totter towards him in dumb, unconditional surrender, and burst into a torrent of thankful tears.

This third time, he held me, not as he had held me before. Then, he had strained me to him like a lover; now, he supported me gravely, reverentially, as any man would support any woman who has half-fainted away. But, by swift degrees, he guessed the truth. He held me closer, he bent his lips to my ear, and he asked, with a grave wonder, in his voice of gold:

"You do not mean ... this?"

"Yes," I whispered, with my eyes closed, "I mean ... this."

For two or three seconds we were content to have it so. Then his clasp weakened. I knew what he meant, and I drew myself free.

"We forgot Susan," I said.

"Yes," he said slowly. "We forgot Susan."

He stood beside me in silence, looking at the sea. Then, without warning, he broke out with terrible words of anger. Not to me. It was as though he arraigned the universe and shook his fist at the stars.

"A thousand curses!" he cried; "a thousand curses on their heads who have brought us all to this! It is not to be borne! It is a tangle of fiends. Great God! To be loved by the two best women on earth, and then, instead of happiness, to find it end in misery all round! It is the work of devils! It is not to be borne!"

He remembered me at his side, and fought down his wrath. At last he turned to me an ashen face, and began:

"There is much to say. Where will you sit down?"

"Nowhere," I answered. "No, do not touch me again. What there is to be said ... say."

We stood an arm's-length apart on the stones, and he spoke:

"Gertrude Langley," he said, "for five weeks I have loved you, and there is no woman in the world, save you, that I ever did love or ever shall. But, through a string of ghastly blunders hardly to be explained or even believed, I have loved you under another name, and amid wildly false notions of your station. Be hurt at nothing I shall say. I believed, on twofold testimony, that you were Susan, your maid. Do not be galled or insulted till you have heard me out."

"You cannot insult me," I said. "Besides, I know all."

"No!" he cried, "you do not know. You know that I have written Susan letters, that I have badgered her to marry me, that I have followed her to Sainte Véronique, and that I am to set eyes upon her to-morrow. But, listen. I will tell you what you do not know. You don't know that this poor girl has a heart of gold, a soul of fire, a mind that is a fountain of gems. Did you know that?"

"No," I said, "I did not."

He mistook my ghost of a smile. It stung him.

"Miss Langley," he said, "we have been wrong; you, and I, and all who have been born, like you and me, to rank and wealth and leisure. Because the novels are nearly all written round such lives as ours, we think that the poor and the servile are without romance, without spirituality. We are not quite sure that they have minds and hearts and souls of their own. I say, we have been wrong. All Susan's few letters to me, save one, have been shy and hurried. But—though I say it in the ears of the only woman I can ever love—there isn't, there can't be in all

the world, a nobler mind than this poor Susan's, a sweeter heart, a purer soul."

I did not answer. His calmness left him.

"You don't see, you won't see, you can't see!" he cried. "Why will you make me put it into words? You are shutting your eyes to the tragedy of it all. Gertrude Langley, what would you have me do?"

I was given some dim sense of the greatness of his soul. Almost mechanically, I replied:

"I would have you do only what is right."

"God bless you for that!" he murmured, and took my hand. "Only what is right! But, tell me, which is the right? I love you, and you love me. When and where you saw me, where and when and why and how your love for me began, I cannot guess. All that matters is ... you love me! Beautiful Gertrude, answer me. You love me and I love you ... but which way lies the right?"

"You mean," I said slowly, disengaging my hand, "that there is Susan?"

"Yes," he said gently. "There is Susan. Which way lies the right? For all I know, I shall find Susan ugly, and she is a lady's-maid. But the point is, I have forced her to love me, with such a love as I did not expect to find in this world. Do not smile, do not imagine I think myself handsome, or in the least adorable. But I have read her last letter fifty times, and I know, if I draw back, if I tell Susan of this cruel tangle, it will break her heart. No, do not interrupt me! In such a case, I know how hard it is for you to believe that I am not mad. Dearest, help me, for God's sake! It's hard enough, God knows!"

I ought to have thrust in words boldly, refusing to be denied. I ought to have told him everything. But he silenced me with one gesture and finished.

"Yet after all," he said, "what is there to discuss or to decide? Haven't you told me already to do the right? And the right is ... to keep faith with Susan. Oh, I know, I know!" he cried out bitterly, "it will wound your heart, it will break mine. But, dearest, we have so much. We have books, we have friends, we have a hundred occupations. But this poor Susan—what has she? She has nothing, except love."

"If she has love," I said, "and we have all else in the world beside; then Susan is rich and we are poor."

He turned away. When he looked at me again, he said:

"It is simply a choice which of us must be robbed of happiness, and burdened with life-long sorrow, and filled with bitterness. You and I are two, and Susan is one. They say minorities must suffer."

He smiled a sad smile, and watched me narrowly. And, at the same moment, a coldness numbed my heart. While he had been extolling Susan, I had drunk in his words deliciously, biding my time to laugh out merrily and prick the shining bubble. But suddenly, all things stood out in a different light. I remembered my

oath to Susan at Traxelby. I remembered that she had given up Gibson. I recalled, with anger, that at this very moment she was prowling about to catch some secret glimpse of her lover.

"Yes," he repeated. "Minorities suffer. It is the way of the world. I renounce Susan, and what does it amount to? A mere lady's-maid sees me break faith and drop her in favour of wealth and beauty. She loses her faith in God and man. Possibly, she even has the bad taste to go and die. Meanwhile I, having always had all I want, go and get a great deal more. Natural, isn't it?"

He laughed a bitter laugh.

"Don't talk again like that," I said, as bitterly as he.

He was silent while I thought my thoughts. I knew full well in the depths of my soul, that to suffer anything to thrust itself between him and me, would be a crime and a blasphemy. Yet I knew it might come to pass. If I told him all about Susan, all about Gibson, all about the letters, he would still have only my word for it that she did not love him in her own way. He would seek Susan to-morrow morning, as appointed, to hear Susan's own words. And, under the glamour of his presence, what might not Susan say?

But light blazed through my brain. I had found the key. I must go back to the Villa. I must track Susan at all costs. I must tell her the whole story of Ruddington's mistake. Probably she had already come back.

I turned to him and said:

"Why be ironical and bitter? You have spoken truly. You have to do what is right."

He seized both my hands. To him it was the end.

"Gertrude," he said, "for the first and last time, my own Gertrude ... so this is Good-bye! Our first meeting is our last. To-morrow ... after it is over ... I shall go straight away. To-morrow is hers. But to-night is ours. Beloved, this is not the end. There are more worlds than this one—this world which some one has cursed for us. For ever, I am all thine. But the waiting will be so long. Beloved, do not say that I may not bid thee Good-bye!"

I restrained him gently, for my mind had clouded again with thronging fears.

"No," I said; "let us not make the future harder by any weakness in the present."

He bowed his head and obeyed. When he looked up, he said quietly:

"One practical point before I go. She will not ... I will not, ever be at Ruddington Towers. Traxelby is your old home. The Towers shall be shut up."

My eyes filled with tears.

"Beloved," I said softly, "good-bye."

I gave him my hand, and he held it to his lips. Then I broke from him and

fled home.

Georgette received me with a volley of outcries about the spoilt dinner.

"Where is Susan?" I asked.

"She is not come back," said Georgette, retreating towards the kitchen. And then I saw that Georgette was in the secret.

"Georgette," I said peremptorily in French, "I insist that you tell me this instant where Susan has gone."

Her brow darkened. She looked at me defiantly, and tossed her head.

"Come," I commanded, with a rap on the table. "I insist. This moment."

"Pardon, Madame," retorted Georgette with Republican spirit, "I am the servant of Madame Dupoirier and the friend of Susan."

There was no time to argue. I shifted my ground, and coaxed.

"If you are the friend of Susan," I said, "you will answer at once. Something very important has happened. We must find her at once."

Georgette hesitated suspiciously before she asked:

"Is it about the milord from England, Madame—the milord with all the money?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" I said. "It is most important."

"Then he may take his money back again," said Georgette with a fine flourish. "Susan, she will only marry for love. She has gone away."

"Gone away?" I echoed, sinking down on a chair.

"Yes, Madame. Susan said, if she didn't run away, the milord would make her marry him."

"Georgette," I cried, springing up, "I give you my word that the milord shall not mention marriage to Susan again. If you are her friend, tell me where to find her. I swear that I am thinking only of her good."

Georgette was silent. The truth rushed in upon me. I said:

"She has run away with Gibson?"

"Yes, Madame," said Georgette tranquilly, "with Monsieur Geebson."

"Georgette!" I cried, "help me to find them, and I'll give you fifty francs. No, don't pout. If I can stop them, Susan and Gibson will be grateful to you as long as they live, on my word of honour."

At last Georgette said: "Susan went out too soon for fear that Madame would stop her. She attends Monsieur Geebson at the bottom of the beck at half-past eight."

I snatched a roll from the table and rushed out again to the beach. Bérigny clock struck eight. There would be six or seven minutes to spare.

As I sped along, a sickening fear seized me. What if Ruddington and Susan, by another of the ghastly mishaps which kept dogging us all along, had run into one another on the beach?

No. As I neared the big boat, I saw him standing there alone. He strode out to meet me eagerly and wonderingly.

"Why are you still here?" I asked.

"Where would you have me be?" he said. "I have always loved France. But henceforth, France will mean for me just these few square yards of shadow on the stones."

"You must not brood," I answered. "You talk as if you are never to be happy any more."

"In some other world," he said, smiling sadly, "I mean to be happy with You."

"Some other world?" I said. "Who knows that God may not reward you soon in this?"

He turned to me with a start; but I did not let him speak.

"Have you eaten?" I asked.

"Not yet."

"How silly!" I said. "Nor have I. Come, eat bread with me. This wind shall be the salt."

He took half the roll and smiled. But I could see that my high spirits first jarred on him, and then troubled him.

"You are not well," he said. "You are over-wrought. You are excited. Let me lead you home."

"No," I said. "I have not felt so well for years. I must go; but not home. There is business to be done."

"Where?" he asked, startled.

"Along the beach."

"Then," he said firmly, "you do not go alone."

I considered for a moment. Then I looked him full in the face.

"If I allow you to come," I said, "will you promise to disappear when you are told, and to come out when you are called, and not to speak till I give you leave?"

He answered, "I promise."

I did not disdain his arm. Whatever befell new, he was mine, all mine. The wind was in our faces, the moonbeams flashed on the water. Colour came to my cheeks, and the breeze ruffled the hair which had gone so long without Susan's brush and comb. As we stamped over the stones we might have been a boy and a girl escaping on a frolic.

A few hundreds of yards from the beck we were able to climb the low slope, and to pad along mutely over the grass. At the first brambles we turned inland, and descended softly into the ravine. We pulled up behind a high bush.

"Hush!" I whispered. "Not a sound. Don't move or speak till I give the

word.”

Through the thin autumn foliage, by the pale light of the moon, we could see a woman’s figure across the beck. It was Susan, seated upon a modest bag.

I did not explain to Ruddington. I did not even tell him who the woman was. Two or three minutes passed; and then the silver chime of Bérigny proclaimed half-past eight.

Susan drew out her little handkerchief, and wiped away a tear. My heart went out to her. There was no Gibson; and I began to hope our task would be easy. But we heard a sudden sound of snapping branches and hurrying feet; and Gibson broke through into the light. Susan jumped up to meet him.

”Oh, Tom!” she wailed. ”I began to think you wasn’t coming.”

Ruddington touched my hand.

”Oughtn’t we to go away from here?” he whispered.

”No!” I whispered back, shaking my fist. ”We oughtn’t.”

”I was out with a blooming car,” explained Gibson. ”Georgette brought your letter at half-past three, but I didn’t get it till seven.”

”Thank goodness you wasn’t away for the night!” exclaimed Susan fervently.

”Well, I’m here, anyway,” said Gibson. ”Not that I expect it’s going to do me any good. You promised you’d settle me this week, on or off, one way or another. I suppose you’ve only brought me here to give me the chuck?”

Susan did not reply.

”What’ve you got there?” asked Gibson with a jump. He had caught sight of Susan’s bag.

”It’s my things,” said Susan. ”Oh, Tom, I want you to take me away!”

”Take you away?” echoed Gibson, thunderstruck.

”Yes, yes, take me away! Now, this minute. Oh, Tom, don’t say you won’t!”

”But where can I take you to?” asked astounded Gibson.

”To Granpong.”

”Not me!” said Susan’s gallant, with emphasis. ”I suppose you think that at a caffy-resterong you can do anything? Don’t make no mistake. They’re the properest lot at Granpong that ever I struck in all my natural. Why, just to think of Madum opening the door, and me bringing in a young lady at midnight! Not me!”

”Oh, Tom, don’t be such a beast!” moaned Susan. ”The very idea! You know quite well, you do, that I’d never go to the same house. I’d die first. But, oh Tom, you must take me somewhere. We might go to the clergyman’s wife.”

”They don’t have no clergymen in France,” said Gibson, with British scorn; ”only priests. And priests don’t have no wives. But look here. What do you want to be took away for? What’s up?”

Susan was silent.

"It's some tiff with the Missis," said Gibson derisively; "that's what it is. And I ain't going to be a party to it. Bet my feet the Missis is in the right. Fact is, this toff"—Gibson paused, and repeated the word with disdain—"this toff has given you swelled head. Not me! I ain't going to take sides against the Missis just for the sake of him. The old girl's always been too good to me."

The undress grammar and off-duty vocabulary of my two model domestics opened my eyes wide and made my ears burn. As for Ruddington, he touched my hand again, and I saw that his face was full of pain. He had guessed that I was showing him Susan.

"We mustn't stay," he said.

"We must," I answered, stamping my foot on the grass. For Susan was speaking.

"No, Tom, no," she moaned; "not the Missis! It isn't a tiff with the Missis. Oh, it breaks my heart to think of it! To-night, just before I ran away, she was sitting looking at the fire. She looked that sad and lonely, I burst out crying; and if I hadn't run straight out of the house, I wouldn't have come at all. No, no, no! Not the Missis."

"What the dooce is it, then?" asked Gibson.

"It's ... it's him!" blurted Susan, desperately.

"Him? Not ... not the toff?"

"Yes," groaned Susan, "the toff! He's coming. He wants to meet me, here."

"Here? To-night?"

"No. To-morrow. Eleven o'clock. Oh, Tom, I can't bear it! Take me away!"

Gibson emitted a long, low whistle. He took off his cap, crushed it up, and put it on again. Then he ducked for Susan's bag and dropped it down a few yards away, as if he wanted room. Last of all, he bent his head till he could look straight into Susan's eyes.

"Susie," he said slowly, "you don't say you're going to give him up?"

He had dropped his vile pronunciation, and had strangely regained the simple dignity with which he had spoken to me at Traxelby.

"Not that you're going to give him up?" he repeated.

"Yes, yes, yes!" said Susan. "I don't want him! I won't have him! I can't bear him! Take me away!"

"And if I do," he asked intently, "can you bear me, Susie? Will you have *me*?"

"Oh, Tom, of course I will!" she wailed, clinging to him with all her might. And, suddenly raising herself on tiptoe, she gave him a resounding rustic kiss.

Behind our bush we recoiled a little, both from them and from one another.

"We will go," said Ruddington.

"We won't," I said, pinching his arm to keep him quiet. So we looked away while Gibson returned the kiss, not once, or twice, or thrice.

"Susie," demanded Gibson at last, "what is his name? Who is he?"

"His name," proclaimed Susan, after an effective delay, "is Lord Ruddington."

Gibson let her fall from his embrace like a stone. He sprang back a man's length.

"Oh yes, of course," he said mockingly, when he had found his breath. "Lord Ruddington, *alias* the King of Spain, *alias* the Emperor of Russia! Of course!"

"Honour bright, it's true!" said Susan indignantly. "If it isn't, may I be struck down dead. His lordship fell over his head in love with me in Traxelby church."

"Susie, this is true?" he demanded, striding up to her and speaking fiercely. "This is true?"

"Don't go on silly," said Susan.

Gibson leaned against a tree and thought for some time. At last he straightened himself up, and said, in low excited tones:

"Look here, Susie, this makes a difference. You don't think I'm going to help you miss a chance like that? Haven't I always said you're fit to be a duchess? No, Susie, it isn't good enough. D'ye think I'm going to let you throw yourself away on a poor thirty-bob-a-week devil like me?"

"Oh don't, Tom, don't!" she pleaded, clinging to him again. "Don't! or you'll make me change my mind."

"There isn't a finer gentleman in all England nor Lord Ruddington," said Gibson.

"Oh don't!" wailed Susan again.

"What is the matter with him?" demanded Gibson. "It isn't his money. No, nor his horses. Perhaps it's his looks?"

"We'd better be going!" I whispered to Ruddington, behind our bush.

"No, no," protested Susan, "it isn't his looks. When I put him in that folding frame, facing Miss Langley, they looked lovely—just like Royalty. No, it isn't his looks. I could put up with that."

"Then what is it you can't put up with?" asked Gibson searchingly.

She scraped the ground with her foot, as she used to scrape the garden gravel, before she replied mysteriously:

"Tom, he's so funny. He's all twists and turns. It'd be like being married to an eel. If he's the same as his letters, he'd make me all giddy. When I read them, everything seems to begin turning and turning round."

Gibson snorted impatiently. "With a thousand pound a week," he said ironically, "you'll soon get used to that."

"Tom, don't, don't!" she cried. "How can you be so cruel? If you cared about me as you said you did, you wouldn't let nobody have me but you—not if it was the Prince of Wales crawling on his bended knees."

Gibson came more into the light. I could read in his face the bitterness of his heart.

"Susie," he said, "what's the use of talking? If I take you away to-night, you know you'll have to marry me, even if you change your mind before to-morrow morning. Unless there's some good reason why you won't marry Lord Ruddington, you'll repent of it when we're poor and when we've to work hard for a living. You'll throw it in my teeth, and we shall be worse'n a cat and a dog."

I was amazed at Gibson's paltriness; amazed and angry. But not for long. All at once my groom drew himself up as grandly as a knight of romance, and demanded:

"Susie, girl—isn't there a better reason?"

My maid was his equal.

"Yes, Tom, yes," she cried passionately. "There's a better reason. Oh, Tom, I'm in love with you, and I always have been, though I've behaved like a little Beast. And I couldn't never be in love with Lord Ruddington if he was all made of gold. Take me away!"

"Why should I?" asked the radiant lover a minute afterwards, making a descent into the practical. "If it's a bargain, what's the good of running away from the Missis? We sha'n't find such a soft job or such a good old girl again in a hurry. If we run away, she won't have us back."

"But he's coming to-morrow," interrupted Susan in a panic.

"A jolly good thing too!" declared Gibson. "If you're going to give him the push, the sooner the better. Let him come. Give him the straight tip. In fact, I'm not sure," added Gibson meditatively, "that he oughtn't to be made to part with a hundred pound for breach of promise. Cheer up, and let 'em all come!"

"No, no!" cried Susan, terror-stricken. "If I see him, he'll turn me round his little finger. I shall be too scared to say a word. I shall be just like a stuck pig. Besides, he'll ask me about the letters."

"Letters?" echoed Gibson.

"Yes, the letters. Oh, Tom, I've been so wicked. When his first letter came to Traxelby, I copied the answer out of an old book."

"You can go now ... if you want to!" I murmured to Ruddington, behind our bush. But he only plucked at my hand, and held it as in a vice, while he listened with all his ears. Susan talked on.

"That old book, with the covers off. But, when I showed it to Miss Langley, she said it didn't sound right, and she wrote out a lovely letter for me to copy, and—"

"Go ahead!" said Gibson.

"And—oh, Tom, I told a lie! I pretended I didn't know I was to copy it out. I thought his Lordship would make fun of my writing and give me up. So I posted it in ... in Miss Langley's writing."

"Lord love us!" put in Gibson, in tones of awe.

"Yes. And Miss Langley was dreadfully angry. But when we'd begun, we had to go on I promised faithful that I would practise my writing; but I didn't play fair."

"So the Missis has been helping him?" demanded Gibson with a blaze of wrath. "The Missis wanted you to have him?"

"No, no! The Missis asked me..."

"Asked what?"

"She asked ... oh, Tom, she asked if I cared for you! And I told a lie, and I said I didn't. Then she helped me. But she put it in all the letters that he must wait, and that he mustn't come after me, and that he mustn't persuade me, and that I wouldn't marry him unless I could be in love with him. No, no, Tom. The Missis has been splendid!"

"What's he come for, then, if you told him he mustn't?" Gibson asked, less angrily.

"I don't know. But Tom, Tom, don't wait here or we shall be caught. Say Yes or No. Will you take me away?"

Gibson's answer came boldly;

"Yes!"

Later on, he added: "We will go back to England and be married at once."

"I have thirty pounds," said practical Susan. "It's in Derlingham Post-office."

"I've only got nineteen pounds seven and six," said Gibson glumly. "Mine's at Derlingham too. But what the dooce does it matter?" he burst out, snatching her to him and challenging Fate with ringing pride. "Susie girl, I've got *you*. You're the grandest girl God ever made. It's all a lot of rot about those letters. You're giving him up all for ... me! Susie girl, if I've to slave my head off to do it, I'll make you happy. If I don't, hell's too good for me. I'll go through water and fire. Let's be off. We'll tell Maddum all about it, and she'll tell us what to do. Where's the bag?"

They turned and stooped to find it. In a twinkling, I broke through the bush, tripped over the stones, and stood on the other side of the beck.

"No," I cried. "You sha'n't go!"

Susan screamed as if she had seen a ghost, and tumbled cowering against Gibson's broad chest. As for Gibson himself, after the first shock of astonishment, he opposed to me a fearless front.

"Asking pardon, Ma'am," he said respectfully but firmly. "She shall."

"She sha'n't," I cried, more firmly still. "Susan, you shall not go."

"Asking pardon, Ma'am," said Gibson again. "We are not slaves. We sha'n't never forget your kindness, Ma'am, and we don't hope to find the like again. But you are speaking to Susan's husband, Ma'am, which isn't the same as the groom. Susan's going with me."

"Gibson," I said, "not so fast. You talk as if I am against you both. When have I ever done you wrong?"

"Done me wrong, Ma'am?" he said, harshly and with a darkening face. "Begging pardon, you've done me wrong this very day. You've broke your promise. He's coming tomorrow—and you didn't,—"

"I did," I said hastily. "It'll be at Grandpont in the morning. I posted it to-day. Gibson, you say Susan will marry you. Susan, is it true?"

"Yes, Miss," said Susan faintly. "It is true."

"Then," I said, "why run away? Lord Ruddington is answered. Susan can't marry Gibson and Lord Ruddington too."

"You mean fair, Ma'am," replied Gibson, "and you wish us well. But you are a young lady, Ma'am. Susan don't trust herself to meet him. And I don't neither."

"Gibson, Susan," I asked, "what if I give you both my word that Lord Ruddington will not ask Susan to marry him, and that he will never write to her any more?"

"With due respects, Ma'am," Gibson answered, "don't pledge your word to any such thing. I say it again, Ma'am, you are a young lady. He's a man, and he's been about the world. If his Lordship's in love with Susan, and if he's come all the way to Sinn Verrynick to ask her, he won't be beat by the groom. You'll no more turn Lord Ruddington back to-morrow, Ma'am, than you'll turn me and Susan back to-night. Susan, let us go."

I stepped forward to seize her, but he waved me aside.

"Susan!" I cried. "Gibson! Listen! Let Susan come to me for one minute. Something tremendous has happened to-night, and I am bound to let her know it. Susan, come here. When you have heard it, you shall go with Gibson or come home with me, just as you think best."

Before he could restrain her, she slipped from his grasp and ran to my side. He followed. I threw my arm round her waist.

"If you please, Ma'am," said Gibson tensely, standing almost as close to me as Susan, "there's going to be no more secrets. What's right to be said at all can be said out loud."

I considered. Then I spoke out clearly and loudly.

"Very well. Have it so. But it would have been easier for Susan to hear it alone. Susan, there has been some dreadful, horrible mistake. It was not you, Susan, whom Lord Ruddington saw at Derlingham and in Traxelby church. He

was misinformed. He has never seen you in his life. He does not want to marry you.”

Susan stared at me, first, with a face as white as chalk. Then she reddened like a rose, and moaned like one wounded, with a choking moan.

”No, Miss Gertrude, no!” she pleaded in anguish, ”Don’t say it wasn’t real. Don’t say...”

”My poor Susan,” I answered, ”it wasn’t real. But what does it matter? You have given him up for Gibson.”

”No,” she cried, with a sudden burst of wild and terrible grief. ”I didn’t, I didn’t, I didn’t! He wasn’t mine to give.”

I hesitated, wondering whether to tell her that Ruddington had indeed been hers to give, because he was willing to sacrifice himself to the end. But I decided not to try her poor wits any more.

”You are wrong, Susan,” I said gently. ”It’s true he wasn’t yours to give. But you believed he was. It is all the same. Gibson, she gave up money, and luxury, and a splendid name, all for you!”

”And, if you please, Ma’am,” demanded Gibson, ”how do we know all this is true? If it wasn’t Susan he saw in Derlingham, who was it? If he didn’t fall in love with Susan, who did he fall in love with? If he doesn’t want to marry Susan, who is it that he does want to marry? No, Ma’am, I’m not taking any more risks. To-morrow, perhaps, we shall find it’s Susan after all.”

I turned to beckon towards the high bush. But Ruddington was already over the stones, I saw him and held my tongue. He came so quietly, so masterfully, that I knew I had only to listen and look on.

”You are Susan?” he said kindly in her ear.

Susan looked up and gave a piercing shriek.

”It’s him, it’s him!” she screamed.

”Don’t be afraid, Susan,” he said gently. ”Miss Langley has told you that you have no more to fear. Some other day, you shall know all. To-night, let me just tell you, on my honour, that it was not my fault. If it had been my fault, I should never forgive myself for causing you all this worry and pain. Depend on me to do all I can to make you and Gibson happy. Tell me that you will try to forgive me.”

”Oh, sir!” panted Susan.—”I mean, Your Lordship! So it wasn’t never me at all?”

”No. It was never you at all.”

She began to weep.

”Oh, Your Lordship!” she gasped. ”Then ... who ... who ... who was it?”

I caught my breath. Gibson bent forward to be sure that all was well. Ruddington drew my free arm through his and smiled.

Susan stared at us with wide eyes.

"Oh, Miss Gertrude," she cried, with a great sob, "thank God!"

Both her warm arms were round my neck. Her soft girlish breast pressed mine, and I could feel her true heart beating wildly with grief and joy. Holding her to me as a mother holds a weeping child, I felt strangely calm. I watched the moonlight dappling the ground under the tree. I heard the sounds of the night: the stirring leaves, the far-off splash of the waves, the soft croon of the wind, the swirl of the beck, and loudest of all, my true-hearted Susan's sobs.

"Yes," I said softly. "Susan ... Gibson ... thank God! For to-night He has been good to us all."

Then I too became as a little child. I broke down and sobbed in Susan's warm embrace till a strong arm clasped me round and led me tenderly away.

Saturday morning, seven o'clock.

A month to-day since we came to France! This morning is gay. The young sunbeams are dancing on the sea, the air is soft, the sky is necked with little white clouds like a blue bay alive with sails. I have been standing on the balcony with my hair floating in the wind. Down on the grass in the garden, three plump, pretty gulls are quite at home.

He prayed that he might come here early this morning, but I said No, not till eleven—the time appointed!

How much there will be to ask, how much to tell! I don't understand yet how the mistake was made. All I have worked out so far is that he saw me three times with—Alice! The Derlingham know-alls, in a hurry to answer his questions before he had fairly asked them, jumped to the conclusion that he had seen me with Susan. It seems he inquired who was the shorter one, the younger one, the prettier one: and both the know-alls made haste to assure him (a courtly compliment, this, to poor me!) that it was Susan—Susan Briggs, Miss Langley's maid. Then a dozen things conspired, he says, to confirm him in his blunder, just as a dozen things have conspired to drag me into this affair and to involve me in it more and more.

He has no light yet on the puzzle of last Tuesday's letter. But he loves me so much that I can tell him all: even to the showing of this book. Perhaps he has kept a book of his own, who knows? If so, I shall learn everything. But, somehow, I feel that the explanations on both sides can wait. What does it matter which way the path has turned and twisted through stones and thorns now that we have reached the goal at last?

I told Susan not to call me till nine o'clock. But I mean to slip downstairs softly; I have business at Bérigny. There is reparation to be made among those

white graves where I slammed the gates of my heart. And, amid the holy stillness of the morning, I am fain to chasten my spirit in the Communion of Saints. For, on this day of my happiness, do I not feel that grannie, and father and mother, and all who have ever loved me, are yearning to me out of the depths that after all are not so very deep and down from the heights that after all are not so very high? So I will go forth, through the little yellow flowers and over the sweet, crisp grass. I will go and sit in the sunshine, on the old steps of the Calvary, while all that great love yearns out to me from the unseen, fondling me and caressing me as with soft hands. I go to say my De Profundis at last, and to breathe a prayer for this poor land, where the fool hath said in his heart that there is no God.

THE END.

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SUSAN ***

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