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THE CLUNY PROBLEM

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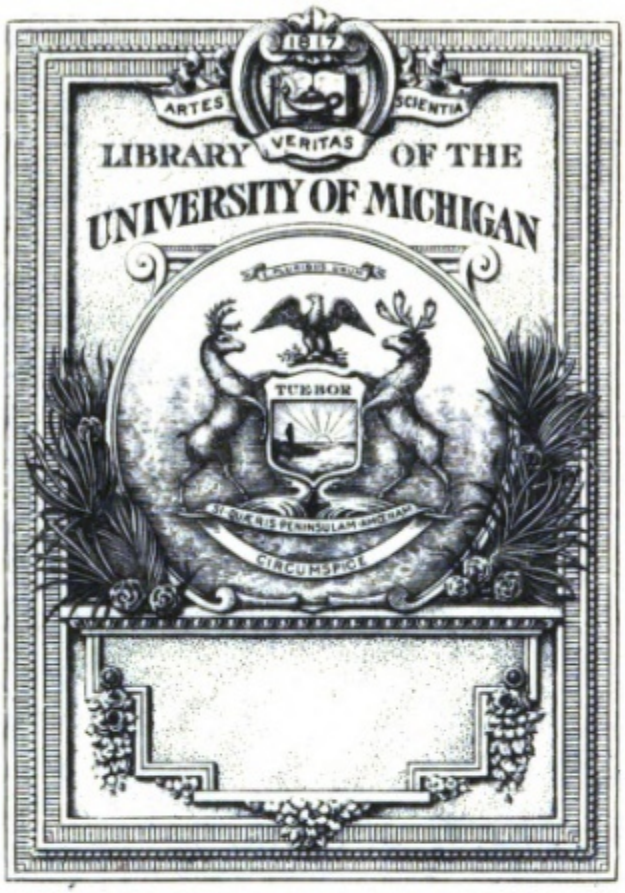

BEQUEST OF
ORMA FITCH BUTLER, PH.D., '07
PROFESSOR OF LATIN

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Other books by

A. Fielding

THE EAMES-ERSKINE CASE

THE CHARTERIS MYSTERY

THE FOOTSTEPS THAT STOPPED

THE CLIFFORD AFFAIR

THE NET AROUND JOAN INGILBY

A complete list of the mystery stories of J. S. Fletcher will be found at the end of this book

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THE
CLUNY PROBLEM

Archibald C.

BY A. FIELDING

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NEW YORK
ALFRED·A·KNOPF
1929

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THE

CLUNY PROBLEM

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CHAPTER I

"ANTHONY!" Vivian Young made a laughing surprised clutch at a tall figure stalking ahead of her down the station platform.

The man turned sharply. At the sight of his fiancée he smiled pleasantly, though a sharp observer would have said that there was something in his eyes that suggested a man about to make the best of a position not entirely to his liking.

"My dear girl!" he ejaculated warmly, "what brings you to Macon? Did you get into the wrong train, or out of the right one, or what?"

"I'm on my way to Cluny. Buried, neglected Cluny. The town where the lace is made, and, less interesting to me, I guess, the town where there are some ruin that must be seen in order to be forgotten. I mean the ruins of that wonderful abbey about which the Frenchman raved at dinner last night. You started him off by asking him if he knew the place. But you didn't speak of coming on here yourself."

"Nor you!" Sir Anthony Cross spoke easily, yet the very swiftness of his reply suggested a hidden irritation.

"Ah, but I'm only marking time at Enghien with a sister! You're supposed to be rushing back to London to summon board meetings, and dismiss the president, I mean the prime minister, and generally make very important things hum. Is this the way you usually go back to England?"

"You can reach it *via* Macon," he said as lightly as she.

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Vivian was smiling up into his face. She was a very pretty young woman, in spite of the fact that she looked clever.

"Sure. Just as you could round by Constantinople," she agreed sweetly.

Again Anthony Cross smiled at her. Yet again there was that faint hint in his face of a man not entirely pleased with things.

"As with you," he began easily, "one might think that French professor has fired me up to look at his town. I'm keen on architecture, you know, and I ought to feel quite ashamed of myself that I've never been to the place. But the idea of your going there! Somehow one doesn't connect you with ruins."

"Why not? We all come to them some day," she spoke with the gaiety of under twenty-five. "Besides, as an American, I dote on anything we don't have over at home. If you're off for the same place, why, we shall have the whole long day to ourselves. You look charmed at the notion, Anthony, yet somehow I don't believe you really like it."

She never called him Tony. One could not easily imagine any one calling the man to whom she was speaking, to whom she was engaged, by a nickname. For, though young looking, there was so little of youth's softness in his face, that one suspected him of being much older than he showed. He had, in fact, crossed the forty line. Hard was the mouth, stubborn the jaw, obstinate the nose, and his fine eyes could at times cleave like a flash of lightning. He looked what he was, a man of high position, social and mental. But for an indefinable air of being a man of affairs, one would have guessed him a barrister.

"If so," he said rather slowly, "it's because I shan't be able

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to see much of you, or of the remains of the great abbey either." He looked at her meditatively before he went on:

"I suppose you're going back to Enhgien to-morrow?"

It was at that little resort so near Paris that he and Vivian had just got engaged. There in the hotel where her brother-in-law and his wife had been staying, Anthony Cross and Vivian had renewed an acquaintanceship made earlier on shipboard.

She nodded. "You too, I suppose?"

"No. I may be delayed some days. There's history to be read in the stones of Cluny, I fancy—since it was made there once upon a time." He spoke as one turning some other thought over in his mind. Now he looked quickly down at her, as though he had decided on his course of action.

"You know the real reason why I'm back in Europe just now," he said in a low voice.

She nodded. She knew from him that there was a constant leakage from the parcels of diamonds sent to Amsterdam by the Diamond Combine in South Africa, of which Anthony Cross was one of the directors. That great firm's detectives had been trying to locate the leakage for months. They had decided that the master mind was not in Amsterdam, nor in Holland, but probably in France. Possibly in Paris. She knew, too, that Cross had left Capetown to make further, and personal, inquiries in the matter.

"Then, in confidence, I believe that in Cluny I may possibly pick up a certain piece of information which I very much want to get. Or rather, that something that I may learn from a man whom I expect to meet there may settle definitely a point that ought to be settled."

His jaw shut very tightly as he said this last. "And that's the reason, dear, why I may not have been as delighted at the

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thought of your coming to Cluny just now as I should otherwise be. In reality, but again in strict confidence, mine is entirely and simply a business visit. At which hotel have you engaged rooms?"

She told him.

"I think, on the whole, it would be better if we do not meet. I should in any case, of course, go to another hotel, but I'll let you take this coming train out there alone, and go on later. Sorry, Vivian, it's a rotten way to spend what might have been a most delightful time together, but there's no help for it."

She did not in the least see the reason, or the need, for so much mystery. But men have their own funny ways of doing business, she decided.

"If I run across you in the street, I'll ask you the way to the abbey in French," she promised gaily.

He smiled at that, genuinely this time.

"At any rate, our engagement has nothing to do with what takes me to Cluny. And I want it kept free of it. It's too beautiful a thing to drag into anything sordid."

He looked into her eyes with passion. It was a look that showed him to be possessed of a side not to be guessed even from a careful scrutiny of his very handsome but rather cold face. "And that being so, it means, as I said, that we'd better not meet at all. Cluny's a tiny place. Only some four thousand souls, and I may have to be there for some time."

The explanation explained nothing to Vivian. But if men were odd when it came to business, they were still odder when it came to sentiment. And, therefore, when both were mixed, they were oddest of all.

"Or perhaps I'll put off going there for a couple of days,"

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he said ruminatingly. "Yes, I rather think I will——" He stood a moment in silence.

"You yourself are in no danger?" she asked suddenly. After all, detecting diamond stealers was dangerous work.

"Not in the least! Here's your train."

He helped her in. The engine pulled out. He looked very grave, very little the lover as he stood there, hat in hand, and yet she felt certain that he was deeply stirred, and trying to conceal the fact.

By what? He was very hard to stir, very hard even to know. And on that came the reflection that he would have had to own a singularly easy character for her to have plumbed it already.

It was only two months since their first meeting. Only a fortnight since their second. True, they had seen a great deal of each other during the passage out from Capetown. Terrific storms had kept the other passengers in their bunks. Officers and the doctor were too busy to have a moment to spare. Anthony had saved her from a rough-and-tumble with a wave when she first came out on deck, tight-reefed in oilskins borrowed from a stewardess. Neither had the faintest idea of who the other was. She had taken him at sight for a much younger man, and had treated him, as Vivian did treat young men, very cavalierly. He had responded in kind. They had quarrelled. But they were literally flung together half a dozen times a day. And, in spite of themselves, they grew first to tolerate, then to like, each other. When he told her his name, perhaps half-unconsciously expecting that it would impress her, she treated him as carelessly as ever. And Sir Anthony was considered one of the really great catches of the matrimonial market. It was genuine carelessness too, he saw. Not assumed to lead

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him on. Whether he were led on, or off, mattered very little to Vivian. When he grasped that fact, he was attracted still more strongly. Her prettiness, of course, had a great deal to do with it, but it was not everything. Then came the night of the all-but wreck in the hurricane. The ship was carrying a full load of steerage passengers. There were many gallant souls on board, but among them all, Anthony Cross stood out by his coolness and his organizing power. He held the frightened steerage quiet, not at the point of his automatic—though he had one in his pocket—but by his own calm personality, and Vivian worked among the women and babies as cheerful, as undismayed, as he. Save for the suffering it caused, she seemed to positively enjoy the danger, and Cross suddenly felt that his life would be incomplete without her. There was something wild and free in the girl that roused the hunter in him. If they lived, he told himself, he would capture her.

He followed her to France, to Enghien-les-bains, and found her in a moment of great depression. An unusual place for Vivian Young to be. She was a journalist by profession and by real preference.

She loved to watch the world with those pretty eyes of hers that were so unexpectedly shrewd, and she loved to shape what she had seen into words. To create an image of her thoughts, see it grow, and watch it stand itself, upright and whole. But she was not making enough to do more than support herself, and at Enghien she learnt from a sister, who prided herself on speaking the truth, that in the past, she had been dependent on her brother-in-law, not, as she had imagined, living on the money left by their parents. Her brother-in-law was an American doctor practising in Paris, and none too well off. Vivian

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felt that she must pay him back as soon and as fast as she could.

That evening Anthony Cross proposed. Vivian did not consciously take him as a means of paying what she felt to be a debt of honor. She was much more impressed by him than she let him guess. By him, himself, not by his position, or his name. There was something great in the man as she knew. And she divined also, with that sure instinct of hers, that under his calm, even cold exterior there was flame.

There was flame in her too. That night he all but won her. She believed that he had. But ever since then, she had felt more and more certain that he had not, which meant that he never would. For one thing, he was too old for her. For another—but what was the use. She had promised to marry him. Still, an engagement is but a trial run of the car, as it were. It's very purpose is to find out how one likes it.

At the first station beyond Macon, a young woman, also an American by the look of her, hurried towards the train where she sat. The new-comer was making for another compartment, but Vivian, at sight of her, flung the door open.

"Edith! Edith! Come in here!" she called.

The new-comer swung herself in and the two kissed affectionately.

"My dearest Vi! Why, what brings you to this part of Europe . . . and just when we're off for Switzerland. . . . I do call that real mean of things. We only started this morning. Adolphe left some papers behind him at Clermain that he must have. Adolphe's my husband, you know."

She threw in the explanation as though referring to the cat.

"We have a villa there all among the vineyards. But how

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just too frightfully maddening that you should be so close to us now. The house is shut up, or I should insist on carrying you off. Where are you making for?"

"Cluny." It was the first word that Vivian had been able to slip in. That had always been the way with Edith Metcalf as she had been in the convent at Paris, where they both had been sent to learn French. Edith de Montdore as she was now. Vivian remembered hearing that she had married a French wine-grower and that the couple lived near Dijon.

"Cluny? Don't tell me, Vivian Young, that you know the vamp?"

"Calm yourself, my dear girl, I've never heard of her. I'm on the way to Cluny for the purpose of self-education. Early Christian churches—wonderful abbey—marvellous abbot's palace and so on. . . . But this sounds much more in my line. Who is the woman? Does she vamp at Cluny? Or where you live?"

"At Cluny. I bet I should move if she came to Clermain," laughed Edith. "She's staying with her husband at a house there owned by a man we know. A Frenchman. But an awfully nice fellow."

"Staying with her husband? Where's the vamping then?"

"Oh, she's a subconscious one, child. She looks as meek as Moses, and as quiet as Lazarus before he was raised from the dead. But all the men rave about her. Oh, Adolphe too! One of the reasons I decided on going away for a bit. I loathe Switzerland in a motor. So many roads you can't go over. But anything's better than the vamp. She's lips like a darkey's, and hair like one too, though it's red, and she's no complexion whatever. Yet Adolphe says she's a Rossetti, and a wonderful type. Don't let your Anthony have a look at her. The best of

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wishes to you both on your engagement, by the way. I did write them, but allow me to embrace you, as they say here."

Edith Montdore did so, without a pause in her chatter.

"Say, you have done well for yourself! And what a splendiferous ring!"

Vivian was carrying her left-hand glove, a fancy of the moment. On her third finger was a great clouded sapphire, a Cross heirloom. Though not otherwise particularly superstitious, Vivian had a dislike to that fault in that particular gem. She said as much.

"Well, I guess I agree with you. Though the setting's perfectly lovely. I told Mrs. Brownlow—that's the vamp's name, by the way—about clouded sapphires meaning a death in one's circle—or rather, only I told her that it meant a loss, for she has some wonderful stones, but two are a bit dark. And within the month after I told her, she lost sapphires and all. I believe the thief got about five thousand dollars worth of jewels off her altogether. I still reckon in dollars, you see, the exchange bobs about too much. My, she was mad! She was taking them to Paris to have them re-set. That sort of makes it doubly annoying. They were only insured for about half their value, it seems. That was her husband's doing."

"What's he like?" Vivian asked. She was quite willing to be chattered to.

"I always thought him a brainless, boneless, sort of creature, until I met a woman the other day who knew them years ago out in China—he's something to do with silk. And this woman told me a story that makes me wonder if he's such a weasel as he looks. It seems that out there all the men fell for Mrs. Brownlow, same as they do here. And one young fellow in particular went wild over her. So wild that Mr. Brownlow

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turned him out of the house one evening. And next morning the boy was found drowned in the river!"

"But what has that to do with the husband—I mean, I don't see——" Vivian wrinkled her smooth forehead.

"Oh, but the young man had a brother who wrote to the British Consul that Mr. Brownlow must have shoved him in, Mr. Brownlow was all but prosecuted—so this woman said. Only there wasn't enough evidence. She herself firmly believed that he had done it. So did most of the people out there. That's why the Brownlows left finally. Thrilling, isn't it! I tell you that story made all the difference as to how I look at Mr. Brownlow now!" Apparently it had greatly increased her respect for the man. And Vivian burst out laughing.

"But surely they're not staying at Cluny year out, year in?" she asked.

"Pretty nearly," Edith Montdore said gloomily. "That's why we're off now. We weren't going for another month. But that woman gets on my nerves. Clermain is only some six miles from Cluny, and we're always meeting, and she makes me look, and feel, like a picture on a cigarette box. Frankly I'm in flight. You see, this Monsieur Pichegru—that's the name of the man they're staying with—runs his house, Villa Porte Bonheur, as a sort of paying-guest house. I believe he lost his money for a time—something went wrong with his vineyards—so he started this, and keeps it up because he likes it. He belongs to an awfully good family and knows every one for miles around. He's a duck, but the only thing is, he won't take maids or valets with people. He says that he hasn't the rooms to spare for them, and that they upset his own servants."

"I should be lost without a maid!" Vivian said in mock distress.

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"You'll have to have one as Lady Cross!"

Vivian nodded. The prospect did not allure her in the least. There was a short pause, then Edith Montdore babbled on:

"Monsieur Pichegru is unmarried, and at his age that means he isn't going to marry. By the way, he's giving a costume dance, masked too, this Saturday. Every one is going. I was, of course, only my frock turned out to be a ghastly failure. Lovely in itself but, my! I looked so homely in it when it came home, that I promptly devolped a heat rash. Suppressed. It seems you can have a suppressed rash. So I have it. The doctor has told my husband that it would only get better with change of air. It has—already." She chuckled gleefully. "Still, when Adolphe left those papers behind him, I insisted on being the one to fetch them. Oh, I'm only joking, but really that woman is the sort you read of." She meant "that you see on the films." Edith Montdore never opened a book—not even a novel. "You know, the kind that set all the men raving with one look."

The ticket collector came in. Mrs. Montdore had no ticket. She was sure that she had dropped it in the corridor. There was not room for more than two of them to hunt. Vivian sat on in the compartment. She was thinking. Vaguely at first, now with certitude came the idea that she had heard the name of Brownlow before. And recently. Quite recently. At the dinner last night when she had first heard of the existence of Cluny. Quickly, with that speed of thought which can flash a whole series of sights and sounds on the screen of memory at once, she seemed to be hearing Anthony Cross ask the French professor of archælogy, who was one of the guests at her sister's table, "Is Cluny worth a visit, do you think?"

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That had led to an account of the little town, and of what can still be seen there. A glowing account. Vivian, in swift retrospect, remembered now wondering a little that Cross, though quite an antiquarian himself, had not asked one question except about the state of the roads, the lie of the houses. And afterwards she had heard him step up to the other again, and say, even more quietly than usual, "You know Cluny well?"

"Very well. My brother is the *directeur* of its school of arts and crafts. I have just come away from the town."

"Indeed? Did you by any chance meet an Englishman there of the name of Brownlow?"

Yes, Vivian was certain that that had been the name murmured so softly by Anthony last night.

The Frenchman had not, and the talk was at once changed. Funny the way one rarely hears a new name without hearing it a second time very soon afterwards! Vivian thought. But the entrance of her friend and the ticket, properly found and clipped, brought her back to the present.

"Say, Vi, I wish you could have a look at the vamp," Edith said, reseating herself and taking up the conversation where she had left off, as though it were a piece of knitting. "You're such a wonderful judge of character from one look at a face. Or you used to be. I sure would like to know where that woman belongs—with us hens, or out among the hawks. I know what! Go to Villa Porte Bonheur for a few days. Monsieur Pichegru won't take ordinary passing tourists, but he'll take any friend of ours."

"His house may be full," Vivian objected.

"It never is. He only has enough people nowadays to keep him from feeling lonely."

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"But I'm intending to stay in Cluny for merely the one night," Vivian pointed out.

"But, why?" her friend asked. "Cluny really is charming. Why not stay for the dance on Saturday? This is Thursday."

"And go in my dressing-gown as 'A lady surprised by a fire'?" Vivian asked. "I'm a traveler, my child, not a bride with all her trousseau to choose from."

"Wear my new dress!" Edith pleaded. "I'll send it on to you. And we're very much the same figure. Besides it's the sort of frock that would fit any one. And though it doesn't suit me, it's a dream of cream and gold. Just your colors. 'Lady into Fox' is what it's supposed to represent. Adolphe designed it himself from some funny book or other. You would look a duck in it!"

"You mean a fox, surely!"

"Now, don't keep on joking!" Edith Montdore was really in earnest. "I want you to promise me to have a good look at the vamp, and give me your opinion. It'll be unbiased, you see. And mine can't be. And yet I really do want to hear what you think of her. Oh, Vi, why not? Monsieur Pichegru charges no more than the hotels do. You told me that Sir Anthony is going back to England, and that, until you joined him in September, you were just going to keep on staying at Enghien. That's a fortnight off. Why not put in two or three days down here instead? I'll get the frock when I go for the papers—it's still in its box—and send it off to you, to wait at the railway station until you have it fetched. And I'll telephone Monsieur Pichegru as soon as I get home—we're one station short of Cluny—you will, won't you?"

Once more Vivian laughed. How like Edith all his rush was! But she promised to think over the idea. It would depend

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on whether she liked the look of Cluny or not. When she saw, lying among the green Cevennes hills, a little gray town with spires and towers rising against the trees in a charming picture, she fell in love with the quiet nook. There were vineyards, and meadows, and a splashing stream rushing down the valley.

Clear of the station, she asked her way to the Villa Porte Bonheur. The name had stuck. Was it not tempting fate to give a house a name like that?

The villa, painted ivory, was one of the prettiest in the place. And the garden was a vision of pink roses and blue delphiniums. It was the garden that did it. At first. But the real reason that made her press the front door bell was a face, of which she caught a glimpse as she walked the winding drive towards the house. It was a woman's face, bending over an embroidery-stand under a tree. For a second Vivian stared, then she turned off down a little side path. That face! She knew quite well where she had seen a photograph of it. It was a very unusual face. Adolphe Montdore was right. It was the true Rossetti type. Inert to everything except the call of the senses, though for that very reason beauty-loving. And the photograph of it that she had seen, had been in the fingers of Anthony Cross only some three days ago. She had come on him suddenly standing staring at it. Lost to the world. At her touch he would have pocketed it, but she had caught his hand.

"Not on your life, young man! It's a picture of your mother, isn't it?" He had laughed, yet in the half-unwilling fashion of one who is annoyed by a sense of humor obtruding on what is not really funny in the least.

"No. She's a problem—a problem that belongs to the past." He now spoke very gravely. "Please don't ask me to tell you about her."

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"Because I won't," his eye had said.

Vivian had changed the subject, biting back a retort that the problem out of the past had a most modern frock on. And now here was the original of that portrait—and of that dress. This must be the vamp of Edith Montdore's outpourings. There could not be two women with faces like that in Cluny—in Villa Porte Bonheur. Something stirred in Vivian. It was anger. Anthony Cross had told her frankly the evening when he asked her to marry him, or apparently frankly, that there had been one woman in his life, in his heart, who had owned it completely for many years. Even though she had been married, and had sent him away from her, his passion had gone so deep that it had been beyond his power to uproot for many a year. But that now it was a thing of the past. Had been of the past for some time.

But this woman, sitting looking down at her embroidery with a slow, faint, oddly waiting look, a look that somehow stirred the imagination, was not of the past. She was of the present. And suddenly Vivian made up her mind to stay at Porte Bonheur if there were room for her. To stay and see whether Anthony Cross's visit were in any way connected with that face instead of missing diamonds. True, he had only asked the Frenchman about the husband—for Vivian was certain that here, close to her, sat Mrs. Brownlow—and Anthony had spoken to herself just now, as though only duty were taking him to the little town. But, Vivian remembered suddenly a lightly flung quip of his on board ship. "Oh, yes, it is always necessary to tell the *truth*. But it isn't always necessary to *tell* the truth."

It would indeed be an odd conjunction if it were mere chance that his inquiries into the stolen diamonds and the

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woman of his past—"the problem"—problem, very likely, because she had preferred her husband to him. Vivian thought cynically and irately—both met here in tiny Cluny. Vivian was not fond of coincidences in a novel and she did not believe in them in real life. And, then, that insistence that he should be left entirely to himself, like any other unattached man. . . .

It was with a very determined step that Vivian swung round, walked up to the front door, and rang the bell. She sent in a card of Edith Montdore's, on which that young woman had scribbled an introduction.

Monsieur Pichegru came down at once into the cold gray drawing-room—one of those typically French drawing-rooms that look chilly even on the hottest day. He was a pleasant-faced, elderly man with the alert, vigorous look of so many of his race. Edith had duly telephoned, and he pressed Vivian to stay at the villa for at least one night, and as many more as she could manage. The terms were very moderate for the comfort provided. He explained, as he showed her around, that he had injured his shoulder a little while ago while shooting rabbits, thanks to a young gun-bearer's brilliant idea of resting the gun that he was reloading on the wet clay ground, with the result that the barrel was blocked and the gun exploded. Monsieur Pichegru rightly thought himself very lucky to have got off with only a bruised shoulder and neck tendons. He usually, at this time of the year, had his house full of people who wanted a day at the birds, but now, with one exception, the villa only held some quiet people who, like herself, were interested in the ruins to be found in Cluny.

Vivian finally chose a charming bedroom looking over the old abbey gardens. At dinner she met the rest of the guests. They appeared to be very usual.

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Mrs. Brownlow showed on closer acquaintance to be a very soft-spoken graceful Frenchwoman of approximately thirty-five. Unlike Edith Montdore, Vivian thought her very beautiful, and very finished. Though it was a type that repelled as well as attracted her. But Mrs. Brownlow seemed very gentle and kind. As for the husband, he appeared to be a silent, quiet, obliging little man. Remembering the tale passed on her, she smiled. It would have to be a very Eastern imagination indeed, she thought, that could picture him drowning his wife's admirer. Vivian thought that he was distinctly proud of her. And they seemed devoted to each other. So much for gossip, she reflected.

There were three young men in the house. Two friends called respectively, Smith and Lascelles. They seemed to Vivian rather superior beings, at least in their own estimation. Smith was in a crack cavalry regiment and was rather fussy over the fact that just now his host could not accompany him shooting, and that two friends of Monsieur Pichegru's, big bankers from Lyons, to whom he had been promised introductions, had not yet come to their country houses near by. Lascelles, Vivian learned, was a master in a smart preparatory school. He had the Cambridge manner to excess, and his account of the geological finds that dot what he called the Burgundian Passage, which once linked the Channel and the Mediterranean, was quite beyond her.

The two young men seemed only mildly interested in Mrs. Brownlow. Unlike the third young fellow, the possessor of ears like jug handles and great red hands and the name of Tibbitts, who was clearly her abject slave.

After dinner, Vivian sent down to the station for the box left for her by train. It was there. And with its arrival, she felt

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that she had definitely committed herself to at least a stay of over the week-end.

As to what Anthony would think of it—she did not greatly care. She would, of course, strictly keep to her promise if they met. But would they meet? That was the interesting point. If he really were coming because of those thefts. . . .

She felt a growing uncertainty as to what Anthony would do, and even as to what she herself might do, in the next few days. It struck her that possibly Edith Montdore might not obtain as unbiased an opinion of Mrs. Brownlow as she expected.

Had Vivian loved the man, the position would have been intolerable. But as it was, she confessed with some malice that not for a long time had she looked forward to anything more than she did to his arrival in Cluny.

Altogether, her stay in Villa Porte Bonheur promised to be most interesting. But she decided that it would be as well to start an article or two for her old paper. Very probably the next week would see her once more with nothing in front of her but her own earnings. And a very pleasant prospect too, she thought it. Even the "desolate freedom of the wild ass," has its points. At least it is freedom, and if you are a wild ass, that alone, not the warmed stable, nor the fenced field, calls to you.

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CHAPTER II

IT was the afternoon after Vivian Young's arrival. The garden of Villa Porte Bonheur lay drowsing in the August heart which was robbing even the flowers of perfume and color. The very hills seemed to fling the light back into the valley, as though it were molten metal too hot to hold. Closed were the windows, empty the summer-house, deserted the tennis courts.

A man pushed open the iron gate, shut it, and looked about him. When he was near the house itself, he studied it attentively. He seemed to be registering the position of all the doors and windows, even of the chimneys, with his cool, light eyes. Then he walked up to the door and knocked. Could he see Mr. Smith?

He spoke in very fair French, but with an accent that bewildered the butler, who answered with a sleepy:

"*Monsieur desire?*"

"To see Mr. Smith," the visitor repeated clearly. He handed in a card. "Take that to the gentleman, and say that I've come to make some further inquiries about the money that Mr. Davidson lost in the express up to Paris a fortnight ago."

"Ah!" The butler became all interest. He showed the caller into a room.

"I'm right, am I not?" asked the young man in a friendly way. "A couple of Monsieur Pichegru's guests lost their belongings two weeks ago in the *train de luxe* between Macon and Paris, did they not? A Mrs. Brownlow lost some valuable jewels. And a Mr. Davidson lost a thousand pounds in money?

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While Mr. Smith and Mr. Tibbitts, who went by the same train, lost nothing?"

"Correct, monsieur. The losses nowadays in sleepers are enough to make one thankful that one travels third class! Monsieur is connected with the inquiry?"

There was a certain alertness about the visitor's face and carriage and a shabbiness about his clothes that made the butler take him for a newspaper man.

"Yes, I am a reporter. Mr. Davidson is connected with my paper. He has entrusted me with the task of clearing up how the money was taken." He seated himself in an arm-chair, which seemed chosen instantly and at random, but which was the most comfortable one in the room.

The butler went in search of Mr. Smith. That young man was taking a siesta, and looked at the pastboard with great disfavor.

"Mr. Mackay. *Aberdeen Mail.*" The last was written in one corner, with the words, "Called for an interview about Mr. Davidson's loss in the Paris train."

"Tell him I know nothing whatever about the affair." Mr. Smith's French was exceedingly good. "Any inquiries he has to make should be put to the police. They have all the information and are handling the case. In other words, Honoré, as far as I am concerned—throw him out! I don't intend to be bothered with reporters."

Mr. Smith relapsed sleepily on to his pillows again.

Tea was at five—a true summer tea, with iced drinks and sugary cakes and salad sandwiches.

Mrs. Brownlow superintended with the grace that seemed native to her. As the only woman—up till now—in the villa, she naturally played hostess for Monsieur Pichegru. Every

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one appeared to like the Brownlows, Vivian thought. And, indeed, they seemed to belong to the pleasant, unassuming type of people whom one so often meets, never saying anything worth remembering, and yet who are themselves remembered when brilliant wits are forgotten.

After tea came tennis. Some French neighbors drifted in, but Vivian and Mr. Tibbitts very wisely withdrew and played by themselves.

"Game!" she called finally, with the snap of victory in her voice; "and set!"

Tibbitts seemed to take his beating philosophically. He was a tall, weedy youth who yet conveyed a suggestion of hidden strength in the set of his sloping, narrow shoulders and the hang of his long arms. He had a weak face, and dressed in the very height of French fashion. Even here in Cluny, Tibbitts alone seemed to have no old clothes, no hats or shoes that only long affection saved from being discarded. His very flannels shrieked of their first month's wear. Vivian had met his type before, she thought; the sons of the newly-rich, with all the blemishes, but none of the brains and pluck, that had given father his rise in the world.

"I'm afraid I'm no good at games," Tibbitts said now in his Cockney voice.

"Sure," Vivian agreed heartily; "I am bad, but thou art worse, brother. I guess Mademoiselle Lenglen would wonder what the game was, if she watched us. But there are still two balls missing. And new ones too."

"It's about time to change, isn't it?" the young man asked doubtfully. "I thought I heard the bell, I mean the gong, go some time ago. Whereabouts do you think the balls are?"

"One, your's, was apparently off on a non-stop flight to

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my home town in Texas. Try over there, while I hunt here in these bushes."

She stepped back swiftly. As she did so, she felt beneath her heel, not yielding earth, but the very firm toe of a very stout shoe. Instead of a scream, she made a swift and amazingly sure lunge. She caught at a man's tightly-buttoned coat, felt her hand struck off with a jerk, and then the branches around her swished and eddied. She had seen nothing. Standing listening, she heard the swishing pass to the other side, then silence. No one was visible as she ran out on to the grass and looked about her.

For fully two minutes Vivian stood staring, then she walked slowly back to the house. The average woman would have run, but this one walked almost reluctantly away, as though guided by prudence, as though impulse would have sent her after that unexplained figure.

From an open window came a contralto voice singing:

"Let us get all the blue overhead,
Let us soar like birds in their flight,
For it's while we are here that the roses are red,
It's after we're gone they are white."

Vivian had heard the song before, but not the voice. It was evidently Mrs. Brownlow. There was something caressing and passionate in it. The voice of a siren. It went well with Mrs. Brownlow's face, while her manner—quiet but indifferent—her way of speaking—cool though kind—went with neither. So thought Vivian as she ran on to her own room. She was in time for dinner. Most girls would have been late, especially if, like herself, they had no maid with them. But Vivian could hustle. One toss, and her tennis frock lay on the floor. Another

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toss, a plunge, a splash or two, a rub down, some more tosses, and she stood ready to go downstairs, her curly hair still damp around the nape of her white neck.

They all went in to dinner in a cheery, unconventional group. The two women first, the men following. Miss Young's seat faced the window, and she looked out of it a good deal, and very attentively.

"How have you been getting on with your history of Cluny, Mr. Murgatroyd?" Mrs. Brownlow asked of the only elderly member of the party. Mr. Murgatroyd sighed a little. He was a stout, short man with a ludicrous resemblance to Pickwick.

"I'm afraid I haven't done well to-day," he said apologetically; "the sunshine was too much for me. And the country-side too inviting."

"You have to be bored to work, don't you find it so?" Vivian asked.

"You mean you've got to work to be bored," Tibbitts corrected with a guffaw of startling loudness. Tibbitts was at his worst seen indoors. He was the kind of young man who gets hats and coats handed to him in the evening and is asked to call the car, with subsequent abject apologies for the mistake. His voice, too, fitted the nameless look about him of being a rank outsider.

"Ever tried it?" Smith asked with a supercilious yet measuring stare.

For some reason or other Tibbitts seemed startled.

"N-no. I mean to say—I was speaking airily." And very red in the face, he turned to Mrs. Brownlow.

Meanwhile Mr. Murgatroyd was talking to Vivian. She had made some remark about architecture, and then continued to watch the gardens. Was that a shadow, or a man, far away

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facing her? When she had finally decided that it was the shadow of a thick branch, Mr. Murgatroyd appeared to be finishing a short lecture.

The professor was evidently nothing if not thorough. He did his best to ensure that Miss Young should be able to recognize the Cluny offshoot of Burgundian architecture whenever she should meet it in later life. Advanced Romanesque it was, but he warned her that, in his humble opinion, she would be making a great mistake to call it pre-Gothic, though if she chose to refer to it as Early Pointed—with the careful stipulation that she was referring to Early Pointed on the continent—she would be quite safe, he thought.

"It was inevitable that the Cluny Benedictines would evolve their own perculiar architecture," he murmured finally, "since their thoughts were peculiar. Their own. Original."

"You think thoughts can influence buildings?" their host asked with a hearty laugh. His English was slow and labored. "The architect's thoughts—yes—and the brickmason's—oh, yes! But otherwise?"

"Buildings"—Mr. Murgatroyd looked across at him—"are made of brick or stone or wood. Are they not? Of thought manifestations, that is to say. And can, therefore, be influenced by thought."

"Then, let's have a week of high thinking," Smith said urgently; "and raise this ceiling for Monsieur Pichegru; he finds it far too low."

Murgatroyd chuckled. But he maintained his position.

"Every thought creates," he repeated, "in us and around us. And it creates in its own image. It draws to itself other thoughts of like kind, therefore other manifestations of like kind."

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"I know what you mean," broke in Tibbitts with the air of an exhausted swimmer at last touching bottom with his toes. "I know what you mean, Mr. Murgatroyd. Misfortunes never come singly. And so on. . . ."

Murgatroyd nodded a little curtly. Tibbitts was not a favorite with him.

"Whatever causes one misfortune would be bound to cause another would be a better way of stating it," he murmured. "Take a criminal—I think that at the back of all our prison systems is the unacknowledged certainty that an evil mind should not be allowed at large to attract other evil minds. We hang a murderer because he must, not he may, cause other murders. The mind of a murderer will murder, in other words."

"It really comes to this," Monsieur Pichegru cut in, in his careful English, and in the tone of a man who dislikes the mysterious, "that talents for good or evil will draw to themselves their own opportunities. I think we can all agree on that?" Monsieur Pichegru had all the Frenchman's love of a discussion at the dinner table. Not at lunch. The midday meal was for the passing of light items of news or gossip, but with the evening, the French spirit seems to expand and rejoice in exercise.

"What do *I* draw to myself, professor?" Vivian asked gaily, catching Murgatroyd's eye as he entirely agreed with their host's condensed version of his idea.

"Opportunities for using your very remarkable quickness of observation, I should say," was his reply. It surprised her. Here was some one else who was quick too. "I should think you would make a very successful newspaper correspondent, because by that law of which we're talking, events of interest

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would be bound to come your way, rather than the way of some duller person."

Vivian smiled a little as at a quaint phantasy, but on that came the startling reflection that here *was* the problem from Anthony Cross's past sitting beside Smith. Here, to the town, if not to the villa where she was staying, Anthony Cross was coming, perhaps on some errand of his own, perhaps really brought here by the hunt for the diamond stealers of which he had spoken.

Here, where just before dinner she had herself had the incident of the boot in the bushes on which she had stepped. And, why—yes, she herself—why was she here? Not as an ordinary tourist. . . .

"Law?" Tibbitts bit off a chunk of peach and talked through it. "You called it that before. I never heard of any such law. Where is it?"

"It's the law by which, unless we ourselves deliberately bury them, our gifts will surely get the chance to be used to their best advantage. It's a law we do not yet understand. But then, what do we understand?" The professor sighed.

"Nothing of what's been talked about just now," Tibbitts said bluntly.

Every one laughed. He flushed a little and thrust out his weak chin.

"I say, Miss Young, I've mended your bracelet for you." He spoke loudly, in the tone of one who intended to show the rest that there were some things he could do better perhaps than they.

"Oh, thank you!" Vivian's bracelet, one of the heavy kind fashionable just now, had come undone during tennis, and had refused to stay fastened. Tibbitts had volunteered to put it right.

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He now took it out of his pocket and held it out to her on the palm of his large, red hand—the hand of a laboring man in spite of its obvious acquaintance with soap and water.

It fastened perfectly. Thanking him, she snapped it shut.

"Talents, and opportunities to use them," Smith murmured lazily, with that undertone of careless contempt in which he always spoke to Tibbitts. "I didn't know you were a handy man, Tibbitts. There should be plenty of work for you if your tastes lie in that direction."

"I used to do metal work when I was a boy." Tibbitts looked uncomfortable. "Arts-and-crafts classes, you know. No end fond of it I was. That's where I got these weals on my palms."

"Just the lad for the garden roller," Smith said firmly. "Monsieur Pichegru, get him to have a heart-to-heart talk with it this evening."

Smith disliked Tibbitts, that much Vivian knew already.

Mrs. Brownlow protested that Tibbitts and she were going to feed some carp in the Abbotts' Pond. She said it gently enough, yet Vivian was certain that she was not pleased with something. Was it possible that she did not care for her fag to slave for other people? If so, here was the first glimpse of one of the vamp's characteristics that Vivian had seen.

"No, no," Monsieur Pichegru said promptly; "I use Mr. Tibbitts for something better. Adrien, the chauffeur, thinks him a marvel. He thinks——"

"Who was that chap, a red-haired chap, who called here this afternoon," Brownlow asked the table in general, apparently not noticing that his host was speaking. "We met just outside the gate?"

"A reporter. He wanted to see me about Davidson's lost

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money," Smith answered in his drawl that struck Vivian as so affected.

"About my lost jewels, I hope, too," Mrs. Brownlow said urgently.

"He only wrote on his card that he came about Davidson's loss," Smith explained. "I didn't see him—why should I? I told him to go to the police. They have all the facts. I loathe reporters."

"But why shouldn't he tell about my jewels too in his paper?" Mrs. Brownlow asked pathetically. She spoke perfect English, but with a very pretty French regularity of accent. "The same thief took both."

"The insurance company in London is investigating, you may be sure," her husband reminded her. "They won't thank us to insert articles in newspapers."

"But the things were only insured for half their value," she said accusingly. "All your fault too. And, of course, no company could be as keen on getting them back as I am. Do see if he won't write up a description of my jewels too. Who did you say the man was, Mr. Smith?"

"Name of Mackay. Scot evidently. Works on some Aberdeen paper."

"Then you may be quite sure he won't work for nothing," Brownlow pointed out to his wife.

Vivian was listening intently. This talk of theft. . . . And it was on account of thefts that Anthony had said he was coming to Cluny. . . . Was it, after all, really business that was bringing him? She had forgotten Edith Montdore's words about "the vamp's" lost sapphires.

Monsieur Pichegru explained, in answer to her inquiry, that a couple of weeks ago Mrs. Brownlow, another guest called

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Davidson who had now left, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Tibbitts, had all four gone up to Paris, taking the night Pullman at Macon. Mrs. Brownlow to join her husband in the capital, and at the same time have some jewelery re-set. Davidson to put some money into a tourist agency. Smith to have a couple of merry days with some friend, and Tibbitts to escort Mrs. Brownlow apparently; at least, so Monsieur Pichegru said with a twinkle in his bright, dark eyes.

In the morning, on their arrival at Paris, Mrs. Brownlow was minus her jewelery and Davidson had lost his wallet containing a thousand pounds in bonds—international bearer bonds unfortunately. Neither Smith nor Tibbitts had lost anything. Except Mr. Smith, all the travelers had been chloroformed—by sprays inserted in holes pierced in the doors, the police thought. They had been the only occupants of the carriage, which had been put on at Macon. The porter seemed to have been drugged. There was nothing about the affair to distinguish it from other similar railway thefts, so Smith claimed when Monsieur Pichegru had finished.

"They tried to bore a hole through the panel of my door, but it was a new one. And teak!" he explained.

"These thefts on the French lines are getting as numerous as their accidents," Lascelles murmured under his breath to Mrs. Brownlow. He had only arrived yesterday morning, and was leaving at the end of the week.

After dinner some French neighbors dropped in again, this time for bridge. Smith, a remarkably good player, and his friend Lascelles excused themselves after a rubber, and sat out in the gardens close to a bed of rhododendrons.

In the thick undergrowth behind them there was from time to time a slight, noiseless ripple—a ripple that seemed to

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be steadily nearing the two figures. It had begun on the outer edge of the little thicket—then it showed towards the middle—then past the middle—now it was close to the edge nearest the backs of the two talkers.

It was on that movement in the bushes that Miss Young's gaze was fixed as she sat by her bedroom window watching the grounds through a very good glass, waiting for the first sign of the return of the man on whose boot she had stepped in the bushes. He was sure to come again she thought. She had looked for him all through dinner and ever since. Now she was certain that her glass was on him, though she saw nothing of any figure.

"I guess a Red Indian couldn't move better," she murmured, putting on a dark cloak, and slipping into her crepe tennis shoes. She made for a clump of bushes behind the two chatting men by a little detour, lingering until at last they got up and passed into the house again. Then she sprang forward into the thicket. The figure should be about here. . . .

It was her own shoulder that a hand grasped.

"Don't be frightened! Don't holler! It's quite all right!" The figure in the darkness was that of a man, the voice just now was low and very urgent.

Most young women would have needed some further reassurance, but Vivian Young did not try to pull herself away. She put her free hand instead into her pocket. Instantly a hand, that felt like steel, gripped it too, not hard, but very firmly.

"It's a torch, not a gun," she said quietly.

"Worse yet," came the swift whisper.

"You're an American, aren't you?" she asked. "I'm from God's country too."

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"Has He only one?" came the tart question. "I'm frae Aberdeen, and—but whaur can we talk wi'oot being overheard?"

"Come with me." Vivian had made up her mind as to her course. "There's a summer-house not far off. . . ."

"Mind these laurel bushes!" he cautioned her. "They rustle unco' loudly."

She took his hand and led him swiftly, considering all things, to a dark outline not far off. There she paused, felt for a moment, opened the door, pulled her companion in, shut the door, and only then switched on the light.

They were in a pleasant, pine-walled, pine-ceilinged room, with a rug or two on the floor. Osier chairs in Mandarin blue with cretonne cushions on them, an osier settee and a small table by the fireplace gave the summer-house a homely look.

Seen in the bright electric light, her companion showed as a short, stocky figure with thick hair of a handsome auburn; a shrewd, freckled face lit by a pair of alert, cool gray eyes.

"Who are you?" she asked, though she guessed.

"Suppose I were to tell ye that I'm just the new undergairdener wi' a taste for listenin' in?" he asked in his marked Scottish accent.

"I should know you for a liar," she replied promptly. "I'm from Texas. We use our wits out there. You're no gardener."

"And wherefore no?"

"Your hands—your fingers—and you called those rhododendrons 'laurels' just now."

He scratched his jutting chin and showed a very fine set of teeth. "Nane sae bad," he conceded fairly. His eyes swept her and studied her. "You yourself are?"

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"A visitor to Porte Bonheur." She sat down. So did he. There was a pause.

"I'll e'en tak' a chance," the man said finally, after he had watched her intently for another moment; "I'll e'en trust ye. I'm a repairter on a paper in Aberdeen."

"Where's that?" she asked.

His reply was a look of boundless pity.

"It's the maist important toon in Grreat Britain," he explained modestly. "Well, I'm a repairter there, and yon affair of the robbery in the train of an Aberdonian, a Mr. Davidson, interested me. I've an idea aboot that theft. At least I had," he said, with rather a sheepish grin. "I've been sent by ma editor to speir oot hoo it a' happened. It's ma ain idea," he went on. "If I fail ma paper winna back me. You tak' ma meaning? If I'm caught oot, I'm just—well, whatever I maun hae to be. A trespasser or maybe even a burglar. But the pay promised if I succeed is grrand. And the credit too. I'd be a made man in ma profession. I'd like fine to succeed," he added in a tone whose sincerity there was no mistaking.

"I've got an idea that might be of use to you," she said brightly, and scribbled something on a magazine lying on the table. Tearing off the page, she handed the scrap to the man.

"That may help you in your search," she repeated pleasantly.

He looked at what she had given him, and a dull red surged up in his lean face till his cheeks glowed like his hair. Then he turned and gave her rather a helpless look.

"You can read shorthand of course," she went on, "since you're a reporter."

For a second he stood biting his thin lips, looking at the

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little white tag. Then he raised his head and laughed a trifle grimly.

"You're a wonder! But you're richt. I'm nae repairter. But I thocht it wad be easier to gain access to the hoose, and your help too, maybe, if ye thocht I was a man belonging to a recognized newspaper. I wanted ye to have confidence in me," he wound up.

"I have confidence in myself," Vivian said placidly; "quite enough to risk associating with you, Mr. Mackay, or even helping you."

"She kens ma name! She kens everything!" he said in half-assumed, half-real admiration. "Well, I am a private detective, Miss Young. Here are my credentials."

He passed a thick note-case over to her. She studied its contents quickly—but quite carefully.

"You're one of the heads of the firm?" she asked, handing it back.

"I *am* the firm. A' there is to it." He spoke the last sentence soberly enough. His glance swept his thread-bare clothes, his shabby shoes, his ancient felt hat, with a meaning look. "It's make or break with me, Miss Young, this job."

Had he tried for a month he could have found no surer way to interest Vivian Young. "Make or break"—that was real life, she thought, with the feeling of a man who comes back after a long absence to familiar landmarks.

"As good as that?" she breathed eagerly. "My, there's nothing like just air behind one for helping to put pep into things. And putting pep into things is all there is to life," she finished with a laugh.

"As guid as that," Mackay repeated her words too, as though he liked them. "'Make or break' is guid, eh?" He

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seemed to consider the thought. "Well, I ca'd masel' a repairter as less alarming than a private detective," he explained after a pause. "I thocht I would hae a better chance for a crack wi' Mr. Smith."

"He seems to disapprove of reporters," she told him. "I must keep it dark that I'm one if I want to fascinate him."

"You're a reporter?"

"On the *Texas Whirlwind*," she said proudly.

"I *did* land a kelt when I talked of being a newspaper man to you!" he said with fervor.

Miss Young did not know what fish he meant, but she grasped the meaning.

"Sure did!" she assented blithely. She did not add that it was because of her descriptions of the scene, her work of rescue during a terrific fire, that her paper had sent her on a year's tour around the world. Nine months of the year were already gone. It was her great chance, she knew. And to think that so far it had only brought her the post of Anthony Cross's future wife. The thought flashed across her now with quite ludicrous dissappointment.

"Mrs. Brownlow, the woman who lost her jewels at the same time as Mr. Davidson did his money, wants you to work for her too, Mr. Mackay. Her husband rather turned the notion down, but I guess she gets her own way with him."

Mackay shook his head.

"By the terms o' ma contract wi' Davidson, I'm pledged not to undertake ony ither worrk till his job is dune. Or given up. And mind you, it's going to be a deefficult job," Mackay confided suddenly; "for every reason. Lack o' money. And on ma parrt lack o' training too. I'm but a beginner, ye ken. I bought the business wi' ma last poond-note and I've no

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succeeded as I hoped. So I come cheap. Which was why Mr. Davidson took me on. The prices o' a French detective made his hair fall oot. Forrby that he canna speak the language, and hasna any confidence in men that kiss each ither."

"It's a great chance for you!" she said warmly.

"It's one that I'll niver get again if I slip up on't." His face looked suddenly very young and troubled. She saw the over-sharp modeling of jaw and high cheekbone. Mackay could do with more food than he had been having lately, she thought.

"As far as determination is concerned I'll no slip. But it's ma brains, I doot, ma reasoning powers. And what you want in detecting, Miss Young, is logic."

"I'm only here over the week-end, but I'll help you find out anything I can," she said impulsively.

"What? Join forces wi' an unmasked gairdener and reporter?" he asked with a swift smile.

"I guess I can call most people's bluff," she said, smiling too. The pleasant smile facing her came off promptly.

"But if it isna bluff in yon hoose? And it may not be, Miss Young. Detecting isna a game for a leddy. Though I winna say but that there micht be bits of information and—well, juist bits like, where an insider could help a lot."

She rose.

"Well, I must go now. But I'll keep my ears and eyes open, and if I can think of anything brilliant I'll let you know. And if anything humble enough to entrust me with comes along you'll be so kind and condescending as to mention it, I hope."

He thanked her warmly.

"Ye're a plucky lassie," he murmured gratefully. "I kennt

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that weel the moment I felt your hand on ma coat. Not a tremble. Not a fumble, and not a soond. But is this summer-hoose safe for a crack?"

"It's stoutly built," she assured him. "I noticed this morning that you can't hear voices outside. Unless, of course, you were to put your ear against the cracks. But why not come to the villa? Call on me, if you like."

"I canna come ben," he said firmly. "Mr. Smith doesna like repairters, ye said yoursel'. And I've sent in ma name as a repairter. But there's an old gentleman staying in yon villa; I saw him fishing this evening. He and I passed a word together. Maist interresting talk on the ruins we had."

"Professor Murgatroyd, yes?"

"I'll watch for him, and mok' friends wi' him. He may know summat that'll help. I feel a bit like a wee laddie oot in his big brither's breeks," he confided whimsically.

"Your great chance will be the fancy-dress ball. Oh, say, Mr. Mackay, it's masked! Until supper at one. Why don't you come and go over to the bedrooms carefully, if you suspect any one in the house. *Do* you suspect any one in the house?" she asked. She meant, did he suspect Smith or Tibbitts.

He could not, or would not, tell her.

"I'm not a guid detective," he said at once, "and never shall be, but at least I dinna blab a' my thochts. But the ball—that's a fine idea—I'll think that over——"

"Sakes alive, Mr. Mackay, you don't want to think things over! You want to grab at them! Jump and land them!"

"Na, na!" he expostulated in a deeply shocked tone, "one should aye act according to the light o' reason, Miss Young. After long and careful deliberation."

She gave him a derisive glance.

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"You're young enough to learn better, fortunately. My father was a Texas Ranger. One of the best. And his motto was 'Leap before you look.'"

"Tut, tut!" Mackay clucked, shaking his head in open horror.

"It's a good one," she said promptly. "None better."

"In Texas, verra likely," he said politely; "but in oor parrt o' the globe, Miss Young, the licht o' reason is what we maun go by."

"Shucks!" was Miss Young's reception of that bit of wisdom, after which she arranged the hour of their next meeting and said good-night.

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CHAPTER III

NEXT morning, Vivian, Mrs. Brownlow, and Mrs. Brownlow's faithful slave, Tibbitts, went out with Mr. Murgatroyd to an old fortress close beside the villa, from whose ancient battlements they had a good view.

It was a glorious day. Vivian shook off all fancies and riddles, and enjoyed it to the full. The meadows were one blaze of buttercups, the hawthorns white with blossom.

Behind them lay the wooded slopes of Fouettin and Saint Mayeul. A lane of lime trees, centuries old, still in full flower, led to the little town on their right. The smell of its blossoms, surely one of the sweetest smells in the world, rose all about them. Girls with big baskets on their arms were cutting off the thick clusters for the famous *tilleul tisane*. To one side the Grosne, crystal clear, glittered past meadows where maize was tossing its great golden plumes. There was a hint of ripening grapes in the air from the vineyards all around.

There is magic in Cluny by night or by day. A spell woven by man, and the mind of man. A spell from out the great days when:

"En tout pays ou le vent vente
L'Abbé de Cluny a rente."

The days when this little town was an asylum for kings, when its abbey led the world of Christian thought, and led it well; when Cardinals of Guise, and Richelieu, and Mazarin, and princes of the blood royal were content to be its "abbot of

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abbots"; when four Popes came from its grand old walls; when its library, and its learning, and its high standards; were only equalled by its power and its wealth.

Vivian leaned over the coping and studied the scene. For a while the historian let them idle, then he set to work. He had promised them a glimpse of the Cluny that he knew. A very different place from the sleepy *ville* that they saw.

Of the great Basilica, that monumental work of the eleventh century, the noblest church in Christendom of its time, he could only speak of as of a lost treasure, save for two towers of the narthex still left standing.

But he built it up again for them. In its green setting, with its triple roofs, its soaring steeples, its innumerable buttresses.

Then he showed them where the abbey ran, a world in itself, with its gardens, and its immense cloisters, its buildings, towers and ramparts.

Vivian was not greatly interested in architecture, but she liked hearing any man talk on what he knew well. Also, she had sent home a delicious little vignette of "The Professor at the Dinner-table," and she wanted another. Even if he had read them, Mr. Murgatroyd would only have been flattered, for she drew him with a very friendly pen.

Mrs. Brownlow seemed interested. But there was so little else doing at Cluny that Vivian suspected her of gracefully making the best of a dull day. Tibbitts shifted heavily from one big foot to the other and breathed hard. When he could, he leaned over the battlements and betted with Vivian on the various depths. He had a quite unexpectedly accurate eye, she found.

"And now"—Mr. Murgatroyd beamed at them like a father promising his youngsters a treat—"now we will go and

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have another look at the beautiful double-arched entrance gate of the old abbey. We won't go on to the museum. I don't doubt you, too, know that by heart."

"Bet your life!" Tibbitts agreed, adding in an aside, "I don't think!"

They walked to the school of arts and crafts, now housed in the old abbey, or part of it. Mrs. Brownlow said that she knew the gate well with its charming view. Why, Vivian asked herself, was she always so interested in Mrs. Brownlow? It was not only because of that odd incident of her picture in Anthony Cross's hands. It was something in the woman herself. Some charm that emanated from her, as perfume from a damask rose. Whether she were a vamp or no, Vivian could well imagine her to be a spell-binder.

Murgatroyd leading, they passed into the building. It was then that Vivian missed Tibbitts.

She believed that they would find him at some café outside, in front of an apéritif, but, to her surprise, looking over her shoulder, she saw him standing still on the handsome broad staircase, the original staircase, and bending down to examine the wrought iron banister.

"Gosh! I never saw finer work!" he muttered. "Old iron this," he went on touching it as Vivian had never thought that his thick fingers could touch anything. "Very old. Yuss," he bent down and studied it intently. Then he straightened up and grinned sheepishly at her before shooting a swift, rather nervous glance at Mrs. Brownlow's slender back.

"Don't often find things in museums and old places that interest me," he murmured apologetically; "first time I ever remember to've cared a damn for any of the rot they show you."

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They walked on, Tibbitts sinking again into the dull young man with the efforts at heavy pleasantry that they knew at the villa.

It was when they were in the cloisters that he seemed to come to life again. He suddenly left them, turned at right angles and was lost to view. His action had something so definite, so purposeful in it, that the others followed.

"I told you the boy was only joking when he said that he had never been here before," Mrs. Brownlow murmured.

They found Tibbitts on his knees by a funny little excrescence in the wall.

"Here is the spot!" he called exultantly. "They've built this doorway half over it, but here was the 'earth where that iron was puddled, bet your life, and drawn and hammered, and worked up, that we saw just now on that staircase."

Margatroyd gave an exclamation.

"You think you've located the blasting furnace of Brother Placidus?" His voice shook with excitement. "We've been hunting for that for years. I was certain that it was under some part of this later addition."

"Where else could it be?" Tibbitts asked contemptuously; "seeing the way the valley faces, it would 'ave to be 'ere, wouldn't it?"

His voice was the voice of a laboring man.

"Then you think this blackened wall——" Murgatroyd's tone was quite humble.

"I don't think! I know! You can see for yourself that part of the old sandstone 'earth is still 'ere. It would be lined with charcoal dust, you know. The pile of ore would go there. The 'earth would be filled up this-a-way with charcoal, and blanketed down with a muck of wet dust and small ore. Then

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you'd start the blast going, and keep adding more blanketing until you got a good heat, then you'd let the blast rip, and bit by bit the whole'ld turn to bloom."

"What's 'bloom'?" Mr. Murgatroyd was always interested in anything even distantly connected with his work. "What's 'bloom,' Mr. Tibbitts?"

Mrs. Brownlow watched the scene with a faint line between her rather thick, very long and low brows.

"Why, your puddled iron o' course. The stuff wot ye draws out and hammers and rolls. The stuff wot some bloke worked into those banisters we saw in the house back there, and that r'iling to the balcony just over our heads." He pointed up with one of his big red hands. "And I'll tell you one thing, the bloke wot designed them knew iron, knew wot it will do, and wot it won't. Beaten it with his bare fists in his time he must 'ave."

"Well done!" Murgatroyd was enchanted. "Well done! They are indeed both by the same master hand. Both by Brother Placidus. But that you should have detected as much at a mere glance—you are indeed a master craftsman, not merely the dilettante which in your modesty you claimed! Metal work was a genuine hobby with you evidently."

"Metal work, yuss." Tibbitts seemed to give a little start, and again he shot a rather timid glance at Mrs. Brownlow, who only turned and began to admire the flowers.

On the way out, Murgatroyd motioned them to follow him to a little room. He pointed to a painting in a corner representing a monk with a rugged, but intellectual head.

"That's Brother Placidus. Looks like a pilgrim with that staff in his hand, doesn't he? Well, he was one. We all are."

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"Staff? That's a rabble, that is!" Tibbitts was staring intently into the dull, dim picture.

"And what, pray, is a rabble?" asked Mrs. Brownlow. Her voice was bored and indifferent.

"Why, what you rabbles with, silly!" was the unexpected reply. There followed a second of appalled silence. Then Mrs. Brownlow gave a forced laugh. There was nothing forced about Vivian's. She had to laugh or burst. The absolute stupefaction on Mrs. Brownlow's features was too marked and too sudden for her self-control. Even Mr. Murgatroyd was betrayed into one reluctant cackle.

"Really, Mr. Tibbitts," Mrs. Brownlow spoke with an effort at gaiety, "you are rather overwhelming as a tutor!"

Tibbitts turned scarlet.

"Sorry, Mrs. Brownlow, I spoke too quick," he mumbled; "I was thinking of that bloke there."

"You haven't told us yet what you rabble, and why you rabble," Vivian reminded him, with another burst of hilarity.

"A rabble is the long bar wot you rouses the boiling with," he said suddenly, and walked off whistling between his teeth. And with that, as far as Tibbitts was concerned, the interest of the morning seemed to be over. But on their saunter back to the villa, a saunter in which Mrs. Brownlow very quietly, but very firmly chose Mr. Murgatroyd as her companion, Tibbitts said suddenly to Vivian:—

"Brother Placidus, eh? That's the same as Placid I suppose?" Vivian said she supposed so too.

"Placidus"—Tibbitts swung his ornate cane to and fro —"'e worked like 'is name. Placid. Nothing hurried about his work. No need to." Again there was a silence, and then he said half to himself:—

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"Must be wonderful to do work like that back there. Work you 'ave a right to be proud of. Work you'd never need to brag about. It speaks for itself, it does. I used to think when I was a nipper that I'd do something like that bloke's wrought iron work some day. You couldn't do nothink finer if you was to try all your life! Yuss, I used to think in those days that once you was grown-up—why, you could do as you liked. Work to please yourself——"

He stopped again. Something in his brown eyes reminded Vivian of a homeless mongrel staring in through a window.

"I believe," she said encouragingly, "that wealth is just as much of a handicap as is poverty."

Tibbitts nodded, but he said nothing more. Mr. Murgatroyd stopped them a second later to point out a Merovingian wooden house. Suddenly Mrs. Brownlow gave a startled little exclamation.

"Ah!" beamed Murgatroyd; "you've noticed that added arch? It is indeed a dissonance. That must have been done when——"

But Mrs. Brownlow had turned and was hurrying down into the rue de la Poste without one glance at the anachronism which Murgatroyd fondly thought had surprised and shocked an informed eye.

Miss Young, as they walked on up the road that climbed to the villa, saw her hasten on towards a tall figure that was sauntering along with a leisurely

"All that I see,
Belongs to me!"

air as she called it. It was Anthony Cross. Vivian saw him stop at a word from Mrs. Brownlow and take off his hat. Mrs.

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Brownlow drew him to one side, and together he and she, after a few minutes animated conversation, walked back towards the center of the town.

Mr. Murgatroyd, since this was a matter unconnected with sticks and stones or past ages, had noticed nothing. He burbled on. Tibbitts melted away into a café. Vivian Young threw the historian a word now and then, but she was thinking hard.

Anthony and the problem from his past! Apparently he had just arrived. He was carrying a small bag. She had noticed that at Macon there was no word or sign of his valet. She would do nothing to deliberately put herself in his path, she had decided. That should be left to Fate. Besides, always at the back of her mind was the knowledge that Anthony really was engaged in a most important search, one which, though he had denied its presence here at Cluny, was not unconnected with danger.

She wondered whether he would learn that she was staying at the Villa Porte Bonheur. She wondered, whether, and if so, when and how they two would meet.

At dinner that night, Mrs. Brownlow spoke of Cross.

"I met an old friend of ours unexpectedly this morning, Tom," she murmured. "It's Anthony Cross. Fancy meeting him again and of all places here! I asked him to drop in for a chat after dinner."

"Anthony Cross?" Tom Brownlow repeated rather vacantly. "Oh, yes, of course! Coming in this evening, is he? Good!"

Surely this was overdoing it, Vivian thought. Surely a couple who had spent the whole afternoon together would have talked over a friend's arrival. Why then this public an-

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nouncement and this apparent difficulty on the husband's part to "place" the friend?

"What brings Cross to Cluny?" Brownlow went on.

"The abbey remains. I suggested his asking you for a room, Monsieur Pichegru. Perhaps he will. If he stays on at all for any length of time. Apparently he has only made up his mind definitely to one night, and took a room at the hotel near the station. If you hadn't happened to be taking us on that historical tour of the town, Mr. Murgatroyd, he might have come and gone without either of us knowing of it. He was *so* surprised to see me walking towards him." This last to her husband, who nodded carelessly.

"Are you talking of *the* Sir Anthony Cross?" Smith asked with interest "One of the directors of the South African Diamond Combine?"

The Brownlows said that that was the man.

"He's on his way back to London on some matter connected with the syndicate, so he told me," the wife added.

Vivian saw Smith flash a quick, inquiring glance at his friend, Mr. Lascelles, who returned it blandly. Catching Vivian's gaze on them, both men dropped their eyes with a haste that looked positvely guilty, and began to crumble their bread.

"Perhaps we can persuade him to let me put him up, though but for one night," suggested Monsieur Pichegru, and again a message of the eyes passed between Smith and his friend. "Any friend of yours, Brownlow, can always count on a room here. And a rest in this quiet spot might do such a busy man as Sir Anthony good."

"I am sorry to seem discourteous," Mr. Murgatroyd said in his clear voice; "but if Sir Anthony Cross were to become an inmate of Villa Porte Bonheur, I should be constrained to

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go to one of the hotels. Under ordinary circumstances that would be no matter, but half-way through my book it would entail, I confess, a certain amount of adjusting of impediments. . . ."

"You know Anthony Cross?" Brownlow asked curiously.

"I have never met him," explained the professor; "but some years ago my brother was very anxious to establish a leper colony not far from one of the mines owned by his company. He had just been appointed a director, I remember, and it was owing to his active and passive resistance that all efforts fell through. I feel that the abandoning of a project of bringing help to a class of human beings who certainly needed it sorely was due entirely and solely to him. And feeling that, I very strongly object to meeting him. His standpoint was——" Mr. Murgatroyd pulled himself up, but his eyes flashed. He looked very different from the placid scholar of the morning.

He shook his head at himself. "The French are right; to be angry and to make bad blood *is* one and the same thing. Sir Anthony must have brought down on himself enough ill will without my adding to it."

"It does not seem to have harmed him, so far," Mrs. Brownlow put in, with, for once, a touch of sarcasm in her voice.

"So far," Murgatroyd repeated. "Remember the words of the wise Solon: 'Account a prosperous man happy only when he ends his life as he began it.' Sir Anthony is still a comparatively young man, as age goes nowadays."

It seemed to Vivian that the rest of the dinner was unusually quiet.

Smith, his friend and Mr. Murgatroyd all seemed lost in

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thought. Only the Brownlows, Monsieur Pichegru and she kept up a desultory chat, with clumsy contributions from Tibbitts.

After dinner, Vivian took a walk by herself through the gardens. For the present she had decided to act exactly as though Anthony Cross were not in the town. She finally strolled back to the summer-house to which she had taken Mackay. It was the hour at which they had agreed to meet.

As she shut the door, some one rose in the dusk inside. It was the detective.

"Sure, it's verra kind of ye, Miss Young," he said, with evident pleasure. "Naething to report, I tak' it? I hope to find some clue when I tak' a luik at the hoose to-morrow nicht. The nicht o' the dance. For I shall come to it. I've met a mon who's a director of a great diamond combine for which I did a bit o' warrk a couple of years back. He's doon to tak' a luik at the ruins, and is putting up at the same hotel as I am.

"I've had a crack wi' him. I tellt him what brings me here—in strict confidence, o' course, and I spoke aboot the ball to-morrow. Balls are a bit oot o' ma line. But he thinks, like you, that I must na miss seeing the inside o' a' the rooms when the parties are engaged below. It seems he kens the leddy who lost her jewels—yon Mrs. Brownlow—and through her he'll meet Monsieur Pichegru, and will ask him for twa invitations for Saturday nicht. Ane for himself, though he doesna expect to be here to use it, and ane for a friend. That's me! Certes, I shall use mine."

"You mean Sir Anthony Cross? Mrs. Brownlow spoke at dinner of having met him in the town. If you've worked for Sir Anthony, perhaps he can put you in the way of some really good job." Vivian was thinking of the diamond thefts.

"A doot that," Mackay said with his self-deprecatory

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smile. "I'm no the class o' detective that Sir Anthony Cross wad employ. What I did for his combine was nobbut looking up some clerk's Edinburgh guarantor. And that class o' warrk is a' I'm guid for, I fear me. Ye see, detecting differs. I've always worked on business questions. Tracing checks, asking aboot characters, and the like. But private warrk—like Mr. Davidson's—it pays the best, o' coorse, but it's the sort I'm no cut oot for, and that's a fact. However, I shall just use ma een to-morrow nicht, and if I find naething after all, I'll awa' to Paris, and try to work at the bogle frae that end. For when a's said and dune, 'tis by the light o' reason alane problems are solved."

"Father solved his with his gun—alone," Vivian said dryly, and Mackay laughed. A laugh that suddenly spoke of youth and a sense of humor, however repressed.

"What are you coming to the dance as?" she asked next. "We ought to be able to recognize each other."

"I thocht o' a ghaist," he said tentatively. "I canna spend ony money on it. And for a ghaist a' I'd need wad be but a sheet and a pillow case—over and abune ma ither claes," he added hastily. It was Vivian's turn to laugh. Suddenly an impish idea struck her. She would have dearly liked to suggest that Mackay should go as "The Ghost of a Young Man Drowned in Shanghai," but she bit back the speech. After all, though the tale linking his death with Mr. Brownlow might be false enough, the young man had probably really died. And besides that, Vivian was no spreader of idle gossip.

"White's rather a poor color for snooping," she said instead.

"True." He thought a moment. "Forbye giving some servant lass the fright of her life. Hoo aboot a collector then? That

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micht do. Juist ma Sunday blacks—ma frock-coats gey shiny at the seams, and I'll rip it a bit here and a bit there—and ma top-hat has seen better days—and wi' ma sma black bag in ma hand, I'd do fine, and widna be seen a mile off. Aye. It'll be as a collector I'll come. A debt-collector, ye ken. And you, Miss Young?"

"I'm 'Lady-into-Fox.' Chiefly a woman, but turning back into the fox that I once was. With a fox's head on my hair. But about what brings you to Cluny—I came here simply bursting with something that happened this afternoon, and yet which seems too monstrous."

She stopped as though she really meant the adjective.

He looked hard at her. His bright, alert, gray eyes were trying to read what she had to tell him before she spoke. His resolute, freckled, rather plain face was alight with interest. Was he to hear something that would help him?

"If only you were hunting for Mrs. Brownlow's jewels instead of, or as well as, Mr. Davidson's money, it might help you tremendously," she said slowly; "though, as I say, I can't believe—no, I can't!" She stopped again.

"I cann't warrk but for Davidson the noo, but I'm as keen on knowing what happened to Mrs. Brownlow's jewels as she can be," he said eagerly. "The twa thefts were the warrk o' the ane thief. There's na doot aboot that. It's not entirely the money I'm working for, Miss Young," he added, as she still did not speak, "though I canna deny that a bit o' siller wad be useful. But it's the thocht o' mebbe beating a criminal at his ain game. I'd like fine to do that!"

She nodded. "Well, this afternoon, while I was practicing some serves, I happened to look towards the house just as a gust of wind blew back the curtains in one of the first floor

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rooms. You'd call it ground floor. And there stood Mr. Tibbitts by the window with a string of black pearls in his hands. He nearly dropped them, and looked ready to drop himself when the curtain billowed around him and he saw me on the grass.

"He sounded me when he came out as to whether I had noticed some beads he'd bought in the village as a present for his sister at home. Now, of course, that's quite possibly all the scene meant. But—it's funny! It sure is! He looked appalled when that curtain blew out like a sail and left the window free. Yet I can't think that Mr. Tibbitts is a thief! He is supposed to be a rich young man! But it was a string of black pearls that Mrs. Brownlow lost along with some sapphires, and those in Tibbitts's hand were just the length of hers—long enough to go around the neck—a choker string. And I never saw a lovelier sheen. They looked like black grapes. And Tibbitts was on the car the night they were stolen from Mrs. Brownlow—altogether——" she shook her head with its bright waves of light-brown hair—hair that matched her eyes in color.

"Which window was it?" Mackay asked at once.

"A long window in a room they call the cedar room. It's a sort of extra room. Hardly ever used."

"Not the room where the safe is?" Mackay asked. She shook her head.

"That's in Monsieur Pichegru's study. I know, because he wanted to lock away any jewelery or money of mine I might have with me. But about Mr. Tibbitts——" she looked inquiringly at Mackay, who only stood thoughtful and silent.

"Sakes alive, why don't you say something?" she said laughing.

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"I'm thinking," he replied gravely.

"But I want to know what you think about what I've just told you—about Tibbitts——"

"It takes time to think," Mackay said judicially; "to think wi' any degree of usefulness, that is. But I'll admit that it's queer," he conceded with one of those boyish smiles that lit up his lean face.

"So are many little things about the house," she said in answer to that. "To-night at dinner, for instance, when Sir Anthony's name came up. Mr. Smith and a friend of his, a Mr. Lascelles—the two you were watching when we met"—Vivian's eyes twinkled like brown diamonds at the recollection—"he's leaving to-morrow morning, by the way—looked so oddly at each other. A long, meaning look, especially when Monsieur Pichegru said he would put Sir Anthony up."

"Is he going to?" Mackay wanted to know.

"Mrs. Brownlow thought Sir Anthony wouldn't be staying long enough to make it worth his while changing over from the hotel. Besides dear old Mr. Murgatroyd got quite mad at the mere notion. I thought Mr. Smith, and Mr. Lascelles, too, both looked very disappointed. Certainly they were very silent for the rest of the meal. Say, Mr. Mackay, it all sounds so silly, gossiping like this. But I like talking to you. Partly because I sure am glad to have some one to speak to who reminds me of home. You look like the kind of men I'm used to. Though, heaven knows, they'd beat you when it comes to grabbing on to things! But also you never know what bit of idle chatter might not help a detective."

"Not this detective! Not me!" Mackay said gloomily. "I'm plum oot o' ma depth. But I'll dae ma best!" he finished sturdily.

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She laughed. "My grandmother used to say:

"Do your best
And leave the rest,
Angels can't do better."

"But the trouble is it isna angels I'm up against," was his only comment on grandmamma's philosophy. "I've been trying to think things oot. But even if I had ma suspicions, hoo can I prove them?"

There was a short silence, then she told him of the morning at the abbey.

"Mr. Tibbitts was too funny. He grew just like a workman. Dropping his aitches and speaking like what we call a Bowery tough. And the way he turned on Mrs. Brownlow, when she was fed up with his talk about a rabble and asked him what it was. Asked him in the tone that says you don't care a cuss what it is—you know the tone." Vivian laughed again. "It sure was funny!"

"Do you think she likes Tibbitts?" Mackay wondered.

"She treats him very nicely. In a sort of elder-sister way that's quite charming. But, then, she is charming in everything she does."

"And her husband—Mr. Brownlow?"

"He speaks to him always in a very civil tone. More I can't say. Mrs. Brownlow told me that they met Tibbitts at Monte Carlo simply flinging his money away right and left. He was a mill hand. She thinks—she doesn't know—and his father emigrated and made a fortune suddenly and then died. She explained to me that they wanted Tibbitts to stay a while at the villa with them and learn to pick up a few things——"

"Such as Mr. Davidson's thousand pounds, and her jewel-

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ery?" asked Mackay grimly, and they both rocked in unseemly mirth.

"How mean we are to talk like this! Say, she fascinates me, Mr. Mackay. She's a wonderful woman."

"She's a face that doesna attract me," he said rather shortly.

"But she's so graceful!"

"Aye. She has a nice walk," he agreed. "I've heerd that Isadora Duncan walked that gait."

"I should like to know her better," Vivian went on, half to herself. "I'm sure she'd be interesting to know. Yet I can't think why I'm not sure."

She rose to go. But she had one question to put.

"Mr. Mackay why did you ask me where Monsieur Pichegru's safe is?"

"I've known of a missing paper once being a' the time in the man's own safe," he said darkly. "That's why, Miss Young."

Vivian thought this over on the way back to the house. And the more she thought it over, the less she understood exactly what the private detective meant. Did he know himself? But her thoughts now were really on Anthony Cross. Had he arrived? Would he and she meet? To-night?

She heard her name called, and found Mr. Smith behind her on the path.

"I thought I heard voices in the summer-house. Have you left poor Tibbitts locked in?" he asked languidly.

"Oh, no," she spoke as casually as he. "I was talking to an acquaintance of mine who didn't know where Monsieur Pichegrus boundary runs. A man who's putting up at the Hotel

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de Bourgogne. By the way, he's an acquaintance of this Sir Anthony Cross's too."

"Why don't you bring him up to the house," Smith suggested in what sounded a sociable tone; "do you know if he's any good at squash racquets?"

"Let's ask him," she suggested.

They found the house, as she knew they would, empty. It had a window that looked on to the opposite side of the path, and she had talked to Smith as they walked towards it. Unless he wished to be found then, Mackay would be out over the sill and through the bushes, like a young salmon over a rapid; of that she was quite sure.

Smith murmured some vague word of regret about the squash racquets and strolled back, while Vivian took a turn through the orchard, enjoying the beauty around her.

Coming back to the villa once more, she saw ahead of her, in a corner of the thickly-wooded drive that made a little bay here, two people standing talking. One was Anthony Cross. He was speaking very earnestly to an over-dressed, over-painted woman. Or rather the woman was talking earnestly to Anthony Cross. She was a remarkably handsome woman too. Vivian thought that she must have been a singularly lovely girl. Standing still in the shadow of some trees she looked at them. By Anthony's expression she saw that he was trying to escape. But the woman would not let him go. There was something absolutely desperate in the very bend of her neck as she seemed to be pouring out a string of entreaties. Twice he tried to leave her, but she only stepped after him and continued to talk. Finally Anthony's face flushed at something said, and with a little twitch of his shoulders very familiar to Vivian—it had reminded her the first time she saw it of a Roman senator

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adjusting his toga—he almost pulled his arm from her hand and turned away. An exclamation from the woman stopped him. Even to Vivian's far-off ears it had had a tragic sound. He looked ashamed of himself, she thought, and turning, he stood patiently for another moment or two. But by the set of his jaw, when he replied, Vivian could guess that he was not giving way. Indeed it looked to her as though he were delivering some sort of an ultimatum, or even warning the woman not to continue her argument, her pleading, her—whatever it was. And when he had done speaking, he turned away in a manner that brooked no further stopping. Resolutely he walked towards the house, out of sight.

The woman stood where he had left her, in the middle now of the path. She stared after him. Her face was towards Vivian. It was pale, and there was a sort of desperate hatred in it, a sort of unable to believe that all was lost expression on it that kept Vivian rooted to the spot. She shivered. What could make a woman look like that at a man? Tragic and almost frightening in their wild fixity, there was a passion of hatred in her magnificent eyes that had to be seen to be believed.

"I wouldn't like any one to look after me like that!" thought Vivian. She wondered what it meant. She was far too experienced, knew too much of the world, to think the worst, as a nicely brought up young woman of the mid-Victorian period would have done. But still—it was an odd look. . . . It did not admit of many interpretations. . . . Vivian went on. The woman, hearing the steps on the gravel, turned, gave her one glance and then walked away swiftly towards the gate. Vivian was half-minded to catch her up and chance some excuse. After all, she was Anthony Cross's fiancée. Or was she? No, to be honest, she didn't care a rap how many old flames, or new

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ones either, Anthony had. She was quite sure that she never had cared, and never would care. And on that thought, she slowed up, turned and walked away. At the first possible moment she intended to take her freedom back.

That wild night on the ship, something big about the man had imposed itself on her and blinded her to many smaller facts—their different upbringing—their different walks in life. A girl, of course, can marry a man of quite another world, but she must want to become a member of that world. Vivian didn't. She was a born fighter. She loved a struggle. And there would be no fighting, no struggling, as Lady Cross. Anthony was not a self-made man. He had shown her some photographs of his family place that had much impressed her. It must be a dream of a house, of a park. But even at that moment of semi-awe, Vivian had known in her heart of hearts that it was no home for her. You couldn't add anything to Quarry Court. You could only keep it up. And keeping up what others had had the fun of making did not appeal to Miss Young.

Arrived at the villa, she went to her room. By the reflection on some ilex bushes below her window, she could see that the lights were on in the cedar room—the room where she had seen Tibbitts standing with the beads—or could it possibly be the pearls—in his hand.

Leaning out, she could even catch a voice, Anthony's voice, speaking quietly as ever. In fact, speaking a good deal more quietly than usual, she thought. Then came a laugh. Mrs. Brownlow's throaty gurgle. And another! Her husband's this time. Anthony did not seem to join in, and he had a very hearty guffaw when he was amused. Next she heard his low tones making what seemed quite a long speech. Evidently the Brownlows had carried their friend off from the drawing-

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room to this quieter spot. There was only one other room in the wing. A sudden wonder struck her as to whether the Brownlows already knew of Anthony Cross's engagement to her. It would hardly be possible for him to be talking so long without telling old friends of the most important step that can befall man or woman. If so, would he learn of her arrival here? Here in the villa? Would he think it a coincidence if he did? He might. But she knew the quickness of his perception, of his reasoning. He was not a man whom you could easily hoodwink. He had an uncanny—at least she thought it uncanny—way of putting just the one question that you did not want him to put, the one and only query whose answer would inevitably give him the kernel of the matter. She decided that if Anthony heard of her arrival, it would be no use pretending that it was not linked with the sight of that photograph, with her overhearing his question about a man called Brownlow.

And on that came the thought to go downstairs now, it was only a little past nine, and leave it to him to meet her as a stranger, or present her as his fiancée. Which would he do? What a delightful, awkward position for him. Vivian was a bit of a minx. The idea appealed to her immensely. She was down the stairs within the minute. She was almost at the door of the cedar room when came the reflection—was it fair to Anthony, supposing the very unlikely case that he did not know of her presence in the house at all; would it be fair to him to spring a meeting on him in circumstances of which he had had no idea when he had asked her to meet him as a stranger? That halted her. Then came the thought that, apart from fairness or not to Anthony, she was sure that he could be very stubborn. In which case the jest might be a rather awkward one in the end. Suppose he let himself be introduced to her as to

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a stranger, and suppose her vague feeling of thin ice, of undertows, was all wrong, and these people at the villa were all that they seemed, how could she ever explain away the facts when they learned them? And since the Brownlows were "all right" and friends of Anthony's, they were sure to learn of them, unless——

Could she save his pride if not his heart? Could she perhaps prevent him telling others of that engagement which she firmly intended to break. She decided to step into a room near the one from where the voices came—it was fitted up rather in an hotel fashion with several little writing-tables—and wait there for his departure, which could not now be long delayed. She would slip out through one of the long windows when he should pass the door and meet him outside the villa gate. She would be frank with him, she would tell him that she had acted on impulse when she had accepted him. That his personal magnetism had swept her judgment off its usually firm set. As to more sordid motives, Vivian refused to acknowledge them, even to herself. They were not really part of her. In that she was right. She was no parasite.

Vivian settled herself in an arm-chair. She did not switch up the light which was back by the door.

It was some minutes before a sound roused her from her thoughts. It was the faint fall of footsteps outside, or rather beside, the room. They died away. Then they came again. Again they died away. Some one was lightly, all but noiselessly, walking up and down a carpeted side-passage which ran between the room where she sat waiting and the room where Sir Anthony sat talking, presumably alone with the Brownlows.

Vivian waited until the steps passed once more, then she noiselessly opened her door and looked out. To her surprise

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the passage, too, showed no light. Whoever was there was in the darkness. And must have switched off the row of lights that had been shining like pink pearls a minute ago.

She hesitated. For after all, she, too, was waiting in the dark. That other person out there might be equally justified in hoping for a word with Anthony Cross. And for an equally good reason perfer, too, not to be seen waiting.

On that, however, came a sudden realization that Anthony Cross claimed to be in Cluny on a mission both secret and important. A mission connected with a theft that ran into many figures. He had laughed at the idea of danger, but the danger might be here just the same.

She knew now that she was not in the least in love with him, but she would always be his friend. Was that figure, doing so soft a sentry-go outside the cedar room, a friend?

She was just on the point of slipping out and switching up the lights, when the door of the cedar room itself opened and shut swiftly, as some one—a man—stepped out. She heard a "Sorry! I had no idea there was any one here!" in Brownlow's voice. He had evidently collided with some unseen person.

She heard an answering, "I can't find the switches. I want the room where Monsieur Pichegru told me that I should find plenty of writing paper."

It was Mr. Lascelles! Quiet Mr. Lascelles, then, who had been taking that promenade up and down the dark passage. Vivian was surprised. The next instant she jumped to her feet. For Brownlow, still speaking very pleasantly, said:

"Oh, that's the other side of us. This way——"

They were coming in here, and she, Vivian, would be found sitting in the dark and apparently waiting—for whom? For what? It was an impossibly ridiculous situation since she

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could give no explanation. There was no time to switch up the light, as the men had already turned the corner and would see the streak under the door and hear the click.

Intensely vexed at the whole affair, she stepped behind the long curtains over the windows. The glass doors themselves had patent fasteners, which were too noisy to dare to open—for the moment—or she would have slipped out now, at once, into the garden. She was delighted when she heard Lascelles say rather nervously:

"Oh, thanks! Thanks so much. I only—eh—wanted some paper to take to my room with me. This will do nicely. Thanks."

"Sure there's nothing else?" Brownlow asked. And was it Vivian's fancy or was there something mocking in the question so solicitously put. "Nothing, thanks," was the reply, and a minute later she heard the two men pass on together down the passage to the main hall.

She waited where she was. One of them might come back, and the villa's carpets were frightfully thick. A moment later she heard some one actually in the room. Some one who now closed the door. Vivian had noticed that her curtains by no means covered the whole of the window recess. She had not dared to touch them for fear of a fold continuing to quiver. Now peeping out, she saw that it was Mr. Brownlow who was back again in the room. But a Brownlow quite incredibly changed. Hands in his pockets, his shoulders hunched, his heard thrust forward, he stood staring at a table beside him with unseeing eyes. And as he stared, his face grew more and more malignant.

The forehead, never lofty, seemed to flatten as she watched. The little eyes to move closer together. His jaw thrust forward till the yellow lower teeth jutted out a good eighth of an

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inch beyond the upper ones. It gave him a horrible resemblance to a wolf. Vivian had seen many seamy sides of life in her newspaper work, but she had never looked into a more criminal face than this man's was—now—seen like this, off his guard.

The story her friend Edith Montdore had told her in the train came back to her. For the first time she thought that the gossip linking the husband with the lover's disappearance might well be true. She could easily imagine this man in front of her, this hitherto unseen, unguessed-at man, jumping on another in the dark, holding his head down under water until the heaving and the struggles should cease. . . . She kept very, very still. Vivian was frightened.

For a full minute she had the benefit of Brownlow's horrid and ferocious look, then, with a sudden gesture as though he had made up his mind, he opened the door again, stood a second, apparently listening, switched off the light, and passed noiselessly out of sight.

She was after him in a flash. That was no face to let roam a house where a man on a dangerous mission might be sitting all unsuspecting.

She flattened herself against the wall, even though he switched out each light as he came to it, so that the corridor leading to the cedar room was quite dark, as dark as the one which Mr. Lascelles had been patrolling. Had he gone back to his post? she wondered. Apparently this idea struck Brownlow, too, for at the corner he turned and gave the side-passage a long scrutiny. From the sound of his steps, she thought that he even tried a door at the farther end which led into the garden. Then he came back, and again he switched off each light. All was in darkness now, except that some leaded panes at the

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other end shed a sort of blurred luminosity all along the corridor.

By it Vivian saw Brownlow tiptoe to the door of the cedar room, and bending down, press his ear to the keyhole.

In the stillness she heard Anthony's voice talking, apparently pleasantly, and a moment later came another peal of laugher from Mrs. Brownlow. Vivian had never heard her laugh much before. Then came a sentence or two in her voice, but said with great animation.

Evidently it was not sober business that was going on behind that door. The man outside it stayed as he was for several minutes, then he straightened up, and, as Vivian backed into the room where she had been, he passed her walking swiftly on into the main part of the house. She followed cautiously until she saw him enter the billiard-room with some word that she did not catch, in a pleasant, ordinary voice.

She moved away, took up a book, and sat down in a corner of the lounge close to the room where she now heard the click of balls.

She had plenty to think of. First of all, she considered Mr. Lascelles's silent pacing of that dark passage. Mr. Lascelles—was he here by some arrangement with Anthony? Was he the man whom Anthony expected to meet? That might be possible. And that long, quiet interchange of glances between himself and Smith at dinner, when Anthony's name had first come up, could her idea explain that too? It must, if it were the right one. She saw the look again. Not stealthy exactly, yet not open. But then came the thought that Anthony's mission, or quest, was he here by some arrangement with Anthony? Was he the of it, of course. That might include Mr. Lascelles. But it obviously did not include Smith. For Mr. Smith had not been

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acting, she felt sure, when he had inquired whether Mrs. Brownlow's chance-met friend were *the* Anthony Cross. But Mr. Lascelles might have had something he wanted to ask of Anthony—some favor. That might explain his acts to-night, and that look between the two friends. . . .

Her thoughts passed on to Brownlow. The man was madly jealous. Of that she felt certain. Most dangerously jealous, too. That sent her mind racing back to the photograph of Mrs. Brownlow, to the "problem" in Anthony Cross's past, to the vamp of Mrs. Montdore. The last term she thought, but the fears of a wife with a slightly uncertain husband. But the photograph, Anthony, and that awful look on the husband's face. . . .

She made up her mind to see Anthony as early as possible to-morrow morning and warn him of what she had seen. It was too late to-night for the talk that she had hoped to have with him outside. And in the villa, he would be accompanied to the door for certain by some member of the household.

She told herself that she ought to leave Porte Bonheur if there was any idea of resurrecting Anthony's past. But she found herself very reluctant to cut herself off from any chance of knowing what happened after she left. The clicking of balls beside her stopped.

"By Jove," came in Brownlow's voice; "my wife and Anthony Cross seem to have a lot to say to each other." How jocosely he said it, and now, as he stepped out of the room, how pleasantly he smiled at her as he passed her chair.

After a moment Smith came out too, and, also after a moment, went on down the same way.

Vivian closed her book and decided that it was her turn to get some note-paper from the writing-room.

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Neither man was to be seen. But she heard Brownlow's voice. Evidently he had joined his wife. She looked at her watch. The talk in the cedar room was certainly a long one. Yet, as a rule, Anthony was a man of few words. She went to her room. It was not till nearly one o'clock that the light ceased to shine on the bushes in front of the cedar room, and only then did Vivian, fearing she did not know what, leave her window, and go to bed.

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CHAPTER IV

NEXT morning, Vivian was out early. She intended to stay out until she met Anthony, even though it was the day of the dance, and the frock made for Edith Montdore needed a few adjustments. Pins would have to do, if necessary. The point was to see Anthony and warn him not to trust to any specious appearance of friendliness on Mr. Brownlow's part, but to realize that the man was a menace, or could be. Vivian had seen that evil face of his in her dreams. She had been glad when it was time to get up.

She was used to a hotter, fiercer land, but this temperate country-side seemed to her very lovely this morning. The Grosne is a true angler's stream; to-day it was clear as the air above it, the speckled trout casting dark shadows on the pebbly bottom as they lazily fanned themselves with a moving fin, or opened and shut their mouths in that foolish, contented way that causes a fisherman to see red. The swallows and martins glanced like blue arrow-heads above them. The water plants were alive with the shimmer of dragon-flies' wings. She watched a little water vole sitting up and munching a spray of marsh-wort in two tiny hands. Near her a cuckoo was calling the one "true" interval of bird song—that mysterious, alluring call. A dipper caught her eye, and paused on a shallow stone to curtsey politely before he started off to take one of his strolls along the bottom.

From a turn in the road, she saw two men fishing. One was Anthony. One was Mackay. Just now, they were apparently

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comparing their tins of bait. Anthony went off to another swim of the river. She came on him again by the Pont de la Levée. Mackay was out of sight around a bend.

"Anthony!"

He turned, glanced all around them, and shook his head, not very indignantly, at her. They were quite alone.

"Woman, indiscretion is thy name!"

"Oh, don't joke! I've something to say to you. First of all, I'm staying at the Villa Porte Bonheur."

He looked at her impassively. She felt that he was angry, very angry, but he made no remark.

"I met a friend in the train who knows Monsieur Pichegru," she hurried on. "She recommended me to try his villa. And besides—but never mind about that. The point is this. Last night, while you were talking so long to Mrs. Brownlow, I came downstairs in order to meet you in the garden on your way out. Well, I heard some one walking up and down in a dark passage quite close beside the room where you were."

She described what happened. She described also the fiendish expression on the face of Brownlow when standing in the room which he thought was empty.

"Now, don't misunderstand me," she finished. "My only concern is that you should know that the man is dangerous. Wildly jealous. He looked capable of anything last night. And I heard a very dreadful story, if true, about him in the train from my friend. A story she had heard from one who knew them out in Shanghai."

She told it. Anthony Cross listened to it, too, without a change of his face. Certainly he did not look at all grateful.

"Do you really think, my dear girl," he asked coldly when she was silent again, "that I am so little capable of man-

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aging my own affairs"—there was the faintest emphasis on the possessive pronoun—"as to need to be guarded and shepherded, however charmingly?"

She knew by his tone that he was, if possible, even angrier than at first.

"I expressly asked you to keep clear of me during my stay down here," Anthony went on. "Did you by any chance overhear me ask Monsieur Bonvy if he knew a man called Brownlow in Cluny?" He spoke in a very level voice.

"I did," she replied promptly. "And also, when I saw Mrs. Brownlow, I recognized the woman whose portrait I had seen you looking at, and remembered what you had told me about the one woman you had loved. Any other questions?" Vivian too was angry. To think that she had given up a much-needed nap this morning in order to be up and out and warn this ungrateful brute.

"And so you deliberately went to Porte Bonheur? In order to keep watch on me?" he asked with deadly politeness of tone.

She nodded.

"Did you speak to the Brownlows of me at all?" she asked as quietly as he. "Did you mention, I mean, that you were engaged?"

"Certainly not," he said almost sharply.

She drew off his ring, and held it out.

"Then I can give you this back now. Thank you for the loan of it, Anthony." Her face was gentle again. "But it was only a loan. I guess we both knew that in our hearts. It really belongs to—some one whom you haven't met yet."

"Just as you like." He spoke as carelessly as though she were returning an umbrella that he had lent her.

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Vivian was relieved and amused and pained all in one.

At that moment Mackay appeared around a bend. Both she and Cross seemed to welcome the sight of a third person.

"Good-morning!" she called out first. Then as he drew nearer, she went on, "You and Sir Anthony are fishing together, I suppose?"

Anthony nodded.

"More or less. We're putting up at the same hotel. How did the fishing go?" he asked, turning to the other man. "Caught anything?"

Mackay had not.

"Like me. And to think that scientists would have us believe that fishes can't hear. I believe that they have all our five senses, and another five of their own as well." Raising his hat to Vivian, Anthony moved off.

"For ma ain part," Mackay said sadly; "I've come to the conclusion that to catch roach you maun think like a roach. I micht do better if the river wasna a strange one."

"I guess you mean if you knew French better, so as to catch up with the thoughts of the French roach," Vivian said laughing. She felt strangely happy. The thing that she had funked—oh, yes, indeed she had—was over. She was free. What a glorious morning it was. How the shadows of yesterday seemed to have passed away. Back at the house she felt the same lightness of heart. It was as if some fairy had changed her eyes. Everything now resumed the usual aspect that things wore in the usual lives of usual people. Such as she was. Such as, she felt sure to-day, were those of the people around her.

True, Mr. Brownlow had looked like a fiend last night. She did not weaken on that. But he might have had "a tooth-

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ache in his temper." Evidently he had got over it to-day. For he was in high spirits.

In the afternoon she wrote a little on her article. But there was too much noise for her thoughts to come easily. And, though she had a good style, it was not yet good enough to do without the support of some thinking.

The house was invaded by a chattering mob of gardeners, and cooks, and furniture movers, and florists' assistants. She found herself at a loose end. Mrs. Brownlow was invisible. Her husband seemed to be spending his time trying to see if his sitting-room chimney smoked. At least, so he explained to Vivian, when, alarmed at a thick puff of smoke rolling down their mutual corridor, she had run along to find its cause.

He was beating a flaming paper to pieces on the hearth.

"It's all right, Miss Young, I'm trying the chimney with a newspaper. We haven't had a fire in it since we've been here. But my wife wants one for to-night. One feels chilly after a dance, don't you think?" Vivian agreed. Ever helpful, she would have flown to his assistance, but something in the small eyes fixed on her—something about the whole mild, smiling face made her alter her mind. She left him to get the better of the smoke by himself.

"My!" she said to herself, "his tooth must be aching again. He looked as though he would have bitten me if I had come one step nearer. And that wasn't a newspaper he was burning either."

It was at lunch that she heard that Anthony was coming to the dance.

"He has telephoned to Lyons to send him a pierrot dress, if there's still one to be had," Mrs. Brownlow said, "though I don't suppose he'll do more than look in at us frivolous folk."

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Vivian felt like saying that on shipboard there had been few better dancers than Anthony. But she kept silence, though there was, for the first time, a rather aggravating air of proprietorship about Mrs. Brownlow's way of speaking of Anthony. It irritated her, and suggested an incipient toothache of her own.

"Will you let him have a room for the night, monsieur?" The soft voice went on, "You offered it so kindly last night, and as he's leaving early in the morning, I think it would be more convenient if he could change here, than if he had to walk back to the inn?"

Monsieur Pichegru at once made for the telephone to ask Anthony Cross to send his things over to the villa, and stay there for whatever time he intended to remain in Cluny. In a few minutes he came back.

"He'll send his things over later on. I'll tell Honoré to put them in the red room. And as he spoke of letters which must get off to-morrow, and which he may have to finish to-night, I've put the cedar room at his disposal, since none of the empty bedrooms has a sitting-room attached to it. We must be sure and leave a couple of chairs for him. And a writing-table can be moved in from the next room. He won't mind the fact that everything else is cleared out for the dancers."

"What with writing and dancing all night, and traveling all day, the strenuous lives rich men lead make me thankful, Tom, that you aren't a millionarie," Mrs. Brownlow said lightly.

"He has asked for two cards for a couple of hotel acquaintances," Monsieur Pichegru went on, going to a side table and rummaging in a drawer.

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"Men?" Mrs. Brownlow asked; "and good dancers?"

"One's a lady. A Mrs. Eastby. I will call on her this afternoon. The other card I'll hand to Sir Anthony when he gets here." And the conversation drifted away from Anthony Cross.

Mrs. Eastby—could that be the name of the woman in the garden, Vivian wondered. But if so, had Anthony asked for an invitation for her? But then, why the whole scene?

That afternoon, Monsieur Pichegru was wanted urgently on the telephone. Monsieur was trying on his fancy dress—the good man was going as Saint Urban, patron saint of vineyards—and rustled in his robes and miter to the instrument. After which he flung his sacerdotal garments wildly off, called for his car to be sent around at once, got into his ordinary clothes, and tore his hair all in a few brief seconds.

His bonded warehouse in Dijon had caught fire. His Chablis, his Mussigny, his Pommard, his Chambertin, his Beaune and his Mercury, not to speak of—as he did promptly and wildly—his Saint Georges and his Montrachet, were in danger. And French laws as to salvage are very trying to proprietors. He was insured, naturally, he called over his shoulder, in answer to sympathetic inquiries from his guests. It was not a money loss but a loss to the world of wines and good cheer that was threatened.

He begged his house party to continue just as though he were present to-night. He might indeed be able to return and join in the dancing, but that was very problematical. In the meantime he delegated the Brownlows as his representatives. But Brownlow refused the honor. "I'm no good as the convivial host," he maintained, laughing.

"The British shyness!" scoffed Monsieur Pichegru; "then

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you, Monsieur Smith, must represent me. I will take no excuses from you! Oh, that reminds me: the card for the lady friend of Sir Anthony Cross, and the recipe for my iced claret-cup which has no equal from the Channel to the Mediterranean—like the little stories dear to your friend who has just left us."

Smith and he walked off, the one receiving, the other giving directions. When at last night fell, the weather was perfect. Mrs. Brownlow was greatly relieved, for she had suggested that the many windows of the music-room, which was being turned into a ball-room, should be taken out and plants and sham plaster pillars be arranged so as to hide the wall-spaces between. The effect was good. Room and garden seemed to merge into one blossoming whole. The lawn had been brought up to the edge of the parquet flooring and level with it.

All the invitable part of the neighborhood was at the dance. Some of the dresses were gorgeous affairs from Paris or Lyons ateliers. Many were simple, and others were humorous.

Mrs. Brownlow wore an ordinary, but very lovely, evening dress of soft silver brocade and lace, over which, from shoulder to hem, front and back, ran a bright blue half moon. On her head was a diadem of wired crystal beads that spelled the word "ONCE."

"Once in a blue moon" was her obvious meaning, and her mask was another blue half moon. It was but decorative. She made no attempt to disguise her identity.

Her husband was "a bottle of Macon"—a shiny roll of black cardboard, duly labeled, and wearing a cork hat.

Vivian looked quite charming in her creamy frock with its gold lace cap and fox's mask a-top of that. Across her face

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stretched tawny velvet with a deep gold fringe. Edith Montdore had not intended to be easily recognized.

The guests were only announced by character. Mackay came early. With Dundreary whiskers made from horse hair, clad all in shabby black, with his shabby little bag, he was a good figure. Taken for "the gas-meter man," he was much applauded.

"Have you seen Sir Anthony?" she asked as he stepped to her side. He replied Scots fashion by another question.

"Why should I have?"

"Oh, no reason. Only he's late."

"Perhaps he isna coming at a'. He's too sensible a mon to care for this sort o' thing."

"You talk like your own grandfather half the time!" Vivian scoffed.

"Wouldn't you give the whole of it for juist quiet under the stars?" he asked suddenly. "I wud. There's an awfu' lot of wishy-washy talked aboot dances. A nicht spent in the open, the sicht o' the sun coming up in the morning, or sinking in the west; yon's worth while. But this—it's juist mak'-believe!" He spoke contemptuously. "I canna thole mak'-believe," he added, quite unnecessarily.

"But it's not make-believe." She spoke with certainty; she had only half-heard what he had said. "I've a feeling, 'a pricking in my thumbs,' that something's stirring to-night in the Villa Porte Bonheur, Mr. Mackay. It may not concern either of us, neither you nor I may ever learn what it is, but I tell you I feel it. Mr. Murgatroyd said people like me attracted things to their neighborhood. That if they were going to happen, they'd happen near them. I wonder if he was right. And I wonder, too, if so, what's going to happen here."

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"Well, it's no great happening, but for ane thing I'm awa' to search the upper rooms. I've been over yon Tibbitts's. I found naething. If he still has a string of black pearls, then a' I can say is that he wears them."

There were several pierrots, most of whom wore a round, pale, cardboard pierrot-face as a mask. Anthony Cross was one of these, but he was easily recognizable by his great height. He made no attempt to find Vivian. On the contrary, he avoided her, choosing Mrs. Brownlow's vicinity with marked preference. Brownlow did not seem to mind; at least he immediately stopped for a genial word with him.

Vivian had not yet seen the woman to whom Anthony had spoken last night in the garden. But after a little while "an Egyptian lady" was ushered in, with a white *yashmak* up to her khol-darkened eyes. Her dress, to Vivian's scrutiny, was made up chiefly of shawls and yards of black tulle from the local shop—a traveling dress evidently. A question of Smith, who was "Le Grand Chef" in white cap and apron, told her that her guess was right.

"But don't say that I gave her away. She happened to speak of rigging up something Eastern. I called on her this afternoon, you know; her husband's a colonel in a camel corps. Did you ever see such eyes?. . ." He broke off to watch the latest arrival. Evidently Smith was struck with Mrs. Eastby's looks. And no wonder, Vivian thought.

"She's here having a look at the ruins," Smith went on. "Met Sir Anthony, who's an old friend of her husband's, it seems, coming down in the train. Funny world! He's over from South Africa, she from God knows what oasis back of beyond, and they meet in a branch line running from Macon to dead-alive little Cluny." He tucked his cardboard *pate* more firmly under

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his arm, and waving a farewell with his soup ladle hurried away to claim his partner. Smith was positively human to-night, Vivian thought.

She watched the veiled figure move towards the tallest pierrot, who was not dancing at the moment. Vivian drifted in that direction too.

"How is my dress, pierrot? Not so bad, considering that it consists of a couple of shawls and window curtains?" The "Egyptian" spoke coquettishly.

"It seems all right to me," Anthony's voice answered indifferently. "Well, I hope you'll enjoy yourself, but frankly, I—well, I was surprised that you cared to come." There was something like suspicion in his tone. And in his eyes, too, as they looked out of his cardboard face.

"Oh, I like being with people who are having a happy time," she said, with a little catch of her breath.

Anthony nodded agreement as he moved away to talk again to Mrs. Brownlow, who had now left her post by the door. Sugar slide was the dance of the moment. Mrs. Brownlow said that she would show him the steps and took him to a quiet corner of the lounge, so shut off by palms that it made a little room to itself. Vivian could not follow there. Nor did she want to. There was only too little mystery about their mutual infatuation, she thought. They were not even pretending an interest in steps. Heads close together, they were sitting and talking. A moment later and they got up and passed into the larger room. Anthony looked as though he were immensely pleased with something, Vivian thought. He had a triumphant air. And at that look a pang stabbed her. Not for his lost affection—not entirely. But for himself. That he should be content to solve the problem in this way. It was not a problem

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any more, Vivian thought; the solution was only too simple, too easy to guess.

She was dancing with Mr. Brownlow. They were doing a sort of in-and-out around some rose bushes when, turning to look at him, she caught a glimpse, just a flash of the face that she had seen—herself hidden—in the writing-room last night. The expression passed in a second. He had been staring over her shoulder. When next she faced that way, she saw that Anthony and Mrs. Brownlow were again together—again talking. Mrs. Brownlow seemed to be yielding to some suggestion of his, but yielding unwillingly.

Finally they turned and went indoors, at an almost peremptory gesture of his.

Brownlow laughed. A very forced laugh, Vivian thought it.

"Dear me! I shall have to call out Sir Anthony before breakfast to-morrow morning, if this goes on. 'Pistols for two, and coffee for one.'"

"He's leaving very early," Vivian said lightly. Though she did not feel like taking the situation lightly.

"He'd better!" Brownlow said under his breath in a tone of such fury that she drew away. She of all people did not intend to be dragged into any quarrel between Mr. Brownlow and Anthony and Alys Brownlow. Let the husband look after his wife better. Certainly to-night for the first time she had met the vamp. Mrs. Brownlow was consciously trying to attract, and, of course, succeeding. The very turn of her head over her shoulder as she passed into the house in front of Anthony was alluring, mysterious, provocative.

Brownlow made some excuse and practically left Vivian *planté la*, as she called it. But some one else came towards her

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with the unmistakable step of one who at last sees that for which he has been hunting.

It was a man's figure, wearing a long robe, the hood drawn over the head, with slits in it for eyes.

"Just in time!" he murmured; "not yet a fox, lady, are you? Do let me have one dance before you change completely."

Vivian studied him. It was Mr. Lascelles, she felt sure. But Mr. Lascelles had left that morning, so she had been told.

"What is a member of the Ku-Klux-Klan doing here?" she asked.

He gave a protesting shudder. "I am a Florentine!" he expostulated. "A Brother of the Misericordia," he gave his hood a tug. "If you are struck down with plague this night, I would bear you to a hospital. On the other hand, should you intend to murder any person or persons with whom you are annoyed, here I stand, ready to help give them Christian sepulchre."

"I had no idea you were useful," she murmured.

He bowed.

"I felt sure that you did not guess my worth," he murmured. "But where is it, Jane?"

"Where is what?" she parried. Jane! Then he did not know her. Jane. . . . Vivian looked about her as she danced off with him. The only woman of her height and build was the Egyptian lady. She was old enough to be Vivian's mother, the girl thought, a little piqued, but, of course, under such a mask as hers, and with lappets of gold lace fastened under her chin as well. She had thought when first she saw him that Mr. Lascelles looked as though he could dance well. Now she found that he could indeed. He had a jockey's sense of balance. She enjoyed herself in silence for some minutes. When they

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were resting, he asked her again urgently: "Well, Jane, how about it? I've come for it."

"For what?" she piped in the treble squeak that she had adopted to-night.

"The protrait you promised me," he replied on the instant. But she noticed that her next partner was already at her elbow. Would his reply have been different had they been alone?

Mr. Lascelles had looked a most cautious man to her. How he watched her to-night! He, who had barely glanced at her yesterday. Always, wherever she went, she saw that figure in the long robe. He seemed to dance with no one else. To have eyes for no one else.

She had no dances to spare. But twice he passed her with a murmur of, "I've come on purpose, Jane." She only laughed.

Shortly after his second inquiry, Vivian noticed that Anthony was in the ball-room, looking keenly towards the main door, as though he were expecting some one. She saw him standing there again a few minutes later, as she swung past, and again looking as though he were waiting for some one, or for something. He had avoided her with great care all the evening. As she had him. But now she felt a sudden impulse to go up to him. He was leaving next morning. She did not want them to part like this. But just then Smith claimed her for the dance.

"Does one good to get back to this sort of thing," he said, as he improvised some new steps with the skill of an expert.

"Mr. Lascelles, too, evidently couldn't stay away," she said after a moment.

"Lascelles?" he started. "Have you seen Lascelles here? To-night?" His tone sounded genuinely amazed.

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She pointed out the tall *frater*. Smith eyed him keenly, then he shook his head.

"That's not Lascelles! That's—I forget who, some friend of some one's, but it's not Lascelles."

Vivian did not believe him. Was he honestly deceived, she wondered, or merely trying to mislead her.

"You'll see at supper-time that it isn't Lascelles," he said positively. "But what's that? The gong? Then it's close on midnight, and time for Pichegru's iced claret-cup.

"Bring forth, he said, the mazers four
My noble fathers loved of yore."

The doors of the ball-room opened, and in came a file of four chefs in white, each with his attendant scullion. The chefs carried silver trays from which artificial icicles hung, piled with what looked like snow, in which was embedded the local and enlarged equivalent of a mazer bowl. The scullions carried smaller trays wreathed with flowers on which rested small silver boxes.

Smith struck the foremost bowl twelve times as the clock in the lounge chimed midnight.

"The drink of obligatory!" He called in French, "I, *le grand chef*, present to you, in Monsieur Pichegru's most regretted absence, his especial *Coupe de Bourgogne á la mode de Cluny*, invented by him in honor of this occasion."

A bottle of local wine was emptied into the well-filled bowls. Then Smith took the silver boxes up one by one.

"Herbs of immortality and health, plucked in the meadows, according to the secret rites handed down in the Pichegru family," he explained.

The contents, woodruff, and raspberry leaves, and lemon

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and cucumber slices, and various flavoring herbs, were tipped into the drink. Smith gave four stirs with his huge spoon that set the ice clinking, then the claret-cup was ladled out.

No one needed a second command, the drink was exceedingly good, very mild, and ice-cold.

Vivian saw Brownlow pledge Anthony with mock formality. Both men seemed on the best of terms with each other. She thought that Mrs. Brownlow, standing a little behind them, eyed them very closely. The *frater* was nowhere to be seen. Nor the Egyptian lady. Bar these two, all the dancers that interested Vivian were present.

When she had finished her own glass, Anthony had disappeared. After the next dance she decided to look him up. She remembered their host's words about the letters that Sir Anthony might have to write. Hurrying down the passage towards the cedar room, she saw, to her surprise, that the Egyptian lady was ahead of her, walking very softly and yet with purpose in her swift glide. She stopped in front of a mirror to powder afresh. The *yashmak* dropped. She was the woman of the garden, and the expression that stared into the mirror was not unlike the one which her face had worn yesterday. It was the look of an utterly desperate woman. She did not see Vivian, the latter was sure of that. Her lips were moving swiftly, hurriedly, as though she were saying something over and over to herself. It occurred to Vivian that as she herself was going to see Anthony Cross for what might well be the very last time, it could do no harm if she were to freshen herself up too. After all, though she did not own magnficent eyes, nor was a Rossetti type, there was no real need for her to look her worst.

She spent some little time in her room. Finally, she slipped

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down again and into the same passage. The villa was built, roughly speaking, like a Z, the main body running north and south, the two projections east and west. At the end of one was the ball-room, at the end of the other this cedar room. Before she reached its door, she passed the room where she had waited in the darkness last night. It opened now, and out bounded Mr. Murgatroyd, looking like a man beside himself with indignation or burning wrath. Now the professor had spoken of possibly watching the revelry for a while from the first floor landing. But this was not the first floor landing. And the way in which he had burst from the room suggested a very different man from the gentle lecturer who was deep in the life of the Benedictines. He had shown some of this violence last night, however, at the mere mention of Anthony's name, as she now recollected.

At sight of her now, he jumped back into the room as suddenly as he had leaped forth, and closed the door. She felt sure that, had she tried it, she would find that he was holding it shut. It almost seemed to her that she could hear his quick, excited breathing from the other side. She was quite sure that she caught a "Not now! Some one's passing!" in a tone of extreme warning.

Vivian stood quite still. What was astir all around her? She walked on into the cedar room. Anthony was alone in it. His pierrot overalls, his pierrot cardboard face were off. He was in gray tweeds, standing with bent head staring at the floor. He swung around as she entered with the expression of a man who says "Here you are at last!" Yet the underlying look on his face, the look that Vivian felt sure had been there before she touched the door handle, was of a cold fury. Both looks, the underlying one and the sudden flash that crossed the other

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as two beams of light might cross each other, left his features when he saw that it was Vivian. Yet she felt that the anger was still there, if anger it should be called, for she had a feeling that it was deeper, larger than mere anger.

He took a step towards her.

"Not now, Vivian," he said quietly. "I haven't a moment to spare now—not even for you."

And taking her gently, but firmly, by the shoulders, he turned her round with a very masterful touch. As always with him, or nearly always, he impressed his will on hers. He dominated. She murmured some word of apology, and like a timid schoolgirl left him.

What in the world made him look at once so fierce and so icy? And what had made Mr. Murgatroyd look as he did? She decided that as there was bitter trouble brewing between Anthony and Mr. Brownlow, Mr. Murgatroyd had been called in to arbitrate or to smooth matters over. Vivian thought that the look on his face must have been caused by indignation at the whole affair. That probably Mrs. Brownlow was in that room of which he had held the door shut, and that he had been trying in vain to reason with her. At any rate, Vivian was sure that husband and old friend were quarreling over the wife.

For once she accepted defeat. It was not a case in which she could interfere. She would leave in the morning. Or no, she must know how events shaped themselves. When Anthony left early next morning, would he leave alone? One thing she had decided on. She would not watch him, nor Mrs. Brownlow. She had tried to-night to say some parting word to the man with whom, for a couple of short weeks, she had been on terms of such intimacy. But he had no time for her. Yet Vivian had a feeling that he had not parted in anger. Rather there

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had been a quick tenderness, not very profound, of course, but still there, in his voice and his touch. Poor Anthony, she thought, caught loitering too near to danger, overtaken by the lava stream of what he thought was an extinct volcano and about to be swept away by it. As she stepped out of the door again into the passage, she caught sight of a now familiar figure at its end.

"Dash it all!" she thought fretfully; "there's that Lascelles again!"

She dived into the side passage. A couple of curtains were looped at its entrance. She unfastened them swiftly. The corridor was very poorly lit to-night. All available lamps had been carried off for the dancing wing. Lascelles, she imagined, thought that she had stepped back into the room out of which he saw her come, for he hurried forward.

"Jane," he said in a cautious voice, "are you there?"

And on that appeared from nowhere the woman whom Vivian felt sure answered to that name, "the Egyptian lady." Vivian had not seen her come, but then her range of vision was limited to the end of the passage beside her. She saw the hooded figure put his hand on the knob of the cedar room door, she saw the woman snatch the hand away with a low, but almost frantic:

"No, no, Reggie! Remember your promise!" The voice of the woman whom Vivian now called Jane was very determined. She stood on tiptoe and whispered something swiftly into her companion's ear. Then both turned away, and, obedient to the woman's urging, passed together down the corridor.

Vivian waited some minutes, then she cautiously slipped across and around to the ball-room by a different way.

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"My, but masked dances can be queer, especially in this house!" she ruminated.

On the floor, she saw Mrs. Brownlow and her husband dancing together, and apparently in a most friendly fashion. That seemed to her to be queerer still.

At supper-time a telegram was read from Monsieur Pichegru. He sent excuses and good wishes to all his guests. He could not hope to be back in Cluny for another day at least, but all was going well. The fire had been got under, and everything had been salvaged.

Masks were now taken off. Mrs. Eastby dropped her *yashmak* as well. Vivian stared at her. She looked ten, nearly twenty, years younger than the distraught figure out on the gravel path pleading with Anthony last night, or than she had done just now, desperately powdering her face and mouthing some words over and over to herself.

No woman in the room could touch her, either for looks, or for a certain magnetic warmth that she seemed to spread about her. Mrs. Brownlow, more painted than Vivian had ever seen her, was but a shadow beside her. Though she tried to take the ascendancy that she usually had in any company at Cluny, the other woman out-shone her beyond all comparison.

Vivian looked around at the people, most of whom were strangers to her. At no table did she see the Brother of the Misericordia. She leaned across to Mrs. Eastby, who was having supper with an utterly fascinated Smith.

"Where's your friend, the Ku-Klux-Klan man as I called him?" Mrs. Eastby looked at her. For a second her eyes wavered, then:

"I don't know whom you mean," she said lightly enough. "What clan did you say?"

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