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The Thousand Eugenias

By

MRS. ALFRED SIDGWICK

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THE

THOUSAND EUGENIAS

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

MRS. ALFRED SIDGWICK

AUTHOR OF

'CYNTHIA'S WAY,' 'THE GRASSHOPPERS,'

'THE INNER SHRINE,' ETC.

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

91 AND 93 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

1902

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE THOUSAND EUGENIAS	1
ANNE AND THE ANARCHIST	202
"THE LAST STRAW"	233
A SENSIBLE WOMAN	253
AUNT THOMASINA	264
AN ICONOCLAST	273
A SKY SIGN	289
WALL-PAPERS	300
MRS. SPETTIGUE	310
WITH THE HELP OF THE COTILLON	321

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THE THOUSAND EUGENIAS

I

THE schoolroom was deserted because an uncle, who had come to Bayswater Square on a few days' visit, had taken the children to the Zoological Gardens for the afternoon. He had not invited Miss Ferrers, their governess, to join the party; and after she had tidied the schoolroom and had done various out-of-door commissions for the mistress of the house, she returned to her kingdom on the fourth floor and sat down to rest. Next day she was going to the seaside with the family, and she still had to pack for herself and the children; but she was too tired to begin directly. The hot weather had come with a rush, and she had been on her feet for hours. Mrs. Hunter and her grown-up daughters had agreed at lunch-time that they were not inclined to move, so Amabel Ferrers had been obliged to move for them from shop to shop and back to the house again, until her little body was aweary of this great world.

It was not agreeable to live in Mrs. Hunter's house as governess, and Amabel would have left long ago

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if she had known how to get food and shelter elsewhere. But a governess is not a cook with the market at her command, and Amabel knew that if she threw up this engagement she might be reduced to any straits before she found another. Her story, so far, was the commonest story in the world. Her parents had brought her up in idleness and, if they ever gave a thought to the future at all, had taken for granted that she would marry in their lifetime. Unfortunately, they both died before she was eighteen; the mother died after the father, and left just enough to pay for her funeral. Amabel was an only child, and knew of no relations except an uncle who had gone to Mexico, twenty years ago, to seek his fortune. As he never wrote home she did not know whether he was dead or alive, but she had found an old address amongst her father's papers, and had written there at a venture some months ago. So far no answer had come, and she had made up her mind that her uncle Michael was dead or out of reach and that she was alone in the world.

This afternoon, as she stared at the sky and the chimney-pots, her thoughts were vexatious and distressing. For several days past Mrs. Hunter's manner had been more unpleasant than usual, and it would be impossible to say anything stronger than that of any one's manner. Amabel knew why she was in disgrace. A fortnight ago there had been a children's party in the house, and she had assisted at it, and

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Mr. Sheringham himself had showed her marked attention. No one else would have mattered quite so much. But Mr. Sheringham! the great financier! who was invited a dozen times before he came once! who was to marry Georgina Hunter, if only he could be made to see it! who was so eligible that Georgina hardly expected to pull it off, but wished she might, because Mr. Sheringham was *so* good-looking; while Mr. Mendoza, the other string to her bow, was fat and had little pig's eyes! That children's party had been a fiasco from Georgina's point of view, and there was worse to follow. On Sunday last, Mr. Sheringham had met Miss Ferrers at morning service, and had walked home with her and the children; and the day before yesterday he had actually found her in Kensington Gardens in the late afternoon, and had stayed talking to her for nearly half-an-hour. On both occasions the children had carried the news home, and Mrs. Hunter had told Amabel that her conduct was forward and unladylike, and that if the offence was repeated she must take the consequences.

This very afternoon the offence had been repeated. She had happened to be in the drawing-room taking instructions about some errands, and Mr. Sheringham had called, and he had looked at her in the most friendly way and asked her if she was going to Eastbourne with the family. When she admitted that she was, he said he thought of running down there himself for a few days; and when she hurried out of the room

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he got up and opened the door for her. She wished he would leave her alone. She was a moth and he was a star, and she was a sensible moth with no desire to singe her wings. She would not let her thoughts dwell on him; but her thoughts dwelt with foreboding on Miss Georgina Hunter's manner when she met her on the stairs just now.

The irruption into the room of a red-headed page boy, with a message from Mrs. Hunter, made her jump.

"Mrs. 'Unter wants you downstairs," he said.

"I've been out ever since lunch and I haven't had tea yet," said Amabel, trying to seem calm and indifferent. "Do you think Mrs. Hunter wants me at once, George?"

"She looked as if she did," said the boy.

"I wonder why tea is so late?"

"I 'eard Mrs. 'Unter tell Mary she needn't bring any up 'ere as the young ladies and gentlemen would 'ave theirs out. Shall I sneak you up a cup from the kitchen, Miss?"

"Yes — no — I can't wait," said Amabel, and she ran downstairs.

Mrs. Hunter sat in her drawing-room surrounded by lamps and silver photograph frames and frilled silk cushions. She was a stupid-looking woman, with a consequential, pursed-up mouth and hard, colourless eyes. She turned towards Amabel with an air of dislike and did not ask her to sit down.

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"I am not satisfied with you, Miss Ferrers," she began. "I have sent for you to tell you so."

"I am doing my best for the children," began Amabel.

"I am not thinking of the children," said Mrs. Hunter.

Amabel wished she had the courage to sit down, she wished she had stayed herself with tea, she wished she had been born without a temper; and she looked at the lady and wondered why people in fortune's good graces should be so unkind to people out of fortune's favor.

"Your behavior is most unbecoming," continued Mrs. Hunter.

"In what way?" said Amabel.

"I am not going to enter into details," said Mrs. Hunter. "The fact is, you allow your head to be turned. You seem to think that when you come downstairs and the gentlemen who visit at the house are civil to you, that you are on an equality with them. I feel it my duty to open your eyes. None of them would ever think of you seriously."

Amabel did not speak, but she could not force back the flush of indignant color in her cheeks or the anger that set her mouth and flashed in her eyes.

"That is the worst of people who have come down in the world," said Mrs. Hunter. "They never want to realize that they have come down."

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"Oh, but they do," said Amabel. "The fact is everlastingly forced on them."

"Then you don't show it in your behavior. Just now when Mr. Sheringham was here ——"

"I should be glad if I need never see Mr. Sheringham again," cried Amabel. "I don't care about him."

According to her lights at the moment she spoke the truth. She felt angry with Mr. Sheringham for having made matters worse for her than they need have been; she felt angry with his coolness and his determination and with her own helplessness.

"What unladylike expressions you use, Miss Ferrers," said Mrs. Hunter. "It is not necessary that you should care about Mr. Sheringham or any one else you have the privilege of meeting in my house. Mr. Sheringham is a most charming person and an intimate friend, and it must be painful for him to come here and meet a young woman who throws herself at his head."

"I should think his head is fairly strong," said Amabel.

"At any rate I am going to do my duty and stop it," said Mrs. Hunter, who was working herself into a pretty passion. "Unless you can give me a guarantee of better behavior for the future ——"

"How can I give you a guarantee that the man won't follow me to church or find out when I'm in the Square with the children?" said Amabel, her anger inexpediently expressing itself.

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"To whom are you alluding, Miss Ferrers?"

"To Mr. Sheringham, of course."

"Then be good enough to give him his proper title. I am not accustomed to hear one of my friends spoken of as a 'man.' However, your impertinence only confirms me in my intentions. I shall not take you to Eastbourne with us, and as we leave the house to-morrow you must leave to-morrow too. I may as well pay you your wages and then we need not meet again. It will be pleasanter for both sides."

"Of course, you know that you are treating me abominably," said Amabel. "If I were a kitchen-maid ——"

"Kitchenmaids have a market value," said Mrs. Hunter. "Incompetent young ladies have none."

"I have nowhere to go to from here."

"That is not my business."

"I have done nothing to deserve such treatment."

"I refuse to prolong the discussion," said Mrs. Hunter, holding out a five-pound note. "I owe you for one month and I will pay you for two. It is more than you deserve."

"It is my legal due," said Amabel; "and I believe you ought to pay me board wages too."

"I shall not pay you another penny," said Mrs. Hunter, and the note fluttered from her fingers and fell on the floor. "Remember you are leaving more or less under a cloud."

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"That is a disgraceful thing to say," exclaimed Amabel.

"I shall say it to any one who comes here for your character," said Mrs. Hunter. "I consider you flighty and impertinent."

Amabel felt that she had no weapons and no hope of redress. She could not rail back as a woman of coarser grain would have done. She picked up the bank note and ran hastily out of the room, and then she burst into tears. She was still crying when the red-headed page boy came into the school-room with a cup of tea and a plate of bread and butter on a tray. He looked at the girl and went away again. In a few minutes Amabel heard a slow, heavy step on the stairs, and she dried her eyes and tried to pull herself together, because she thought it must be Mrs. Hunter. But the door opened and the cook appeared, panting and good-natured.

"Ginger said you were crying, Miss," she began; "I thought I'd come and see. Ain't you well?"

"I'm to leave the house to-morrow, Mrs. Pugsley," said Amabel. "Do you know of any cheap, respectable room? I've nowhere to go."

The cook sat down.

"Why are you to leave the house to-morrow?" she inquired, and Amabel saw that every one would ask her the same question, and that it would be difficult to answer.

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"Mrs. Hunter is not satisfied," she said; "I think she has taken a dislike to me."

"Mrs. 'Unter is not a lady," said the cook, with the queer discrimination of her class in such matters.

"You are. That's reason enough, I'll be bound. Don't you fret, Miss. I'll go round to the office I patronise to-morrow and I'll tell 'em if they don't find you something soft within a week they won't 'ave me on their books again, nor any of my friends."

"It's very kind of you," said Amabel, cheering up a little, "but I'm afraid no one will take me without a reference."

"Well!" said the cook, beginning to bristle.

"Mrs. Hunter refuses me a good one."

"Then I shall have a few words with Mrs. 'Unter to-morrow morning," said the cook majestically. "She won't let me go if she can 'elp it. A better behaved young lady I never saw — and them children so spoiled and quarrelsome, Job 'imself would give 'em a good hiding, and of course it's what they deserve."

At that moment George's red head thrust itself cautiously in at the door.

"Now what do you want, Ginger?" said the cook. "Don't you see I'm engaged?"

The boy held a telegram towards her and she took it from him.

"You needn't wait," she said; and, when he had shut the door, she turned to Amabel.

"Ginger is that curious. It's for you, Miss," she said.

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II

"For me!" cried Amabel. She could hardly believe it; but she saw her name on the orange-colored envelope and on the form inside.

"Come and see me, Paris. Cannot leave. Hôtel Ritz. — Michael Ferrers."

"How extraordinary," said Amabel, and she showed the form to her friend.

"What's it mean?" said the cook. "I never can make head nor tail of a telegram. Why can't people write a plain letter? If there was less hurry there'd be less mistakes, I always tell my kitchenmaids. But you may preach all your life and you won't persuade other folks to practise."

"I suppose," said Amabel, and she took the telegram into her hands again — "I suppose it is from my uncle, Michael Ferrers. I wrote to him some months ago. I thought he was in South America, but this seems to come from Paris."

"How do you know?" said the cook suspiciously, and they examined the telegram together. When Amabel lifted her head she pointed to the five-pound note lying on the table.

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"That is all the money I have in the world," said she.

"Lor!" said the cook.

"And if I spend it on going to Paris ——"

"And find it was one of them lying telegrams, and you hadn't no uncle at all, and there was no such hotel."

"I don't see how that could happen," said Amabel.

"Anything can happen with telegrams," said the cook, "else what'd the halfpenny papers do? 'Horrible massacre!' one day: 'Women and children tortured: nobody left alive!' and next day every one all right and the news as flat as pancakes. I know them telegrams. And yet, seeing how you're placed, it do seem worth a little risk — just to go there and drive up to the hotel — if you can find it — and ask if they know your uncle — and come straight back if they don't."

Here the cook raised her voice. "Ginger," she cried, and when Ginger immediately opened the door, she winked at Amabel.

"I knew you wouldn't be far off," she said placidly; "you run round to Whiteley's as fast as your feet'll carry you, and go to that counter where they have the railway time-tables laid out — somewhere near the provisions, it is — say you want to get to Paris quick and cheap. You won't have to pay — but there's twopence in case you do — and mind you're back in five minutes."

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"And what'll I say if SHE rings?" said the boy, in injured accents.

"Say I sent you for a lemon," said the cook. "Here's another penny. Bring one."

"If I go — and spend my money — and nothing comes of it — I shall be worse off than before," said Amabel, when the boy had run off.

"You mustn't look forward to that," said the cook. "Turn a bright face to the world and the world'll turn a bright face to you. Besides, you can always come back here and lodge with my sister in the Artesian Road, as is a widow. Don't you trouble too much. It's no good, and it spoils the complexion."

"I wish I could cook," said Amabel. "I should never be out of work then."

"P'raps you'd sometimes wish you were — when the hot weather comes and the jellies are uncertain. Every perfession has its drawbacks," said the cook; and then Amabel went on with her tea, and presently Ginger came back with various time-tables.

"If I go by Newhaven and Dieppe to-morrow, I shall get there at seven," said Amabel, in a little while. "Oh, Cookie, dear, am I really going to risk half my fortune! The single fare is £1, 5s.; the return is ——"

"Don't take a return," advised the cook. "It looks distrustful. I must go and see to my dinner now, my dear, because last time I let Maria do the quenelles she sent 'em up in a mash. But I'll see you off from Victoria to-morrow morning."

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"I can't believe I'm going," said Amabel. "I can't believe in that telegram."

"It's a chance," said the cook, "and if you don't take a chance in this world, where are you? I dare-say it won't be all jam in Paris any more nor what it is here. Your uncle may have a wife, and she may have a temper; but if he's one to like a pretty face and figure you'll do. You're not as unlucky as you think you are, and that's a fact. You can't expect everything of them above, and as far as eyes and hair and shape go, they've done pretty well for you."

Amabel looked in the glass when her friend had departed, and she certainly saw a charming girl reflected there. Her hair was thick and bright and wavy, and her eyes were grey and her nose straightly cut and delicate; and besides beauty of feature she possessed just now the beauty of youth, and would always possess the beauty of expression that is the outward sign of kindness and intelligence. The sudden change in her prospects had dried her tears and diverted her thoughts, and as she packed for the children and herself, she dwelt on the uncertain issues of to-morrow instead of fretting over the offences of to-day. She tried to remember everything her father had ever said of his brother Michael, and she could not remember much. She did not know of any estrangement to account for her uncle's long silence. Her parents had believed him to be dead, and when she found his name above an address in a Spanish-

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sounding South American town, she had written as people write to some one quite unknown, in a spirit of adventure and with uncertain hope of a reply.

The evening passed quickly. The children came back and kept her busy, and when they were in bed she still had a good deal to do. It was midnight before she had finished, and then she fell asleep, and woke with a start next morning when a maid came in with a cup of tea sent upstairs by the cook. Amabel drank it as she was dressing.

"Why are you putting on your hat?" said Florrie, the elder of two children who slept in the room.

"Because I am going away," said Amabel.

"I know you are going away. Mamma told me last night she would not keep you any longer because you were not setting Guinevere and me a good example. But she said you were to give us our breakfast first as usual."

"I'm afraid I can't stay for that," said Amabel, putting on her veil.

"But you must if Mamma tells you to," said the child, with a good imitation of her mother's pompous manner; and as Amabel took no notice she jumped out of bed and ran downstairs to lodge a complaint.

Luckily for Amabel her trunk had been carried down by Ginger and a housemaid the night before, but she was stopped herself this morning by the apparition of Mrs. Hunter in a quilted dressing-gown and curling-pins.

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"Miss Ferrers," she said, "be good enough to go upstairs again at once and give the children their breakfast. You will leave this house when we leave for Eastbourne and not a moment before."

"I must leave at once," said Amabel, and she took another step towards the last flight of stairs; but Mrs. Hunter's portly figure barred the way.

"Come along, Miss," said a fat, good-tempered voice from below, "the cab's here."

"Cook!" said Mrs. Hunter, and she went downstairs herself, followed, of course, by Amabel. Ginger was in the hall as well as the cook.

"It's all right, mum," said the cook. "I'll be back before you're ready to give orders. I'm only going as far as Victoria to see Miss Ferrers off."

"Victoria! Didn't you tell me yesterday you had nowhere to go, you wicked, deceitful girl! — trying to excite my pity on false pretences."

"There wasn't much false pretences," said the cook, for Amabel would not condescend to speak. "Things is like weather, and take up sudden for the better sometimes. Miss Ferrers had an invitation she didn't expect last night to go and stay with an uncle in Paris at the Hôtel — What was the name of the hotel, Miss?"

"The Hôtel Ritz," said Amabel.

"A likely story," said Mrs. Hunter. "Dukes and millionaires stay at the Hôtel Ritz."

"I shouldn't mind either the one or the other in

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my family," said the cook, and she followed Amabel down the front steps.

"I'm sure you'll lose your place on my account," said Amabel regretfully, as they drove away.

"Lor' bless you, my dear, I can get twenty places a hour and pick and choose," said her champion. "Think of my made dishes and my gravies. I've rather a fancy to go and live with an earl. I read such a lot about earls in all them Family Story-tellers, but I ain't never rolled out pastry for one. I don't see why I shouldn't as good as another. After all, pastry is pastry and nothing else, whether it's for a earl or a gentleman."

"You're the only friend I'm leaving in London," said Amabel as the train moved out of the station.

"And I hope you'll soon be back with one better worth looking at," said the cook.

Amabel's fellow-pilgrims certainly seemed to think her worth looking at, and she travelled with some pleasant people, who helped her through the Douane and into a cab at Paris. As she drove through the twinkling streets to the Place Vendôme, all the hopes and doubts that had possessed her since yesterday reached their height, and when the driver stopped at the doors of the hotel and a porter came forward, Amabel hardly had breath enough to bring out her uncle's name. But the man only signed her inside the hotel, and there she had to do with a clerk, who spoke English — said that Mr. Ferrers was in, and

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invited her to wait in a room close by. She sat down and looked through the window at the courtyard, which was gay with plants and full of people sitting at little tables. Through the open door of the room she saw other people pass through the hall, in and out of the hotel, and from the square outside she heard the rumble of wheels, the tuff-tuff of automobiles, and the cries of paper boys with the latest edition of *La Patrie*. But her impressions were blurred, for her thoughts were fixed entirely on the unknown uncle, and every pulse in her body seemed to wait for his arrival. But the noise and the movement went on around her, and no one came into the room. She stared out at the courtyard, she watched the hall, the minutes passed very slowly. At last she went up to the centre table, found some English papers there, and turned over the pages of the *Times*. When she looked towards the door again, a man of middle age had come inside the room, and stood there watching her. He shut the door as she went towards him.

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III

"I AM Amabel Ferrers," she said.

"I am Michael Ferrers," said he, and then for a moment they took stock of each other. He was a grizzled, wiry-looking man, and he seemed to be in a hurry; and his eyes, though they were fixed on her, were preoccupied.

"You're very much like your father," he said; "when he was a boy he was so pretty that strangers used to stop him in the street and ask him his name. Every one took to him at once."

"Some people take a dislike to me," said Amabel, thinking of Mrs. Hunter and her family.

"I don't think I shall," said Mr. Ferrers; "I'm glad you've come. I shall have ten days or so here, unless anything goes wrong with the Eugenia, and then back I go to Mexico."

Amabel felt dreadfully disappointed. If her uncle was going to the other end of the world in a short ten days, nothing much would come of her acquaintance with him. She wondered who Eugenia was, and why Mr. Ferrers spoke of her with the definite article.

"Your letter crawled around the world after me," he continued. "I got it in Japan. I was very sorry

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to hear my brother and his wife were both dead. I always meant to look them up, but I haven't been as near England as this for twenty years, and I never write letters. You didn't tell me much in yours. Are you an only child?"

"Yes," said Amabel; "I've neither kith nor kin — except you."

"What have you been doing, then, since your parents died?"

"I was in a situation as governess till this morning."

"Bless me! didn't my brother make money?"

"Never very much, and when mother died there wasn't five pounds. I didn't tell you in my letter, because I thought you might be as poor as I was. If you are going back to Mexico, Uncle Michael, I'm afraid I ought to go straight back to London and find a new situation. The money I have won't last many days, and I don't know any one in London to help me except a cook ——"

"A cook!"

"Yes — where I was governess — she was very kind, but, of course, she is not well off and ——"

"But I am," interrupted Mr. Ferrers. "I wish I'd known about your father. It puzzles me why any one who wants money shouldn't get it. If the Eugenia behaves as I expect she will, I shall have more money than *I* want soon."

"Is she — are you — is the Eugenia my aunt?" said Amabel.

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"The Eugenia is a mine," said Mr. Ferrers seriously. "I am not married."

"I wish you were," said Amabel.

"You must find a wife for me, then," said Mr. Ferrers; "I've never had time. But you needn't think about going back to London yet. I'll order you a room and something to eat, and when you're ready come down here again and let me know. I've two people dining with me, and I must go back to them."

"Are they very smart people?" said Amabel a little later, when she had dressed and dined and found her uncle again. "I don't suppose you know what a smart woman would think of my clothes, and I've put on my Sunday frock."

"The Varasdins are Hungarians," said Mr. Ferrers, leading the way to the courtyard. "I only know them through doing business with the husband. She appears to be an agreeable woman. I never saw her till to-night. I think she's in black. They both speak English. They have suggested that we should go out somewhere — to a café, I suppose. It will be more entertaining for you than sitting still here."

Mr. Ferrers stopped near one of the little tables, and introduced Amabel to the two people waiting for him there. The husband was a tall, flabby-looking man, with shifty brown eyes and a head of hair that wanted cutting. He made Amabel an elaborate bow, and at once engaged her in conversation, but she found it difficult to attend to him because her fascinated eyes

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returned again and again to the brilliant figure of his wife. Even judged by the French standard of beauty, which differs so much from our own, Madame Varasdin was not a beautiful woman, and, judged by the English and the Greek ideals, she was positively plain. In colouring and in feature she could no more compare with Amabel than the monkey on a barrel organ can compare with the charming Italian boy who pets him. She had dark, very narrow eyes, a big mouth, a sallow skin, and stiff black hair rolled back from her face in Japanese fashion. But she had the manner and the glances of a woman who has found times without number that she is irresistible; she was as graceful as a cat, she talked with vivacity and she dressed with art. When Amabel appeared, she said a civil word or two, and then seemed to make up her mind that a girl in such a blouse and skirt was not one to reckon with. So she settled her long feather boa and entertained Mr. Ferrers and looked about her. In a little while her attention seemed to fix itself on a young man sitting at a table opposite their own, and when her party got up to go she went a little out of her way in order to pass close by him. There could be no doubt as to his nationality. He was well groomed, he was drinking a whisky and soda, he was reading *Punch* and the *Times*. As Madame Varasdin rustled past him, he looked up and at once sprang to his feet. His manner expressed ardent pleasure, but his British tongue said, "Oh, Madame Varasdin!"

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and then stopped short. He seemed to know the husband too, and shook hands with him as if he only half liked the obligation.

Madame Varasdin mentioned to the others that he was Mr. Newby, and then she sat down at his table and talked to him, and Amabel thought she had never seen any one smile so brilliantly or express so much with her hands. But Mr. Ferrers soon grew impatient.

"We ought to be going," he said to M. Varasdin; and Varasdin said to his wife in a diffident voice —

"Mr. Ferrers thinks we should go now, Anastasie."

Anastasie's eyes almost shut as she just glanced at her husband.

"Go on," she said; "I will come when I am ready. Mr. Newby will escort me, I know."

"Rather," said Mr. Newby.

Varasdin was evidently used to doing as he was bid. He found a cab outside the hotel for his companions and himself and drove with them to the Café de Paris. On the way he told Mr. Ferrers that his wife had met Mr. Newby at Aix-les-Bains last year, and that he had a large income and was very sympathetic.

Amabel was amused by the little grunt with which her uncle received this account of their new acquaintance, but after that she did not listen to what the two men were saying, because they began to talk of business, and she was bewitched by the sights and lights

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of Paris. When they were seated within the café, her uncle ordered ice for her and Bocks for M. Varasdin and himself, and they watched the midnight life of the city coming and going in fine raiment. They had been there for some time when Madame Varasdin appeared with Mr. Newby, and though the café was full of well-dressed women, all eyes followed her because she was strikingly tall and graceful and wore fine diamonds and a fine cloak. The cloak had hanging sleeves and an amazing ruffled collar and gold embroideries, and a Venetian painter would have shown you Anastasie framed and draped with it, and you would have turned like the rest of that company from Amabel, who was a beauty, to the woman who was plain.

She sat down and ordered little hot crayfish that she ate without bread or sauces and with the help of her fingers. She had lithe-looking, long hands, and they blazed with jewels, and Amabel first watched her and then turned away. The lady made her meal as her neighbours did, and yet it was unpleasant to see her delicate fingers tear the little creatures asunder. Amabel was a matter-of-fact Briton and not fanciful; yet it crossed her fancy that Madame Varasdin would have destroyed the crayfish with the same quickness and appetite if they had been alive. When she had finished, she pushed back her chair and talked to Mr. Ferrers and Mr. Newby. Her English was fluent and correct, and her foreign accent gave point to her

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stories, which were all of cosmopolitan people and in cynical demonstration of human folly. Their flavour was not sweet in the memory, but they suited the hour, because the hour was dominated by the lady who told them. For all the notice any one took of Amabel she might have been a wooden dummy; but she looked and listened and felt very well amused. It was after midnight when Madame Varasdin suddenly got up.

"Look at those women in mourning," she said audibly; "they are taking the table opposite us. We don't want to sit and stare at them. I hate anything gloomy."

"Are you busy to-morrow, Madame Varasdin?" said Mr. Ferrers.

The lady glanced at Mr. Newby, who turned red.

"Do you want me to take your niece to see the Tomb of Napoleon?" she asked.

"Something of the kind," said Mr. Ferrers. "I shall be busy till five. Could you come to lunch, and then take Amabel to the right milliners? I believe they are more important than the Tomb."

"I will come with pleasure," said Madame Varasdin. "I have one engagement to-morrow, but I can fix any time I choose for it. I will call for your niece in the morning and we will have lunch together, and at five — at five, when you are free, Mr. Ferrers, you will find us at Colombin's, the tea-house in the Rue Cambon, you know. Can I depend on you to pick us up there?"

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"Certainly!" said Mr. Ferrers. "But how about your other engagement?"

"Six o'clock will do for that," said Madame Varasdin. "We don't dine till half-past seven. Mr. Newby, will you dine with us to-morrow at half-past seven?"

"With pleasure," said Mr. Newby.

"I wish Varasdin had half the wits of his wife," said Mr. Ferrers to Amabel, as they drove home together. "I call her a very agreeable woman, don't you?"

"Ye-es," said Amabel, with the uncertain assent that points to a contrary opinion. She could not keep her eyes off Madame Varasdin, but she was not at all sure that she thought her agreeable.

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IV.

AMABEL had not seen the Tomb of Napoleon yet, but she had seen a Paris dressmaker and several Paris shops, and now she sat at one of Colombin's tea-tables, in a blouse and a hat and a ruffle that changed her in a twinkling from a moth to a butterfly. Her uncle had taken her breath away that morning by telling her, all in a hurry, while he drank his coffee and glanced at his financial papers, that he meant to provide for her, and that, as he had to be in Paris on and off till this affair of the Eugenia was settled, she might stay there for the present — in the hotel at first, and, when he ran back to Mexico, in a family or a Pension.

"You must ask Madame Varasdin about clothes," he said, with a glance at his niece's worse-for-wear guinea coat and skirt. "She appears to understand them. You can't go about with her dressed like a country cousin. I've plenty of money and nothing much to do with it, and no one belonging to me. You may just as well have a good time. I like the way you came here — straight off, on the chance. I've done things of that sort myself, and I'm on the top of the wave now. Here is some French money."

Mr. Ferrers had taken out a pocket-book and was

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extracting French bank notes from it. He put five beside her, and she saw that each one was for a thousand francs.

"Oh!" she said, and her uncle looked at her with amusement. He enjoyed her surprise and confusion, and he enjoyed using some of his money in this novel way.

"It won't last you long if you go shopping with Madame Varasdin," he said. "She looks expensive. I don't know how a fool like her husband manages to pay for those diamonds."

"Is M. Varasdin a fool?" said Amabel.

"He's a fool who's always telling you he's a clever fellow," said Mr. Ferrers. "I'd any time rather deal with a clever fellow who tells me he's a fool."

Then he got up and put away his pocket-book, and said to Amabel that he must go about his business now, but that, if nothing happened to prevent it, he would take her to the opera to-night; and Amabel got ready for Madame Varasdin, having made up her mind that the first thing she would buy should be a silk dress for the cook.

"What do you want?" said Madame Varasdin, as they sat at lunch together.

"I believe I want everything — from your point of view," said Amabel, for the lady's walking gown and hat were as elegant as her evening raiment had been. "I am sure you would say my clothes were only fit for a bonfire."

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"Clothes cost money," said Madame Varasdin, with the smile that seemed to shut her eyes. "Have you any idea of Paris prices? For a bolero and skirt I pay my tailor ——"

She paused, and her glance gauged Amabel's poor shrunken coat and skirt, and Amabel felt quite uncomfortable and in a hurry to cast it from her.

"The gown I am wearing cost twenty guineas," Madame Varasdin continued. "The little man who made it is rather clever. You might order two or three things from him to begin with."

"My uncle gave me five thousand francs this morning," said Amabel. "I thought it was a great deal and would last a long time. I should not like to spend it extravagantly."

"It won't go far if you want everything," said Madame Varasdin. "From what Hyacinth tells me of your uncle he could give you five thousand francs a week and never know he was spending money. But men are all the same. They expect a woman to spend a thousand francs and look like a thousand pounds. I told Hyacinth this morning that I wanted a new hat, and he threatened to commit suicide."

"Does he often do that?" said Amabel, puzzled by the lady's tranquil manner.

"Whenever anything annoys him," said Madame Varasdin. Then they called a cab and began the business of the day, and long before five o'clock

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Amabel had spent most of her money. She had bought the silk dress and despatched it to the cook, and she had presented Madame Varasdin with a hat that the lady tried on and put down with a sigh because it cost five guineas. Amabel hardly ventured to offer it, but Madame Varasdin made the way easy for her, and accepted it with so much grace that the girl saw that she had done the right thing. And now here they were at Colombin's drinking tea and eating little muffins, and looking at English cakes that were not quite what English cakes should be, because they were neither stale nor stodgy. The rooms were very full and cheerful, and most people were talking English and American.

"Are there no French people in Paris?" said Amabel.

"It is not easy to come across them," said Madame Varasdin. "I have lived here for a year and know none."

"Where did you live before?" said Amabel, and as the question passed her lips she knew she would have done better not to ask it.

"I have lived in every capital in Europe," said Madame Varasdin. "My husband's affairs are always taking him to fresh places."

As she replied her husband came in, accompanied by Mr. Ferrers. The two men were talking as they crossed the outer shop. They stopped inside the room to talk, and when they reached their own party they

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were still at the height of their argument, and had only a formal greeting for the ladies.

"What has happened?" said Madame Varasdin.

"That's what we want to know," said her husband.

"It's Eugenias," said Mr. Ferrers, "and I believe it's Mexican Jem."

He looked cool and angry, and M. Varasdin looked uncomfortable. Amabel began to understand that the money she had been spending so easily was not always made with ease of mind.

"Something must have gone wrong over there," said M. Varasdin.

"I don't believe it," said Mr. Ferrers. "Mexican Jem is banging the market; that's all."

"But Eugenias are on offer all over the place," said M. Varasdin, in an explanatory way to his wife. "They're as flat as ditchwater. It's easy enough to say it's banging ——"

"Can't you find out what has happened?" said Madame Varasdin.

"No, we can't," said Mr. Ferrers. "The mine is fifty miles from anywhere. Of course we have wired to the new manager, but we have had no answer."

"Who is Mexican Jem?" said Amabel.

"A man who was buying all the Eugenias he could get a week or two ago," said her uncle.

"But he's off them now, and I wish I was," said M. Varasdin. "It's too much of a gamble."

"Have you any?" said his wife.

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"I'm sorry to say I have a thousand in my pocket."

He opened a letter case, and took from it the certificate of the shares. It lay open on the table for any one to see, and Amabel looked at the wording curiously.

"Well, I've made up my mind," said Mr. Ferrers; "I'm going straight over there. In case anything has gone wrong, I'd rather be on the spot. But I shall leave orders that if Mexican Jem offers a line tomorrow they are taken for me."

"What we want is to get Wolfenstein interested in them," said M. Varasdin. "He would strengthen our faction."

"Wolfenstein's hands are not clean," said Mr. Ferrers.

Varasdin shrugged his shoulders.

"Business is business," said he; "Wolfenstein is a very clever man. He made a quarter of a million last year, and this year he's doing better still; and you should see the names of the people who go to his wife's parties. They don't seem to mind about his hands."

"I'm rather nice about my name," said Mr. Ferrers. "I've never been mixed up with a shady lot yet."

"If you talk like that to my husband he will think you are not a good man of business," said Mme. Varasdin.

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"Well, I'm going to score off Mexican Jem," said Mr. Ferrers.

"Or he'll score off us," said M. Varasdin, looking dolefully at the Eugenia shares.

Amabel thought her uncle's glance took the other man's measure and found him wanting.

"I'll let you out if you like," said Mr. Ferrers; "I'll take back your little lot."

"Done," said Varasdin eagerly.

"Perhaps you are throwing away a good thing," said Mme. Varasdin rather anxiously. Mr. Ferrers had taken out his cheque-book, and was filling in a cheque.

"I'll give you your thousand pounds," he said, with an air of conviction that was impressive. "You couldn't get the price in London or here this afternoon. But I believe in Eugenias."

"I can't afford a gamble," said Varasdin sulkily. "My expenses are too heavy."

Mr. Ferrers tore off the cheque and presented it to M. Varasdin. For a few minutes there was a lull at that particular tea-table, and Amabel wondered what was going to happen. She saw that her uncle's thoughts were far away from the Parisian tea-house. He consulted first a calendar and then a railway time-table, and then he looked at his watch.

"I can just do it," he said. "But I must be at the Nord in half-an-hour."

As if each minute had grown precious, he pushed back his chair and got up, but his eyes fell on Amabel,

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and he sat down again. She looked at him expectantly.

"I can't take you to the opera till I come back," he said; "I must go to Mexico at once and find out what has happened. I'll leave you all the French money I have, and I'll pay up at the hotel, and I'll send you a cheque. You mustn't stay on at the Ritz by yourself. Mme. Varasdin, can you tell my niece of a comfortable pension? If not, she had better go straight to England."

"When shall you be back, Uncle Michael?" said Amabel, and she looked at him rather wistfully.

"It is sure to be weeks, it might be months," said Mr. Ferrers. "I may find the new manager is making a mess of things. You must send me your address, of course. I'll wire you mine. You'll be all right, you know. So shall I — at least I hope I shall — Anyhow — if I'm not all right — give me that certificate, Varasdin — I believe you will be with this — but take care of it, my dear — they're bearer shares."

"What is it?" said Amabel, taking the paper from her uncle.

"It's a thousand Eugenias," said Mr. Ferrers.

"Mademoiselle enters the affair in the pleasantest way," said M. Varasdin. "She takes no risk, and the chance of a big profit. Even to-day, when things look so black, that little bit of paper could be sold for eight or nine hundred pounds, Mademoiselle."

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"But I have just seen you sell it for a thousand," Amabel reminded him.

"The prices of such things go up and down," her uncle explained to her. "These shares may be worth a good many thousands soon. Keep them tight till I wire to you to sell, and remember that they are unregistered and can be stolen as easily as a bank-note."

"But how shall I sell them?" said Amabel.

"Go to a respectable stockbroker," said Mr. Ferrers.

"I don't know one," said Amabel.

"You know me," said M. Varasdin. "I shall be happy to give you any assistance in my power while your uncle is away."

"Are you a stockbroker?" said Amabel.

"I am not exactly on the Bourse," said M. Varasdin, taking a fine attitude. "I keep outside and have more scope. I am what you call a financier."

"Oh!" said Amabel uncomprehendingly; and she took the certificate of the shares back from Madame Varasdin, who had been studying it intently. "I suppose I'm worth robbing," she said to her uncle, as she put the certificate and the French money into her purse.

"You will be in six weeks' time, I hope," said he; and then he got up, and his glance lingered a little on her pretty face, and he could see that she was more concerned about his going away than about the money he had given her.

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"Come back soon, Uncle Michael," she said, as she stood at the door with him for a moment.

"Suppose I didn't — you'd be all right, you know, my dear. If I live I'll send you money; and if I don't, you're my legal heir. I'll write to my solicitors and tell them about you before I leave New York. Take care of your Eugenias, and don't trust that Varasdin too much. I heard things I don't like about him to-day. I'm glad to have done with him as far as business goes. I dare say he'll do in private life."

"What do you think of Madame Varasdin?" said Amabel rather anxiously.

"I think she's a clever woman," said Mr. Ferrers, signing to a cab-driver. "She will tell you how to dress and where to live, and that is all you want of her. I could see she was furious because her husband wouldn't keep his Eugenias. She has the wit to believe in me. I'm not going to take you with me now because I must race the clock, and you'd be in my way. You talk to Madame Varasdin about a boarding-house, and settle in somewhere to-night. I shall be back before you've time to turn around. Good-bye."

Mr. Ferrers kissed his niece and took off his hat to the Varasdins, who were approaching the door. He showed the cab-driver a twenty-franc piece, and told him what he must do to get it, and so in a twinkling he clattered out of the narrow side-street into the Rue de Rivoli. Amabel watched the cab, and then walked

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slowly towards the Boulevards with the Varasdins. She felt forlorn.

"What are you going to do now, Mademoiselle?" said M. Varasdin.

"My uncle told me to make inquiries about a pension," said Amabel. "Do you know of one?"

"How would you like to come and stay with us?" said Mme. Varasdin.

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V

"WITH you?" repeated Amabel, a good deal surprised and puzzled. The proposal was made in such a business-like tone that she guessed a business-like idea must be at the back of it; and she looked at Mme. Varasdin's hat and gown and jewels, and wondered.

"We have a flat in the best part of Paris," continued Mme. Varasdin. "From our balcony you can see Mont Valérien if you look one way, and the Arc de Triomphe if you look the other. We are close to the Bois."

"But surely I should be in your way?" said Amabel.

"No," said Mme. Varasdin. "We have often had some one with us for a time. When my old friend, Baron Rosenmeyer, went on a financial mission to Turkey, he confided his only daughter to my care. He paid me — what is it in your English money? — seven guineas a week."

Twenty-four hours ago Amabel would have known that Mme. Varasdin asked too much; but the day's work had left her ideas about money quite topsy-turvy. In a city where people paid five guineas for a straw hat trimmed with a couple of quills, and thirty guineas for a cashmere gown, a guinea a day

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for board and lodging sounded almost moderate. She had a pocketful of money, her uncle had promised her a cheque, and she had the thousand Eugenias.

"If you are quite sure I shall not be in your way —" she began again, embarrassed by the difficulty of rejecting the idea and uncertain whether she fancied it.

"Come and try," said Mme. Varasdin. "If you don't like us, you can any day go to a pension; but I think you will like us. I am sure your uncle would be glad to hear you were with me, and not with strangers."

So the matter was settled, and Amabel went back to the hotel and collected her things, and at seven o'clock she was driving out to Mme. Varasdin's flat in the Avenue Ernani. It was still light, and as she drove across the Place de la Concorde and up the Champs Elysées, she felt glad that she was to stay in this beautiful, happy-looking city, where she would see the golden side of life, she who had seen the drab side ever since she could remember. She was adrift here, but she would have been adrift in London too, for she had no friends there. The few friends left to her lived in a grimy little Lancashire town, where her parents had lived and struggled with debt, and died. She loved her own country, but her memories of it, though they were tender, were sad. Her drive through Paris on this brilliant evening was like a dancing tune that sets your spirits dancing to its own measure.

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Mme. Varasdin received her, and took her into a small drawing-room that communicated with a larger one by means of glass doors. It had a parqueted floor, the inevitable mirror over the mantelpiece, a walnut centre table, and some damaged-looking red satin chairs.

"This is the room I shall give you," said Mme. Varasdin. "The bedstead will be brought down from the attic after dinner; and there is a washstand too, the very one I bought for Amalie von Rosenmeyer. You see your window opens on to the balcony, so you will have a fine view."

Amabel thought she would rather have had a wardrobe and a chest of drawers. An anteroom with a table and chairs did not come up to her British ideas of comfort and privacy so well as a Bloomsbury attic where you can lock your one door and put away your clothes. The doors leading into the salon were curtained, but she could find neither key nor bolt to them; and through her window she could see the boots of some one sitting on the balcony.

"Mr. Newby is here," said Mme. Varasdin. "He will dine with us. It is not necessary to dress for dinner. If you take off your hat you will be ready."

Amabel thought that, under the circumstances, a more prolonged toilet would have been difficult to manage; so she took off her hat and then followed her hostess on to the balcony. The boots, she found, belonged to Mr. Newby, who rose to greet her. He

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looked younger than ever, and when he saw his hostess's tea-gown he stuck his monocle into his eye and said —

"I say, Madame Varasdin! what a rippin' dress and what rippin' flowers! Did you have the flowers made for you? I never saw any like 'em!"

For Mme. Varasdin's toilet had not been accomplished by taking off a hat. She wore a loose greenish-blue gown that hung as Amabel had never seen a gown hang before, and chains of uncut turquoises and great jewelled clasps and flowers with all the blues and greens of heaven blended in their petals.

"They are ixias," said Anastasie, and then M. Varasdin appeared and they went in to dinner.

It was a very good dinner, but Amabel did not know whether the talk that went on was good or bad, because she could not follow it. She was never quite sure whether people or speculations or both together were being discussed, and she felt rather pleased when Mr. Varasdin coupled together two names she had heard before, and told Mr. Newby that Mexican Jem had cleared out of Eugenias, and that instead of rising like rockets they were dropping like sticks.

"I suppose even Mexican Jem may make a mistake," said Mr. Newby.

"Well, I've left them alone," said M. Varasdin. "I'm afraid of a gamble, and I don't mind who knows it."

"What will happen to my Eugenias if they drop

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like sticks?" said Amabel. It was the first time she had entered into the conversation.

"Your Eugenias?" said Mr. Newby.

"My uncle gave me a thousand," said Amabel, and she opened the bag hanging at her side and passed the certificate across the table to Mr. Newby. He glanced at it and was going to pass it back, when Mme. Varasdin took it from him.

"Sell them to me to-night for five hundred pounds," she said; "I love a gamble."

"Don't do it," said Varasdin, addressing his wife with such sudden and violent excitement that his two guests felt quite alarmed. "Don't do it. Mexican Jem has got even. So have I, and we know what we are about. Mr. Ferrers has given mademoiselle a bagatelle. In a fortnight they may not be worth five pounds. Besides, where will you get five hundred pounds? Do you think I will give five hundred pounds for such wickedness? Do you think I have them to give? Will you pay for your own gambles, then, madame? You always think you know best and that I am a fool, but I, Hyacinth Louis Varasdin, tell you there is nothing in Eugenias, nothing at all."

He brought his hand down on the table with such a bang that his wine glasses tottered, and the maid-servant nearly dropped the dish in her hands. Anastasie only blinked at her husband.

"I don't agree with you, Varasdin," said Mr. Newby, in his queer, high, young voice. "I believe

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they'll come out right in the end. If any one had chucked a thousand at me I should stick to 'em."

"I must stick to them," said Amabel, restoring the certificate to her purse. "My uncle told me not to sell them till he wired."

"You must take care of your purse, then," said Mr. Newby. "Any one who stole it could sell them. They're bearer shares."

"What disagreeable ideas you have," said Mme. Varasdin, getting up from table.

But Mr. Newby's manner had put Amabel uncomfortably on her guard, and for at least a week she slept with her purse under her pillow. She did not know what degree of distrust her fellow-countryman meant to instil, or which member of the household inspired it, but she thought it could not be Mme. Varasdin. Mr. Newby's case with regard to her was plain, and what puzzled Amabel was M. Varasdin's alternate blindness and fidgety interference. He fawned on the young man in his presence, and called him a "beefsteak" when his back was turned, and Amabel found that by a beefsteak her host meant some one rude and loutish and dull of mind. She wondered whether Mme. Varasdin called her names the moment she was out of hearing. Her respect for the husband and wife did not grow with her sojourn in their house, but they laid themselves out to please her, and she was neither uncomfortable nor unhappy as a rule. She soon discovered that they had dreadful and

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frequent scenes with each other, and at first, after hearing their voices raised in shrill vituperation, she used to feel ashamed to look them in the face. But they were so unashamed themselves that she began to take these storms for granted, as you take thunder for granted when you travel to a hotter climate. They were invariably about money, although Mr. Newby's name somehow got mixed up with them every time.

Of course Amabel's life had given her no social experience, but even she perceived that the Varasdins were not in good position. They seemed to know no French people at all, but only a cosmopolitan rabble of artists and business men. The artists were obscure and impecunious, and the business men came from heaven knows where, and made their money heaven knows how. They would squander money one day and borrow the next, and as lief get the best of a bargain with a friend as with an enemy. Their womenkind were not always as doubtful and unpleasing as they were themselves. The matrons were often absorbed in domestic affairs and greatly tried by the ups and downs of life. There was one very fat lady who told Amabel that she never knew whether her husband would come back from business with a diamond necklace for her, or with a revolver that he proposed to hold first to her head and then to his own. She had been through every extreme of fortune with him, and had nearly starved while he was well fed in an Austrian prison. She was rather proud

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of the prison episode, and said that Mathias had been the victim of a brother's guile. But when Amabel saw Mathias she thought a man with those eyes could not be without guile himself. He was a good-natured person, devoted to his fat wife and his grown-up daughters, and inclined to make a pet of Amabel. Just at present he was living in great magnificence on the Champs Elysées, and the eldest daughter was about to marry a Berlin stockbroker. The Varasdins, with Amabel, were invited to the wedding and to a reception at the house the night before.

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VI

The Varasdins were sitting on the balcony with Mr. Newby and Amabel. Below them the long double line of young chestnuts stretched to right and left as far as the eye could follow, the tall white houses rose high above the trees, and the street lights flashed amongst their branches. The busy traffic of the city sounded far away, and the people strolling along the pavement beneath were not present in any disturbing degree to the people on the balcony. At the windows of the opposite houses there was no sign of the inhabitants, except the lace curtains with which they shut themselves in. The stars were coming out in a clear sky, and from the hills beyond the Bois a pleasant breeze swept through the avenue towards Paris.

"It is my birthday to-morrow," Mme. Varasdin was saying. "What will you give me, Hyancinth?"

"Everything I have is yours already," said Hyacinth.

"But you haven't much," said Anastasie. "I want a string of real pearls."

"I will give you the pearls and mademoiselle the Koh-i-noor on the same day. I can get one as easily as the other."

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"Pearls are beastly expensive things," said Mr. Newby. "Don't see much good in them either."

"You haven't seen the gown I am going to wear at the Gregorios'," said Mme. Varasdin; "pearls would be the making of it."

"How much is the gown going to cost?" inquired M. Varasdin.

"You will see when the bill comes in," said Anastasie blandly.

"Paris is a very costly place," said Amabel. "I've spent all the money Uncle Michael left me and about half the cheque he sent. I can't think what poor people do here. How do they exist, Mme. Varasdin?"

"I take no interest in them. It is so easy to make money that people who are poor are stupid. I prefer to contemplate people like the Gregorios. They understand the art of life."

"You mean they understand the art of swindling," said Mr. Newby.

Amabel looked up rather startled and expecting Mme. Varasdin to take offense, but she only laughed.

"You like a man who sits in a prison one year and buys a palace the next," said M. Varasdin.

"I like a man who can get into a palace after a prison," said his wife. "You want brains and energy to do that."

Something in her tone and glance made her husband wince and then bluster.

"Gregorio is a rogue," he shouted; "Gregorio made

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all his money out of that Coal Syndicate, and it was one of the biggest frauds. He has ruined thousands."

"And we're all going to dance at his daughter's wedding to-morrow," piped Mr. Newby. "I suppose he'll have good champagne."

"I taught him how to play ping-pong the other day," said Amabel. "He didn't like picking up the balls; he is so fat. He is always very kind, and when Jeanne Gregorio spilt her wine on the governess's dress I saw him give her a hundred-franc note for a new one. Mrs. Hunter was highly respectable, and I never had enough to eat in her house, and she nagged from morning till night. It seems that swindlers are agreeable people to live with."

"Quite," said Mr. Newby, "as long as you drink their champagne and pocket their bank notes and don't trust them with a penny. If that governess saved all her life for her old age, and put her savings into his hands, he'd foist some of his rotten stuff on her without a pang, and to-morrow she'd be in the workhouse, and he'd be giving a party, and you and I would be drinking his champagne. That's how it's done, Miss Ferrers. Be Gregorio, or be you or me, but don't be some poor devil who starves and scrapes and ends in the gutter after all."

"People are not forced to speculate; they are so greedy," said M. Varasdin.

"Oh! of course, the lamb should keep away from the wolf," said Mr. Newby.

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"After all, the *raison d'être* of a lamb is to be eaten," said Mme. Varasdin. "You like it yourself for dinner."

Later on in the evening, when Mr. Newby had departed, the husband and wife still sat together on the balcony. It was a most unusual thing for them to do.

"I've the devil's luck lately," began the man.

"That's nothing new," said the lady.

"There must be a smash soon."

"That's why I made a bid for the pearls."

"What will they be worth if you get them? I want thousands. The moment I touch anything it comes to grief. The moment I take my hands off it prospers. I tell you I've the devil's luck."

"I'm sure I had when I married you," said Anastasie.

"It's your extravagance that brings us to ruin," said Hyacinth.

"I want money and I mean to have it," said his wife. "I'd rather be dead than poor. People who can't make money out of a world full of imbeciles deserve all the kicks they get. It is the one thing worth doing, and if I were a man I would do it or go out. What is the use of health or beauty or brains except as a means to money? Life without it is a martyrdom that lasts as long as life itself. I, at any rate, care for nothing else, desire nothing else. If I were a man I would have striven for it with so single a mind, with such a fierce determination, that I tell you

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I would have got it. No obstacles should have hindered me; I would have thrust them aside. No difficulties should have baffled me; I would have mastered them. How can a man be so indolent, so dull, so poor in spirit? You have no money? Go out into the market-place and make some, fool. You play the poorest part of all — you wolf — who never brings home his lamb."

"Oh! you have a tongue," said M. Varasdin; "I never denied that."

Then he go out a pencil and a pocket-book, and did little sums, and he got more and more excited and unhappy, and at last he dashed them both to the ground and said he could not stand this state of things any longer, and that unless Anastasie came to his assistance he would go straight downstairs and throw himself into the Seine.

"What do you expect me to do?" said Anastasie.

"Get hold of money — somehow — anyhow."

"If you would be obliging enough to throw yourself into the Seine, I might marry Mr. Newby. The stupid young man is rich."

"I'm not going to drown myself to please you," said M. Varasdin.

"I am convinced you will not drown yourself. It would take a little courage and perhaps be unpleasant."

"Some day I shall kill you," snarled the man.

Mme. Varasdin got up.

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"I have often thought one of us would be better out of the way," she said.

But next day a basket of roses arrived for her, and amongst the roses there was a jeweller's case, and in the case there was a string of pearls and Mr. Newby's card. She held them up triumphantly.

"You may give me another string whenever you like," she said to Hyacinth.

"Mr. Newby is very gallant," he observed, and Amabel, who was present, looked in vain for any trace of embarrassment in his manner or in his wife's. They were well satisfied. At night, when she went to the Gregorios', Mme. Varasdin wore the pearls round her neck, and the eyes of every woman in the room followed her with longing. The type of woman gathered there would rather have pearls than love or honour or renown.

"If you have the wits of a sparrow you'll make money out of this," she said to her husband. "Every one will think you've given them to me. Pearls mean money, and money means credit."

"No one will think I have given them to you," growled M. Varasdin. "Haven't you come here with that English booby at your heels?"

"But, my dear, you are dull beyond understanding. Isn't Miss Ferrers at my heels, too, and isn't she the prettiest girl in the room?"

"I may be dull," said M. Varasdin; "but I'm sharp enough to see the fellow can't keep his eyes off

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you. He's too raw and silly to care about a beautiful girl."

With this back-hander the exasperated gentleman sheered off, and the moment he did so Mr. Newby deserted Amabel for the lady of riper years and more subtle charm. He sat down beside Mme. Varasdin, and looked through his single eyeglass at the splendid rooms and at the people moving about in them, and when they were unusually odd he asked her to explain them. Sometimes he made a remark that surprised her by its shrewdness, but she found his conversation on the whole extremely dull.

Like most continentals, she failed entirely to understand a man of Mr. Newby's type, a type so common at home that every playing-field is full of it, and every battle is fought by it, and every ship manned by it. He was one of the swarm of clean-shaven, clean-minded English boys, with brains that never dazzle and never collapse, and a character that will neither tell lies nor forgive them. Even his civilisation was of a kind she could not discover or appreciate. She saw that he was awkward and tongue-tied, and she did not understand why he called Egon Rosenmeyer a bounder. She thought Egon Rosenmeyer charming. He had curly hair and an impudent tongue, his anecdotes had to be whispered, he was a facile musician, and as for his *bonnes fortunes*, they were like the waves of the sea, countless and overlapping. He was always ready to tell her about them, too, and

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she wished he would sit beside her instead of Mr. Newby.

"There's that little beast of a Rosenmeyer getting introduced to Miss Ferrers," said Mr. Newby. "How sick she'll be."

"Go, and rescue her, then, and send Egon to me. I like him."

"How can any one like him?"

"What's wrong with him?" asked Mme. Varasdin.

But to explain that was, of course, beyond Mr. Newby's powers.

"A man should have some muscle," he said.

Mme. Varasdin's eyes fixed themselves on Mr. Newby's large, sunburnt hand. He had taken one glove off and wore the other.

"He should if he wants to be a railway porter and shoulder trunks, or a drayman and roll about barrels of beer," she said. "I don't know what use muscles are to you and M. Rosenmeyer, or what ornament. It is a superstition Europe does not share with you. Nowadays, even a war is waged with brains — a successful war, that is; you will find it out some day when you are face to face with a civilised people."

"H—m," said Mr. Newby. He did not get up because he saw that Amabel was coming towards them with her new cavalier in tow. Her face and figure and air were all English; her clothes and her coiffure were all French; and so she was, as Mme. Varasdin had said, the prettiest girl in the room.

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"What do you think M. Rosenmeyer has just told me?" she said. "Mexican Jem is coming here to-night."

"How have the Gregorios managed that?" said Mme. Varasdin.

"I'm surprised myself," said M. Rosenmeyer. "Old Gregorio told me the moment I arrived. He keeps running to the stairs and watching for him. If he was expecting a royal duke he could not be in a greater fuss."

"If a royal duke came here it would be to borrow money," said Mme. Varasdin. "If Mexican Jem only looks your way you make it. He is a more important guest to old Gregorio than any duke could be."

"But who is Mexican Jem?" asked Amabel.

"A financial power," said M. Rosenmeyer.

"But if he is English, how is it these foreigners know him?"

"The whole world knows him since he brought out the great El Paso Mine," said Mr. Newby.

"Is he very rich?" asked Mme. Varasdin.

"If I had a year of his income I'd never do a day's work again," said M. Rosenmeyer.

"He's an awfully decent chap, too," said Mr. Newby. "As straight as they make 'em."

"Oh! do you believe that of anybody?" said M. Rosenmeyer, who understood the English idiom. "I myself am strictly honourable, but I never expect to find other people so."

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"H—m," said Mr. Newby again, and M. Rosenmeyer had no notion that the inarticulate English lad had taken his measure.

"I think Mexican Jem must have come," said Amabel. "There's a buzz near that further door."

"I see him," said Mr. Newby. "He has just come into the room with Mme. Gregorio."

"They crowd round him so," complained Mme. Varasdin, "any one would think he was going to throw them shares to scramble for."

She got up and went towards the centre of the room, followed by Amabel and the two young men. They made a little separate group as the host and hostess, accompanied by a tall, distinguished-looking man, steered their way. Amabel's eyes were uncertain and astonished, and she turned to Mr. Newby.

"Do you mean that tall, fair man?" she said. "He has just been stopped by some one."

"That's him," said Mr. Newby.

"That Mexican Jem!" cried Amabel, and her voice carried a little further than it should have done. The gentleman looked straight at her and smiled.

"Why, he knows you," said Mme. Varasdin. "He is coming to us. You must present him to me."

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VII

"Of course he knows me," said Amabel. "It is Mr. Sheringham. I never heard him called Mexican Jem.'

"Then you didn't keep company with the Stock Exchange," said Mr. Newby, and the next moment he and Amabel were shaking hands with the guest of the evening. Madame Varasdin edged herself a little in front of Amabel as soon as she could, and set herself to capture Mr. Sheringham. She could not distinguish between simple and simpleton, and she expected to play with the three people born under the Union Jack as a juggler plays with balls, throwing one away to catch the other and yet keeping them all in hand. Large as her experience was of men, she had never come across one yet whose directness was the very weapon with which he turned her subtleties, and whose strength against her lay partly in his want of taste for the exotic. The impression she made on Mr. Sheringham was of a tall, thin woman, who had eyes like a Jap and such a fidgety way with her hands that she pulled at her handkerchief while she talked to him. Her gold-embroidered gown was no doubt very fine, but it was a gown that persistently got in front of Amabel, and the first moment he could he walked round it.

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"Come and have an ice, Miss Ferrers," he said, and gave Amabel his arm and walked off with her.

"That's Mexican Jem," said Mr. Newby. "What he wants he takes, and you can no more stop him than a pebble can stop a steam roller."

"Do fetch me an ice," said Mme. Varasdin. But when the young man came back with it he could not find her. He stood about for a time and felt rather bored and then he went away. He knew when he bought the pearls that he was playing the fool, and to-night he knew it with still greater conviction. The lady did not care a straw for him, and all her lures were spread for his money. He thought the game would soon come to an end. It had been amusing, costly, and instructive, and he was beginning to tire of it. He detested the husband, and his admiration of the wife was not the admiration of esteem; it was not even the tolerant, half-contemptuous admiration men feel for a sinner who is her own enemy and no one else's. The boy had been fascinated and was coming to his senses.

Meanwhile Madame Varasdin sat in a corner of the balcony with Egon Rosenmeyer and told him how badly Mr. Newby bored her. The balcony was furnished with palms and wicker chairs, and lighted with Chinese lanterns that were bobbing in the breeze; and Madame Varasdin herself, with her narrow eyes and clinging gown, looked like one of the ivory-headed ladies on the fan she had just unfurled.

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"He is as dull and heavy as his national food," she said, "and the girl is as excellent and insipid. Between the two I am having a time. Oh! I assure you it is not gay at home now. What a race! And it is always they who have the money."

"If you want money you should make eyes at the other one," said M. Rosenmeyer. "What became of him?"

"He walked away with mademoiselle," said Mme. Varasdin. "But they are astounding, these ladies and gentlemen. Their tongues are spiritless, their manners are rude, their flirtations are scandalous. Yet to all the world they give themselves airs."

"Let us talk of something agreeable," said M. Rosenmeyer. "Have you heard Yvette's last song?"

Sheringham had taken Amabel to the further end of the balcony which ran along two sides of the corner house in which the Gregorios lived. He fetched her an ice and some champagne, and then he sat down and looked at her.

"What has happened to you?" he said. "Do you remember the last time we met — in Mrs. Hunter's drawing-room — you said you were going to Eastbourne next day — and I said I would run down there too. I never did. I was detained by business."

"I know," said Amabel sedately. "You were banging the market."

"What?" said Sheringham.

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Amabel took the train of her white satin gown out of danger.

"You nearly upset that champagne," she said.

"No wonder. What do you know about markets?"

"Nothing at all. But when my uncle went off in a hurry to Mexico ——"

"Your uncle?"

"Uncle Michael."

"Michael Ferrers! 'Eugenia' Ferrers! Is he your uncle? Then that explains the cook."

"The cook! Oh! do you mean Mrs. Pugsley?"

"I dare say I do," said Sheringham. "I made her acquaintance last Sunday. I wanted to see you again, and, as it was the only way open to me, I dropped in to lunch at Bayswater Square. I expected to meet you at lunch, of course; but when we went down, there sat all those pasty-faced children and a pasty-faced old dragon with them."

"Mrs. Hunter sent me out of the house," said Amabel.

"So I was given to understand, when I made inquiries after lunch."

"Did she say I was horrid?"

"What she said is of no importance. At the time it made me rather angry, and I suppose I showed it ——"

"Oh!" said Amabel, with breathless interest. "Did she shrivel up?"

"Not perceptibly. Our parting was what you may

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call strained. She pretended not to know where you were."

"Did you ask her?"

"Of course I did."

"That would have made her angry."

"Yes," said Mr. Sheringham pensively, "there were some feathers flying. The sort of feathers that do fly in drawing-rooms, you know. I hate a row with a woman."

"Oh! did you have a row?" said Amabel. "Do tell me what happened."

"Nothing happened. I said it was downright wicked to send a girl like you adrift in London for no reason whatever, and that seemed to annoy her. I walked out of the house in a rage, and then that red-headed Buttons came tearing after me ——"

"Oh! Ginger," said Amabel. "I like Ginger."

"So do I," said Mr. Sheringham. "He stopped me and said, 'Would I please wait a minute and speak to the cook?' I was just asking him what the — what the message signified, when the cook herself appeared."

"She's an old dear," said Amabel. "I love her more than some fine ladies."

"I love her too," said Mr. Sheringham. "We went inside the Square garden, and sat down on a bench, and she said she hoped she wasn't taking a liberty, but she thought I might like to know as Miss Ferrers was gone to live in Paris with an uncle as was a mil-

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lionaire. We were more than half-an-hour together, and had a most interesting conversation. She told me ever so many things I wanted to know."

"What sort of things?"

"Oh! little things — about you — and your career as a governess to five pasty-faced children — and why she took to you from the first moment she ever set eyes on you — and how the cloak she was wearing came from you — and that you were living with some people called Varasdin, in the Avenue Ernani — and then we said good-bye — she sent you her respects — and some day when I get married, she is coming to be my cook."

"But I don't agree to that," cried Amabel. "She is coming to live with Uncle Michael and me — when we settle down together."

"So yesterday I came to Paris and stumbled against old Gregorio first thing. I asked him if he knew the Varasdins and you — and he asked me here to meet you. That's my story. Now, what do you mean with your talk about banging markets?"

"Uncle Michael said it must be you — when he went off in a hurry — because Eugenias went down."

"It wasn't me. Of course, they went down. The reef is pinched out. They're no good. Your uncle must have lost a big slice of his million over them, I'm afraid."

"I'm sorry they're no good," said Amabel, who did not feel much affected by the news of her uncle's mis-

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fortunes. The journey through life of a speculator presented itself to her mind like a switchback with violent ups and downs that the traveller took as a matter of course.

"I'm uncommonly sorry too," said Mr. Sheringham.

"I have a thousand," explained Amabel. "What does 'pinched out' mean?"

"No gold. I got the news through a private source the day after I saw you, and wired from Havre to sell. But Mr. Ferrers must have had the news soon after me."

"My uncle will be sorry," said Amabel. "He seemed to take such an interest in Eugenias."

"They've been very interesting lately," said Sheringham. "I've dropped about a hundred thousand on them myself."

"Then M. Varasdin was right," said Amabel. "He was afraid of them."

"What sort of people are the Varasdins?"

"He is a financier, whatever that may mean," said Amabel.

"I know pretty well what it means in his case. M. Gregorio gave me a confidential sketch of his friend's career. It has been chequered and sometimes cloudy. I was thinking of the husband and wife together and of their relation to you. How did your uncle come to place you with them?"

Amabel explained, and said that she was not uncomfortable.

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"The lady wears very fine pearls," said Sheringham.

"Oh! Mr. Newby gave her those," said Amabel.

Mr. Sheringham looked thoughtful.

"I want to come and see you," he said. "Are you having much fun? Do these people show you Paris?"

"We go to theatres and cafés. We never do the things I am dying to do."

"What are you dying to do?"

"I want to go to St. Germain in a steam tram and gather lilies of the valley and Solomon's Seal in the forest. Jeanne Gregorio went with her governess the other day. She says it was like a journey in a dream. You fly along the road opposite people you have never seen, past villages and a winding river, and trees and fields. There are lovely colours and effects of light and water, she says, and then you arrive at a palace and a forest and the forest is full of flowers. Jeanne Gregorio enjoys her life very much. Yesterday she went up the Seine in a penny boat as far as the Jardin des Plantes. She says she had never known before how beautiful Paris was."

"We might do that any day," said Mr. Sheringham, and he suggested that they should find Madame Varasdin and make a plan for to-morrow. So they got up and walked along the balcony and came upon the lady still sitting with M. Rosenmeyer. She accepted Mr. Sheringham's invitation to lunch, and managed with considerable skill to engage his atten-

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tion and to exclude the others. Egon Rosenmeyer understood at once that he was ousted, and went back to the salon. Amabel soon began to think she had better go back too. She felt in the way. She sat behind Madame Varasdin and could only see Mr. Sheringham over the lady's shoulder and fan, and she could not join in their talk because it was in French and all about a new farce she had not seen. Besides, Madame Varasdin did not give her a chance. Presently the strains of Jeanne Gregorio's violin floated towards her from inside the house and she got up. But as she reached the window she came into collision with M. Varasdin, who rushed on to the balcony with a newspaper in his hand.

"Look! Look!" he cried excitedly to his wife. "My luck! my usual luck! or is it a lie? or was the bad news a lie? Is the whole thing a swindle, or am I a fool?"

"Since you ask me — you are probably a fool," said Mme. Varasdin, taking the paper from her husband's trembling hand and trying to read it by the light of the nearest lantern. M. Varasdin turned to Amabel.

"It is you who are lucky if it is true," he shrieked, and the idea seemed to give him more pain than pleasure.

"What has happened?" said Amabel.

"You hold Eugenias, don't you — a thousand Eugenias? A new reef has been struck — it is a big

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strike — they'll go up — the devil knows where they'll go — I should have made my fortune ——"

He stopped because his anger and excitement were literally choking him. He tumbled into a chair, breathing hard, still muttering to himself, demoralised and helpless. The paper fluttered from Madame Varasdin's hands. She was hard hit too. Mr. Sheringham picked it up.

"May I see?" he said.

"Does it affect you?" said Amabel, watching him.

"I am in the same boat as this gentleman," he said, with a glance at M. Varasdin's huddled figure. "I had my chance and lost it. I sold when there was a slump."

"Oh! but there is an important difference between you and this gentleman," said Mme. Varasdin bitterly. "In your affairs the matter is probably a trifle."

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VIII

AMABEL did not like M. Varasdin, because he had a florid manner and a deceitful tongue, yet she sometimes pitied him. He cringed before his bland, masterful wife, and, in spite of his smiles and his flattering speeches, he had the look of a miserable man. Mme. Varasdin had hardly spoken to him as they drove home from the Gregorios', and her tone when she did was so slighting that Amabel marvelled at his endurance. She left them as soon as she could and went to bed, wishing she was not so lonely. Her mind was busy, her thoughts were dancing; when she looked at the glass her face astonished her. It had changed as a hill does when the sunlight suddenly falls there, and she felt so happy and so wide awake that she walked to and fro in her room and talked to the dream-sister she had wished for in many a sad hour and missed now when sorrow and poverty were left behind. The imaginary sister had always been a person of sense, however; had often kept up her courage; had sometimes convinced her that she was a fool, and to-night advised her to go to bed and to sleep as swiftly as she could. "Joy cometh in the morning," said the sister; and Amabel laughed as she shut her eyes.

Meanwhile the Varasdins had gone into the dining-

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room and turned on the light. The man brought a bottle of syrup and a syphon of soda-water from the sideboard, and mixed a glass for his wife. He lit a cigarette for himself, and filled a liqueur glass with brandy. He did not sit down, but moved about the room in a sort of sulky silence, both defiant and afraid.

"If it was possible for you to speak without lying, I should like to know how much money you *have* got," began Anastasie, when she, too, had brooded in angry quiet over the grievance in her mind.

"I tell you I am ruined," said her husband. "Perhaps you will believe it when you see the chairs and tables sold."

He waited a moment to watch the effect of this admission, before he added: "and your jewels, my dear, they will be sold too."

But he might as well have watched a mask as his wife's face when she did not wish it to tell him anything. The contempt and anger she took no pains to hide gave him no fresh clue to any move she proposed to make in their present perilous position.

"What does this news mean exactly?" she said. "Suppose you held Eugenias?"

The man put his hands to his temples with a gesture of despair. There were lines of anger in his forehead that terribly debased his face, and his wife turned her eyes from him. She did not fear his impotent display of wrath, but it was an ugly spectacle.

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"I ought to have had five thousand," he said. "I could cut my throat when I think of it."

"What will five thousand shares be worth in a week's time?"

"Don't ask me. I can't bear it, I tell you. If this news is true — if a great reef has been struck, the mine is what Ferrers said it was — there will be a rush — how can I tell you where they will go? — anywhere — to fifty — to a hundred — it just depends on the news. And I'm cleaned out. I could have paid for five thousand Eugenias when Ferrers was here; I have been dealing in Americans instead — and, as usual, a panic came. They have had my last franc — I'm cleaned out."

"Well," said Anastasie, "what do you mean to do?"

"What is there to do? What can a man do without money? I must *have* money," said M. Varasdin, and he brought down his clenched hand on the table so heavily that the glasses clattered.

"Oh! don't bluster when we're by ourselves," said Anastasie. "You have neither sense nor spirit, and breaking glass won't persuade me of the contrary. We have been married fourteen weary years. I ought to know you."

"I can't for the life of me see what *you* do, except squander any money I and other men are fools enough to give you," said M. Varasdin.

"Nevertheless it is I who have the brains," said

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his wife. "When you are in a mess you always expect me to pull you out."

"Pull me out this time, then. I'm in pretty deep."

Madame Varasdin began to take off her long gloves with a slow, delicate care that preserved their shape.

"Of course, I know what you mean," she said. "You want the girl's Eugenias."

"I would go to hell for them," said Hyacinth Louis.

"They are in her purse."

"How can I get hold of her purse?"

"You wish me to do that, of course. It is not easy. Besides — if we had them — would it be safe to sell them?"

"As safe as changing a bank-note. I should go to Buda-Pesth and sell them through Uncle Joseph. He is always willing to help a man over a difficulty. I should give him a commission, and the money would be in the family. He has a great deal of family feeling."

"You never see either a danger or a mistake until it has you in its clutch," said Anastasie. "You were born a bungler. If we get these shares I shall take them to Uncle Joseph myself. Last time I saw him he said: 'My girl, you may help Hyacinth on his feet twenty times over and he will always return to the gutter. He is a *Schlemihl*. It is trouble thrown away to help a *Schlemihl*.'"

"Get the shares and you may call me any names you please," said M. Varasdin. "We will sell them

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and settle down in a good climate and live easily and sleep softly. That is all I ask. I'm sick of work and struggle and failure."

"So am I," said his wife grimly.

"You will do it, then?"

"Is there anything else to do?"

The man shrank from the hatred and anger in his wife's low voice, and after she had gone he drank some more brandy and lit a fresh cigar and took up the evening paper again. But the paper contained nothing that could lead his thoughts from his own misfortunes. Except the one with theft in front of it he could not see a loophole through which he could crawl towards better days; and hitherto his thefts had not been of this kind. An unscrupulous financier brings more misery on people than any burglar can, but society has not consented yet to class them together. Varasdin had lived on the knave's borderland, sliding downhill on the whole and yet with his eyes on the region where men walk safely, though they bear a dishonoured name. He desired to be a flourishing rogue and not to sit in gaol again, where a man of his stomach suffers torture. Yet, think as he might, he could see no way but the one to prosperity, and all of a sudden further suspense and patience grew intolerable. With the weak man's longing for immediate action, even if it is untimely action, he threw down his paper, and, cigar in hand, marched straight into his wife's room. She had put on a thin white wrapper and was reading

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a novel, and she looked up with a scowl as her husband opened the door.

"I've been thinking it over," he said. "We must get those Eugenias, and the sooner it's done the better."

"Well — get them, then," said his wife.

"You know I can't."

"Yes, I know."

"How will you set about it?"

"As I set about other things — when I see some hope of success."

"Why can't you go into her room and take them? She is probably asleep."

"How like you, to be satisfied with probability in such a case."

"I shall have to get them myself."

"I am not anxious for the job," said Anastasie, and she rose and came towards the door with the intention, he surmised, of shutting him out of the room. But he came further into it.

"You are sure you understand?" he said. "I owe money all round. I don't possess a hundred francs. if something isn't done to help me at once I'm a ruined man."

"You told me all this five minutes ago," said Mme. Varasdin. "I suppose that even if you are ruined I may brush my hair."

"We shall go under," he said, throwing out his hands. "We may go and beg in the streets if some-

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thing isn't done. And you sit here and brush your hair with silver brushes. Do you know what ruin means? Do you know what cold and hunger are and the shame of rags?"

"I have known, thanks to you. I shall know again if I trust to you."

It seemed from their glances as if this man and woman had reached the last extremity of hate and distress; and yet to the man at least separation did not suggest itself with any promise of relief. His wife's dislike and contempt goaded him to fury, but there was no one else in the world who could help him — and he had no idea of helping himself.

"If you sold your pearls it would be something," he said sullenly.

"I am not going to sell my pearls yet," she said. "When I do I shall keep the money. I shall not throw it out of the window — or give it to you. Will you be good enough to go now? It is two o'clock, and I have a long day before me."

"What have you to do?"

"I take Miss Ferrers to Paillard's to lunch with Mr. Sheringham. We are to do something absurd in the afternoon, something with a steamboat and the Jardin des Plantes, I believe. We shall be together all day, and in the evening the gentlemen will probably dine here."

"Together — all — day," said M. Varasdin with a quiver in his voice, and he went quietly out of the

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room. His wife listened to his step in the corrider and heard him shut his door and lock it. Then she went to bed herself and was soon asleep.

Next day she took great pains with her toilet, but she found when she arrived at Paillard's that it was trouble thrown away. Mr. Sheringham only had eyes for Amabel, who wore a white serge coat and skirt made by an English tailor, and a white sailor hat. He had invited Mr. Newby to make a fourth, and even he looked again and again at Amabel, and said, in an undertone to Mme. Varasdin, that if ever you did see a really pretty girl in Paris you only had to hear her speak to discover she was English or American.

"It is an acquired taste," said Anastasie. "Over here we don't admire your solid red-faced dairy-maids. Our beauties have grace and delicacy and charm."

Mr. Newby replied with one of those little grunts that are the inexpressive Englishman's favourite form of dissent. He perceived that Amabel's cheeks were not red, nor was her figure solid, but it did not seem worth while to say so to Mme. Varasdin. He began to talk about oysters instead. After lunch they took two little open carriages and drove to the Jardin des Plantes.

"We will come back by steamboat," said Mr. Sheringham to Amabel when they had started. "We have the whole afternoon and evening before us. I am

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going to dine with you too; Mme. Varasdin has asked me. It sounds ungrateful, but I don't like Mme. Varasdin or her husband either. I have accepted because I want to see you and see how the land lies. I am not sure yet whether I shall have to go back early or late to-morrow. Why don't you come back too?"

"Oh! why should I?" said Amabel. "Uncle Michael expects to find me in Paris. We are going to set up house together in New York."

"That sort of plan doesn't always come off," said Mr. Sheringham.

"It's a very pleasant plan."

"I can imagine a still pleasanter one," said Mr. Sheringham.

Amabel did not ask him to describe it. His voice, his eyes, his manner were all eloquent of the desire in his heart; and in a man's way, without actual confession, he had been telling her ever since they met that he loved her. Her thoughts were not fixed on the city and its sights, and when they got out of the carriage at the Jardin des Plantes she was happy and preoccupied and perhaps not very wide awake. At any rate Mme. Varasdin's voice and touch, a few minutes later, seemed to rouse her out of a dream.

"The gentlemen have gone off to speak to one of the keepers," she said. "It seems that we ought to have had some sort of passes of admission. I wish you would lend me your purse a moment. I have

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forgotten to bring any money, and I want to go to that stall and buy some cakes for the elephants."

Amabel's eyes were on a perambulating Polar bear, deep down below her. Without looking at Mme. Varasdin she gave her the little beaded purse-bag she was carrying in her hand.

"Shall I come with you?" she said absently.

"No," said Mme. Varasdin. "The gentlemen expect to find us here. I will be back in a moment."

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IX

MADAME VARASDIN had never attempted a theft requiring so much skill and effrontery. She had to extract the certificate of the shares without being seen by the woman who sold cakes or by any chance passer-by; and, of course, when the robbery was discovered she would have to take the line that Amabel was careless, had left her purse here and there, and had probably lost her property out of doors. She knew where to hide the slip of paper while the storm burst, and had, in fact, spent some minutes that morning over the lining of an old winter jacket that usually lay with other rubbish at the bottom of a trunk, in a lumber room at the top of the house.

Her past life contained many episodes that prepared her in some degree for the present hour. She had stolen pence at school. She was the child of shifty, thriftless parents, and her married life had always been unstable. For Amabel she had no pity, but only an envious grudge of her youth and her smiling fortunes; and she would have defrauded the girl of her last penny and her last chance without a pang. She had no room in her mind for any needs except her own, and no heart for any one else's troubles. She would very much rather have had a rich husband

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than a poor one who drove her to run risks. But money she must have. She could not work; she could not deny herself; she was dainty, delicate, and selfish; one of those who cumber the earth and behave as if the earth and everything in it were made for them.

She opened the bag as she stood at the stall, and saw that it contained an inner pocket with a separate clasp; and when she undid the clasp she saw that the certificate was wedged tightly inside. It was a thick paper, folded several times, and yet rather too long for the width of the bag. There was a handkerchief in the purse too, and Mme. Varasdin took that out and held it over the open pocket while she apparrently felt for change for the cakes, and really tugged at the certificate. To find it, to hold it in her hands, and then to discover that it was jammed, was a bit of the devil's luck she had not bargained for. The woman who had sold her the cakes had wrapped them up, and waited patiently for payment. Mme. Varasdin turned away from her, stooped a little over the purse as if to look more carefully for the coins she wanted, and by dint of stretching the inner bag violently apart, at last got out the paper she wanted. Her hand closed over it, but could not quite conceal it. She hurriedly took some silver coins from the purse, kept the handkerchief covering the shares for the moment, and turned towards the stall again to pay for her cakes. She meant to hide the certificate in an inside pocket of her tailor-made coat as she walked away, but she did

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not mean to let the stallkeeper see her doing this. What she had done, so far, had been done in a moment and unobserved, and the thought flamed within her that, by her own dexterity, she held a fortune between her fingers, a fortune that, a minute later, would be her own. She put the silver on the stall, took up the cakes and some copper change and, as she did so, heard the creak of footsteps behind her, and then Mr. Newby's voice in her ears.

"Buying nuts for the monkeys, Madame Varasdin?" said he, and wondered why the lady started violently and afterwards neither spoke nor moved. She stood there like a creature petrified, conscious all the while that Sheringham stood there too, and that the handkerchief and the folded paper it did not wholly conceal were still in her right hand. The sudden fall from success to utter failure confounded and enraged her, but she did not lose her head. She recognised that for the moment it was failure. When she had recovered sufficiently she put the coppers, the handkerchief, and the certificate all together into the gaping mouth of the bag. Then she shut it with a snap, and showed Mr. Newby a smiling face as she gave him her parcel of cakes to carry.

"Where did you get your purse?" he said, with his eyes on the bead-bag. "It is exactly like one I helped Miss Ferrers choose in the Avenue de l'Opéra last week, and the man vowed he had not another."

"It is Miss Ferrers' purse," said Mme. Varasdin.

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"I borrowed it just now to buy the cakes. I had forgotten my own."

"She wanted a big one because she carries those shares about with her that her uncle gave her," continued Mr. Newby. "I stuffed them into the inside pocket for her, and I told her at the time she would never get them out unless she tore the purse; but she won't want to get them out till he tells her to sell, and then the price of the purse won't matter. What are Eugenias doing to-day, Sheringham? That strike had much effect yet?"

"Sent them up to three already," said Mr. Sheringham.

"Wish I had a few," said Mr. Newby.

Mr. Sheringham did not show much interest in the sensational rise of Eugenias. He was watching Mme. Varasdin. He had seen her start when they came up to her; he had seen the paper and the handkerchief in her hand, and he had seen her return both to the bag. His curiosity was aroused, and he made up his mind to ask Amabel whether she had taken the certificate out of the inside pocket of the purse, and whether the purse was torn. Madame Varasdin, however, forestalled him.

"But there is a thick-folded paper in the purse," she said. "I got it out with the handkerchief just now when I wanted some small coins. It was not in the inside pocket."

"Bai Jove," said Mr. Newby, "Miss Ferrers must

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have been playing with her Eugenias. Isn't the purse torn?"

Madame Varasdin just undid the clasp and snapped it to again.

"I think it is, a little," she said. "But I hate opening any one else's purse, don't you? It makes one feel as if one was reading a letter meant for somebody else."

"I never tried that," said Mr. Newby lightly.

"I wonder why Miss Ferrers carries these shares about with her in this way," said Sheringham. "A purse is easily lost."

"Of course it is," said Mme. Varasdin. "Miss Ferrers is most careless. I have often seen this one lying about. We have honest servants just at present, I believe, but my cook is leaving ——"

"I don't think servants would steal shares," said Mr. Newby.

"She might drop them anywhere — in a shop when she takes them out with her handkerchief — as I did just now. I have begged her to be more careful, but she pays no attention to me. She sees that Hyacinth carries papers of importance in his pocket-book, and I suppose she thinks it is a safe thing to do."

"She usually wears this purse hanging from her waistband," said Mr. Newby. "That's safe enough — if she had left the certificate where I put it. I wonder why she was carrying the bag loose to-day?"

"Because she is wearing a blouse that does not

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admit of a waistband," explained Mme. Varasdin. "You should have chosen a purse with a chatelaine hook. That can be worn with anything."

"We thought a ring safer than a hook," said Mr. Newby.

While they talked they approached the bear-pit again, and Amabel saw them and came their way.

"But you have not bought many cakes," she said, with a disappointed air, when she saw the little parcel in Mr. Newby's hand.

"Madame Varasdin is responsible," said he. "We met at the cake-stall."

"Come and get some more," said Sheringham, addressing Amabel.

"Yes," said Mme. Varasdin; "let us all go and buy some more and give the poor animals a feast. I adore animals. They are greedy and suspicious without being ashamed of it. We are just as bad as they are really, but we make greater pretensions — the morality of men lies chiefly on their lips."

"Suspicion is not always a vice," said Sheringham.

"It is always an unamiable trait," said Mme. Varasdin.

"Then how would you catch your criminals?" asked Mr. Newby.

"There would be no criminals if society were less corrupt," said Mme. Varasdin.

"Meanwhile, a police force is useful," said Sheringham; and then they arrived at the stall and he bought

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more cakes and paid for them. As they went away from it again, Madame Varasdin returned Amabel's purse.

"Don't let me forget that I owe you a franc," she said.

As a matter of fact, she owed Amabel a good deal. The seven guineas a week the girl paid regularly for board and lodging did not pay all the expenses of the flat, and it was a long time since Hyacinth Louis had had a balance at the bank. Madame Varasdin often borrowed money from her guest, and hitherto Amabel had lent it without protest. Money had come into her hands so suddenly and unexpectedly that for the time being she had grown careless and let it slip anyhow through her fingers. But she was beginning to see that loans to her present host and hostess were like water poured through a sieve. She wished her uncle would come back and put an end to the connection for her, and she often wished she had never occupied the room with the crimson satin chairs. The Varasdins were, of course, as civil as self-interest demanded, and the food was good and the flat in a pleasant quarter; but all these advantages did not make up for a sense of insecurity that she could not shake off. Only this morning, something had happened to heighten it.

Any one who has to do with continental servants knows, of course, that they are not as determined as British servants to treat the relationship between employer and employed from a purely business point of

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view. They are inclined to be friendly and loquacious, to take your interest in their affairs for granted, and if they like you or admire you, to say so without beating about the bush. Before Amabel had been a week in the Avenue Ernani she knew that the Alsatian cook supported an aged mother, and that she was engaged to a railway-guard who had a hot temper but a good heart; and that Adèle, the *femme-de chambre,* had been very unlucky in her situations, and had remarked the day Amabel arrived that mademoiselle had a sweet nature and would, doubtless, be easy to please. The cook used to bring Amabel a little bunch of flowers every day, and the *femme-de-chambre* used to help her to dress, and both girls would have gossiped about the Varasdins if Amabel had not stopped them from the first. But this morning the cook had come to her in a state of angry excitement and poured forth her tale. Amabel did not find angry Alsatian-French easy to follow, but she made out that the cook was leaving for Alsace to-morrow because her mother was ill, and that she could not get her wages out of the Varasdins. Bandits she called them, among other things, and in a voluble patois she advised Amabel not to remain with such people. When Amabel gave her enough money for her journey, she shed tears and kissed the girl's hand, and implored her to leave the house.

"It is not a house for you," she said plainly; and Adèle, who was present, nodded mysteriously, and

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said that she herself did not mean to stay much longer, whether she got paid or not.

"Some day it will be ph—tt!" she said, and her dramatic gesture described an explosion and the wreck it leaves behind.

Amabel's growing uneasiness was not set at rest by these remarks, but it did not occur to her that there was any need for hurry. Financial difficulties do not, as a rule, drive you out of the house at an hour's notice, like an infectious disease. She resolved, however, to talk to Mr. Sheringham about the choice before her of finding different quarters in Paris and returning to England. He was not an old, tried friend, but she had made up her mind that he was a friend, and that the wide world did not hold his match in kindness, strength, and wisdom. In her own mind she likened him to the golden Sigurd, whose eyes were so awful to his enemies and so kind to children, to the poor, and to the women who loved him; and as she walked round the elephant-house with the astute financier she tried to fancy what he would look like in a helmet and armour of gold. She thought they would become him, and puzzled him considerably by showing a sudden, ardent, and irrelevant interest in the fancy balls he had attended and the costumes he had chosen.

"I went as a clown once, when I was about eighteen," he remembered with some difficulty.

"Oh!" said Amabel, profoundly shocked. "How unsuitable!"

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"I wonder you think so," said Mr. Sheringham. "You must have forgotten our first meeting."

That was so far from the truth that Amabel coloured and did not speak. They were standing in front of an engaging giant elephant with an appetite for cakes. They had been standing there for some time. Madame Varasdin and Mr. Newby had disappeared.

"Do you remember our first meeting?" said Mr. Sheringham.

"It was on Florrie Hunter's birthday, when she had a children's party."

"It was in the dining-room. Miss Hunter invited me to pull a cracker — a very stiff one — I gave a sort of backward jerk over it, and nearly upset some one behind me who had a dish in her hands."

"You did upset the custards. Mrs. Hunter called me clumsy and apologised to you."

"You cried."

"No, never!"

"I swear I saw tears in your eyes."

"That's not crying."

"And all the rest of the evening I tried to get near you ——"

"Yes," said Amabel, with a reminiscent sigh; "I know you did."

"You suddenly disappeared."

"Mrs. Hunter told me to go upstairs and stay there."

"Did you cry when you were upstairs?"

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"The elephant is asking for another cake," said Amabel. "Let us talk about elephants and not about tears. If I did cry I am ashamed of it. I wish I had more courage. I wish I was not afraid of people. I suppose if you know your quarrel is just you do not shrink from it. I do; and I hate myself for it."

"How many people are you afraid of, and how many quarrels have you on your hands?" asked Mr. Sheringham.

"You should have gone as a knight," exclaimed Amabel, who was watching his eyes, and she laughed at his momentary want of comprehension. "Where are the others?" she said.

"But you don't answer my question," said he.

They walked right round the elephant-house, and did not see the others. Then they went out into the gardens and did not find them there.

"I know what has happened," said Amabel. "Madame Varasdin has driven home. She told me nothing would induce her to travel on a penny steamboat; and I saw her shudder and open a smelling-bottle when we went into the elephant-house. I suppose she thought that, as you were to dine with her, you would not mind escorting me home. You know, M. Varasdin does not dress for dinner."

"But we need not go yet," said Mr. Sheringham, looking at his watch. "You said you wanted to see all the animals."

"How is it you have time? I thought people like

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you and Uncle Michael never had time for anything but business."

"Is your uncle married?"

"No," said Amabel, thinking that her companion was irrelevant now. "He told me he had never had time to think about it."

"I should have said the same three months ago," observed Mr. Sheringham.

"What happened three months ago?" asked Amabel.

"We've been over all that," said Mr. Sheringham. "There was a children's party — and a stiff cracker — and upset custards — and an angry lady ——"

"Oh!" said Amabel.

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X

It was after five when they strolled through the gardens to the Quai d'Austerlitz and took the first steamboat that went their way. Amabel thought it was a pleasant way of seeing Paris. She sat on the clean, half-empty boat with Mr. Sheringham, and steamed smoothly under the bridges of the city past the spires of many churches and the façades of many splendid buildings, in sight of the city traffic and sometimes in hearing of the city wheels. Evening lights set the city and the sky afire, and a summer breeze blew up the river from seawards and met them freshly. Mr. Sheringham had led Amabel to a seat in the bows, which they had to themselves. It was a little way below the main-deck, and they were almost out of sight of other passengers and quite out of hearing. Amabel looked at the clouds and thought her own fate was as suddenly and rosily aglow as they were. She looked at the man beside her, and wondered where his eyes had been these many years, and why she out of all the women in the world should please him. She tried to discover his qualities, and she entered with wonder into the lover's land where mortals walk as gods.

It was a happy hour for both of them. Mr. Shering-

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ham had been too hard at work all his life to fritter and diffuse his affections, and he had fallen in love, as a healthy-minded man often does, with the most ardent belief and delight. His subtlety was all financial; in the human relations of life he showed himself simple and kind. "Here by God's grace is the one maid for me," says Geraint, the first time he sets eyes on Enid, and the same thought had flashed across Sheringham's mind when he turned in a hurry and saw Amabel's scared face and the custard streaming absurdly down the worst and meanest dress in the room. Now she sat beside him fine and radiant as a lily. Without his aid Fortune had turned her wheel. But the change that meant so much to her hardly engaged his thoughts. Poor or rich, she was the one maid for him. He talked to her about his home and his people, and she told him about the loneliness and the poverty she had passed through. When words failed them, they watched the city and the sky.

"I wish I had more courage," said Amabel suddenly. "There is a disagreeable thing I ought to do, and I believe I shall just go on from day to day not doing it — unless something happens to make it easier."

"Is it a *very* disagreeable thing?" asked Sheringham.

"I want to get away from the Varasdins."

"I am glad to hear it. I don't like either of them."

Masculine approval is always bracing and pleasant to the feminine mind, especially when the encouraging

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man happens also to be the only man in the world of any importance.

"It is so difficult to tell Madame Varasdin," Amabel went on. "Besides it does seem unkind to leave them just when my money is so necessary to them. If M. Varasdin began to prosper again, I should not hesitate. You know about business matters, Mr. Sheringham. Is he ever likely to get on?"

"You can never say with a man like that."

"Couldn't you put him in the way of things?"

"I would rather not have any dealings with him."

"Well — I hope Uncle Michael will soon come back. I am glad you are not operating against him, as he thought. I wrote to him this morning and told him you had lost a hundred thousand over Eugenias, and that you were very pleased for his sake to hear about the new reef."

"Oh! Did you?" said Sheringham.

"Yes," said Amabel. "And I asked him to send you a few shares if they went up — instead of those you sold so badly, you know."

"I don't think you can expect him to do that," said Sheringham, taken aback. "It isn't usual."

"I am sure Uncle Michael would like to," continued Amabel. "He seemed to be wrapped up in Eugenias, and it would vex him to think any one lost over them, especially any friend of ours. He carries them about in his pocket like love letters. He gave me a thousand. I'll show them to you."

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"Yes, do," said Mr. Sheringham, and he watched her open the bag. She looked as much taken aback as he expected.

"How very odd," she said. "Some one has wrenched them out of the inner pocket, and they were in so tight — the lining is all torn and the frame twisted ——"

She turned the contents of the bag into her lap and examined it. Meanwhile Mr. Sheringham looked at the certificate of the shares.

"It must have been Madame Varasdin when I lent her the purse," she went on. "She has always been rather keen about Eugenias and angry with her husband because he had none. I suppose she wanted to look at them. But how vexatious it is. I only bought this bag a week ago, and it cost fifty francs. Such things are so dear in Paris. I'll never lend it to Madame Varasdin again. Do you think it can be mended?"

"I daresay. But why don't you sell your shares and invest the money — not directly perhaps, but when they go higher still? And you should keep them in a safe place. You know they are bearer shares. If they were stolen you would probably never recover them."

"Stolen!" said Amabel; and he saw that he had frightened her and he repented of it. He cared very little whether she came to him with a thousand Eugenias in her hand or with never a penny. The important thing was that she should come.

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"Oh, well!" he said, "I can't see why you should carry them about."

"Uncle Michael told me to keep them till he wired and then to sell them at once. But he was in such a hurry, he never told me where to sell them — at least he said something about a respectable stockbroker — somehow I don't like the idea of M. Varasdin."

"I'm a stockbroker, you know," said Sheringham.

"Oh, thank you!" said Amabel. "Then the moment Uncle Michael wires, I'll post this paper to you."

"You may do that," said Sheringham, "but you should also wire your uncle's instructions. Then I shall know what to do."

He wished she could give the certificate into his charge at once; but just then the collector came round for fares, and when he had gone again Amabel put her loose money and her Eugenias back into the bag. She called Mr. Sheringham's attention to the bridge they were approaching — their talk shifted, and the opportunity passed by. His suspicions were so vague, and his uneasiness so undetermined, that he was inclined to wait rather than to alarm her seriously. He had seen the shares in Madame Varasdin's hands, but the very audacity of her attempt baffled him. Amabel would have missed the shares by this time; she must have raised a hue-and-cry; what would the lady who borrowed the purse have said in her own defence? Sheringham saw with a flash how little she would

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need to say as long as the shares were not found in her possession or their sale traced to her.

"I hope you will soon come back to England," he said to Amabel; and that was all the outcome just at present of his train of thought.

When they got back to the flat, Madame Varasdin sat on the balcony in a poppy-red gown. She had twisted Mr. Newby's pearls round her throat, and she wore other pearls in her hair, and for the time being she had got rid of Mr. Newby. She entertained Sheringham while Amabel changed her gown, and when the girl came back it seemed as if the witch had bewitched him. Anyhow, until the other men arrived, she held his attention, paid him brazen court, and let Amabel sit silent and neglected. The girl, unversed in the ways of men, was puzzled by his temporary capture; and, after dinner, when Madame Varasdin went back to her seat on the balcony and invited the three men to follow her, Amabel stayed behind in the salon. She opened the piano, and began to play softly to herself, without music and without lights. Voices and laughter reached her from outside, and, through an open window, she could just see a scarlet sleeve whenever Madame Varasdin lifted her cigarette to her lips. All through dinner the lady had led the talk and turned it, while the men responded and were entertained. With the best will in the world Amabel could not take her part, and by the end of the meal her silence had become a little dejected. Once or twice

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Mr. Sheringham had looked across the table at her inquiringly, as if he saw that something was the matter and wondered what; but his hostess always managed to divert his attention. As a friend for Amabel he did not change his opinion of Madame Varasdin, but he began to understand why young gentlemen presented her with pearls. Her way of telling gay French stories in a low voice, and with a serene brow, was just what would make a young gentleman feel that he was really seeing life. At one moment Mr. Newby had been so well amused that he was obliged to giggle. M. Varasdin sat at his own table with the air of a lay figure that smiles whatever face you show it, and smiles without joy or understanding.

While Amabel played, it grew so dark that she could hardly distinguish the notes of the piano, or the furniture in the room; yet her heart gave a leap of hope and delight as she heard some one come slowly towards her. She could just make out that it was Mr. Sheringham. He sat down beside her, while she finished an adagio from a Beethoven Sonata.

"Why do you stay in here by yourself?" he said. "Don't you like the balcony?"

"Is it pleasanter out there?"

"It might be if you came."

"Very well," said Amabel, and she was shutting the lid of the piano when she felt an arresting touch on her arm.

"There is no hurry now," said Mr. Sheringham.

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