
WILLIAM JOHN LOCKE
THE TALE OF TRIONA

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER XXVII

CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

OLIVIA GALE leaned back in her chair at the end of the dining-room table, and looked first at the elderly gentleman on her right, and then at the elderly gentleman on her left.

“You’re both of you as kind as can be, and I’m more than grateful for all you’ve done; but I do wish you’d see that it’s no use arguing. It only hurts and makes us tired. Do help yourself, Mr. Trivett. And—another cup of tea, Mr. Fenmarch?”

Mr. Fenmarch, on her left, passed his cup with a sigh. He was a dusty, greyish man, his face covered with an indeterminate growth of thin short hair. His eyes were of a dull, unspeculative blue.

“As your solicitor, my dear Olivia,” said he, “I can only obey instructions. As the friend of your family, I venture to give you advice.”

“Why the deuce your father didn’t tie you up in a trusteeship till you were twenty-five, at any rate,” said Mr. Trivett on her right, helping himself to whisky and soda—the table, covered with a green baize cloth, was littered with papers and afternoon refreshments. “Why the dickens——” he began again after a sizzling gulp.

“Yes, it’s most unfortunate,” said Mr. Fenmarch, cutting off his friend’s period. “And what you are going to do with yourself, all alone in the world, with this enormous amount of liquid money is more than I can imagine.”

Olivia smiled and tapped the blue-veined hand that set down his teacup.

“Of course you can’t. If imagination ran away with a solicitor, it would land him in the workhouse.”

“That’s where it will land you, Olivia,” said Mr. Trivett. “Common sense is the better mount.”

“That’s rather neat,” she said.

“If it wasn’t, I wouldn’t have said it,” retorted Mr. Trivett, sinking his red jowls into his collar, which made them redder than before.

“You’re so quick and clever,” said Olivia, “that I can’t understand why you won’t see things from my point of view.”

“You’ve got to learn that a man of experience can’t take the view of a wrong-headed young woman.”

Mr. Trivett emphasized the asperity of his tone by a thump of his palm on the table.

As a matter of fact, he was genuinely angry. He was the senior partner in Trivett and Gale, Auctioneers and Estate Agents, in the comfortable little Shropshire town of Medlow; or rather the only surviving partner, for Gale, Olivia’s father, and his two sons had one after the other been wiped out in a recent world accident. Olivia’s decision, inspired from no other fount he could think of than lunacy, involved the withdrawal of considerable capital from the business. This, of course, being an honourable man, he could not dispute; but here were peace and reconstruction and inflated prices, and heaven knew how much percentage on the middleman’s capital, and here was this inexperienced girl throwing away a safe income and clamouring for a

settlement in full. They had argued and argued. It may be stated here that Mr. Trivett was the Executor of her father's estate, which made his position the more delicate and exasperating.

And now Mr. Trivett's exasperation reached the table-thumping point.

Olivia smiled wearily.

"It's such a pity."

"What's a pity?"

"Oh, everything. One thing is that there's no more gold. Of course, I know you can't understand. But that's your fault, not mine. I should have liked to realize all that I've got in sovereigns. Do you think they'd fill a bath? Have you ever thought how lovely it would be to wallow in a bath of sovereigns? Treasury notes are not the same thing. They're either very dirty and smell of plumbers, or very new and smell of rancid oil. Gold is the real basis of Romance."

He put her down for a mere female fool, and replied practically:

"We'll not see a gold coin in England again for the next fifty years."

"Well, well," she said; "anyhow, there's still some romance in mounting the deadly breech of the bank counter with a drawn cheque in one's hand."

"I'm afraid, my dear Olivia," said Mr. Fenmarch mildly, "I don't quite see what we're talking about."

"Why, we've discussed it every day for the last three months," cried Olivia, "and now this is the very last end of everything. A final settlement, as you call it! That's what you two dears have come for, isn't it?"

“Unfortunately, yes,” said Mr. Fenmarch.

“Then it’s all so simple. You’ve shown me this”—she picked up a foolscap document and dropped it—“the full statement of account of my father’s estate, and I approve—I being the only person concerned. You’ve got to give me one last cheque for that amount”—she tapped the document—“and I give you my receipt, signed over a penny stamp—you’ll have to stand me a penny stamp, for I’ve only got three-halfpenny ones in the house—and there’s an end of the matter.”

“My clerk made out the receipt and put the penny stamp on,” said Mr. Fenmarch, untroubled by her smile. “Here it is.”

“Solicitors’ clerks seem to think of everything,” said Olivia. “Fancy his remembering the penny stamp!”

“It’s charged up against you, in Fenmarch’s bill—item ‘sundries,’ ” remarked Mr. Trivett, pointing a fat forefinger.

“Why, naturally. Why should Mr. Fenmarch shower pennies on me? It’s the delicate thoughtfulness that I admire. I hope you’ll raise that young man’s salary.”

Mr. Fenmarch looked pained, like a horse to whom one had offered wooden oats, and swung his head away. Mr. Trivett opened his mouth to speak, but before he spoke finished his whisky and soda.

“My dear Olivia,” said he, “I’m sorry to see you so flippant. You’ve disappointed me and Mrs. Trivett who’ve known you since you were born, more than I can say. Until your poor mother died—God bless her—we thought you the most capable, level-headed young woman in this town. But

for the last three months—you'll forgive my freedom in saying so—you have shown yourself to be quite impossible."

He paused, angry. Olivia smiled and drummed on the table.

"Have some more whisky."

"No, I won't," he said in a loud voice. "Whisky's too expensive to ladle out in that offhand fashion. It's a luxury, as you'll jolly well soon discover. I'm talking for your good, Olivia. That's why Fenmarch and I are here. Two minutes will wind up the business. But we have your interests at heart, my girl, and we want to make a last appeal."

She covered with hers the back of his red-glazed hand and spoke in a softened voice:—

"Yes, I know, I know. I've said already that you and Mr. Fenmarch were dears. But what would you have me do? I'm twenty-three. Alone in the world."

"You have your uncle and aunt at Clapham," said Mr. Trivett.

"I've also some sort of relations in the monkey cage at the Zoo," said Olivia.

The repartee to the effect that it was the fittest home for her only occurring to Mr. Trivett when he was getting into bed that night, he merely stared at her gaspingly. She continued:

"I'm absolutely alone in the world. Do you think it reasonable for me to stay in this dull old house, in this mouldering old town, where one never sees a man from one year's end to another, living for the rest of my life on the few hundreds a year which I could get if my capital were properly invested?"

“We don’t grant your premises, Olivia,” said Mr. Fenmarch. “ ‘The Towers’ may be old, but it is not dull. Medlow is not mouldering, but singularly progressive, and the place seems to—to pullulate with young men. So I think our advice to you is eminently reasonable.”

“Oh, dear!” sighed Olivia. “That’s where all the trouble comes in. Our ideas of dullness, mouldering and pullu—what you call it; don’t correspond. Mother was very fond of a story of Sydney Smith. Perhaps she told you. He was walking one day with a friend through the slums and came across two women quarrelling across the street, through opposite windows. And Sydney Smith said: ‘They’ll never come to an agreement, because they are arguing from different premises.’ ”

There was a silence.

“I’ll have a drop more whisky,” said Mr. Trivett.

“I think I see the point of the remark,” said Mr. Fenmarch greyly. “It was a play on the two meanings of the word.”

“That was what my mother gave me to understand,” said Olivia.

Then, after another spell of chill silence, she cried, her nerves on edge:

“Do let us come to the end of it!”

“We will,” said Mr. Trivett impressively. “But not before I’ve made a few remarks in protest, with Fenmarch as witness. I’m sorry there’s not another witness——”

“Oh, I’ll get one!” cried Olivia. “Myra—the faithful Myra.”

“Myra’s a servant, also a fool; and you’ve got her under your thumb,” said Mr. Trivett.

“Well, well,” said Olivia, “we’ll give Myra a miss. But I know what you’re going to say—and the kind heart that makes you say it.”

A touch of real tenderness crept into her fine dark eyes and almost softened Mr. Trivett. She looked so young, so slender, so immature in her simple mourning. Her soft black hair clustered over her forehead in a manner which he felt was inconsistent with a woman fighting her way alone in the world. She hadn’t a bit of colour in her cheeks; wanted feeding up, he thought. She was capable enough in her own sphere, the management of her house, the care of a bed-ridden mother, the appreciation of legal technicalities. Until she had got this bee in her bonnet he had admired her prodigiously; though, with the reserve which every Englishman makes in his admiration, he deplored the shrewdness of her tongue. But this idea of hers, to realize all her money in hard cash at the bank and go off into unknown perils was preposterous. She was not fit for it. You could take her by the neck in one hand and by the waist in another and break her to bits…. He was a good, honest man with fatherly instincts developed by the possession of daughters of his own, strapping red-cheeked girls, who had stayed soberly at home until the right young man had come along and carried them off to modest homes of unimpeachable respectability. So when he met the tenderness in Olivia’s eyes he mitigated the asperities of his projected discourse and preached her a very human little sermon. While he spoke, Mr. Fenmarch nodded his unhumorous head and stroked the straggling grey hairs on his cheek. When he had ended, Mr. Fenmarch seconded, as it were, the resolution.

Then Olivia thanked them prettily, promised to avoid extravagance, and, in case of difficulty, to come to them for advice. The final cheque was passed over, the final receipt signed across the penny stamp provided with such forethought, and Olivia Gale entered into uncontrolled possession of her fortune.

The men rose to take their leave. Olivia held the hand of the burly red-faced man who had been her father's partner and looked up at him.

"I know, if you could have your way, you would give me a good hiding."

He laughed grimly. "Not the least doubt of it." Then he patted her roughly on the shoulder.

"And you, Mr. Fenmarch?"

He regarded her drearily. "After a long experience in my profession, Olivia, I have come to one conclusion—clients are a mistake. Good-bye."

Left alone, Olivia stood for a moment wondering whether, after all, the dusty lawyer had a jaded sense of humour. Then she turned and caught up the cheque and sketched a few triumphant dancing steps. Suddenly, holding it in her hand, she rushed out into the hall, where the men were putting on their overcoats.

"We've forgotten the most important thing, Mr. Trivett. You wrote me something about an offer for the house."

"An enquiry—not an offer," replied Mr. Trivett. "Yes. I forgot to mention it. A Major somebody. Wait——" He lugged out a fat pocket-book which he consulted. "That's it. Major Olifant. Coming down here to-morrow to look over it. Appointment at twelve, if that suits you. Unfortunately, I've

an engagement and can’t show him round. But I’ll send Perkins, if you like.”

“If the Major wants to eat me, he’ll eat up poor little Mr. Perkins, too,” said Olivia. “So don’t worry.”

She waited until Myra, the maid, had helped them into their overcoats and opened the front door. After final leavetakings, they were gone. Olivia put up her hands, one of them still holding the cheque, on Myra’s gaunt shoulders and shook her and laughed.

“I’ve beaten them at last. I knew I should. Now you and I are going to have the devil’s own time.”

“We’ll have, Miss Olivia,” said Myra, withdrawing like a wooden automaton from the embrace, “the time we’ll be deserving.”

Myra was long, lean, and angular, dressed precisely in parlourmaid’s black; but the absence of cap on her faultlessly neat iron grey hair and the black apron suggested a cross between the housekeeper and personal maid. She shared, with a cook and a vague, print-attired help, the whole service of the house. The fact of Myra had been one of the earliest implanted in the consciousness of Olivia’s awakening childhood. Myra was there, perdurable as father and mother, as Polly, the parrot, whose “Drat the child” of that morning was the same echo of Myra’s voice, as it was when, at the age of two, she began to interpret the bird’s articulate speech. And, as far as she could remember, Myra had always been the same. Age had not withered her, nor had custom staled her infinite invariability. She had been withered since the beginning of time, and she had been as unchanging in aspect and flavour as Olivia’s lifelong

breakfast egg. Myra's origins were hidden in mystery. A family legend declared her a foundling. She had come as a girl from Essex, recommended by a friend, long since dead, of Mrs. Gale. She never spoke of father, mother, sisters, and brothers; but every year, when she took her holiday, she was presumed to return to her native county. With that exception she seemed to have far less of a private life than the household cat. It never occurred to Olivia that she could possibly lead an independent existence. Her age was about forty-five.

"They think I'm either mad or immoral," said Olivia. "Thank God, they're not religious, or they'd be holding prayer meetings over me."

"They might do worse," replied Myra.

The girl laughed. "So you disapprove, too, do you? Well, you'll have to get over it."

"I've got over many things—one more or less don't matter. And if I were you, Miss, I wouldn't stand in this draughty hall."

"All that I'm thinking of," said Olivia, in high good humour, "is that, with you as duenna, I shall look too respectable. No one will believe it possible for any one except an adventuress."

"That's what I gather you're going to be," said Myra. If she had put any sting into her words it would have been a retort. But no one knew what emotions guided Myra's speech. With the same tonelessness she would have proclaimed the house to be on fire, or dinner to be ready, or the day to be fine.

“Well, if you don’t like the prospect, Myra, you needn’t come,” said Olivia. “I’ll easily find something fluffy in short skirts and silk stockings to do for me.”

“We’re wasting gas, Miss,” said Myra, pulling the little chain of the bye-pass and thereby plunging the hall in darkness.

“Oh, bother you!” cried Olivia, stumbling into the passage and knocking against the parrot’s cage outside the dining-room door, and Polly shrieked out:

“Drat the child! Drat the child!”

Before entering the dining-room she aimed a Parthian shot at Myra.

“I suppose you agree with the little beast. Well, the two of you’ll have to look after each other, and I wish you joy.”

She cleared the dining-room table of the tea things and the whisky and glasses and the superfluous papers, and opened the window to let out the smell of Mr. Trivett’s strong cigar, and crossed the passage to the drawing-room opposite, where a small fire was still burning. And there, in spite of the exultation of her triumph over Mr. Trivett and Mr. Fenmarch, she suddenly felt very dreadfully alone; also just a whit frightened. The precious cheque, symbol of independence, which she had taken up, laid down, taken up again, during her little household duties, fell to the ground as she lay in the arm-chair by the fireside.

Was her victory, and all it implied, that of a reasonable being and a decent girl, or that of a little fool and a hussy?

Perhaps the mother whom she worshipped and to whom she had devotedly sacrificed the last four years of her young life was the inspiration of her revolt. For her mother had

been a highly bred woman, of a proud old Anglo-Indian family, all Generals and Colonels and Sirs and Ladies, whose names had been involved in the history of British India for generations; and when she threw the Anglo-Indian family halo over the windmills and married young Stephen Gale, who used to stand in the market-place of Medlow and bawl out the bidding for pigs and sheep, the family turned her down with the Anglo-Indian thoroughness that had compelled her mother to lose her life in a plague-stricken district and her father to lose his on the North-West Frontier. The family argument was simple. When you—or everything mattering that means you—have ruled provinces and commanded armies and been Sahibs from the beginning of Anglo-Indian time, you can’t go and marry a man who sells pigs at auction, and remain alive. None of the family deigned to gauge the personal value of the pig-seller. The Anglo-Brahmin lost caste. It is true that, afterwards, patronizing efforts were made by Brahminical uncles and aunts and cousins to bridge over the impassable gulf; but Mrs. Gale, very much in love with her pig-selling husband, snapped her fingers at them and told them, in individually opposite terms, to go hang.

It was a love match right enough. And a love match it remained to the very end of all things; after she had borne him two sons and a daughter; all through the young lives of the children; up to the day when the telegram came announcing the death of their elder son—the younger had been killed in the curious world accident a month or so before—and Stephen Gale stood by her bedside—she had even then succumbed to her incurable malady—and said,

shaken with an emotion to which one does not refer nowadays:

“Mary, my dear, what am I to do?”

And she, the blood in her speaking—the blood that had given itself at Agra, Lucknow, Khandahar, Chitral—replied:

“Go, dear.”

Olivia, sitting by, gripped her young hands in mingled horror and grief and passionate wonder. And Stephen Gale, just fifty, went out to avenge his sons and do what was right in his wife’s eyes—for his wife was his country incarnate, her voice, being England’s voice. A love match it was and a love match it remained while he stuck it for two or three years—an elderly man at an inglorious Base, until he died of pneumonia—over there.

Mrs. Gale had lingered for a year, and, close as their relations had been all Olivia’s life, they grew infinitely closer during this period of bereavement. It was only then that the mother gave delicate expression to the nostalgia of half a lifetime, the longing for her own kind, and the ways and thoughts and imponderable principles of her own caste. And, imperceptibly, Olivia’s eyes were opened to the essential differences between her mother and the social circle into which she had married. Olivia, ever since her shrewd child’s mind began to appreciate values, knew perfectly well that the Trivetts and the Gales were not accounted as gentlefolk in the town. She early became aware of the socially divided line across which she could not pass so as to enter Blair Park, the high-class girls’ school on the hill, but narrowed her to Landsdowne House, where the daughters of the tradespeople received their education. And

when the two crocodiles happened to pass each other on country walks she hated the smug, stuckup Blair Park girls with their pretty blue and white ribbons round their straw hats, and hated her red ribbon with “LH” embroidered on it, as a badge of servitude. When she grew up she accepted countless other social facts as immutable conditions of existence. Mortals were divided by her unquestioning father into three categories—“the swells,” “homely folk like ourselves,” and “common people.” So long as each member of the three sections knew his place and respected it, the world was as comfortable a planet as sentient being could desire. That was one factor in his worship of his wife: she had stepped from her higher plane to his and had loyally, unmurmuringly identified herself with it. He had never a notion, good man, of the shocks, the inner wounds, the instinctive revolts, the longings that she hid behind her loving eyes. Nor had Olivia; although as a schoolgirl she knew and felt proud that her mother really belonged to Blair Park and not to Landsdowne House. As she grew up, she realized her mother’s refining influence, and, as far as young blood would allow, used her as a model of speech and manner. And during the long invalid years, when she read aloud and discussed a wide range of literature, she received unconsciously a sensitive education. But it was only in this last poignant intimacy, when they were left starkly alone together, that she sounded the depths of the loyal, loving, and yet strangely suffering woman.

“I remember once, long ago, when you were a mite of five,” Mrs. Gale had said in a memorable confidence, “we were staying at a hotel in Eastbourne, and I got into

conversation on the verandah with a Colonel somebody—I forget his name—with whom we had spoken several times before—one of those spare brown, blue-eyed men, all leather and taut string, that wear their clothes like uniform. You see, I was born and bred among them, dear. And we talked and we talked and I didn't know how the time flew, and I missed an appointment with your father in the town. And he came and found us together—and he was very angry. It was the only time in our lives he said an unkind word to me. It was the only time I gave him any sort of cause for jealousy. But he really hadn't. It was only just the joy of talking to a gentleman again. And I couldn't tell him. It would have broken his dear heart."

This was the first flashlight across her mother's soul, and in its illumination vanished many obscure and haunting perplexities of her girlhood. Had Mrs. Gale lived the normal life of women, surrounded by those that loved her, she would doubtless have gone to her grave without revealing her inner self to living mortal. But infinite sorrow and the weakness engendered by constant physical pain had transformed her into a spirituality just breathing the breath of life and regarding her daughter less as a woman than as a kindred essence from whom no secrets could be hid. At her bedside Olivia thus learned the mystery of birth and life and death. Chiefly the mystery of life, which appealed more to her ardent maidenhood.

So when at last her mother faded out of existence and Olivia's vigil was over, she faced a world of changing values with a new set of values of her own. She could not formulate them; but she was acutely conscious that they were

different from those of the good, honest Mr. Trivett and the dull and honourable Mr. Fenmarch, and that to all the social circle which these two represented they would be unintelligible. In a way, she found herself possessed of a new calculus in which she trusted to solve the problems which defied the simple arithmetic of the homely folk of Medlow.

All these memories and vague certainties passed through the girl's mind as she sat before the fire in self-examination after her victory, and conflicted with the prosaic and indicatively common-sense arguments of her late advisers. She knew that father and brothers, all beloved and revered, would have been staunchly on the side of the Trivetts. On the other hand, her mother, as she had said to her husband on the edge of a far, far greater adventure, would have said: "Go, dear." Of that she had no doubt.... Yet it meant cutting herself adrift from Medlow and all its ways and all its associations. It meant a definite struggle to raise herself from her father's second social category to the first. It meant, therefore, justifying herself against odious insinuations on the part of her scant acquaintance.

And then the youth in her rose insistent. During all these years of stress and fever which had marked her development from child into woman she had done nothing but remain immured within the walls familiar from her babyhood. Other girls had gone afar, in strange independence, to vivid scenes, to unforgettable adventures, in the service of their country, in the service of mankind—just as her brothers and father had gone—and she had

stayed there, ineradicable, in that one little tiny spot. The sick-room, the kitchen, the shops in Old Street, where, in defiance of Food Controller, she had fought for cream and butter and eggs and English meat so that her mother could live; the sick-room again, the simple white and green bedroom which meant to her little more than the sleep of exhaustion; the sick-room once more, with its pathos of spiritual love and physical repulsion—such had been the iron environment of her life. Sorrow after sorrow, and mourning after mourning had come, and the little gaieties of the "homely folk" of her father's definition had gone on without her participation. And her girl friends of Landsdowne House had either married rising young tradesmen in distant towns, or had found some further scope for their energies at the end of the Great Adventure and were far away. In the meanwhile other homely folk whom she did not know had poured into the town. All kinds of people seemed to be settling there, anyhow, without rhyme or reason. It was only when there was not a house to be rented in the neighbourhood that she understood why.

"You have a comfortable home of your own. Why, on earth, don't you stay in it?" Mr. Trivett had asked.

But she had stayed in it, alone, for the three months since her mother's death, waiting on the law's delays; and those three months had been foretaste enough of the dreary infinite years that would lie before her, should she remain. She was too young, too full of sap, to face the blight of sunlessness. She longed for the sights and the sounds and the freedom of the great world. What she would do when she got into it, she did not exactly know. Possibly she

might meet a fairy prince. If such a speculation was that of a hussy, why then, she argued, all women are hussies from birth. As for being a fool for defying advice on the proper investment of her money—well, perhaps she was not quite such a fool as Mr. Trivett imagined. If she did not spend her capital, it would be just as safe lying on deposit at the bank as invested in stocks and shares; safer, for she had lately had wearisome experience of the depreciation of securities. She would not be senselessly extravagant; in fact, with the sanguineness of youth she hoped to be able to live on the interest on her deposit and the rent of the furnished house. But behind her, definite, tangible, uninfluenced by Stock Exchange fluctuations, would be her fortune. And then—a contingency which she did not put before Mr. Trivett and Mr. Fenmarch, for a woman seldom discloses her main argument to a male adversary—there might come a glorious moment in some now unconjecturable adventure when it might be essential for her to draw cheques for dazzling sums which she could put in her pocket and go over mysterious hills and far away. She stood on the edge of her dull tableland and gazed wide-eyed at the rolling Land of Romance veiled by gold and purple mist. And in that Land, from immemorial time, people carried their money in bags, into which they dipped their hands, as occasion required, and cast the unmeaning counters at the feet of poverty or into the lap of greed.

When she sat down to her solitary supper, she had decided that she was neither hussy nor fool. She held baffling discourse with Myra, who could not be enticed into enthusiasm over the immediate future. Teasing Myra had

been her joy from infancy. She sketched their career—that of female Don Quixote and Sancho Panza—that of knights of old in quest of glorious adventure. She quoted, mock heroically:

“The ride abroad redressing human wrong.”

“Better redress the young London women which I see the pictures of in the illustrated papers,” said Myra.

Olivia laughed. “You are a dear old blessing, you know.”

“I’m sure of it,” said Myra, with an expressionless face. “Anyways, you’re not going to buy one of them things when you get to London.”

“I am,” replied Olivia. “And you’ll have to help me put it on.”

“You can’t help folks put on nothing,” said Myra.

“What do you think you’ll do when you’re really shocked?” asked Olivia.

“I never think what I’ll do,” replied Myra. “It’s waste of time.”

Olivia enjoyed her supper.

CHAPTER II

Table of Contents

IT was only when she waited the next morning for her possible tenant, the Major Olifant of whom Mr. Trivett had spoken, and went through the familiar rooms to see that they were fit for alien inspection, that she realized the sacrilege which she was about to commit. Every room was sacred, inhabited by some beloved ghost. The very furniture bore landmarks of the wear and tear of those that were dead. To say nothing of the beds on which they had slept, the chairs in which they had sat, which still seemed to retain the impress of their forms, there persisted a hundred exquisitely memorable trivialities. The arm of the oak settle in the hall still showed the ravages of the teeth of Barabbas, the mongrel bull-terrier pup introduced, fifteen years ago, into the house, by Charles her elder brother; an animal who, from being cursed by the whole family for a pestilential cur, wriggled his way, thanks to his adoration of Charles, into the hearts of them all, and died from old age and perhaps doggy anxiety a few months after Charles had sailed for France. In her father's study, a small room heterogeneously adorned with hunting crops and car accessories and stuffed trout and a large scale map of Medlow and neighbourhood and suggestive in no way of a studious habit, the surface of the knee-hole writing table and the mahogany mantelpiece were scored with fluted little burns from cigarette-ends, he having been a careless smoker. There was a legend that the family cradle, for many years mouldering in an outhouse, bore the same stigmata.

The very bathroom was not free of intimate history. In the midst of the blue and red stained panes on the lower sash stared one of plain ground glass—the record of her brother Bobby aged twelve, who, vowing vengeance against an unsympathetic visiting aunt (soon afterwards deceased), had the brilliant idea of catapulting her through the closed window while she was having her bath. And there was her mother's room....

She could not let all this pass into vulgar hands. The vague plan of letting the house furnished, which had hitherto not been unattractive, now became monstrously definite. She hated the sacrilegious and intrusive Major Olifant. He would bring down a dowdy wife and a cartload of children to the profanation of these her household gods. She went in search of Myra and found her dusting her own prim little bedroom.

"I'm going out. When Major Olifant calls, tell him I've changed my mind and the house is not to let."

Then she put on hat and coat and went downstairs to take the air of the sleepy midday High Street. But as she opened the front door she ran into a man getting out of a two-seater car driven by a chauffeur. He raised his hat.

"I beg your pardon," said he, "but is this 'The Towers'?"

"It is," she replied. "I suppose you've—you've come with an order to view from Messrs. Trivett and Gale."

"Quite so," said he pleasantly. "I have an appointment with Miss Gale."

"I'm Miss Gale," said Olivia.

She noticed an involuntary twitch of surprise, at once suppressed, pass over his face.

“And my name’s Olifant. Major Olifant.”

She had pictured quite a different would-be intruder, a red-faced, obese, and pushing fellow. Instead, she saw a well-bred, spare man of medium height wearing a stained service Burberry the empty left sleeve of which was pinned in front; a man in his middle thirties, with crisp light brown hair, long, broad forehead characterized by curious bumps over the brows, a very long, straight nose and attractive dark blue eyes which keenly and smilingly held hers without touch of offence.

“I’ve decided not to let the house,” said Olivia.

The smile vanished from his eyes. “I’m sorry,” said he stiffly. “I was given to understand——”

“Yes, I know,” she said quickly. Her conscience getting hold of the missing arm smote her. “Where have you come from?”

“Oxford.”

She gasped. “Why, that’s a hundred miles!”

“Ninety-four.”

“But you must be perishing with cold,” she cried. “Do come in and get warm, at any rate. Perhaps I can explain. And your man, too.” She pointed. “Round that way you’ll find a garage. I’ll send the maid. Please come in, Major Olifant. Oh—but you must!”

She entered the house, leaving him no option but to follow. To divest himself of his Burberry he made curious writhing movements with his shoulders, and swerved aside politely when she offered assistance.

“Please don’t worry. I’m all right. I’ve all kinds of little stunts of my own invention.”

And, as he said it, he got clear and threw the mackintosh on the oak chest. He rubbed the knuckle of his right hand against the side of his rough tweed jacket.

“Just five minutes to get warm and I won’t trespass further on your hospitality.”

She showed him into the drawing-room, thanked goodness there was a showy wood-fire burning, and went out after Myra.

“I thought the house wasn’t to be let,” said the latter after receiving many instructions.

“The letting of the house has nothing to do with two cold and hungry men who have motored here on a raw November morning for hundreds of miles on false pretences.”

She re-entered the drawing-room with a tray bearing whisky decanter, siphon, and glass, which she set on a side table.

“I’m alone in the world now, Major Olifant,” she said, “but I’ve lived nearly all my life with men—my father and two brothers——” She felt that the explanation was essential. “Please help yourself.”

He met her eyes, which, though defiant, held the menace of tears. He made the vaguest, most delicate of gestures with his right hand—his empty sleeve, the air. She moved an assenting head; then swiftly she grasped the decanter.

“Say when.”

“Just that.”

She squirted the siphon.

“So?”

“Perfect. A thousand thanks.”

He took the glass from her and deferentially awaited her next movement. Tricksy memory flashed across her mind the picture of the Anglo-Indian colonel of her mother's pathetic little confidence. For a moment or two she stood confused, flushed, self-conscious, suddenly hating herself for not knowing instinctly what to do. In desperation she cried.

"Oh, please drink it! You must want it awfully."

He laughed, made a little bow, and drank.

"Now do sit down near the fire. I'm dreadfully sorry," she continued when they were settled. "Dreadfully sorry you should have had all this journey for nothing. As a matter of fact, I wanted to let the house and only changed my mind an hour ago."

"You have lived here all your life?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Please say no more about it," said he courteously.

She burst at once into explanations. Father, brothers, mother—all the dear ghosts, at the last moment, had held out their barring hands. He smiled at her pretty dark-eyed earnestness.

"There are few houses nowadays without ghosts. But there might be a stranger now and then who would have the tact and understanding to win their confidence."

This was at the end of a talk which had lasted she knew not how long. The little silence which ensued was broken by the shrill clang of the ormolu clock on the mantelpiece striking one. She sprang to her feet.

"One o'clock. Why, you must be famished. Seven o'clock breakfast at latest. There'll be something to eat, whatever it

is.”

“But, my dear Miss Gale,” cried Major Olifant, rising in protest, “I couldn’t dream of it—there must be an hotel——”

“There isn’t,” cried Olivia unveraciously, and vanished.

Major Olifant, too late to open the door for her, retraced his steps and stood, back to fire, idly evoking, as a man does, the human purposes that had gone to the making of the room, and he was puzzled. Some delicate spirit had chosen the old gold curtains which harmonized with the cushions on the plain upholstered settee and with the early Chippendale armchairs and with the Chippendale bookcase filled with odds and ends of good china, old Chelsea, Coalport, a bit or two of Sèvres and Dresden. Some green chrysanthemums bowed, in dainty raggedness, over the edge of a fine cut crystal vase. An exquisite water-colour over the piano attracted his attention. He crossed the room to examine it and drew a little breath of surprise to read the signature of Bonington—a thing beyond price. On a table by the French window, which led into a conservatory and thence into the little garden, stood a box of Persian lacquer. But there, throwing into confusion the charm of all this, a great Victorian mirror in a heavy florid gold frame blared like a German band from over the mantelpiece, and on the opposite wall two huge companion pictures representing in violent colours scenes of smug domestic life, also in gold frames, with a slip of wood let in bearing the legend “Exhibited at the Royal Academy, 1888,” screamed like an orchestrion.

He was looking round for further evidence of obvious conflict of individualities, when Myra appeared to take him

to get rid of the dust of the journey. When he returned to the drawing-room he found Olivia.

“I can’t help feeling an inconscionable intruder,” said he.

“My only concern is that I’ll be able to give you something fit to eat.”

He laughed. “The man who has come out of France and Mesopotamia finikin in his food is a fraud.”

“Still,” she objected, “I don’t want to send you back to Mrs. Olifant racked with indigestion.”

“Mrs. Olifant?” He wore a look of humorous puzzlement.

“I suppose you have a wife and family?”

“Good heavens, no!” he cried, with an air of horror. “I’m a bachelor.”

She regarded him for a few seconds, as though from an entirely fresh point of view.

“But what on earth does a bachelor want with a great big house—with ten bedrooms?”

“Has it got ten bedrooms?”

“I presume Mr. Trivett sent you the particulars: ‘Desirable Residence, standing in own grounds, three acres. Ten bedrooms, three reception rooms. Bath H. and C.,’ and so forth?”

“The Bath H. and C. was all I worried about.”

They both laughed. Myra announced luncheon. They went into the dining-room. By the side of Major Olifant’s plate was a leather case. He flashed on her a look of enquiry, at which the blood rose into her pale cheeks.

“I’ve been interviewing your man,” she said rather defiantly. “He produced that from the pocket of the car.”