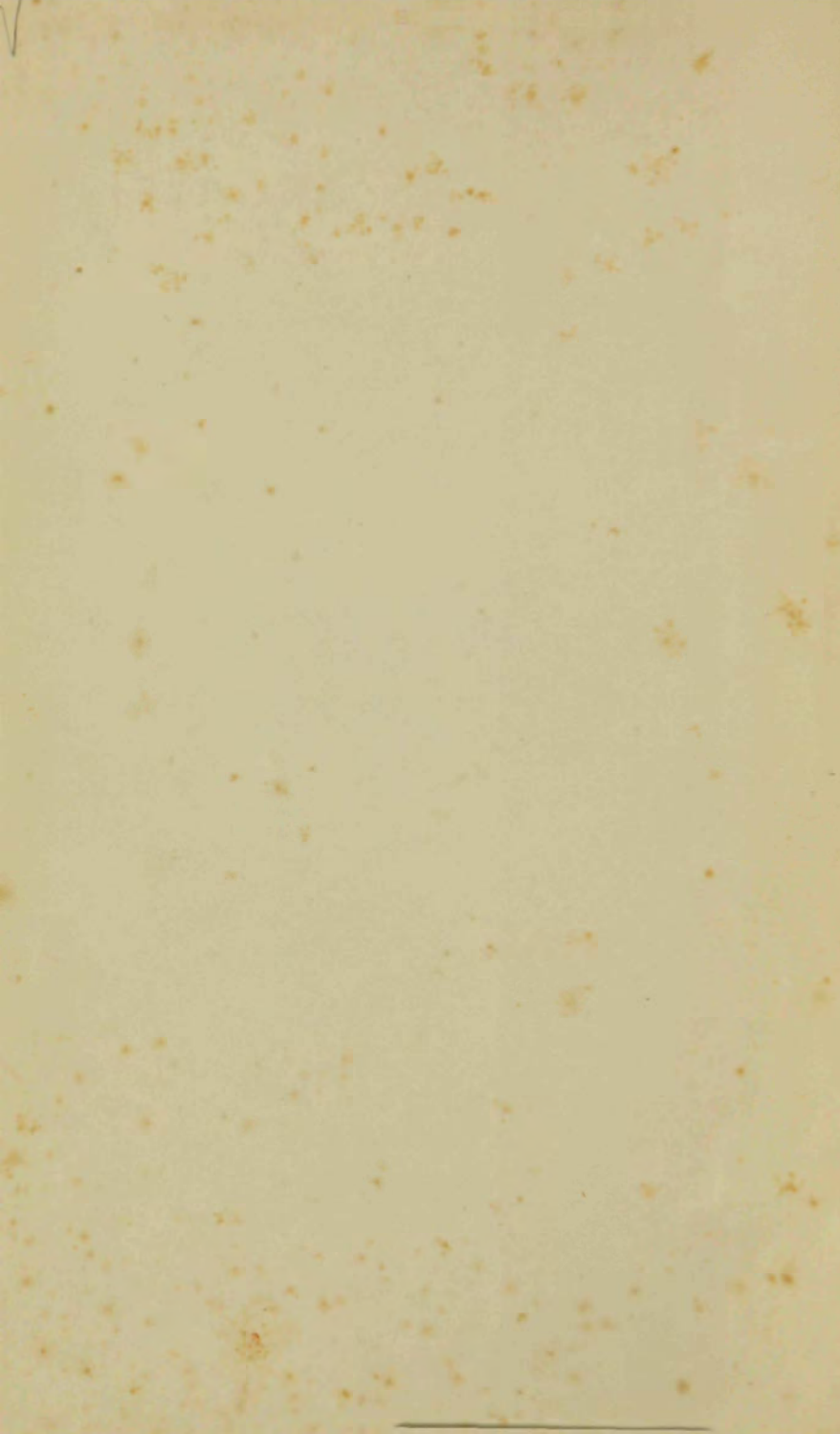


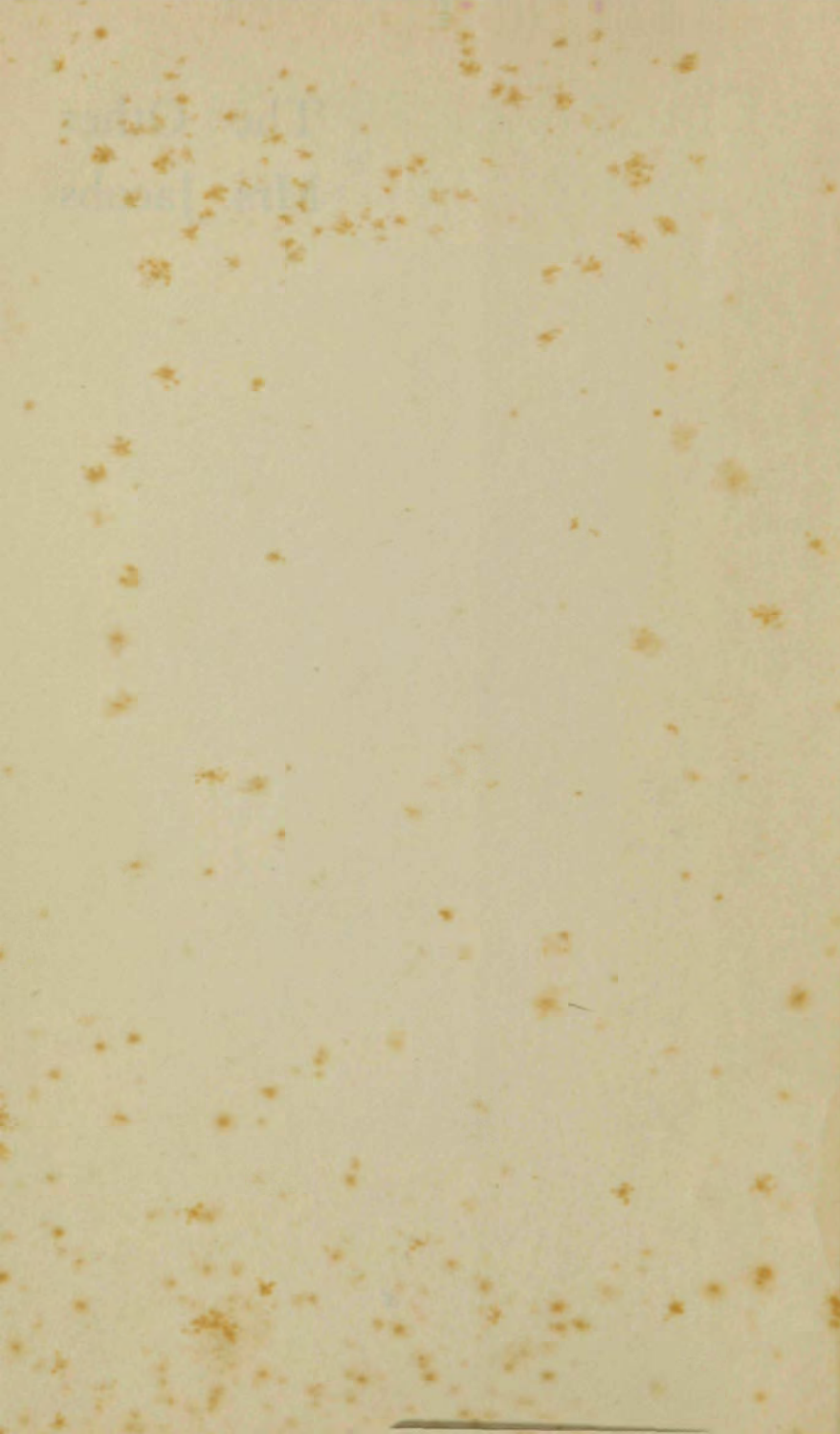
THE
OTHER
MRS.
JACOBS
BY
MRS. CAMPBELL
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The Other
Mrs Jacobs



The Other Mrs Jacobs

A Matrimonial Complication

By

Mrs Campbell Praed

Author of

"Nadine," "The Scourge-Stick," "The Insane Root,"
"As a Watch in the Night," "Fugitive Anne,"
"Dwellers by the River," etc.



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The Other Mrs Jacobs

CHAPTER I

THE COMING OF MISS PENGELLEY

THE train bearing Susan Pengelley to London was nearing Paddington. Ealing—Broadway, Acton, flashed past. With every hundred yards the air grew thicker; and, though it was not four o'clock of a late September afternoon, the lamps were lighted at Westbourne Park Station. Here Miss Pengelley roused herself, collected her various odds and ends stowed in the rack, put on and buttoned her gloves—after the manner of a country girl she had taken them off—then waited while the tickets were being collected. She coughed a little as she put down her window. In the south country that morning, where autumn was in its golden glory, the air had been fresh and pure, and Miss Pengelley wondered whether she would be able to endure contentedly this stifling atmosphere. London was wrapped in fog—not that mysterious yellow fog which has its own weird charm, but the grey, smoky, penetrating kind that is an oppression and an irritation.

Susan Pengelley's thoughts went back to the shabby, overcrowded Devonshire Vicarage she had left behind her, and she gulped down a dry sob in her throat. She could fancy her family sitting down to tea—a large, boisterous party; no one wanting

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her especially, most, in fact, envying her for the good start in the world she was about to make. For Miss Pengelley was to receive a pound a week with all expenses paid, and, in these conditions, her outlook on life should be cheerful, seeing that her earnings hitherto—from the sale of flowers through a *Daily Mail* advertisement, stray teachings in the village, and an occasional story published in women's penny papers—had been slender, fluctuating, and indeed, precarious.

The wonder was that she had been chosen instead of her next sister, Kate, who was brisk, clever and managing—or Polly, who was pretty, and, in a mild way, musical. No doubt, however, Providence had considered the destinies of the parish, since Kate was lay curate to a consumptive father, and Polly played the organ and trained the choir; whereas Susan had no qualities beyond a certain timid bookiness, and capacity for making herself pleasant in a demure and humble way. Of all the sisters she was quite the best fitted for the post of companion. Susan was a small, colourless individual with pale brown hair, light hazel eyes and neat, regular features, in which lay her only pretensions to good looks. Her manner was quiet, self-possessed, and just a little deprecatory. She had the kind of egotism which makes a merit of self-effacement, but is at the same time fully existent and keenly observant.

Susan's thoughts had been running riot over the prospects before her. They were sufficiently tempting. She had met Mrs Jacobs—the lady by whom she was engaged—at the house of a neighbour who happened to have married Mr Jacobs's sister. Mrs Miller, a fat, clever Jewess, had not appealed greatly to the Pengelleys' imagination; but Mrs Jacobs was a very different kind of person, and at first sight she had entirely captivated Susan Pengelley. Mrs Jacobs was a lady of repute in the literary world, where her identity was but thinly veiled under the *nom de plume*

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of "Spiridia." Her presence caused quite a flutter in the Devonshire village on the occasion of a garden party which Mrs Miller gave in her sister-in-law's honour. People had expected her to be odd, and not quite proper, for the pseudonym "Spiridia" suggested something in her work which, it was supposed, she might be ashamed to own directly. They were surprised to see an elegant, cold and altogether conventional woman, beautifully dressed, with a look in her eyes which made Susan Pengelley feel that the best part of her soul was elsewhere. The girl's simple admiration, and certain other qualities in her, had won her a place in "Spiridia's" consciousness. Susan felt that this was about all that could be said till Mrs Miller told her sister-in-law that Susan Pengelley was looking out for a situation as companion, that she was a good reader, and always got on well with boys; also that she had published one or two little stories, could work a typewriter, and would certainly be equal to the rough correction of proofs. Mrs Jacobs, who was in need of a companion with just such qualifications, acting on impulse, had then and there engaged Susan Pengelley. That was all; but the girl felt as though she had become prime minister to a sovereign, and it was with a beating heart and a mind prepared for important issues that she got herself and her belongings into a cab and gave the order of "Branxton Gardens, Hyde Park." Properly speaking, it was Bayswater, but from Mrs Miller's remarks Miss Pengelley had an idea that she was entering the most fashionable part of London. The Westbourne Terrace houses looked, she thought, extremely imposing, and those in Branxton Gardens, where the cab pulled up presently, seemed to her no less so. Great stuccoed fronts they had, with tall windows, porticos supported by massive pillars, and flights of snowy steps, and an electric jet over each doorway. A street loafer obtruded himself as Susan

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timorously rang the bell; he requested employment in the matter of carrying trunks. Miss Pengelley began shyly bargaining with this person when the hall door was flung open, and a small butler, supported by a big, raw-looking footman, answered her summons.

"Miss Pengelley, I *think*?" he said, bending forward a thin, sandy-haired face, and displaying an irreproachable shirt cuff as he relieved Miss Pengelley of her dressing bag. "Mrs Jacobs is expecting you, miss. You be off," to the loafer. "We don't require you."

"Oh! I said I'd give him sixpence," exclaimed Susan, producing the coin from her worn little purse. The butler presented it to the footman, who handed it to the loafer, with directions to "get down that box."

Miss Pengelley paid the cabman and took in her hand a little basket of late roses, which she had carefully culled from the south wall of the Vicarage, as an offering to "Spiridia."

The butler led her up a softly-carpeted staircase, putting on the electric light, which revealed deep orange walls hung with what Miss Pengelley supposed to be quaint old paintings, but which were in reality framed specimens of curious needlework. A big glass in a recess draped with embroidery reflected Miss Pengelley's own countrified figure, as well as tall palms and a marble Psyche over which the fronds drooped. There was another palm on the upper landing, where an imposing piece of dark carving, supporting some odd-shaped plates and tankards of old silver or pewter, stood between two doors facing each other. The butler opened that on Miss Pengelley's left, at the same time switching on the electric light in a large, oblong drawing-room. This was handsomely furnished in the style of the first Empire, with an Aubusson carpet in which the foot sank, severe consoles, gilt chairs, some fine cabinets

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and an imposing fireplace with an ornate clock. The room was upholstered in pale French brocade and had in it many beautiful things, but to Susan Pengelley's fancy it did not seem to reflect the personality of "Spiridia," except in the matter of a few feminine appurtenances scattered about and a cosy nook by the fireplace, against the angle of a wide bay window, where was an embroidery frame beside a deep, modern chair and a little table holding library books and various oddments.

On the walls were some good pictures, of the Dutch School mostly, and the place of honour at one end was occupied by a life-size portrait of "Spiridia" in a quaint, mediæval-looking dress, sitting by a spinning-wheel. A white sheepskin rug was spread before the fire of ship wood throwing out green and violet gleams, and in front of it a tea-table was laid; the muffins heated over a brass tripod which contained lighted spirit. On the side of the fireplace, opposite the big window, was an invalid-chair which caught Miss Pengelley's attention, with a table beside it laden with books and newspapers, and bearing a vase holding stephanotis. The room was full of lovely flowers in pots and vases, and Miss Pengelley felt ashamed of her humble offering. The scent of hothouse blossoms almost overpowered her, so did the richness of the room, the glints of gilding and of inlaid furniture, the general impression of a luxury to which she was wholly unaccustomed. The butler had withdrawn, leaving Susan alone to enjoy her new sensations.

Miss Pengelley heard a door near at hand open; she guessed that it must be that of the room opposite this one, which she supposed to be Mrs Jacobs's boudoir or study; she could not connect the setting of the room she was in—so purely conventional—with the poetic novels of "Spiridia." Now, she heard the sound of voices; first the butler's announcement

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—merely the tone of a well-trained servant; then higher and sharper notes in comment, and lastly Mrs Jacobs's voice, but not as Miss Pengelley had first heard it, at Mrs Miller's garden party. Then it had been thinly modulated, cold, measured in its polite utterances; now it sounded sweet and full, with a ring of emotion. Who could she be speaking to? Miss Pengelley had no time to speculate. There was a silken rustle and Mrs Jacobs entered the room. She welcomed Miss Pengelley without effusion. "Oh! I hope you had no trouble in finding us. Of course we're quite close to the station. Such a horrid day, isn't it? Our first London fog."

She had shaken hands with Miss Pengelley, and now moved to the tea-table, where the urn was hissing and sending out steam. She poured out some water into the teapot, where the tea was already made.

"I am afraid it has been standing," she said. "I ought to have come in sooner. You'll be glad to have some tea, Miss Pengelley."

Susan murmured a commonplace. She was thinking more of Mrs Jacobs than of her tea. The pink-shaded electric light shone straight down upon her hostess. "Spiridia" looked taller and slimmer than ever in her grey teagown, with white fur and some yellowish old lace, which fell from her throat and her wrists as she poured out the tea. From that day Susan associated old lace with "Spiridia." Both the lace and the pseudonym seemed to belong to her specially, while her own name—Mrs Jacobs—was altogether unsuited to her, and Susan disliked it. "Spiridia" had long, thin hands, on which were some fine rings. As she lifted up her head, asking Miss Pengelley if she took sugar, a pair of large, brilliant, greeny-blue eyes flashed from between dark lashes. Mrs Jacobs had an oval face, rather pale, with a sad, slightly-perplexed expression, as though she were not wholly at ease in a world

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which she did not quite understand, and which failed to understand her, with the result that her manner was that of a creature whose natural impulses had been repressed. Above her forehead were masses of soft-looking golden hair, showing a silvery sheen in certain lights where grey was creeping amid the gold. Mrs Jacobs was not a young woman. She must have been about thirty-five, yet it seemed to Susan Pengelley that, even though she might be white-haired and withered, she could never really be old. She was like a woman out of a Norse Saga, Miss Pengelley thought, but a Saga woman would not have had that aloof, composed manner, which so chilled Susan that she did not offer the basket of roses.

She took her tea from Mrs Jacobs's hand, resenting a little that her hostess had asked her no questions about her journey, whether she was tired, cold, or any of those trivial inquiries which at least betoken some interest on the part of the interlocutor. Mrs Jacobs's attention seemed to be entirely diverted. All the time she talked her eyes were turning uneasily towards the door, left open, Susan fancied, on purpose, and at last, as if unable to restrain her impatience, she went to the fireplace and touched the bell.

It was answered almost before the sound could reach downstairs. There was a movement on the landing, a short, dull thud, as of a stick upon the carpeted floor, and, following the direction of Mrs Jacobs's eyes, Miss Pengelley saw, framed in the doorway, the figure of a crippled youth leaning on a crutch, and supported as well by the assiduous butler.

"My son," said Mrs Jacobs, hastily. "It's Miss Pengelley, Ronald," she added by way of introduction. Young Jacobs made an awkward duck of his head sideways as he moved laboriously forward, which might have meant an abrupt salutation for the

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newcomer or a sign for his attendant. Mrs Jacobs went to his side, tendering him the help of her right arm, but the boy fretfully refused it.

"It's all right, mother. Don't make such a fuss," he said.

Mrs Jacobs went back to the tea-table, still anxiously watching her son's progress.

"Oh! Hornblow, take care! That footstool is in Mr Ronald's way. Now, Ronnie, dear—pull up the cushion, Hornblow—are you quite comfortable?"

The youth grunted assent. His appearance, Susan thought, was more prepossessing than his manners, though he was not in the least like his mother. No doubt, she further reflected, he took after his father. Slender, dark, with a thin, slightly-beaked nose, black eyes looking hungrily out on the world of which his infirmity made him but a poor citizen, and a well-shaped but full mouth, the upper lip faintly shaded with black down, Ronald Jacobs would have been good-looking but for his crippled form—one side appeared paralysed—and his peevish expression. He was the centre of thought. Nobody remembered Miss Pengelley, who stood shy, jarred, interested, her untouched cup in her hand. Hornblow, the admirable butler, handed muffins and caviare sandwiches—the last petulantly put aside by the youth. Mrs Jacobs sugared, watered and creamed Ronald's tea, placing it on a table beside his chair. The butler was leaving the room when he paused upon the threshold of the door.

"Mr Jacobs has telephoned, ma'am. He may be a little late for dinner, and begs that you'll go on without him. Mr Jacobs, ma'am, will not take soup."

"Oh, very well," returned Mrs Jacobs, as though this were a matter of ordinary occurrence. "You can call up Mr Jacobs, Hornblow, at 7.45," she added, "and if he hasn't started we will have dinner at the usual time."

Hornblow retired. Mrs Jacobs ministered to her

The Coming of Miss Pengelley

son's wants. She had forgotten all about Miss Pengelley, who stood silent, demure, taking stock of the proceedings and reflecting within herself that, as regarded Mr Ronald Jacobs, her office would prove no sinecure. Suddenly Mrs Jacobs addressed her,—

"Oh, Miss Pengelley, do sit down. Won't you have some muffins or cake? Do take care of yourself. Ronnie, dear, what's the matter?"

"I don't like this tea, mum. It's bitter. It's been standing. It's all tannin. You know what Doctor Grier says about that. And I haven't got enough sugar."

"We'll have some made fresh," said Mrs Jacobs. "Yes, it has been standing. I quite forgot. We were so interested in our talk, Ronnie. But Hornblow did tell us. I'll ring for some more," and she touched the electric button.

Miss Pengelley was relieved to find that she was not responsible, as she at first feared, for the tannin in the tea. She sat silent, taking occasional sips and munching the rolled bread and butter which she had preferred to other delicacies. The imperturbable Hornblow reappeared, and bore off the teapot. Probably it occurred to him, as it did to Miss Pengelley, that, seeing there was a kettle and a spirit-stand, Mrs Jacobs might herself have mixed the beverage. Ronald eyed the tea-table with a dissatisfied air.

"I'm sick of caviare sandwiches, mother."

"Oh, Ronnie! And your father has it straight from Russia! Well, try my St Helga herrings—pounded with cayenne. They're delicious."

"I'm sick of St Helga too," said Ronald. "Køenigsen is overdoing his boom at St Helga. Is he coming this evening, mother?"

"I don't know, dear. I'm expecting a telegram," said Mrs Jacobs. She turned to Miss Pengelley. "You'll need a map of the country now you've come among us," she said courteously. "Mr Køenigsen,

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the painter, is a countryman of mine—from St Helga, you know—our wee North Sea republic. That's why I was christened Helga."

Miss Pengelley knew enough geography to remember that St Helga was an island between the Orkneys and Norway. She also knew that it was autonomous, and had a State Chamber and a president of its own. Later she learned that Helga Jacobs was the only daughter of a now deceased president, and that Karl Koenigsen, the painter, had been her humble playmate. The Wheel of Fortune turns. Karl Koenigsen, with a genius for self-advertisement, was winning fame in London as an artist, exploiting a new method; Helga had married Mr Jacobs, and wore the laurels of "Spiridia."

Miss Pengelley was recalled from vague visions of St Helga by Ronald's fretful tone.

"What are those things—macaroons? Please pass them, Miss— Mother! What did you say was her name?"

"Miss Pengelley," said Mrs Jacobs.

"Oh! Pengelley. That dish at your elbow—don't you see it? Yes, that's right—thanks."

Susan was obliging by nature, but young Jacobs's dictatorial tone made, in Elizabethan language, her gorge rise. She got up constrainedly, and handed him the dish of macaroons, from which he slowly and deliberately chose two, keeping her standing the while, and then began delicately to bite one. Susan sat down again, a dull heat causing her face to burn. Hornblow came in with fresh tea, but Ronald then decided that he preferred a glass of hot milk, which was duly brought him. Mrs Jacobs seemed once more to remember the existence of her companion.

"Oh, Miss Pengelley, take something. Caviare sandwiches—a macaroon? No? Perhaps you'd like to see your room?"

"Thank you," said Miss Pengelley, "if I might."

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"Certainly—the upper housemaid will show you. I always read to Ronald after tea. Pray ask for anything you want."

The footman had answered Mrs Jacobs's summons. "Tell Jennings, please, to come and show Miss Pengelley her room," said Mrs Jacobs.

Miss Pengelley had a disagreeable feeling of being treated as a dependant. She got up stiffly, and then remembered the small basket of roses.

"I thought you might like these," she said, shyly tendering them. "But I see you have so many flowers."

"None so sweet as fresh-picked country ones," replied Mrs Jacobs, with a more natural smile. "They're beautiful, aren't they, Ron?"

The boy gave a grudging assent. His mother watched him anxiously as she picked out the finest rose, and laid it on the table beside him. He took no notice of the action, and Mrs Jacobs said apologetically to Miss Pengelley, "He's been ill. It's such a comfort to see him more like himself." Then it seemed to occur to her that Ronald's normal condition might not appear attractive to Miss Pengelley, and she added, with an admonitory laugh at her son, "I must explain to Miss Pengelley, Ron, that we're always delighted when you are cross, because it shows that you are getting well."

"I wish you wouldn't fuss so," said the amiable Ron. "Can't I be as I please, without having it commented on?"

Mrs Jacobs turned to the roses. She held the basket to her face and sniffed them tenderly. Her large blue eyes, looking at Susan over the blossoms, were childlike, apart from the rest of her face. There was the same sort of wonder and mystery in them as in the eyes of a child. "I love flowers," she said simply. "Thank you very much for bringing me these."

At that moment the white-capped upper house-

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maid appeared, standing at attention in the doorway.

"Oh! Jennings, show Miss Pengelley her room; and you'll see, please, that she has everything she wants."

"What did you say her name was, mother?" asked Ronald again, when Susan had left the room.

"Oh! Pengelley. Didn't I tell you, dear?"

"What a mouthful! Well, she isn't exactly stimulating," observed Ronald, superciliously, "either in appearance or manner. But if she can read to me while you're writing, and answer your notes, and sympathise with the Universal Agent's views of art and literature, I suppose the rest doesn't matter."

"Ronald! I cannot bear the way you have got into of talking about your father. Why do you call him the Universal Agent?"

"It's what he calls himself."

"Yes, but from you it does not seem respectful."

"Oh! Hang respect! I'm not a baby. And he despises me for being a cripple, and for having some interests in life outside money-making. You needn't grudge me *my* innings."

"I grudge you nothing—nothing," she answered with almost passionate fervour. "God knows that if I could atone to you by any sacrifice for having brought you into the world as you are, my poor darling, I'd make it without a thought of the cost. But I can't! I can't!"

"Now, mother, don't be tragic. You won't mend matters that way. Let's get out of this room. I always feel depressed in it. Anyone could see that it isn't your taste."

"It is your father's taste, Ronald," said Mrs Jacobs, in gentle rebuke. "I asked him to furnish this room in the way he liked best. He chose beautiful things, and I have never wished them changed."

"I daresay they cost a good deal of money, but for my part I like depths of colour and harmonious

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effects. Oh! if I could only go to India, or Japan, or Egypt, instead of being tied to a stick and a Bath-chair!"

Touched to the heart, his mother went to him, and, with a movement intensely maternal, laid her fair head for a moment against the youth's dark curls.

"Ring for Hornblow, mother," said Ronald, peremptorily. "Let me get back to my own room, and we'll go on with 'Lafcadio Hearn.'"

Mrs Jacobs obeyed.

"By the way," said Ronald, "Doctor Grier will be glad to see Miss Pengelley. He was preaching to me the other day about fagging you. Do I fag you, old lady?"

"You know my pleasure is to please you, Ron. But perhaps it's fortunate that 'Spiridia' doesn't need to write for her living, or she would not be able to give you so much of her time, dear boy."

"Oh, bosh!" said Ronald. "One money-making member of a family is quite enough."

Just then Hornblow entered, and in deferential silence handed the cripple his crutch, while he helped him to rise, and escorted him across the landing to his own sitting-room. Mrs Jacobs followed, carrying a book and sundry miscellaneous properties. Hornblow switched off the light, and the drawing-room was left in shadowy stillness.

CHAPTER II

THE LION'S WHELP

MEANWHILE Miss Pengelley, under the guidance of Jennings, had mounted to her room at the top of two steep flights of stairs—a small, square chamber, simply but comfortably furnished. It had not, however, an inch of space to spare, and Susan found some difficulty in disposing of her things. Jennings, a Cornish woman also, elderly and loquacious, lingered, obligingly making herself of use, till at last Miss Pengelley dismissed her, debating in her own mind whether she should change her dress at once and go down in view of possible duties awaiting her. She had forgotten to ask the dinner hour, and did not like to ring.

It was now six o'clock, and Susan, accustomed to country dinner hours, thought the Jacobs might dine at seven, till she remembered the telephonic message Hornblow had given, and which at the time she had scarcely taken in. It occurred to her that she might be expected to write menus or arrange flowers, which she vaguely understood to come within the scope of a companion's work. In any case, she hoped that at present at least young Mr Jacobs would not be thrown upon her charge, for she looked forward with no delight to ministering to Ronald's wants. Attired in a black silk skirt by no means new, and a pink and black checked blouse cut down at the neck and ruffled with imitation lace, Miss Pengelley considered that she presented a suitable appearance as the

The Lion's Whelp

humble dependant. She picked up her knitting—there were always socks to be made for the boys at home—and shyly descended the stairs.

The drawing-room was in fire-lit dusk, and Miss Pengelley was far too diffident to turn on the electric light for her own benefit. Indeed, she regarded electricity in any form as something strange and mysterious, with which she had best not meddle. Making shift with circumstance, she seated herself near the fire and knitted briskly, her thoughts, as was natural, turning upon her new experiences. She had found the door open, and so left it. The opposite door on the landing had been closed. Miss Pengelley supposed it to be that of Mrs Jacobs's study or boudoir, and drew a mental picture of "Spiridia" in the throes of composition amid her personal surroundings. Presently, through the shut door, came the sound of a piano and of a woman singing. Susan at once concluded that it was Mrs Jacobs, and, dropping her knitting, listened profoundly interested.

The voice was a half contralto, and had those plaintive, vibrant notes which touch the least susceptible heart. Miss Pengelley was emotional in her demure way, and felt thrilled by Mrs Jacobs's song, which in her fancy resembled the cry of a caged wild bird yearning for liberty, and was oddly in harmony with that look Mrs Jacobs had given her over the basket of roses. The words of the song were partly English, it seemed; but at the end of each stanza came a refrain in some foreign tongue, unknown to Miss Pengelley. A long silence followed the song, broken at length by the reverberation of a gong played upon the half landing by a practised hand. Then came the opening of a door, the subdued hum of talk—Hornblow delivering a message perhaps—Ronald's high-pitched rejoinder and consequential laugh, the more melodious ripple of Mrs Jacobs's merriment and her sweeter tones. Then presently a stir in the opposite room; the rustle of silk skirts

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going upstairs, and the peculiar chud of Ronald's crutch on the thick carpet as he made a move.

Miss Pengelley knitted on for some time in the gloaming, feeling very hungry, for she had eaten nothing since her breakfast, except a sandwich in the train, and her scrappy tea. By-and-by another silken rustle announced Mrs Jacobs's approach. The room was flooded all of a sudden with electric light, turned on outside the door, and the mistress of the house swept in. She seemed to Susan very elaborately dressed in deep blue brocade, with touches of old lace. The shapely throat rose snowily above the bodice, and the stately head, with its crown of fair hair showed the gleam of a diamond arrow.

Mrs Jacobs came forward to the fire, not at first perceiving Miss Pengelley, whose existence had taken small hold of her pre-occupied mind.

"Oh, Miss Pengelley, don't move. I hope you're rested and that Jennings has looked after you all right?"

Mrs Jacobs hardly seemed to expect an answer to her inquiries, as she drew forward a stool and seated herself, holding her hands to the blaze.

"I'm a chilly mortal for a north-country woman," she said, with her little stiff laugh. "It's an odd combination, for I believe I have the spirit of the north and yet the southern love of warmth."

"I thought your singing sounded like that," Miss Pengelley ventured timidly. "It was you who was singing, wasn't it?"

"Crooning," corrected Mrs Jacobs. "Yes, Ronald likes my crooning in the twilight. "It's so dull for him these long evenings. His eyes are weak, you know, and Doctor Grier won't let him read much. That is a great deprivation, for Ronald's chief pleasures are intellectual ones. Poor boy!" Mrs Jacobs sighed and gazed mournfully into the fire. Susan broke the pause by asking the language of the refrain.

The Lion's Whelp

"Oh! a sort of Norwegian Gaelic. It's a folk-song of my own island—St Helga—which nobody ever seemed to have heard of till Karl Kœnigsen's pictures made it a sort of fashion in London. But we have a monopoly—he and I—of the St Helga carvings and embroideries. And the silver work, too, is lovely. No, you won't see any here," as Susan glanced round the room. "The St Helga embroideries and carvings don't go with the style of this room, which is an especial fancy of my husband's. He bought most of the things in Paris. At that time, he had opportunities for purchasing good works of art."

Susan replied frankly that she was ignorant in such matters, but that she could see everything in the room was very valuable. She wondered whether Mr Jacobs had been at that time a dealer in such furniture, but Mrs Jacobs did not enlighten her on this point, though she talked *bric-à-brac* for a few minutes with zest and evident knowledge. Indeed, as she chatted now her manner was much more natural, Susan thought, than when her son had been present. Again she mentioned St Helga and Karl Kœnigsen. She seemed to like talking about her own country and her countryman. Susan noticed that the wondering, childlike expression came again into her eyes as she spoke of Karl Kœnigsen's growing fame, and the mission he had set himself in regard to the art of St Helga. Apparently Ronald was for the moment off his mother's mind, for Mrs Jacobs did not, as before tea, keep glancing towards the door. By-and-by, Hornblow announced dinner, adding respectfully,—

"I rung up Mr Jacobs, ma'am, and he says he's leaving presently, and will pick you up with the fish."

Mrs Jacobs made a move.

"My son will join us downstairs," she said. "He rests there a little while in the smoking-room, after the labour of dressing."

She led the way. Ronald was being settled at

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table when they reached the dining-room. Miss Pengelley received an impression of stately sumptuousness in this apartment. Walls, ceiling and furniture were of dark carved wood. On the ledge beneath the ceiling was a display of quaint pewter vessels, and between the panels were plaques and dishes in hammered silver which looked old—specimens, no doubt, of St Helga art. The one scarcely accordant note was a sideboard, not in itself incongruous, but which groaned beneath a collection of modern plate.

There were two vacant covers, that at the head of the table, and one opposite Ronald, who sat at his mother's left hand. Susan was signed to a seat between the two empty places.

"Mr Kœnigsen, ma'am," suggested Hornblow, as he removed the soup plates. "Shall I have the soup warmed?"

"Karl is always late," put in Ronald.

"Yes, it can be brought back when Mr Kœnigsen comes," said Mrs Jacobs, in answer to Hornblow. "And please be particularly careful that the fish is kept hot for Mr Jacobs."

Salmon cutlets were duly handed. Miss Pengelley had not consumed her portion when a latch clicked in the hall door. A man's footsteps sounded crossing the hall to the rooms at the back.

"The Universal Agent!" announced Ronald, and presently his father entered the room.

To Miss Pengelley's observant eyes there was something mechanical about Mrs Jacobs's smile, but she welcomed her husband graciously in response to his inquiry, "How are you, Helga? Been getting on all right?"

He went up to her, apparently oblivious of the presence of a stranger.

"Oh, yes!" she returned. "I'm afraid you've had a hard day. We obeyed your orders, and did not keep back the soup."

The Lion's Whelp

"Quite right. Yes, it's been a hard day. I've been—bothered." He brought out the word slowly, with a forced laugh.

"Bothered?" Mrs Jacobs repeated anxiously.

"Oh, personally. Not in the way of business."

"A troublesome client?" she suggested.

"Yes." He laughed again. "That's it, my dear. And a man's most troublesome client is often himself."

"What is it?"

She looked up at him as he bent over her chair—she was sitting at the end of the table near the door by which he had entered—and touched the hand which lay on her shoulder. "Aren't you well, Lion?"

"Grier hasn't been here to-day?" he asked suddenly.

"No," she answered, "Ronald is much better. But aren't you well, Lion?"

"Yes, yes. Don't you worry," he hastily rejoined. "There's nothing the matter with me." He moved to his place, and his eyes fell upon Miss Pengelley as, after a "Well, youngster!" they travelled along the opposite side and met her gaze.

"Miss Pengelley—my husband," said Mrs Jacobs, adding, "Miss Pengelley came up from near Tavistock this afternoon."

"Ah, yes, I remember. I ought to apologise, Miss Pengelley, for being late and for not having dressed."

Susan had risen to shake hands, and responded gratefully to his greeting, which was the pleasantest she had received. Hornblow, with the sherry decanter in one hand, hovered about his master, casting at the same time an admonishing glance at the young footman who appeared in the doorway carrying a fresh relay of fish.

"William!—the sauce. Salmon cutlets, sir—hot from the fire."

Mr Jacobs helped himself in an abstracted manner.

The Other Mrs Jacobs

"Sherry, sir? What claret, sir?"

"Whisky and potash," said Mr Jacobs. "No, Hornblow, you can bring up a bottle of Pol Roger, '89."

"Very good, sir."

Mr Jacobs half excused himself for the indulgence.

"I feel a bit down. You'll have some champagne, too, Helga? It'll do Miss Pengelley good after her journey. Two bottles, Hornblow. I thought Koenigsen was dining to-night?" he added, turning to his wife.

"I had a telegram from Brighton. He's been painting someone there," replied Mrs Jacobs. "He said he would be late."

"But he's coming? I had something I wanted to see Koenigsen about to-night."

"Oh, yes, he's coming," put in Ronald. "He's promised to put a touch or two to my drawings before I send them up to-morrow."

"I say, young man, is that altogether on the square?"

"Oh! it isn't anything that matters," interposed Mrs Jacobs. "Mr Koenigsen has told me that he doesn't really touch up Ron's drawings. He just shows him where they might be improved. It is such an interest to my boy sending in to these competitions, and such a pleasure when he wins a prize," Mrs Jacobs added, turning with polite explanatoriness to Miss Pengelley. "I'm sorry to say that he is not as busy as he ought to be just now with his studies. The tutor left us just before Ron's last illness, and we have not yet found him another. I am so grateful to Karl Koenigsen for helping and amusing Ron as he does." Mr Jacobs looked up from his fish in a ruminative way—first at the boy and then at his wife.

"You think he really does like Ron then—does he, Helga?"

"Why, of course," said Mrs Jacobs, laughing

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sweetly. "That's why he comes here. I don't know what Ron would do without Karl Koenigsen."

Mr Jacobs turned to Miss Pengelley.

"I daresay you've heard of Karl Koenigsen, the St Helgan painter."

"Only since I came here," said Susan.

"You mustn't tell him that," said Mr Jacobs. "Koenigsen wouldn't like to feel that he was unknown even in the wilds of Devonshire. That sort of thing is his weakness."

"It seems a pardonable one in a celebrity," said Miss Pengelley. She was feeling less shy, and Mr Jacobs somehow attracted her. He had done so from the moment that he had entered, and had appeared so absorbed in his wife as to be unconscious of anyone else in the room. Her intuitional faculty, which was quick to penetrate new situations, scented severe agitation in him, which he was trying to hide by random talk. She had now full opportunity for studying him. He was a man of fifty or more, of strong Jewish type, dark, with a beaked nose, a heavy black moustache, and hair which was almost white. He had the keen look of a sharp business man, but he did not appear aggressively moneyed, nor even aggressively Jewish. He caught up Miss Pengelley.

"Most social weaknesses are pardonable. We're all snobs at heart, and those on the lowest rung of the ladder have got to fight their way to the top. Koenigsen's enemies say that he kicks down his ladders. I haven't seen him do it, and I don't know why I should believe ill of him till I've proved it. My opinion of Karl Koenigsen is that he's a clever, good-hearted chap, with an eye to the main chance, and his head screwed the right way on to his shoulders."

"Hear! hear!" observed Ronald. The youth had thrown himself sideways in his chair, while he rather contemptuously refused a dish of sweetbreads Hornblow offered him.

The Other Mrs Jacobs

"Oh! *do*, Ronnie, dear," urged his mother. "You know Doctor Grier likes you to have sweetbreads—they're so nourishing."

It occurred to Susan that Mrs Jacobs also needed nourishing. She had a hacking cough of which no one seemed to take any notice. The bones showed through her skin, and she was pale, except for a hectic spot on either cheek. She dallied with her food listlessly.

Ronald allowed the dish to come to his shoulder before he petulantly refused it once more. His father's eyes were upon him with an expression of faint disdain and disapproval.

"Sweetbreads and truffles—and Ronald won't have any!" remarked Mr Jacobs. "When I was an office-boy, at somewhere about fifteen shillings a week, I'd never seen a sweetbread nor heard of a truffle."

There was a humorous sadness in Mr Jacobs's remarks. He seemed in the mood for retrospection. Catching Susan's eye again, he said,—

"Perhaps it is not necessary for me to observe, Miss Pengelley, that I'm a self-made man. I can't even glory in the proverbial half-crown, for to the best of my belief it was a two-franc piece with which I started life at Helsingkraad. Helga doesn't mind my mentioning it. 'Spiridia' has the glory, and Ahasuerus-Jacobs makes the money."

There was nothing purse-proud in the man's manner, whatever the words might have been.

"Miss Pengelley, I see that you are amused at my name—Ahasuerus-Jacobs." He spoke it with a dryly humorous intonation. "It *is* a mouthful, but it is not exactly my own. I got it from old Ahasuerus the Jew, as they used to call him—as noble an old man as ever bowed in the synagogue. He started the firm, and took me into partnership with him, and called it Ahasuerus-Jacobs, and so it has been ever since, though Ahasuerus has been gathered to his fathers these ten years back. Ahasuerus-Jacobs I

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sign my cheques, but I—I am Judah, the Lion's whelp."

"The Lion's whelp?" Susan repeated, not seizing his drift.

"Don't you know your Bible, Miss Pengelley? I understood that you were a clergyman's daughter. Turn up Jacob's blessing upon his son Judah—'*Judah, the lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?*'"

Ronald stared at his father, and Hornblow paused in the act of pouring him out more champagne. It was clear that Mr Jacobs was not quite in his usual mood. And indeed there was something odd, wild, emotional, in the man's utterance as he rolled out the Old Testament words. Miss Pengelley had a curious feeling that she was on the borders of tragedy, and in Mrs Jacobs's face, as she gazed anxiously at her husband, there seemed to be a reflection of the same thought. Mr Jacobs raised his glass of champagne to his lips and bowed to his wife in a queer, formal fashion that seemed but a covering to deep feeling struggling within him.

"I drink to your health, Helga, my dear. To your health, prosperity and happiness."

Mrs Jacobs, still startled and looking agitated, bowed in nervous acknowledgment of the toast. Ronald only stared. Susan had nothing but water in which to drink it, having disclaimed the need of wine, but Hornblow, with the air of an officiant at holy mysteries, went round again, at a sign from his master, filling all their glasses with champagne. And just then, to general relief, came a diversion. The front door bell gave a long ting. Hornblow signed to the footman. "Fish back!" he said in a dramatic aside and went out. There was a slight disturbance in the hall. Ronald's face brightened, and Mrs Jacobs, with the air of one released from strain, said, "Here is Mr Koenigsen at last."

The Other Mrs Jacobs

He came in with mock hesitation and a string of apologies, protesting against the bringing back of the dinner. His train, he said, had been late, and his cabman had been drunk. Koenigsen was a large, fair man, with prominent blue eyes, yellow curling hair, and a blonde beard not too carefully trimmed. He shook hands in an exaggeratedly deferential manner with Mrs Jacobs, and was jocular and friendly with his host.

"You got my letter, Jacobs, about that little bit of business?" Mr Jacobs nodded.

"If Ahasuerus had been alive, Koenigsen, he'd be wanting you for a partner instead of me. This is the man who's pushing my wife's island, Miss Pengelley. Mr Koenigsen—Miss Pengelley."

The artist and Susan exchanged quick glances and stiff bows.

"St Helga will keep moving, Karl, as long as you're behind it. I've sent out that paragraph for you. What about the Duchess?"

"You'll know all about her on Friday evening, Jacobs. She can wait till then," nonchalantly returned Koenigsen.

"It's a clever stroke of yours, Karl—very clever—the seal of approval on your gallery scheme." Jacobs turned again to Miss Pengelley. "Here's a painter not content with ordinary channels like R.A.'s and common art folk. He must start a St Helgan Gallery on his own account."

"With a royal duchess to boss the show," put in Ronald, pertly.

"Oh, 'Spiridia' is going to boss my show," said Mr Koenigsen, smiling at his hostess.

"No, no," said Mrs Jacobs, "you'd much better have a duchess."

"I don't want a duchess, I want 'Spiridia,'" said Koenigsen. "Probably there will be three duchesses at the opening of my St Helgan Gallery, but there will be only one 'Spiridia.'"

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"'Spiridia' isn't a St Helgan name," objected Ronald. "I can't think, mother, why you chose such a silly pseudonym."

"Nor I," answered Mrs Jacobs, imperturbably.

"She would be St Helga herself," said Kœnigsen, "in national costume, against a background of St Helgan tapestry."

"With the distaff and spinning-wheel—just as you painted her, Karl," said Ronald.

"Just as I painted her," repeated Kœnigsen, "with the distaff and spinning-wheel—emblematic of St Helgan industry."

Mrs Jacobs protested. The artist pleaded. Mr Jacobs joined in the talk, which now ignored "Spiridia's" companion. Kœnigsen was a clever talker and tossed repartee back to his host. Mr Jacobs took a good deal of champagne. There was a certain recklessness in his gaiety. Miss Pengelley wondered whether he was always so, and whether he had drunk too much, or whether, as she seemed to divine, the conviviality was put on to conceal an undercurrent of gloom. She looked to see if his wife were discomposed by it, but apparently Mrs Jacobs was relieved from anxiety, for she was chatting animatedly. Miss Pengelley was amused by the conversation, though she did not understand the metropolitan flavour of it, the Bohemian allusions and artistic shop-talk. Kœnigsen rapidly disposed of the courses in which he was behind the others, and to Mrs Jacobs's satisfaction Ronald now ate heartily of the *entrée* of sweetbreads. The painter seemed to have a stimulating effect upon everybody, and, though she was sure that she disliked him, Miss Pengelley was obliged to admit a magnetic attraction in his personality. She found it natural that he should already have done great things, and be contemplating more ambitious ventures. His many-sidedness was interesting. Gradually she discovered a subtle distinction between his manner

The Other Mrs Jacobs

to Mr Jacobs and that in which he addressed "Spiridia"; also that he played upon Mrs Jacobs's maternal sympathies through his attentions to Ronald.

Susan was interested in all she heard and in all that passed before her. She felt as though she were a spectator at a play. A literary savour crept into the discourse. Ronald, who was a young prig, as well as a cub, decided Miss Pengelley, pronounced an opinion upon the book he was having read to him, by Lafcadio Hearn, and Mrs Jacobs had a good deal to say also on that subject. Mr Jacobs dropped out of the discussion. He had forgotten the existence of his wife's companion. Miss Pengelley saw that. His whole attention was centred upon his wife herself. He sat silent, watching "Spiridia" as she leant her graceful head towards K  nigsen, looking more than ever, Susan thought, like a medi  val saint—no—a Saga woman. But Susan was touched and surprised by the expression of yearning devotion and deep sadness on the countenance of Mr Jacobs as he watched his wife. It was, to her fertile imagination, as though an embodiment of tragedy appeared, having suddenly doffed the mask and socks of comedy. What did it mean? She averted her eyes so that he should not find out that she was aware of the change in him, and presently he pulled himself together, and launched a remark. They were speaking of St Helga again, and Mrs Jacobs, eyes were alight as they talked of her dear northern island. K  nigsen, it was clear to the observant country mouse, regarded St Helga as capital to be turned to account in his profession; whereas Mrs Jacobs seemed to think of it as too sacred and beloved to be even used in her books. The one spoke like an exile; the other as an escaped prisoner from its shores. The novelist's voice thrilled Susan once more, as she talked of a lone headland which she and the artist both knew and which he had

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painted. Mr Kœnigsen sneered at the opinion upon this picture of a critic who had never seen Altbröd. It was he himself, he declared, who had discovered St Helga from an artistic point of view. He was determined to exploit St Helga. Had he not painted villages of St Helga, children of St Helga, fishers of St Helga, women of St Helga, and chief among them—with a low bow towards Mrs Jacobs—St Helga herself! Yes, Miss Pengelley thought, Mrs Jacobs would certainly make a good model for St Helga. She had an un-worldworn, fifteenth-century look. Sophisticated though she appeared in many ways, the spirit of a dreamy north maiden sometimes looked out from her eyes, which were like the sea.

By-and-by, Mrs Jacobs rose, with a glance at Susan. But she lingered outside the dining-room door—bidding Miss Pengelley go first—in order that she might presently watch the laborious ascent of her son, supported by the inestimable Hornblow. Ronald would have remained had he had his own way, for he liked Kœnigsen's stories, and considered himself a man at sixteen. But his father dismissed him in a decided manner as he hung back.

"No, youngster, you join the ladies." And Ronald was obliged to take up his crutch and depart.

CHAPTER III

THE DEATH WARRANT

THE two men were alone. Kœnigsen pulled his chair a little nearer to his host. The door was closed. Hornblow had placed cigars and a lighted taper in its silver holder. Mr Jacobs pushed along the decanters.

"Help yourself, Kœnigsen."

The painter did so, commenting upon the bouquet and excellence of the vintage.

"Yes, it's good wine," rejoined Mr Jacobs. "I bought it at the Fattorini sale. Now about that paragraph of yours and the Duchess, and all the rest of that St Helgan business. We'll get through that first, and afterwards I've got some business of my own I'd like to talk to you about."

"With the greatest pleasure," said Kœnigsen, on the alert at once. "Don't bother about me."

"Oh, mine's a small affair—a personal matter, but to your advantage perhaps. Well, I think you'd best shorten that paragraph for *Shade and Sparkle*. It'll do for one or two other papers as well." He named them. "I can arrange it for you. Of course the directors know my wife is a St Helgan woman, and old Brack—the President—though he died a pauper, left a name behind him. But—I suppose the Duchess's commission is genuine?"

"Certainly," said Kœnigsen. "That is to say, it will be after my show."

"Oh! well, perhaps it had better be put am-

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biguously. That's really all I wanted to know. You see, one can't exactly take liberties with royalties; and that's the sort of thing editors want to be sure about. I admire your business methods, Koenigsen. One's got to be smart in these days. All the same, you must know where you are when it comes to royalties. The Duchess is sure to be there, I suppose?"

"Quite sure."

"That's all right. And about my wife receiving for you. Of course she's a St Helga woman, and you were playmates, weren't you, in St Helga?"

"Yes. That is to say, Mrs Jacobs was the daughter of the President, you see."

"I know. The wonder was she married *me*! But a President of St Helga don't count much. A queer little island that is protected by every Government and no Government—only good for tapestry and fish. You're quite right to exploit it. The enamels and old silver have caught on extraordinarily. Were all your specimens made at St Helga?"

"Oh, certainly," said Koenigsen. "I know the manufactories. In fact, I've got an interest in the place. You know Altbröd—that part north of the island?"

"No, I don't. Was never in St Helga but once in my life. It was at Helsingkräad that I met Helga—after the old President had been turned out, you know."

"Yes, I know," returned Koenigsen, sympathetically.

"Queer marriage laws they have in St Helga—something like the Scotch," went on Jacobs. "I remember—" He seemed to be wandering from his subject. Koenigsen pulled him back.

"Then it's all right about that 'ad.'?"

"Yes, yes, that's all right. I'd rather like you to come with me to the board meeting on *Shade and Sparkle*, and bring the sketches of your gallery.

The Other Mrs Jacobs

We might lunch in the City. Board meeting's on Wednesday—2.30."

"I shall be delighted," said Kœnigsen.

"What I wanted to say was about Helga receiving for you—being a St Helgan woman. I trust you, Kœnigsen, to see that the thing is properly done. Her position as a daughter of the late President recognised and explained to the Duchess—you understand? I don't want any gutter Press comments and innuendoes, and horrible reporting women, lying, to make capital out of 'Spiridia.' I may count upon you, Kœnigsen, to see that Helga is protected in every possible way?"

"My dear Jacobs! surely you realise that there's nobody in the world I hold more sacred than your wife? I should consider her interests far beyond my own."

"That's good. I believed it of you. A man couldn't have been brought up with my Helga, no matter in what humble capacity—oh, yes, I know, she's told me, but it's of no consequence and we don't talk about it—without feeling that sort of feudal loyalty. I've heard you and Helga speak of the old feudal spirit in St Helga, though I'm afraid the commercial spirit has got the better of that nowadays. Still, you two understand it, cherish it. You'll always remember that though Helga Brack married Judah Jacobs, the self-made Jew advertising agent, she's got the blood of North Sea heroes in her veins, and must be upheld and guarded and treated with the respect she deserves. I've tried to do it, Kœnigsen. It's been my sole object in making money. When I die she'll have everything—left to my wife absolutely, you understand. I wanted to show my trust in Helga—she'll look after the boy, if he lives, and it's a nice pile."

"I'm sure of that, old man. Ahasuerus-Jacobs is a paying business."

"Oh, well, whether it'll go on without me is

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another matter. There's a pretty sharp junior partner, but not a man I could trust—not one to whom I could confide Helga's interests. An outsider is better for that. Are you following me, Koenigsen?"

"Perfectly, Jacobs. But I can't imagine why you are considering these eventualities."

"I'll tell you presently. As regards the firm of Ahasuerus-Jacobs, everything depends on personal management. I've been realising that for some time, and Helga's eggs will not all be in one basket. I've no relations, Koenigsen, not a soul in the world belonging to me except a sister, who doesn't count much—nor has Helga."

"Really!" put in Koenigsen, politely. "Nor, I may add, have I."

"All the better. And you're St Helga born; there must be the national sympathy. Women don't understand business, and you're a sharp business man, Koenigsen. I notice you never lose a point. You wouldn't let that junior partner have things all his own way in the settling up. Helga knows nothing about business. Writing-women never do. She'd be taken in. She'd need a man to back her. Now, the long and short of it is, Koenigsen, that I had a new will drawn up to-day which I shall sign to-morrow, and in it I've left you £5000—just a little set off for your trouble—and appointed you joint executor with Helga."

Koenigsen was taken aback. £5000! The sum was not a large one, but it meant a good deal to him. And what a wealthy widow Helga would be were her husband to die now! What had put the idea of death into Jacob's head? The man looked fairly healthy; sallow, beaky and, perhaps, a little worn, as was but natural after a long day in the City: but, as far as illness was concerned, Koenigsen had never heard it mentioned in connection with Jacobs.

"My dear fellow!" he exclaimed, "it's extremely

The Other Mrs Jacobs

generous of you, and I can't tell you how I value your confidence, which, I assure you on my sacred word of honour, will never be misplaced. But you're a young man yet, and this will you're speaking of is not likely to come into operation. I venture to prophesy that you will make several more before you join the majority. I only hope that you will continue to feel the same trust in me. I appreciate it, Jacobs, I assure you, beyond words. Still, there's no reason, old fellow, is there, why you should feel feverish about testamentary arrangements?"

"That's just it!" Jacobs seemed suddenly to collapse. He lifted his glass of wine, but set it down without putting it to his lips, then, leaning forward, dropped his head between his hands and remained so for quite a minute. His cheroot smouldered on his empty dessert plate. Koenigsen meanwhile puffed on in silence; at length he took his cigar from his mouth and savoured the aroma of it in a meditative manner. He was knocking off the ash when Jacobs raised a haggard face and stared at him gloomily.

"My dear Jacobs, what is the matter?"

"I've had my death warrant, Koenigsen. That's what it means—that's why I went to my lawyer's to-day and made him draw out a new will—simple, short and to the point."

"Good heavens, Jacobs! Are you speaking seriously?"

"It's God's truth, as far as medical science can interpret it. But, first of all, give me your word not to breathe anything of this to Helga."

"You have my word," said Koenigsen, briefly. "But tell me—is this that man Grier's verdict?"

"Do you know him?" asked Jacobs.

It was on the tip of Koenigsen's tongue to say "I know his wife," but he amended the sentence to "I know him slightly," and added, "I also know that he's an alarmist."

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"So I thought at first, and went to another man. He confirmed Grier's opinion. This morning I went to a third. The verdict was the same. After that I considered it wisest to instruct my lawyer."

"They may be mistaken," said Koenigsen. "Doctors do make mistakes, you know."

"Not three of them, in separate consultations. Anyhow, it was good enough for me. I daresay I shall consult others; but, to tell the truth, I felt that Grier was right. He's a queer man—knows what he's talking about, medically, at anyrate."

"He's a queer man," repeated Koenigsen.

"A bit of a brute," rejoined Jacobs, "but straight."

"Is he straight?" said Koenigsen. "Well, I've heard—"

"What?" asked Jacobs. "He attends my wife."

"Oh! nothing—only hints. Ever met *his* wife?"

"Didn't know he was married," said Jacobs.

"He is. Yes, of course, he's married. To an uncommonly pretty woman." Koenigsen laughed rather fatuously. "Oh, yes! he's very much married—a long time married. She's a fascinating little dark devil of a woman."

"I don't like fascinating little dark devils of women," said Jacobs. "I knew one once." He spoke in a retrospective way again. "She led me a dance. Well, she's dead—a long time ago—before I married Helga. Look here, Koenigsen!" he said abruptly, "I feel an interest in you. Don't you go taking up with fascinating devils of women, who ain't just the type you want to trot down the vale with, and put in front of you for the world to say, 'He can't be such a bad sort to have got a wife like that.' Do you suppose I don't know how the world speaks of me and Helga? I worship her the more for it."

"Jacobs, old man," said Koenigsen, "what is it the doctor says is the matter with you?"

"Aneurism of *the* heart," replied Jacobs, grimly. "There's but one end to that. I may last a year or

The Other Mrs Jacobs

two with care, or I may die at any moment if it comes to strain. You've given me your word, mind—nothing to Helga."

"I've given it to you," said Kœnigsen. "Upon my soul, Jacobs, I'm sorry; but I hope it isn't so bad as you think."

"No good crying over spilt milk. I've lived too fast—only in the way of business understand, at all events since I married. A man with a wife like Helga doesn't lead a double life. But, when you begin on nothing a year, you can't make a fortune without spending the only capital you've got—your health. And that's what I've done. But I don't regret it; I'd do the same over again, since it assures Helga's future. But there comes a time when one must lie down at last. It's a case of the lion coming up from his prey. I've never wished harm to any man, but in the City you've got to fight, and it's the best fighter that comes uppermost. Well, the old lion has couched down now. I can't get that text out of my head; the wife has always called me Lion. What is it, Hornblow?"

"If you please, sir, Mrs Jacobs thinks you might not have remembered, perhaps, that dinner was later than usual; and Mr Ronald would like to have a chat with Mr Kœnigsen before going to bed, sir."

"All right! You go up, Kœnigsen. I'll follow you presently."

Hornblow closed the door again and the two men got up. Kœnigsen took his cigar from the amber holder he habitually used, and which he now replaced in its case. Jacobs held out his hand across the corner of the table.

"I can depend on you, Kœnigsen, as a St Helgan man, to look after my Helga's interests."

"You may depend on me," said Kœnigsen. With an apparent impulse he took Jacobs's other hand. But the painter's palms were clammy. Ordinarily he shook hands in limp fashion, but his grip to-night

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was tenacious. It deceived his host. Nevertheless, it was of himself in connection with the woman who was the central object of both their thoughts that the painter was thinking now, rather than of the friend whom he already saw dead before him. Koenigsen was preparing to kick down the last ladder by which he had climbed.

Meanwhile, in the drawing-room the evening had been dull. Mrs Jacobs worked at her embroidery in an abstracted manner, after having set Miss Pengelley to show Ronald a new game of Patience. Ronald was extremely surly. Even his mother apologised for him. It was then that she sent the message by Hornblow to the dining-room.

Koenigsen entered alone.

"Where is my husband?" asked Mrs Jacobs.

"He's coming up presently," and Koenigsen went across as he spoke to look at Mrs Jacobs's embroidery as though he had a proprietary interest therein. His manner was caressing. He bent over her so closely that his blonde beard touched her hair.

Mrs Jacobs accepted his attentions with a sublime unconsciousness, clearly showing that she wished him to be agreeable to Ronald, but not pressing the point, as the boy was just then employed upon a difficult Patience, in the course of which he rudely contradicted Miss Pengelley, and insisted upon her working out the game all over again.

Susan at first, in the intricacies of her occupation, caught occasional snatches of Koenigsen's talk, which seemed mainly about the party he was giving on Friday—the opening, as she gleaned, of his St Helgan Gallery, to a number of persons, distinguished or otherwise. That there were some guests not specially welcome Miss Pengelley learned from the frankness with which Mr Koenigsen bewailed the necessity he was under of receiving certain dealers, vulgar patrons, and unpresentable Press people who, socially speaking, would be a blemish upon the lustre of his

The Other Mrs Jacobs

entertainment. It occurred casually to Miss Pengelley that these detrimental might constitute some of the ladders Mr Kœnigsen was credited with wishing to kick down.

A question of etiquette in regard to the particular duchess of royal birth and artistic proclivities seriously perplexed him, and he was looking to St Helga—as he called Mrs Jacobs—to help him through his difficulties.

"You are my saint—my guardian angel—my inspiration!" he exclaimed. "Without you I could do nothing."

Mrs Jacobs gazed up at him, faint sarcasm in her clear blue eyes. He did not often indulge in such florid compliments. She smiled quizzically.

"I don't know when I began to be your guardian angel, Karl," she said.

"When you were a dainty little lady of seven, and I mended your hoop for you, and drew a picture of you, in the blue and red chalks with which the fishermen made their tallies, on the end of an old barrel—do you remember?" He had glanced across towards the pair at the other end of the room. They seemed engrossed with their Patience. But he dropped his voice as a precautionary measure.

Mrs Jacobs laughed outright.

"I *don't* remember, but I'll take your account for granted—the budding Giotto! You've been telling that story to an interviewer. I read it not long ago in one of the papers. I thought—well, I thought, Karl, that you would have had better taste than to talk about me quite so freely. You may have drawn me in red and blue chalks on the end of a barrel at St Helga, but it is an episode that I have totally forgotten."

"That's likely enough," he returned, in no way abashed by her gentle rebuke. "You were—the President's daughter."

"Poor, dethroned President!" she put in. "I can

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only think of him as my beloved father, who was unhappy, and is dead. You knew me, Karl, when I was prosperous—not later, in the days of my tribulation.”

“If I had but known you then,” he exclaimed, “life might have been different for both of us. If I had been with you in the time of your sorrow instead of—your husband!”

“He was very good to me,” she said thoughtfully. “No one could have been kinder.”

“But you didn’t love him, Helga. You never loved him. Be honest with yourself. You married him from gratitude. To think of you as the wife of Ahasuerus-Jacobs!”

“Hush!” she said with sudden dignity, glancing anxiously at her son and Miss Pengelley. “I can listen to nothing in disparagement of my husband. I am proud, and—and—*glad* to be the wife of the best man I have ever known.”

“Nevertheless, he is Ahasuerus-Jacobs, the advertising agent and money-lender. I don’t disparage your husband. Far from it, Helga. I respect and admire him. That I must envy him, too, is my—misfortune. Forgive me, for the sake of the days when you were my princess and I your vassal. It was no sin to worship you then. And, after all, you are the same Helga and I the same Karl. How can I help worshipping you still—my ideal—my dream lady?”

Helga shook her head. There was a shade of embarrassment in her manner, but she tried to laugh again lightly.

“Spare me any more of your rhapsodies, Karl. You are talking nonsense to-night. I can’t think what has come over you. You must have been reading some of my novels. ‘Spiridia’ is always accused by critics of over-fine sentiment—of trotting out ideals, dream ladies, fairy princes, and all the rest of our romantic stock-in-trade. Hush! hush!” as he

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protested in a fervid whisper. "Real life is too commonplace to deal in that sort of thing; and you and I are too good friends to think of it when we're alone together. We'll keep it for the British public—Thackeray's 'Great Big Stupid,' you know—supplied with ink and oils. And that reminds me—aren't you going to look at Ron's drawings? Ron! what *have* you done with the cards? Oh, Miss Pengelley, don't trouble!"

For Ronald, in a fit of temper, had flung the neat little piles on to the carpet.

"Now, you can pick 'em up, Miss Pengelley," he cried pettishly; "and so much for your wonderful new Patience."

"My dear Ron!" exclaimed his mother, admonishingly, "I am sure you must be tired. It's too late for you to be up."

"And you've monopolised Karl all the evening! Haven't you done with all this St Helgan rot? I want you, Karl."

"Gently, boy," put in the painter, in indulgent tones. "And look here—you're making a mistake about this Still-Life Exhibition. You've two days yet before you need send up. I'll come to-morrow afternoon, and criticise the drawings by daylight."

"That will do very nicely," said Mrs Jacobs. "I'm going out between three and five. You shall take care of Ron while Miss Pengelley does some typing for me. I intend to make you useful," she added, nodding at Miss Pengelley, "for I'm dreadfully behindhand with my new book. Now, Ron, here is Hornblow for you. You really must go off."

The assiduous Hornblow brought young Jacobs his crutch, and amid grumbling and cross adjurations to his slaves to "leave him alone and not bother," the youth, under Hornblow's and his mother's guidance, was conveyed across the landing. Mrs Jacobs turned at the door. "I'll be back presently, and we'll go down, Karl, and keep Lion company. Evidently he

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prefers the smoking-room. Miss Pengelley, if you're tired, you mustn't mind leaving us."

Thus virtually dismissed, Miss Pengelley, who had certainly no desire for Koenigsen's company, said good-night, and retired to the solitude of her small chamber.

CHAPTER IV

DOCTOR GRIER

SUSAN breakfasted alone the following morning, which was something of a relief to her. It gave her time to collect her thoughts for the day. She ventured to ask for the morning papers. Hornblow, who replied, told her that they were all taken up to Mr Ronald's room, and that he would try to obtain one for her as soon as possible, but Susan bade him not trouble, and felt sorry for having asked. She had not the least idea what duties she would be required to perform, and after breakfast she dawdled over the fire, her knitting in her hand, not liking to sit down and do anything on her own account, for she expected every minute to be summoned to Mrs Jacobs.

Jennings had told her—in answer to her inquiries—when she brought the hot water and early cup of tea, that Mrs Jacobs breakfasted alone, and that Mr Ronald also had his breakfast before rising. Apparently the different members of the family were accustomed to take their morning meals separately, for, according to Jennings's further information, Mr Jacobs had his at a very early hour before starting for his office. Mr Jacobs was certainly a hard-working man. Thinking over the previous evening, Susan felt her impression concerning Mr Jacobs confirmed. There was something about the man which strongly appealed to her—not least the tragic element she had intuitively discovered underlying the outward *bon-homie*. She wondered to what this could be due. It

Doctor Grier

did not seem possible that it could be laid to his wife's charge. Yet Miss Pengelley had divined that, notwithstanding her gracious appreciation of him, and her care for his comfort, "Spiridia" did not love her husband. And in reading "Spiridia's" books Miss Pengelley had formed the conclusion that their author could love deeply and passionately. Had the capacity for love crystallised entirely in mere maternal devotion to her afflicted son? It appeared so, and yet Susan felt instinctively that this was not the case.

Presently, as she had expected, Susan received a summons from Mrs Jacobs, who sent for her to her study, and the girl went upstairs wondering where this room could be. She found it adjoining Mrs Jacobs's bed-chamber—a tiny slip, evidently intended originally for a dressing-room. There were two or three ship logs burning in the grate, and giving a cheerful look to the little room, which, small though it was, had the stamp of its owner's individuality. The walls, an indescribable tint between rose and violet, were lined half-way with book-cases—chiefly works of reference, for Mrs Jacobs kept the more interesting part of her library for her son's benefit in his sitting-room. A writing-table and a typewriter stand occupied the greater part of the available space. Besides, there were a couple of armchairs and two small upright ones. That practically comprised the furniture of the room. But with flowers, dainty silver knick-knacks, St Helgan tapestry, and a few rare bits of china, the little study looked most attractive.

Mrs Jacobs met Miss Pengelley at the door and seemed at first almost unwilling that her companion should enter this sanctum, thus Susan only caught glimpses of it behind "Spiridia's" tall, slight form. The needs of business, however—for Susan was taking directions to answer notes and type some sheets of manuscript—compelled Mrs Jacobs to let her secretary come in, but she did not ask her to sit

The Other Mrs Jacobs

down. Miss Pengelley, however, did not resent this grudging attitude on the part of "Spiridia." It was in keeping with a certain virginal reticence in regard to the woman's real individuality—a different thing from the outward presentment—which to the adoring Devonshire girl seemed already sacrosanct. But in manner Mrs Jacobs was perfectly commonplace.

"I have a spare typewriter which I will send down to the dining-room for you," said she. "You'd better work there, I think. Nobody is likely to disturb you, for the room is only used at meal times. You understand a Remington, Miss Pengelley?"

Susan said she had learnt on a Remington, and glanced over the sheaves of sprawling manuscript handed her. She saw that the writing would be difficult to decipher. Spiridia did not write a legible hand, as she herself confessed, with a frank laugh.

"My thoughts always go so much faster than my pen, that I find it a hard matter to keep up with them," she said. "However, I hope you will be able to make this out. If you cannot, please leave spaces, and we can fill in the bits afterwards. I shall ask you not to come and disturb me with questions, Miss Pengelley, for I like to take this hour or two uninterrupted if possible, as soon as my housekeeping duties are over and before I go in to my boy, who is not yet up. By-and-by, perhaps, you will read to him instead of me, and then I shall be able to get through more work."

Susan nodded pleasantly, but with a mental reservation. Though she did not mind how many hours a day she spent in typing for Mrs Jacobs, she was in no hurry to act as reader for Master Ronald. Seeing now that Mrs Jacobs no longer required her, she tucked the manuscript under her arm and ran downstairs. In a few minutes Hornblow appeared in the dining-room panting under the weight of the Remington, a former-grade one of the same kind as that with which Susan had been accustomed to

Doctor Grier

type her father's sermons. He placed it on the writing-table before the window. Here it was in the best possible light. Nevertheless, Susan could scarcely see to do her work, for the lower half of the window was filled up with closely-hanging strings of Algerian beads, which screened it from the gaze of passers-by. The room looked out upon the street, where the opposite row of tall grey houses loomed gloomily. Like many London dining-rooms, it was dark and dreary in the day-time, and Susan was glad of the standard electric lamp which Hornblow put beside her, and turned on for her benefit. She soon settled to work, and, as was her custom, put her whole soul into the task before her. Soon she grew interested in the story. It seemed—or so she fancied—to give her some insight into the authoress's character and life, and she could not forbear, after the fashion of many readers, from conjecturing resemblances between certain situations in the book and such as might possibly have occurred to "Spiridia." At eleven o'clock the footman appeared with a request that she would go up to Mr Ronald. Somewhat regretfully Susan sorted the sheets, laying them in a neat pile, with a paper weight on the top, and followed the man, who led the way upstairs and through the door opposite the drawing-room, into Ronald's sitting-room.

It was the first time that she had been into this room, and it struck her unpleasantly. If Ronald's supposedly enlightened taste found cause for objection in the pseudo Greek art of the First Empire as favoured by his father, his own passion for colour and grotesque adornment was less chaste and certainly less reposeful. As far as the original tones of his walls could be determined they were an odd pinky-yellow vermillion, but there was a frieze of fiery blue scaled dragons—a sort of old temple decoration—below the embossed ceiling, and a dado of books in brilliant leather and gold bindings, leaving but a

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narrow intermediate space, which was filled up with oddments in pottery, metal and framed embroidery. The couch was a low, wide divan, covered with gorgeous cushions. There was an unwholesome scent of sandalwood. An enormous pot of yellow lilies stood upon a carved pedestal in the window, and here and there, were impressionist landscapes, specimens of K enigsen's early work. A corner of the room was filled up, studio fashion, with a screen of tissue paper against the window in it, to soften the light, an easel holding an unfinished drawing, and a table with an array of brushes, china palettes with dried-up Indian ink, and various artist's implements. The room had a pleasant outlook over gardens at the back, where a gleam of wintry sunshine was striving to pierce the fog. The trees were leafless, but the spread of lawn and winding walks brought to Susan some faint suggestion of the country and of home.

Ronald himself, small, shrunken, dark-eyed and pale of face, was lying back in a deep chair, with crimson and yellow cushions at his back, a handsome embroidered coverlet across his knees. On the table beside him stood a little tray with a bowl of milk or soup which he had just emptied. He made the slightest possible attempt at a morning greeting, and turned instantly to his mother, who was standing beside him.

"So you're going, mum. Well, I hope the work will progress all the quicker for the extra time you are giving it. Now, Miss— I can't remember your name."

"Pengelley," said Mrs Jacobs, as she left the room.

"I hate long names," grumbled Ronald. "Sit down, please. It always fidgets me to see people standing. Take that book beside you." He pointed a thin finger to a volume of travels in the East which lay on the table close by. "You'll find a marker at the right place. Read on till I tell you to stop

Doctor Grier

Susan took the book. She was angry at his mode of speech, and was inclined to let him see it, but the boy was sublimely indifferent to his own lack of manners. She found the place without comment and began to read. Her voice was clear and well modulated. She read well, and was not troubled by the nervousness she would naturally have felt had the youth been less insufferably rude. She went on calmly—a distant inflection in her voice which made her seem aloof from everything but the matter in hand. She became interested too. Ronald was a conceited boor, but he had, notwithstanding, a certain amount of literary cultivation, and there was something pathetic in his yearning for foreign adventure and Oriental colouring. Miss Pengelley pleased Ronald. He preferred a machine to serve him—except where his mother was in question—and Susan's voice was soothing. Ronald was always more unbalanced in the mornings. When at length Susan stopped to rest for a moment, after reading many pages, he grunted, in the nearest approach to affability, "You read well."

Susan disdained to reply, and after a minute continued. It apparently never occurred to Ronald that she might get tired. She went steadily on for an hour, and then Hornblow came to fetch his young master downstairs for an airing in a wheeled chair that Ronald usually took in the gardens before luncheon.

To Susan's relief and satisfaction she was not asked to accompany him, though she caught a look in Ronald's face which seemed to indicate that he was debating whether or not he should command her services. Susan, however, beat a hasty retreat.

Then suddenly she remembered the notes she had to answer for "Spiridia." They kept her occupied until luncheon time, when Ronald was brought in from the garden, looking certainly in a more amiable mood. Miss Pengelley found the meal trying, never-

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theless, for Mrs Jacobs and her son were so much to each other that any ordinary third person present must necessarily be left more or less out of the conversation. Susan ate her luncheon, taking but little part in the talk, in which from time to time Mrs Jacobs made perfunctorily polite attempts to include her. It was not of much use. The topics were too new to Susan, and gradually even Mrs Jacobs ceased to pay any heed to her companion.

After luncheon Susan expected to receive further directions for the afternoon, but none seemed forthcoming. Mrs Jacobs, before she had left the table, glanced over the various notes Susan had written, and simply remarking that they were "all right," requested Miss Pengelley to give them to the butler to stamp and post. Then she went away upstairs, her mind evidently full of her own affairs. Ronald, too, with some grumbling and grunting, was conveyed from the dining-room to his own sitting-room for his afternoon rest, and Susan found herself once more alone. The obliging Hornblow had placed *The Morning Post* at the corner of the writing-table for her edification, and she took it up, and, drawing her chair to the fire, sat down for a few minutes' quiet reading before going on with her work. But Miss Pengelley could not keep her attention on the paper. Her mind went wandering off, and she reflected upon the various aspects of her new life. She knew herself to be unreasonable, yet she began to regret having undertaken the post. She disliked the feeling of having lost her independence, of being at the beck and call of an employer—worse than that, of being brought into contact with young Ronald, for whom she had already conceived something akin to detestation. She foresaw that a considerable part of her duties would consist in reading to, and attending upon, Ronald. She had been prepared to throw herself heart and soul into working for "Spiridia," but her ardour was already chilled

Doctor Grier

by the sense of coldness and aloofness in the novelist. And if her intercourse with "Spiridia" was to be confined to typing down here in this dreary room and delivering her tale of bricks at the end of the day, Miss Pengelley thought that the occupation would be less congenial than she had anticipated. She had to force herself to remember that she was in receipt of a regular salary, which was a matter of moment to her. It was only natural to suppose that she must render a fair amount of work in return. Therefore it remained for Miss Pengelley to decide how far she was prepared, for the sake of her salary and for the honour and glory of living with "Spiridia," to put up with such small disagreeables as her position would entail upon her. She had half a mind to give up her situation and try for work which would not oblige her to live in the home of her employer. She was honest enough to confess to herself that it was her own silly pride which made her dislike to be an appendage. But, after all, why should she not have her pride and live in a garret if she preferred being queen of that humble abode in off hours to dining as a dependant at a rich man's table?

Miss Pengelley, beneath her demure exterior, had a good deal of character, and though she was quite willing to efface herself at her own discretion when circumstances appeared to demand the sacrifice, she was not prepared to relish the process when performed by other people.

The money she received was again an important consideration, but surely there must be other situations, other kinds of employment, to which she might turn. Susan began to think that the post of companion was not wholly delectable. It seemed to be a sort of no-man's-land, which included all the drawbacks and none of the advantages of any other walk in life. However, she had come to Mrs Jacobs on a month's trial, and it would be wiser, she decided, to see the month through. At the worst, she could

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leave when it ended, and if she could continue to remain for a quarter, Mrs Jacobs would probably give her a recommendation elsewhere.

Having made up her mind to this course, Susan went back to the writing-table and her typewriter. She was far too conscientious to waste time which she considered another person had bought, and so set to work with a will, typing in almost an unnecessarily careful way, and thus driving off for the present troublesome thoughts.

So fully occupied was her mind that she paid no attention to the driving up of the carriage and the departure of Mrs Jacobs on her afternoon round, nor to various rings at the door-bell and the ushering up of a visitor to Ronald's sitting-room, whom she afterwards remembered must be Mr Koenigsen come to look at the boy's drawings. She had left the door of the room ajar, as it had been placed by the butler after luncheon, and so, as she sat at her work, was in full view of anyone on the staircase. The demure little figure in its neat serge dress had its back turned to the door, and consequently her face could not be seen, but her brown head was visible as she bent assiduously over her work, and she looked the very embodiment of conscientious application. Presently a brougham drove to the door, and a tall, broad-shouldered, grey-headed man alighted. His peculiar, long-drawn ring was answered immediately, for Hornblow knew better than to keep Doctor Grier waiting. On the way upstairs the doctor caught sight of Miss Pengelley.

"Is that the lady who was expected?" he asked bluntly of the butler.

"Yes, sir. Miss Pengelley arrived last evening," replied the deferential Hornblow.

"Half a minute, Hornblow—you can wait for me," was the doctor's reply, and, turning round, he came down the two or three stairs he had ascended, and advanced with long strides—he was a big man—into the dining-room.

Doctor Grier

Miss Pengelley did not hear his tread on the soft carpet, and was consequently exceedingly astonished when a large, firm hand was laid upon her shoulder, and a gruff, but not unkindly, voice said,—

"Now, young woman, stop that and listen to me."

Susan half turned, too much astonished to speak.

"You're the new importation, aren't you?" went on the doctor, unmoved by her surprise.

"I—I came yesterday," stammered Miss Pengelley, wondering who he was and what he wanted with her.

"Well, I must have a talk to you. I'm just going upstairs to see the young man. I don't suppose I shall be very long, but you stop here, please. Let me find you in this room when I come back. That's all."

Susan was held as in a vice by the pressure of that strong, nervous hand. She had the consciousness of something very powerful hovering over her. The voice, which was slightly Scotch in its accent, went on, and the doctor took away his hand.

"You and I will have to understand each other. There are two or three little points we are going to discuss."

A kind of half smile twitched the doctor's mouth, as Miss Pengelley, released, suddenly faced him, her jaw dropping and her eyes round with amazement.

"My name's Grier—medical attendant, you know. Don't look as though I were going to eat you. I daresay I seem an unmannerly brute, but it's only because I'm a busy man and can't waste my time in beating about the bush. You'll see—we shall get on all right."

He put his hand upon her shoulder again encouragingly for a moment, and the touch sent an astonishing thrill through Susan Pengelley. The doctor moved away, and she gazed after his long, straight figure in its well-cut frock-coat, not knowing whether to laugh or to be indignant. She had found plenty in the

The Other Mrs Jacobs

house since she came to rouse her indignation, and it did not seem altogether surprising that there should be something fresh to do so. Oddly enough, however, she did not resent Doctor Grier's attitude towards her; it piqued her curiosity; but she saw plainly that, whether indignant or not, it would be useless to show it to him as she felt inclined to do to Ronald.

"What a very odd man!" she thought. "And what in the world can he want to talk to me about? I did not come here as a nurse."

Puzzled and perturbed, but not absolutely displeased, Susan remained motionless, thinking over the situation. Her mind was fully alive to the possibilities that it indicated, for evidently Doctor Grier had something serious to say to her, and ever since she had been in the house Susan had felt that there was a great deal she should like to be told. It seemed a strange thing for a stranger to come and talk to her like this. Susan wondered what it would lead to. So far, Doctor Grier had not had any possible opportunity of understanding what sort of person she was, and consequently it was puzzling in the extreme that he should feel inclined to take her into his confidence. She was so interested in her reflections that she forgot how time went, and sat idle, her hands in her lap, looking straight up the staircase, down which the doctor should return. More than half an hour elapsed before he reappeared. When at length he did so, she merely lifted her eyes to greet him, without a word. There was nothing for her to say; it was for him to speak, since he had sought the interview. He closed the door as he came in, and advanced across the room with a grim and rather sardonic smile.

"Well, young woman, you haven't done much since I went up. You'll never get on at this rate, you know."

"I haven't tried to," said Susan, simply. "I have

Doctor Grier

been thinking about you, and what you wanted to see me for."

"Good. That's a straight answer, at all events. Well, I'll soon enlighten your curiosity."

He pulled forward a chair opposite to Miss Pengelley, who was sitting sideways before her typewriter, and put himself slowly and deliberately into it, eyeing her in a keen way with a pair of very piercing grey eyes, while she, in her turn, was able to study him, which she did freely, feeling that there was no need to consider formalities. His face was impressive; clean shaven, gaunt-featured, with a peculiarly mobile mouth, and a somewhat awe-inspiring determination. The head was covered with short, iron-grey hair, which receded on either side at the forehead, and was set on a long, lean neck. Notwithstanding his roughness of manner, he was clearly a gentleman, and a refined one—as Susan, who was a bit of a palmist, could tell from his well-shaped, sensitive hands, which he held in front of him, the fingers joined in a deliberative manner. He did not speak for quite a minute. Susan gave an awkward laugh.

"Well, Doctor Grier?"

"Well—I was thinking. Now let me recommend you not to waste your time when you are given manuscripts to type. I should say that you are a scrupulous young woman. Your conscience will prick you when you awake to the fact that you're neglecting the work you're required to do. You haven't turned in your chair since I left the room."

"How do you know that?" asked Susan, promptly.

Doctor Grier gave his shoulders an elephantine shrug.

"Because your gown happens to hang in the same folds as when I was here last. Also, the same sheet is in the typewriter, and the pointer hasn't moved an inch."

Susan's light hazel eyes glistened.

"You are very observant."

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"So are you. My profession obliges me to be, and so, I take it, does yours."

Miss Pengelley nodded. The man understood her. She felt him to be almost congenial. His brusqueness no longer offended. The insignificant little spinster, conventional and colourless though she might appear, had something in her that rose in rapid response to his scrutiny.

"Aren't you wasting time now in reading me a homily on my work?" said she, demurely.

"No, I'm not. I have my own methods of going about my duties, just as you have about yours. I like a straight eye and a straight answer. I see I can get 'em from you. Well," he went on, "you'll have to use your wits here. I'll wager that you don't half know what you've come for?"

"To perform the duties of a companion—to make myself generally useful," said Susan, with a twinge of bitterness in her tone.

"A good deal more than that. Any fool can be a companion, speaking generally. Here you'll need tact, judgment, perception and common sense—which last is the saving grace of all difficulties."

"Suppose you tell me exactly what *is* wanted of me," remarked Susan.

"Just what you can give without particular trouble, but with, I imagine, considerable interest to yourself. You couldn't fail to be interested in—one of my patients here." The man had hesitated a second. His voice softened slightly.

"I had better tell you at once that I don't feel the least interest in Ronald Jacobs," said Susan, bluntly.

"So I supposed," was the equally blunt reply. "The boy's insulted you, no doubt. That goes without saying. There's nothing gained by taking any notice of the young cub in that respect. But—I conclude you're interested in his mother?"

"Extremely. I would do anything for Mrs Jacobs

Doctor Grier

that she would let me, but I'm afraid that wouldn't be much, except my work."

"Wait and see. I can understand that you'll find it difficult at first, but the day may come when she'll want you—badly. Mrs Jacobs is my patient as well as her son, but she's a woman who will never admit that she is not in the most robust health—unless, as was the case last year, sheer physical inability forces her to give in. She has delicate lungs. I should like her to go to the south of France for the winter, but I fear it's impossible. I can't get her away just now."

He paused. Susan heard with astonishment his gruff tone tempered by deep solicitude. It aroused her sympathy still further. She watched him in silence. His rugged brows drew together in a furrow. Suddenly his eyes shot out a piercing gleam.

"You see," he said, as though he expected Miss Pengelley to have taken in everything that was in his mind. "We've got to do the best we can. Now this is a"—he seemed to be searching for an adjective—"a three-cornered household. You may have noticed that?"

Miss Pengelley had, in her quiet way, a shrewd wit.

"I should have supposed," she said, "from what I have seen, that Mr Koenigsen made it four-cornered."

Doctor Grier fired another sharp look at her, by which she thought he measured her perceptive faculty.

"Good! Yes, that's so." He put his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets and stared frankly at Susan. "I don't mind telling you," he said, "that I can't stick that man. I've left him up there just now. He's fiddling at Ronald's sketches. It don't do any harm to either of 'em, nor to the results of the competition, I should say. It amuses Ronald, and at all events it takes something off his mother. But that man—ugh!"

The Other Mrs Jacobs

Doctor Grier made an expressive grimace. "I suppose he's got his uses—like other parasites. And he can draw; I'll give him his due. He plays up to Ahasuerus-Jacobs—who's no judge of character, whatever else he may be—for the sake of getting puffs gratis into the newspapers. He plays up to 'Spiridia' because she was the most important girl in St Helga—and he's trotting out St Helga just now, to get all he can out of it. Also because she is—*what she is*. And he plays up to Ronald to please his mother. But all that's no concern of ours. Now, young woman, you're no fool. D'you take in what I'm driving at? Can you make yourself a sort of buffer, and keep things from bumping up against each other? It mayn't be altogether pleasant or easy, you know, but I've studied you pretty closely during the last ten minutes, and I take it you're a fairly capable young woman, and level-headed. Can you keep your head in an emergency—if there should happen to come an emergency?" He spoke the last words slowly.

"What sort of emergency?" asked Susan. "I didn't expect to be called upon for anything outside of the—ordinary routine. That's not my business."

"When you've lived as long as I have, young woman, you'll know that you're liable to be called upon for anything outside of ordinary routine at any moment. One of the first things you've got to learn in life—if you mean to be of use to anybody—is when to mind your own business and when to mind other people's. As to this job, you'll soon see whether it suits you or not. If it doesn't you can cut it, you know."

He regarded her intently. Susan's shoulders gave a rather impatient twitch.

"I wish you'd tell me what I'm to expect. Do you mean that Ronald's going to die?"

"No, I don't. Not yet, at all events—though it's on the cards that he might, and a good thing too.

Doctor Grier

His existence is only an irk to himself and everybody besides—even his mother, who dotes on him. No one else could care twopence about him, of course, he's such an insufferable young ass. He wouldn't have been a bad sort of boy properly brought up, but he has been spoiled from his cradle. Mistaken kindness on his mother's part—his infirmity, of course, the chief reason. It's no good considering causes—we've got to deal with results—that's the deuce in life. She has made herself a slave to the boy. He's literally sapping her system. Now there may be trouble before her—of a different kind." Again the doctor's voice softened. "She's got to get the strength to stand it in case it comes. Look here, Miss Pengelley—that's your name, isn't it? If you were a fool, I'd suggest to you to pack up and go—you've been considering it, I see. But you're *not* a fool, and you'll stay."

"You seem to have come to a definite opinion about me," said Susan, sharply, but with a pleased smile. "Yes, I shall stay."

Doctor Grier looked at her with narrowed eyelids—it was a trick he had—focussing upon her for the moment with all his energies.

"Good!" he remarked. "You're no fool—I said so. That's why I'm wasting all this time on you. Understand me, young woman, I don't pay afternoon calls. Now, just give your mind to this—if these people are left to their own devices, they'll hurry each other into their graves. The boy suffers from cerebral trouble—you've noticed he's half paralysed. The chief membranes are affected—you wouldn't know their names if I told you. He gets attacks of blinding pain, when his mother goes nearly mad, and I come in with morphia injections to stop it. But the young scamp merely wants feeding and stimulating—not fussing over. You can do pretty nearly as much for him as I can. Make yourself necessary to him, then snub him if he doesn't behave. He'll learn

The Other Mrs Jacobs

to respect you for it, if he doesn't like you any the better. As for his mother, keep him away from her as much as possible. She's a highly-strung creature, and her nerves aren't good for much any more than her lungs. She's wearing herself out, simply preparing a weapon for her own destruction in that boy. She had an attack of hæmorrhage last year from tending him. If she gets another I can't answer for the consequences. D'you take this in?"

"I think so." Susan nodded slowly. "But what can *I* do?"

"Save her in every way you can. She can't stand strain. Shield her in case of stress or—sudden shock. Fill up chinks. Women like you are born to fill up chinks. And a good thing for the rest of the world that you're there to do it."

Miss Pengelley smiled sadly. The kindness in the man's tone, however, in spite of its gruffness, robbed the words of their sting.

"Very well. But as to details?"

"They're not my business. *You've* got to work in details. Keep your eyes open, and stick to the lines I've shown you." He got up and stood, his brows bent in a frown. "I don't say you'll find it easy. It won't be. But someone's wanted here, and, in a sense, even a fool would have been better than no one. That was why I urged Mrs Jacobs to have a companion."

"Then I'm indebted to you for my engagement, am I?" retorted Susan, with a quick sally.

He smiled broadly. Now she noticed how his smile sweetened, and, in a fashion, spiritualised his face. She noticed indelible signs of suffering there, and had a darting suspicion that Doctor Grier's strange roughness and disdain of minor conventionalities might have arisen from the breaking of an illusion. Miss Pengelley's intuition told her that the man who postured as a hard-headed, hard-spoken medical practitioner might be in the depths of him

Doctor Grier

a tender-hearted idealist. If so, it seemed a sin, she thought, to have shattered Doctor Grier's ideals.

The doctor's narrowed eyes were no longer reading Miss Pengelley, but had fixed themselves upon an old silver platter against the carved wall. He was silent for several seconds; then he drew a long breath, and shook himself free from what were evidently disquieting thoughts.

"Come now, young woman, you're on in this job? and we understand each other?"

"I'll do my best," said Susan.

"Common sense diluted with—shall we say, tact? It's a rare combination. Try it. Here's my card. If you want me, send round—Hyde Park Street—I'm close by. But mind, I'm not a fashionable consulting physician; I take my bad cases early, and eleven to two are my hours at home."

"But, doctor," demurred Susan. "How am I to know whether or not you are wanted? I'm not a nurse. And really I can't interfere with Mrs Jacobs's care of her son."

"Stuff!" said the doctor. "I said you weren't a fool. Don't make yourself out one. This is no case for a nurse. If I thought a nurse necessary I'd put one in." He held out his hand, and took Susan's palm in his. "*Your* business is to see that we don't have a nurse—understand?"

"H'm! Yes, I understand," replied Miss Pengelley, dubiously. "I hope you won't be disappointed in me, Doctor Grier."

"I don't mean to be," he answered, as he left her.

CHAPTER V

A DAUGHTER OF THE SEA

MRS JACOBS'S brougham drove up again just as Miss Pengelley—determined not to let her interview with the doctor unsettle her powers of concentration past mending—was preparing to resume her typewriting. Doctor Grier's coachman, summoned by his master from the opposite direction, pulled round sharply to let Mrs Jacobs's carriage pass. She gave an exclamation of surprise and pleasure as the doctor stepped forward and opened the door for her to get out.

"I didn't expect to see you to-day," she said, holding out her hand. "Nothing is wrong with Ronald? They didn't send for you, did they?"

"No; I merely came to see how things were getting on. He's doing very well. There have been no more attacks of pain?"

"No, thank God!"

The two passed into the house.

"You'll stop and speak to me for a few moments?" said Mrs Jacobs.

She led the way along the hall, through what was evidently Mr Jacobs's smoking-room—the French windows of which gave on to the garden—into a narrower room beside it. This had a small window banked up with flowers, a writing-table at an angle with the window, a fireplace, a couch and one or two chairs. There was also a bookcase filled with unin-

A Daughter of the Sea

teresting reference volumes—directories, Court guides, cookery books, and the like. On the table were a little pile of tradesmen's books, a sheaf of filed bills, and a packet of photographs with the name of the photographer in large letters upon it. Mrs Jacobs took a chair and motioned Doctor Grier to one opposite.

"I don't know whether you've ever been in here," she said, noticing his glance round. "It's where I interview the cook in the morning and transact other domestic business. I've been thinking that I ought to give it up to Miss Pengelley for her typewriting."

"She seems comfortable enough in the dining-room," said Doctor Grier.

"Have you seen her, then?"

"Yes. I took the liberty of interviewing the young woman on my own account."

"That was kind of you. And what do you think of her?"

"She's no fool, as I told her. She's a loyal soul, I should say. They are rare. You won't go far wrong in making a friend of her."

"I find making friends with people difficult," answered Mrs Jacobs.

"You shouldn't. People are ready enough to make friends with you."

"That's just it."

"Well! Is it a drawback?"

"I'm ungrateful, I know. People seem so much more interested in me than I am in them."

"You're not ungrateful; you're self-respecting. As a rule, people are sympathetic in proportion with what they can get out of you. By the way, you don't find it difficult—apparently—to be interested in that painter fellow—Køenigsen."

"Karl Køenigsen! You see, we were both born on St Helga."

"So I read somewhere. You inspired the career in which he has been seemingly successful by sitting

The Other Mrs Jacobs

to him for your portrait, which he drew with the pencil of a St Helgan fisherman."

"On the end of a herring barrel! I see you know all about it."

"Yes," returned the doctor, grimly. "I think I know all about it."

"You don't like Karl Kœnigsen?" she said.

"Candidly, I don't. But that's of no particular consequence. Mrs Jacobs, you have coughed three times since I've been in the room. Will you permit me to listen to your breathing?"

"Certainly, if you think it advisable. I'm sorry I haven't got a tea-gown on; they're so much more convenient. If you don't mind waiting a moment—" She moved to the couch at the end of the room and fumbled with the hooks of her bodice. He produced his stethoscope, and waited with professional gravity till she was ready. Then, leaning over her, he placed the end of the instrument against the lace and cambric which covered her chest, and slowly and carefully made his examination, remaining silent a minute or two when it was over and he had replaced his stethoscope in his breast pocket.

"Well?" she asked, looking up with a smile.

"There's no fresh mischief. You'd do all right if only you were careful—didn't go out in the evening and—what is more important—didn't run up and down stairs continually at Master Ronald's beck and call. You should leave that boy to take care of himself. It would be better for him and better for you."

"That's out of the question," she answered decidedly. "So long as my poor boy lives, so long as he needs me, I shall feel it my duty to be at his beck and call, as you put it."

"Like a woman! And where's the sense in it all?" he exclaimed roughly. "Why should your health, which is valuable to a number of persons—your life, perhaps—be sacrificed for the sake of one which"—he shrugged—"is much less worth the saving?"

A Daughter of the Sea

"Oh! Doctor Grier!" she rejoined, deeply hurt. "I did not think you could be so cruel."

"Yes, I am cruel—I admit it. I'm brutal when it's necessary. I never pretend to be otherwise. Ask your anti-vivisectionists what they think of me. But I'm true to my creed—the martyrdom of the few for the benefit of the many."

"So," she said in a curious tone, with her eyes averted, "if my death, say, would further scientific research one iota, you'd immolate me cheerfully?"

"You!"

The man reared himself, a tall grey pillar, with head bent a little towards her, the thin, flexible lips twitching queerly. He said not another word; but the manner in which he uttered the monosyllable made her turn quickly to him, a questioning look in her eyes. With trembling fingers she readjusted the velvet and lace of her bodice. A little bunch of Parma violets fell out as she did so. Doctor Grier stooped and picked it up, but she noticed that he did not give it back to her. He turned his back upon her deliberately, and, going towards the window, took up the chair he had been sitting in and planted it nearer the couch. When he returned she saw that the violets were no longer in his hand. Her breath came quickly. She was not at ease. Her usually calm manner had deserted her, but the man did not appear conscious of it.

"Well, Mrs Jacobs," he began, in a slow, expressionless tone as he seated himself, "did your husband tell you that he'd been to see me the other day?"

"Lion? No, he said nothing about it. I suppose that he was anxious about Ronald or me. I hope you did not alarm him?"

"No; I did not alarm him about you or Ronald, so I suppose he did not think the visit he paid me worth mentioning."

"I suppose not. But I'm glad you didn't frighten him unnecessarily. I felt just a little uneasy about

The Other Mrs Jacobs

Lion himself last night. He did not seem quite as usual."

"Not quite as usual, eh? What was the matter?"

"He had had a long day in the City. There was something different in his manner—partly excitement, partly depression. I fancied he might not be well. But when Mr Kœnigsen came in he cheered him up. I don't suppose there was anything really the matter. Lion has always had such splendid health."

"So he has always had splendid health!" repeated the doctor.

"Always. It is I who have been the weakly, nerve-ridden creature. I who am responsible for everything—*everything*."

"What do mean by 'everything'? It seems to me that things have gone fairly prosperously with you in a general sense."

"You know that to me everything means the one thing—and that is Ronald. I can never cease from reproaching myself—"

"For what?"

"You know! If I had been happier—more self-controlled—he would not have been as he is."

"Then you were *not* happy before he was born?" said the doctor, in a low voice.

"How could I be? I had had so much trouble. I—I was miserable. There was a time when I wished to destroy myself."

"You didn't want to marry your husband? It was that which made you miserable?" He spoke in the same repressed way, but there was a faint question in the tone.

She seemed reluctant to speak, but his grey eyes upon her face had almost a mesmeric effect.

"You needn't mind telling me," he said, "though, no doubt, you wouldn't speak of this to—anyone else."

"No, but—you're different."

"Am I different from anyone else to you?"

A Daughter of the Sea

"Ah! Yes." She struggled for composure. "A doctor one regards like one's lawyer or a priest."

"Of course. I'm used to confidences—get some queer ones occasionally. You can trust me."

"I am sure of it. I have often thought—if you had been there then, I should not have felt so friendless."

"Yes," he said quickly. "If I had been there—! Where? And when?"

"It was at Helsingkräad—after the trouble in St Helga. You have heard?"

"You mean the expulsion of the President?"

"Yes. My father was very ill. And he had had great losses. We were almost penniless."

He gave an inarticulate sound which might have meant anything. She had paused, one thin hand pulling feverishly at the laces at her throat. Remembrance was painful to her.

"And so—you got married?" said the doctor.

"Mr Jacobs, who was in business at Helsingkräad, became acquainted with us," she said, speaking rapidly. "He was very kind to my father. We could not help liking him. After a time I found out that—he had paid for things for us. My father wouldn't have lived so long if it hadn't been for him. I knew, too, that he was not rich himself—then. He did not begin to be prosperous till afterwards, when a rich old man took him into partnership. It was before that—that I married him. It was the only thing I could do. He—he had been so very kind."

"And from that day?"

"Oh! from that day he has been tremendously successful. He always says I brought him luck"—with a little laugh. "After my father died we went to Paris. He made one or two good *coups* there. It was in Paris that he began to collect beautiful things for me. He has always thought so much of me. Ronald was born in Paris."

"Ah! Within a year of your marriage?"

The Other Mrs Jacobs

"Yes—oh!" and she shivered. "It is dreadful to look back."

"Why, in Heaven's name, did you marry a man you could not love?"

She was thinking deeply. The question gave her a sudden start.

"You mustn't misunderstand me. It isn't like that now. Lion has been so good to me. I should be inhuman if I did not—care for him. But I think I was not human then."

"Not human!"

"You know the old stories of people who were half fairies—those northern legends of sea-women who yearned for the love of men, and through it to gain an immortal soul, yet who could not, because of their nature, endure to be cribbed in human habitations, and who were always craving for elemental joys. Women who needed an impossible sort of love, great, strong, almost rough, all-embracing—like the sea. Do you follow what I mean?"

"I believe I do."

"Well, it has come to me—sometimes when I have been writing, sometimes in waking dreams—that there is a Divine Fount which is Love itself—the Fount of true life, from which we all, according to the degree in which we love, may draw sustenance."

"A fine idea—if it would work."

"In that case, if the true selves of us were in connection with that Fount of love and life, no mistakes in marriage could ever be made. Each union of bodies would be a sacrament, each soul brought into the world a re-consecration."

"Yes, yes, go on."

"Oh! I've nothing more to say, and I must be boring you. I don't know what tempted me to speak of such things. They are my fancies. Writers are privileged to be imaginative. And I'm not quite like other women."

A Daughter of the Sea

"That's true. But it's of yourself I want to hear. This love that is strong—cruel perhaps through realising its strength, but all-embracing—you could trust yourself to a love like that?"

"I used to think so. It's the northern blood in me, perhaps, longing for the sea. I've always identified the sea with a love like that. In my dreams—my real dreams—I sometimes seem to be floating away on a huge, powerful, briny wave—a wave that's like strong cradling arms which would never let one go."

"Your *real* dreams, you say—what is the difference?"

"There's a difference. Those dreams belong to the self of me which just—longs for the sea."

"And for the love that is like the sea?"

She made no answer, but his gaze drew hers. The blue eyes that had a tinge of green in them in some lights—like the sea, he thought—slowly met his piercing grey ones, and the looks blended, so that his softened in a wonderful way and hers gleamed with a spark of fire. Neither spoke for several seconds. At length she gave a long sigh like that which preludes the awakening from a magnetic trance; and as he withdrew his gaze, she stared round her in a childish half-conscious manner.

"The self of you here doesn't want the sea, at all events," he said harshly. "It is quite content with driving about in a brougham or victoria, and in receiving visitors and going to shows and parties."

"That's not the real self." She laughed softly. "It's strange to be two persons, isn't it? I can separate the two me's quite easily now—except sometimes when I am writing—it's one of the reasons why I don't much care to write about St Helga. But at the beginning, they were always tearing at each other."

"And that helped to make you miserable?"

"Very likely. But if I thought in the right way

The Other Mrs Jacobs

about the child who was coming, I should have tried to be different. I did not want to bring a child into the world, but I did not realise that the child itself would be the expression of my spiritual revolt—my secret aversion. It was an unreasoning aversion, for I had nothing to complain of—you understand that? Now I know that it was the soul of me which revolted. My poor Ronald was the victim of that outrage on Nature. Then, when you talk about the sacrifice of the few for the sake of the many, and I think of that one life, for which I would gladly give my own any day, it seems horrible that Nature should revenge herself through the maternal instinct, which is stronger in me than anything else. Doctor Grier, it is partly your doing."

"My doing!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, for it is only since I have known you that I have reasoned out things to myself and hated myself because of them."

"There is no need to hate yourself," he said gently. "That is a mistake. I have taught you something, it seems, but not enough. You should have waited—you should have stayed beside your northern sea till the great wave came for you and swept you away upon its breast to the mysterious fount you speak of."

"It would have been beautiful," she murmured, "beautiful." Leaning back on her cushions, she half covered her face with her hands as though to shut out the vision. He put out his own hand and touched one of hers.

"Tell me this," he said, "if I may ask it. Did that love ever take shape? Was there ever anyone for whom you cared, beside that northern sea?"

She dropped her hands upon her lap, and the blue-green eyes looked at him with the frank gaze of a child.

"Before I was married? No, there was no one. My sea-lover has existed only in dreams. No one has ever understood that part of me."

A Daughter of the Sea

"I understand it."

"Perhaps. I think you do." She stirred uneasily. The frank eyes dropped. A flush rose slowly over the pale proud face. "Spiridia" was not the ice-cold conventional woman of the world now. She looked very human, very adorable, Miss Pengelley would have thought. And the grim grey face of the man regarding her was like a lava crust concealing volcanic fires.

Suddenly she asked,—

"*You* have no children?"

"No, I have to thank Heaven for that mercy."

"You are married, I know—though I only heard it a few days ago. Karl Koenigsen told me."

"Yes, I'm married. I've been married a good many years now—almost as long as you have."

"Karl says she is very handsome," said Helga, tentatively, in a girlish way. It was a feminine touch that evoked a slight smile from Doctor Grier.

"She *is* handsome," he admitted.

"Karl has painted her, he tells me. I must have seen the portrait. I wish I had known whose it was." There was no answer. "But I shall see her herself, on Friday. You will both be at his reception, I hear. I hope we shall get to know each other. I'll ask Karl to introduce me."

"Please, don't. I'd rather you didn't know my wife."

Helga stared at him again with her clear eyes.

"Oh! But why?"

"I'd rather you didn't. In the first place, you wouldn't get on together. But there are several reasons why I'd rather you did not know my wife. For one thing, she was born in a different position of life from you."

"That wouldn't matter in the least."

"She was married when I knew her first to some sort of tradesman. I understood that her husband had practically deserted her."

The Other Mrs Jacobs

"He must have been a very bad man."

"I daresay. Most men are bad. He'd married her on impulse, I believe, and very soon ceased to care for her."

"But that wasn't the case with you? *You* loved her?"

"I thought so, which comes to the same thing at the time. But I'm afraid my marriage wasn't in accord with the Divine Fount you mentioned just now."

Helga drew a deep breath. Her eyes shone softly.

"I'm sorry," she said. "So it was perhaps like mine—something of a mistake."

He nodded.

"But I don't see why I shouldn't know her—especially as she is going to be at Mr Koenigsen's."

"If you were anybody else, I could not tell you anything about my wife. But I'd like you to know. As things are, perhaps you ought to know. At all events the story's safe enough in your keeping."

"Have *I* not trusted *you*?" was Helga's sole response. She watched him eagerly. He hesitated somewhat still, and his face grew greyer and more grim.

"The cases are totally different. To begin with, my early relations with my wife were not legitimate. I told you she was married. I was young, and rising in my profession. Such a scandal as a divorce case would have ruined my career. The simpler course was to arrange so that her husband should believe her dead. It happened that circumstances played into my hands. She went into a hospital where I was house physician. It was supposed that she had died under an operation. I need not go into further particulars of the fraud—though it might, no doubt, afford you adaptable 'copy.' Looking back now, it seems incredible that I should have concocted and carried through such a plot. A good many queer things have happened in my life. One of the

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strangest is the way in which Fate has abetted my own headstrong will. One might almost fancy that Will is in itself of the nature of Godhead. Over and over again it has only been necessary for me to exert sufficient determination, and—no matter how difficult the object to be achieved—something—accident—coincidence—an unexpected human agency, has stepped in and enabled me to accomplish my end. Now I am sometimes afraid to resolve, lest I should be cursed with a wish fulfilled."

He spoke bitterly. Mrs Jacobs was listening with the deepest attention.

"I'm regularly poaching on your preserves," he said, with a short laugh. "It's a three-volume novel, isn't it?"

"Please go on," she said simply.

"There isn't much more. I gave up the appointment a little later, and started private practice. Some time afterwards she told me that she had learned that her husband was dead. Of course I married her, and that's all."

He got up before Helga had time to make any comment upon his story, saying abruptly, "I've wasted far too much time. This wasn't what I came for. But it's better that I shouldn't have done what I had in my mind. Good-bye, Mrs Jacobs."

"Stop! stop!" she exclaimed eagerly. "What was it you intended to do?"

"Something that will bear keeping," he replied evasively. "I've told Miss Pengelley to send for me if—anything should happen."

"What should happen? You don't anticipate disaster? Ron is doing well," she asked anxiously.

"Oh, yes, the boy's all right. I was thinking of you rather than of Ron. But you'll do for the present, I should say. Take care of yourself—if you can. Good-bye."

He shook hands. She had got up, and was standing by the writing-table. The anxious look had

The Other Mrs Jacobs

passed from her face. It lightened again as he smiled at her—a smile few people ever saw. She seemed girlishly desirous to detain him, yet scarcely knowing how to do so. Her eye fell upon the packet of photographs.

“Oh, I see these have come. You must tell me what you think of them.” She opened the covering. He could not resist the temptation, and lingered, examining the cabinet portrait she handed him. It was a half-length.

“I like this,” he said.

Something in his face made her ask shyly, “Would you—do you think you would care to have one?”

“I should care very much,” he answered.

“I’ll sign it—shall I?” She held the pen poised. “Is it to be ‘Spiridia’? No, I rather be Ron’s mother to you.”

She wrote “Helga Jacobs” across the corner of the photograph, and held it to the fire to dry. Then she gave it to him.

“You want an envelope. I’m afraid I haven’t one large enough. This will do,” and she slipped it between a sheet of notepaper, securing it with an india-rubber band.

He put it into his breast pocket, and, with a gruff “Thank you,” turned out of the room.

CHAPTER VI

CLARICE

DOCTOR GRIER was late in getting home that evening. He was too conscientious to curtail his visits to his other patients because his interviews had been lengthy with Miss Pengelley and Mrs Jacobs. The delay caused him no particular regret, beyond the fact that it made him hungry. And even so, dinner was not to him the important matter that it is to most men. He ate to live; he did not live to eat. Indeed, he was wont to say of himself that he had no interests outside his profession. He worked three-fourths of the twenty-four hours, never sparing any effort in the performance of his medical duties.

It was long past nine when he reached his house in Hyde Park Street. The door of a small room—a secondary waiting-room opposite the dining-room, where Doctor Grier's patients congregated during consulting hours—opened abruptly as he let himself into the hall. He was confronted by a small, but extremely pretty, woman, who stood full under the flash of the electric light. She looked cross but nevertheless brilliant. It would have been difficult to guess her age, or how much of her beauty was due to art. Clarice Grier knew how to make the best of herself. She employed a *masseuse* to keep down stoutness, and to promote the flow of her already vivacious blood, and she was a lucrative client to beauty specialists. Yet by nature she had a skin of milk and roses, daring dark eyes, and arched brows, a red mutinous mouth, and a quantity of wavy dark

The Other Mrs Jacobs

hair, which was elaborately dressed. Her tea-jacket, cut open at the throat, was like a crinkly scarlet poppy, and upon it a diamond and ruby beetle fastened to her left shoulder seemed to be crawling. She was an effective little figure, and though certainly nearing middle life could be enchanting enough when she chose. She seldom troubled to employ her charms upon her husband, however, and he had become indifferent to them.

"Well, I think you might have managed to come in sooner," she said. "You knew I was going to be by myself this evening."

"That was your own fault, surely," said he, with an effort at geniality. "I am delighted that you should see your friends."

"Oh, yes—to get me off your hands. I know all about that. At the same time, you object to most of the amusing people I ask to the house."

"Fifth-rate actors and actresses, and slimy parasites who'd sell their souls for the run of my cellar and a good dinner. All right. *I*, too, know all about that. We've pretty well exhausted the Kœnigsen question and others." He was rapidly opening and glancing at the letters which had been piled upon a table in the little square hall. "Though you might have had that ass of a painter. No, he's not an ass; I withdraw that epithet—that beast of a painter—if you'd like. Only I do object to paying for a portrait of you, and having it worked out as well in wine and cigars; we'll throw in the dinners."

"If it comes to that," said Clarice, casting a long, searching glance at the doctor, who was reading his letters, and took no notice of her, "there are plenty of people only too glad to dine and wine Karl Kœnigsen. He doesn't need patronage nowadays. Besides," she added, with a sort of tentative defiance, "he dines and lunches me"—she was going to say "often enough," but changed it to "occasionally."

"He's welcome, and so are you. He naturally

Clarice

finds it advisable to do his share—somehow. As long as I'm not bored with him I don't care."

"You're going to his show on Friday?" she said sharply.

"That idiotic evening reception at his St Helgan Gallery—dress toggery, and the rest of it, with seedy specimens of the Peerage on exhibition! Yes, I *am* going. I told you I'd take you—since you're always complaining that the world doesn't know that you've got a husband. Now, for goodness' sake, let me have my dinner, and stop worrying. Where's Pingpongo?"

"Little beast! He's shut up in the consulting-room. And I'd better tell you, Andrew, that if you want company during dinner you'll choose between mine and Pingpongo's. Which is it to be?—before I go into the dining-room."

"I should be ungallant to show preference for the society of a monkey," said Doctor Grier. "Come, Clarice. Pingpongo and I will eat our nuts together in my study after the fashion of primitive man."

He pushed open the dining-room door, switched on the light, and then rang the bell. It was a large room, severely but handsomely furnished, with good proof engravings and some rather fine bronzes. One end only of the table was laid, the other half was still cumbered with the books and papers supplied for the amusement of waiting patients. A big presentation bowl of silver, containing yellow chrysanthemums, and some small ferns in pots, made a division in the middle of the table. On the white cloth were four other vases of glass, holding flowers. The table equipments were dainty. It appeared that Doctor Grier was a man of means.

"I had my dinner more than an hour ago," re-remarked Clarice, subsiding, a crimson and black heap, into an armchair by the fire, and stretching out a high-heeled shoe and several inches of lace

The Other Mrs Jacobs

stocking from under the frilleries of her red silk petticoat.

"So I should suppose," said Doctor Grier, dryly. There was a copper heating apparatus on the side-board, with a spirit lamp underneath, and on it various dishes. He solemnly lifted the cover of each in turn, and then looked up straight into the face of an elderly man-servant who just appeared. "Inquire, if you please, whether there is an uncooked chop or steak in the house, or any wholesome cold meat?" he said in a voice of thunder.

"Why?" asked Mrs Grier. "Aren't the things hot? I told them to keep the lamp lighted."

"Very much too hot, thank you. Dried to a cinder."

"Well, you should have come in earlier," said Mrs Grier, easily. "You can't expect a cook to stand such late hours. She told me as much the other day. I'm expecting her to give notice every morning." Doctor Grier made no answer, but took his seat at the end of the table, pouring himself out a glass of whisky and potash water. He waited in grim silence. "I declare, Andrew, you may consider yourself lucky to have any dinner at all," went on Mrs Grier, pettishly. "If I didn't slave myself and propitiate the powers that be with a pleasant word and a holiday treat now and again we should never get a cook to stay with us. They don't like doctors' houses, and I'm not surprised at it. Dinners to be cooked at all hours, and no consideration whatever! I sha'n't dare to go downstairs to-morrow morning."

"Oh! Good Lord! Then *I'll* settle the matter for you," exclaimed the doctor.

The servant entered at the moment with a smoking bowl of soup. "Cook has a chop on the grid-iron, sir, and wishes to know whether that will be sufficient."

"No," replied the doctor. He put his elbows on

Clarice

the table, joined his fingers together, and fixed the man with his piercing grey eyes, while he spoke with slowness and force. "I wish, Johnson, to bring to your notice a fact to which I, in the exercise of my profession, am compelled to pay attention. Brain work, Johnson, is an exhausting process. Perhaps you are not aware of that?"

"No, sir—Yes, sir."

"A man who has fasted for eight hours, working his brain continually during the time, is not going to be satisfied with a twice-cooked and dried-up mess like that. Put down on the order-sheet that when I am not home by a quarter past eight nothing is to be kept hot for me, but that two dishes, not counting soup, are to be specially and freshly cooked, ready for half-past nine."

"Yes, sir."

"I have repeatedly given this order," went on Doctor Grier, "and it has not been attended to. Understand—if I have to repeat it again the cook leaves the house next morning."

"Yes, sir."

Mrs Grier gave a hysterical, rather scornful, laugh. Doctor Grier, about to begin his soup, stopped the man at the door.

"Johnson!"

"Yes, sir."

"You and the cook will each have five pounds added to your yearly wages to reimburse you for the inconvenience I am occasioning you. If you don't like these terms, you can either, or both, go."

"Yes, sir. Thank you sir."

He went out. Mrs Grier got up from her chair by the fire and came to the table, her dark head rearing itself with a suggestion of an irritated snake above the poppy red of her jacket.

"And, pray, what reimbursement am *I* to get for the inconvenience and the humiliation you are occasioning *me*?"

The Other Mrs Jacobs

Doctor Grier looked at her, and his nervous mouth twisted itself into an untranslatable expression; it might have been contempt, it might have been compunction. His eye was caught by the ruby and diamond beetle on her bodice.

"Who gave you that?" he asked suddenly.

Clarice seemed for a second taken aback by the abruptness of his question. She flushed, and her eyes dropped. But they fronted him again in an instant.

"I don't choose to render you an account, either of the things I buy or that are given to me."

Doctor Grier shrugged his shoulders.

"Whether you do so or not does not matter—perhaps. It all depends upon the giver. There's a considerable difference, remember, between buying a thing and receiving it as a present in the way you don't care to acknowledge. However, we need not argue the point just now. You should have a toad to match that crawling thing on the other side. I'll see what I can do."

He dived in his pockets, bringing out his stethoscope and a miscellaneous heap of papers and small articles. Among them was the cabinet photograph that Helga had given him in its covering, which was torn a little, held by an india-rubber band, and stuck inside the band at the back of the picture the tiny bunch of faded violets. He noticed the photograph and the violets instantly, and would have withdrawn the packet, but that would be to at once challenge Mrs Grier's attention. He laid the heap, with a small case containing surgical instruments, on the table at his elbow while he searched for some fees paid that day, which he had a habit of thrusting promiscuously anywhere about his person. At that moment Johnson entered, and Mrs Grier pushed away the contents of the doctor's pockets to make room for the chop and a dish of savoury macaroni which he set down before his master. Doctor Grier

Clarice

waited till the man had gone, then flung on the table a little heap of sovereigns. He counted out fifteen, and pushed them across to her.

"Will that condone the insult? I think you can get a small toad that I saw at Streeter's the other day for the amount."

She took the sovereigns, at first eagerly, then, with them in her hand, seemed to hesitate before dropping them into a gilt reticule that dangled from a chain at her waist. She made a sudden movement as though she would have flung them in his face.

"Good heavens, Andrew! You make me hate you."

"Why? It's not so many years ago that you used to reproach me for spending my money on instruments and experiments instead of buying you diamonds with it. I've endeavoured since my practice increased to repair the omission."

"Why!" she repeated passionately. "Do you think it's only diamonds that a woman wants of a man? Do you think I don't read the meaning of your sarcastic face, your indifference and neglect, your brutality! You are tired of me, Andrew—sick of me—though I'm better looking if anything than I was seventeen years ago. Your fancy for me is dead—dead—as Clarice Jacobs was supposed to be." She laughed again in hysterical anger. There was nothing of disappointed affection in her emotion, and he knew it. She was merely indignant that she could be of so little account.

He took no notice of her outburst, but went on doggedly eating his chop, and in the intervals dropping the macaroni into his mouth, Italian fashion.

"Johnson cooked this," he said. "Learned the knack at a restaurant in Leicester Square. Faithful Johnson! I've no doubt he prepared it for his own supper. It's cheap at an extra five pounds a year."

"Andrew, *will* you answer me? Aren't you sorry you married me?"

The Other Mrs Jacobs

"It's unfortunate," he said, utterly exasperated, "that I am unable to make a bargain with you on the same sort of terms as with the cook."

"Oh! you can't tell me to go, if that's what you mean," she exclaimed. "You can't pack me out of your house, however much you may wish it—at any rate till I choose to depart."

"Then, in Heaven's name, Clarice, tell me what your price is for holding your tongue while a hard-worked man is eating his dinner. How much more will do it?" He made a gesture as if to search his pockets again. "I'm afraid I must wait till tomorrow," he added. "I haven't enough about me."

"You insult me!" she cried.

"Oh, I've done that so often, according to you. Come, Clarice, you're no chicken—though I'm bound to say you don't look more than twenty-five, and I'm certainly long past all that nonsense. Drop it. We've lived together nearly eighteen years, and have quarrelled furiously certainly during fifteen of them. It gets monotonous. Can't you make yourself happy in your own way, and let me go mine in peace?"

"Thank you. Don't forget that you've given me permission to amuse myself as I please, and don't be surprised if I take it—that's all. As for you yourself—I'm not a fool, Andrew. A doctor has rare opportunities, you know."

Doctor Grier's eyes flashed fire. He pushed his plate away and half rose.

"Will you have some quince jelly? That hasn't been spoiled by keeping," she said sweetly.

"No, thank you. I'll take the nuts, and retire to Pingpongo. Your arm is on those papers of mine. Allow me, please."

She moved her arm, and with her pretty dimpled hand, which twinkled with many rings, she turned over the pile in a manner which was peculiarly irritating to him. But he forbore stiffly. Suddenly

Clarice

she pounced upon the cabinet photograph, with its circling rubber band, from which the scanty wrapper slipped as she lifted it. So also did the violets.

"A photograph!" she exclaimed. "And of a woman! Oh, this is just what I suspected. He carries it in his breast! Now, my highly moral Andrew, what have you to say to this?"

She held up the picture, tearing down the paper covering so that she could see the face. Doctor Grier made an involuntary movement of his arm, as though to rescue the picture from her grasp, but she held it tantalisingly away from him.

"Give it to me, please. The picture is of nobody that you know."

"I see that. But it is of somebody that *you* know—and very intimately, since you carry it about with you, to gaze upon in the intervals of your round."

"You are mistaken," he said coldly. "That photograph was given to me this afternoon."

"Who is she?" asked Clarice, in her most vixenish way. She was still tantalising him, as a naughty child might, by holding the picture beyond his reach.

"The mother of one of my patients."

"And something else!" she added, with sudden uncontrolled passion. "*This* is the woman you love. I know it. I have guessed for months that there was somebody, and now your face tells me the truth. Oh! you think yourself a man of iron, Andrew Grier, but *I* know a certain expression in your eyes—a particular note in your voice. Remember that once you were madly in love with me—that once you ran a foolhardy risk for my sake. Are you going to run the same risk for her sake? Do you mean to risk a divorce suit this time, or will you contrive to get her into a hospital, and pretend that she's dead, and then take her away and start life afresh as a respectably married physician? But you've got me to reckon with this time, and I don't intend to be shunted—

The Other Mrs Jacobs

unless I do it of my own accord, to benefit myself."

There was a note of intention at the back of her last words, and Grier looked at her sharply, but she was on guard at the instant. Her eyes dropped from his face to the photograph. They were those rather prominent, short-sighted eyes, which have their own fascination. And now they spied a name written by a broad pen across the light film at the corner of the photograph, which in her excitement she had not observed before. The name seemed to startle and attract her. She peered closely at it, unable to decipher all the letters; then held it nearer under the light, and put up a gold *pince-nez* which hung upon the same chain as her little reticule.

"Helga Jacobs!" She pronounced the name slowly, and, dropping the picture on the table, turned upon him almost tragically.

"Who is Helga Jacobs?"

"She is Mrs Jacobs, wife of an advertising agent, well known in London."

"An advertising agent!" she repeated. "I have not heard of him."

"That is not unlikely," replied Doctor Grier. "You are neither a tradesman nor a budding celebrity."

"It seems strange that I should not have heard," she faltered.

He was surprised at her obvious discomposure. Then he laughed cynically.

"It is strange," he retorted, "that your friend Kœnigsen has not enlightened you as to the firm of Ahasuerus-Jacobs, which has considerably furthered *his* professional advancement. I am given to understand that it makes a speciality of what are called 'preliminary puffs.'"

"Oh!" The expression of Mrs Grier's face changed completely. She looked relieved. "Ahasuerus-Jacobs! Is that the firm? I don't think I ever

Clarice

heard of anybody who was called Ahasuerus—except the man in the Bible. I—well, I'll confess, Andrew, that for a moment I was taken aback. Old associations, you know. Perhaps that isn't odd—altogether. Doesn't it strike you as a curious coincidence that your life should be influenced—at such a long interval—by two women of the married name of Jacobs?"

He preferred to ignore the inference.

"Jacobs is a common enough name," he said.

"*Jacobs*—yes. Ahasuerus isn't common. I'm glad it's Ahasuerus."

"What on earth do you mean, Clarice? The man you're thinking of is dead—or else—"

"Or else I shouldn't be the lawful Mrs Grier, as of course she is the lawful Mrs Ahasuerus-Jacobs. You needn't disturb yourself, Andrew. We're both tied and bound—she and I. A pity, isn't it? I'd go on carrying about her photograph in my breast pocket, if I were you. And the violets—did she give them to you, or did you steal them?" She snatched up the drooping flowers, while Grier ground his teeth to check the oath that rose to his lips.

"I don't think I shall let you have these," and Clarice tossed the faded bunch into the fire, where they sizzled on the coals, while Grier looked on grimly. Then she flung him the photograph. "I won't deprive you of that treasure. And I promise not to be jealous of the other Mrs Jacobs. She's quite a different type from me—a sort of stained-glass, mediæval person. No doubt you find her soothing."

Clarice moved away from the table, while Grier with difficulty suppressed his rage. His wife stood between the glow of the electric lamp and the fire, a brilliant little figure with her gleaming eyes, her flushed cheeks and scarlet lips. Most men would have admired her, but Grier had grown blind to her attractions, and had never detested her more than at

The Other Mrs Jacobs

that moment. He was saved the necessity of speech by a funny little screech at the door, and a sound of gentle scratching.

"Mercy!" cried Clarice. "That fool Johnson has let out the little beast. He'll ruin the paint. Open the door, Andrew. It's that abominable monkey of yours."

She waited while her husband crossed the room and flung open the door. Outside, a small grey monkey, clad in a neatly-braided suit, was cowering, a picture of eager anticipation. At sight of his master the creature sprang forward, and, clambering up Doctor Grier's leg, nestled against his shoulder. The doctor held him closely, and with one hand mechanically stroked the little head. His wife looked at the monkey with an expression of disgust, and from the monkey to the big grey man whom she knew she had temporarily subdued. It was an instance of the everlasting ascendancy of the physically inferior female over the male brute, so bombastic on occasion, but a bubble pricked when the nagging feminine chooses to assert itself. Some such thought crossed Doctor Grier's mind, and he gave a sardonic laugh as he hugged his monkey to his breast. They were a poor match for Clarice—these two; though, in her own way, she was but a mischievous monkey herself—a creature without morality, without affection, without honour, and being such an one, by necessity of the universal order of things—successful. The glittering red and black figure, making a clatter and a flash of trinkets and high-heeled shoes, walked to the door.

"Good-night, Andrew. Since Pingpongo has arrived it is time for me to retire. I leave you to your monkey, and to your midnight meditations."

CHAPTER VII

PINGPONGO

DOCTOR GRIER walked off presently, with Pingpongo on his shoulder, a plate of nuts in one hand and his papers and instruments in the other, to his private room at the back of the house. Here he saw his patients in the morning, endeavouring to cure the ills of others, and here at night he was wont to face his own.

It was a pleasant room, square and rather small, two sides lined with bookcases which had cupboards below them, one end occupied by an old dresser, the back of which was stacked with photographs of patients and friends of his professional life. He was apt, when he entered the room, to give a glance of kindly recognition at the many faces which greeted him. It was refreshing when he came in alone, tired and dispirited, to see there the friends which did not fail him—men of science who had done much to help the world, and whose example and sympathy had been, perhaps, his own keenest incentive to progress; delicate women and little children who had grown strong under his fostering care; and, sprinkled among the rest, rougher portraits of humbler patients, many of whom owed a new lease of life to the clever, gruff, but kindly doctor.

He laid down the things he had brought in, and detached from the pile the portrait of Helga Jacobs. He looked at it for several minutes before he put it away in a drawer. It was a pretty picture, the head

The Other Mrs Jacobs

drooping slightly, the fair hair loosely knotted with a twist of velvet ribbon above the broad, thoughtful brow, the candid eyes, which had often seemed to him so like the sea, with something of the sea's restlessness troubling their depths, gazing at him with the childlike look he knew so well. Doctor Grier gave an involuntary exclamation, half laugh, half groan, as he put the picture away, determinedly closing a drawer upon it. Then he drew a chair to the fire, and, with Pingpongo nestling against his arm, proceeded to light his pipe. Afterwards he cracked nuts, eagerly watched by the monkey as he threw the shells into the fire, and heaped up the kernels in preparation for Pingpongo's feast. Pingpongo, a well-brought-up monkey, who waited the signal for dining, leaped down at the first nut thrown him to his own footstool in front of the fire, where he squatted grotesquely nibbling, while his master discoursed after his custom during their evening *tête-à-tête*.

"A bad business, Pingpongo—a damned bad business! But you and I have got to work through it, straight and square. We'll try no tricks this time, Pingpongo. We're not going to make fools of ourselves again. And we won't be the other thing—not if we know it. There!"

He threw another nut to the monkey, who caught it adroitly, regarded it earnestly as he held it in his skinny claw, and then he looked up quizzically at his master, as if to say, "While there are nuts we have something left to live for."

Grier smiled in spite of himself, and the man's face broke up like the cracking of a mask. Pingpongo was a comical little creature, full of understanding, and with a great capacity for enjoyment, which in his little life had found small scope.

"What a chap you are, Pingpongo! Philosophical as usual. Well, one can't feel oneself absolutely desolate when one has a pal like you to show one

Pingpongo

what the love principle is like—down at the lower end of creation, at all events. She was quite right, Pingpongo, when she spoke of that Divine Fount, though it seems a bit out of our line, doesn't it?"

The monkey appeared to comprehend. He chattered knowingly. Doctor Grier leant forward with an affectation of listening to him. It was part of the play that the pair went through every night.

"I'd give something to have reached your philosophical standpoint, Pingpongo. Nuts and a cosy corner—eh? What more could man or monkey desire? But I'd like to have your opinion on the sex question, anyhow, my friend. I don't think we've ever discussed it before—not quite so directly—that is, as we're called upon to feel it just now. You see the sex element dominates evolution, Pingpongo—you can't deny that. There's no getting away from it, try as we will. We *can't* get away from the individualism of it—the pair tending to unity. What do you think about it, old fellow? Did you, in prehistoric ages, spring into being alongside a she-monkey, whose tendency was to mate with you—whether you happened to wish it or not—through the eons, till you both gain together a rung of the evolutionary ladder. The law of dualism is universal, Pingpongo, and it upsets all materialistic theories. Night and Day! Sun and Moon! Male and Female! It works through the whole order of things. But the meaning of it is a nut too hard for you or me to crack, my boy. All the same, you might tell me, Pingpongo, if you know, whether there's a she-monkey anywhere in the universe, climbing the evolutionary ladder in due ratio with your progress—a rung or two behind or before, maybe; but the two of you bound to pick up with each other at last. If there is, I'm uncommonly sorry for you in the early stages of your acquaintanceship. Later on, no doubt, you'll mature into a sort of sublime coalition."

The monkey grinned, showing its sharp white

The Other Mrs Jacobs

teeth as it chewed the nuts Doctor Grier threw it from time to time. All the while it watched the doctor with the deepest interest, though a good deal of it was centred in the diminishing pile of nuts, but which, nevertheless, was not wholly selfish. It led a lonely life, this poor little scrap of creation, for there was a rooted antipathy between the monkey and Mrs Grier; and the women-servants, following their mistress's example, treated the monkey with scant kindness. Only Johnson, the man-servant, who had held his post for many years, and wished to stand well in his master's estimation, extended to Pingpongo a time-serving consideration. Pingpongo felt himself painfully neglected during the consultation hours, when he was banished from Doctor Grier's study, lest he should create disturbance and divert attention from medical matters in hand. This was due to an unfortunate occurrence. Pingpongo had been permitted to play about in the waiting-room, offering amusement to waiting patients collected there, till one day a mischievous boy teased him, and Pingpongo, in self-defence, had made a grab at the boy's hand. The boy screamed. Johnson appeared on the scene. Complaints were made, and henceforth Pingpongo was banished to the back yard, which was planted with geraniums in the summer, and to a dark den on the half landing where, during the winter, he spent much of his days. Pingpongo regarded that cupboard much as the British might have regarded the Black Hole of Calcutta in the days of Clive. Yet this black hole of Pingpongo's had its own advantages. There he was at least free from cuffs and kicks and opprobrious epithets, wounding to his sensitive nature.

There was but one person in the world whom Pingpongo loved, and that was the man who had saved his life in a vivisection-room, an incident that neither man nor monkey ever forgot. Whenever the little creature crept now into his arms and

Pingpongo

rested there, Grier recollected the first occasion upon which he had done so, when the monkey was chosen to endure torture in the inquisition chamber, as the victim of a brain experiment. Then, after a fierce struggle, it had sprung with one wild leap to Doctor Grier's breast, and had clung to him with the tenacity of a creature knowing its life was at stake. As a humane man, from the ordinary point of view, Grier hated vivisection. Yet as a man of science—and a very large part of Doctor Grier's personality had become simply the man of science, dead to all other considerations—he regarded vivisection as a natural and legitimate road to knowledge. On this occasion, however, the humane instinct had dominated him, quickened by the pathetic terror of the small creature that appealed to his protection. His whole being revolted from the sacrifice, and, in the face of opposition and derision, he had bargained for its life. Henceforward, Pingpongo—as he called the monkey—became the devoted slave of his saviour.

The nuts consumed, they now sat together on the wide, softly-padded leather chair facing the fire, Grier smoking, and the monkey watching with a reflective air the clouds of blue smoke that were puffed from the pipe. If Pingpongo could have talked, Grier would have argued out vexed questions seriously with him, for the man yearned sometimes for a companion who would share the burden of his soul. But there was no one. He had never had a companion, save occasionally some man friend. Clarice at her zenith was merely a bright tropical creature, flitting from flower to flower, sunning herself in whatsoever pleased her best. He knew her to be heartless and selfish; he shivered as he considered that she was now in all probability calmly settling to sleep upstairs, without a qualm for the disturbance she had caused or any thought of what his feelings might be. A strong distaste seized him as his mind went back to the one mad act of his youth, so hastily

The Other Mrs Jacobs

resolved upon, and carried through in defiance of the better part of his nature—later, so bitterly repented of. Oh! to be five-and-twenty again, with fetters still unforged!

Yet, as he was honest with himself, he decided that, if he could only put the clock back, without count of the experience years had brought, he would probably act just in the same way over again. Looking back through the telescope of time Grier admitted this, for he had found Clarice Jacobs at nineteen exceedingly fascinating. It was a pity that the fascination had worn off with intimate acquaintance-ship. The story he had so briefly sketched to Helga Jacobs had been substantially correct. Memory retraced the years again now, to the day when Clarice had come to him, hysterical, clinging, and bewitchingly pretty, with the information that she said she had just received of the death of her husband, Jacobs. Their child was coming, and Grier's first thought had been to marry her at once. There was no hesitation in his mind, for she had not then lost her charm for him; though had she done so, it is doubtful if it would have made any difference in his action. He asked no questions, but took her to a registry office. The child had died three weeks after its birth, and there had never been another, for which he was devoutly thankful; but at least, he thought, it was buried with a legal right to the name inscribed on its tombstone.

The commercial traveller—that was what she told him that her husband was—had chosen a fitting opportunity for the time of his departure from this world. So Clarice—offspring of a French *cocotte*, though born in London—father unknown, supposed widow of one Jonah Jacobs, defunct, became Andrew Grier's wife.

Suddenly Grier sprang up in his chair, dislodging Pingpongo, who whined a little and went off to his own footstool again. Jacobs! Could there possibly

Pingpongo

be any connection? She had seemed so startled. No, it was unlikely. Jacobs was the commonest of surnames. And Helga called her husband "Lion"—Grier did not know why, but supposed it to be a nickname, as the cheques he had received for medical attendance were invariably signed "Ahasuerus-Jacobs."

Yet, as Clarice had said, it was an odd coincidence. Clarice Jacobs! Helga Jacobs! Their husbands might have been related. At all events, he hoped fate would keep them apart. As for Helga, he much preferred her literary pseudonym, and he wished now that he had asked her to sign the photograph "Spiridia." Then Clarice would have had no clue to her identity. As it was, Clarice would of course recognise Mrs Jacobs at Karl K  nigsen's reception, and though he had begged Helga not to be introduced, if she could prevent it, to his wife, there was no knowing what Clarice might do, if she were in one of her reckless moods, and she had a fancy for making Helga's acquaintance. Well, after all, did it greatly matter? He had been foolish to speak so frankly to Mrs Jacobs. That indefinable something in her which always appealed to him had been too strong. He had almost lost control of himself in her presence. The realisation of the fact that she was not indifferent to him had thrilled him to the verge of committing what he felt would have been an unpardonable outrage upon her confidence. It was well that he had succeeded in holding an iron hand upon himself, even at the cost of appearing hard and unsympathetic. She might forgive the one; she could never have forgiven the other. On the whole he was glad that he had not divulged to her the truth about her husband, which he had come there to make known to her. Jacobs had not wished her to know, but Grier had at first thought it would be wiser to prepare her. He had, however, decided during their talk that he would not tell her, for it seemed to him that in her state of

The Other Mrs Jacobs

health apprehension would be far worse for her than even a sudden shock. His heart leaped within him as he remembered that before very long she would probably be a widow, and a wild regret tore him. If only he were free!

To do him justice, he had never till now speculated upon how different things might have been for him had he not made Clarice his wife. It had not occurred to him that he need not have married her. That one mad act excepted, Grier was a straightforward, clean-living man; and it would have seemed to him beneath contempt to play any woman false. He was getting together a good London practice when he married. His profession absorbed him, and it was a long time before he would acknowledge to himself that he had made a terrible mistake. It was natural, he supposed, that Clarice should repine at the dull life she led both before and after her position was regularised, for it was out of his power to give her much of his society. Then, one or two holidays spent with her made him realise how utterly unfitted she was to be his companion, and the two had drifted far apart. For a long time now he had taken his vacation trips alone; and as he became more sought after, the two saw less and less of each other. Thus it came about that medical science was the one thing Grier lived for. At least this had been so till he was called to attend Ronald Jacobs. During the months that followed, Grier began to understand for the first time what a woman might be as wife and mother and mistress of a house. For in his professional life, narrowed from other interests, he had had small experience of women except as patients. He was startled when he began to feel the hold Helga Jacobs was getting over him. But he had tried to keep grip upon himself. He was a different being now from the undisciplined youth who had been swept along by the sensuous attraction of Clarice. Now he was captivated by a woman seemingly as cold as Clarice had been the reverse,

Pingpongo

and who, if her deepest longings were but poorly satisfied in her home, yet made the upholding of it an ideal from which she never wavered.

The situation would have become a strained one to a different nature, but Grier had also made a god of duty, and was able to fulfil it as far as was required of him in his relations with Mrs Jacobs and her son, without, at least until to-day, any divergence into paths of treacherous sweetness. But to hear Helga's name—Helga, who was to him divinity and priestess—lightly tossed from the lips of Clarice, was more than he could bear, and he cursed the accident, due to his own carelessness, which had led to his wife's discovery of Helga's photograph. Nevertheless, the man cared little on his own account whether he had betrayed his secret. Clarice might think what she would. No doubt she believed that a man who had once plotted to deceive a husband would be ready to do the same thing again.

Grier got up presently, and Pingpongo, who was disconsolately examining a few empty nutshells which had fallen on the floor, watched his master in a melancholy way while he went to the writing-table. There he opened the drawer he had so carefully closed a little while before. With Helga's photograph in his hand, the man's face, grim, grey and unhandsome though it was, softened curiously. He gazed reverently at the picture for some time, and then replaced it in the drawer. He had been trying to learn from it what, in given conditions, she would think or feel. He could only judge from his own somewhat limited personal knowledge of the woman. He had never read one of "Spiridia's" novels, and had seen little of the social side of her life. He did not know her as the world knew her. Nevertheless, it was the real woman whom he knew—of that he was quite sure.

As he turned back again, Pingpongo, who was squatting before the fire, which was dying down, lifted his little grey face with a pathetic expression

The Other Mrs Jacobs

upon it. The nutshells had all proved to be empty, and Pingpongo's philosophy, for the present at all events, was a thing of the past. He was cold and tired, and he wanted to go to sleep.

"Life's a queer business, Pingpongo—a terrible jumble at best. One seems always to get mixed up with the wrong people; but I suppose if we're such fools as to tie knots in our tails, Pingpongo, we can't complain of the kinks. Imagine how nice it would be if you could go swinging away into the wild woods in search of your ideal she-monkey—provided she happened to be the right one! And imagine what life would be if I could find Helga free, and go to her with clean and unshackled hands and give her the love she craves for. I take it *that's* the key to evolution and progress, Pingpongo, from the lowest rung of the ladder to the highest—Love."

The monkey dropped down from the stool where he was sitting and crawled in abject devotion to his master's knee, which he hugged sympathetically with both his small arms.

CHAPTER VIII

CHRYSANTHEMUMS

THE next day was brighter. The fog, temporarily dispelled, hung only here and there in thin curtains of mist, through which filtered pale gleams of autumnal sunshine.

Mrs Grier, in whom a mixed nationality asserted itself in various ways, never descended to breakfast in the dining-room, where the doctor ate a healthy English meal, but had her chocolate and French rolls in the boudoir adjoining her bedroom. The doctor's room was at the back, over his consulting-room, and it frequently happened on days when Mrs Grier dined out, or went to the theatre, that he did not see his wife at all during the twenty-four hours.

Mrs Grier, with a satisfied air, looked out of her bedroom window upon the improvement in the weather. She was busy dressing herself for an outdoor excursion, having taken her early luncheon in the morning-room. Doctor Grier ate no luncheon beyond a biscuit and a glass of sherry taken in an interval between seeing his patients and starting off at two o'clock on his afternoon round. It was one of Mrs Grier's grievances that she could not ask more than two friends to luncheon, because the larger room in which they dined was not available in the middle of the day. Mrs Grier enjoyed the process of beautifying herself. Her costume was a daring and yet harmonious combination of colour

The Other Mrs Jacobs

—a blend of brown, blue and green, with, here and there, flaring touches of red. Her large picture hat was wreathed in autumn leaves and scarlet berries, and a bouquet of tawny orchids nestled in her muff of sable and lace. She was a striking-looking little woman, with her bright eyes, her carefully-rouged cheeks, and the small, scarlet, determined mouth. She flashed a smile at herself in the glass, for she was well satisfied with her appearance, and her teeth showed like pearls between the red lines of her lips. Evidently her thoughts gave her pleasure, for the ill-tempered mood of last evening seemed to have departed.

Her toilette completed, she picked up her gloves and parasol and went downstairs. Before leaving the house, however, some curious attraction drew her into her husband's consulting-room. She had heard the carriage drive off which took him upon his round, and felt annoyed, for she would have liked to use it herself. She opened the door, finding the room, as she had supposed, unoccupied, and advanced slowly, gazing round, especially at the array of photographs, though she scarcely expected to find there the portrait of Mrs Jacobs. He would keep that, she thought, in a less public place. She wished to study the face of the woman whom she felt instinctively was likely to influence her own life. A burning desire filled her that she might somehow have the power of controlling that influence, and of turning it to suit her own ends. Clarice Grier had long ceased to care for her husband, but she was none the less jealous of the woman whom she guessed had won from him what she could never again possess.

She searched about the mantelpiece and writing-table, and even tried the drawers, finding them locked. Suddenly something growled at her angrily, and she started as if she had been shot, to see that Pingpongo had swung himself up to a corner of the

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table and was gibbering at her, his small face distorted, his lips drawn back from his teeth in a most sardonic and human grin. The little creature looked like the embodiment of some power seated there to protect that which his master held sacred.

Clarice shrank back, feeling almost frightened. She had an insane dislike and dread of Pingpongo. The creature affected her strangely, and had she been superstitiously inclined she might have explained on psychological grounds her terror of the tiny thing. As it was, she raised her fist and went forward to cuff Pingpongo. But the monkey showed such fierce anger in every line of its small, tense form and distorted face, that she stayed the blow and turned upon her heel. "Little beast! Get out of here. Or no—perhaps you're better where you are. You can stop there," and she signed loftily to him from the door mat. "You and your master are a pair of ill-tempered brutes, and you, at all events, sha'n't come about the house."

She shut the door carefully upon the monkey and, going out, ordered Johnson to whistle up a hansom. Five minutes later she was being driven towards Victoria.

In the train, going down to the Crystal Palace, where she was bent for the afternoon, Clarice pulled a note out of her reticule, and, smoothing it against her palm, read over again the few lines it contained :—

"DEAR LITTLE WOMAN,—I'm painting an ex-mayoress at Sydenham to-morrow, and am bidden, at the end of my sitting, to the family mutton and greens. Suppose you meet me at the Crystal Palace. I believe there's a Chrysanthemum Show on, and I'll be in the Pompeïan Court between four and half past. We might have tea together, and should still get home in time for dinner. Our evening last time was delicious, but a little risky. I don't think we must do it again, for the present

The Other Mrs Jacobs

at anyrate. But it will be delightful to have you all to myself even for an hour or two.—Yours as always,
K.”

“Risky!” commented Clarice. “Perhaps it was, but life would be a tame sort of affair if we never took a risk. You were not so cautious, Mr Karl, a year ago, before you took up this St Helga craze. St Helga! St Helga! Helga Jacobs!” She repeated the name half aloud, for she was alone in the carriage. “Has this woman, Helga Jacobs, got anything to do with it, I wonder? That would be queer—a regular chapter of coincidences. But I’m not going to allow interference with my plans, whatever comes of it. You shall have a nice long rope, my dear Karl, and so shall you, my excellent, moral Andrew. But you’ll both find at the critical moment that there’s someone you know pretty well, but haven’t made sufficient allowance for, at the other end of it. And that someone doesn’t intend that either of you shall hang himself—oh, dear, no!”

Mrs Grier laughed to herself as she looked out of the window and watched the suburban villas, festooned with red virginia creeper, fly past as the train went on. She had a genius for intrigue, and thoroughly enjoyed dramatic complications. Her opportunities for these had not been extensive during her respectable married life in London, but she had made the most of them. Now, as years increased, she became reckless. Sometimes, when she longed madly for some fresh excitement, anything to break what she was pleased to call the monotony of her days, she felt that she would not care very much if her husband found out how she employed her time during the many hours which he devoted to his profession. He had no business to neglect his wife, she told herself, if he expected her to be faithful.

When the train reached the Crystal Palace Station,

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Clarice sauntered up the stairs, making her way into the great building without hurry, for it wanted three-quarters of an hour yet to the time of her appointment. Koenigsen would, she knew, come in at another entrance, and she would be able to stroll about and look at the flowers before meeting him. The Chrysanthemum Show was, she found, a more important affair than she had imagined, and the Palace was unusually crowded. The great central transept of the glass building was crowded with exhibition growers and with flower lovers who had come to see the blooms. Clarice mingled with the surging mass of people, putting up her long-handled glasses so that she might study the different varieties, for she took some interest in flowers, and she certainly did not care for palms or statuary, the other chief features of the nave. By degrees she grew fascinated by the rows of curiously tangled and magnificent, regular petalled blossoms. Each heavy head, proudly set in its own holder, looked like a lovely lady attired for conquest, and seemed to be saying to her that as much time and trouble had been expended upon its toilette as that which had been given to her own. Mrs Grier was a practical little person, not particularly imaginative, but she almost fancied that the chrysanthemums were laughing at her and favourably comparing their own beauty with her own. It amused her to think so, at anyrate, and she strolled on, listening idly to the snatches of talk around her, as she paused before one group of specimens after another, without paying much heed to what was going on in her vicinity.

Presently the sight of a man's back and profile arrested her attention. She stood rooted to the spot, and her cheeks paled beneath their artificial rose. There was something in the set of the strong-looking neck and shoulders, and in the lines of the grave profile strangely familiar. The man was carefully dressed in a well-cut frock-coat and neatly-brushed silk hat.

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He held a handsome stick in one hand, which he raised to point out a particular plant to another man with whom he was talking; and on the ungloved hand Clarice saw a peculiar ring—a turquoise scarab—which she remembered. Had she needed any other confirmation of the truth of her suspicions that ring would have been sufficient. But she needed none. Though nearly eighteen years had elapsed since she had last seen that beaked face, clean-shaven but for its heavy moustache, and though the hair, which she remembered as black, was now grizzled, she felt no doubt that she was looking upon Judah Jacobs, the commercial traveller, whom, as a girl of seventeen, she had married in Brussels, and whom she had left at Helsingkräad on the plea of a visit to some friends in England, because she was tired of him. She watched him, fascinated by his appearance, the look of prosperity about him, and a certain dignity which in former years he had not possessed. He had not grown stout and coarse with advancing age, as many men do; on the contrary, he seemed to be more refined; his bearing was almost distinguished. And his clothes were of English make. He must have left Helsingkräad, she decided, and be living in London. Very likely he had married again. It was strange that he was not dead, after all. Clarice had well-nigh persuaded herself during the course of these years that she had really been a widow when Doctor Grier went through with her that ceremony at the registry office, though she had not been at all sure of it at the time. Wild thoughts surged in her mind. She was essentially theatrical, and gloried in a situation. Here was one to suit the most exacting appetite. It did not occur to her to make her escape. She was listening intently to what Judah Jacobs was saying. His voice had not altered either, but he had less accent than formerly.

“Well, I’ll mention it at the *Shade and Sparkle*

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board," he remarked. "But they're particular, you know, and expensive. It'll be a pretty heavy commission."

"I take it the 'ad.' is worth paying for," returned the other. "I shall trust to you to cut it as low as you can. There's amateur gardeners in high life who'll read *Shade and Sparkle*, but won't look at a catalogue." The man speaking was evidently a chrysanthemum grower, who wished to advertise a new variety. He was gazing with parental affection at a singularly fine specimen. "The trouble I've had to get those petals in place," he went on. "You'd scarcely believe it. Every one of 'em has got to be curled like a woman's hair, and treated with as much care, but they are beauties to look at. They pay for their bit o' dressing. Now for the catalogue—remember, I shall expect you to send me a first-rate artist who'll do the picture in style. Three blooms, I should say—single figures standing out on a tasty background, with maybe the stalks just crossed at the tip, and a chaste design in gold, and two shades of purple for the lettering."

Mr Jacobs nodded. The subject was not as dear to his heart as it was to that of the grower, but he took directions for the advertisement in his usual attentive, business-like manner. A few more words passed between them, then Mr Jacobs pulled out his pocket-book and made some notes. The case was of russia leather, with a neat gold monogram.

"Fancy Jude coming to that!" thought Clarice. "It looks like a keepsake—from a woman. I shouldn't wonder if he'd got another wife." Then suddenly an idea flashed into her brain which almost staggered her. "Helga Jacobs! Judah Jacobs! Ahasuerus Jacobs! Supposing these were one and the same man. Supposing Helga Jacobs was his wife!"

Clarice laughed excitedly. She was not conscious of having laughed aloud, but Mr Jacobs heard her. He turned abruptly, and the two stood face to face.

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Her mocking eyes met his, and her red lips smiled at him. The crowd pressing forward at the moment forced them nearer to each other, and her dress brushed his knee.

"*Dieu !*" she exclaimed, falling back upon her mother's tongue, which Grier did not speak, and the fashion of which she had almost forgotten, and added dramatically, "So it *is* you, Jude—come back from the dead !"

CHAPTER IX

A HEAVY PREMIUM

THE recognition on both sides was complete. A grey pallor overspread Mr Jacobs's face. He staggered, and leaned against the broad red pedestal of the statue of Perseus, his left hand spasmodically pressing his chest.

"Have I startled you into a fit?" she asked. "Well, I was a bit taken aback myself." As he did not answer she took his arm. "Come, Jude, I didn't mean to upset you. What is it—horror or joy—which? Look here, let's go into one of those courts at the side and talk things out. That's the best thing to do."

He recovered himself with a gasp. His face was still ashen. She drew him away from the throng. "Feeling better," she said. "Have a nip of brandy?"

He shook his head, and, standing up straightly, he freed himself from her hold and looked at her from head to foot.

"My God! Clarice," he exclaimed, "what's the meaning of this? I understood that you had died eighteen years ago in St James's Hospital."

"And I," she returned, "was under the impression that you were killed seventeen and a half years ago in a railway accident between Ostend and Paris."

"Yes, I know," he replied. "A few other people thought so at the time. It was a mistake."

"Apparently we have both been labouring under a

The Other Mrs Jacobs

mistake," she said. "Sit down, Jude. There's nobody here. Heavens! If it isn't just like old days to be talking to you again."

She had led him to a recess in the Italian Court, and placed herself upon a seat, inviting him by a gesture to her side, but he refused.

"I'll stand, thank you. This a serious matter. You hardly seem to realise *how* serious. I must have it explained. How comes that it you were reported to me as having died under an operation on the 27th of November '82?"

Clarice shrugged her shoulders with a provoking smile.

"I wonder that you remember the date so exactly."

"I have good reason for doing so. My life's happiness depended upon it."

"Oh! Does that mean that you're married again?"

"Yes."

"It would have been too much, I suppose, to expect that you would remain faithful to my memory, considering, too, the rows we had in our short matrimonial career."

"You have still your devil's knack of gibing."

"Oh, dear, no. I've grown quite amiable. And I've worn well, haven't I? How do you think I look?"

"As you always looked. You haven't changed in the least. How did you manage it, Clarice?"

"What? Keeping my good looks? An easy conscience and a healthy diet."

"I don't mean that. You never had a conscience, and I don't suppose you've grown one. How did you contrive such a plot? for of course it *was* a plot to deceive me and to get your liberty."

"Frankly, Jude, it was," rejoined Clarice, with engaging candour. "You see, I didn't find you delightful to live with. You were an abominably tough customer, remember."

A Heavy Premium

"I had to keep a tight hand on you," said he, "or you'd have run me into debt and disgraced me by your flighty ways."

"You were always a prude. The mistake you made was in marrying a girl of seventeen who'd been used to enjoy herself. Fancy cooping me up in an attic floor at Helsingkräad. It was enough to drive one mad. You know it nearly drove *me* mad. I should never have lost my health as I did if you had provided me with decent comforts and amusements."

"I did all I could. You had every penny of my savings when you insisted upon going to England for treatment."

"I wonder that I had the spirit to insist. When I think of how I suffered! And if I hadn't been so ill I might have had a lovely time in London—but not on your savings."

"I quite believe it. How came you to go into a hospital?"

"I'd spent all my money, and I knew it was no use writing to you for more. Besides—I made acquaintance with the house physician. He arranged things for me."

"Connived at your infamous plot. Now I begin to understand."

"Oh, well, Jude, they *do* make mistakes sometimes, you know, in hospitals as well as in other places. I believe I really *was* dead, as far as appearances went—for a few hours. Don't ask me the medical explanation. I can't give it. Catalepsy, I suppose. Aren't there plenty of stories about people laid ready for their coffins who have wakened up in mortuaries and dissecting-rooms, and been rescued from the grave by sentimental doctors? That's just how it was with me—only they didn't take me into the dissecting-room—mercifully. And in my case there happened to be a sentimental doctor at hand, ready to perform the act of resuscitation. But, if it comes to awkward questions, Jude, how did your name

The Other Mrs Jacobs

happen to be on the list of killed in that railway accident?"

"It wasn't me at all. There was another Jacobs at Helsingkräad."

"Well, how should I know that—shut up as I used to be in my attic? But I had no especial desire to push the inquiry. I didn't write to Helsingkräad for particulars. The announcement served my purpose. It got me a second husband."

"So the man married you?"

"I'm quite respectable, Jude, if that's what you mean. I see you are looking at my get-up. I live in a good quarter. I've got a visiting list. I'm asked occasionally to help hold a stall at some stupid hospital bazaar. And there's someone legally responsible for my dressmaker's bills."

"They must come heavy. Who is the fellow?"

Clarice placed her finger saucily upon her lip.

"Oh! fie, Jude! Your wife's name is not on my visiting list. It appears to me, my friend, that' as we've both committed bigamy, we'd better be discreet."

"I am guiltless of blame. I made due inquiries."

"You needn't be afraid. I don't intend to have the law of you. But still, you know, Jude, strictly speaking, *I'm* Mrs Jacobs. By the way—just as a matter of curiosity—is the other Mrs Jacobs's name—*Helga*?"

A smothered oath burst from the lips of Jacobs. Clarice mocked at him.

"Come, come, Jude! You really should have dropped those vulgar habits. It sounds quite like old times to hear you swear at me again. But we're both in respectable society now, remember. Do you damn the other Mrs Jacobs?"

"Look here, Clarice. Leave my wife alone—do you understand? She's not to be mentioned or thought of in the same breath with you."

"Heigho! Have we married into the royal family?"

A Heavy Premium

Times have changed with you, Jude, since we lived in the attic floor at Helsingkräad."

"They *have* changed—considerably."

"Did you come into a fortune? Now, do tell me—it's a pardonable interest. When did the luck turn?"

"It turned when I won a lottery ticket for sixty thousand francs."

"You don't say so? And how long was that after I left you?"

"Not many months."

"What a pity I didn't know," said Clarice, frankly. "I might have come back. I call it unkind of you to have kept that dark, Jude. Still, sixty thousand francs sounds a great thing, but it doesn't come to anything so tremendous after all." She did a rapid sum in mental arithmetic.

"It was the beginning of my fortune," he said. "It brought me into touch with the business man who took me into partnership, and who has since died and left me his money and his interest in the firm, of which I'm consequently the head now."

"I know who you mean—that old Jew money-lender in Helsingkräad—Ahasuerus."

"Yes. I don't know how you've heard it."

"I've just put two and two together. It was silly of me not to do so before. So that's why you're Ahasuerus-Jacobs in these days. Big advertising agency, isn't it? Money-lending, too, I suppose? Oh, yes, I can easily find out all I want to know about you, and about your wife too."

The pallid look came again over his face, and something also of terror.

"I should like to make the other Mrs Jacobs's acquaintance," pursued Clarice. "It might be managed without much difficulty. You could introduce me as an old friend, couldn't you? And anyhow, there's nothing to prevent me from finding out your address in the Red Book, and calling to

The Other Mrs Jacobs

introduce myself. I should soon judge whether it would be worth my while to disturb the harmony of your dove's nest."

"You demon!" he cried. "Before you do that, I'll tell my wife the truth and face the matter out. The plot was of *your* contriving, and, if it came to a court of law, the charge of bigamy would lie on *your* shoulders! What you'd have to consider is whether it would be worth your while to pay the penalty."

"There's a good deal to consider, one way and another," returned Clarice, sweetly. "I shall take a little while to think it all out. As far as paying the penalty goes I think we stand pretty even. Looking at things all round, it's a nice tangle—perhaps a more complicated one than you're aware of." She laughed in a way that maddened him.

"Look here," he said roughly. "You don't want to disgrace yourself, I suppose. What's your object in this?"

"I always liked a gamble, Jude, though you wouldn't even let me play at *Petits Chevaux*."

"It's money then! I thought as much."

"It might be love, Jude—or hate. You don't seem to suspect that I might be glad to get rid of my husband—at a fair price."

"I am not surprised. He must be a man utterly without principle."

"Oh! he has principles—of a sort. Chiefly scientific ones."

"What's your price?" he asked abruptly. "I'll pay it, if it's within reason."

"For my husband. He's a rising celebrity—not to be had for nothing."

"Cease jesting. How much do you want for holding your tongue and leaving my wife alone?"

"I can't agree to that indefinitely—not at any price," she answered with set lips.

He considered for a few moments in silence, while Clarice watched him furtively. "You're a fiend," he

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muttered. "Can I buy a year's silence from you then? At—say a thousand pounds?"

"Ah! There's something at the bottom of this," Clarice exclaimed warily. "What am I risking on the year? If I'm to insure against your death, Jude, it must be a heavy premium. Do you suffer from liver, my friend, or is it heart? You look as pale as a ghost. There's something wrong with you."

"Nonsense. There's nothing wrong."

"Yes, there is, and it's my belief you know it. I'd want a medical certificate to convince me that you're sound."

Mr Jacobs shook his shoulders with an angry laugh as he turned, taking a few steps along the court, then coming back to her. She had risen, and was looking at him with malign triumph. He stood, bending forward a little towards her, both hands resting on the head of his walking-stick, the ungloved one uppermost.

"If I hadn't recognised your face, I should have known you by that ring," she observed.

"Come," he exclaimed, "there's no use in bandying words. I've got to catch a train back to London."

"And I have to meet a friend here," she replied. "On the whole, I'd rather he didn't find me talking to you, so I think, Jude, we'd better say good-bye."

She moved towards the archway, which gave on the great nave, and peered amid the crowd through her double eyeglass. "I fancy I see him," she said, rejoining Mr Jacobs. "If you want to get to the train, Jude, you can go along that way."

She pointed to another exit from the court. He put his hand peremptorily on her shoulder.

"Clarice, you'd better take care," he said hoarsely. "I'm capable of killing you rather than that you should bring trouble on my wife. What is the sum to be?"

"Three thousand," she answered promptly. "And

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"I'll do nothing for a year from the day you pay it me."

He seemed to be thinking.

"You might have been more modest in your demands," he said at length. "But I agree. When and where shall I give it to you?"

She was sorry now that she had not said four thousand. He must be richer even than she had supposed. She, too, thought for a few moments.

"I will come to your office," she said. "There will be nothing unusual in that, I suppose. Where is it?"

He demurred, but she insisted. She had no intention, she told him, of "giving herself away," and this was the simplest plan to avert suspicion. It ended in his telling her where his office was. She consulted the tablets hanging with her little gold reticule, after she had entered the address.

"I could come the day after to-morrow—Saturday morning. That will give you time to get the oof together. Notes, please. Shall we say 12.30?"

"No, it won't do. I'm going out of town by a late train on Friday, and I don't get to the office till Monday."

"Very well. Let it be Monday morning at 12.30. If you were amiable you might take me to lunch at the Ship and Turtle."

"I am not amiable. And I can't see you quite so early in the day. I am not sure when I may get back. You had better come about five o'clock. I shall be there then, and we'll get it over. This is a bad business for me, Clarice. I don't bless the fate that thrust you in my way."

"Bear!" she pouted. "I certainly do not envy the other Mrs Jacobs. Well, good-bye till Monday. That's your road."

She watched him disappear by the other exit; then taking a tiny aluminium case, containing looking-glass, powder, and one or two other toilet adjuncts

A Heavy Premium

from her muff, she surveyed herself, touching up her face and rearranging her fringe beneath her spotted veil. A group of chrysanthemum lovers strayed into the court, interrupting her in the little rite to beauty which she was performing, and Clarice, putting away the things, rose with a rustle of her silken skirts, and betook herself once more to the central hall, in which the crowd was thinning a little. She sauntered along in the direction where she had espied Koenigsen, but could not now distinguish him, and turned off towards the place of rendezvous. No doubt he had gone back there, or would do so presently. She concluded that he had grown tired of waiting, which was not surprising, seeing that she was a good while after the time appointed. She quickened her steps, glancing hither and thither in pretty perturbation, for she was really anxious lest she should miss him. It was scarcely like Clarice to put herself out because she was inconveniencing someone else, and her anxiety was a tribute to Koenigsen's power over her.

At last she came upon him in a secluded corner, twirling his blonde moustache, and looking puzzled and cross. He had not seen her, and she made a little *détour*, and stopped for a moment admiring the physique of the man, the flowing beard and the distinctive personality. She looked cautiously round, but the chrysanthemum show and the tea hour had caused a congestion of interests in the nave. There was no one about just here. She stole up behind him, cooing in his ear a plea for pardon.

"So sorry! So sorry! Please don't be angry. Will the Viking forgive his repentant Clari?"

Koenigsen turned round and raised his hat with elaborate courtesy. He was always elaborate, and, to give him his due, seldom ill-tempered; for Koenigsen had found that moods which did not amuse his patrons were not paying, socially or professionally. Yet Clarice scented a certain aloofness

The Other Mrs Jacobs

in his salutation. She became more conventional immediately.

"I have been detained," she said, "by an old friend whom I had not seen for years, and who would not let me go."

"Ah!" he rejoined; "so it was not the cab, nor the crowd, nor the grey wolf of a husband. Dear witch, the sight of you is an ample atonement for half an hour of boredom."

"I'm glad you think so. Then I needn't make any more apologies."

He examined her critically.

"You look charming. I'm so glad you appreciate the value of a vivid patch of colour. Why is it that the ordinary woman is never well dressed?"

"Because she dresses for women, and not for men," rejoined Clarice. "There's one month, no more, in the life of the ordinary virtuous woman when she dresses for a man."

"*The* man. And he goes nap on that honeymoon month. Poor devil! It's soon ended."

"The woman goes nap on that month too—sometimes," said Clarice. "And it's soon ended for her. Man is an animal that desires change."

"Man is a noble animal, especially the artist," parried Koenigsen. "He remains faithful to his ideal, though he may worship it under different names."

Clarice tilted her hat, as she looked up at the tall artist beside her. There was pained questioning in the look. She had lost her mocking air, and it might have been a distressed child asking,—

"Does that mean that you are getting tired of me, Karl?"

They were walking through a deserted corridor. He avoided her glance as he answered,—

"My dear Clari, the scent of roses is always pleasant, and so are the effervescent qualities of champagne. Still, for practical purposes—"

A Heavy Premium

"Solid diet is desirable!" She took the words out of his mouth. "How did you enjoy the family mutton to-day?"

"It really was mutton—first-class mutton, roasted, with onion sauce."

"Excellent! I had a *pâté-de-foie-gras* sandwich, with still moselle."

He smiled and turned to her.

"You are irresistible in every way. Let me look at you, witch."

She stopped. They had got into the Palace grounds. Clarice seized the picturesque moment, and put herself into harmony with a plaster Artemis, and a dead tree draped in gorgeous virginia creeper. Koenigsen gazed at her admiringly.

"Thank you. My ex-mayoress is stout and ruby-coloured. She insisted upon being painted in black satin trimmed with jet. You can imagine what a relief you are to the eyes."

"I daresay she is a very good woman—your ex-mayoress, and consequently much happier than I am."

"Aren't you happy, my dear child?"

"You know that I'm not." She spoke impetuously. "You know that my life resolves itself each day into one question—shall I or shall I not see him? When I do, it means, perhaps, an hour of feverish joy and an after-taste of doubt. When I do not, twenty-four hours of blank misery."

"Do you think that's good enough, Clari? Hadn't we better put a stop to it?"

"What do you mean? Are you tired of me?" she asked again.

"Certainly not. It is impossible to tire of anyone who shows such a delicious variety of moods as you do, my dear. But—well, the fact is that I've settled down into a less Bohemian groove. This St Helga business has undoubtedly brought me into prominence, and that is likely to increase, rather than the

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other way. I'm taking a different line of work. The chances are that I shall be compelled to give up my free, hugger-mugger sort of studio life, and perhaps build myself a house in one of the new artistic quarters. And later on, of course, I shall have to—marry."

"Ah!" The word was a sharp exclamation of pain. "So that is what is in your mind, Karl Koenigsen?"

"Most men have to come to it some time or other, you know, Clarice. Besides, it isn't as if you weren't married yourself." He waited a minute, during which she preserved an ominous silence. "I don't mean that we need break off entirely," he added rather awkwardly. "No one can understand me as you do."

Clarice was still silent. They had reached a tree in the grounds which had a bench under it. She seated herself at one end of the bench; he sideways at the other, so that they were face to face.

"I thought you were going to the tea-rooms," he objected.

"Not just yet."

"But I engaged our table, and ordered chocolate with whipped cream—just as you like it."

"It can wait," said Clarice. "Now tell me. Who is the girl?"

"There's no girl. You know I detest girls. I could never marry a girl."

Clarice broke into her tinkling laugh. She began to feel reassured.

"It must be a widow then."

"Oh, dear, no. There's no widow. I am merely contemplating a possible contingency."

"A probable contingency!"

"Well, if you like to put it so. But believe me, I've made no plans. It's as well to be prepared, that's all."

"Yes, it's as well to be prepared," rejoined Clarice. "For example, if *I* were free, would you marry *me*?"

A Heavy Premium

"It would be delightful, of course," he answered, but without enthusiasm. "Only, for one thing, you are not free."

"I might be. Stranger things have happened."

She looked at him provocatively. He smiled at her, but shook his head.

"Grey wolves live long, and they show fangs when they're hungry."

"My grey wolf will never again be hungry for me," she said. "He's prowling after other prey."

"Is that so?"

"He's in love with one of his patients."

Kœnigsen shrugged.

"I wish him good fortune. But let us talk of something more amusing."

A few minutes ago he had felt almost afraid of Clarice. She had sounded tragic, and he disliked tragedy. Now he cleverly turned the conversation, and was grateful to her for following him off emotional ground. He told her about the preparations for his evening exhibition, about his prospects, his sellers, his commission to paint aristocratic ladies—sundry experiences flattering to his egotism which had befallen him. She too had incidents of the last few days to relate, and gave them a piquant flavour. After all, he reflected, she was excellent company.

"I want you to come and sit for me for an idea I'm working out," he said.

"What is the idea?" she asked.

"Something from one of 'Spiridia's' books—*The Chameleon Maid*—you're just the type."

"I don't care for 'Spiridia's' books. They're too dreamy and fanciful to suit me. It's a pseudonym, isn't it? Do you know who she is?"

"I ought to," he answered unguardedly. "We both come from St Helga."

Clarice seized a clue.

"Then she has helped you in the St Helgan Gallery business?"

The Other Mrs Jacobs

"Yes, of course."

"I wonder you never told me about her."

"Well, it's a mistake talking about one woman to another. They don't like it—specially 'Spiridia.'"

"Why specially 'Spiridia'?"

"Because it isn't her real name, and she doesn't care about it being identified with her socially—though, of course, most people know."

"I don't know."

"You're a little out of the swim, you see, my dear. The artistic and literary swim, I mean, of course," he added hastily. "Science is your line, doctors, and so forth."

"That's true," she answered, mollified; "but I should like to know 'Spiridia.'"

"You'll see her at my show to-morrow evening."

"Then there's no great secret about it. Is she a widow?"

"Oh, no. Her husband is a great friend of mine."

"So she's married?" A light of relief shone in Clarice's eyes. "You might tell me her name."

"It's a very ugly one. It doesn't suit her at all. A horrid Jewish name."

"Well, you needn't apologise on her behalf. I presume she took it to please herself. What on earth is it?"

"Jacobs."

"Jacobs!" repeated Clarice. "Tell me—is it Helga Jacobs?"

"Yes. She's a countrywoman of mine—named after her native island. How did you know?"

"I've seen a signed photograph that she gave to my husband."

"Now I come to think of it," said Koenigsen, "your husband attends young Jacobs—her son. We were speaking of Doctor Grier only a few days ago, and I was surprised to find that she did not know he was married. I wonder why he did not tell her."

A Heavy Premium

"He did not tell her," said Clarice, "because she's the woman he's in love with."

Clarice rose abruptly. A tumult was raging within her. Here indeed were complications. She laughed shrilly. Then she felt K  nigsen's eyes upon her face, and was afraid of betraying herself.

"Come to the tea-room," she said. "It's time we had that chocolate and whipped cream."

CHAPTER IX

THE REFORMATION OF RONALD

MISS PENGELLEY did not at once put Doctor Grier's advice to the test, but, as the difficulties of her position in nowise lessened, she started to work upon the third morning with the private resolution to follow his suggestions, at least as far as Ronald was concerned. She was determined not to let that young man continue to bully her, or, if he did so, to show him plainly that she was not inclined to put her services at his disposal unless he accepted them courteously. To-day Hornblow laid the *Daily Telegraph* at the corner of the breakfast-table.

"I don't fancy that Mr Ronald will require it yet, miss," he said. "Mr Ronald has a good many other papers to read."

"I will take it up to him myself," said Miss Pengelley, inwardly deciding that Master Ronald should wait for the *Daily Telegraph* until she had finished with it.

By-and-by she sat down to her typewriter, and worked very busily during the early part of the morning. Mrs Jacobs came into the room for a minute or two on her way from interviewing the cook, and they had a little conversation about the chapters Miss Pengelley was typing. "Spiridia," when she got into the vein of her work, seemed so different a person from the conventional Mrs Jacobs that Susan realised with surprise how many-sided the woman was.

The Reformation of Ronald

"I mean to shut myself up and be busy to-day," she said. "I shall not drive, as we are going out this evening. Doctor Grier scolds me if I undertake too much. You will come with us, Miss Pengelley?"

The tone suggested a command rather than an invitation.

"Where to?" asked Susan, doubtfully, resenting this way of being taken so much for granted.

"To Mr Koenigsen's party—the opening of the St Helgan Gallery," returned Mrs Jacobs, her tone implying that Miss Pengelley should not have forgotten an occasion so important.

"Oh, but I am not asked," said Susan.

"That does not matter. You will be one of our party," replied Mrs Jacobs.

"But I don't think I should care to go, thank you," said Susan, rather stiffly. "I shouldn't know anybody; and besides, I only met Mr Koenigsen last night, and he did not mention it to me."

"He would have supposed, naturally, that you would be with us. It must be as you please, of course. But I should have liked you to come. The fact is, I was relying on your help with Ronald. The dear boy scarcely ever goes out—he has to be in his chair, you know—but he is so fond of Karl Koenigsen, and he has been looking forward to this party."

"I did not understand that you expected me to go out in the evenings," said Susan. "But if that is so, I will do as you wish."

"Oh, I couldn't press the point against your inclinations," said Mrs Jacobs. Her manner plainly showed that she had not anticipated being met with a refusal, and that she was somewhat annoyed. She had counted upon her companion rather too freely, and now saw that it would be necessary to give Susan some individual consideration. Miss Pengelley, on the other hand, felt that she had gained a point, and, that being so, was willing to concede it. She did not, however, say anything more at the time,

The Other Mrs Jacobs

and Mrs Jacobs left the room, merely remarking, "You will go up to Ron at eleven, won't you?"

"Oh, certainly," returned Miss Pengelley, cheerfully. "I find he likes my reading, and I'm so well accustomed to reading aloud that it is no exertion."

She spoke rather as though she conferred the favour upon Ronald in reading to him, and Mrs Jacobs went away, wondering at the hitherto undiscovered strain of self-assertiveness which she now found in her small, shy companion. She little guessed that the same influence which so strongly affected her own life had been at work here.

"Spiridia" went upstairs to her study, and soon became immersed in the history of her latest heroine, while Susan diligently struggled to reproduce a clean copy of the somewhat illegible handwriting. At eleven o'clock she shovelled her papers together and went briskly upstairs. Ronald answered her tap at his door with "Come in," and then said perversely,—

"I didn't send for you."

"No, but your mother asked me to come up at eleven, so I am here."

"You're too soon this morning," growled Ronald.

"Oh! Aren't you ready for me? Never mind. I can amuse myself looking round your room." She turned her back upon him and began studying the bookcases and pictures on the wall. Ronald regarded her with astonishment as he finished his beef-tea. Presently Hornblow, who had been arranging various small details for his comfort, took the tray and left the room.

"I say, Miss— Here, what's your name?" exclaimed Ronald.

"Pengelley," returned Susan, calmly, turning round. "It's just as easy to remember as any other name. Suppose you try to call me by it."

"Suppose I don't," replied the boy, rudely. "What's the good of worrying? I never exert myself needlessly."

The Reformation of Ronald

"You won't find this exertion needless," answered Susan, sitting down. "You'll see that unless you remember my name, I sha'n't be able to answer to it."

"You can answer to anything else just as well, I suppose?"

"I daresay we can all do that," said Susan, smiling. "Suppose I call you Thing-um-bob to begin with?" A small answering smile broke on Ronald's lips, but he checked it. It was too great condescension to smile upon this flippant young person. Susan, who was reading him from a new point of view, promptly changed the subject. "I *do* pity you," she said, leaning back comfortably in her chair and picking up the book which she knew that he wanted read to him.

"Pity me!" growled Ronald, fiercely. "Because I am a cripple, I suppose—for the same reason that everyone else pities me."

"Oh, not at all—not at all," said Susan, cheerfully. "I pity you because your disagreeable manners must lose you so many friends and give you such a bad time in life."

Ronald was too much astonished for the moment to rebuke her for this unwonted liberty. Miss Pengelley took advantage of his silence to go on, "It must be so unpleasant to be always turning the worst side of you to everybody, as you do, and of course getting the worst side back again. There's nothing in the world to pity you for otherwise that I can see. It seems to me that that you're an uncommonly lucky boy."

Ronald recovered himself.

"I say Miss—" he began.

"Yes," said Susan, alertly. "Miss—who did you say?"

"Pengelley," grumbled Ronald. "You're speaking pretty straight to a fellow, you know."

"I should think I am. That's what I'm here for.

The Other Mrs Jacobs

You don't imagine, do you, that I came to talk twaddle to you?"

"You came to make yourself useful," said Ronald, rudely.

"So I did," was Susan's quiet reply. "Tremendously useful, I hope, to your mother. And I mean to be useful to you, if you're nice to me. If you're not, well, of course, I sha'n't bother myself about you."

"I like that! What do you get paid for?" sneered Ronald.

"For work that I'm perfectly ready and willing to do, but I can't do it, you know, if other people won't let me."

"If you don't do it there's no good in your staying," said Ronald.

"That," replied Miss Pengelley, with dignity, "will be for your mother and for me to decide. Now, suppose that instead of discussing how long I'm going to remain here we make the best of our time together, and enjoy ourselves as well as we can, while I *am* here. What a delightful room you have!"

Ronald looked round him with satisfaction.

"Yes, it *is* rather nice," he admitted. "It's all my own taste, of course."

"So I thought," replied Susan, and the boy did not detect any sarcasm in her voice. "With some assistance from Mr Kœnigsen, perhaps?"

"Oh, well, Karl's taste is more matured than mine—that's only to be expected," said the boy, unwilling to give credit to anyone else, even his beloved Karl. "He has helped me a little in the details. We've talked things over together. But the main idea is my own."

"I thought it must be so," said Susan. "Most artists would dislike such a mixture of brilliant colours, I should think. It's very evident that *you* want about you as much warmth as you can get together."

The Reformation of Ronald

"I yearn for it," said the boy. "It's the only thing that makes me feel alive. I can't stand these London fogs and the dull, dark days, and all that's so horrible in an English climate."

"Which place do you like best of those you've been to?" said Miss Pengelley, thoughtlessly, and repented of her indiscretion when she saw the blank look of despair on Ronald's face.

"I've never been anywhere since I was a baby, except a few miles in the country, where I could be driven to. They won't let me go in railway trains—it brings on the pain."

"Is that very bad?" asked Susan, sympathetically. The boy twisted his face as though the mere thought were enough to frighten him.

"You wouldn't want it again if you'd had it once. They inject stuff, you know, and that stills it; but it's pretty bad. If it wasn't for that I could travel where I so long to go."

"To St Helga?" asked Susan.

"St Helga! No. It's my mother who yearns after St Helga. She can't go there because of leaving me; but I believe she's really homesick sometimes for that bleak little place, with its cliffs and the wild birds and the sea. She's often described it to me, and so has Karl Kœnigsen, who's booming it now, but I've got no leanings towards St Helga."

"You'd like Italy, perhaps, and Greece, or even the south of France. They're very beautiful."

"Yes, I know—olives and vineyards and old ruins. But you've never been there, Miss Pengelley?"

"Not to Italy or Greece, but I've stayed a good deal in Mentone with my mother. She died of consumption. It's some years ago now."

"Oh, I didn't know you'd ever been out of Devonshire." Ronald looked at Susan with increased respect. "But it isn't anywhere this side of the Mediterranean that I long to go. I want blinding sunshine and bright blue skies and palms. I'd enjoy a bit of desert,

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dry and hot, with camels and Arabs, and the afterglow, like Goodall's Egyptian paintings. The colour of a real tropical afterglow must be perfectly glorious."

"Yes, it's very fine," said Susan. I just remember seeing it at Galle—the beautiful pink glow behind cocoanut palms."

Ronald stared at her.

"What, *you*—you've seen the East?"

"Not much of it. But my old dad was an army chaplain in India, and I was born there. I didn't come home either till I was older than most Indian children, for we elders had to wait for the younger ones to go with us. There wasn't much money for us to do as we liked, though I daresay you wouldn't understand that."

"Money!" repeated Ronald, with a contemptuous inflexion. "Oh! money doesn't help one much."

"I think it does—a good deal," returned Miss Pengelley, frankly. "If it wasn't for money—or rather the lack of it—I shouldn't be here now."

"I shouldn't care how poor I was," said Ronald, "if I had grown up in India—if I'd even gone there as a tourist. Tell me," he asked suddenly, "have you ever seen the Taj?"

"I was born at Agra," replied Miss Pengelley. "We lived there several years. Yes, I remember the Taj."

Ronald was silent, too deeply impressed for words. Presently he pointed to a small, brilliant picture on an easel.

"That's the Taj at sunset. Kœnigsen painted that."

Susan examined it critically.

"It's good in its way," she said. "It seems to me what you'd call a vivid bit of colour. But it's rather like a tinted photograph."

"Oh!" Ronald was agape. "You mustn't say that to Kœnigsen. But I don't suppose you know

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much about it. It's considered splendid. My father paid a lot for that."

"I daresay. But everyone has a right to an opinion—don't you think so? Now *I* think that Mr Kœnigsen has missed the poetry of the Taj. It's just the poetry that makes it what it is—the most perfect monument a great king could build to the memory of the dead woman whom he loved."

"I hadn't thought about that," said Ronald.

"No, you wouldn't," retorted Susan. "A boy doesn't think of such things. Apparently Mr Kœnigsen didn't either. He only saw a fine bit of form and colour."

Again Ronald meditated in silence. Then,—

"I say, Miss Pengelley, tell me some more about India."

"Oh, I haven't any more. It's my eldest brother who could tell you interesting things. He loves the East—like you. He's living in Ceylon—in the centre of it—where the old dead cities are that belonged to that wonderful civilisation long before Christ. The natives still go up in thousands to worship there. Most people would think it a dreadful place—so hot and full of fever; but he just loves it. He doesn't come to England very often, but when he does he growls at the climate almost as much as you do, and pines for his jungle and his steamy heat, and snakes and wild elephants, and all that sort of thing."

Ronald's dark, peaky face was stretched forward, and he no longer looked supercilious and discontented.

"I didn't know you'd got any brothers," he blurted.

"You never asked me," smiled Miss Pengelley. "Of course I've got brothers—plenty of them. That was one reason why Mrs Jacobs engaged me," she said frankly. "I'm used to boys."

"How many of them are there? And what do they do all day?"

The Other Mrs Jacobs

"They've got to work, all of them; they're not so fortunate as you are," laughed Miss Pengelley. "Two are at school still; one is in Australia; and the eldest, who is in Ceylon, is a missionary."

"Oh! A missionary!" Ronald's tone said that he didn't think much of that. "It must be a precious dull life."

"It isn't dull at all. He's got to do a good many things in the intervals of converting black men," laughed Susan. "He rides all over the country among the native villages. And he's obliged to be a very good sportsman, because there's lots of big game about, and it's just as well to know how to shoot in a country like that, for it might be dangerous if one didn't. He goes into all sorts of out-of-the-way places, and has heaps of exciting adventures. I have a lot of his letters upstairs telling me about them—not at all the kind of things you read about in books."

Ronald wriggled among his cushions.

"I—I suppose they're private letters."

"Not particularly. You see, we're a large family, and our letters go the rounds, so Jack's adventures are common property. But you're ready now, aren't you, to get on with this book about the East?" She turned over the pages and prepared to begin. Ronald, however, had evidently something to say. He cleared his throat once or twice, and at last interrupted her as she plunged into a chapter.

"I say, Miss—er—Pengelley, if those letters aren't private, couldn't you read me a bit or two out of them? I get so tired of made-up travel books. I'd like to get hold of something real and fresh. You might bring some down, mightn't you?"

"I certainly might, some day, perhaps—when you've been particularly nice to me, you know." Miss Pengelley laughed at the boy in an unembarrassed fashion, and immediately began to read. Ronald did not pay much attention at first. He was

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vexed to feel that somehow she had got the better of him. But very soon the soothing inflexions of her voice allayed his annoyance and invited his attention. Miss Pengelley read for three-quarters of an hour without stopping, then put down the book. "Now, as you haven't asked me if I'm tired," she said, "I'll take the liberty of mentioning that I am. Suppose you tell me something for a change."

"I've got nothing to tell. How should *I* know interesting things—a cooped-up cripple without a chance of seeing or doing anything?" growled Ronald.

"Well, I should have said that you had plenty to interest you; but of course that's a matter of opinion. You've lots of things to look at anyhow, and you might tell me something about the insides of those book or stories of the pictures. I'm sure you know them."

"They're mostly Kœnigsen's sketches in Java and places like that. He's got a story to tell about every one of them. A delightful chap is Karl Kœnigsen."

"That, too, is a matter of opinion," said Susan, who was mischievously endeavouring to hold her own at all points. "I don't know anything about Java. Do let me hear some of his stories. That's an odd bit." She pointed to a rough drawing of what was evidently an extinct crater.

"That's a volcano," explained Ron, "and he rode through miles and miles of primeval forest to look at it. There was a rebellion going on, and those fellows in the foreground are warriors, and they nearly did for Kœnigsen."

He touched up the tale of an exciting adventure in which Karl Kœnigsen had on his own showing performed prodigies of valour. Miss Pengelley's shrewd wit discerned some flaws in the narrative, and, moreover, she took leave to doubt that Karl Kœnigsen—except as an after-dinner speaker—had ever recklessly exposed himself to danger. She was

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arguing the question with Ronald when Mrs Jacobs came in and was surprised to find her son so animated.

"Ron, dear! I hope you're not overtiring yourself. You mustn't let him talk too much, Miss Pengelley."

"Oh! mother, I wish you wouldn't be always fussing over me," exclaimed Ronald, crossly. "It's the only fault you have," he explained, with some compunction, seeing a shade cross her face. He made an awkward grab at her hand and laid it caressingly against his cheek with what was for him an unusual show of affection. Mrs Jacobs stooped to kiss him.

"As long as you're happy, dear," she said. "I should like you to do always just as you like—if only it were not bad for you."

She stayed a few minutes, talking lightly, but with a preoccupied air, which was evident by her having asked no question about the subject of mirth between Ronald and Miss Pengelley cut short by her entrance. Susan, shrewdly perceptive, took note of this and wondered, but was enlightened when, in reply to Ronald's question, "What's the matter, mum? You don't seem quite in form somehow," Mrs Jacobs replied,—

"I'm worried about your father, Ron. He hasn't been like himself the last day or two, and this morning I really thought he must be ill."

"Oh! he's all right," returned Ronald, cheerfully. "There couldn't possibly be anything wrong with the Universal Agent—there never is. What would all the advertising people do if such a calamity happened? Besides, if he was ill he'd know it himself and send for old Grier."

"That's just it. Doctor Grier told me the day before yesterday that your father had been to see him, and it never occurred to me that it might have been on any other account than yours and mine."

"He's all right, you may be sure," repeated Ronald. "It's 'Spiridia's' imagination that's at fault, mother."

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It makes you always on the lookout for things. Go and work it off in the book."

"Yes, I will," said Mrs Jacobs. Pausing as she went, she said, "I'm trusting Miss Pengelley, Ron, not to let you over-exert yourself."

When the door had closed behind her, Ronald turned to Susan.

"Now, Miss Pengelley. Hullo! What are you thinking of?"

"I was thinking about your mother—how gifted and charming she is, and yet with so many claims upon her how devoted to her crippled son!"

Ronald had never considered the matter in that light.

"Why, she's my mother," he said.

"Exactly. And not like most other people's mothers."

"Oh!" returned Ronald, dubiously, "I thought—"

"That all mothers were the same. You'd find the difference, my young friend, if you'd seen as much of the world even as I have. I can tell you that you'd better make the most of such a mother when you've got her."

"Well, of course I do," answered Ronald. "We get on very well together."

"Very well indeed," returned Miss Pengelley. "Only I notice that she's everlastingly considering what she can do to give you pleasure; and really, Ronald, you do remind me sometimes of a bear with a sore head."

Susan looked at the boy to see if she had gone too far. But apparently Ronald found plain speaking salutary.

"I say, Miss Pengelley, you're coming it rather strong. You're as bad as old Grier. That's the sort of thing he's always stuffing down my throat."

"And quite right too. Somebody's got to do it, unless you mend your ways and save one the trouble."

The Other Mrs Jacobs

"But what can a fellow do? I think the world of my mother, of course. But what chance have I—a cripple, tied to a chair and a crutch—of doing anything for her?"

"It seems to me that you have got more chance of that than ordinary boys who are away at school or out in the world could possibly have. You might, for instance, show her a pleasant face when she does things for you instead of finding fault with her for looking after you."

"Come, I say, Miss Pengelley—"

"Well?"

"How long is it since you arrived?"

Susan consulted her watch.

"This is Friday morning—fifteen minutes to twelve. I arrived on Tuesday just about 4.45, I should say. That makes about sixty-six hours and some odd minutes."

Ronald smiled.

"Seems to me that you've taken us in, and turned us round, and settled in your own mind pretty freely what stuff we're made of."

"I never was considered slow," admitted Susan, complacently. "And when you've come to a place for a special purpose it's as well not to waste time in setting about it. I came here to help your mother—and you. I can't do one without the other."

Ronald grinned sardonically.

"So you begin helping by preaching at me?"

"Not a bit of it. I hate sermons—except my Dad's—and anyway, I don't expect you to listen to one from me. Still, I don't see why you shouldn't do what you can for your mother."

Ronald leaned back amid his cushions with that curious old-man air which sat so strangely on his shrivelled boyish form.

"Well, then, you might mention a thing I could do for her, and I'll do it."

The Reformation of Ronald

"Done!" cried Susan, merrily. "She's going to a party this evening. Get her some flowers. She'd like them, wouldn't she?"

The boy looked pleased.

"I daresay she would. I never thought of it. Look here—we might find out from Julie—that's her maid, you know—what she's going to wear to-night, and get them to match her dress. The workroom is on your floor, Miss Pengelley."

"All right," said Susan. "I'll look in and find out if I can."

"But I don't know how I'm to get them," said the boy. "We must go to a good florist's, you know."

"I can't help you there—though I'll go and forage for one, if you like. Or—don't you get sick of trundling round the garden? Why shouldn't you go in your chair and find the florist yourself?"

"Not a bad idea! I will. There's a good one in the Bayswater Road, I know. Ring the bell, Miss Pengelley—do you mind?"

"Not when I'm asked politely," said Susan—who was beginning to feel proud of herself—doing as he desired, and then making for the door.

"But you are coming too? Oh, I say, Miss Pengelley, you must! I can't stand that stable-help who wheels me going in to choose flowers."

"I'll come if you like," said Susan. "I shall enjoy a walk."

"That's right. I say—a little diffidently—we might get a bunch for you too. What are you going to wear?"

"I'm not going," said Susan.

"Not going!"

"That needn't prevent me from helping you to choose your mother's flowers."

"But you *are* going! Here, Hornblow"—to the butler, who was respectfully waiting—"telephone round to the stables for my chair—at once,

The Other Mrs Jacobs

and then you can come and get me my coat and hat."

"Very good, sir," and Hornblow departed.

Ronald turned again to Susan.

"You must come to-night. The show will be fun to you, even if it's dull to me." His face drooped pathetically. Susan felt a pang of sympathy for the boy—the first it had been possible for her to feel. "Mother will have people like flies buzzing round her. She's going to help Karl receive, too. I shall only be able to stick to my chair in a corner all the time. You might come, Miss Pengelley."

Susan considered for a moment.

"I didn't intend to, because, you see, I wasn't asked by Mr Koenigsen, and I sha'n't know a soul, and didn't particularly care to go. But if you'd like me to keep you company—well, that makes a difference."

"I should like it immensely," said Ronald, brightening. "We could have some fun together. You've been awfully rough on a fellow, Miss Pengelley. Make up for it. I shouldn't wonder if you're right in what you've been saying, but if you come along with us to-night you'll be able to judge of the effect of the slating you've given me. I daresay I deserved it. I'm a selfish beggar, but being driven to think so much about oneself is apt to spoil one's temper."

"I'm sure it is," said Susan, brightly. "All right, I'll come this evening."

Miss Pengelley trotted upstairs, past "Spiridia's" sanctum, which was closed, and to her own floor, where she found the workroom, and a French maid busily employed upon a gown which was the one, she informed Susan, that her mistress was to wear that evening. It was of white satin, made in somewhat mediæval fashion, an outer robe opening over an under dress, and close-fitting sleeves of soft, thin stuff, embroidered, as the maid said, in St Helgan colours

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—greenish blue and pinkish yellow—a conventional design of lilies outlined in seed pearls. The dress was very beautiful, and Miss Pengelley pictured to herself how well it and Mrs Jacobs would become each other. She hastened back, after putting on her hat and jacket, to find Ronald ready for his outing.

CHAPTER XI

A QUESTION OF CONDITIONS

BUT neither Ronald, nor Miss Pengelley, nor perhaps Mrs Jacobs herself, had calculated upon the Covent Garden bouquet of La France roses and smilax sent by Kœnigsen, which arrived almost simultaneously with Ronald's offering. The boy's bouquet was the choicest in its way. It had been chosen with much deliberation by himself and Miss Pengelley, and was composed of blue lilies of varying shades and flesh-coloured orchids, bound by trails of palest green—the nearest match Susan could suggest to Mrs Jacobs's lovely St Helgan dress.

Kœnigsen's flowers were brought up at tea-time, accompanied by a note, which Mrs Jacobs read with a surprised look, the faint flush deepening on her face. Ronald was annoyed at being forestalled.

"Let's see, mum."

But Mrs Jacobs withheld the missive.

"No, no, it's nonsense. An ebullition of Karl's artistic temperament. I shall have to make it clear to him that I'm much too old to have adoring notes sent to me—even in fun."

"Why, Karl's taking a new line," said Ronald. "I don't believe he ever bothered to send you flowers before. And as for adoring notes! This St Helga boom has turned his head, mum."

"That's it," replied Mrs Jacobs. "It's all because I'm a St Helgan woman. But Karl should have

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remembered that there's blue in the St Helgan colours. I've had my gown embroidered on purpose," she added regretfully, as she laid the bouquet upon a table. Hornblow had carried off the florist's box. Ronald exchanged a triumphant glance with Miss Pengelley.

"Never mind, mum. You wait and see. Somebody else remembered you and knew exactly what you were going to wear to-night. I'll bet you a bob, Miss Pengelley, that those roses won't see the St Helga Gallery."

Mrs Jacobs looked sufficiently mystified to please the boy, but she had no time to inquire further what he meant, for at that moment Hornblow reappeared, bearing another box, from which he extracted the bouquet of blue lilies and orchids. Mrs Jacobs exclaimed, in surprise and delight,—

"Why, these really are St Helgan colours, and it's a perfect match for my gown. Who could have thought of it? Ron! I believe it's you."

"I'm striking out a new line too, mother—like Karl. But you'll wear mine, won't you?"

"Of course I will. They are charming. Dear, dearest boy, thank you so very much."

Mrs Jacobs lifted the flowers to her face. Her blue-green eyes, which matched the lilies, filled with a sudden rush of tears. The bouquet was indeed lovely, and it would add the finishing effect to her costume; but it was the unselfish thought in her usually selfish darling that touched her. Meanwhile, Hornblow had taken from the bottom of the box a spray of violets and camellias.

"There's this too, ma'am."

"Oh! Give 'em to me!" cried Ronald, and immediately handed the spray to Susan. "You must wear 'em, Miss Pengelley. I settled with the shop-girl when you weren't looking."

Susan, highly gratified, accepted the peace-offering.

"But Miss Pengelley isn't going," said his mother.

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"Oh, yes, she is," replied Ronald. "I've persuaded her."

"If it doesn't make any difference to you," said Susan, demurely.

Mrs Jacobs acquiesced somewhat stiffly, though she was glad that matters had so arranged themselves. She saw with some surprise the more friendly footing established between Ronald and Miss Pengelley, but though it was a relief to her, she was too much absorbed in her own thoughts to pay much attention to outside conditions.

Hornblow came back at the moment, the bearer of a telephone message.

"Mr Jacobs is afraid he can't get back in time to go with you this evening, ma'am. He desires me to say that he'll dine in the City and follow you to Mr Koenigsen's Gallery."

"There, you see," said Ronald, when the butler had gone, "there can't be much wrong with the Universal Agent. I know what's upsetting him. He's hot on an American deal; and you've got to be pretty sharp to get the better of Stars and Stripes."

To Miss Pengelley's susceptible fancy, "Spiridia" appeared the very embodiment of romance, when she came down to dinner in her mediæval-looking gown, with its front of pearl-outlined pink and blue lilies, its wide hanging sleeves, showing inside ones clinging closely, and its straight embroidered corselet ending in a girdle of quaintly-set greenish stones and pearls, while a coronet of similar stones, tipped with pearls, was set on her luxuriant fair hair, and a double row of pearls encircled her neck. She carried Ronald's lilies, and so fair and youthful did she look that it was difficult to realise that she could be the boy's mother.

Miss Pengelley, a Puritan figure in a grey and white gown, with Ronald's violets and camellias at her breast, ventured on a timid appreciation of Mrs Jacobs's costume and jewels.

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"They are St Helga pearls, and this"—touching her girdle—"is a kind of malachite found only in St Helga. I'm glad you like me," responded "Spiridia," simply.

The St Helga Gallery was in a quiet side street between Bond Street and Regent Street. They arrived there before ten o'clock, for Mrs Jacobs had promised to be early. Already, however, two or three carriages were drawing up at the kerb, and policemen were guarding the awning and crimson-carpeted footway.

A carrying-chair had been provided for Ronald, and he was borne safely by Hornblow and an assistant up the broad flight of stairs, and through the palms on the landing to a convenient position in the Gallery, where he would have the best view of what was going on.

It was a long room, with pictures set at intervals along the walls—not too many of them—the chief ones specially illuminated. These were mostly paintings of wild landscapes—bold headlands jutting out into a northern sea, with white gulls circling round the cliffs; sunrise, sunset and moonlight effects upon the waves—Køenigsen excelled in these; bits of moor and stony waste, cotters' dwellings and fishing villages; while placed among the larger pictures were portraits of St Helgan old men and old women in the picturesque head-dress of the peasantry, lads, girls and children—a representative display of St Helgan types. In the centre of one wall, draped with the St Helgan flag, was the portrait of a fine-looking, white-haired man in whose features Miss Pengelley discerned a likeness to Mrs Jacobs, and was not surprised to have pointed out to her as the late President Brack. This was stated to be copied by Køenigsen from an original picture in the Assembly House at St Helga. It was certainly not in Køenigsen's style, though at first, on looking round the Gallery, Miss Pengelley was struck by the

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painter's versatility. She learned later, however, from the conversation of a group of people studying the pictures, that Koenigsen was not responsible for the entire contents of the Gallery, but that he was in reality the founder of a St Helgan School, numbering various young modern painters among its members.

At one end of the Gallery were some fine specimens of the famous St Helgan tapestry, and of the carving and silver work of that curious island. Ronald solved the doubt in her mind.

"You'd never think, would you, Miss Pengelley, that an artist could hit upon such a scheme as this for making money. There isn't a sharper business man in London than Karl Koenigsen, nor a better painter into the bargain."

"What is the scheme exactly?" asked Susan.

"Why, he started it first by running his St Helga pictures for all he was worth. Then by getting the tapestry and things cheap and on commission in St Helga, and persuading swells that they couldn't be truly artistic unless they bought them. And now he's got this place, which he calls the St Helgan Studio, to exhibit his pictures in as well, and some by other chaps who aren't big enough to interfere with him. Of course they pay for the privilege. I shouldn't wonder if he made his fortune out of St Helga before he's done."

"Nor I," returned Miss Pengelley.

She was stationed by Ronald's chair, watching, with interest and amusement, the scene in which her own part was that of humble spectator. And indeed it was quite a brilliant one. London evening parties in the circles of Upper Bohemia are all pretty much the same, and the crowd which frequents them does not greatly vary. As at private views, there are always certain well-known celebrities — politicians, aristocratic cranks, great ladies with artistic sympathies, literary big guns, celebrated actors and

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actresses, and the inevitable sprinkling of wealthy patrons and fashionable journalists. Karl Kœnigsen's gathering did not differ particularly from such assemblies. The royal duchess, hailing by birth from that particular northern kingdom which holds a protectorate on St Helga, did not appear, in spite of Mr Kœnigsen's professed expectations. Susan wondered whether there had ever been any real grounds for supposing that she would do so. At all events, her name was not printed on the invitation cards, an opportunity which—had it been authorised—the enterprising painter would certainly not have let slip. But there were, as he had announced, two ordinary duchesses, and a number of less important personages recorded in the Peerage; indeed, the list of names duly given in *The Morning Post* the next morning must have stirred with envy the hearts of many an ambitious hostess.

These people did not stay very long, for it happened that a charity ball under distinguished patronage, the first of the winter season, was taking place that evening, and most of them were going on to it, but their fine dresses and diamonds lent lustre to the assembly and dazzled Miss Pengelley's countrified vision. She had never seen anything like this before, and was genuinely glad that she had not yielded to her first impulse and stayed at home. But wherever her eyes wandered they invariably returned, when a rift in the throng permitted it, to "Spiridia," who, though not ostensibly receiving the guests, was yet near enough to Mr Kœnigsen to shake hands with everyone she knew, and to be introduced to several strangers as the daughter of St Helga's famous, if unfortunate, President.

There was music presently—a small string band of male performers, and a few women singers, all in the St Helgan costume, singing and playing St Helgan airs. The buzz of talk almost drowned the musicians' performance, but perhaps it was only designed to

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promote conversation. By-and-by, curtains were thrown back from a doorway leading out of the Gallery, so that a flower-decked refreshment-room, with attendants in St Helgan dress, could be seen, and the congested crowd began to circulate a little more freely.

"Well, young lady, is this your first experience of a London party?" asked a deep voice presently at Susan's elbow.

She turned hastily and saw Doctor Grier. He looked taller than ever, she thought, and immensely distinguished, in spite of his somewhat gruff manner. His clean-shaven face, with its clear-cut, distinctive features, towered above the heads of the men. His paleness, and a certain rigidity of expression, gave the suggestion of grey marble, which, however, was belied by the flashing eyes bent now upon her. Susan met the piercing look straight.

"Good evening, Doctor Grier. I've been scolding Ronald for not remembering my name; but I don't fancy you even know it."

"Oh, yes, I do—it's Pengelley—good old Cornish appellation. Miss Pengelley, will you allow me to take you into the refreshment-room?"

He offered his arm with an old-world courtesy that was an odd contrast to his former brusqueness. She glanced at the boy in the chair.

"I'm in charge of Ronald."

"Never mind. Young man, it won't hurt you to stay by yourself for ten minutes. Why doesn't your friend the painter come and look after you?"

"I'm not a lord or a lady, or even a rich art connoisseur," returned Ronald, who, when good-tempered, was not without some sense of humour.

"You've about sized it," said Doctor Grier, "but the grandees are already beginning to melt away. What will you have in the way of supper, boy? I'll sample the grub and liquor for you and send you

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along whatever I think is most wholesome. That'll be the best way."

"Oh, Doctor Grier, how kind of you!"

It was Mrs Jacobs's voice. "Ron, dear, I've been trying to get at you. How have you been enjoying yourself?" She did not wait for an answer, her face looked a little troubled as her eyes sought those of the doctor. "You have not seen my husband, have you, Doctor Grier? He was late. He said he would follow us."

"No, I haven't seen him. I'm just going to take Miss Pengelley to have some supper. May I come back for you? Will you do me that honour?"

"I should be very pleased," began Helga, vaguely, but just at that moment Mr Koenigsen appeared. He had evidently followed her.

"How are you, Ron? Lend me your mother for ten minutes." He swept off Mrs Jacobs, taking no notice of Doctor Grier and Miss Pengelley, towards a miniature palm grove at a corner of the Gallery, which was in reality a photographic studio utilised temporarily as a conservatory.

Mrs Jacobs appeared to have scarcely heard the last words that Doctor Grier addressed to her. She had taken the artist's arm without protest, and the two were already disappearing in the crowd. Ronald looked annoyed.

Doctor Grier watched the retreating figures, a curious expression on his face. He might have been a Roman emperor unexpectedly affronted, thought Miss Pengelley. He caught her eye and gave a queer laugh.

"All right! We'll join the beasts feeding, Miss Pengelley. Just you wait in patience, young man. Your turn's coming, and I can tell you that you've got the best of it in one respect. You have a seat, and it can't be taken from you. I doubt if we shall be as lucky. Allow me, Miss Pengelley." Doctor Grier was magnificent when he wore his best

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manners. He seemed in no particular hurry, however, but first made a round of the room, passing by the conservatory, and calling Susan's attention to the arrangement of it in cunning corners, each small nook with its couches and chairs being screened from the other by an abutting stand of flowers, the whole dimly lighted by one thickly-shaded electric globe. In the furthest recess Miss Pengelley fancied that she saw the gleam of Mrs Jacobs's white brocaded dress and fair hair, but was not certain. Doctor Grier led her along.

"I'm very pleased with you," he said abruptly. "I see that you're doing what I told you."

"I have endeavoured to follow your advice," answered Miss Pengelley, with mock meekness.

"You'll find I didn't give it without having weighed my words. I suppose that you stood up to Ronald," he went on. "Otherwise that young man wouldn't regard you so amiably as he apparently does. I congratulate you upon your victory."

"He didn't want much standing up to," replied Susan. "After all, Ronald's not such a bad boy."

"He's an utterly spoilt one," said the doctor. There was a short silence as the pair perambulated the Gallery. Then he said abruptly,—

"Has there been anything wrong with Ahasuerus-Jacobs?"

Susan was puzzled for a minute or two.

"The firm, do you mean, or the man?"

"No, I mean the man."

"Oh! Mr Jacobs! I don't know. Mrs Jacobs was a little uneasy about him, but there didn't seem much the matter."

"There's a great deal the matter. Wait a minute—" They had reached the supper-tables and he was making a way to find her standing-room. "What will you have? Quails in aspic—lobster salad? Turkey? And champagne, or hock cup?"

"Quails in aspic and hock cup, please."

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"That's right. I like a woman to answer promptly, and to know her own mind, even if it's only about food."

He attended solicitously to her various wants; then, when she was fairly started, he foraged for a substantial plate of turkey and tongue, which he held in one hand while he poured out some hock cup with the other. Suddenly perceiving Hornblow among the waiters, he beckoned to the man across the table.

"Mr Ronald's by himself and wants his supper. You take this along, and if you can get hold of a sweet that's light and digestible—no pastry kick-shaws—and no lobster salad, mind—so much the better. A good supper may stave off bad consequences. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," returned Hornblow, and went on his mission.

Susan greatly enjoyed her small repast, and decided that Doctor Grier when not, so to speak, on the professional rampage was a very pleasant companion. He was in no haste to get back to Ronald now that Kœnigsen had appropriated Mrs Jacobs, but pointed out to Susan various celebrities, and then took her on a tour of inspection among the pictures. They stopped before a painting by Kœnigsen of a long, lone promontory stretching out into the sea, cleft, as it seemed, in the middle, so that a great bare cliff—the home of nesting birds—reared itself above a shelving landslip, from which the earth *débris* had been washed away, leaving only granite ribs and strange mounds of rock that, at the outlying point, took shape of strange primeval monsters. In the curve of the cape lay a stretch of sand, and over this the waves crept, licking it lovingly, and dashing themselves against the lower cliff. Poised above the little beach one white gull appeared to be waiting for the advance of a foam-crested billow, in order that it might swoop down and lose itself in the mysterious green hollow of the embracing wave.

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"Oh! that reminds me of Mrs Jacobs," exclaimed Miss Pengelley.

Doctor Grier shook his great shoulders as if roused from a dream.

"What! The lonely white bird crying to the sea, as it scents storm, shipwreck and disaster! You have a poetic imagination, Miss Pengelley."

"I did not mean that at all," returned Susan, "but if you like to think so, I'm not sure that the bird does not remind me of Mrs Jacobs."

Glancing along, she had caught sight of "Spiridia," her gleaming white brocade dress floating behind her, and with its breast of soft-hued embroidery making her look not unlike a bird, as she moved swiftly along the room towards where Ronald was stationed. She had evidently been intercepted in her course by some people who had detained her in conversation, but she seemed to have come from the conservatory, and Miss Pengelley wondered what had become of Kœnigsen. For Mrs Jacobs was alone, and moreover, now that her conventional smile claimed by the little group detaining her had faded away from her face, Susan fancied that she showed signs of discomposure.

Doctor Grier also was watching the stately figure which had its head erect, the face tilted a little, with an expression upon it faintly tinged with alarm, yet resolute.

"The wild bird driven back to her nest," he said.

Miss Pengelley turned to him.

"What did you mean," she asked, moved to the question by something in his tone, "when you said that there was a great deal the matter?"

"That—no more nor less. But it's best that she should not apprehend trouble. Only if there should come a time when something unexpected happens, you'll remember that I've told you this, Miss Pengelley, so that you may feel perfect confidence in sending for me as speedily as possible."

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"Yes," replied Susan, wondering, yet strangely impressed. She had the feeling that, no matter what disaster might bode, she could rely on this man's support.

Just then she perceived Koenigsen. He, too, was coming from the direction of the conservatory, but in company of a woman who seemed the direct opposite of Mrs Jacobs. Miss Pengelley attracted Doctor Grier's attention to the two.

"You have been pointing out all sorts of people to me. Tell me who is that extremely pretty lady in the wonderful crimson dress with the diamond lizards and things in front, and the snake round her neck. She must have a fancy for uncanny reptiles. I mean the lady walking across with Mr Koenigsen."

"That's—Mrs Grier," answered the doctor. "Yes, she has a fancy for reptiles." His glance at Koenigsen seemed to Miss Pengelley's mind to point the remark. She laughed, feeling that she had made an inadvertant speech.

"Well, I don't think there's much of the reptile about you, Doctor Grier, and I conclude that Mrs Grier likes you!"

"It is to be assumed that she does," said Doctor Grier in his most measured manner. "But you are not quite right, Miss Pengelley. I have a good deal in common with certain snakes. There's a brown one, for instance, called in some places the *piora*, which when molested becomes so fierce that it will pursue its enemy for miles. I can be fierce in certain conditions."

"Perhaps. But not treacherous, I am certain."

"Morality is also a question of conditions. It's allowable to fight a foe with his own weapon."

The red lady with the dark hair, in which reposed a drowsy poppy sprinkled with diamond dewdrops, glided past a little in advance of them. At the sound of Doctor Grier's voice she turned a mocking face towards him over her shoulder. Koenigsen did

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not notice either the doctor or Miss Pengelley. He looked cross and slightly agitated. The two were making straight for Mrs Jacobs, now standing by her son's chair.

At that moment, standing at the entrance and gazing round, no doubt in search of his wife, Miss Pengelley perceived Mr Jacobs. He was not able to advance for a minute or so, owing to the pressure of a number of people suddenly emerging from the supper-room on their way to the staircase.

CHAPTER XII

THE EAVESDROPPER

MRS GRIER'S highly-decorated personality was, upon the night of K  nigsen's party, a battle-ground of conflicting emotions not of the most elevated order. She was an ill-regulated little lady, in spite of her natural shrewdness and acquisitive tendencies. She certainly liked money, but she liked K  nigsen even better. He was perhaps the only person in the world who had the power to sway what might be called Clarice Grier's heart. Her further weakness was a revengeful and occasionally miscalculating temper. That impulsive temper had all her life weighed down the scale against the more politic and self-interested part of her. Just now it was upsetting the balance altogether.

She was intensely jealous of Helga, and proportionately furious with her. She was jealous of her for three reasons—because she was Judah Jacobs's wife—this was the first, but least powerful reason—and because she was enjoying the money which Clarice knew would have been her own had she not deserted her first husband. Secondly, she was jealous because Andrew Grier preferred Helga to herself. She was heartily tired of Grier, and disliked him now, but he had attracted her immensely at one time, and she did not care to see, as she did plainly, that he had not only become entirely indifferent to her, but was, moreover, she shrewdly guessed, deeply attached to another woman, and that

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woman the one who stood in the place that might have been her own. But the strongest reason of all was that Kœnigsen, for whom she had an unreasoning infatuation, and whom she considered her own property, was also, she suspected, in love with Helga Jacobs. She felt that Helga was supplanting her all round, and the exact truth of how matters stood she was determined to ascertain for herself, as far as possible, that evening.

Therefore she watched every movement of Helga's and Kœnigsen's; and when, as the evening went on, and the strain of his duties as host was somewhat relieved, he led Helga into the conservatory with the evident intention of securing a *tête-à-tête*, Clarice seized her opportunity and slipped in after them, sheltering herself behind a stand of plants which partitioned the nook in which they sat from that where she was ensconced, within earshot of their conversation.

The beginning of it was lost to her. They seemed to be discussing some moot point. Kœnigsen was gently upbraiding Mrs Jacobs for neglect she had shown him.

"If it had been anyone else in the world," Clarice heard him say, "do you suppose I should have cared? But *you*—you who are the one woman in the world to me. You who have inspired all that is best in my work—all that is highest in myself. And on this evening above all others! Helga—you'll not be angry with me for calling you Helga? I can't help going back in memory to the time when we were playmates on the beach together in our own beloved island."

Mrs Jacobs's voice, calm, faintly rebuking, interrupted him.

"Do you really care so very much for St Helga, Karl? For itself, I mean, not for what it has meant to you in your career."

"The one means the other," he answered. "Yes, I

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do care for St Helga, not because it is my birthplace—but because it is yours. I love St Helga—and Helga”— he paused dramatically—“Helga, I love *you*. Now you can understand how I felt the slight to my devotion in your rejection of my poor roses.”

Mrs Jacobs laughed again, now rather nervously.

“Really, Karl, the last day or two you have quite embarrassed me by your romantic way of being devoted. Luckily I’m not vain, or you might make me forget that I’m thirty-five and the mother of a boy of sixteen. Just think how Lion and Ron would laugh if they heard you talking like that to me. My good friend, it’s a mistake.”

“No, it is not a mistake. It’s serious truth, and some-day you will realise it.”

Helga’s manner became more distant.

“I don’t understand you this evening. And now I think I should like to go back and see if Lion has come.”

“Oh! not yet. Give me just a little longer. Have I offended you? And I would be anything—I would do anything rather than lose your friendship. Only let me come to you as before, and time shall prove the strength and loyalty of my affection.”

“That’s right.” Helga’s tone became warmer. She seemed relieved. “You know that ever since we have found ourselves together in London, Karl, I have treated you almost as a brother, in memory of the old St Helgan days. Of course you shall come to us whenever you like. Ron would be miserable if you stayed away. But you mustn’t talk nonsense, my friend.”

“I know that I should not have spoken. But I was mad at the sight of you carrying another man’s flowers, and my jealousy got the better of me.”

“My dear Karl, your jealousy is too absurd! If you hadn’t been so dreadfully tragic I would have told you that the giver of this bouquet was Ron.

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Wasn't it sweet of the boy to find out from Julie what I was going to wear, and then to contrive the St Helgan colours in his flowers?"

"Ron! I didn't know he ever got you flowers."

"It's the first time, and that's what makes it so dear."

"I didn't think of the St Helgan colours," said the painter, regretfully. "I thought only of what would suit you—of the flowers which were sweetest and most like you, and so I chose La France roses."

"They're perfectly lovely, and I've got them in water at home. Now, will you take me back, please. I'm wondering what can have become of my husband. And besides, I've just remembered that I promised to go in to supper with Doctor Grier."

She got up, and as she did so dropped her fan. While he looked for it she moved, struck by an arrangement of flowers in front of her.

"Why, I believe those are white chrysanthemums trained over a shape!" she explained. "I have been thinking all the time that there was a marble statue hidden among the palms."

"A Japanese man did it," he said, and at that moment saw the fan, which had fallen into a pot of flowers at the end of the stand behind which Clarice was sitting. Picking it up, he caught a glimpse of red drapery among the plants, and, rising abruptly, confronted Mrs Grier, who had got up and was advancing towards him.

Her eyes flashed with fury, and the snake's head dropping forward on her chest was lifted by her spasmodic breathing. She looked a beautiful virago, and startled Mrs Jacobs, who was returning from her examination of the distorted chrysanthemum plant. Helga's hand was outstretched for her fan, when she saw from the expression of both faces that something was wrong. She could not have doubted it when Clarice, who had absolutely lost control over herself, spoke to Koenigsen in meaning tones,—

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"I have been waiting for you to keep your engagement with me, but you seem already too well occupied."

Køenigsen shrank and paled. That also was evident to Helga. She moved swiftly by, not taking her fan, and merely saying, "Please, don't mind me, I can find my own way back," went out of the conservatory.

Clarice, left alone with her companion, burst into a soft, vindictive laugh, not unlike, he thought, the hissing of an angry snake.

"You serpent!" he exclaimed.

She laughed on.

"So that is the other Mrs Jacobs!"

"The other Mrs Jacobs! What do you mean?"

She pulled herself up, but the curb was not effectual.

"Nothing. She *is* Mrs Jacobs, isn't she? Can't there be two Mrs Jacobs in the world? Helga Jacobs! She's the woman you're trying to throw me over for? She is the woman you love better than any other woman in the world. *Dieu!* The perfidy of men! But it was a bit forced, my Karl! I've heard you put more passion than that into 'I love you!'" She poked her chin forward a little as if jeering at him. "'I love you, Clarice!' 'I love you, Helga!'" All the same, is it? No, it is *not* all the same. You'll find more fire here to warm you than in that iceberg." She struck her bosom lightly with her gloved hand, and her face, changing, suddenly appealed to him in all its old seductiveness. He wavered, and her eyes lured him.

"You love me—you love me!" she cried with almost infantile delight. "And you shall marry me, my Viking. I shall advertise you better than all your St Helgas. I've a scheme for it." She put her hand upon his arm. He shook it off. Her manner of proprietorship goaded him to brutality.

"No, I *don't* love you. You'd better know the

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truth. You're all very well for—what you are! But to marry you! To go through the divorce court for you! *No!* It's Helga Jacobs that I mean to marry—by-and-by, when her husband is dead."

"Oh! You know he's going to die—do you? So do I. He'll be dead before the year's out. Isn't that what you're calculating upon?"

She threw her ball at random. He caught it, reckless, like many a crafty man in a moment of excitement.

"Come! I see your husband isn't particular in what they call professional honour. He's told you what he knows himself. The man has an aneurism of the heart and may die any day. It's the money I'm going for, Clarice, and I mean to have it, so don't you stand in my light or it'll be the worse for you. I'll make it worth your while to play into my hands. Let us cry 'quits' and be friends."

"Thanks. Have you forgotten," said she, with a stiffening back of her neck and a malign gleam in her eyes, "that my husband is in love with Mrs Jacobs too?"

"Pshaw! I'm not afraid of him. He's got to get rid of you, my dear, and that won't be so easy. I shall be first in the field. Take care!" as a suburban-looking man and two young ladies in limp draperies sauntered in. "We haven't got the place to ourselves. Come and have some supper."

"No supper, thank you. What you've got to do first is to take me up and introduce me to Mrs Jacobs—the other Mrs Jacobs, you know."

"I don't understand in the least what you're driving at."

"Never mind. You may some day. Some day, Karl Koenigsen, you'll have reason to regret that you ever met Mrs Jacobs—not the other Mrs Jacobs."

"You're getting mixed," he laughed, and she, taking his arm, laughed too.

"Perhaps I am. Perhaps things *are* a little mixed.

The Eavesdropper

Only remember what I say. Now, here's your humble slave, Karl K  nigsen." She made him a mock salutation. "There's nothing I enjoy so much as a game of wits, especially when there's a good stake in question. Oh, yes, I'll play into your hands if you make it worth my while. And the first thing I shall do to show how humble I am will be to apologise to Mrs Jacobs for having taken you from her so rudely. Of course I did not know that she was in your charge. Do you see? Now, present me nicely, as an old friend of yours and the wife of her esteemed medical attendant."

He hesitated.

"I don't see what your object is in wanting to know Mrs Jacobs."

"Don't you? Heavens! How dense men are. A woman would understand in a moment. Can't you give me credit for a little feminine desire to judge for myself as to the charms that have captivated both my lover and my husband. In fact, I might put the last word in the plural," and she gave again her derisive laugh, which made K  nigsen somewhat uneasy, for it had a meaning behind it that he could not fathom. He began to feel that he had been a fool to show his hand. But he knew Clarice's weak point—greed of money—and he decided that he would pay her off handsomely as soon as possible.

Mrs Jacobs, bending over her boy as she talked to him, was not aware of the approach of K  nigsen and Mrs Grier till they were close upon her. Miss Pengelley, loitering along the opposite line of pictures with Doctor Grier, who, strangely enough, in spite of his half engagement to take Mrs Jacobs in to supper, did not seem inclined to hasten the moment, was watching the wearer of the red dress, as with sinuous gait she proceeded up the room on K  nigsen's arm. Susan marvelled within herself at the sensuous attraction—she was sure it could be no other—that had drawn this grey, steel-like man to such a creature as

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that. Miss Pengelley's intuitive faculty enabled her to gauge fairly correctly the chief features in Mrs Grier's temperament and character. She could understand that there might exist an affinity between the painter and his present companion, but that Doctor Grier could have been enchained by such a type seemed incredible to Susan, till she remembered how, in their progress down the Gallery, he had shown a frank appreciation of female beauty. It was Mrs Grier's beauty, no doubt, that had cast its spell upon him. She was still—even in her maturity—a most fascinating woman. What, then, must she have been in youth?

Miss Pengelley, glancing round, saw that Mr Jacobs, released from the block at the entrance, was now making his way towards his wife. Susan was suddenly struck by the expression of his face as he came up quickly through the now thinning throng. It was eager and indignant, but through the anxiety and indignation she seemed to discern a sign of fear. What did it mean? She saw that Mr Jacobs's eyes were also upon the woman in red, who, with her small dark head and brilliant malign face protruding slightly, was nearing "Spiridia." Mr Jacobs seemed to be pressing forward in order to frustrate their meeting. And now Susan heard a muffled throat sound—an inarticulate oath—from her own cavalier. The doctor was craning his lean neck over the fashionably-dressed heads of two ladies in front of him which somewhat impeded his view of the woman in red.

He was obviously aware of the converging forces, for he had noticed Mr Jacobs's entrance, and Susan felt certain that he likewise would have frustrated the introduction between the two women had it been possible for him to do so.

But it was not possible. And Miss Pengelley, watching him with deep interest, saw the effort he made at self-restraint, as with iron face and arms

The Eavesdropper

folded he awaited the result. Miss Pengelley turned her eyes upon Mrs Jacobs, who looked up over Ronald's chair at a word from the boy calling her attention to Kœnigsen. A slightly-puzzled and slightly-relieved expression came over her face as Kœnigsen made the presentation, and Mrs Grier, holding out her hand, said a sentence or two, inaudible to Susan, but giving an impression of apologetic but keenly-pointed adulation. Mrs Jacobs at first bowed stiffly, then with the rearing of her fair head and the straight gaze of her blue eyes, which was a peculiarity of her manner when she felt at a loss, she accepted the situation and said a few formal words in reply. Before she could touch Mrs Grier's fingers, however, a heavy hand fell on her own shoulder, which made her start backward. She looked round and saw her husband's face, dark and angry, strangely agitated, his look fixed not upon herself but on the lady who stood by Kœnigsen.

"Why—Lion!" she faltered.

Mr Jacobs drew her sharply to his side. He made a visible effort to recover his composure.

"Helga! I beg your pardon for disturbing you so abruptly, but, my dear, I want you. I wish to take you home at once."

"But, Lion! Mr Kœnigsen has just introduced—"

Jacobs broke in, not allowing her to pronounce the name.

"Mr Kœnigsen will excuse you. I regret that the introduction cannot be made. I am obliged to take you away. Come."

She obeyed instantly, placing her hand upon her husband's coat sleeve with perfect confidence, though she was evidently surprised. So swiftly did he bear her away that she had not time for the slightest recognition of either Kœnigsen or Clarice. One of her husband's arms was extended before her, as if to make a way; there was something fiercely protective in the attitude. With the other he held hers closely

The Other Mrs Jacobs

to him. Koenigsen had dropped back in astonishment a pace or two. Clarice stood alone. Her face was distorted with passion; the eyes blazed, and the little protruding head more than ever suggested an enraged snake. Mr Jacobs's glance had swept her furiously for a second as he turned away with Helga.

The result was marked. Several people noticed it. Koenigsen looked amazed and even a little abashed. Ronald was dumbfounded. Clarice stood helpless, quivering from head to foot as though she had been struck. For once her rage was too deep to find expression. Doctor Grier took in every detail of the scene. If he did not actually hear the words that passed, he understood perfectly what had been said, and his face grew grimmer than its wont. With a formal bow to Miss Pengelley, whom he left standing where she was, he marched forward and took his place beside Mrs Grier. He offered her his arm with punctilious politeness.

"I believe, Clarice, that your carriage has been waiting for some time," he said. "Good-night, Mr Koenigsen. My wife and I have to thank you for an interesting evening."

CHAPTER XIII

A LONG FAREWELL

MR JACOBS led his wife downstairs, got her cloak for her, and put her into the brougham which, fortunately, was first on the rank, almost without a word. He took a seat beside her, and, except for a question as to the opening of the window, made no remark. She sat cold, pained, a wild thought darting through her mind that he might possibly have been an unseen auditor of Kœnigsen's declaration, and had taken seriously what Helga herself interpreted as merely an aberration of the artistic temperament—that excuse for so many vagaries. If this were so, she felt scornful of her husband's mood, supposing the cause of it to be so explainable. Surely he might know her better than to imagine her capable of being moved by Kœnigsen's raptures. That was not the kind of man, she thought bitterly, who could stir her soul. There was only one man living who could. Alas! her husband had failed to do so.

And now a little live thing, deep in Helga's breast, seemed to uncoil and drain her heart's blood—a live thing the existence of which she had first owned to herself two nights back, the night following her interview with Doctor Grier, when her pain and her shame had kept her awake, weeping, through the long hours. She had crushed down the thing—killed it, she believed—but it had awakened again at sight of the woman in red, who was Doctor Grier's wife. He did not love the woman, Helga knew, but she was his

The Other Mrs Jacobs

wife; and for herself, the man beside her was her husband of seventeen years, and the father of her almost grown-up son. Truly that revelation of her own passion which had come to Helga was torture and humiliation unutterable. For she had always been a simple-hearted, loyal woman, this daughter of St Helga. With the poetry of her northern ancestry, she had inherited much of the brave simplicity of sea-born men and women. It was not her way to whine over a lot that she herself had made, nor to be otherwise than sincere and dutiful in the natural relations of life. To be false to those obligations—to requite the kindness of so many years by unfaithfulness even in thought—seemed to Helga Jacobs despicable. She had suffered silently, but intensely, over the disillusionment of her girlish dreams, the sacrifice of romantic hopes, the renunciation of an ideal love, which in youth she had claimed as her right from fate. It seemed, indeed, a cruel wrong that this love should come to her now, when she was, as she told herself, almost an old woman, in a guise she could never have pictured to herself, and under such conditions that the slightest indulgence of it would be, according to her code of honour, a heinous sin.

Till now, Helga's interests—with the exception of that part of them which she gave to her work—and her heart throes also, had been confined within the circle of her own home—these last born of sorrow on account of her son's infirmity, and yearning regret that she was unable to give the best of herself to her husband who adored her, and whom she respected but could not love. From the beginning of her married life she had stifled the natural cravings for a love to which she could respond, at bitter cost to herself. Later on, she gave them vent in "Spiridia's" dreamy romances, which were a delight to the few but caviare to the general. Upon Ronald she had lavished the pent-up store of passion, which took shape in maternal devotion. To her husband she

A Long Farewell

invariably gave appreciative, even tender, consideration. So her married life had flowed on through the years, and no opportunity for budding had been given to those latent capacities which, in different circumstances, might have blossomed to an almost tropical luxuriance. She had got to the stage of content or apathy—she hardly knew which—as to the lack in her destiny of woman's keener emotions. No man had ever stirred her to more than kindly friendship till eight months ago when Doctor Grier had been called in to an acute development of Ronald's malady, which had been greatly relieved by his skilful treatment. And during those eight months a new desire, sweet, troublous, and latterly full of pain, had been born in Helga Jacobs's breast. The anguish of it now made her shudder.

"Are you cold, Helga?" Mr Jacobs asked in a heavy, spiritless tone. "Shall I put up this window?"

"No, thank you."

They had reached the Marble Arch, and there was a momentary stoppage caused by traffic coming from the Edgware Road. Helga leaned forward and looked out towards the shadowy Park on one side and the converging vista of lights ahead. A faint mist blurred outlines, heightening the mystery and giving a sense of unreality to the roar and movement of the night City. That very feeling of mystery quickened Helga's pulses, the flashing lights excited her. She had a sudden longing to break through the limitations of her life, to know herself better, to know the man beside her as she had never quite known him, and, firstly, to escape from the vague distress of uncertainty which intensified with every moment of silence. She turned to her husband. "Will you explain why you took me away in that sudden manner, just as Mr Koenigsen was introducing Doctor Grier's wife to me? It was a strange thing to do. She might almost have thought it an insult."

The Other Mrs Jacobs

Mr Jacobs did not at first answer. It was evident that he scarcely heard her.

"Why did you bring me home?" she repeated gently.

He merely answered in a dull tone, "It doesn't matter."

"But it does matter. The one thing I have always felt quite unnecessary is being rude to people."

A huge market waggon rattled past at the moment, making a great noise, and coming so close that it almost grazed the wheel of the brougham. Mrs Jacobs started. She was in a nervous, highly-strung condition to-night. Mr Jacobs put his head out of the window, and, contrary to his wont, swore at the coachman.

"Damn you! keep more to your left," he cried.

"Copley is never careless. It wasn't his fault, Lion," exclaimed Mrs Jacobs.

"Yes, it was his fault. He could have steered clear. He's always getting within an ace of an accident."

Mr Jacobs spoke in unreasoning irritation. He was in reality proud of the coachman, who had come from a great house, and was, his master often said, one of the best drivers in London. It was very unlike Mr Jacobs to complain of the man in this way, and Helga saw that he must be very much upset about something, or he would not have done so. She refrained, therefore, from further inquiries, and there was silence again. Presently they turned up Westbourne Terrace and into Braxton Gardens. The footman opened the door and Jacobs helped his wife to alight.

"The carriage had better go back at once," she said, "for Miss Pengelley and Ronald. Hornblow is there, and you need not go with it," she added to the footman.

The man touched his hat, and gave the order. The brougham drove off while Mr Jacobs opened the hall

A Long Farewell

door with his latchkey and let his wife in. She followed him into the hall and to the smoking-room, pausing to say to the footman,—

“When the carriage comes back let Hornblow know that Mr Ronald should go at once to bed. I shall not come up to him this evening.”

Mr Jacobs closed the door. There was a fire burning on the hearth, and in front of it a small table with decanters and glasses, syphons, cigars and biscuits. Mr Jacobs at once poured out some brandy, putting in a small quantity of soda water, and drank it straight off.

His wife looked at him in wonder, remarking the pallor of his face, which contrasted with his heavy dark moustache.

“What time did you get home, Lion?”

“I don’t know. About half-past ten.” He seated himself in a big leather-covered chair.

“You had dined, of course?”

“I had a chop—yes.” And he added, “It was a heavy day for me in the City. There was an unexpected turn of work at Birmingham.”

“Oh! I suppose you waited for telegrams?”

“Yes. It’s a big amalgamation affair of Davis’s—our old friend, you know. I’ve got to see him early to-morrow.”

“How are you going to manage that?”

“I shall take the 2 a.m. train from Euston.”

“What! To-night?”

“This morning.” He had his watch out. “It’s half-past twelve.”

“Oh! You should have told the carriage to wait.” She rang the bell.

Jacobs gave the order to the footman, adding, “I want my Gladstone bag packed with a change, and my day clothes. I shall go as I am.”

The servant went out.

“Do you mean to stay over to-morrow, Lion?”

“I must. I’ve got to talk things over with Davis

The Other Mrs Jacobs

—to work out figures. I've misled him a bit. He thinks I'm going into this concern, but I've changed my mind, and I shall stay over Sunday with him and explain my reasons."

"Then you won't be back till Monday?"

"I shall get to the office on Monday forenoon. You won't see me till the evening."

He became moodily silent again. She warmed herself for a few minutes at the fire; then she said,—

"Will you give me a glass of port wine, Lion, and a biscuit?"

He roused himself.

"I beg your pardon, Helga. I hadn't thought of it."

She daintily sipped the wine and nibbled a biscuit.

"I'm a little hungry, Lion. I have had nothing to eat since dinner. I was to have gone in to supper with Doctor Grier, but you came and carried me off without rhyme or reason, making me appear extremely ill-mannered. Will you tell me why you did so? It almost seemed as if you hadn't wanted me to know Mrs Grier."

"To know whom?" he cried. "Who did you say?"

"Mrs Grier. Doctor Grier's wife."

Helga had sufficiently aroused her husband now. He stared at her aghast.

"So that's who she is! Grier's wife! Are you sure of that, Helga?"

"Quite sure. Why do you ask? But I'd better tell you, Lion—for I can see you must have heard something about Mrs Grier, though I don't understand why you should question her marriage—that I know her story."

"You know her story? That I'm sure you don't," he said abruptly.

"Indeed I do. Doctor Grier himself told me.

A Long Farewell

Why do you look so horrified? Men are always hard on poor women who make the one mistake of loving too much."

"How on earth did Doctor Grier come to speak to you about—his wife?"

Helga looked into her husband's face straightly.

"I had heard that he was married, and I suggested to him that I should like to make Mrs Grier's acquaintance. He has been so kind—it seemed only friendly."

"You won't do it," exclaimed Jacobs, sharply. "Do you hear, Helga? I forbid you to know that woman."

"Very well, Lion; I have no desire to do so, especially as Doctor Grier himself does not wish it. But I can't think why you should judge her so harshly."

"What makes you think I judge her harshly—eh?"

"Because he himself told me the story. It was in confidence, but that ought not to matter between you and me. I am sure you would understand and respect his motives."

"So *he* did not want you to know her? And what was *his* version of the affair?"

"I understood from him that she had been unhappily married. I do not think her husband could have been at all a nice man to leave her in such a position—ill, alone and unprotected."

"Ah! Precisely. The husband no doubt was not a nice man."

"Then Doctor Grier told me that peculiar circumstances came about—I did not glean them clearly—and it is likely that he was to blame. But they loved each other, and they were young. Need we condemn them, Lion? He took her away, it is true, but it was from conditions in which she must always have been miserable. And, directly her husband died, he married her."

The Other Mrs Jacobs

Jacobs burst into a cynical laugh.

"So that was the story he told you! And you defend him?"

"I would defend him, if it were necessary, through much worse," she replied, her eyes lightening with the gleam that her husband knew betokened strong feeling. He was watching her closely — almost hungrily.

"Then, my wife, you will not like obeying another command I am going to put upon you. I have never before laid a command on you, Helga," he added wistfully.

"No, but I am ready to obey. What is this one?"

"That you never again receive that man Grier in this house."

She turned pale, and the light in her eyes deepened. The tall figure swayed slightly. She was forced to put her hand to the mantelpiece to steady herself.

"I can't do that."

"Why not? What is he to you? There are plenty of other doctors in London."

"None like him. I owe him Ronald's life. And, besides, he is my friend. You must give me a better reason than you have given me, Lion, before I can do this thing."

"You refuse?"

"If you enforce your authority I must obey you. You are my husband, and I have sworn to do so, but it would be against my will and my judgment. I trust that you will not enforce your authority."

"I have a very good reason, Helga—a very strong reason for cutting off all connection between ourselves and that man and woman."

"Then tell it me before I promise."

"I cannot."

"Your reason must have to do with the woman, for till you saw her this evening you had no objection to raise against Doctor Grier. Personally, I think you are Puritanical, but I have said that I don't care to

A Long Farewell

know her and there's an end of the matter in her case. It does not affect Doctor Grier in so far as he is professionally concerned."

The door bell tinkled as she finished speaking, and there came the sound of the footman hurrying across the hall, of Ronald's and Miss Pengelley's voices, and of the message about the carriage given to the coachman.

Mrs Jacobs, glad of the respite, moved.

"I will speak to Ronald," she said, and went into the hall.

"You are here soon."

"Hullo, mother! We were in a cab and met the carriage—luck, wasn't it, that Copley saw us and called out? What's all the fuss about?" cried the boy.

"Nothing, dear. Your father has to catch a train presently. He is going to Birmingham."

"Oh, that's it, is it? But why make such a scene? It regularly gave Karl the hump. Old Grier stalked up like a turkey cock in the bloomingest rage you ever saw and carried his pretty wife off under his arm. It *was* rough on her."

"Hush, Ronald; it was all a mistake. Now go to bed. I just came out to say good-night." She kissed him, more hurriedly than usual. "Good-night, Miss Pengelley."

The sense of tragedy in the air was still heavy on Susan. She seemed to see it written in Mrs Jacobs's white face and large eyes.

"Can't I take anything up for you?" she asked. "Shall I send Julie down?"

"No, no; I'll be up presently, when Mr Jacobs has gone. Hornblow, you'll see that your master's bag is put into the carriage, and fill his flask with brandy. And—the fur-lined coat, Hornblow."

She went back, closing the door after her. Mr Jacobs was sitting forward in his armchair, his elbows on his knees, his face supported on his hands. He

The Other Mrs Jacobs

had been touched by his wife's solicitude, and he looked up as she came back.

"That's good of you, Helga—to think of those things."

"What else should I be? You've always been good to me, Lion."

She came close to him, and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Lion!" he repeated, as though the name pleased him. His thoughts seemed to veer oddly. He muttered bits of the biblical text. "The old lion stooped down. . . . And when the old lion is couched who shall rouse him up? But there's strength, in him yet, my Helga, for the sceptre shall not depart from Judah. . . . And your old Lion has power to protect you, if you will let him. No one shall hurt you as long as I live, my wife—my one true wife—nor after."

Helga was deeply touched. She knelt beside him, covering his hands, which were cold, with her own. Her voice rang with genuine anxiety.

"You're not well, Lion. I know it, though you've been trying to hide it from me. You haven't been yourself for the last few days, and more. Tell me what's the matter. If it's money trouble—things wrong in the business, you know I don't mind that."

He released one hand, and stroked her hair softly—an unwonted caress, for Jacobs was shy of caressing his beautiful wife. He looked at her tenderly, but his eyes were bloodshot, and the worried look in them did not ease her mind.

"There's nothing wrong in the business. Ahasuerus-Jacobs stands firm. There's plenty of money which shall be yours, my Helga—no one else's. It shall be tied up safely to come to you. I'll see to it without delay, so that there shall be no mischance."

"You know that I don't care about that," she repeated. "But I can't feel that you ought to take this journey. Do wait till to-morrow."

A Long Farewell

"No, I cannot. It's important. There's an early consultation of vendors before the board meeting. You wouldn't understand—but Davis mustn't be let in. He relies on me."

She urged him no more. A constraint fell between them. She did not want to go back to the subject which Ronald's return had interrupted, and she was afraid of his re-opening it. She slowly rose from her crouching posture beside him and stood again by the mantelpiece, gazing thoughtfully into the fire. Presently she knew that he was looking at her again; his look seemed burning into her. Turning her face, she almost shrank before the imploring expression in his eyes.

"You are very beautiful in that dress," he said. "And the coronet becomes you. You are like a queen, Helga. I have always felt towards you as a man might to his queen—I feel it still. It's hard for me to realise that you've lived in my house and been my wife for seventeen years."

"For seventeen years!" she repeated gently.

"You have never grown tired of doing your duty by me, Helga? I know that it has only been duty from the first, my dear."

"Oh, no, no," she said faintly.

He slowly shook his head.

"I know, my dear—I understand. You have never even allowed yourself the luxury of rebelling against our unequal marriage. Hush! yes, it was unequal. You wouldn't have married me if I had not worried you into it. And I blame myself now—when it is too late—I blame myself."

"Oh, don't, don't, Lion!" she cried distressfully.

"I have no right to do it. You were a princess—as I say, a queen."

"A dethroned princess!" she said, trying to laugh, but her voice quavered. She moved impulsively and stood by his chair, her hand hanging down the back of it till it touched his shoulder.

The Other Mrs Jacobs

"And what was I? Not even Ahasuerus-Jacobs then. Merely a junior partner in the firm of an old Jew money-lender—just a Jew myself, common of my kind. I should have remembered what I was—what I had been."

"But that's all past, Lion. I did marry you, gratefully. And you have prospered and have given me comfort, luxury, and oh! not least, an affection that I value most deeply and that I can never repay you for."

He snatched at her hand with a sudden outburst of feeling.

"You have repaid me—repaid me a thousand times, Helga. But I like you to say that. Thank you, my dear. *Bon sang ne peut mentir*, you know. I've always felt that about you. But I want you to understand that I've not been blind, Helga. I have realised the disparity between us, and the wrong—yes, it's true—the wrong I've done you. Yet I want you to know, too, that all through my life—the rough and tumble and the push of business, you have been the mainspring of every venture. From the first day I knew you till this very night nothing has weighed in comparison with you. At any time, I'd have counted heaven well lost so long as I held you."

He pressed her hand passionately, almost fiercely, and pulled her down so that he might gaze into her face.

"Say that you believe it, Helga."

"I do believe it, Lion—I believe every word of it," she murmured brokenly.

"I have wronged you, I know," he went on. "Now that it is too late, I see what a fool I must have been. But as God is above me, I had no thought of harming you—remember that. I meant only to shield and protect you against the world—to make your life happier if I could."

"And you have done it. Dear Lion, don't—*don't* think I have not been happy with you. I should

A Long Farewell

have been lonely and miserable indeed at Helsingkräad if you had not taken pity upon me. No words of mine can prove how much I feel about your tenderness, your devotion. Indeed, my dear, you exaggerate that disparity, as you call it. There was not any real disparity between us. But never mind. Try not to think of it. We have been husband and wife for seventeen years. Can we not forget—everything else?"

She spoke with an evident effort, of which he was painfully conscious. Yet her heart yearned to comfort him. Her arm stole round his neck. Just then there came a discreet rattling of the door handle, and Hornblow entered.

"If you please, sir, Copley says he ought to allow a good half-hour for getting to Euston. The Marylebone Road is up, sir."

Mr Jacobs rose, looking at his watch. It was half-past one.

"I must go."

Helga still stood behind her husband's chair. She seemed loth to leave him.

"You have everything ready, Hornblow?"

"Yes, ma'am. Here is your coat, sir. I've filled the cigar-case."

Mr Jacobs was helped into the heavy furred garment. Then Hornblow bustled forth. And then her husband turned to Helga. He took her into his arms and kissed her very gently, very tenderly, holding her to his heart as though he could not bear to let her go.

"You have been the best wife woman ever was to man. May God bless you for it. Remember, Helga, whatever happens, how much you were to me."

His tone had in it all the sadness of a long farewell.

"But you are coming back on Monday, Lion?" she asked, surprised at his manner, and still disturbed about him.

The Other Mrs Jacobs

"On Monday—yes. And now good-night—good-bye, until I see you again."

"Till Monday," she repeated. "Monday evening, I suppose. You will be home to dinner?"

He nodded, and she followed him into the hall, where the door stood open.

"Remember me to Mr Davis," she called out, as she watched him get into the brougham and drive off. Then, putting her hand to her head, and feeling a little dazed and very weary, she went slowly upstairs, where the French maid, who had been craning over the balusters to see what was going on, retired adroitly to the bedroom to receive her mistress.

CHAPTER XIV

QUITS!

EARLY on the following afternoon, Mrs Jacobs was at home entertaining a casual visitor. This happened to be a poetess well known in literary circles, who had penetrated that "luminous obscurity"—as a clever journalist phrased it—which surrounded the pseudonym of "Spiridia," and who now proclaimed herself as ardently devoted to the authoress of *The Chameleon Maid*. It was at this point of the poetess's monologue that Hornblow threw open the drawing-room door, and announced "Mrs Grier."

The poetess declared later among her fellow-admirers of *The Chameleon Maid* at a certain club dedicated to the cult of genius, which had achieved a literary—in contradistinction to a commercial—success as the Trade puts it, that "Spiridia" paled, and, like the much-hymned sensitive plant, shrank at slightest contact with this specimen of fashionable Philistinism.

Mrs Grier might certainly have been supposed by the uninitiated to represent all that was fashionable and Philistine. Nothing of the high-souled stamped her personality. She looked a Bond Street model of the latest Parisian fashion, except that her face was by no means insipid. Indeed, she seemed braced by some daring resolution, and gave out an electric force that was almost irresistible.

She advanced, her skirts rustling with each balanced movement of the hips; her sable overwrap suggest-

The Other Mrs Jacobs

ing opulence, her laces and the violets at her breast exhaling an odour both natural and artificial; her small head reared with the chin slightly protruded—her favourite trick—and a toque, cunning in its simplicity, perched upon her elaborately-dressed hair, while a piece of spotted net, pinned at just the right angle with a diamond and enamel ladybird, veiled the carefully-made-up face—a perfect exemplar of the art which defies nature.

She took one hand out of her muff—a concoction of fur, lace and violets—and extended it to her hostess. Mrs Jacobs, startled out of her ordinary self-possession, stood staring blankly at her guest.

“You don’t remember me, perhaps,” said Mrs Grier. “Our introduction was cut short last night. I told Karl that I should certainly come to-day, and renew it on my own account. He said that probably Mr Jacobs felt ill. I trust there was nothing serious the matter?”

“Oh, no. My husband had to leave for Birmingham last night on business,” said Helga, recovering herself and accepting Mrs Grier’s proffered hand.

“Ah! I’m glad that was all. Of course *I* am accustomed to having my husband called out suddenly at inconvenient moments. You know Andrew, I think, very well, Mrs Jacobs?”

“I am indebted to Doctor Grier for most kind care of my invalid son,” said Helga, stiffly.

“Yes. I saw your son last night. How very sad for you.”

Mrs Jacobs gave no response beyond the formal indication of a chair.

The lady rattled on,—

“Karl’s party was very successful — don’t you think?”

“Oh, very.”

Mrs Jacobs’s polite glance sideways included her first visitor, who joined in the conversation. The poetess had also been at the opening of the St Helgan

Quits !

Gallery, and concurred in Mrs Grier's remark that it was such a pity the royalties had failed Mr Kœnigsen —also that the big ball had caused the party to break up so early.

"But nobody ever does stay late at such things," said the poetess, with a superior air.

The talk fluttered round Mr Kœnigsen's pictures, and Mrs Grier remarked to her hostess,—

"Do you know one reason why I have been so very anxious to make your acquaintance?"

Helga started, and recovered herself, meeting an indefinable look in the bright eyes of Clarice.

"Not in the least."

"Karl is making a picture out of your *Chameleon Maid*, as of course he must have told you, and he has asked me to be his model."

"For *The Chameleon Maid*?" Helga repeated mechanically.

"Yes. May I flatter my vanity with your approval?"

"It would be difficult for me to judge," said Helga, coldly, "unless I knew you better."

"I trust that condition may be fulfilled," answered Mrs Grier.

The poetess now took her leave, and Clarice waited while pleasant nothings were said at the door. When Mrs Jacobs returned, Clarice at once opened the attack.

"I am glad now to take the advantage of finding you alone, for I have something of importance, that you may prefer should be private, to say to you."

Mrs Jacobs straightened herself.

"I hardly see how there could be anything of that sort."

"Perhaps not. But you will presently. You are extremely intimate with Doctor Grier."

Helga looked at her visitor without flinching.

"Of course you are aware," she said, "that Doctor Grier is my own and my husband's medical adviser, in regard to our son's unhappy condition of health.

The Other Mrs Jacobs

We are naturally intimate with him—in his professional capacity.”

“Ah! I should have supposed that your intimacy with Doctor Grier was much more personal. However, that is not the point. I didn’t come here to pose as the jealous wife. I am far from feeling any foolish sentiments of that sort. Don’t be afraid. I shall not upbraid you. I merely came to make you aware of your position.”

“My position! I do not understand you, Mrs Grier.”

“I am going to explain myself. Perhaps you would be surprised to hear that *I* have been extremely intimate with the man you call your husband?”

“Certainly I should. But really I think that this is a subject which need not be discussed.”

Mrs Grier laughed.

“It’s got to be discussed between Judah and me before we’ve done with it. He was silly to insult me as he did last night. He didn’t bargain for the consequences, though he might have known that mine isn’t the kind of temper which it’s safe to rouse. All he cares for is that *you* should live safely in your fool’s paradise. I don’t mind telling you that you’re all that Andrew cares for either. As for Kœnigsen, he cares for nobody but himself. But of the two of us he likes me best, so I’ve got the pull there. But he wants your money and ‘Spiridia’s’ influence. And that’s why he’s counting on marrying you when Judah Jacobs has left you, as he will do, a rich widow.”

The woman flung out her words. She had passed the point of self-control, and it was characteristic of Clarice that when she had ruthlessly started on a course, she did not stop to consider how far she might be endangering her own interests in pursuing it. She had come to the house to-day a pent tornado of emotions—fury against Jacobs, fury against Grier,

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fury against Helga, and, strongest of all, fury against Koenigsen — in which was a blending of wounded pride, baulked love, and yet a reluctant appreciation of his astuteness. Among the four, she really resented least the attitude of Grier. He had, at anyrate, she said to herself, behaved like a gentleman in the way in which he had carried her off, and the marked courtesy with which he had wrapped her up and put her into the brougham. But that had been only while people were looking on. His contemptuous silence during the drive home, and his subsequent indifferent avoidance of her, galled inexpressibly. There had been moments in that day when her dull dislike of him culminated into active hatred, and she had felt that liberty to quit his house and his presence would be worth purchasing at any price. Added to these various motive forces, there was that impulsive tendency in the woman which had wrecked her before, to bring things to a crisis and to cut a tangle, even prematurely. The threads of thought made a maze in her mind in a briefer space than it has taken to write them.

There had been silence for a few moments. Helga, indignation and amazement in her face, had risen, incapable of finding words. At last she said,—

"Mrs Grier, you must be mad to speak to me in this way. I don't know what you mean. My husband, please God, will live for many years—as long as I myself live, I hope. As for Mr Koenigsen, it's absurd and infamous to suppose that he could have any such ideas."

Clarice nodded mockingly.

"Wait and see. Next time that he makes love to you, remember what I have said."

"You must be mad," repeated Helga. "Besides, what can you have to do with my husband? He never saw you before last night."

But even as she answered Clarice a sudden doubt assailed her. If he had known nothing of the woman,

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why should Judah have prohibited so strenuously any acquaintanceship between her and his wife? Helga reflected that she was now involuntarily transgressing that prohibition.

"Mrs Grier," she said quietly, "you will understand how unwilling I am to be discourteous, but I ought to tell you that my husband would not consider you a welcome visitor in his house. He has better reason, perhaps, than I know of for his objection to my receiving you."

Clarice shrugged with a gesture of infinite scorn.

"Oh, yes, that's certainly true. But his is not exactly a prudish objection. Judah Jacobs can't forbid me his house. I have more right here than you have," she added, with sublime effrontery.

Helga made a movement towards the bell.

"It is time," she said, "that this interview ended."

But Clarice got up hastily, interposing herself between Helga and the fireplace.

"Stop! You want to have me turned out, but I shall not go before I've told you the truth. You wouldn't like me to say it in front of your butler, I'll warrant. Heavens! What are *you* that you should show me such magnificent airs? Listen! You are not Judah Jacobs's wife. *I* am his wife!"

"You!" Helga shrank as if she had been struck.

"Yes. Seems queer, doesn't it? But it's true, nevertheless. I suppose we've both committed bigamy — quite innocently, of course — but that doesn't alter the facts of the case. *I'm* Mrs Jacobs. He married me in Brussels, got tired of me, and was glad enough to believe that I was dead—never took the trouble, in short, to investigate a little mistake that was made about my decease. I daresay he had fallen in love with you already at that time. You may have been in Helsingkräad then, for all I know."

"Helsingkräad!"

"Yes; a nice cosmopolitan seaside resort for shady characters, political refugees, Jew sharpers, and the

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scum of the earth generally. It wasn't surprising that I wanted to get out of Helsingkräad."

Helga stood motionless, her face bloodless, her eyes staring as though some horror transfixed them. She had put her hands out in front of her, in an instinctive gesture of self-protection.

"Well, what do you think of it?" cried Clarice, shrilly. "A pleasant little matrimonial complication, isn't it? You might turn it into a story, only some people would think it rather shocking. I shouldn't wonder if it were boycotted on the bookstalls. You don't seem to see the humour of the situation."

"You are an evil woman," returned Helga, slowly, "and it may be that you have come here only to frighten and torment me. But if that is so, I cannot imagine your motive in bringing trouble and disgrace upon a good man whom you've married, and who does not deserve this of you."

"Mercy! What beautifully unselfish sentiments! You seem to think more of Andrew Grier's disgrace than you do of your own. He'll survive it, I assure you."

Helga made a movement, dropping her arms to her side, but said nothing.

"I daresay I'm doing you both a good turn," continued Clarice. "Disinterested of me, isn't it? But I'll let you into a secret that may astonish you, since you hold different opinions, no doubt. I'm heartily sick of my grey wolf. He can snarl sometimes, I tell you."

"Will you please leave the house?" said Helga, goaded beyond endurance. "When my husband comes back he will tell me whether your story is true or false, but you and I can never again have anything to say to each other."

"Would you like to see a proof of my story?" asked Clarice. "I have brought one with me." She opened the little chain reticule at her side, and handed Helga a folded paper.

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"You will see that it is a letter from Judah. It was written a great many years ago, but you may perhaps recognise his handwriting—though I daresay that has altered, like all the rest of him."

She held the paper out to Helga, who took it reluctantly, and glanced at the heading, "Dearest Clarice." Helga turned the sheet sharply over, and read the signature, "Your affectionate Husband, Judah Jacobs."

The letter dropped from Helga's fingers. Clarice moved to pick it up; then pointedly refrained.

"No, you may keep it, to show Judah. I have others—as well as more important evidence if there's to be any question of going to law about it. You see now that you're not Mrs Jacobs, since I—the original Mrs Jacobs—am here alive before you. And, of course, you understand, too, that your son is—"

"Ah!"

Helga, wounded in her most vulnerable point, uttered a gasping cry, which reached the ears of Miss Pengelley, who was at that moment in the act of opening the drawing-room door, where she was coming on an errand to Mrs Jacobs.

She halted at sight of the two women facing each other—Mrs Grier, vindictive, uncontrolled, the woman of the people showing through her outside veneer; Helga, shaken, supporting herself by one hand on the high back of a chair, her face white and changed, her whole appearance giving the suggestion that she had been mentally stricken in some severe way. Miss Pengelley was taken aback. She hesitated, then, moving a step forward, she explained her errand,—

"I came to tell you, Mrs Jacobs, that Ronald is not well."

There was a short silence. Susan realised now how heavy the blow to Mrs Jacobs must have been, for she scarcely seemed to hear what had been said. Susan did not repeat her announcement. She waited. And the next moment she was astonished at Mrs

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Grier's extraordinary bad manners, for she broke out, with a jeering laugh,—

"So, it will be Andrew's turn now to console! You have my leave to tell him all I've said to you. It will come as a pleasing surprise."

"Mrs Grier!"

Miss Pengelley's voice sounded menacing as she walked straight up to the visitor. Her advance and her astonished, rebuking gaze disconcerted Clarice. She knew that she had allowed her jealous rage to carry her too far, and now she felt afraid of what she had done. Susan had no idea of what had really occurred, but saw that it must be something seriously distressing to Mrs Jacobs, and she felt sure that the visitor was responsible for it, whatever it might be. Her own sense of devotion to Helga made her doubly indignant with the woman who had wounded her. Susan remembered Doctor Grier's injunction to her to protect Mrs Jacobs, and determined to obey it even though she were forced to eject his own wife. Helga still stood perfectly motionless; indeed, her consciousness might have been elsewhere but for her look of mute appeal to Miss Pengelley, which seemed in Susan's eyes sufficient authority for what she was about to do. The determined little figure passed resolutely between the other two women and pressed the electric bell so firmly that the ting of it came echoing back from below. Hornblow, she knew, was hovering about the smoking-room, where Ronald was, and would answer the summons at once.

"Excuse me," said Miss Pengelley, addressing Mrs Grier, "but I must ask you to leave Mrs Jacobs now. Her son is ill."

Clarice had not time to make any reply, for Hornblow appeared at the moment.

"Show this lady out," said Miss Pengelley, in a tone that brooked no delay, adding hurriedly, "You have not left Mr Ronald alone?"

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"William is with Mr Ronald, miss. Mr Ronald is asking for Mrs Jacobs."

"We will come at once," said Miss Pengelley. She put herself in front of Helga, who she saw was quite incapable of dismissing her visitor.

"You must pardon my hurrying you away without any more words," said the irate little person, adroitly conveying Mrs Grier across the room, and not permitting her even a glance at Helga. "Mrs Jacobs is going to her son. Nothing else can be thought of when Ronald is ill. Pray don't trouble to say good-bye. I don't know whether you have a carriage, but I must ask you not to wait for a cab to be called, as Ronald is on the ground floor just now, and the least sound is disturbing to him."

Miss Pengelley literally forced the enemy to retreat, closing the door behind her with a fierce snap. An instantaneous exchange of glances with the invaluable Hornblow had assured Susan that she was now safe. She could rely upon the butler to carry out any injunction to the letter. The door shut upon the pair, Susan flew swiftly to Mrs Jacobs's side.

"I knew that was what you would wish. You don't think I took too much upon myself?"

Helga shook her head, and held out her hand in dumb gratitude. With Mrs Grier's departure the tension had slackened, but her poor brain still felt in a whirl.

"I'm only doing what Doctor Grier told me," Susan went on. "He said I must prevent your being worried if I could. You don't mind—do you?"

"No, no," said Helga, feebly. "You did quite right. I thank you."

"I could see that she had annoyed you, and I felt I must get rid of her. There!" exclaimed Susan, "the woman has gone." A muffled sound arose; it was the closing of the hall door, the manner of which gave token of imperative measures on the part of Hornblow.

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Helga shuddered.

"She must never come here again."

"She shall not," said Susan, comfortingly. "I'll see to that. Now," she added, "you'll come to Ronald. He's asking for you. That's what I wanted to say. He isn't very well. He's in the smoking-room, for I didn't know whether I ought to let him come upstairs. The pain came on while we were in the garden. It's not very bad, but you know it may get worse. You'll come, won't you?"

Helga put her hand to her forehead. The words beat upon her brain in a dull way. She could think of nothing but the surf beating upon the shores of St Helga.

"Do come at once," said Miss Pengelley, persuasively. "I want to know about the morphia. Ronald says he must have some—he is afraid of an attack if he doesn't. Shall I send for the doctor, or are you accustomed to inject it?"

"Ronald! Oh, Ronald!" broke piteously from his mother's lips. "And I can do nothing—nothing."

"You can come to him—he wants you," pleaded Miss Pengelley.

She coaxed Mrs Jacobs a step or two. Then Helga's eyes fell suddenly, and she stood as if fascinated looking at the letter she had dropped on the floor. Miss Pengelley picked it up and held it out to her, but she refused to touch it.

"Put it away, please," she faltered.

Susan carried it to the writing-table—an old French *escritoire*—and placed it in a drawer.

"Now," she said, "we'll go to Ronald," and with her arm through Helga's she led her gently downstairs.

She let the mother go into the room alone, and, turning back, caught Hornblow in the hall.

"About the morphia, Hornblow—who injects it?"

"Doctor Grier, miss."

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"Then it would be best to send William off at once in a cab to Hyde Park Street. Let him find out where the doctor has gone and follow him, so that he can bring him back."

Hornblow agreed deferentially. He was becoming impressed by Miss Pengelley's capacity for management. The footman was dispatched immediately. Ronald still lay on the sofa in the smoking-room, pale and drawn, holding his mother's hand. Mrs Jacobs continued to seem dazed still, but she spoke to him tenderly from time to time. The boy was not suffering much as yet, but the state of apprehension he was in was pitiful to see. Susan awaited the doctor's arrival with anxiety, for she could not tell whether or no a bad attack was impending, and she felt that the very sight of the grim, grey face would give her a sense of support. She watched the clock eagerly, but as it was extremely doubtful where William would succeed in picking up the doctor's brougham, she had no idea how long he might be.

Meanwhile Ronald and his mother were the best company for each other, and Susan flitted between the dining-room window and the hall, waiting with what patience she could summon. Fortunately Doctor Grier was found not far from Hyde Park Street, and in a little more than half an hour he had arrived, and was preparing the morphia injection.

"Have you ever done this?" he asked gruffly of Susan.

"Never," she answered.

"Then you'd better come here and watch me do it. You may have to give it for the next day or two. I can't be here again anyway before ten o'clock to-morrow morning. I'm giving a quarter of a grain now, and I don't anticipate any increase of pain after that. But should it recur any time after twelve o'clock to-night, you'll inject a sixth—this tube. Use hot water; it melts the tabloid quicker than cold. I

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shall leave the syringe with you. Mind you keep it properly clean, and boil your needle. Now come and see."

Susan had looked at the tube he indicated, and studied attentively every movement he made. She followed him as he went to the sofa, on one side of which Mrs Jacobs sat, her hand in Ronald's. Miss Pengelley noticed that she had not spoken to Doctor Grier. The merest bend of the head when he entered was the only salutation she gave him. Now she scarcely seemed to recognise his presence, except by rising and moving away from the sofa as he approached. There was something very strange about her, thought Susan, and she observed, too, that Doctor Grier saw it, though he took no apparent notice of her manner.

"Now look here, young woman—watch," he said; and Susan watched while he picked up the skin of the boy's wrist, and with a deft motion of his finger and thumb drove the blood from it before he slipped in the needle. "Eye downwards, of course, but don't drive the point too deep—lengthways under the skin—see. You can do that, if it's necessary?"

"I think so," replied Miss Pengelley.

Relief was almost instantaneous. The terror and creases of pain seemed to smooth out in Ronald's forehead, and he lost the drawn, pinched look.

"He'd better be got to his bedroom at once," said Doctor Grier, "and be put to bed. Keep him as quiet as possible." He looked towards Mrs Jacobs, who again bent her head but said nothing. It seemed to Miss Pengelley that the doctor's grey eyes gleamed like diamonds between their half-shut lids, and his thin, flexible mouth twitched slightly. He said no more, but all the while his look was upon Helga as she mechanically helped Ronald into the carrying-chair, which was brought by Hornblow and the footman. Then the little procession left the room, and Helga went with it. Miss Pengelley was

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following, fancying she might be wanted, when the doctor detained her.

"Wait. I've something to say to you."

He went to the door and deliberately closed it. Then he came back, and gave her some fuller instructions as to the preparation of the injection and the proper care of the needle. Finally, he put the tiny tube of tabloids and the case containing the syringe into her hand.

"Now," he said, "what has happened?"

"It was just after coming in from the drive in his chair that Ronald felt—"

"I'm not speaking of Ronald. Friday's affair was quite enough to upset him. It is Mrs Jacobs that I want to know about. Something has happened to her."

Then Miss Pengelley told how she had gone to Mrs Jacobs in the drawing-room, and how she had found a visitor there who had evidently been saying something of a nature distressing to Mrs Jacobs, and how—remembering her conversation with Doctor Grier the day after her arrival in Branxton Gardens—Susan had taken upon herself to summarily dismiss the offending visitor.

"Quite right. I see that I didn't make a mistake in trusting you. Who was the woman?"

Miss Pengelley hesitated.

"I don't know that I ought to tell you."

"Ought!" he blazed out. "There can be no oughts between a physician and his patient. Of course you ought to tell me. Who was the woman?"

"It was Mrs Grier," replied Susan.

If ever the man deserved his wife's epithet of "grey wolf," Doctor Grier did so now. His upper lip was drawn sharply back, showing the white, even teeth. His eyes looked dangerous. He remained quite silent, but walked straight to the window and stood there fully a minute with his back turned to

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Susan before he came back. Then his face was steel again.

"You did perfectly right," he said. "I am very much obliged to you."

He seized her hand in a grip which was painful in its pressure, and without another word he left the room. She heard the hall door shut after him and his carriage drive away. Susan stood bewildered. She had expected that he would go up to see Ronald comfortably settled and to confer with Ronald's mother. But his sudden departure made her feel that he had some other intention in his mind.

CHAPTER XV

AFTER SEVENTEEN YEARS

THAT night Miss Pengelley's attention was divided between Ronald and Mrs Jacobs, and, indeed, it seemed to her that the mother needed more care than the son. Some great blow had evidently fallen upon Mrs Jacobs. Of this Susan felt assured, but it was impossible for her to conjecture its nature. "Spiridia" had seemingly lost entirely her easy self-reliance, her indifferent pride, and the conventional mannerisms which she seldom put off in the presence of any person.

Susan naturally associated the change in her with Mrs Grier's visit, though how that could have caused it was inexplicable. Ronald's condition luckily did not call for any special anxiety. As Susan knew, he was subject to such attacks of pain in the head. Excitement or late hours were liable to bring them on, but this, so far, was not a severe turn. So the attentive Hornblow informed Miss Pengelley as she ate a hurried dinner downstairs. She had been unwilling to have the formal meal served for herself alone. Mrs Jacobs refused to eat, and would not leave Ronald's quarters, but the boy was now sleeping quietly after the morphia, and Miss Pengelley wisely reflected that she gained nothing by mortifying the flesh, and had best husband her strength against further demands upon it.

Her dinner, however, was but a short affair, and she went up again to find Julie the maid with a basin

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of soup and a pint bottle of champagne imploring her mistress to take nourishment. Mrs Jacobs waved away the soup but sipped a glass of champagne. She could not be persuaded to go upstairs to bed, insisting that she would remain that night upon the sitting sofa in Ronald's sitting-room. But Miss Pengelley noticed that she did not go into his bedroom nor show any deep concern about the boy, which she thought was very unlike Ronald's mother, and which bore out her notion that Mrs Jacobs had sustained some mental shock. By-and-by Julie brought down a dressing-gown in which she robed her mistress, who submitted unprotestingly, and Miss Pengelley also made preparations for a vigil. She settled in the drawing-room, waiting for Ronald's awakening to see if a further dose of morphia would be required. The hours passed on. It was midnight. She ventured to tap at the door across the landing.

There was no answer, and she went in. The room was in darkness, Ronald's Oriental decorations making a shadowy blur in the feeble gleam which came from a screened light in the boy's bedroom, the door of which opened into his sitting-room. The fire was dying down, and Susan went to put on more coal, lifting each lump and placing it with noiseless precision. But she paused in her task at the sound of low, gasping sobs which came from the next room, mingled with broken ejaculations. Moving softly to the bedroom door, with a confused idea that it might be Ronald in pain, Susan peeped round the screen. But it was not Ronald; the boy seemed still asleep. It was his mother, who half crouched, half knelt, at the head of the bed, her face pressed against the bolster, only the fair curls of her hair visible in the feeble light. She was whispering to herself between the dry, long-drawn sobs that shook her frame.

"My boy! My boy! As though I had not injured you enough without this cruellest thing of

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all. But I did not know—Ronald!—I did not know. Oh! I can't bear it! The shame of it—to you—and to me. After seventeen years—seventeen years of servitude! No, I am wrong—I ought not to take it so; he has always been kind to me. And he did not know—Ronald, do you hear—your father did not know, at least, till last night. He could not have known, or he never would have done it. Now I understand what he meant when he spoke so strangely—what it was that upset him so. Oh! I must not blame him, but it is difficult—difficult. What shall I do? What shall I do? Where shall we go?—my son—my son!”

At length there came silence, except for the long-drawn sobs. Susan waited and watched, deeply pitiful. If she could have gone and put her arms round the unhappy woman, assuring her of, at least, her own sympathy and loyal devotion through any crisis! But this she dared not do. Presently there came again low whispers, wrung as from a soul in agony.

“Ah! Dear God! Did *he* know—he whom I thought so good and true—so different from everyone else in the world. Was it for *this* that he was so kind to me—only because he pitied me, only because he knew of the wrong? Surely he must have known whose wife she had been, and that the man was *not* dead. Ah! How shall I bear it?”

Miss Pengelley stole back through Ronald's sitting-room to the drawing-room. She felt that it was sacrilege to intrude on grief such as this. Something terrible had happened. What could it be? She wondered whether Mr Jacobs ought not to be telegraphed for. But this responsibility she dared not take upon herself; and in any case it would be impossible until the morning. She consoled herself with the thought that at ten o'clock Doctor Grier would come. He would know what to do.

Miss Pengelley walked restlessly up and down the

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room, listening to the French clock on the mantel-piece as it ticked and chimed the quarters. An hour passed. She had replenished the fire; her little arrangements were made, in case of need—a wine-glass, the syringe, the tube of tabloids, and a kettle of hot water simmering inside the fender. Twice she went to the door of Ronald's sitting-room and listened, but there was no sound, and she came back, leaving the door ajar. But presently she heard voices—Ronald's in fretful expostulation and Mrs Jacobs's exhausted, grief-wrung accents. Miss Pengelley's heart went out in a gush of frightened pity for the sorrow she could neither understand nor assuage. She, however, determined to ignore it, for she guessed how Mrs Jacobs would suffer later at the thought that a stranger had witnessed her abasement. Accordingly Susan stood in uncertainty, her hands twisting nervously in front of her as she waited at the drawing-room door, her eyes piercing the obscurity of the landing. Then Ronald's door opened wider, and Mrs Jacobs approached her.

"Miss Pengelley," she said in a shaky voice, "I don't know what to do. Ronald's in pain again, I can't get him to take food, nor the medicine he has in these attacks."

"I'm going to give him another injection of morphia. Doctor Grier explained it to me. Will you tell him so while I get it ready?" said Susan. But Mrs Jacobs sank helplessly into a chair.

"I can't. I think I've made him worse. I oughtn't to be near him."

Miss Pengelley had poured some hot water into the wine-glass, and was filling the syringe.

"Never mind. It'll be ready in a minute. I'll take it to him. He'll go to sleep, and then you should rest too."

"I can't rest."

Susan had put the tabloid into the syringe, and screwed on the needle.

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"I wish I had Doctor Grier's orders to dose you too," she said. "It's your nerves that are shaken, and I can't do anything for you. I wish I could."

"It's my nerves," repeated Mrs Jacobs. "The weakness is inherited," she added in a dull, forced way. "I break down under strain—sometimes. I can't help it."

"We're all liable to that," said Susan, with a cheerfulness she was far from feeling. "I'm going in to Ronald now, Mrs Jacobs. Will you trust me to give him this, or would you like to see me do it?"

"Oh, I trust you," said Mrs Jacobs, and Susan went at once into the boy's room.

Ronald was moving his head restlessly on the pillow, and groaned slightly. His face seemed to have aged, and to look smaller. It was cadaverous and lined by pain. He opened his eyes when Susan addressed him, and they brightened at sight of the syringe.

"Hullo! Old Grier is not such a brute after all. I thought it was cruel of him to leave me like this without anybody. I had a nurse before to give me that."

"I'm your nurse for to-night," said Susan. "I don't believe you'll need one at all to-morrow. You'll be ever so much better—you'll see."

The boy put out his lean wrist, and she picked up the skin quite dexterously, considering that it was her first attempt at doing so. She was somewhat nervous, but she was careful not to let the boy see that, and in a moment the dose was injected. She was glad to notice how soon the drug began to work; it was pleasant to watch the creases smooth out of Ronald's face and to hear his sigh of relief as he nestled down into the pillows.

"That's jolly. You're a brick, Miss Pengelley. I say, what's the matter with mum?" he asked suddenly.

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"I don't know of anything the matter," replied Susan, evasively.

"Oh, yes, there is. When I woke she was kicking up no end of a shindy, crying, and going on like one o'clock. I couldn't make it out. I'm not very bad, am I?"

"No, you're not at all bad. Hornblow says it's a very slight turn."

"And *he* ought to know—good old Hornblow," murmured the boy. "That's what I thought. If I was bad, Grier wouldn't have left me like this—he never does. He's a chap you can rely on, is Grier. But mother's got shaky nerves—because of her wonderful imagination, I've heard. I suppose they go together. Once or twice all of a sudden she's kind of gone to pieces, but it doesn't happen very often. You'll look after her, won't you?"

"Of course I will—as well as I possibly can," said Susan.

She smoothed the bed-clothes and set the pillows straight, then raised him, putting her arms behind them.

"You've got to take this milk, Ronald, before you go off again."

He swallowed the draught with a wry face.

"It's got brandy in it. I wouldn't have it before. What a fellow you are, Miss Pengelley, to get your own way. I say," as she laid him gently down again, "I'm sorry I didn't mind my manners better at first. You're worth it."

She smiled at the apology.

"That's all right, Ron. Go to sleep now. We mustn't talk any more. Trot off to dreamland, and I'll look after your mother."

He turned his head obediently over, and closed his eyes, while she found the champagne, and took it in with a biscuit to Mrs Jacobs.

"You're very kind, I'm sure," said Helga, sitting up meekly. "Really, I don't know what I should

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have done without you. It's a comfort to feel you're here. I think you are trustworthy, Miss Pengelley."

Quick tears rose to Susan's eyes.

"I'd make any sacrifice sooner than betray a trust you placed in me," she exclaimed impulsively.

"Thank you, my dear," said Helga. "I'm sure you would be faithful—a quality one does not often meet with. And I have done nothing to make you faithful to me."

"You are yourself," said Susan, simply. "That is enough."

"Is it? Well, I'm glad. Miss Pengelley, you must have seen that I'm in trouble. I don't know how it will end."

"Would you like me to telegraph for Mr Jacobs," suggested Susan, "the first thing in the morning?"

Helga shuddered violently.

"No, no, on no account. I do not want him summoned home. I must have time to think things out—to prepare myself. Promise me that you will not let Mr Jacobs be sent for."

Susan duly promised, asking no further questions. She spoke reassuringly of Ronald's condition, and of his readiness to accept her ministrations, and finally, after saying that she would herself watch in his sitting-room the rest of the night, she succeeded in persuading Mrs Jacobs to go up to her own room, where she delivered her into the charge of Julie, who was drowsing by the fire.

The next morning Ronald seemed almost well. He was free from pain, and apparently the threatened attack had passed off. Mrs Jacobs, when she heard the news from Miss Pengelley, said that since he was so much better she would not go down to him, but would remain in her study till later in the day. Susan marvelled at her unusual reluctance to be with the boy, but the discreet young person made no comment.

"I will leave him to you," Mrs Jacobs repeated in

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her most reserved tones. Yet Susan felt sure that the restraint was self-imposed to prevent a break down. Mrs Jacobs looked terribly ill—a mere ghost of herself—and though her face and speech were calm, the trembling of her hands told how great was the strain under which she laboured.

“I will let you know when the doctor comes,” said Susan. “He said he would be here at ten.”

“You need not trouble. I shall not see him unless it is necessary. Please take his directions, and let me know afterwards what he says.”

A sudden spasm had crossed Mrs Jacobs's face. She seemed to shrink from seeing Doctor Grier almost as much as she had done at the suggestion of sending for her husband. Susan wondered still more, and she felt dismayed. It was as though her sheet anchor had given way. But there was no encouragement for her to speak. Marble could not have been colder than Mrs Jacobs in her present mood. Just now, at all events, it was impossible to get below the surface with her. So Susan retired to the next floor to read aloud to Ronald until Doctor Grier should arrive. It was Sunday morning. The bell of a Roman Catholic church near was calling devout servant-maids and others, ill-disposed for the longer and later ceremonial, to ten o'clock mass. There was no traffic in the street, and this morning, children were not playing in the gardens. A sense of Sabbatical hush, oddly incongruous to Susan Pengelley, who was keenly conscious of the drama within these four walls, pervaded the outside atmosphere. Yet it was soothing too, in its way, and carried her mind off to the Devonshire Vicarage near Tavistock. In actual speech she was led thither by way of Lafcadio Hearn and Buddhist rites, and the missionary brother about whom Ronald began to ask questions. So the book was dropped and they talked instead, becoming better friends as they did so.

Doctor Grier was punctual almost to the minute,

The Other Mrs Jacobs

from which Miss Pengelley divined that he must have come straight from his own house. He marched up to Ronald's quarters, not waiting to be announced, and shook hands at the bedroom door with Miss Pengelley, who had risen to meet him. He drew her back into the sitting-room. He too, she thought, looked ill, and grimmer and greyer than ever. His eyes went piercingly round in one sweeping glance that penetrated to every corner, and, failing to find what they sought, came back, and fixedly searched those of Miss Pengelley.

"Well, how have things been?" he asked abruptly.

"Ronald has done well," she answered, and began to give her report on the previous night, but he interrupted her almost rudely.

"I don't want to be told about Ronald. I can see him for myself."

He did not, however, push his questioning as to the things about which he did want to know any further just then, for Ronald called out, and he went straight in to where the boy was lying. Then with a short, "Now, youngster," he proceeded, in grave silence, to count the pulse and make other medical investigations.

When he had finished he walked back into the next room, where Miss Pengelley was awaiting him, carefully closing the door upon Ronald. Somehow, Miss Pengelley felt a little afraid of him. His manner was portentous; it certainly boded ill to someone. There was a barely-repressed ferocity about him that was quite formidable. He stood on the hearthrug, one arm over the chimneypiece, the long deft hand dangling, the other in his pocket.

"Is she ill?" he asked, without preamble.

Miss Pengelley knew that he was alluding to Mrs Jacobs.

"She seems upset."

Doctor Grier gave a low sound that was something like an animal's growl.

After Seventeen Years

"Where is she?"

"In her study. Shall I tell her you are here?"

"No, she wouldn't see me," he answered, smiling queerly. "I'll go up by myself and take the risk."

So saying he strode to the door, but stopped before he went out.

"That young shaver will do all right. You needn't worry over him. See that he's fed up, and kept quiet—that's all."

Miss Pengelley listened to the masterful footstep mounting the stairs, and thought that Mrs Jacobs would have small difficulty in guessing who was the presumptuous intruder upon her solitude.

CHAPTER XVI

EXILED

DOCTOR GRIER knocked at Helga's door. The answer was inaudible, but he took it for granted, and went in. She had risen, and was standing quite still by the writing-table, her face set and very white. She had perfect command over herself now, however, and held out her hand in the most conventional manner. The effect upon him of her attitude and bearing was remarkable. The man who a few minutes before had appeared so masterful seemed now stricken with shyness. He took her hand without speaking.

"Won't you sit down?" she said stiffly, and added, with what struck him as extraordinary indifference, when he remembered her former wild anxiety at the least mishap that befell her son, "I hope you found Ronald better."

Her manner was so strange and repellent, and she was so wholly unlike her usual self, that he stared at her with surprised reproachful eyes, not understanding her mood; for even the truth, as he divined it, did not, he felt, account for this change in her. He had believed that even though she must have been annoyed at his wife's mad jealousy—he suspected no other motive for Clarice's visit—at least she would not misjudge him, nor cancel their friendship.

She had seated herself, but he remained standing, his head bent down to her, his eyes searching her

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face. She kept her own eyes lowered, and persistently avoided his gaze, while she fidgeted mechanically with the lace and fur on her loose morning gown.

The silence was painful, but much more eloquent than speech could have been. It was as if the space between them were filled by a little army of thoughts—impalpable yet definite things—fighting against each other. The battle went to the strongest. She had to look up at last.

"Ronald is better?" she said faintly.

"Yes, he'll do. You can trust him to that girl downstairs. She's a good sort. I'm not going to waste force on talking about Ronald. It's you I'm troubling over."

She made a shrinking gesture.

"No, no—never mind me."

"I *do* mind you. I mind about you more than about anything else in the world. I'm a rough, blunt-spoken, ill-mannered brute, but I had a fancy that you understood me."

"I don't understand—anything," she replied, with a despairing intonation.

"I mean that you shall understand *me*. Rightly or wrongly—conventions or no conventions—you've got to understand me. Afterwards you may turn me out of doors if you choose."

He deliberately looked round, and put himself upon a high, straight chair which stood in front of the typewriter. It was nearer that in which she sat than the armchair opposite, which she had indicated to him. He was a good deal higher than she was, and stooped forward, his two hands on his knees, looking straight at her face. Her gaze, which moved upward for a second, was fascinated and caught by his, but when he presently put one hand upon the arm of her chair, it dropped again. He did not touch her, but began to speak in a curt, expressionless way.

The Other Mrs Jacobs

"I want to tell you first that I know my wife was here yesterday. I don't know what passed between you. I have not seen her since. When I got home last night I found that she had gone to stay with friends of hers at Brighton. There's nothing unusual in that, she often goes there; but this time I concluded that it was because she wanted to avoid me. You see, I am quite in the dark as to her motive in coming to you—except this. She affects jealousy of me. It is unfounded and unreasonable; the terms on which we have lived for some years are not of that close nature which permits jealousy as a right. However, the sight of your photograph—the one you gave me the other day—made her suspect that I—cared for you."

He paused in the utterance of the last words, and after them, as if for a sign of some sort from her, but she gave none. So he went on,—

"I told you roughly a few days ago the story of my marriage. You know in part the reason why I did not wish you to make my wife's acquaintance. Not the whole of it. That comes into the revelation of myself, which I'm going to make you. But it became clear to me on Friday night that your husband also has reasons for preferring that you should not know my wife. This complicates things. I foresee that it may lead to a stopping short of professional relations. Therefore, to my thinking, it's the more necessary that you should understand me. I intend to protect my wife while she and I remain under the same roof, though I have no respect for her, and though I curse the day that I bound myself to her. Do you see? It's plain speaking, Heaven knows."

Helga merely bent her head. She could not trust herself to answer.

"I don't want to pretend to you that there's an iota of justification for me in my early relations with my wife. It was a passion of the flesh—nothing of

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the soul in it. I took the bit in my teeth, and let it drive me blindly forward. I don't mean that I wasn't prepared to pay the cost. I've paid it—pretty heavily. The mistake I made was in myself—in thinking for a second that that sort of woman could satisfy me. In less than two years I knew what I'd done. Since then I've lived only for science. I've scoffed at happiness. I've become almost an ascetic—perhaps something of an idealist. Can you understand that?"

"I think so," said Helga, slowly. "Idealism is the balm for disappointed souls."

"As well as the intoxicant for foolish ones. Mine has been a practical sort of idealism though—daring dreams of discoveries for the alleviation of human sufferings. Nothing more—until lately."

"Lately?" she questioned.

"You spoke to me once of your real dreams. I have real dreams too."

"But my real dreams are unrealisable," she said sadly.

"So are mine. But they are none the less real."

There was silence. Then he said abruptly in a harsher tone,—

"I've gone away from what I was speaking about. Part of the price I must pay is the upholding of my wife, even though I may lose by it what is intensely dear. The point is, that your husband put upon her a public affront—at least he appeared to do so. I must have the matter out with him. If the affront was intentional, I see nothing for it but that I shall cease to be your medical attendant."

"That is true," she replied. "I had better tell you that Mr Jacobs does not wish you to continue your visits here."

"Do you know the cause of this?" he asked quietly.

"Do not *you* know?" she exclaimed feverishly. "Has not—" She stopped awkwardly.

The Other Mrs Jacobs

"You mean has not my wife enlightened me? No. I never question her on any subject more than seems absolutely necessary. The interview I purpose obtaining with your husband in regard to his action the other night would explain matters more satisfactorily than any information I could get from Clarice. However, after I heard from Miss Pengelley that she had been here yesterday, I went home with the intention of asking my wife what she had come for, and, if possible, getting a further clue to the whole situation; but, as I told you, she had gone to Brighton, and I have had no opportunity for finding out anything. Cannot you throw any light on the matter?"

Helga's lips parted, but no sound came. She was watching his face with an anxiety so evident that it made him press his question.

"I feel sure that you can tell me something. Think," he said.

She shook her head.

"I cannot. If you do not know already—there is nothing *I* can tell you. But"—as his eyes still urged her—"do you not think of a possible cause?"

"I have thought of a possibility which had not occurred to me till recently—the possibility that Mr Jacobs may be a connection of my wife's first husband—the surname is the same—and that he recognised her. If that were the case, surely he would have told you."

She was silent, her eyes averted.

"Did he give you that explanation?" pursued Doctor Grier.

"He gave me no explanation," she answered slowly.

"Nevertheless, there's something in your mind," he exclaimed—"something that's poisoning you against me—that has altogether changed you towards me. I see it in your face. I hear it in your voice. Your eyes can't lie, Helga—your voice cannot either. Both

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were true that day when you and I talked alone in the little room downstairs. We stood soul to soul that day, as it might have been if we were on one of your own wild headlands, with the cleansing ocean at our feet, and the winds of heaven sweeping around us. Why can't we be so now—true heart friends—each one of us knowing the secret misery and the secret yearning of the other. There's no shame in such heart's truth. For God's sake, let us have it between us."

She turned at his appeal, like a creature at bay.

"Oh! How I wish it might be! I do so need a friend. Everything seems crumbling round me. I don't know what to think or where to turn. I only know one thing—and that is that we mustn't see each other any more."

He bent closer to her, and his gruff voice deepened and softened.

"Is that because you know that I love you, Helga?"

She cowered away from him in the big armchair, putting up her hand to screen her face.

"Oh! Hush! You must not say that. It is wrong—it is impossible."

"It's the truth," he answered firmly, "and there are conditions in which the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, is owed from one human being to another. I made up my mind when I came into this room that you should have the truth from me in its entirety. Why not? We aren't children, you and I, to be frightened by a bogie. If the thing is there in us, and we own up to it, that doesn't mean cringing to be whipped by Mrs Grundy. Let us be proud of it. Renounce it, if need be, but never deny it."

Helga dropped her hand from her face and gazed up at him.

"I don't deny it," she said very low. "If we had

The Other Mrs Jacobs

death in front of us I'd own it, and, after all, it's as good as death for us now."

"As good!"

He gave that pathetic yet radiant smile which at rare times illumined his stern countenance. Then he rose, and, bending over the back of her chair, reverently kissed a golden tress that lay lightly on her forehead.

"You have likened a doctor to a priest," he said. "The man who loves nobly is a guardian, too, of holy mysteries. My love for you is no ignoble thing, Helga. I kiss your hair as a priest might kiss the altar."

A rush of emotion overswept Helga. She caught his hand and laid her cheek against it with the confiding gesture of a child. For in truth, notwithstanding her thirty-five years, Helga had kept the unsophisticated heart which a girl of seventeen might have taken to her lover. In spite of her fears the world seemed no longer a cold, empty shell. One of her illusions at least had not failed. Then in sharp contrast came the remembrance of Clarice's mocking words, and of the terrible situation she must now face. And the lightning thought followed—"If she is Judah Jacobs's wife *we* are both free."

But Helga shrank in horror from the bare mental suggestion, as though it were a prompting of evil. A sudden revulsion seized her. She rose to her feet, struggling for calmness. She was neither shame-faced nor frightened now, and her marble reserve had melted, for had she not frankly avowed her love to him? But though the confession had passed her lips, honour demanded one course only. She prayed him, if his love were indeed noble, to leave her; to breathe it no more, but to help her by silence and absence to meet the difficulties that assailed her. Trouble was threatening, she owned—trouble of which she could not speak. Indeed, it had already come, and she had not met it in the strength she would have wished.

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This must be her sole thought now. She had Ronald to think for as well. She must shield him as far as she was able, for upon him too the blow would fall severely.

Drops dimmed her blue eyes as she pleaded. Grier listened and wondered. He could only suppose that her husband, in spite of his protestations to the contrary, had told her of the fatal disease which must soon kill him. This appeared to the doctor the most natural meaning of her words. Thus misconception arose in the minds of both.

"I know all about your trouble," he said. "Of course, you would guess that. But I had almost forgotten it for the moment. I confess that I ought to have remembered the peculiar conditions you are in. Perhaps, if I had done so, I should not have urged so freely my feeling for you."

Helga stared at him blankly.

"You know my trouble," she said, "and yet—you could come to me—like this? Oh! how could you?"

"It was ill-timed, I admit. Forgive me for being such a blundering fool. I thought only of you, and I couldn't bear to see you suffer. I wanted to make you sure of my love for you—whatever came between us. I didn't recollect that perhaps you might not care to be told of it—just now. Yet I can't be altogether sorry I spoke, for it has shown you that at least you can count upon one loyal friend."

"If you know," she cried passionately, "you must understand how impossible it is that there should ever be any word of love between us."

"Impossible now," he answered, "but time focusses events and feelings so that we get to see them in their right proportion. Who knows? The grief of to-day may become the gain of to-morrow. After all, there is a universal law of justice."

"If there is," she cried, "it has left me and my son out in its workings. Justice there may be for others, but to us—nothing, *nothing* can atone."

The Other Mrs Jacobs

He gazed at her in some surprise.

"If you feel it so deeply," he said, "there is no more for me to say. Mere formal consolations are out of the question. It was presumptuous of me, I know, to suppose that any regard of mine could compensate, but I imagined—"

Helga sank back into her chair. Her bosom was shaken with the violence of the emotion she was striving to suppress. She interrupted him, putting out her hand again, and snatching his to her lips.

"Oh! don't," she cried. "You are all the world to me—have I not acknowledged it? Whenever I can free myself in thought from the conditions of my actual life I feel you as a part of me. You belong to my sea world. You must have been there from the beginning, for I *knew* that you loved me long before your eyes told me so. And your love has seemed to me like the sea—strange and strong."

"But all-embracing," he muttered hoarsely. "And strong enough to cradle you to the day of doom."

For a moment she leaned against his shoulder. Her breath came and went in fluttering gasps. The nearness of his presence, that from a weaker man would have brought forth weakness, gave her strength. Then she drew herself deliberately away.

"I had a kingdom of my own once," she said tenderly, "in which I might have dared to bid you welcome. Together we would have reigned over a measureless ocean of love, as the sea-gods of old ruled the sea. But that cannot be now. I exiled myself from my kingdom seventeen long years ago, and I must abide in the path that I have chosen and do my duty there. And you too, my friend, have your duty to think of, and the lot you have made for yourself to fulfil. So we must think no more of that sea kingdom, except in dreams. It may be that some day hereafter the dream world will become the real, and we shall meet there at last with no shadow of wrong between us. But now—now—"

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Her voice broke.

"Now, the only thing I can do for you is to leave you. Is that what you would say?"

"Yes, go," she answered, "go. I shall remember, but—you must go."

He made no pretence at farewell, but silently left her.

CHAPTER XVII

DEATH THE CLAIMANT

MRS GRIER'S trip to Brighton had not been wholly unpremeditated. She knew that Kœnigsen was also going there, to proceed, on Saturday afternoon, with his portrait of a lady dwelling in Hove and to indulge in Sunday boating and sea breezes which, from force of early associations, were peculiarly agreeable to him. It had indeed been informally arranged between him and Clarice that she should take advantage of having friends at Brighton as a pretext for Saturday to Monday trips, and she had done so fairly often.

Notwithstanding Kœnigsen's involuntary revelation of his mercenary motives, and her fixed determination to revenge this slight on his part, Clarice's infatuation for him remained undiminished. The sordid elements in her own nature recognised their counterpart in that of Kœnigsen, and pitted themselves against him. It was, as she had phrased it, a game of wits. The woman meant to play her hand to the best advantage, one desire all the time ruling her mind—the desire to maintain at any cost her hold over the man who, of all men she had ever known, most strongly enchained her volatile fancy. This dominant feeling had actuated her in her flight from London even more definitely than the present impulse to avoid disagreeable explanations with Doctor Grier on the subject of her visit to Mrs Jacobs—about which she felt instinctively he would have heard from Miss Pengelley.

Death the Claimant

Clarice was thoroughly sick of Grier ; he both bored and frightened her, and she liked neither sensation. In fact, she really did not care how soon she was released from him, provided always that the release did not jeopardise her relations with Koenigsen. Clarice fully intended to marry Koenigsen herself ; she had an audacious project in the back of her mind for doing so, but threads were complicated and needed deft handling. Everything depended upon when Mr Jacobs should die, and upon how collateral events might work towards the main issue. Clarice counted a good deal upon her personal influence over Koenigsen. Whatever might be Helga's attraction for him, from the matrimonial point of view he was somewhat in the position of a pilgrim trying to warm himself at a star, and he would be liable, under irresponsible conditions, to be tempted by the ruddy glow and comforting warmth of a more earthly fire.

So in that Sunday intercourse with the painter, Clarice practised with considerable effect her tricks of fascination which, to be candid, were not of a highly-refined order. It is a common saw that familiarity breeds contempt, and in this instance it was justified, for unfortunately Clarice was not restrained by any nice scruples as to language and conduct becoming to angelic woman, and undoubtedly Koenigsen was lacking in the gentlemanly instinct which prescribes a chivalric attitude in all circumstances and moods. Things, however, went trippingly till the journey back on Monday afternoon in a coupé compartment, with privacy secured by a tip to the guard. Then some small accidents and an ill-timed remark ruffled the temper of both, and led to recriminations and even positive declarations best not chronicled. A situation like this was the kind in which Clarice always wrecked herself, and on the present occasion she was true to the traditions of her temperament. The pair roundly abused each other until the train stopped at Clapham Junction, when

The Other Mrs Jacobs

Køenigsen, with a Parthian charge that for a moment annihilated Clarice, jumped out with his Gladstone bag and hailed a porter; mindful, notwithstanding his emotional perturbation, of a lucrative appointment at Sydenham to lunch with the ex-mayor, and to make a tentative sketch of one of her children, which might lead to a further commission.

Clarice watched him disappear, her little hands clenched, her features convulsed with impotent rage, her inner being in somewhat the same volcanic condition as when, in defiance of politic considerations, she had invaded Helga's territory. She was again in the mood to commit an imprudence, but had not even sufficient judgment to decide in what form her jealous animosity should manifest itself.

At Victoria she took a hansom, and drove, not to her own house in Hyde Park Street, but to a ladies' club near Piccadilly, of which she was a member. There she partook of a dainty luncheon, with a small bottle of Burgundy to wash it down, smoked a cigarette and restlessly read the papers in the reading-room, picking them up one after the other, and devouring the Society columns, most of which contained some reference to Karl Køenigsen's party in the St Helgan Gallery, and a flattering allusion to Mrs Jacobs, the beautiful daughter of the late deposed President Brack—so the paragraph ran—well known in the literary world under her pseudonym of "Spiridia," who was also the inspiring influence which had directed the St Helgan painter's highest efforts.

Clarice glowered over the notices, her small chin protruded and a demure smile round her full, red mouth. Presently she sat down by a writing-table, dashed off a note or two cancelling engagements, and, after a glance at the clock, got herself ready for the warpath, and made her way Citywards, arriving soon after four at the office of Ahasuerus-Jacobs.

She was considerably before her time, and was

Death the Claimant

kept for half an hour in a luxuriously-furnished waiting-room, where were bookcases mostly containing splendidly-bound catalogues of various firms that had employed Mr Jacobs's agency; while on the walls were chromo-lithographs and engravings of certain works of art purchased through Mr Jacobs for advertising purposes, clever designs for posters, and the original black and white drawings of well-known advertisements. There were also portraits of celebrities whom Mr Jacobs had helped on in the road to success. Clarice eyed these through her *pince-nez*, and appraised the furnishings of the room, judging therefrom that Ahasuerus-Jacobs was a flourishing concern.

At last she heard steps in the corridor outside, a voice which she recognised as that of Mr Jacobs asking some questions of his clerk, and a door shut close by. The clerk came in a minute or two and ushered her through another door to Mr Jacobs's private room. It too was extremely well furnished; massive chairs with castors embedded in a rich Turkey carpet; a fine fireplace, in which the best coal burned briskly; on the walls, the gems of Mr Jacobs's collection of advertisement designs; in the centre of the room, beneath a handsome electric light pendant, a carved American roller desk, strewn with documents of different kinds.

Mr Jacobs laid aside a legal-looking parchment, which he had been perusing, and rose as Clarice entered. She had not given her name, merely saying that she had an appointment on business with Mr Jacobs, but he had evidently guessed the identity of his visitor. He looked ill, worried, and certainly not in a pleasant humour. She advanced with her undulating gait, her hand extended, and he took it unwillingly and awkwardly.

There was no awkwardness about Clarice. She beamed on him enticingly when she had seated herself in an armchair at the end of the writing-table,

The Other Mrs Jacobs

after having taken off a long grey gauze veil that had shrouded her becoming French toque. She folded it carefully, pinning it together with a little paste monstrosity, by which it had been fastened beneath her chin, and remarked casually,—

"I came up from Brighton this morning, and I always tie up my face in the train, because I like facing the engine. It's just as well, too, to wear a veil when one is paying compromising visits to gentlemen in the City."

Her little airs and graces irritated him. He hated her for her cool, inquisitive way of peering round the room, and looking at the papers and things on his writing-table. He saw her eyes upon a miniature of Helga, in a gold and enamel case, with doors that now stood open. He was vexed with himself for not having closed them, and he did so now with an angry snap. Then he leaned forward, one elbow on the desk supporting his chin as he stared at Clarice. She was struck by his unhealthy pallor, his sharpened features and the lines beneath his eyes.

"You're not looking over fit," she said. "What's the matter, Jude? Has my coming upset you?"

"I'm not well. I've had a longish railway journey. Let's get to business, and be done with it."

"Oh, you needn't be in such a hurry. I've a great deal to talk to you about. You shouldn't take things to heart so, old man—that's what's the matter with you. You should get all the fun you can out of life—as I do. I call it great fun coming to call on you like this."

"It is fun that I beg you will not repeat."

"Well, we'll see what inducement you offer me to keep away. You seem to forget that I came here in fulfilment of our bargain. I hope you're ready to keep your part of it?"

"You must realise that you have already broken the bargain by attempting as you did to get introduced to my wife."

Death the Claimant

"Gracious! So the poor little cat mustn't even look at the queen if it happens to find itself in the same room with her most gracious majesty. Pussie must tuck in her tail and trot away. Poor Pussie! I'd like to see her do it—that's all. Do you remember, Jude, in the old days when we were spooning, how you used to call me 'little cat'? Nobody has ever called me 'Pussie' since. You really used to be quite a dear, Jude, just at the beginning, before you took to scolding me for my frivolities."

Her voice had grown plaintive and purring. She could not resist putting forth her feline fascinations, even to this man who, she knew, despised her. She half rose, and leaned over the writing-table, stroking his arm in a caressing way of hers that she knew he would remember; but he flung off her hand fiercely.

"Drop it. I'm not going to stand that kind of thing from you now."

Clarice, wholly unabashed, sank gracefully into her chair, and contemplated her beautifully-fitting suède glove.

"Really, Jude, one wouldn't imagine that I'd ever been married to you," she observed in an injured tone.

"Look here," he said roughly, "our bargain was that you were to keep silence for a year, and not to go near my wife."

Clarice looked up sharply. She scented an uncalculated complication. She had relied upon his absence from home during the last few days, and there had been some method after all in her mad visit to Helga—an invasion which she had since repented of. The proverb anent well-laid plans came into her head.

"Have you been home since Friday night?" she asked innocently.

"No. What do you want to know for?"

"Oh, nothing particular. But listen to me, Jude.

The Other Mrs Jacobs

You insulted me abominably that night, and for no reason. How could I help Karl Koenigsen insisting upon introducing me to his friend when I'm a great friend of his too? It was the most natural thing in the world. Nothing would have come of it if you hadn't stalked off like a sort of avenging male Nemesis, setting all the world talking, and making unnecessary difficulties all round, and, I don't mind telling you, raising the devil in me. I've taken my own measures to prevent myself from being injured by your atrocious conduct—that was only to be expected. You may like them or not—I can't help that. But if you don't, just remember that you upset your own apple cart—not I."

"What on earth do you mean?" he exclaimed anxiously. "What have you been doing?"

"Oh, nothing in especial. Only you should have made some allowance for my impulsive nature. You ought to know me pretty well by this time. I always had a temper, as you're well aware, and it hasn't improved, so you'd better look out. If Mrs Jacobs—the other Mrs Jacobs—asks inconvenient questions, you have my leave to tell her any fibs that seem to suit the circumstances. That is, of course, supposing that you've squared me as we arranged."

"I was a fool to agree to such terms. They are monstrous. Besides, as I've said, you've broken the bargain."

"Judah Jacobs, no one could ever labour under a mistake concerning your nationality," imperturbably remarked Clarice. "You were always the same—never did like parting. I shouldn't have run away from you if you'd shown yourself less stingy. But unless your memory's failed you, I think you must remember that I said our bargain was to date from to-day. Therefore I haven't broken the conditions. I promised you that from the time you handed me over that three thousand pounds, I'd not betray you to the other Mrs Jacobs for a whole year. I'm ready

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to swear to it on the Good Book, if you've got one handy, but I suppose you haven't."

He made no show of resenting the gibe, but opened a drawer in a weary manner, and produced a Bible.

"Here!" he said, "I fancied this would come in useful. Even unscrupulous women consider an oath to some extent binding. I know that the spoken word represents small value to you."

Clarice's eyes flashed fire.

"I must say, Jude, that you don't compliment my sense of honour. I've no objection to swearing, and I don't want to cast any aspersions on your moral character, but you'll excuse my suggesting that it would look more business-like if the stakes were put on the table."

"As you please."

He took a bunch of keys hanging at the end of a chain from his trouser pocket and selected one. She had got up from her chair, and was fussily clearing a space on the table at the side of the slanting desk in the centre, moving the documents that lay there, and among them that one which he had been perusing before her entrance, and over which he had hastily shuffled a bundle of letters. Clarice saw that it was folded in three, and that the middle fold was docketed on the outside in a scrolly caligraphy, "Will of Judah Jacobs, Esquire, of 59 Braxton Gardens, W., and 3 Chesham Buildings, E.C." Clarice softly turned the document over, and saw that its length was less than one side of the parchment sheet. It was evidently drawn up in an extremely simple manner. She glanced at it swiftly. Mr Jacobs had moved away, and was standing with his back to her, in the act of opening an iron safe set in the opposite corner of the wall, and so placed that even were he to look round the high back of the *escritoire* would shield her from observation. Clarice, who was short-sighted, bent her head close to the table, and, running her eyes

The Other Mrs Jacobs

comprehensively down the page, took in the sense of the document. One name had caught her eye. It was that of Karl Kœnigsen. She saw that he was a legatee to the extent of five thousand pounds, also that he was appointed executor jointly with "my wife," to whom the whole of Judah Jacobs's fortune was left absolutely unreservedly. There was no mention of his son.

Clarice had just time, before Mr Jacobs came back from the safe, to thrust the document under her muff, which, with its decoration of lace and violets, completely covered the paper, and looked as though it had been carelessly thrown there in some impetuous movement of its owner.

Clarice's keen wits were rapidly working. But she sat down, presenting a guileless and unabashed face to Mr Jacobs as he approached and laid on the writing-table a bundle of crisp banknotes. He counted them, turning the corner of each with the practised hand of one accustomed to giving and receiving large sums.

"Thirty hundreds, in three packets of ten," he said.

"Thank you. I'm not sure that I shouldn't have preferred fifties. Still, this will do quite nicely. Now!" she put on a business-like air, "please tell me what to do, and exactly what I've got to say. I don't think I ever swore to anything in my life before."

"You must stand up. Hold this"—he gave her the Book—"and repeat after me."

He said the words of the oath over to her, and she repeated them, kissing the volume solemnly in conclusion.

"There! That's done," she exclaimed in a tone of relief. "Hand over the oof. Why, you must be simply rolling, Jude. Don't I wish I'd insisted on five thou'."

Mr Jacobs put the Book back in the drawer, and pushed over the bundle of notes.

"Heavens! What a prey for thieves!" She took

Death the Claimant

it up greedily. "Where shall I put them for safety?" She reflected a moment; then throwing back her sable cape she unfastened the bodice of her dress, and placed the packet of banknotes inside her bosom, triumphantly rebuttoned the bodice, and again brought forward her cape, carefully replacing the jabot of old Genoese point which she had disarranged.

Mr Jacobs watched her with ill-concealed impatience. When she had finished he said emphatically,—

"You will now understand that from me and from my household you and yours are absolutely divided."

"Really, Judah, you are not civil, to say the least of it. Perhaps the division may not be quite so easy to accomplish as you imagine—social threads in the way, and little predilections you might not have bargained for! Karl Kœnigsen isn't the only close mutual friend we have—I, and—the other Mrs Jacobs."

He turned livid.

"I insist upon you speaking of my wife with proper respect."

"Well, I'll call her 'Mrs Jacobs,' if it makes you any happier. We'll concede her that point for the present. How are you going to get the lady to send her devoted and trustworthy physician to the right about?"

"That is already done. Doctor Grier will not again enter my house."

"Don't you be too sure about that. To the best of my knowledge he was sent for last Saturday. You'll find Andrew a hard nut to crack. He'll want to know the reason why, I can tell you; and if he means to see—*Mrs Jacobs*, he'll do it. Mind he hasn't a suspicion that Ahasuerus-Jacobs and my late lamented are one and the same, and I'd be just as well pleased that he hadn't—just yet."

"Do you intend to imply that he's ignorant of

The Other Mrs Jacobs

your former history? That's impossible. You went into the hospital as Mrs Jacobs."

"Certainly I did. And I also bought this the other day"—she touched a pin with a fantastic jewelled head, which held together the folds of her lace—"pretty, isn't it?—from Mr Jacobs, jeweller, in the Edgware Road. And I occasionally employ an upholstering woman who calls herself Mrs Jacobs. There are plenty of us in the world. Andrew has never been unduly curious about my matrimonial antecedents. I will say for him, that he's only inquisitive about microbes, and that sort of beastly thing. He's utterly devoid of healthy human interests in the ordinary way. Really, I should never have thought that Andrew, who has been a woman-hater ever since he fell out of love with me, would have lost his head over—the other Mrs Jacobs."

"What do you mean? Explain yourself," said Jacobs, hoarsely, ignoring the taunt.

"Simply that he's in love with her—that's all. I taxed him with it myself. Haven't I seen the signs in him before? And it isn't all on one side either, I fancy. Doctors have plenty of chances for ingratiating themselves, you know. I wouldn't mind betting one of these"—she touched the notes in her breast—"that they've done some billing and cooing while you've been away. You thought you had put your foot down, my clever Jude, but I think I may safely assure you that it wasn't to much purpose."

"How dare you?" Mr Jacobs gripped Clarice's shoulder with a force that made her stagger. "I forbid you to speak of my wife."

"But she *isn't* your wife, my dear Jude." Clarice's tinkling laugh rang out exasperatingly. "Don't press so hard—you hurt me. She's only—the other Mrs Jacobs. And what's more, she won't long be even that. As soon as you're dead, my friend, there'll be a lovely set out—a race for the Jacobs Stakes—entries, Andrew Grier and Karl Kœnigsen.

Death the Claimant

They both know that you've got an aneurism of the heart, and may die any day, so they've started the running already. It will be a pity if you can't look down from aloft and see which wins."

Mr Jacobs's hand suddenly relaxed its grasp of Clarice's shoulder. He lurched back, and dropped heavily into the swivel chair in front of his desk.

"You'd better take care of yourself, Jude," Clarice went on mockingly. "Excitement's bad for you. And you'll need all your wits to manage the rival claimants for the hand of the other Mrs J.—with your money in it. They're a smart pair. But just you keep an eye on Karl Kœnigsen—that's my advice to you. Andrew's in earnest fast enough—only, you see, he's got *me* to look after him. Now Karl Kœnigsen wants a wife for practical purposes, and he means to have your Helga."

"Kœnigsen!" repeated Jacobs, in a dull tone. "That's a lie, at all events."

"Oh, is it? Find out. Anyway, don't leave your shoes ready for him to step into. He thinks they'd just fit him. It's the money he wants mostly, but he manages to throw in a bit of love-making. You can prove what I say if you like to catch your 'wife' unawares. Ask her what became of the fan she dropped near the Japanese chrysanthemums in the conservatory on Friday night, just after Karl Kœnigsen had told her that he adored her. I heard him say it, but you can pretend that you did, too."

Mr Jacobs said not a word. He sat huddled in the chair, his shoulders hunched, his head falling forward on his breast.

Clarice got up and went softly behind him, whispering in his ear,—

"Think it over, Jude, and if you want any more suggestions you can let me know. But keep friends with me, Jude. You never did get the better of the little cat, and you're not going to now. A cat has claws, mind, that might scratch when you were not

The Other Mrs Jacobs

looking. But she has nice little soft paws too, and she only puts the paws out if you play with her prettily. You read your Bible, I hope, Jude. There's a line in it you might remember with advantage—'Where the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.' I shouldn't wonder if I see something of that sort, by-and-by."

He took no notice of her, but sat still, his head bowed upon his breast. Tired of taunting, and deciding that she had said enough, Clarice moved, and caught up her muff, leaving the will visible, with its endorsement uppermost. Then, with a parting wave of her hand, and a light "So long, Jude!" she left the room, not knowing that Death stood behind the chair in which Judah Jacobs was seated, having come to claim his victim.

CHAPTER XVIII

BY TELEPHONE

MISS PENGELLEY went down to the dining-room late on Monday afternoon with the intention of typing a letter to her brother in Ceylon. The duty had been neglected, for in fact her mind during the last few days had been filled with "Spiridia" and the intricacies of the Jacobs household, leaving no room for her own concerns. Even now, after typing a few lines she let her hands drop, and her thoughts wandered over the events of the past few days. She was not needed upstairs just now, for Ronald was sleeping, and Mrs Jacobs had established herself in his sitting-room, her embroidery frame—which Miss Pengelley had brought—before her, while she drew her needle to and fro in a mechanical almost vacuous manner, which showed that her attention was by no means fixed upon her task.

Miss Pengelley was distressed at the change in Mrs Jacobs—the deep depression, alternating with fits of feverish activity in which she descended and remounted the stairs, paced the drawing-room, settling to nothing, and went in and out of Ronald's room asking questions as to his health which were wholly unnecessary; for, beyond a certain lassitude—the after effects of his bout of pain—the boy was in almost his normal condition.

It was about midday when Mrs Jacobs had issued from her study, dressed in ordinary day attire. Doctor Grier had not come that day. On Sunday

The Other Mrs Jacobs

Miss Pengelley had waited to see him after his interview with Mrs Jacobs, keeping the door of Ronald's sitting-room ajar in case he had any further directions to give. She had heard him leave the study, and go past the landing, not pausing a moment; but when she ran out to intercept him, she had only caught sight of the forbidding outline of his shoulders, and of the grim profile as he let himself out at the hall door.

Later in that day, Miss Pengelley had surprised Mrs Jacobs's eyes fixed upon her with a strained, inquiring expression. Venturing to ask what was in her mind, Susan received the reply,—

"I was thinking of something Doctor Grier had said. He told me he was sure you could be trusted, if you would, to take care—good care—of Ronald. I am glad of that, because it makes me feel that he would be safe with you if—if ever I left him."

"Are you going away then, Mrs Jacobs?" asked Miss Pengelley.

"I never do leave him," said Helga, seemingly answering her own thoughts as much as Susan's. "But the time might come when perhaps I'd have to. One can never tell. I sometimes feel as if I must get away. I don't encourage the feeling, but it becomes too strong for me occasionally."

"It would do you good to have a change," said Susan, seriously, "and indeed you may trust me to take every care of Ronald. We are very good friends, and I am sure I could look after him, if Doctor Grier came in now and then and told me what to do."

"Yes," said Mrs Jacobs. "Of course if he were here, that would be all right; but one cannot be sure of always having the same doctor. However, we'll see. I am not going away just yet—I could not, in any case. But if—if ever I am obliged to go, Miss Pengelley, may I rely on your kind care of my boy?"

By Telephone

"Undoubtedly," said Susan, sympathetically. "I will look after him to the very best of my ability. And I hope you will consider the idea of taking a change, Mrs Jacobs. I feel sure you would enjoy it."

"I don't want a change in the ordinary sense of the word," returned Helga, sadly; "but there are times, I confess, when I want to get right away by myself—when I feel as if I could not bear the restrictions of London life any longer. I am not town born nor bred, you know, Miss Pengelley. I was born and brought up in St Helga. I lived there till I was sixteen, until my father was deposed, and we went to Helsingkräad. I loved the island so, and I have never seen it since. I have a tiny property, a little cottage on a wild headland that belonged to my mother, where my foster-mother is now living. She is a St Helgan fisherwoman. If I could but go there again for a few weeks, I think my spirit would be strengthened, and I should be better able to face life as it is."

"Why shouldn't you go up there?" replied Miss Pengelley. "It is a very good thought. I should certainly go."

"Well, I will think of it," said Helga, and relapsed into silence.

Soon after that Miss Pengelley went downstairs to write her letter, leaving the mother and son alone. The letter proceeded briskly for the first page. It was easy enough to give an interesting description of her first impressions of 59 Branxton Gardens and its inmates. Susan went on to describe Karl Kœnigsen, and her first experience of the gaieties of Upper Bohemia, as seen at the St Helgan Gallery. But after that she flagged, and was now sitting ruminating upon her later experiences in this memorable week.

Suddenly the telephone bell rang in the little room where Mrs Jacobs interviewed her cook. It tinged

The Other Mrs Jacobs

peremptorily, and for so long that Miss Pengelley was feeling half inclined to go and hear what was the matter when the shambling footsteps of the awkward footman sounded on the basement stairs. She knew by this that Hornblow, who was usually the officiant in the telephone-room, must have gone out for an after-tea constitutional. The footman was not accustomed to taking telephone messages, and the nature of this must have considerably upset him, for he appeared presently at the dining-room door showing a distraught countenance and appealing to Miss Pengelley.

"Please, miss, there's something happened at the telephone, and Mr Hornblow is out. If you please, miss, would you mind coming—the gentleman at the other end he asked if there wasn't somebody in the house as was responsible, and on no account to call Mrs Jacobs."

The bell was going on all the time, persistently tinging. Miss Pengelley rose at once from her typewriter and followed the affrighted footman to the instrument. The man bent over the mouthpiece, and, during a brief pause in the rattle, called, "'Ello! Sir! Are you there?"

He put the tube to his ear and listened a moment or two, then answered back, "Yessir, the lady's come, sir."

There was a short reply, and William relinquished the ear-tube with a shaking hand.

"Will you please come, miss. The gentleman's waiting to speak to you."

Susan advanced with some trepidation, and held the tube to her own ear. There sounded a sharp, assured voice, "Are you there? Who are you?"

"I'm Susan Pengelley."

"*Who?* Speak up, please."

"Miss Pengelley. Mrs Jacobs's companion."

"All right. Can I rely upon you not to alarm Mrs Jacobs?"

By Telephone

"Certainly."

"Very good. "I'm Radstock—*Rad-stock*—junior partner of Jacobs's, you know. Can you hear?"

"Yes, pretty well."

"Got strong nerves and a head on your shoulders—eh?"

"Yes. Please say what's the matter."

"Well, I've got bad news—very bad news. Are you there?"

There was a buzz in the instrument; the connection seemed imperfect, and the junior partner's voice had become distant and indistinct.

A break followed, which seemed to Susan interminable. Then the bell rang again. Once more, "Hello! Are you there?"

"Yes—yes. What is the bad news? Please speak louder."

"Wait a minute. Doctor Grier's here. We sent for him at once. He'll speak to you."

There came another voice along the wire, resonant, deliberate.

"Miss Pengelley! Are you there?"

"Yes, I'm here. Do tell me what has happened."

"I'm sorry to say Mr Jacobs died suddenly about five o'clock."

"What!" Susan let fall the ear-piece in her horror. A faint, thin whispering came from the telephone which recalled her. She collected herself with an effort.

"Say it again, please."

"Can you hear? Mr Jacobs died of heart disease in his office this afternoon. He was found dead in his chair at five o'clock. . . . Are you there? Do you understand?"

"O—o—oh!" Susan could give nothing but the long-drawn monosyllable.

"I want you to break it to Mrs Jacobs. First tell me—do you know what I've said to you?"

"Yes. Mr Jacobs died . . . I cannot believe it."

The Other Mrs Jacobs

"It is unfortunately true. We are bringing the body home. Will you prepare the servants? Can I depend on your judgment and sympathy in breaking it to Mrs Jacobs?"

"I will do my best."

Miss Pengelley staggered away from the instrument, which was rung off again. William had left the room, and she stood trying to collect her faculties for the task before her. She began to ask herself whether she had heard aright; she had one wild impulse to ring up the junior partner and get corroboration of the terrible news. But a minute's reflection told her that there could be no mistake. She had recognised Doctor Grier's voice, and his announcement had been sufficiently positive. Besides, she remembered his prognostications of approaching disaster, and felt sure that this was what he had meant. She went back to her typewriter, and stared stupidly at the lines, which danced before her eyes. It seemed incredible that only a few minutes back she had been writing an ordinary chatty letter to her brother describing her new surroundings. It was barely a week since she had arrived in Branxton Gardens. How much had happened in that time! She knew that since Saturday she had felt oppressed by a vague sense of something painful in the background, but she had never dreamed of calamity so swift and dire as this. Mr Jacobs dead! Her mind leaped back to the first evening, and his strangely-uttered quotation concerning "Judah—the lion's whelp." Truly now was he couched down, and none should ever raise him up. Mr Jacobs dead! She had to hammer the fact upon her dull brain before she could realise it.

And now it was her duty to go up and break the tidings to his widow, as Doctor Grier had bidden her. She never thought of disobeying, although it occurred to her that he might more naturally have undertaken the task himself. How would Mrs Jacobs bear it?

By Telephone

Would she be stunned by the sudden misfortune? Would she faint? Would she weep? Or would the intensity of her grief dry up the fountain of tears?

Susan wondered whether she ought not first to summon the servants, but she did not know for which of them to send. Hornblow's entrance solved the doubt. He looked scared, having just come in from his walk, to be met with the footman's incoherent version of what he had gleaned at the telephone. Hornblow was deeply moved when Miss Pengelley told him the truth regarding it, as was perhaps natural, from his own point of view.

"Dear! Dear! Dear! What a misfortune! I'm truly grieved, miss, as will be every one of us—upper and under—downstairs. As fine a gentleman, was Mr Jacobs, as ever stepped, in spite of being in business, and him with a drop of Jewish blood in him. Never could I wish to have a better master, all the same. Though when I come here first, Miss Pengelley, me having always lived in the best English families, I fancied it something of a come down. But I can honestly say, I've never regretted it; and I've been here now five years come the 15th of January. Not a word of unpleasantness, but once, between us, and that altogether on account of Mr Jacobs preferring to engage inexperienced footmen—young men as he knew something about, and wanted to give a chance to, he said. He never would realise that it put a deal on me." Hornblow heaved a deep sigh. "Well, well, 'in the midst of life'—that is a true saying, miss. And how will my poor mistress bear it? And who is to tell her?"

"I've got to do it, Hornblow," said Miss Pengelley, resolutely. "They are bringing—him home. Doctor Grier told me to say that you must be prepared."

"The smoking-room, miss," said Hornblow, in awe-stricken accents. "I'll see to it. Mrs Jacobs can depend on me. I understand all that is usual

The Other Mrs Jacobs

when there's a death in the house. I'd best inform Mam'selle Julie. She's in the housekeeper's room."

Miss Pengelley dragged herself upstairs, endeavouring as best she could to compose her face, so that it might not at once convey the evil news, should Ronald be awake, and his mother still with him. But it happened that Mrs Jacobs, seized with restlessness, had gone into the drawing-room, and was in the act of pulling out drawer after drawer in a Boule cabinet which stood near the window. She half turned at Miss Pengelley's entrance.

"I am looking for a letter," she said. "I dropped it the day—on Saturday afternoon."

Susan knew she must be referring to the letter which was lying on the floor when Mrs Grier had been hustled so unceremoniously out of the house. She went to the *escritoire*, and, taking the folded paper from where she had then placed it, handed it to Mrs Jacobs.

"I think," she said, "that this is what you want."

Helga looked at it, her brows contracting as if with pain, and hastily thrust it into a little velvet bag which hung from her waist.

"Yes, that's it." She walked about the room for a minute or two, and, as she neared the door, freakishly turned on a cluster of electric lights in the centre of the ceiling, which made a sudden illumination, and caused Susan to shrink, afraid of her own betraying countenance.

"I hate dimness," Mrs Jacobs cried. "I want as much light as I can get—light in all dark holes and shadowy corners—lights for one's poor soul to see its way by when it's walking along a difficult path in life." She stopped abruptly in front of Susan, and the girl's manner arrested her attention.

"What is it? You look as if something had happened. Isn't Ronald all right?"

"Ronald's all right," Miss Pengelley faltered, "but there is—I have something to tell you."

By Telephone

"Yes? I thought I heard the telephone bell a little while ago. Hornblow ought to have brought up the message."

"Hornblow was out. He's only just come back. I was sent for to speak with someone through the telephone."

"With whom? It was from the office, I suppose?"

"Yes, the message was from the office."

"Well, can't you tell me what it was?" Mrs Jacobs spoke impatiently, yet not with keen anxiety. She had the manner of one preoccupied by some secret absorbing interest, to whom all outside tidings are comparatively unimportant. "Is there anything wrong? Why don't you say who was at the telephone?"

"It was Doctor Grier," said Susan, taking courage at the mere mention of his name.

"Doctor Grier!" Mrs Jacobs, who had continued to move restlessly to and fro, stopped again in sheer amazement.

"Do you mean that Doctor Grier spoke to you from the office—Mr Jacobs's office?"

"Yes," said Susan, outwardly sedate but inwardly trembling.

"What was he doing there?" Sudden fear looked out of Helga's eyes.

"He had been sent for," said Susan.

"Sent for? Why?"

"There was someone who had been taken ill."

"Someone!" Helga came closer and caught Susan's arm. "Miss Pengelley, speak out. I'm not a child or a fool. *Who* was taken ill?"

"Mr Jacobs," said Susan, gently. "He was taken ill suddenly—very ill!" Helga's eyes devoured her face as she went on, her voice thrilling with intense pity. "There was something the matter with him that no one knew of except, I think, Doctor Grier. It was his heart."

The Other Mrs Jacobs

"Except Doctor Grier! Oh! my God!" exclaimed Helga, adding stormily, "Why do you say *was*?"

"Because—oh! Mrs Jacobs, I don't know how to tell you."

Tears rushed into Susan's eyes. She held out her arms in an impulse of compassionate protection. "Can you understand? He is not suffering now."

"Do you mean that he is—*dead*?" asked Helga, in a hushed voice.

Susan simply nodded.

Helga stood motionless, her face the pallid colour of old marble.

"Heaven has been very merciful. May his soul rest in peace," were the first words that broke from her lips.

To Susan's astonishment there came an expression of quietude, almost of relief, over her face. The tortured look which had been upon it for the last two days seemed now to have suddenly melted away. She clasped her hands upon her bosom, and stood with her face uplifted, in the attitude, Susan thought, of some pictured saint. Great drops filled her eyes, and coursed slowly down her cheeks. She was safe now, Susan knew. There was no further need to apprehend terrible consequences from the shock. Helga was looking at her again with the sorrowful simplicity of a child.

"I am thanking God," she said, "that he has been spared trouble and pain. Now I can always think of him as my husband who, through all our life together, cared only to make me happy. I am glad he is at rest, where no harm can touch him."

Susan wondered, not understanding what she meant, and fancying that perhaps the suddenness of the shock had turned her mind a little astray. Mrs Jacobs's calmness, though her grief was evidently deep and genuine, puzzled the girl, who sensed behind it some darker tragedy, at which she could not

By Telephone

even dimly guess. The only clue she had was that it held some relation to Helga's dead husband, but what that relation was she could not conjecture.

Being a practical little person, Miss Pengelley did not disdain material aids in her ministrations, and when Mrs Jacobs, who, like most neurotic, highly-strung women, was subject to quick reactions, sobbed and shivered, Susan made her sip champagne, which she took at the door from Julie. It was of the finest brand, which Hornblow had thoughtfully got out of the cellar, and sent up by "Mam'selle Julie," a black-eyed, sallow-faced, well-dressed young person, who hung about the landing in the hope of being called to the succour of her madame, whom she adored. Susan bade the girl go upstairs and prepare her mistress's rooms in case Mrs Jacobs would wish to retire thither, which seemed likely. Julie flew to light the fires there—the blinds were already drawn down—and to have in readiness the nearest approach that madame's wardrobe furnished to the garb of woe.

Helga's vivid imagination had at once conjured up a dramatic picture of the dead man being borne in silence to his home on the day, and almost at the hour, which he had fixed for his return in such different fashion. All her thoughts seemed to be of her husband ; she only remembered her son, as, with Miss Pengelley's arm in hers, she slowly mounted the stairs.

"I can't go back to Ronald," she said plaintively, her hand at her side. "He might want to talk about his father, and I don't think I could bear it—just now. I wonder if you would mind telling him, Miss Pengelley, what has happened. Do you think you could? I know you will do it in a kind way."

"Indeed I will," replied Susan, fervently. She was anxious to get Mrs Jacobs out of sight and hearing of the arrival of the dead master of the house, for whom preparations were being made below. "Doctor

The Other Mrs Jacobs

Grier is coming himself," Susan added. "Shall he go upstairs to you?"

But Mrs Jacobs shook her head. She trembled from head to foot and was forced to put out her hand suddenly and cling to the balusters for support.

"No, no, not now. I don't want to see him. Ask him to look after Ronald, but please don't let him come near me. I want to be alone. I must be alone—*quite* alone."

Susan agreed, thinking that, after all, it was but natural that the new-made widow should shrink from seeing anyone, even her friend the doctor. They had reached the upper landing by this time and went into the little study. The curtains were drawn and the shaded light above the typewriter shed but a feeble glow on the sanctum of "Spiridia." Somehow Susan felt that, once inside this little room, the woman she was tending was much more "Spiridia" than Mrs Jacobs, for she fully realised the gulf between the two sides of Helga. Susan looked to the accustomed inspirational atmosphere of the room to afford such consolation as it might. Instinctively, she felt that it would soothe and comfort. So Mrs Jacobs remained silent and solitary. Even Julie was refused admittance. "I want to be alone," was all Helga's desire.

It was an easier task to break to Ronald the news that he had lost his father. The youth had never felt any profound affection for the Universal Agent, as he had been used to style the head of Ahasuerus-Jacobs, and his death was not likely to make any immediate blank in Ronald's existence. The father's prevailing sentiments towards his crippled son had been at best a compassionate toleration, at worst something akin to contempt, and, mingled with this, a faint resentment of Helga's injudicious devotion to the boy. Perhaps the only practical point on which there had been dissidence between Judah Jacobs and Helga was the management of their son; and it must be confessed that the father's view of the matter was

By Telephone

the soundest, and could it have been carried out would probably have made a better man of Ronald. The boy himself was perfectly aware of his father's attitude, and this knowledge on his part had not contributed to harmony between them, but Ronald, for all his priggish old-mannishness, was but a boy in years and understanding. On the present occasion, his sudden throwing off of selfish egotism, a few natural tears that he shed, and his real concern for his mother, raised him considerably in Miss Pengelley's opinion. The bond between these two was welding itself in a curious way.

Miss Pengelley was still sitting with Ronald, telling him again such meagre particulars as Doctor Grier had given her through the telephone, when the sound of a carriage and a cab driving up, of the hall door opening and closing, and of the tread of men's feet in the hall, disturbed the heavy hush which had fallen upon the house. Ronald raised himself nervously upon his couch and looked at Miss Pengelley, tears starting to his eyes again, for the boy was still weak, and, though he had not cared much for his father, he had felt the shock more than she guessed. Susan turned rather pale and listened silently.

Presently the sound of footsteps and of muffled voices ceased. The door of the smoking-room fell to with a dull thud. Ronald and Miss Pengelley both knew that the burden had been laid there upon the couch, which Susan remembered, with a little shiver, was long, narrow, without arms, and bier-like.

By-and-by a message came up that Mr Radstock, the junior partner, was below. With an audacity which, in the circumstances, was perhaps commendable, he desired to see Mrs Jacobs. Miss Pengelley, who had descended on Hornblow's intimation of Mr Radstock's wishes, stood warder of Helga's privacy.

The junior partner was a gentleman of florid manners and vulpine countenance, who, Susan had already gleaned, was no favourite with Mrs Jacobs. Mr

The Other Mrs Jacobs

Radstock thought that Mrs Jacobs would wish to know the particulars of her husband's last hours, and he had an idea that she might throw some light on the identity of a lady unknown to the clerk admitting her, who had not given her name, but who came, she said, by appointment, to see Mr Jacobs. She had made her own way out, for no one had been summoned by Mr Jacobs, according to his custom when dismissing a client, to show the way to the door. That lady was the last person who had seen Mr Jacobs alive. After her departure the clerk, knocking and receiving no answer, had entered the private room of the senior partner to find him sitting in front of the writing-table, stone dead. It was a question whether the interview with the unknown lady had accelerated his end.

It flashed into Susan's mind that this lady visitor might prove to be one of the elements of tragedy which she had sensed. Nevertheless Miss Pengelley was unwilling that Mrs Jacobs should be disturbed.

"No, no," she cried. "Mrs Jacobs told me especially that she wished to be alone. I am sure that she would rather not see you. And even if she would, why trouble her with this story of a woman she probably knows nothing of, and who could have had nothing to do with Mr Jacobs's death?"

Mr Radstock's manner conveyed clearly that he did not consider Mrs Jacobs's companion as a person authorised to give any opinion on the subject. Luckily Doctor Grier came in at the moment—he had been engaged upon superintending some last offices for the dead. He at once settled the point under discussion.

It was quite out of the question that Mrs Jacobs should be disturbed. Nothing must be referred to her—to-day at all events. The junior partner altered his tone and submitted with a fairly good grace. Miss Pengelley could not help admiring the doctor as he stood, tall and commanding, his back to the fire.

By Telephone

"Miss Pengelley," he said, with formal courtesy that was in marked contrast to Radstock's rather insolent manner, "I should inform you that I took upon myself, as medical attendant to the family, the responsibility of sending for Mr Jacobs's solicitor. As Mr Radstock knows"—and he glanced at the junior partner—"a document, purporting to be Mr Jacobs's will, was lying on the table before which the dead body was seated. The endorsement gave the name of the lawyer who had drawn it up, and I sent for him and handed the will into his keeping. He will probably be here shortly, and will advise as to the proper steps to be taken."

Susan made some suitable reply, and then the junior partner took his leave, and Doctor Grier and Miss Pengelley remained alone together in the dining-room.

"Well!" he said grimly. "This is a bad business and you've got your work cut out before you."

"What am I to do?" asked Susan, diffidently.

"Do? Why, prove that you are what I've summed you up at—no fool. Keep your wits about you and protect that poor woman upstairs as far as lies in your power."

"Of course. That's all I'm caring about," said Susan. "I'll do my best."

"You can't do more," he rejoined gruffly. "At all events, don't get scared. There may be other complications ahead, I don't exactly know of what sort; but you take my advice"—he flung up his chin determinedly—"Go straight—and chuck the consequences."

"I'm not afraid of consequences," said Susan, simply. "They don't concern me."

"No, they don't. And be thankful for it."

"Won't you go up to Mrs Jacobs?" suggested Susan. "She said that she wouldn't see anyone, but you're different."

"Oh! Ay! I'm different, in a sense; but if she

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didn't say so I won't chance it. No, thanks, I'm not going up. Tell me how she took it."

He sat down by the table and questioned Susan minutely. The girl gave the history of the last twenty-four hours, and of Mrs Jacobs's moods. The doctor sat for several moments gazing blankly into space, deep in thought. Then he shook himself as though he had come to some conclusion.

"No. I can't do anything now. She's best alone. The lawyer man will see to things. If she seems restless again—excited, you understand—give her this."

He took out his stylograph and a small pad and dashed off a prescription.

"Bromide," he said, "and *cannabis indica*. You'll send it out at once to be made up; and let her take it, if necessary. And"—he had advanced a step and halted in front of Susan, his hand outstretched—"if anything goes wrong—*anything*, mind—you will send for me."

His grey eyes, steely discs, the pupils of which seemed to have contracted into pin-points of concentrated light, revealed to Susan a look which she had never seen in them before. In that look she beheld the man's soul naked. She had surprised his secret. She knew that he loved Mrs Jacobs, and he knew that she knew it; but the greatness and strength of the man was such that he did not care. It was characteristic of him that he only gave a harsh laugh.

"You seem taken aback, young woman," he said. "Didn't suppose I was built that way, did you? Well, it doesn't matter much. I think we understand each other. We'll both of us do for her the best that we know how—eh? But I'm not going near her at present. The lawyer man will come and tell her all she needs to know. I'm not on in this act. Only—I'm *there*, you understand, just as any other ordinary doctor might be—to give bromide and that sort of

By Telephone

thing when it's wanted. So you send for me if you require me—I sha'n't be long in coming. Mind, I trust you, young woman."

And Miss Pengelley knew by the ring of his voice that Doctor Grier trusted her absolutely in the care of the woman he loved.

The iron grip of his hand as he held hers before leaving the room was a physical impression and a mental memory. He had not been long gone when the solicitor arrived, a typical man of law, whom Mrs Jacobs consented to see, and who was accordingly admitted to her study. The interview was not a long one, and the lawyer presently departed in time for his own family dinner in a street behind Lancaster Gate.

There was no family dinner served that evening at 59 Braxton Gardens. Julie took up a tray to Mrs Jacobs. Miss Pengelley and Ronald ate in a scrappy fashion together, while footsteps, muffled by the thick carpet, passed to and fro below, and lights burned in the death chamber. Already the heavy scent of Roman hyacinths, white roses and Eucharist lilies floated up from the lower storey. Mam'selle Julie, actuated by an emotional impulse and anxious to please her mistress, had gone forth to the florist's where Ronald had purchased his blue lilies and pink orchids, and had returned laden with offerings, which she humbly laid at the shrine of death.

Later on in the evening, when Ronald had been put to bed and all seemed still, Susan crept softly down to the ground floor, where the King of Terrors held court with the silent dead. The women whom Doctor Grier had brought to perform what was required were at supper, and Susan supposed the room would be otherwise tenantless. She turned the door handle noiselessly, and was about to enter, when she shrank back again, seeing that she must not intrude, for a dark figure knelt beside the white-draped couch.

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No sound of weeping disturbed the solemnity of that last long sleep. Helga's grief was voiceless, but none the less sincere. Her long, thin fingers held closely one of the dead hands—hands that, since she had held them at the marriage altar, had been raised only in tender offices and kindly deeds for her. Judah Jacobs would have been glad had he read her thoughts of him and seen how closely she clung to him now that he was about to be taken from her. All that night she remained beside him.

CHAPTER XIX

REPRISALS

CLARICE read in the newspaper the announcement of Mr Jacobs's sudden death with a shock of surprise and not altogether of satisfaction. She had not looked for this tragic turn of events, and felt a little uncomfortable at the thought that perhaps the excitement of his interview with her had killed Mr Jacobs sooner than might otherwise have been the case. Of course, she knew that his death was due to specific disease, of which his doctors, and others as well, were aware, so she had no dread of unpleasant complications. Still, it would have been a relief to her could she have been assured that someone else had had a later interview than her own with Mr Jacobs.

She had gone back to Brighton with the £3000 in notes safely buttoned up inside her bodice, and had presently sent a telegram to Doctor Grier from the address of her friends, to whose house she had now repaired, announcing that she did not, for the present, propose returning to London. As a matter of fact, she intended going up the following day in order to duly deposit her money at her own bank, where her balance was already pretty considerable. Clarice undoubtedly deserved the commendation given to the unjust steward. She had provided herself against emergencies, and in certain buyings and sellings of stock had made friends with the mammon of unrighteousness. Doctor Grier would

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have been surprised could he have inspected the ledgers of a bank with which he had no idea that his wife had dealings.

Clarice, in her generation, was a wise woman, who had taken due advantage of the Married Women's Property Act. Apart from her personal powers of seduction, she had a strong hold over Kœnigsen in the fact that she had, in the days of his impecuniosity, advanced him six or seven hundred pounds, a sum which, as he explained to her, his expenses in connection with the St Helgan Gallery had made it inconvenient to him to repay. At the present moment, however, Clarice was glad that Kœnigsen had not repaid the loan. The ways of a certain type of woman are crooked and difficult for the healthy minded to comprehend. Clarice was the most extraordinary mixture of guile and folly. The best-laid plans of hers were liable to be disarranged by some freak of temper, and she was quite aware that, in respect of Helga, she had acted imprudently. Having secured her £3000, she had hopes that Jacobs would abet her by lying to his wife, and that she would have a little breathing space in which to concoct future mischief. She had not dreamed that Judah would die so soon. And this cutting short of all her projects was, at first, extremely disconcerting.

She was pondering upon her situation over her cup of chocolate, with its accompaniment of poached eggs and bacon—for her friend's house being an establishment for paying guests, she had paid for exemption from rules, and usually breakfasted in her own room—when a telegram was brought her—a peremptory command from her husband to go back at once; reply paid.

Clarice scribbled insolently on the form enclosed with Doctor Grier's mandate,—

"Regret engagements prevent immediate return. Will wire to-morrow.—CLARICE," and gave the

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message to the maid, but, on second thoughts, recalled her at the door, while she wrote another telegram—to Karl Kœnigsen, at his private studio—"Must see you on important business connected with loan. Wolf demands explanation. Meet me to-day twelve o'clock at studio, without fail, or consequences may affect you unpleasantly."

"I think that will fetch him," she said to herself as, after sending off the telegrams, she got up and dressed to be in time for the 10.40 train to London.

A disappointment, however, awaited her. Kœnigsen was not in his studio, and Clarice's temper did not become sweeter when she read the letter he had left for her.

He was occupied, he said wordily, with the arrangements for Mr Jacobs's funeral—this, and other business in the same connection, having devolved upon him in his position as executor for the deceased man's will.

"This document," Kœnigson wrote, "is extremely simple, everything being left unreservedly to his wife, with the exception of a legacy of £5000 to myself. You will see, therefore, that, even taking into consideration the expenses of my St Helgan Gallery, which have crippled me somewhat, I shall have no difficulty in repaying your kind loan, and I shall, of course, be ready to give your husband any explanation of the transaction which you may consider desirable. For the present, I fear that I shall not be able to see you, as I am anxious to hurry through all necessary legal business before my departure for St Helga, on a commission just offered me to paint the portrait of the ruling President. This is contingent on my being able to finish it by a near date, when he goes for the winter to Egypt. The commission is so important, in view of the success of my new venture—the Gallery—that it would be folly on my part to let any private personal affairs interfere with it."

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Then followed a sarcastic allusion to Clarice's ebullition in the train on the previous day, and some conventional expression of regret at this unfortunate termination of an agreeable and stimulating friendship.

The tone of the letter was distant—final. Clarice's blood boiled. She tore the sheet into little bits and flung them on the floor in front of the easel, on which was a canvas with the roughed-in study of "The Chameleon Maid," her own face slightly indicated. Clarice then proceeded to give token of her presence and her indignation by tearing, with a handy palette-knife, a great three-cornered slit in the canvas, which was fortunately not sufficiently advanced to be of much real value. Then she went into the street, hailed a hansom, and was driven to her club.

She had half a mind to go to her own house and confront Doctor Grier during his consulting hours, which kept him at home till after two o'clock. But prudence prevailed, and bade her take time for consideration before making any more mistakes, and committing herself finally. A sudden fancy darted through her mind. How amusing and dramatic it would be to throw off the mask, and to go attired in widow's weeds to the funeral of her late lawful spouse. Again, however, prudence stepped in. She was not yet prepared to burn her boats. Besides, it was highly probable that Doctor Grier would attend the funeral, and she had no relish for an encounter in those conditions with her grey wolf, who could bite awkwardly when so minded. It would, she reflected, be quite as dramatic and less dangerous to tackle the wolf single-handed at home. She would make an effective scene, and then let him down easily, as it were; and he really deserved something for his chivalrous protection of her at Kœnigsen's party. Besides, she might thus secure for herself some monetary compensation which—if he should not succeed in securing Helga's fortune—would, she knew, endear

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her to Kœnigsen. For Clarice's fixed intention—utterly vague as to detail, but a goal in the distance—was, somehow or other, to become Mrs Karl Kœnigsen. Now, it occurred to her that she would reveal to Andrew Grier Kœnigsen's deep-laid plot in regard to Helga, and thus pit the two men against each other. Kœnigsen would certainly have small comfort in his wooing of Helga if Andrew Grier was put upon his trail, knowing himself free to fight the painter for possession of the other Mrs Jacobs.

Clarice laughed delightedly. As she had told Judah Jacobs, she had a faculty for getting all the fun she could out of life. Few women would have found amusement in the present tangle of circumstances that surrounded, but she enjoyed unravelling it. A cup of coffee and a glass of *crème de Menthe* had stimulated her wits and softened her indignation against all the parties concerned, even against the deceased Mr Jacobs for dying with such inopportune haste before she had been able to formulate a satisfactory plan of action. Now, in her milder mood, a new idea came to her—an idea that she felt instinctively had been lying dormant at the back of her mind ever since she had read the will lying on Mr Jacobs's table. Kœnigsen's letter had conveyed to her that it was the will she herself read which was now in operation. That will left everything unreservedly to his wife—not specifying her by name. And if Helga were *not* his wife—which she certainly was not—why, then, Clarice was his wife.

The notion was illuminating. Clarice pressed her fingers to her temple and sought back for the exact wording of the will. In her best moments she had a power of concentration which was remarkable, and faculty for storing in her mind every detail of an object once observed—no matter how briefly—which would have rivalled that of the Conjuror Houdin himself. Clarice could take away in her memory the contents of a whole shop window by merely standing in front

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of it for a minute or two. She could do the same with a page in a book or an article in a newspaper that specially interested her. She could almost have sworn to the clauses in Judah Jacobs's short and uncomplicated will, each of which was clearly imprinted upon the tablets of her brain. Therefore, instead of expending her wrath in a scheme which might ultimately have proved detrimental, Clarice got into another hansom, and betook herself to Old Jewry, to the office of a lawyer who had more than once acted for her in money transactions—an astute person, in whom Clarice felt that she could confide, and who was not particular as to the business he undertook, provided that it was likely to be profitable.

It was in accordance with the advice of this gentleman that Clarice remained at Brighton during the days which followed Mr Jacobs's death, and until his funeral had taken place.

As had been supposed, Doctor Grier attended it. There was a large following to the coffin—business associates of the dead man and many personal friends. Among them was Mr Simeon Davis, of Birmingham, a white-headed old man, with stooping shoulders and a keen but kindly face. He it was of whom Mr Jacobs had spoken to Helga the last evening they were together, and at whose house he stayed during his visit to Birmingham. Mr Davis was an old friend both of Jacobs and of Helga, and he was one of the few people whom she saw at this time. He was naturally deeply distressed at the sudden death of his comrade, of the possibility of which he frankly told Helga that Judah had warned him. He showed himself very sympathetic towards her in her loss, and his almost fatherly kindness was a great comfort to Helga in her dull, dazed misery. Mr Davis knew, he said, that the affairs of the firm must be in a prospering condition, and he seemed extremely glad to learn that the will which was about to be acted upon was likely to benefit Helga to a considerable extent.

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Nevertheless, he paid a visit to Mr Bowles, Helga's lawyer, at the first opportunity, and the two were closeted together for upwards of half an hour. When they came out of the room they had been talking in, the lawyer was regarding Simeon Davis with some curiosity.

"I can rely upon you, then, Mr Bowles," said the old gentleman, busily buttoning up his overcoat.

"You can rely upon me, Mr Davis. You shall have the first intimation I receive of any claims put forward on the estate of the late Mr Jacobs, assuming, of course, that nothing can be done without my knowledge. But I confess that I should have preferred you to be more frank with me."

"A promise to a dead man is not lightly set aside," returned Mr Davis. "I swore to befriend—er—Mrs Jacobs's interests if they were in danger; but unless that seems likely to be the case, my pledge does not require me to take any steps in the matter. I also swore, as I've told you, to say nothing to a living soul of my poor friend's apprehensions, if everything went on satisfactorily. Therefore, I'm not at liberty to explain myself any further as yet."

"Most extraordinary!" murmured the lawyer. "Mr Jacobs must certainly have anticipated something of the sort."

"There's no doubt that he did, and that's what we've got to keep our eyes open for. But I flatter myself, Mr Bowles, that you and I together can manage to checkmate any unwelcome applicants in the interests of Ahasuerus-Jacobs—eh?"

The lawyer smiled in a satisfied way. He was considered clever, and Mr Davis was well known to possess a level head in business affairs, but neither was aware what an exceedingly sharp-witted little lady was at that very time arming herself for contest with them.

Clarice returned to town on the following evening after the funeral. In the interim she had held no

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further communication with Doctor Grier, beyond a telegram sent at the last moment announcing her return. She opined correctly that matters medical and personal would occupy his time and attention too well for him to trouble much about her whereabouts. When she reached home she saw her telegram lying, as she had expected, unopened, and she smiled mischievously at the agreeable surprise he would find on his re-entrance. She dressed herself very becomingly in a new evening gown, all cloudy frills and folds of black chiffon, without a vestige of white or a gew-gaw to relieve its blackness. The mourning note was obtrusively evident, and struck him as he entered, giving him a curious pang. He had caught a glimpse of Helga that day in her widow's weeds, and the association was unpleasant to him. But he made no comment. That evening he was in earlier than usual from his round, and dinner was served with full ceremonial, so that there was no opportunity for any private talk between the two till Johnson had finally left the room. As he did so Pingpongo came wriggling in, uncertain of his welcome, for he saw that the doctor was not alone. His master held out a banana, however, which the monkey clutched and devoured. To-night Clarice did not make her usual objection to Pingpongo's presence. Indeed, she seemed rather to welcome the diversion he made. She even cracked and threw him some filberts, a grace which Pingpongo hesitatingly accepted, showing his teeth the while. Presently Doctor Grier called the monkey, and as Pingpongo leaped into his arms he prepared to retire to his own sanctum in company of this small but faithful friend. Clarice, however, interposed.

"I want to speak to you, Andrew. Please get rid of that little beast, and I'll come with you to your study, and say what I've got to say before I go to my hotel."

"To your hotel! What on earth are you talking

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about?" he asked, pausing in the act of refilling his cigar-case from a box which Johnson had left on the table.

Clarice quavered a little, but her spirit rose, as it always did in face of a dramatic situation.

"I mean," she said, "that it's not fitting I should stay in your house now that I've discovered my true position."

"Oh! Good Lord," he exclaimed, "you've stopped in my house somewhere about eighteen years, and for sixteen of them anyhow you've had a wife's right to do it. Isn't that long enough for you to drop sentimental nonsense? Pray what do you consider is your true position?"

"My true position," replied Clarice, with demure irony, "is that of the late Judah Jacobs's widow."

Doctor Grier put back into the box a cigar which he had been about to place in his case, and shut to the lid.

"I don't understand you," he said stiffly.

"I think we had better go into the other room," replied Clarice, with forced composure, "and then I'll explain more fully. But do, please, send away that little wretch. Johnson shall shut him up in his own den."

"He can stay here."

"No, he can't. He'll get on the table, and break the glasses. Not that that matters to me—now." She gave a hysterical laugh. "They're not *my* glasses any longer. I've been collecting my property, Andrew. I suppose that I may take my dresses and my jewellery?"

Doctor Grier swore a muffled oath.

"You may take the house if you please."

Johnson appeared at this moment, for Clarice had rung the bell. He **was** desired by his mistress to put the monkey into a little dark room built over the pantry, which was held in detestation by Pingpongo.

"Come, Andrew," said Clarice, and led the way

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into the doctor's study. Grier followed her, his face greyer than ever, and so set that the outlines seemed drawn in black, while there was a strange, smouldering light in his eyes. When they were alone together he shut the door deliberately, turned on the electric light, and planted himself in front of the fireplace opposite her. She had subsided, a black feathery mass, into the armchair at the end of the writing-table where his patients sat when they laid themselves bare to the physician's searching eyes.

"Now, let's have this infernal business out," he said roughly.

"I wonder, Andrew," said Clarice, with insolent courage, "whether you swear like that when you're talking to—the other Mrs Jacobs."

He made a step forward, and stood glowering down at her in a way that frightened even the intrepid Clarice.

"Look here!" he said, "I'm not a patient man, and you know it. Let me have the straight truth, without any abominable innuendoes. By Heaven! If what I've now a suspicion of is the fact, you've lied from the beginning. Answer me. Is that so?"

Clarice braced herself, sitting very erect and looking at him without flinching; her small, snake-like head, with its brilliant eyes, its elaborately-arranged hair and delicately-tinted complexion, rising defiantly above the soft black frillings of her gown. But she made no reply.

"Answer me," he repeated. "Did you lie when you told me that the man Jonah Jacobs, of Helsingkräad—whose name you showed me in a list of those killed in a railway accident between Ostend and Paris—was your husband?"

Clarice faltered.

"I believed that he was my husband."

"You believed! The conjunction of names could hardly admit of doubt."

"In the first account that I saw of the accident his

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name was given merely as J. Jacobs, of Helsingkräad. It did not seem possible that there could be two J. Jacobs, of Helsingkräad."

"I understood from you that you had received from Helsingkräad confirmation of the report, and of the man's identity. Were you lying then?"

Clarice flung out her arms with a dramatic gesture.

"If I did lie, Andrew, I had a powerful motive for doing so. Our child's legitimacy was at stake."

He smiled sardonically.

"On the face of things, the argument isn't sound. Thank God, however, the child did not live. Go on. We'll have facts, please. Later, you showed me an announcement of the accident, describing the name as Jonah. You knew then, at all events, that that was not your husband's name."

"I thought that it might easily have been a misprint for Judah."

"Judah!" he exclaimed quickly. "Yes, I learned for the first time on the day Mr Jacobs died that his name was not Ahasuerus, as I had supposed, but Judah. . . . Now, tell me, woman"—Doctor Grier raised his eyes, which had been lowered on the carpet, and transfixed Clarice by their darting fire, while his voice, which a moment before had been measured and comparatively calm, rang with barely-suppressed passion—"what was your connection with Judah Jacobs?" he thundered.

Clarice had shrunk back in her chair and did not at once reply. It was plain that she was not at her ease with him. He repeated his question more sternly than before. She pulled herself together with an effort, and faced him again undaunted.

"You needn't try to frighten me, Andrew. I don't intend to conceal the truth. Really, my good friend, considering the way in which you deceived everybody all round at the beginning I don't think it becomes you to take that lofty moral tone with me. How would you have accounted for yourself in the witness

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box, my virtuous Andrew, if it had come to a trial for bigamy? You may be thankful that poor Judah Jacobs died just when he did—and his other wife may be thankful also, for there might have been some pretty scandal. How the newspapers would have gloated! One isn't 'Spiridia' for nothing."

"Did you go to her on Saturday to tell her that?" he asked, his voice still full of repressed fury.

"Yes," she returned audaciously. "I thought it only fair to both of us that she should understand her position." She paused a moment, then, seeing that he still said nothing, she went on. "It stands to reason that if *I*—his first wife—was alive when Judah Jacobs married President Brack's daughter that marriage was illegal. Helga Brack was not his lawful wife and now never can be."

He stood immovable, only his eyes blazing.

"So *you* were the unknown lady who visited Mr Jacobs at his office and saw him last alive?"

Clarice winced.

"I suppose so. Believe me, Andrew, I only met him accidentally a few days before. And then—I had an appointment with him. We were to talk things over. He seemed all right when I was there. Shall I have to appear if there were any inquiry? Could they rake it all up again now?" she asked anxiously.

"How could there be any inquiry? It's too late for a Coroner's inquest. No; you are quite safe. I gave a certificate of death."

"Oh! I'm glad of that. It would have been so awkward. Now the affair can be hushed up and there may be a compromise."

"Indeed! Is that your idea?"

"It's the obvious one. I have my rights as well as the other Mrs Jacobs."

"And how do you propose to maintain them?"

"I can't tell you that yet. There are the terms of the will to be considered."

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"I see. In looking back upon your career, there is one thing that surprises me. You always went for money. Well, I can't understand why you did not take up with someone who could have supplied you more freely than I have been able to do."

Clarice laughed recklessly.

"A mistake, wasn't it? But I was a child. I did not know my world nor my own powers. Perhaps if I had— But there's a good deal in personal magnetism. You fascinated me, Andrew, for a time, incomprehensible though it appears now. I'd never met anybody like you. If you could only realise what your strength is, my good Andrew, when you choose to exert it. And when you were attracted by me, you didn't care for God or the devil so long as you had me. I rather wish you had gone on loving me. It was splendid to feel that you were loved by a man who would go down to hell to get the woman he wanted."

"Yes ; I went down to hell for you," he said.

"And if you had stayed there," smiled Clarice, "I'd have worshipped you—so long as you made me obey you. But you did not think that worth while. That was a mistake on your part, my friend. I call you a depraved type of man. You only care to hunt the unknown. It's like your passion for finding new microbes. You'd get tired even of that stained-glass woman if you had her long enough. Well, you are free now to make love to her, and to marry her if you please. But may I ask first, Andrew, what you propose doing in regard to *me*?"

"I have no suggestion to make at present. You appear to have decided matters for yourself."

"It has not occurred to you, for instance," remarked Clarice, blandly, "that a gentleman might feel himself in the circumstances bound in honour to marry me."

"No. In the circumstances I certainly do not feel myself bound by honour to marry you—again."

"I presume, however," Clarice went on tentatively.

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"that you don't propose to cast me adrift without a provision for my declining years."

"No, I don't. You are at liberty to draw upon my bankers within limits of which you will be informed, until a permanent arrangement can be made."

"Thank you." Clarice rose from her chair. She was evidently relieved. "Johnson can call me a cab, I suppose?"

"You are mistress here. Pray give whatever orders you wish."

"That's really nice of you. I declare you haven't taken it half badly, Andrew," was Clarice's frank response. "Still, I'm not going to remain in your house. That wouldn't be quite proper as things are. I've engaged rooms in Robinson's Family Hotel in Gloucester Terrace. It's extremely respectable and convenient for moving my belongings. You approve?"

"As you please." He rang the bell. "Will you have a four-wheeler or a hansom? Or, if you prefer it, I will telephone to the stables for the brougham."

"Oh, that would not be worth while. A four-wheeler, Johnson. And the dressing-bag and jewel-box inside, please. You'll find them in the boudoir."

"Very good, ma'am."

The man went out, and presently the whistle sounded. Clarice, moving to the door, stopped before she opened it.

"I will get my cloak. I hope you have no objection to my taking Reynolds. (Reynolds was the upper housemaid, who also served as Clarice's maid.) You will find that the under ones do perfectly well. She has gone on already with my trunks."

"By all means." He advanced and opened the door for her to pass through. Clarice stood for a moment facing him, a faint quiver of emotion passing over her features.

"Is this going to be good-bye, Andrew?"

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"We shall no doubt meet again. I do not share your desire for a scene."

He bowed slightly as he held the door handle, his features rigid as ever.

"Perhaps that would be another mistake," she acknowledged, with a small shrug.

She looked at him, the slight stir of emotion in her face changing to a malevolent smile.

"I am going to return you good for evil, Andrew, and to give you a friendly hint. Karl Koenigsen has made up his mind to marry your stained-glass woman, and he thinks he will succeed in doing it. He told me so himself. Take my advice and don't be restrained by any conventional scruples—for I assure you that he has none—if you want to be beforehand with him. I wish you a merry wooing."

Her taunting laugh drove the man to fury, but the only sign he gave of it was to clench his hands in front of him so tightly that the veins in his wrists stood out, and Clarice had a darting fancy that it was to keep them from her throat.

She went upstairs, lingering to cast a glance on her way at the drawing-room, and then, when she had put on her cloak, making a regretful survey of her bedroom with the little boudoir adjoining it.

"I was very comfortable," muttered Clarice, "and he didn't interfere with me. But think what it would have been after I had grown old! And one can't start afresh after forty."

The cab was at the door, and Johnson, having bestowed the jewel-box and dressing-bag on the front seat, was standing guard over them when Clarice descended the stairs. Doctor Grier came out of the smoking-room and offered her his arm with formal politeness. She took it, laughing hysterically, and he put her into the cab and shut the door.

"I hope you will find your rooms comfortable," he said, and gave the address to the driver. Clarice saw him re-enter the house as she drove away.

CHAPTER XX

EXIT MR KØENIGSEN

MISS PENGELLEY was deeply concerned at the change wrought in Mrs Jacobs by her sudden bereavement. Helga seemed indifferent to all the ordinary affairs of life. Her face had the blank expression of one who lives in a dream. She seemed to have lost interest even in Ronald, and was content that Susan should render him those services in which formerly she herself had jealously delighted. Fortunately, Ronald was entirely satisfied with his new companion, and, indeed, appeared to prefer her society to that of his mother. Young people are selfish; they do not like to see long faces, and they abhor domestic tragedy, even on the stage. Ronald was no exception to this rule. His mother's attitude irritated him; he shuddered at sight of her in widow's weeds, and avoided any allusion to his father's death. So it was that, in the early days of her sorrow—for it was a very real sorrow—Helga mourned in the solitude of her own rooms, and seldom came downstairs. Miss Pengelley, alarmed at the tale of sleeplessness, and even more at her want of appetite, her listlessness, and strained, stony look, wished to send for Doctor Grier, but this Mrs Jacobs sternly forbade.

Sometimes Susan fancied that she might be hurt at Ronald's openly-shown preference for herself. But one morning when Mrs Jacobs had suddenly left her son's room while he was discussing with Susan a novel they had been reading, and Miss Pengelley had

Exit Mr Koenigsen

followed her into the drawing-room to ask if anything were amiss, Helga said, with unusual warmth,—

"I'm so grateful to you for being nice to my boy. I can't tell you how glad I am that he has taken to you in this—for Ronald—extraordinary way. I could never have trusted him to anybody else, and now I feel that he would not miss me if I were to go away."

Susan caught at the suggestion.

"Dear Mrs Jacobs, don't you think that it would do you good to have a complete change of scene and occupation?"

"Occupation!" Mrs Jacobs echoed sadly. "Othello's occupation is gone. Ronald does not want me, and there's nobody else now."

"Oh! There are many—many," cried Susan. "You cannot realise how many there are that need you—as 'Spiridia'—as yourself."

Mrs Jacobs smiled wanly, but said nothing.

"Ronald, too," Susan went on impetuously. "He is only a boy, and boys have phases. I have seen so much of that in my brothers. He didn't like me at first, and now it's just because I stand up to him, and treat him like one of our own boys, and because I've been about a bit and can tell him of places he's read of, that he finds me better company than he thought I should be. I'm thankful that we're such friends. If Ronald hadn't taken to me I should be of very little use to you just now, but as it is I can amuse him, and he'd be perfectly safe with me, I'm certain, supposing that you wanted to go away."

"Yes, he would be quite safe with you, I'm sure of that," said Helga. "And he wouldn't miss me. That's how it is with us mothers; we expend our lives in our children's service, only to find out sooner or later that we are of small value to them."

"But it's not so with Ronald," Susan exclaimed, distressed at the effect of her well-meant remarks. "I'm sure that he thinks of you more than of anybody

The Other Mrs Jacobs

in the world. It's partly my doing that he does not put forward so many claims upon you now. I told him when I first came that if he were like other boys he'd be trying to wait on you instead of letting you always do things for him. Please don't think me impertinent, but I must say," added Miss Pengelley, in a burst of candour, "that I couldn't bear Ronald at first. I thought him so selfish and rude; but since he's tried to be pleasanter I'm getting quite fond of him, and I'd take the greatest care of him if you left him with me."

"I'm sure you would." Mrs Jacobs held out her hand. "You are a good girl," she said. "You've been the greatest comfort to me."

Susan's heart glowed. They were the first really appreciative words "Spiridia" had spoken to her, and they came with greater force from one ordinarily so cold. But Susan was restrained from any response at the moment by the entrance of Hornblow.

"Mr Koenigsen has just gone into Mr Ronald's room, ma'am, and asks if he might see you."

Mrs Jacobs hesitated. She had not seen Karl Koenigsen since the night of his party, though he had called several times on Ronald. In his position as joint-executor he had consulted her through Mr Bowles, the lawyer.

"Yes, I will see Mr Koenigsen," she said. "Ask him to come to me here."

Miss Pengelley retired to Ronald's sitting-room. On the landing she met the painter, who was dressed with more care than usual, and, in his dark frock-coat and black tie, with his fair beard neatly trimmed, looked extremely distinguished.

Ronald called after him fretfully,—

"You will come back, Karl?"

Koenigsen's manner when he approached Helga was a blend of deference and embarrassment. He could not help remembering the scene in the conservatory, and, like Clarice, was annoyed with Fate for

Exit Mr Koenigsen

having hurried things unduly. Helga greeted him formally, aweing him somewhat by her stately aspect in the severe black gown and widow's cap.

She motioned him to a seat. He uttered some halting expression of sympathy, and spoke of his own sorrow in the loss of a valued friend, and of his consternation at the unexpectedness of the event.

She waived aside his condolences with quiet dignity.

"My loss is too recent and too great for me to be able to speak of it with calmness just yet. But I have to thank you, Karl, for all that you have done to spare me pain and trouble during these last few days."

"You know," he answered impetuously, "that even if it had not been my duty it would have been my pleasure. But I am glad to feel that it has been given me as a duty, and that my poor friend trusted me."

"Yes, he trusted you. Lion was always fond of you, Karl. Of course he remembered that you were my own countryman, and that we were children in St Helga together."

"In different positions," returned Koenigsen, deprecatingly. "You, the President's daughter; I, a very humble lad. But that does not seem to count now."

"Oh!" cried Helga, "why should it ever have counted? I spent much of my childhood with my foster-mother, who was only a fisherwoman."

"But your own mother was a great lady—very different from mine."

"Certainly she came of an ancient family, but she was the last of her race and very poor. And she was a true St Helgan woman. She showed that by insisting upon being married according to the St Helgan rite, which is still the law of the land, you know, but not often put into force now that we have a State religion and are Christians like the people of civilised countries."

The Other Mrs Jacobs

"I don't know much about old St Helgan customs," said Koenigsen, "but I am glad of anything which brings us closer together. Helga"—he brought out the name diffidently, but she did not seem to notice the familiarity—"we have at least this in common—that your foster-mother, as well as my parents, came of fisher-folk."

"I expect that is where you get your power of painting the sea and I my love of it," said Helga, simply. "You and I are akin in that sense, Karl—we are both bred of the sea."

"And yet we both live in London and never go near it; the real sea, I mean."

"I am not sure, Karl, whether you would prefer to live by the real sea," said Helga, with a faintly smiling shake of her head. "The real sea would not bring you commissions and St Helgan Galleries, and newspaper puffs, and all the kind of things which make you rich and famous."

"The sea is like poetry; one can't live on it," returned Karl. "To gain worldly goods one must leave the big mother and strike out a line for himself."

"We have both done that," said Helga. "Yet I'm sure that our mother the sea has not deserted either you or me, Karl. Such inspiration as we have she has given us. But she does not like us to forsake her altogether. Often I hear her calling, and there are moments when I feel that I must obey her voice."

Helga spoke dreamily, her eyes fixed on the fire as though she beheld sea waves in its leaping flames. Karl felt that there was something odd about her, a greater change than even her loss warranted. He saw that she was not thinking in the least about practical matters, and doubted whether she had given any consideration at all beyond what was immediately necessary to the provisions of her husband's will. Suddenly, however, she asked a question as to certain legacies Mr Jacobs had left to Hornblow and others of the servants.

Exit Mr Kœnigsen

"I am glad that he remembered Copley," she said presently, her mind going back to their drive home from the St Helgan Gallery and their last leavetaking. Then she added, "I am glad too that he has left you a little money."

"That is nothing," rejoined Kœnigsen. "It is his trust in me, his appreciation of my"—he hesitated slightly—"my affection for you which I value so greatly."

There was a pause, during which Helga still gazed abstractedly into the fire. Kœnigsen continued,—

"Perhaps you would like to know that he spoke to me about his will, and told me that he had made me an executor. It was upon the evening that I dined here last, after you had left the dining-room. I feel sure that he had an apprehension of the end, though, of course," Kœnigsen hastily added, "I never dreamed for an instant that it could possibly be so near."

Helga said nothing. Kœnigsen waited, fumbling with some documents which were enclosed in a large, legal-looking envelope, with the name of Mr Bowles's firm upon it. He quoted the lawyer, and for a few minutes tried to chain her languid attention to business arrangements requiring her sanction.

"Bowles was coming himself, but I told him that I wished to see you and would ask your opinion," Kœnigsen said, shuffling the papers together again. "One of my reasons for venturing to intrude upon you was that I may be called away for a few days, and I could not find it in my heart to go without a word from you. Bowles assures me that he has everything in train, and that I shall not be wanted any more at present. But, of course, you know that a telegram would find me wherever I am, and that the least wish of yours would bring me to you immediately."

Helga did not seem to take in the meaning of his

The Other Mrs Jacobs

words. She asked no question as to his destination, and Kœnigsen was relieved by her want of curiosity. He did not wish to tell her that he was going to St Helga in order to paint the President's portrait. She might consider it as a slur from him upon her father's memory, and might resent the introduction of President Brack's rival and successor into the St Helgan Gallery. Besides, the trip would entail a much longer absence than he had suggested, and he did not want her to imagine that he could be happy away from her. Then, too, it was not in Kœnigsen's nature to run straight.

But Helga appeared indifferent to his projected departure, and this piqued him into more effusiveness than was prudent. He leant towards her, his blue eyes full of pathos, his voice tenderly modulated.

"Oh! if I could make you understand," he said, "how painful I find it to go away from you, and yet how much harder it is to be near you and yet compelled to feel myself at a distance, when night and day my heart is full of the longing to comfort and take care of you."

Helga looked at him blankly. Her dulled brain did not grasp the possibility of his making love to her in present conditions, and the wave of tragic happening that had lately overswept her seemed to have washed away all remembrance of his offence that night in the St Helgan Gallery.

"You are very kind, Karl," she said, "but there is nothing that anybody can do for me just now. Indeed, sometimes the strongest craving I have is to be alone."

"That mood will not last," he answered. "The strangeness of your new conditions will wear off after a time, and then you will have your own future to consider, and that of Ronald. He will need a man's influence, and you a protector."

"I!" Helga gave a little shudder. "Oh, no, no. What are you thinking of?" she exclaimed.

Exit Mr Kœnigsen

"Of you!" he rejoined emotionally. "I think of nothing—of no one but you. And your husband knew this and was glad of it. Let me tell you something which will show you that he confided you to my care. You remember the last night that I dined here before his death?"

"I have thought of it many times," she answered. "It was on that night that I first noticed Lion as being unlike himself. But I didn't know the reason." She faltered. Clarice's revelation came back to her mind with a sharp sting, and she wondered whether her husband had then known that the woman was alive and near them. A look of pain and perplexity crossed her face. "Tell me," she added, "what passed between you."

"He spoke to me after you had left the dining-room about the will he had just made, though, as I said just now, I never for an instant dreamed that it would be necessary to put it into force so soon. But I think now that he must have foreseen what was coming. He dwelt a good deal upon your loneliness in the event of anything happening to him, and on his wish that you should have the help and advice in practical matters of a man upon whose regard for your interests he might safely rely. He told me that it was for this reason he had appointed me as an executor under his will. I feel sure that he had guessed my secret, Helga, and it is my joy and comfort to realise that he did not blame me for my presumption. I know that if he could look upon us now he would give his sanction to the hope I scarcely dare put into words. In all these long years I have thought it my duty to crush it down, and I have done my best, but to no effect. Now, now I may venture at last to give it vent."

Helga drew herself up stiffly, her eyes meeting his with cold astonishment.

"You are speaking very strangely. I cannot think that you see the meaning which might be put on

The Other Mrs Jacobs

your words. I must beg that you will not repeat them."

Køenigsen flung himself before her in a melodramatic attitude. His fixed purpose to win her and her fortune, combined with his enormous egoism, intoxicated him, and made him lose all sense of proportion. Previous experience had convinced him that to try hard enough for a thing was to gain it, and that to attack a citadel with sufficient force and determination meant, as a rule, taking it. He was convinced that nothing was to be done by shilly-shallying. In worldly affairs, as well as in affairs of gallantry, these excellent rules had carried him along exceedingly well. So well, in fact, that he was blind to the possibility that mere bluff and tenacity, even combined with his fine powers of push, which had hitherto proved so efficacious, would not advance him in his wooing of Helga.

"What have I done to offend you?" he cried. "Oh! What have I done? I—who worship you—who would rather die than that you should be displeased with me. I, who live only in the hope of one day making you my own. Helga! You know that I adore you. How can I hide my love? It leaps from my breast in spite of myself. How can I care for times and seasons—for the fact that you are not a month-old widow? Surely all that is mere convention; it does not touch the real soul of either of us. Oh! Yes, yes." He bore down with his torrent of words her rebuking gesture. "I know how deeply you cared for your husband, I know all his good qualities. But he had nothing of the artist in him; he could not understand your genius—he was no true mate for you. He might have appreciated, but he could not comprehend. It is I, like you, St Helga born—drinking from the same fount of inspiration—I only who can follow the flight of 'Spiridia's' divine spirit. Think of what we might do together! You with your art, I with mine—we might conquer the

Exit Mr Koenigsen

world. Who knows what the future might not bring forth? Your father was deposed because his tendencies were monarchical. He still has a following. There might be a bloodless revolution—and you and I, children of the sea, might reign as king and queen of St Helga—our own beloved isle. Think of it—dearest. I ask no answer now—no pledge. I will be silent for as long a time as you impose silence upon me. Only give me the right to speak again later—in six months—a year. There is no need for undue delay. The world would not wonder. Our marriage would seem the most fitting, the most natural thing—”

At length Helga succeeded in interrupting him. She had risen, and withdrew herself from him in righteous indignation.

“I could not have believed that you would insult me so!” she exclaimed, struggling for calmness. “Hush—go away. You must never speak to me again. I do not want even to see you any more. I cannot allow you to come here at all after this. It is not only *me* whom you have insulted”—she clasped her hands passionately and her voice choked with a sob—“but my—my husband in his grave. My poor dead Lion!”

Koenigsen stumbled to his feet. Fury at his ill-success made him lose control over himself. The innate vulgarity of the man broke through his customary veneer.

“Your poor dead Lion!” he cried jeeringly. “It’s very pretty, no doubt, to act the disconsolate widow, and to pretend that you wouldn’t look at anybody else. But do you suppose that I’m a fool? Do you think I couldn’t see that you never really cared a jot for that stupid, money-making Jew. Why, you were ready enough to flirt with me when you could do it with impunity. You didn’t disdain *then* any distraction I could afford you, though you chose to make out that it was all on Ronald’s account. Ronald!

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Your would-be devotion to him was just a blind! You've hardly been near him lately—he told me so. No, I know what it is—you've got a sentimental fancy for your ugly doctor with his intolerable airs. That overbearing sort of man always knows how to manage women. But it won't pay. He's very much married already."

Helga, white with passion, pointed to the door.

"Go. You have offended beyond pardon."

In a flash Kœnigsen saw that this was the case, and he shrank away, abject in his apologies.

"Forgive me! Forgive me! I lost my head. For our friendship's sake, forgive me, Helga. I love you so, and I was mad. I'll own anything—I'll do anything. I know I spoke too freely. I was a cad. But when a man is in torture, he doesn't take heed to his speech. I pray you—make some allowance for me."

"That is impossible," said Helga. "You have said too much. Now—go."

She moved to the bell and pressed the button, standing by the fireplace with face averted.

"You are cruel!" he cried cringingly; "I shall suffer horribly. And I am going away."

"That I am glad of," she returned. "Meanwhile, where any question of business is concerned, you will kindly allow Mr Bowles to act between us."

He expostulated feebly. She kept a resolute silence. When Hornblow appeared, she said, with a formal bow, "Good-bye, Mr Kœnigsen," and, turning to the man, "I rang for you to show Mr Kœnigsen out."

The painter ground his teeth, though inaudibly. It required a supreme effort to preserve an unmoved front, but he contrived to do so. He was accustomed to let himself out of the house when he came, quite informally, and Hornblow knew this. Whatever

Exit Mr Koenigsen

astonishment the butler may have felt, however, he was far too well trained to show any sign of. Koenigsen retired in his wake, humbled and crest-fallen. When the hall door had closed behind him, Helga threw herself upon the sofa, and burst into the sobs of outraged pride which she could no longer control.

CHAPTER XXI

MR BOWLES'S LETTER

MISS PENGELLEY, entering the drawing-room at Ronald's request, to ask why Karl Kœnigsen had left the house without first coming to his room, stopped short in the delivery of her message.

"Oh! Mrs Jacobs, what is the matter? I'm so sorry to see you in such trouble. Is there nothing I can do?"

She spoke impulsively. Had she thought for a moment she would have deemed it wiser to hasten away in silence, knowing that Helga would prefer to remain unnoticed. Helga's recent friendliness, however, had prompted the utterance, and Susan spoke truly when she said she could not bear to see her in such distress. Mrs Jacobs lifted a distorted face, making vain efforts to speak composedly.

"I am only hurt and annoyed about something—nothing that really matters. Does Ronald want anything?"

Susan followed her lead of unconcern.

"The thing that Ronald particularly wants just now is Mr Kœnigsen. He is vexed at not having seen him again, and wished me to ask you why Mr Kœnigsen went off in such haste, and when he is coming again."

"I don't think that Mr Kœnigsen is likely to come here again," said Mrs Jacobs, formally. "He is going away."

Mr Bowles's Letter

"Oh! Ronald will be sorry. He said just now that there is no one who amuses him as much as Mr Kœnigsen. And Ron wanted to see him especially about some drawings which he is going to send up to another competition."

"Let him be honest then," exclaimed Helga. "His father was right. Mr Kœnigsen never ought to have touched up Ronald's drawings. I wish—" She stopped suddenly as the footman handed her a letter.

"A messenger boy has just brought this, ma'am. Is there any answer?"

Mrs Jacobs opened the letter. The heading was that of Mr Bowles's office, and the lawyer had written it himself. Susan could not help seeing this; she had become familiar with Mr Bowles's stiff caligraphy. Mrs Jacobs read it, a curious expression coming over her face.

"There is no answer," she said at length dully, and the footman departed. Mrs Jacobs turned the page, and re-read the letter from beginning to end. Miss Pengelley watched her, a little alarmed, for the look on her face was so strange. It was not surprise, though the communication had evidently caused a shock. It was rather a recognition of fatality. Helga put the letter down on her lap. She seemed quite unconscious of Miss Pengelley's presence. Her eyes were fixed on vacancy, and Susan saw that the tension of her mind was great.

"Can I do nothing for you," said the girl, "before I go back to Ronald?"

Mrs Jacobs started as if from a dream.

"No. . . . Yes—please get me to-day's *Daily Telegraph*." Then, as Miss Pengelley turned, she added, "One sees the shipping announcements best in the *Daily Telegraph*, doesn't one?"

"I think so," replied Susan, and went to Ronald's sitting-room for the paper, which she handed to Mrs Jacobs. Helga held the sheet up before her, and

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stared at it in an odd, blind manner. Suddenly she let it drop.

"I can't see," she said helplessly. "There comes a mist before my eyes, and the lines run into each other. What does it mean? Am I losing my sight?"

"It means nerves," said Miss Pengelley, picking up the newspaper. "Tell me what you were wanting to look out. Perhaps I can find it for you"

Mrs Jacobs hesitated. Susan saw that her brain was in a turmoil and that she could hardly collect her thoughts.

"No, no, never mind," she said. "It doesn't matter. Nothing matters now."

She got up and walked agitatedly for a few seconds, her hands pressed to her temples. Susan remembered what she had once said about not being able to bear strain, and watched her in helpless alarm. Suddenly Mrs Jacobs stopped, and, flinging down her arms, gazed wildly at Susan, not as though she saw her, but seeming to look beyond, through vistas of despair.

"Oh, what is it?" cried Susan, touched to the quick. "If only I knew, and could help you."

"You can't help me. No one can help me," replied Mrs Jacobs. "There isn't a soul in the world now who can protect me from the horrible thing which has come upon me. But I don't care—I seem to have got past caring. Every single person I've trusted has failed me, and the world seems one hideous lie."

"I would not fail you," said Susan, in a very low tone, but resolutely, "if you would trust me."

Mrs Jacobs paid no heed to the words. Apparently she did not hear them; for, having loosened the brake upon herself, she had no longer command over her speech. She went on passionately,—

"I've nothing to make me care to remain alive except Ronald. But for him I'd do what I've often longed to do—longed with an unutterable longing.

Mr Bowles's Letter

Oh! if I could stand on a lonely cliff that I know, where the sea dashes up and calls one to its great, strong, beautiful bosom, and then to stretch out one's arms and fling oneself to meet the waves, and be drawn down, down into the depths where all would be silence and peace. I yearn for it! I yearn for it!"

"And Ronald," said Susan, calm yet terrified—"Ronald would be alone."

"It would be better for him if he were alone—at least without me," answered his mother. Ronald would certainly not miss me much. He would be bright and happy after a time, and he might learn to forget—if I were dead. But if I were there I should always be a reminder—" She broke off, and clasped her hands closely over her face, while deep-drawn sobs again shook her frame. Susan ran to her side, and flung her arm round the heaving shoulders, forgetting everything in her intense desire to comfort the unhappy woman.

"I'd give anything—anything," she said, "if I could help you. I'd cut off my right hand if that would be any use. I know that I'm nothing to you except your secretary—a stranger who has been but a few days in your house. But in those few days I've learned to love you—don't think it presumptuous of me to say that. How could I help it? And to see you in such terrible trouble, and not be able to do anything, it's just heart-breaking."

She had led Mrs Jacobs to a chair, and now knelt beside her with face upraised, and expressing a devotion to which Helga could not remain indifferent. Something in her eyes emboldened Susan, and she went on, her heart in her voice,—

"I know that if you did not mind it, it might be a relief to unburden yourself. And even if I couldn't do anything now, at least you'd know that there was one person you could make whatever use of that you pleased; and who would not obtrude—sympathy even,

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and who would die rather than betray your confidence."

Miss Pengelley's words came out brokenly.

"I can be trusted—indeed, *indeed*, I can. If there's nothing else that's any good in me, I know at least that I'm faithful."

Helga's sobs had subsided. The sincerity of Miss Pengelley's appeal touched some womanly chord in her, and she bent down and kissed the girl's forehead. Now the ice of her manner melted completely.

"I'll tell you," she said in a whispering way. "I am certain that you would be faithful. Besides, other people know—all the world may know before long, and why should not you? Only, no word to Ronald. I want to spare him to the last. And that's why I can't be with him. To look at him is agony when I remember the wrong I have done him—innocently, but the wrong remains. But before I tell you"—she clutched Miss Pengelley's hand—"promise me one thing; you said just now that you were ready to do anything for me, and I will put you to the test."

"Tell me what it is," said Miss Pengelley, resolute still, though a little afraid that some difficult thing, detrimental to Mrs Jacobs herself, might be demanded of her. "I will be true to my word, as long as it is not anything impossible."

"Oh! It is nothing impossible," Mrs Jacobs replied. "I want you to promise me that, whatever happens—whatever happens, mind—you will stay and take care of Ronald as long as he himself wishes it."

"I can promise that," said Susan, relieved, "with all my heart."

"Thank you. Do not be afraid that you will suffer by it. Ronald will not be penniless. All the money which has come from 'Spiridia's' writings will be his. It is not a very great deal, but enough to provide for his comfort. And all his pictures and pretty things

Mr Bowles's Letter

are his own. They were given to him, and should not be taken away."

"But there could be no chance of that," said Susan, bewildered. "Ronald can never be poor."

"Not very poor, but in a different position, quite. You will understand if you read that letter which came just now."

She pointed to the letter from Mr Bowles that lay upon the sofa where she had been sitting when she received it. Miss Pengelley got up and took the letter.

"Do you mean that I am to read it?"

"Yes. Then you will understand."

Mr Bowles's small, rather clerkly hand was not difficult to decipher, and Miss Pengelley quickly grasped the nature of Mrs Jacobs's trouble, so far as it was set forth in Mr Bowles's letter. It appeared that there was another firm of solicitors concerned in the matter, a certain Messrs Gibson & Tring, upon whose professional status Mr Bowles pronounced a strongly adverse opinion. He did not hesitate to say that the case upon which these solicitors had, on behalf of their client, approached him, was no doubt an attempt to extort money, in the hope that to avoid publicity Mrs Jacobs would agree to a compromise.

Messrs Gibson & Tring's client, Miss Pengelley understood, was a lady who declared herself to be the late Mr Jacobs's lawful wife, and who now claimed under his will on the ground that, as by the wording of the will the testator left property unreservedly to his wife, she—the claimant—being legally Mr Jacobs's wife, was alone entitled to inherit.

Proofs, said Mr Bowles, were submitted as to the identity of the claimant, and there was no doubt that Mr Jacobs had contracted marriage previous to his union with the daughter of President Brack. There were, however, complications in relation to the claimant which would, in Mr Bowles's opinion, invali-

The Other Mrs Jacobs

date the claim. But these he would prefer to discuss by word of mouth with Mrs Jacobs, upon whom he proposed to call at any hour that might be convenient to her the next day. In the meantime, he suggested that she should look over any letters or papers of her late husband's which might throw light on the matter.

Miss Pengelley put down the letter. She looked at Mrs Jacobs and saw that Helga's eyes were again fixed blankly on space, and that she had that puzzled, distressed expression which seemed to indicate some slight mental aberration, and alarmed Susan more than anything in her demeanour. Miss Pengelley spoke with intentional bluntness, recalling Helga from her troubled dream.

"Well, really, Mrs Jacobs, I can't see that this is anything to worry about. It looks just as Mr Bowles says—an attempt to extort money. If that story of the first marriage were true, and the woman alive all this time, why did she not come forward long ago?"

"Why?" said Helga, with an ironic intonation. "Because she had been provided for by another man whom she liked better, and because she did not know what had become of her first husband until lately—when he had grown rich. I understand all that. I have met the woman."

"You have met the woman?" Miss Pengelley repeated eagerly.

"Yes, and you have met her too. Do you not remember her coming to this house and your sending her away from it? She is—supposed to be—the wife of Doctor Grier."

"Oh! No, no!" cried Susan, fighting against the conviction which now burst upon her. "It is not possible that Doctor Grier can know of this."

"I hope not—I believe that he does not know it," returned Helga, haltingly. "If that were so I should have lost my last straw of faith in man."

Mr Bowles's Letter

"But yet—she is his wife!" exclaimed Miss Pengelley.

"As I was the wife of my husband," replied Mrs Jacobs, with bitter irony.

"At all events I can't believe anything of Doctor Grier that is not good or honourable!" exclaimed Miss Pengelley. "If there is only one true man in the world, he is that man."

"You think so?" said Mrs Jacobs, eagerly.

"I am sure of it," returned Susan, with fervour.

Mrs Jacobs sat silent, her eyes downcast, while she plucked at the crape on her gown, a nervous action that distressed Miss Pengelley. Suddenly she looked up, all the former wildness in her eyes.

"It is horrible—horrible!" she exclaimed, with a gasp as for breath. "I cannot bear it—I will not! Why should I be called upon to bear it? I, who have only tried to do my duty."

Susan made an impulsive movement towards her, but she was restrained by the muffled thud of Ronald's crutch which sounded on the landing. He had managed to help himself to it unaided, and presently he limped in, calling out peevishly,—

"Miss Pengelley, I think it's a shame leaving me to stew in there by myself. And you too, mum! What have you done with Karl Koenigsen? Why didn't he come back to me? When is he coming again?"

Mrs Jacobs had started up at Ronald's entrance. The anguish written upon her face as she looked at her son went to Miss Pengelley's heart.

"He is not coming again," she said.

"Not coming again! What do you mean, mum?"

"He is not coming," repeated Mrs Jacobs.

"Well, I do call that a shame. He can't get back this evening, I suppose. And I particularly wanted him to dine here to-night. What's the sense of keeping the house shut up like a church? Besides, life isn't worth living without Karl Koenigsen."

The Other Mrs Jacobs

"Is that how you feel, Ronald?" said Mrs Jacobs, in a low, pained voice; but the boy was too full of his grievances to notice that she was hurt.

"There's nobody who's such good company," he retorted sulkily. "I can't get on without him."

"Ronald!" said Miss Pengelley, with severe rebuke in her tone.

"Oh! I'm not complaining about you, Miss Pengelley, you needn't think it. You're a real good sort, but you're not Karl K nigsen, and mum isn't either. And a chap does want brightening up a bit when everybody's in the blues. Mum, can't I have him telephoned for to try and get back to dinner?"

"No," said Mrs Jacobs, with a peremptoriness absolutely new to the boy. Then, as he at once began a fretful protest, she went on, "Have you no eyes nor heart, Ronald, that you do not see I am tried beyond what I can bear? It is as I said," and she turned to Susan. "It is not *I* who would be missed. But you may do as you please, Ron, and since you care for Karl more than for anyone else, I will not stand between you. I only ask you to wait—a very little while."

She swept out of the room with heaving bosom, not giving any heed to the boy's muttered apology, ignoring also Susan's mute sympathy. With the air of a woman distraught, she waved the girl back from the door and went up to the study, where she shut herself in.

Astonished and contrite, Ronald submitted meekly to Susan's reproaches, and then allowed himself to be consoled and read to, after a fit of very childish weeping. He had had a slight recurrence of pain the previous day, and was what Susan called "fretched." Ronald's moods were certainly a cross between wretchedness and fretfulness; and since she had ministered to his bodily weakness, Susan

Mr Bowles's Letter

had begun to look upon him as a sick child, and to find excuses for his selfish temper.

Mrs Jacobs did not come down to luncheon, but that was no unusual occurrence. Shortly afterwards, when Ronald had lain down to rest, the lady's maid came to get for her mistress the newspaper, which Miss Pengelley was then perusing in the drawing-room, wondering the while what part of the shipping column Mrs Jacobs had wished to consult. Susan sent up a message by Julie to ask whether she could be of any service, but it was a considerable time before the maid returned with an answer—a polite negative, coupled with a request that Miss Pengelley would not go out of call of Mr Ronald, and would do her best to make him happy. Julie lingered, evidently perturbed, and, being garrulous after her kind, she confided to Miss Pengelley her uneasiness at the unbalanced state of madame's nerves. "And indeed that was not surprising," she added, "after the terrible shock of monsieur's sudden death." But did Miss Pengelley consider it well that madame should make a visit into the country quite alone? It must certainly be, though madame had not expressly said so, to the sister of monsieur, in Devonshire, who had been prevented by illness from coming up to the funeral, and, as Miss Pengelley knew, the journey to Morden-under-Edge was not a short one. Julie related that she had packed at madame's orders the smallest trunk, but had been told that she would not be required to attend her mistress. "And why?" Julie demanded, with dramatic gestures, since the house of Madame Miller was sufficiently large to accommodate a troupe of servants. She had dressed her mistress in outdoor garments, and the footman was even now putting the trunk upon a hansom. Madame had asked for a hansom, and had refused to have the carriage ordered, all of which Julie clearly felt to be unaccountable, and ill-befitting Mrs Jacobs's condition.

The Other Mrs Jacobs

To Miss Pengelley, Mrs Jacobs's proceedings appeared less unreasonable. She could understand that the tortured woman would shrink from her servants' sympathetic scrutiny, especially that of her maid. Even Helga's shrinking from meeting so ordinary a friend as Koenigsen seemed comprehensible in the circumstances, for Miss Pengelley had no knowledge of what had taken place between the painter and Mrs Jacobs that morning. Moreover, in the matrimonial complication suggested by Mr Bowles's letter, Susan realised how much painful embarrassment must attend the breaking off of medical relations with Doctor Grier. This was the worst part of it all to the mind of Susan, who relied so implicitly upon her friend the doctor.

Julie, summoned by her mistress, fled upstairs; descending presently laden with Mrs Jacobs's dressing-bag, and a minute or two later, Miss Pengelley, standing by the open door of the drawing-room, saw Mrs Jacobs coming down the stairs. Helga's face was hidden by her heavy crape-edged veil, and her figure was shrouded in a long black travelling cloak, but she walked firmly, as though her resolution had given her strength. Miss Pengelley went forward, meeting her as she was about to step down the lower flight. Mrs Jacobs looked composedly at the girl and held out her hand.

"I have not a great deal of time; the cab is here."

"But you will have missed the three o'clock express," said Susan. "It's a long way to Waterloo. There's not another train till nearly six, and by that I think you have to wait at Tavistock."

Morden-on-Edge was reached by a branch line from that town.

"At Tavistock!" repeated Mrs Jacobs, with a puzzled stare, which made Miss Pengelley think that Julie must have misunderstood her. But Helga quickly collected herself, as Miss Pengelley exclaimed, in a surprised manner,—

Mr Bowles's Letter

"It's Tavistock, for Morden-on-Edge! You are going to Mrs Miller's, are you not?"

Helga replied quietly,—

"I have some business to do first."

"But ought you to go alone?" said Susan, anxiously. "It will be midnight before you get to Morden-on-Edge, and surely you should have someone with you. Won't you take Hornblow—if not Julie?"

Mrs Jacobs's little proud movement of her neck and chin rebuked Susan for her officiousness. She answered, with something of her old haughty reserve,—

"I prefer to be alone, and I shall do very well, thank you. Please give my love to Ronald," she went on. "He's asleep now, probably, and I won't disturb him. Tell him it is my wish that he should amuse and interest himself in whatever way he likes, without"—her voice broke—"without thinking about me."

"Oh, Mrs Jacobs! How could he help that? He was so sorry—poor Ronald. He cried because he had seemed selfish. He didn't understand."

"No, he didn't understand," Mrs Jacobs said in a low voice. "But it doesn't matter. Nothing will matter—by-and-by."

Susan's fears rose again. She began to fancy that Mrs Jacobs had some wild project in her mind, then comforted herself with the thought that she could not come to much harm while under Mrs Miller's care. Nevertheless, Susan was deeply distressed, though she had no words except an entreaty to be allowed to help in some way.

"You help me far more than you suppose," said Helga, with a note of affection in her voice, which, till she spoke of her son, had been hard and strained. "My kind little friend, I am going away relying upon the promise you gave me to stay with Ronald."

The Other Mrs Jacobs

"Of course, I will keep it. But I shouldn't think of not doing so. It will only be for a few days."

"Remember!" said Helga, and without further farewell she stepped down the stairs. "No, no," she cried from the bottom, as she looked back and saw Susan about to descend; "stay near Ronald."

Miss Pengelley, still standing on the stairs, heard Hornblow ask his mistress a question about the forwarding of her letters, and Helga's reply, "No, do not forward anything until I write."

Neither did this seem altogether strange to Miss Pengelley, who felt that, were she in Mrs Jacobs's place, she, too, might be glad of a few days' respite from the receipt of disagreeable communications and from painful interviews.

Miss Pengelley waited at the head of the stairs till she heard the cab drive off and the hall door close. It occurred to her as natural that Mrs Jacobs's business might be with Mr Bowles, and that she should stop at his office on her way to Waterloo. But this theory was upset shortly afterwards by the appearance of Hornblow, carrying a telegraph form, which he put before Miss Pengelley.

"If you please, miss, can you tell me whether Mrs Jacobs intended this to be sent? Mam'selle Julie believes so, but was so flustered over the packing that she can't remember."

Miss Pengelley looked at the form. It was addressed to Mr Bowles, and the message ran:—

"Am leaving London to-day, so cannot make appointment to see you. Unable at present to give any information concerning subject of your letter. Please act as you think best. Will communicate with you later.
HELGA JACOBS."

Miss Pengelley thought for a moment, and then she said,—

Mr Bowles's Letter

"Yes; someone had better dispatch it at once."

She decided that even if Mrs Jacobs had gone to see Mr Bowles, there would be no harm in sending the telegram.

CHAPTER XXII

ENTER MR DAVIS

A WEEK had passed. Miss Pengelley was beginning to feel uncomfortable at not hearing from Mrs Jacobs. She had written to her twice, to the care of Mrs Miller at Morden-on-Edge, reporting Ronald's progress, but the letters remained unanswered. Moreover, a huge pile of correspondence was awaiting Helga at Branxton Gardens, jealously guarded by Hornblow, to whom the care of forwarding letters was always entrusted. But his mistress had given no sign. Somewhat to Susan's surprise, her sister, writing from the Vicarage, had asked her whether it was really true that Mrs Jacobs was staying with Mrs Miller, as Susan had said in one of her letters home, because, although they saw Mrs Miller almost daily driving through the village, there had been no indication of Mrs Jacobs's presence at the Manor House. The Vicarage and the Manor House were on rather formal terms of acquaintanceship, not extending beyond summer garden-parties and very occasional winter dinners. Otherwise, Susan would have begged her sister to go and see Mrs Jacobs, and send word of her condition of health and spirits. As it was, she hesitated for a day or two, and finally decided that she would write for news direct to Mrs Miller.

In the meanwhile, life at Branxton Gardens had been dull, and Ronald in his most fretted humour. He had not been able to understand his mother's

Enter Mr Davis

sudden departure, and did not even accept the explanation that she had gone for counsel and comfort in her grief to his father's sister, which Miss Pengelley set forth, for he was perfectly aware, as he remarked to Susan, that Mrs Miller and Mr and Mrs Jacobs had never "got on." This Susan could understand, but she discreetly kept her views on the subject to herself. Ronald was furthermore annoyed because Karl Kœnigsen had at first returned no answer to the boy's invitations to luncheon and dinner, and had at last written curtly to say that he had been extremely busy, and was now on the eve of departing for St Helga, where he had a commission to paint the President's portrait. Ronald was indignant. He had all his father's pride in Helga's ancestry, and considered that, like themselves, Kœnigsen ought to recognise no President of St Helga except the deposed and defunct President Brack. But the boy could do nothing beyond making himself a heavy burden upon the faithful Miss Pengelley, till a happy thought suggested the skating carnival at Olympia, and a possibility that he might enjoy it in a miniature sledge. The first attempt was an immense success; and so for several days Ronald's expeditions to Olympia, with Miss Pengelley and the footman in attendance, were a triumphant attack against the onslaughts of boredom.

A good deal happened during that week. Clarice grew tired of the dulness of her respectable hotel, and she chafed at Kœnigsen's neglect. She became impatient, too, of the delays and obstacles in the carrying out of her plans concerning the Jacobs property. Therefore, when by means of her own she had ascertained the date of Kœnigsen's departure for St Helga she decided to accompany him uninvited. She was anxious to make up her quarrel with him as soon as possible, and she relied upon her personal powers of fascination—which had never yet failed her, as far as he was concerned, when she chose to exert them—to

The Other Mrs Jacobs

effect this, if she could manage to bring about a meeting with her recalcitrant admirer. The opportunity for intrigue that it would afford her inspired her anew with fresh ideas for the entanglement of the man she meant to marry. Clarice knew very well that the St Helgan marriage laws were something like those formerly in force in Scotland, and her heart bounded at the possibility that a stay on the island in company with Karl might involve. For was she not now absolutely free? That he was unaware of this did not trouble her. She had no more scruples about deceiving him than she had had in deceiving Doctor Grier or Judah Jacobs, rather less in fact, for, as she argued with herself, what she hoped to do was for his benefit as well as her own, and perhaps she was not altogether wrong in her summing up. Kœnigsen certainly cared more for Clarice than he could care for anybody except himself, and as she shrewdly supposed she was likely to make him a far more suitable helpmeet than would a more refined or scrupulous woman, who would naturally be less akin to him. Nevertheless, the meeting would have to appear accidental, for Clarice knew perfectly well that Kœnigsen was serious in his endeavours to avoid her, and that an encounter, to result in the reconciliation that she now so ardently desired, must be carefully arranged. She set her wits to work in the matter, and chance—or destiny—favoured her.

There are several ways of reaching the island of St Helga, the chief of which are first by direct boat from Hull, and secondly, by continental express and steamer from Hamburg. Of course there are cheaper routes, but that boots not. Clarice happened to hit upon the one Kœnigsen had chosen, *viâ* Hamburg, and the two met face to face on the deck of the steamer in mid channel. Clarice, in her neat travelling dress and daring little scarlet toque set upon her curly dark head, with her dancing eyes and red lips, looked like a wind-blown flower as she swayed in the

Enter Mr Davis

breeze. Instinctively he put out his arm to support her as the vessel gave a sudden roll. She smiled and bowed, but she steadied herself without his aid and drew coquettishly away. Then, as if a touch of feeling had overcome her, she returned to his side, and laying her hand on his prettily suggested that they should make friends. There was no means of escaping her, Karl reflected, here at all events, and for the present, so he submitted with a show of amiability, and in five minutes found the crossing rendered much pleasanter by her presence. Of course he taxed her with following him intentionally, and she acknowledged with flattering candour that she had hoped to meet him. Outside the radius of Helga's influence all the old charms of Clarice soon made themselves felt upon him. Intoxicated at the thought that she was not exerting them in vain, Clarice led him on by the magic of her merry eyes and tempting lips till the most amicable relations were established between the pair. Koenigsen was bound for the Presidential residence, but before going there he contrived to spend two or three days with Clarice at a small seaside resort called Altbröd—literally High Marsh.

This was a place well known to Koenigsen, and the subject of one of his best paintings. It was a bluff, rocky promontory stretching into the sea, once almost an island, with two ridges of rock and a raised swampy tract connecting it with the main island. The marsh had been drained, and as it was found to be extraordinarily fertile, as well as sheltered by the cliffs, which for the most part had surrounded it, was converted by President Brack into a State experimental garden. There was a scattered town on either side of it, and a good beach facing south, where summer visitors disported themselves, though at this time of year the season had practically ended. The place had other attractions, however, among them a good hotel, and a Kursaal which did not close till the end of November, and which now permitted

The Other Mrs Jacobs

Clarice to indulge her favourite passion for gambling. She had drawn out of the bank the whole of her quarter's allowance with which Doctor Grier still supplied her, and very soon augmented it at play. Koenigsen was unusually lucky also, and as, like many northerners, he was superstitious, he began to believe that he owed his luck to Clarice. She fostered the idea, since it made him more assiduous in his lover-like attentions, and the two thoroughly enjoyed themselves. For conscience' sake, and at Clarice's instigation—for her protection, as she put it, in case of calumny—Koenigsen entered her on the hotel books as his wife.

To return to Miss Pengelley. She had just finished her letter to Mrs Miller, ready one afternoon for the country post, when Mr Bowles, the lawyer, was shown in to her. He had called to inquire Mrs Jacobs's whereabouts, not having, as he said, seen her nor heard from her since the telegram she had left behind on the day of her departure. He had been expecting every day to receive her address. There was a question of great importance, he said, on which Mrs Jacobs should be consulted, but he naturally gave Miss Pengelley no further information on the matter, and presently took his leave. Susan could only tell him that she believed Mrs Jacobs had gone to the house of her sister-in-law in Devonshire. This address she gave him, promising to let him know at once directly she heard definitely. In her perplexity, the poor girl added a postscript to her letter, begging Mrs Miller to telegraph the first thing next day; then, to avoid risk of miscarriage, Susan went out herself and posted the letter at the district office in Spring Street.

Upon her return she found Ronald rather overdone by his morning's exertions at Olympia, and he seemed threatened with a recurrence of pain. Poor Miss Pengelley's distress of mind increased. Mrs Jacobs had left her no directions in case of Ronald being ill again, and

Enter Mr Davis

she blamed herself for not having asked for explicit instructions. In the peculiar condition of affairs she did not like to send for Doctor Grier, and yet was more reluctant to call in a new doctor, who might possibly mismanage the case. However, after giving Ronald a harmless opiate, which seemed to soothe him, she resolved to do nothing till the morrow. But during the night, which she spent beside him, Ronald became worse, and the first thing in the morning she dispatched the footman for Doctor Grier. Unfortunately the doctor had been called out, and there was nothing for it but to leave a message bidding him come as soon as possible.

Surprises were in store that day for Miss Pengelley. About half-past ten Ronald had fallen into a dose, and she was becoming extremely anxious about the non-arrival of Mrs Miller's telegram, when a card was brought her bearing the name of Mr Simeon Davis, of Birmingham, who, Hornblow related, had in the first instance asked for Mrs Jacobs, then for the address at which she might be found, and on learning to his dismay that this could not be given, had requested that Miss Pengelley, whose presence in the house Hornblow had explained, would allow him a few minutes' conversation.

Susan descended to the smoking-room, there to encounter that same little white-haired old gentleman who had attended Mr Jacobs's funeral. To-day he seemed lame, and supported himself with a stick, as he stated that he was one of the late Mr Jacobs oldest and most intimate friends, and begged for Mrs Jacobs's address. He could not believe that her household did not know it, and it was of great moment, he said, that he should see her, as he had a most important communication to make.

"I am very sorry," said Miss Pengelley, "Please sit down. It was only yesterday that Mr Bowles, the lawyer, called, and said that he wanted to see Mrs Jacobs about something most important."

The Other Mrs Jacobs

"I haven't seen Mr Bowles yet," said old Mr Davis, hurriedly, as he took a chair, moving with difficulty, "for I have only just come down straight from Birmingham; but I know the gentleman you mean. I have been in correspondence with him, and I have reason to believe that our business is the same. Now, my dear young lady, pray tell me where Mrs Jacobs is."

"But I cannot," said Susan, in distress. "I wish that I could. I could not tell Mr Bowles, for I didn't know. I would give anything in the world to know myself. We thought she was with Mrs Miller—Mr Jacobs's sister."

"Of course—of course, I remember the lady. And is she not?"

"I don't think so. She has not written since she left, and I was beginning to get uneasy, and was made more so by hearing from my sister—my own people live at Morden-on-Edge, where Mrs Miller lives—that they had not seen nor heard anything of her there. Then I wrote to Mrs Miller to inquire, and begged her to telegraph the first thing this morning."

"Very right and proper of you. And the telegram—?"

"Hasn't come yet."

"Never mind—never mind. Don't look so anxious. I daresay it will come presently. Come now, Miss Pengelley, I can understand that Mrs Jacobs is very wise in placing confidence in you."

"She is kind enough to do so," said Susan, a little stiffly, "to a certain extent, that is. I knew before she went away that she was in trouble—she had had a shock—and that is what has made me so anxious." Susan stopped short, realising that she had no right to give this old gentleman, friendly though he might seem, a clue to Mrs Jacobs's secrets, at all events till she was sure that he was already aware of them. At that moment there was a sharp ring of the front

Enter Mr Davis

door bell. Susan was silent, thinking that she knew who had rung the bell, and waited while footsteps passed up and down the hall and ascended the staircase. She recognised, too, a certain firm, brisk tread. Presently Hornblow entered.

"It is the doctor, miss. I told him you were engaged, and he said it was not necessary for you to go up, but that he would see you after leaving Mr Ronald."

Susan nodded. The man went out, but returned almost immediately with a yellow envelope on a salver.

"This has just come, miss. The boy is waiting to see if there is an answer."

Miss Pengelley tore open the telegram and read it, deep anxiety in her face.

"No, no—there's no answer," she said confusedly, then handed the pink paper to Mr Davis.

"You see," she said, "Mrs Jacobs has never been there."

The old gentleman jerked his head in a depressed manner as he, too, read it.

"No, that's clear. She's not with Mrs Miller. What made you think she'd gone to Devonshire?"

Miss Pengelley stated what the maid had told her, and also how Mrs Jacobs had tacitly acquiesced in the supposition that she was going to Morden-on-Edge.

"She hadn't any other relations that she'd be likely to go to, and I never thought of anything else," added Susan, miserably, "until just lately. It seemed so natural."

"Yes, it would have seemed natural," assented Mr Davis; "but natural things aren't always the sort of things women do when they're upset. I take it from you that Mrs Jacobs was a bit upset. Now, the question is, Where is she? Can't you suggest any other place?"

Susan shook her head. "I can only think of St Helga."

The Other Mrs Jacobs

"St Helga! That seems a bad shot. I've always understood that Mrs Jacobs had no connection now with her birthplace, and that she had never been back to it since her father was chucked out of office."

"But she always wanted to go. She would have gone sometimes if it hadn't been for leaving Ronald; but she couldn't take him there: the journey is too trying. Just lately, in this grief and shock, she has been quite homesick for the island. She told me so. She was craving to be near the sea, and quite alone. Only the day she left, she had asked for a paper that she might look at the shipping column. I thought afterwards that perhaps she had wanted to see when the steamers sailed for St Helga."

"Not bad reasoning," said Mr Davis. "You're a sharp girl, I see. There are several routes, however, and your butler tells me that she left home nearly a week ago. It would be difficult now to trace her, unless we take a run up to St Helga."

"Oh! I blame myself—I blame myself!" cried Susan, despairingly.

"Come, come, you needn't do that. It seems to me you've acted in every way as well as could be expected of you. Mrs Jacobs must have had a pretty fair amount of confidence in you, or she wouldn't have left you alone with the boy, nor yet have let you get wind of her trouble as you mentioned a minute ago." He gave Susan a penetrating glance, and went on tentatively, "What about this shock now? Were you meaning the shock of her husband's sudden death?"

"Partly," said Susan, "not altogether." She felt forced to speak frankly by the compelling look of the old gentleman's sharp eyes. "The fact of the matter is, Mrs Jacobs received a letter that morning which I know upset her. It was from Mr Bowles, the lawyer."

"Precisely. Just what I thought—that idiot Bowles. Well, and what was the result?"

Enter Mr Davis

"She frightened me rather—she seemed to feel it so. And yet I don't know," said Susan, reflectively, "whether I wasn't foolish to have such fears."

"What sort of fears? Suppose you tell me what they were," he persisted.

"Oh! I don't know," repeated Susan, distressedly. "I scarcely like to put them into words—they seemed so impossible. And Mrs Jacobs was quite calm when she left. Besides, if I had been in her place, I'm sure I should have felt the same. I know I should have wanted to get quite away from everybody. It did not appear at all strange to me that she should not write, nor want her letters forwarded. I knew she would not feel anxious about Ronald because I wrote to her at Mrs Miller's, thinking she was there; and as long as she was getting satisfactory news of him from me, I didn't expect her to answer my letters. Now I quite see how stupid I was. Oh! I wish that I had made sure sooner that she was not there. Now it is too late."

"Nonsense," said Mr Davis, bluntly. "Mrs Jacobs is somewhere about, and in a day or two you'll hear. If she went to St Helga, it would be a matter of four days, roughly speaking, from the time she left here, before a letter could possibly reach you. And she mightn't write directly she arrived. Your idea about her going off there is plausible enough, my dear young madam. You seem to have thought it all out pretty clearly. But meanwhile business won't wait. I shall have to follow her up somehow, if it's to be done."

"I shall never forgive myself if anything has happened to her," reiterated Susan, sadly.

"What should have happened to her?" demanded Mr Davis. "If there'd been an accident to train or steamer, do you suppose we shouldn't have heard of it? Even if she'd been taken ill, there must have been something about her by which she would have been identified fast enough, and her friends would

The Other Mrs Jacobs

have been written to. Come, do you fancy she's been taken ill?"

"Not exactly that," replied Susan, hesitatingly. "Perhaps I'm disposed to exaggerate; but really Mrs Jacobs seemed so unhinged a little while before she went away, though, as I said just now, she was quite herself when she actually left, and that made me think no more of the wild things she had said."

"You're a bit close, aren't you?" said Mr Davis, with a benevolent smile, then added—

"But as you've admitted so much, you may as well tell me what kind of wild things Mrs Jacobs said." He did not, however, display any great show of anxiety, and his apparent phlegm checked Susan's impulse to confidence. She only answered guardedly,—

"Mrs Jacobs seemed to want to go away and hide herself."

"From the possible result of certain painful family disclosures—eh? Is that what you mean?"

Susan gave him a quick questioning look. She felt sure now that he understood, but did not dare to say more till he had committed himself further. He smiled again at her caution.

"Come, we shall get to the bottom of this in time," he remarked. "Mrs Jacobs knew what she was about in putting faith in you, that's evident. Suppose I explain. These disclosures are connected with Mr Jacobs's first marriage, and they are of a kind which must greatly disturb a proud, sensitive woman. Now you see you needn't shrink from telling me whatever you know or suspect. My poor dead friend gave me the whole story of his first unfortunate marriage when he was at Birmingham with me just before his death. In fact, that's what I've come down about. I needn't say that poor Jacobs acted innocently. No doubt the—er—present Mrs Jacobs told you the facts as far as she and Mr Bowles knew them. Am I right in that conjecture?"

Enter Mr Davis

Susan was greatly relieved.

"I read Mr Bowles's letter," she said simply. "Mrs Jacobs gave it to me and then she told me what she knew."

"Did she, indeed? Well, you surprise me. I shouldn't have thought you'd have got behind that crust of reserve. I've known Mrs Jacobs ever since she was a bride, and no man has admired her more. But she's a proud woman, and some think a cold one. To my mind the coldness has only been a mask, but old folks see furthest sometimes. I must say," he added, with a faintly humorous intonation, "that though I've been acquainted with Jacobs and his wife for fifteen or sixteen years, I've never really known the lady. All the same, I promised to stand by her when poor old Jacobs went under, so here I am, and here you'd have seen me sooner if it hadn't been for a confounded attack of gout. But when you've got a toe like mine you can't dance to other folk's tunes. Some infernal twinges came on the night before I got Bowles's letter saying the woman had put in her claim; and the next day, just when I ought to have come to London, I couldn't budge. I've only got a slipper on now, as you can see, but crippled though I am, I'm not going to stand by and let my poor old friend's wishes be disregarded, and the wife he adored thrust aside by an interloper, whatever her rights may be. I only wish I'd had a chance of softening the blow to Mrs Jacobs. I thought of saying something the day I called, just after poor Jacobs's funeral. But it seemed premature, and she was always a bit stand-offish. I couldn't get it out somehow. Besides, I hoped there'd be no need. What vexes me is, that Bowles did not wire to me before writing to Mrs Jacobs. He ought to have done so. He agreed to let me know directly the woman began giving trouble; and so he did, but only by letter, and he must have written off to Mrs Jacobs by the same post—confound him! And then this gout came on. But if I'd known

The Other Mrs Jacobs

first, I'd have wired to stop his communicating with Mrs Jacobs till I could get to London and break the ice a bit. I wonder, though, that she believed the story all at once."

"She had heard it before," said Susan.

Mr Davis looked astonished.

"Heard it before! How? Poor Jacobs took good care not to tell her."

"The woman told her," said Susan. "I did not know at the time, but I believe it was two days before Mr Jacobs died."

"Infamous!" exclaimed Mr Davis. "And it was upon the very day he died that she was to go to his office and get from him the price of her silence. I've no doubt that she did it too. *That* was the woman who saw him last, I'll take my oath. And the shock of the interview must have killed him. But he knew the condition of his heart, luckily; and while he was with me during the two days before his death he did what he could to secure his property to—er—the present Mrs Jacobs. We talked it over, and he made a will, carefully worded, so that if the woman who happens to be his first wife should prove her claim, the other Mrs Jacobs would get everything secured to *her*. But, of course, my dear madam, you can understand that poor Jacobs didn't wish such a scandal made public if it could be helped. He knew how it would cut up the—er—lady living here. She's just the sort with whom it would go pretty deep, and Jacobs would sooner have chopped off his own head than have injured a hair of hers. So he laid it on me not to produce this second will unless matters called for it. I'm bound to say I was quite of his opinion in that. I don't know how far I may be legally punishable for its concealment, and I don't care. I'm ready to take the consequences." Mr Davis leaned forward on his stick, facing Miss Pengelley, with a look that showed he was not easily daunted. Susan realised that the apparently insignificant old

Enter Mr Davis

gentleman would prove a formidable enemy or an invaluable friend. She felt thankful to think that his interests were enlisted in Helga's favour.

"I know something about women—I'm sixty-five," proceeded Mr Davis. "This upstart seems a bit smarter than most, and a bit more daring, but it's only money she wants. I hoped she'd have the sense to lie low, but if she shows fight I fancy this weapon I've got up my sleeve will soon settle her. She has employed a disreputable firm of solicitors, who'd stick at nothing any more than she would, but it's my belief that if she shows her face in a court of law she won't carry her case—as soon as the original plot with the man she afterwards married is shown up. Still, the fact remains that poor Jacobs's second marriage was not a valid one, and it's the disclosure of that which we wish to prevent. Now what I want to say to Mrs—er—Helga Jacobs is simply to urge her to keep a brave front and to show fight on her side. But how am I to get hold of her? Of course, I must consult Bowles, and then we shall telegraph or send at once to St Helga."

He picked up his hat, but put it down again and took out a pocket-book. Scribbling the name of an hotel upon a card, he handed it to Susan.

"I'm staying in London," he said. "If any word should come, you'll let me know."

Susan looked at the card mechanically. A sudden thought had flashed into her mind. Doctor Grier was in the house; she would tell him everything. He, if anyone on earth, could and would find Helga and save her. For the awful fear that she might have sought her own sea only to throw herself into its embrace, was heavy upon the girl. Her one desire now was to get rid of the old man.

"I ought to go. The doctor is waiting," she murmured. He caught the word. He had evidently not paid much attention to Hornblow's announcement.

The Other Mrs Jacobs

"The doctor! What's he here for? Something wrong with the boy?"

"Nothing serious, I hope. He is better than he was during the night. But I'm naturally anxious."

"Of course, of course. And a new doctor, no doubt. What an extraordinary complication that *that* man of all others should have attended the boy—and done well by him, I hear. Poor Jacobs told me of his discovery, and that he had forbidden Grier the house."

Susan bridled.

"Doctor Grier is in the house now. Mr Davis, I cannot hear a word against Doctor Grier. I don't know the beginning of the story—I don't want to know, for I am convinced that although he may have been carried away by his devotion to that unworthy woman, and have suffered for it, it is impossible that he could have been guilty of fraud or disloyalty. You don't know him. If you had once seen him you would understand."

"Hoity-toity! What a champion he's got, to be sure," exclaimed Mr Davis, with a twinkle in his eye, though his face flamed as he answered, "No, I don't understand, young madam, how, in the absence of any responsible head of the house, you, knowing the truth, can have allowed that man admittance."

"There is a responsible head," said Miss Pengelley, straightening her small form to its fullest height. "*I* am responsible for Ronald's health during his mother's absence. She trusted him to me, and as she gave me no directions to change his doctor I shall not do so, unless it is to some other medical man whom Doctor Grier recommends."

"It doesn't strike you, I suppose, that Doctor Grier may be an accomplice in this second plot to rob Mrs Jacobs of her fortune, as he was an instigator of the plot by which Jacobs was made to believe that his first wife was dead?"

"No, it does *not* so strike me," said Miss Pengelley,

Enter Mr Davis

her voice ringing indignantly. Every nerve in her thrilled, for she had heard a strong tread on the stairs and the turning of a handle, and now, facing the opening door, to which Mr Davis's back was turned, she beheld a tall figure and a grey, haggard face framed in the doorway. "He is here," she said. "Judge for yourself if he is capable of that."

Mr Davis rose slowly and confronted the grey wolf, as Clarice called him, whose fangs were certainly showing between the thin, classically-cut lips. For the space of thirty-five seconds the men faced each other in silence. Mr Davis was by no means a coward, but a pitched battle with Doctor Grier did not come into his calculations. Moreover, he had a humorous relish of the situation which he was not sure that his opponent shared. Therefore he turned again to Susan.

"As Judah Jacobs's friend," he remarked, "I must decline to discuss anything whatsoever with Doctor Grier, either as to his conduct in the past or as to the possibilities of the future, unless indeed some further light is thrown upon the case. Perhaps Mrs Jacobs may be able to do that. My business at present is to find her. And my opinion as to the line of conduct *you* have adopted, madam, admits of no deviation."

Hat in hand, and leaning heavily upon his stick, the little old gentleman limped across the room towards the door where Grier, like a grim sentinel, stood. He took no notice of this speech, but moved stiffly to one side to allow the old gentleman to pass. Mr Davis turned in the doorway.

"Personally, Miss Pengelley, I may acknowledge that I'm proud to have met you. I fancied that Mrs Jacobs would only have one friend to stand by her—my gouty old self. I see now that I reckoned without *you*."

"I'd do anything for her," cried Susan, emotionally, for she was overwrought, "but there are others who love and would serve her as well."

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She looked straight at Doctor Grier as she spoke. His face seemed to grow greyer still, but not a muscle of it moved. Only his gleaming eyes flashed a glance at Miss Pengelley and then darted towards the old man in the doorway, seeming to be in themselves alive—disagreeably alive, thought Mr Davis, as he limped more quickly than his gouty toe enjoyed out of the room.

Susan had rung mechanically, and now stood listening. Hornblow was doing something in the dining-room; she heard him usher the old man out, and call his cab, and put him into it. Then the front door closed, and it seemed to Susan as though a great tension had been relaxed. She began to shake all over as she stood, and felt as though she were going to cry hysterically. She commanded herself sufficiently to sink into a chair. Doctor Grier went out of the room and, meeting Hornblow, demanded a glass of port wine. The butler poured it out in the dining-room, and Doctor Grier took it straight in and brought Miss Pengelley to some degree of calmness by his peremptory insistence that she should swallow it at once. When she had done so and had ceased shaking, he went to the door and closed it firmly, then returned and, planting himself in a chair opposite to her, said, in his most masterful tone,—

"Now, young woman, remember you're not a fool, and tell me at once what has happened to Mrs Jacobs. You spoke pretty straight just now, but you can take it from me that you're right. I love her, and I'd shoot myself sooner than that she should come to harm through me or anybody connected in any way with me. Do you know what I mean?"

"Yes, yes," said Susan.

"And you believe me—you believe that I love her?"

"Oh! I knew it—I knew it!" said Susan.

"That's all right. Now we understand each other. Then begin at the beginning, and tell me everything

Enter Mr Davis

from the day I was here last—I mean the day I saw her last. Never mind the funeral. And you needn't tell me about the visit that was paid her by the woman who was called my wife. She isn't my wife—you know that—and I don't care what becomes of her, now that I have learned the game she is playing. Mind you, I'd have stood by her if she had deserved it—you believe that, don't you?"

"Yes," repeated Susan, "I believe it."

"Very well. Now to business. Mrs Jacobs went away on Wednesday and hasn't written or been heard of since. You thought she was in Devonshire—I know all about that; Ronald told me. And I've had a word with Julie—from the medical point of view, you understand—about her mistress. Therefore you may skip detail of that sort. All I want to know is everything she said to you before she went and all that you know which nobody else in the house knows. Let me have the story."

Susan told him everything, even to the revelation Mr Davis had made concerning the second will. He nodded his head when she came to the point of Mr Davis's narrative and said, "Good, good—very good."

Then Susan went back to what distressed her most—Helga's vague suggestion of suicide and her wild words when she had spoken of flinging herself from a lonely cliff into the embracing silence of the sea.

"She said that she knew the place," said Susan. "It must be St Helga."

"Yes," he replied, "it is at St Helga. Don't you remember the picture which we saw at the Gallery—that lonely cape with a great cloven cliff and a beach below over which the waves curled up, dashing against the rock, with white sea-birds circling round?"

"I remember," said Susan. "The name of the place was Altbröd. I looked it out in the catalogue."

"It was at Altbröd that Helga Brack spent a good

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part of her childhood after her mother's death, with her foster-mother. She has told me about it. I wonder if that foster-mother lives there still?"

"I think Mrs Jacobs told me that she did," said Susan. "But she would be quite an old woman, surely?"

"Not necessarily. Mrs Jacobs was very young when she left St Helga. The woman might not have been much more than a girl. They have a primitive way of making marriages in St Helga. In fact, from what I have read, it has seemed to me, taking into consideration the weakness of the flesh, that it would be difficult for people to remain long unmarried in St Helga."

"Ah!" Susan was not interested in St Helgan marriage laws. "Doctor Grier!" she exclaimed suddenly, "I feel it inside me somehow that Mrs Jacobs has gone to that place—Altbröd."

"I feel it too, inside me—so strongly that I have just made up my mind to take train and passage *via* Hull. That is the shortest route."

"Oh! Will you go?" exclaimed Susan.

"Certainly. I should easily catch the steamer. I don't know if there is any direct express service, but the boat goes late, and there are trains to Hull all the afternoon. Here, young woman, if you want a medico, send for Macgregor—six doors down from my place." He wrote a hurried address. "Macgregor takes my work when I'm away. You can rely on him, but the young man's getting on all right. It's his mother who wants looking after."

"Oh! You are good, and strong, and kind," said Susan.

Doctor Grier smiled grimly.

"You're the first person that's applied the adjective good to any efforts of mine. As to *kind*"—he shrugged his great shoulders—"I can't claim to be wholly disinterested; but I'm strong enough, I hope, to save her from herself."

CHAPTER XXIII

AT ALTBRÖD

IT was midday when Doctor Grier landed at St Helga. Distances are not great on the island, so the afternoon was yet young when he arrived at the hotel in Altbröd. This—the principal, and indeed the only one open now in the little watering-place—was situated on the island side of that dividing upland marsh which President Brack had converted into a beautiful garden with an extensive glass house, in which sub-tropical plants flourished. The Kursaal, also a State endowment, stood on the edge of the gardens, and not far from the hotel.

The day was unusually mild for October, and, moreover, St Helga being sheltered by a volcanic mountain to the north-east enjoyed in certain parts a sort of St Martin's summer of its own. Doctor Grier was surprised to find so few evidences of the coming winter, but reflected that this year the signs of the times had been somewhat topsy-turvy. He had never before visited the odd little island republic, and from the moment he stepped on it he became sensible of its peculiar charm. Passing in a doll train along a few miles of south-western coast to Altbröd, he was struck by the beauty of the country, and could now well understand Helga's poetic devotion to her birthplace. The tiny town of Altbröd nestling in its garden and surrounded on all but the south side by cliffs, which protected it from inclement winds, had certainly attractions of an austere climatic kind as a pleasure resort. But the nip in the air was not dis-

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agreeable, so exhilarating was its clearness; though one could realise that there might be raging of the elements over the stark headland jutting out beyond the town into the sea, which was naked and desolate except for a few fishers' huts and a lighthouse, and which seemed, in truth, the outmost of the land.

Doctor Grier walked straight from the station to the hotel, carrying his Gladstone bag, for in this slack season there appeared to be no porters at Altbröd. The hotel, too, seemed fairly empty, judging from the large choice of rooms offered him. He engaged one, and proceeded to inspect the visitors' book. Here was no sign of Helga, but on the top of the last page in the list of recent arrivals he beheld to his surprise the names of Mr and Mrs Kœnigsen. He could have no doubt of the identity of the man, for there, under the descriptive headings which St Helga law or custom required, and in the painter's own hand-writing, which Doctor Grier recognised, was inscribed:—"Baptismal Name, Karl; Country of Birth, St Helga; Present Residence, London; Profession, Artist;" while, continuing the classification of the visitors, stood, "Wife of Karl Kœnigsen—Baptismal Name, Clarice."

Doctor Grier started violently, a muttered oath between his lips. He was completely taken aback, though a moment later he assured himself that this could not be the Clarice he knew. He had heard nothing of her since her departure beyond the fact that Reynolds, the upper housemaid, had returned to Hyde Park Street to resume her duties, stating that Mrs Grier had said she was going down to Brighton, and would not require her services as a lady's maid any longer. Doctor Grier had assumed, therefore, that Clarice was with the friends she so frequently visited, and to find her cropping up at St Helga—if it were she—was a little startling. It did not, however, seem possible that this could be the same Clarice. Yet if it were, why should he care? The

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partnership was dissolved, and he had no wish to renew it. Still he could not have believed *this* of her.

The manager who, oddly enough, was an American, and Doctor Grier had been wondering what had brought him to this region, remarked casually, with a strong western accent,—

"Well, I've reckon you've struck a trail you didn't expect."

"That's certainly true," said Doctor Grier, "but there's a mistake somewhere," and he pointed to the entry. "This gentleman wasn't married a week ago."

"Well, I conclude if he wasn't married then that he's pretty well spliced up now," returned the manager. "I reckon that, being a born St Helgan, he knows what he's doing. It isn't the first Gretna Green business we've pulled through in this hotel—even in my time."

"What do you mean?" asked Doctor Grier.

"Well, I guess it's a runaway match, though I wouldn't say that the missus had just come out of the nursery. You don't happen to be a parent or a guardian, sir, do you? Because, if you are, it may be a satisfaction to you to know that there's no getting out of it now. This is as good as a church register," and he put his hand on the open book.

"Oh! Indeed," said Doctor Grier, drily. "Still, you must be aware that Gretna Green is exploded, and that, anyhow, we aren't in Scotland."

"I observe that you're not acquainted with St Helgan law," replied the manager, with a grin, and he proceeded to explain that when a St Helgan man in his own country, publicly or in writing, acknowledged a woman as his wife, no further ceremony was needed to make them legally one—provided, of course, that the contracting parties were both free.

Doctor Grier gave a short, queer laugh. The ironical possibilities of the situation appealed sud-

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denly to his sense of humour. He remembered that St Helgan marriages were valid in England, for there had flashed across him while the manager was speaking a case he had read some time back in the newspapers, in which an English woman sought in a court of law to disprove a marriage contracted in similar fashion in St Helga with a native of that place, and had failed to obtain her freedom. He laughed again, and the manager, falling in with his grim amusement, launched forth on the subject of St Helgan law, but was interrupted curtly by his guest with the question,—

“Are the lady and gentleman in the hotel?”

The manager pointed through an archway to the suite of *sitting-rooms* with a conservatory at the end, and signified that Mr and Mrs Koenigsen were there, enjoying coffee and cigarettes.

Doctor Grier strode through the drawing-rooms, waving back the manager, who would have preceded and announced him. He heard Clarice's laugh—there was no mistaking it—and he halted dead short for an instant.

“Good Lord!” he murmured under his breath, his teeth showing wolf-like where his lips turned up at the corners. “Good Lord! What earthly object could they have had in making such fools of themselves?”

He reconnoitred cautiously, and now beheld a profile and elaborately-dressed head protruding from the depths of a basket chair, while a white hand and wrist, laden with rings and bangles, and flourishing a cigarette, seemed to be emphasising the laugh which had been addressed to the occupant of another basket chair drawn up close by. This chair, like the other, was set with its back towards Doctor Grier, who only caught the glimpse of an unmistakable yellow beard. Undoubtedly the pair were Clarice and Koenigsen, and they were evidently on extremely good terms with one another. Grier trod softly

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round a central bed in the conservatory, where some creepers trained to the roof fell round a cluster of broad-leaved palms, which hid him as he approached, so that the two engrossed in friendly dalliance were quite unaware of his presence till he came upon them face to face.

Clarice was the first to recognise him. She paled for a moment beneath her rouge, but regained her self-possession directly, and, rising, dropped the newcomer a mocking curtsy. Koenigsen rose also, his face guilty and confused. He was too dumbfounded to speak. Clarice was equal to the occasion.

"Really, Andrew, I never imagined you capable of such a dramatic surprise. It is like the last act in—shall we say a matrimonial comedy? Tragedy is not in my line—nor in Karl's either. Pray let us have no bloodshed. To fight would be misdirected force."

"I haven't the slightest intention of challenging Mr Koenigsen to a duel, if that is what you mean," returned Doctor Grier, drily. "Perhaps I should apologise for interrupting your delightful honeymoon. Allow me to congratulate you, Mr Koenigsen, upon having, through the admirable simplicity of St Helgan law, secured to yourself a wife who is in every respect worthy of you."

The painter's jaw dropped. He looked stupidly from Clarice to Doctor Grier.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed. "This lady—Mrs Grier—is *your* wife. I can prove to you that our meeting here is a sheer accident."

"How about the hotel register?" retorted Grier. "But let me remark that the entry which I have just read does not specially concern me, as I have no desire to dispute your possession of this lady—nor any legal right to do so."

Koenigsen still stared helplessly.

"That's true enough. I'll explain," put in Clarice, sharply.

Grier went on in his colourless tones.

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"I see that you are not aware that when I, with the most honourable intentions, went through the ceremony of marriage with this lady, her first husband was unfortunately alive—a fact of which, until very recently, I have been ignorant. You will realise, therefore, that she is not my wife, and never has been in the legal sense. However, her first husband having died recently, she is now perfectly free to contract a third marriage, which it appears that she has done."

Køenigsen looked more than ever dismayed. He knew the St Helgan laws, but had not realised that he might be running any risk in the matter, supposing Clarice to be already married.

"At all events, *I* have not married her," he cried. "In any circumstances, my position and my means would prevent my doing so. There's some monstrous mistake about this, but I emphatically repeat, I have not married her."

Clarice's laugh was impish.

"We shall see, my Viking. When you understand that I bring you the fortune which you hoped to win with the other Mrs Jacobs, perhaps you will not be so averse from acknowledging your marriage with me."

"But I have *not* married her," repeated Karl, turning furiously to Grier and ignoring Clarice.

Grier smiled civilly.

"You should be better acquainted than I am with the law of St Helga," he said. "You certainly ought to know if it is the case, as I am given to understand, that a written acknowledgment of a woman as one's wife constitutes in St Helga a marriage which is recognised as valid everywhere. However, it is no concern of mine. You will no doubt ascertain your legal position."

Clarice seized Køenigsen's arm.

"You must listen to me, Karl," she cried. "It is true about the marriage laws—you know that. I remember reading it in a book long ago—though I had forgotten. But there is nothing to regret. I

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did not tell you everything about my circumstances, because I wished first to win my case about the Jacobs estate. But what Andrew says is true. I was married before, you know, but it happens that my husband did not really die till the other day. He was Judah Jacobs. But we did not find each other out till just before he died. I, and not the other Mrs Jacobs, am entitled to his money. He left it all to his wife—well, *I* am his lawful widow. Do you see?”

Køenigsen turned slowly towards her, a crafty gleam in his eyes. She went on eagerly,—

“That woman’s marriage was no more valid than mine with him.” Her rings flashed in a movement of her hand towards Grier, who stood immovable, not a smile now upon his face. “The fates be praised, I’m free from the fangs of that grey wolf. Excuse my candour, Andrew—you needn’t listen. It was *you* whom I always liked best, Karl, and you’re fond of me. You know that you are happier with me than you could ever be with anybody else. And if I bring you the money for which you wanted to marry the other Mrs Jacobs what more can you desire?”

“Stay!” said Doctor Grier, sternly. “You will find it less easy than you suppose to carry out your ingenious plan. The day before Mr Jacobs died he made a new will in favour of his wife Helga—a will that cannot be disputed. It is in the hands of his friend, Mr Davis, of Birmingham. As for you”—and he looked scathingly at Clarice—“you got £3000 from him the day he died, so you have had your share. Mr Køenigsen may be interested in hearing,” Grier added, turning to the painter, “that there is no mention of him in the second will; but I imagine, in respect of the legacy of £5000, that Mrs Jacobs might be induced to abide so far by the provisions of the first will—that is, if you—and your wife—make no more trouble.”

With this shot, sent at a venture, Doctor Grier

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turned on his heel, and stalked down the conservatory.

Koenigsen stood speechless, too confounded to find words. But Clarice was a philosopher, as well as an intriguing woman. She put her arm through his, and with her head against his shoulder looked enticingly up into his face.

"Never mind, my Viking. She wouldn't have taken you, and if she had, you'd soon have hated her. Fancy being tied for life to 'Spiridia!' You might as well marry a figure with a halo out of a church window. Her tragic airs will suit my grey wolf very much better, though I shouldn't wonder if he got tired of them after a bit. Come, look at me, and think what a jolly time we've had together. You'll enjoy life a great deal more in my company, my sapient Karl, and you'll see that I shall help you on in the world pretty considerably. It will be well worth my while. And, after all, we haven't done so badly out of poor old Judah. Five thousand to you, and three thousand to me—eight in all. And I've a little pile laid by as well; it will come in handy. That's right, my Viking, I like to see you smile. . . . I knew you'd come to the conclusion that it's no use being angry. Now for the Kursaal, and to follow my luck!"

Grier questioned the manager as to the possibility of an English lady being at Altbröd, and yet not staying at his hotel—a lady who would probably be wearing deep mourning.

"I guess," returned the American, "that you may find her up with Sauben's wife round by the lighthouse."

"How do you know that?" said Grier, "and who is Sauben?"

"Oh! he's of no account," replied the manager. "I reckon it's Sauben's wife that bosses his show—the biggest talker within twenty miles of Altbröd, which is as good as saying that Sauben's wife's tongue is not to be beaten in St Helga—but a good-

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natured soul for all that. As for how I know anything about an Englishwoman in black on the island, one of the railway people told me. She's been there three or four days now, or longer, I guess. No, she doesn't come near the hotel. You go round by the beach and up the zig-zag towards the lighthouse, and ask the first brat you meet after Sauben's wife. You'll not have any difficulty in finding her."

Acting on these directions, Doctor Grier betook himself at once through the gardens, down the village street, and along the strip of sand which lay beneath the neck of the hump, then up a steep, winding path towards the rounded summit of the headland. There was neither woman, child, nor man to be seen of whom he could ask guidance, and he paused three-parts of the way up and diverged sideways along a thread-like track, to where a miniature landslip had left a small earthen plateau, with rocks—bare but for patches of yellow lichen—shelving up behind and dropping in front sheer to the water.

All the time while he mounted he heard the continuous boom of billows against the cliff, and now and then the long, weary sob of a wave, retreating through a hollow in the basalt rampart. Never had Grier beheld a scene so wild and lonely; the stretching sea, grey, blue and white, save where, near the shore, there were drifts of mauve and purple weed; the sky grey and white too, with sweeping wind-clouds—a blast from the north cutting him with its cold breath. Off this more deserted part of the promontory, sea-birds swirled and darted in curving flights, adding to the sense of desolation—cormorants and northern divers,—while the screaming cry of a heron sounded from a boulder beneath the cliff. Far out on the level of the sea he thought he saw, rising and falling, the great black shoulders of a shoal of porpoises.

Now, as Grier rounded a projecting wing of rock that had broken the landslip, he saw on the little

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plateau a black figure of a woman outlined against the sky. She stood on the very edge of the precipice. His heart seemed to stop beating. The figure swayed slightly—perhaps a gust of wind had caught it—and a despairing fear fell upon him lest, after all, he should have come too late—lest Helga, whom he knew it to be, should, indeed, have some mad thought in her mind of flinging herself into the cruel embrace of the sea. He hastened on; his teeth set, and every nerve and sinew strung. Ah! could she but realise that the kingdom of which she had dreamed might at last be her own on earth, and that the love she had longed for—strong as the waves, rough maybe, but all-embracing, and faithful unto death—was even now nearing her side, ready to enfold her.

Those were the longest moments that Andrew Grier had ever known. He seemed to live through an eternity in their anguish of suspense, with the figure, a slim black outline betwixt sky and sea; while his heart, like the pistons of a steam-engine, now pounded against his ribs, and he strode noiselessly forward, fearing to startle her. Merciful Heaven! A moment more, and he might have been too late.

His arms seized her before he spoke. She gave a sudden cry, and turned, not knowing who had followed her. Then the two pairs of eyes met, and answered each other. He drew her gently back towards the shelter of the cliff. His face was working with emotion, but a singularly sweet smile played on his lips, and he said calmly, "You must not go so near the edge; you might fall over. I am come, Helga, to take care of you."

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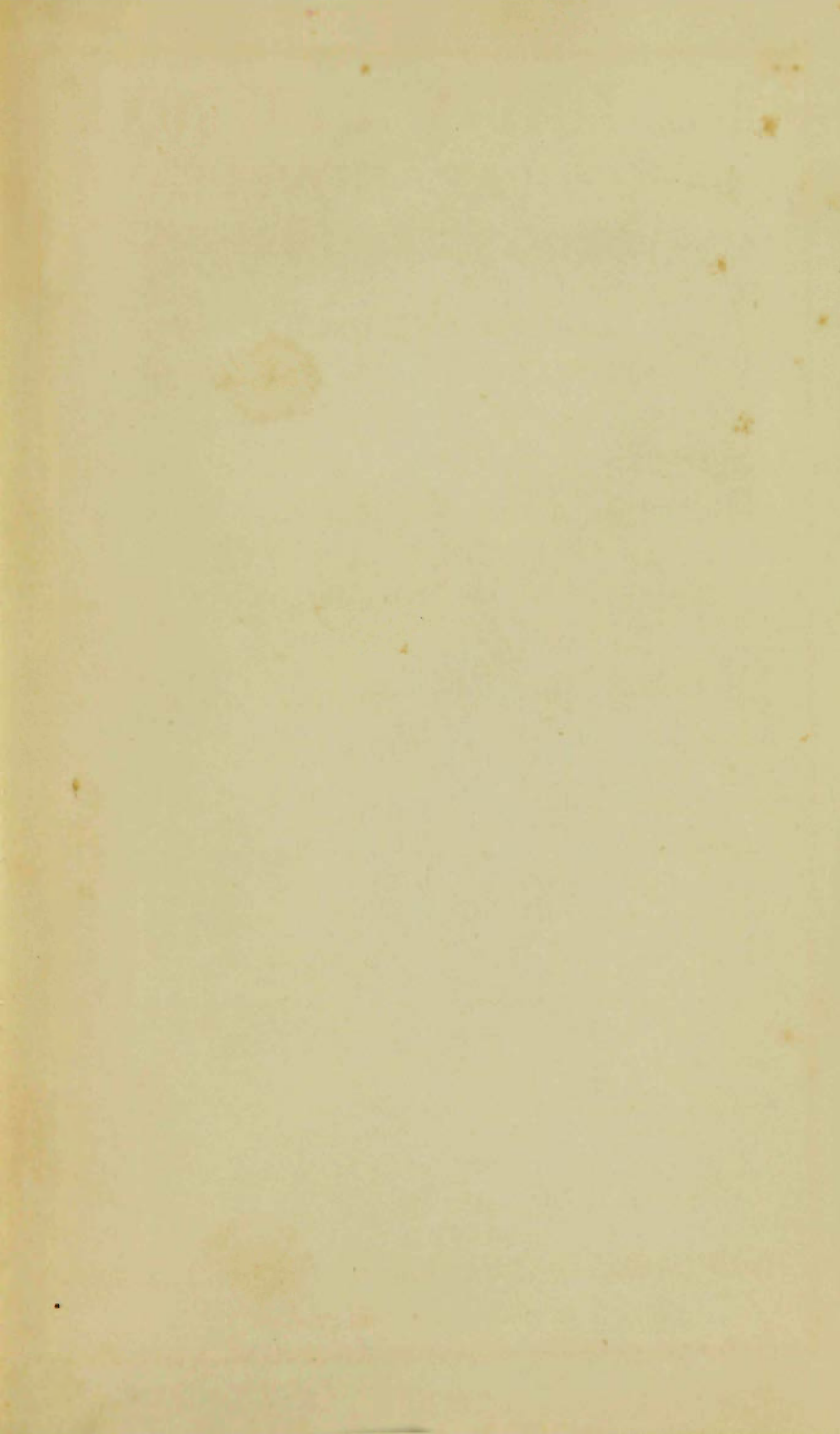
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