Sharp Ink

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THE INTRUSIONS OF PEGGY

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Sharp Ink Publishing
2022
Contact: info@sharpinkbooks.com

ISBN 978-80-282-3683-0

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CHAPTER I LIFE IS RECOMMENDED

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The changeful April morning that she watched from the window of her flat looking over the river began a day of significance in the career of Trix Trevalla—of feminine significance, almost milliner's perhaps, but of significance all the same. She had put off her widow's weeds, and for the first time these three years back was dressed in a soft shade of blue; the harmony of her eyes and the gleams of her brown hair welcomed the colour with the cordiality of an old friendship happily renewed. Mrs. Trevalla's maid had been all in a flutter over the momentous transformation; in her mistress it bred a quietly retrospective mood. As she lay in an armchair watching the water and the clouds, she turned back on the course of her life, remembering many things. The beginning of a new era brought the old before her eyes in a protesting flash of vividness. She abandoned herself to recollections—an insidious form of dissipating the mind, which goes well with a relaxed ease of the body.

Not that Mrs. Trevalla's recollections were calculated to promote a sense of luxury, unless indeed they were to act as a provocative contrast.

There was childhood, spent in a whirling succession of lodging-houses. They had little individuality and retained hardly any separate identity; each had consisted of two rooms with folding doors between, and somewhere, at the back or on the floor above, a cupboard for her to sleep in. There was the first baby, her brother, who died when she was six; he had been a helpless, clinging child, incapable of

living without far more sympathy and encouragement than he had ever got. Luckily she had been of hardier stuff. There was her mother, a bridling, blushing, weak-kneed woman (Trix's memory was candid); kind save when her nerves were bad, and when they were, unkind in a weak and desultory fashion that did not deserve the name of cruelty. Trix had always felt less anger than contempt for her half-hysterical outbursts, and bore no malice on their account. This pale visitor soon faded—as indeed Mrs. Trevalla herself had—into non-existence, and a different picture took its place. Here was the Reverend Algernon, her father, explaining that he found himself unsuited to pastoral work and indisposed to adopt any other active calling, that inadequate means were a misfortune, not a fault, that a man must follow his temperament, and that he asked only to be allowed to go his own way—he did not add to pay it—in peace and quiet. His utterances came back with the old distinction of manner and the distant politeness with which Mr. Trevalla bore himself towards all disagreeable incidents of life—under which head there was much reason to surmise that he ranked his daughter.

Was he unjust in that? Trix was puzzled. She recalled a sturdy, stubborn, rather self-assertive child. The freshness of delicacy is rubbed off, the appeal of shyness silenced, by a hand-to-mouth existence, by a habit of regarding the leavings of the first-floor lodger in the light of windfalls, by constant flittings unmarked by the discharge of obligations incurred in the abandoned locality, by a practical outlawry from the class to which we should in the ordinary course belong. Trix decided that she must have been an

unattractive girl, rather hard, too much awake to the ways of the world, readily retorting its chilliness towards her. All this was natural enough, since neither death nor poverty nor lack of love was strange to her. Natural, yes; pleasant, no, Trix concluded, and with that she extended a degree of pardon to Mr. Trevalla. He had something to say for himself. With a smile she recalled what he always did say for himself, if anyone seemed to challenge the spotlessness of his character. On such painful occasions he would mention that he was, and had been for twenty years, a teetotaler. There were reasons in the Trevalla family history which made the fact remarkable; in its owner's eyes the virtue was so striking and enormous that it had exhausted the moral possibilities of his being, condemned other excellencies to atrophy, and left him, in the flower-show of graces, the self-complacent exhibitor of a single bloom.

Yet he had become a party to the great conspiracy; it was no less, however much motives of love, and hopes ever sanguine, might excuse it in one of the parties to it—not the Reverend Algernon. They had all been involved in it—her father, old Lady Trevalla (her husband had been a soldier and K.C.B.), Vesey Trevalla himself. Vesey loved Trix, Lady Trevalla loved Vesey in a mother's conscienceless way; the mother persuaded herself that the experiment would work, the son would not stop to ask the question. The Reverend Algernon presumably persuaded himself too—and money was very scarce. So Trix was bidden to notice—when those days at Bournemouth came back to mind, her brows contracted into a frown as though from a quick spasm of pain—how Vesey loved her, what a good steady fellow he

was, how safely she might trust herself to him. Why, he was a teetotaler too! 'Yes, though his gay friends do laugh at him!' exclaimed Lady Trevalla admiringly. They were actually staying at a Temperance Hotel! The stress laid on these facts did not seem strange to an ignorant girl of seventeen, accustomed to Mr. Trevalla's solitary but eloquent virtue. Rather weary of the trait, she pouted a little over it, and then forgot it as a matter of small moment one way or the other. So the conspiracy throve, and ended in the good marriage with the well-to-do cousin, in being Mrs. Trevalla of Trevalla Haven, married to a big, handsome, ruddy fellow who loved her. The wedding-day stood out in memory; clearest of all now was what had been no more than a faint and elusive but ever-present sense that for some reason the guests, Vesey's neighbours, looked on her with pity—the men who pressed her hand and the women who kissed her cheek. And at the last old Lady Trevalla had burst suddenly into unrestrained sobbing. Why? Vesey looked very uncomfortable, and even the Reverend Algernon was rather upset. However, consciences do no harm if they do not get the upper hand till the work is done; Trix was already Vesey's wife.

He was something of a man, this Vesey Trevalla; he was large-built in mind, equitable, kind, shrewd, of a clear vision. To the end he was a good friend and a worthy companion in his hours of reason. Trix's thoughts of him were free from bitterness. Her early life had given her a tolerance that stood her in stead, a touch of callousness which enabled her to endure. As a child she had shrugged thin shoulders under her shabby frock; she shrugged her shoulders at the tragedy

now; her heart did not break, but hardened a little more. She made some ineffectual efforts to reclaim him; their hopelessness was absurdly plain; after a few months Vesey laughed at them, she almost laughed herself. She settled down into the impossible life, reproaching nobody. When her husband was sober, she never referred to what had happened when he was drunk; if he threw a plate at her then, she dodged the plate: she seemed in a sense to have been dodging plates and suchlike missiles all her life. Sometimes he had suspicions of himself, and conjured up recollections of what he had done. 'Oh, what does last night matter?' she would ask in a friendly if rather contemptuous tone. Once she lifted the veil for a moment. He found her standing by the body of her baby; it had died while he was unfit to be told, or at any rate unable to understand.

'So the poor little chap's gone,' he said softly, laying his hand on her shoulder.

'Yes, Vesey, he's gone, thank God!' she said, looking him full in the eyes.

He turned away without a word, and went out with a heavy tread. Trix felt that she had been cruel, but she did not apologise, and Vesey showed no grudge.

The odd thing about the four years her married life lasted was that they now seemed so short. Even before old Lady Trevalla's death (which happened a year after the wedding) Trix had accommodated herself to her position. From that time all was monotony—the kind of monotony which might well kill, but, failing that, left little to mark out one day from another. She did not remember even that she had been acutely miserable either for her husband or for herself;

rather she had come to disbelieve in acute feelings. She had grown deadened to sorrow as to joy, and to love, the great parent of both; the hardening process of her youth had been carried further. When Vesey caught a chill and crumpled up under it as sodden men do, and died with a thankfulness he did not conceal, she was unmoved. She was not grateful for the deliverance, nor yet grieved for the loss of a friend. She shrugged her shoulders again, asking what the world was going to do with her next.

Mr. Trevalla took a view more hopeful than his daughter's, concluding that there was cause for feeling considerable satisfaction both on moral and on worldly grounds. From the higher standpoint Trix (under his guidance) had made a noble although unsuccessful effort, and had shown the fortitude to be expected from his daughter; while Vesey, poor fellow, had been well looked after to the end, and was now beyond the reach of temptation. From the lower—Mr. Trevalla glanced for a moment round the cosy apartment he now occupied at Brighton, where he was beginning to get a nice little library round him—yes, from the lower, while it was regrettable that the estate had passed to a distant cousin, Trix was left with twenty thousand pounds (in free cash, for Vesey had refused to make a settlement, since he did not know what money he would want—that is, how long he would last) and an ascertained social position. She was only twenty-two when left a widow, and better-looking than she had ever been in her life. On the whole, were the four years misspent? Had anybody very much to grumble at? Certainly nobody had any reason to reproach himself. And he

wondered why Trix had not sent for him to console her in her affliction. He was glad she had not, but he thought that the invitation would have been natural and becoming.

'But I never pretended to understand women,' he murmured, with his gentle smile.

Women would have declared that they did not understand him either, using the phrase with a bitter intention foreign to the Reverend Algernon's lips and temper. His good points were so purely intellectual—lucidity of thought, temperance of opinion, tolerance, humour, appreciation of things which deserved it. These gifts would, with women, have pleaded their rarity in vain against the more ordinary endowments of willingness to work and a capacity for thinking, even occasionally, about other people. Men liked him—so long as they had no business relations with him. But women are moralists, from the best to the worst of them. If he had lived, Trix would probably have scorned to avail herself of his counsels. Yet they might well have been useful to her in after days; he was a good taster of men. As it was, he died soon after Vesey, having caught a chill and refused to drink hot grog. That was his doctor's explanation. Mr. Trevalla's dying smile accused the man of cloaking his own ignorance by such an excuse; he prized his virtue too much to charge it with his death. He was sorry to leave his rooms at Brighton; other very strong feeling about his departure he had none. Certainly his daughter did not come between him and his preparations for hereafter, nor the thought of her solitude distract his fleeting soul.

In the general result life seemed ended for Trix Trevalla at twenty-two, and, pending release from it in the ordinary

course, she contemplated an impatient and provisional existence in Continental *pensions*—establishments where a young and pretty woman could not be suspected of wishing to reap any advantage from prettiness or youth. Hundreds of estimable ladies guarantee this security, and thereby obtain a genteel and sufficient company round their modest and inexpensive tables. It was what Trix asked for, and for two years she got it. During this period she sometimes regretted Vesey Trevalla, and sometimes asked whether vacancy were not worse than misery, or on what grounds limbo was to be preferred to hell. She could not make up her mind on this question—nor is it proposed to settle it here. Probably most people have tried both on their own account.

One evening she arrived at Paris rather late, and the isolation ward (metaphors will not be denied sometimes) to which she had been recommended was found to be full. Somewhat apprehensive, she was driven to an hotel of respectability, and, rushing to catch the flying coat-tails of *table d'hôte*, found herself seated beside a man who was apparently not much above thirty. This unwonted propinquity set her doing what she had not done for years in public, though she had never altogether abandoned the practice as a private solace: as she drank her cold soup, she laughed. Her neighbour, a shabby man with a rather shaggy beard, turned benevolently inquiring eyes on her. A moment's glance made him start a little and say, 'Surely it's Mrs. Trevalla?'

'That's my name,' answered Trix, wondering greatly, but thanking heaven for a soul who knew her. In the *pensions* they never knew who you were, but were always trying to

find out, and generally succeeded the day after you went away.

'That's very curious,' he went on. 'I daresay you'll be surprised, but your photograph stands on my bedroom mantel-piece. I knew you directly from it. It was sent to me.'

'When was it sent you?' she asked.

'At the time of your marriage.' He grew grave as he spoke.

'You were his friend?'

'I called myself so.' Conversation was busy round them, yet he lowered his voice to add, 'I don't know now whether I had any right.'

'Why not?'

'I gave up very soon.'

Trix's eyes shot a quick glance at him and she frowned a little.

'Well, I ought to have been more than a friend, and so did I,' she said.

'It would have been utterly useless, of course. Reason recognises that, but then conscience isn't always reasonable.'

She agreed with a nod as she galloped through her fish, eager to overtake the *menu*.

'Besides, I have——' He hesitated a moment, smiling apologetically and playing nervously with a knife. 'I have a propensity myself, and that makes me judge him more easily—and myself not so lightly.'

She looked at his pint of *ordinaire* with eyebrows raised.

'Oh, no, quite another,' he assured her, smiling. 'But it's enough to teach me what propensities are.'

'What is it? Tell me.' She caught eagerly at the strange luxury of intimate talk.

'Never! But, as I say, I've learnt from it. Are you alone here, Mrs. Trevalla?'

'Here and everywhere,' said Trix, with a sigh and a smile.

'Come for a stroll after dinner. I'm an old friend of Vesey's, you know.' The last remark was evidently thrown in as a concession to rules not held in much honour by the speaker. Trix said that she would come; the outing seemed a treat to her after the *pensions*.

They drank beer together on the boulevards; he heard her story, and he said many things to her, waving (as the evening wore on) a pipe to and fro from his mouth to the length of his arm. It was entirely owing to the things which he said that evening on the boulevards that she sat now in the flat over the river, her mourning doffed, her guaranteed *pensions* forsaken, London before her, an unknown alluring sea.

'What you want,' he told her, with smiling vehemence, 'is a revenge. Hitherto you've done nothing; you've only had things done to you. You've made nothing; you've only been made into things yourself. Life has played with you; go and play with it.'

Trix listened, sitting very still, with eager eyes. There was a life, then—a life still open to her; the door was not shut, nor her story of necessity ended.

'I daresay you'll scorch your fingers; for the fire burns. But it's better to die of heat than of cold. And if trouble comes, call at 6A Danes Inn.'

'Where in the world is Danes Inn?' she asked, laughing.

'Between New and Clement's, of course.' He looked at her in momentary surprise, and then laughed. 'Oh, well, not above a mile from civilisation—and a shilling cab from aristocracy. I happen to lodge there.'

She looked at him curiously. He was shabby yet rather distinguished, shaggy but clean. He advised life, and he lived in Danes Inn, where an instinct told her that life would not be a very maddening or riotous thing.

'Come, you must live again, Mrs. Trevalla,' he urged.

'Do you live, as you call it?' she asked, half in mockery, half in a genuine curiosity.

A shade of doubt, perhaps of distress, spread over his face. He knocked out his pipe deliberately before answering.

'Well, hardly, perhaps.' Then he added eagerly, 'I work, though.'

'Does that do instead?' To Trix's new-born mood the substitute seemed a poor one.

'Yes—if you have a propensity.'

What was his tone? Sad or humorous, serious or mocking? It sounded all.

'Oh, work's your propensity, is it?' she cried gaily and scornfully, as she rose to her feet. 'I don't think it's mine, you know.'

He made no reply, but turned away to pay for the beer. It was a trifling circumstance, but she noticed that at first he put down three *sous* for the waiter, and then returned to the table in order to make the tip six. He looked as if he had done his duty when he had made it six.

They walked back to the hotel together and shook hands in the hall.

'6A Danes Inn?' she asked merrily.

'6A Danes Inn, Mrs. Trevalla. Is it possible that my advice is working?'

'It's working very hard indeed—as hard as you work. But Danes Inn is only a refuge, isn't it?'

'It's not fit for much more, I fear.'

'I shall remember it. And now, as a formality—and perhaps as a concession to the postman—who are you?'

'My name is Airey Newton.'

'I never heard Vesey mention you.'

'No, I expect not. But I knew him very well. I'm not an impostor, Mrs. Trevalla.'

'Why didn't he mention you?' asked Trix. Vesey had been, on the whole, a communicative man.

He hesitated a moment before he answered.

'Well, I wrote to him on the subject of his marriage,' he confessed at last.

She needed no more.

'I see,' she said, with an understanding nod. 'Well, that was—honest of you. Good night, Mr. Newton.'

This meeting—all their conversation—was fresh and speaking in her brain as she sat looking over the river in her recovered gown of blue. But for the meeting, but for the shabby man and what he had said, there would have been no blue gown, she would not have been in London nor in the flat. He had brought her there, to do something, to make something, to play with life as life had played with her, to have a revenge, to die, if die she must, of heat rather than of cold.

Well, she would follow his advice—would accept and fulfil it amply. 'At the worst there are the *pensions* again—and there's Danes Inn!'

She laughed at that idea, but her laugh was rather hard, her mouth a little grim, her eyes mischievous. These were the marks youth and the four years had left. Besides, she cared for not a soul on earth.

CHAPTER II COMING NEAR THE FIRE

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At the age of forty (a point now passed by some half-dozen years) Mrs. Bonfill had become motherly. The change was sudden, complete, and eminently wise. It was accomplished during a summer's retirement; she disappeared a queen regnant, she reappeared a dowager—all by her own act, for none had yet ventured to call her *passée*. But she was a big woman, and she recognised facts. She had her reward. She gained power instead of losing it; she had always loved power, and had the shrewdness to discern that there was more than one form of it. The obvious form she had never, as a young and handsome woman, misused or over-used; she had no temptations that way, or, as her friend Lady Blixworth preferred to put it, 'In that respect dearest Sarah was always *bourgeoise* to the core.' The new form she now attained—influence—was more to her taste. She liked to shape people's lives; if they were submissive and obedient she would make their fortunes. She needed some natural capacities in her *protégés*, of course; but, since she chose cleverly, these were seldom lacking. Mrs. Bonfill did the rest. She could open doors that obeyed no common key; she could smooth difficulties; she had in two or three cases blotted out a past, and once had reformed a gambler. But she liked best to make marriages and Ministers. Her own daughter, of course, she married immediately—that was nothing. She had married Nellie Towler to Sir James Quinby-Lee—the betting had been ten to one against it—and Lady Mildred Haughton to Frank

Cleveland—flat in the face of both the families. As for Ministers, she stood well with Lord Farringham, was an old friend of Lord Glentorly, and, to put it unkindly, had Constantine Blair fairly in her pocket. It does not do to exaggerate drawing-room influence, but when Beaufort Chance became a Whip, and young Lord Mervyn was appointed Glentorly's Under-Secretary at the War Office, and everybody knew that they were Mrs. Bonfill's last and prime favourites—well, the coincidence was remarkable. And never a breath of scandal with it all! It was no small achievement for a woman born in, bred at, and married from an unpretentious villa at Streatham. *La carrière ouverte*—but perhaps that is doing some injustice to Mr. Bonfill. After all, he and the big house in Grosvenor Square had made everything possible. Mrs. Bonfill loved her husband, and she never tried to make him a Minister; it was a well-balanced mind, save for that foible of power. He was very proud of her, though he rather wondered why she took so much trouble about other people's affairs. He owned a brewery, and was Chairman of a railway company.

Trix Trevalla had been no more than a month in London when she had the great good fortune to be taken up by Mrs. Bonfill. It was not everybody's luck. Mrs. Bonfill was particular; she refused hundreds, some for her own reasons, some because of the things Viola Blixworth might say. The Frickers, for example, failed in their assault on Mrs. Bonfill—or had up to now. Yet Mrs. Bonfill herself would have been good-natured to the Frickers.

'I can't expose myself to Viola by taking up the Frickers,' she explained to her husband, who had been not

indisposed, for business reasons, to do Fricker a good turn. For Lady Blixworth, with no other qualities very striking to a casual observer, and with an appearance that the term 'elegant' did ample justice to, possessed a knack of describing people whom she did not like in a way that they did not like—a gift which made her respected and, on the whole, popular.

'The woman's like a bolster grown fat; the daughter's like a sausage filled unevenly; and the man—well, I wouldn't have him to a political party!'

Thus had Lady Blixworth dealt with the Frickers, and even Mrs. Bonfill quailed.

It was very different with Trix Trevalla. Pretty, presentable, pleasant, even witty in an unsubtle sort of fashion, she made an immediate success. She was understood to be well-off too; the flat was not a cheap one; she began to entertain a good deal in a quiet way; she drove a remarkably neat brougham. These things are not done for nothing—nor even on the interest of twenty thousand pounds. Yet Trix did them, and nobody asked any questions except Mrs. Bonfill, and she was assured that Trix was living well within her means. May not 'means' denote capital as well as income? The distinction was in itself rather obscure to Trix, and, Vesey Trevalla having made no settlement, there was nothing to drive it home. Lastly, Trix was most prettily docile and submissive to Mrs. Bonfill—grateful, attentive, and obedient. She earned a reward. Any woman with half an eye could see what that reward should be.

But for once Mrs. Bonfill vacillated. After knowing Trix a fortnight she destined her for Beaufort Chance, who had a fair income, ambition at least equal to his talents, and a chance of the House of Lords some day. Before she had known Trix a month—so engaging and docile was Trix—Mrs. Bonfill began to wonder whether Beaufort Chance were good enough. Certainly Trix was making a very great success. What then? Should it be Mervyn, Mrs. Bonfill's prime card, her chosen disciple? A man destined, as she believed, to go very high—starting pretty high anyhow, and starts in the handicap are not to be disregarded. Mrs. Bonfill doubted seriously whether, in that mental book she kept, she could not transfer Trix to Mervyn. If Trix went on behaving well—— But the truth is that Mrs. Bonfill herself was captured by Trix. Yet Trix feared Mrs. Bonfill, even while she liked and to some extent managed her. After favouring Chance, Mrs. Bonfill began to put forward Mervyn. Whether Trix's management had anything to do with this result it is hard to say.

Practical statesmen are not generally blamed for such changes of purpose. They may hold out hopes of, say, a reduction of taxation to one class or interest, and ultimately award the boon to another. Nobody is very severe on them. But it comes rather hard on the disappointed interest, which, in revenge, may show what teeth it has.

Trix and Mervyn were waltzing together at Mrs. Bonfill's dance. Lady Blixworth sat on a sofa with Beaufort Chance and looked on—at the dance and at her companion.

'She's rather remarkable,' she was saying in her idle languid voice. 'She was meant to be vulgar, I'm sure, but

she contrives to avoid it. I rather admire her.'

'A dangerous shade of feeling to excite in you, it seems,' he remarked sourly.

The lady imparted an artificial alarm to her countenance.

'I'm so sorry if I said anything wrong; but, oh, surely, there's no truth in the report that you're——?' A motion of her fan towards Trix ended the sentence.

'Not the least,' he answered gruffly.

Sympathy succeeded alarm. With people not too clever Lady Blixworth allowed herself a liberal display of sympathy. It may have been all right to make Beaufort a Whip (though that question arose afterwards in an acute form), but he was no genius in a drawing-room.

'Dear Sarah talks so at random sometimes,' she drawled. 'Well-meant, I know, Beaufort; but it does put people in awkward positions, doesn't it?'

He was a conceited man, and a pink-and-white one. He flushed visibly and angrily.

'What has Mrs. Bonfill been saying about me?'

'Oh, nothing much; it's just her way. And you mustn't resent it—you owe so much to her.' Lady Blixworth was enjoying herself; she had a natural delight in mischief, especially when she could direct it against her beloved and dreaded Sarah with fair security.

'What did she say?'

'Say! Nothing, you foolish man! She diffused an impression.'

'That I——?'

'That you liked Mrs. Trevalla! She was wrong, I suppose. *Voilà tout*, and, above all, don't look hot and furious; the

room's stifling as it is.'

Beaufort Chance was furious. We forgive much ill-treatment so it is secret, we accept many benefits on the same understanding. To parade the benefit and to let the injustice leak out are the things that make us smart. Lady Blixworth had by dexterous implication accused Mrs. Bonfill of both offences. Beaufort had not the self-control to seem less angry than he was. 'Surely,' thought Lady Blixworth, watching him, 'he's too stupid even for politics!'

'You may take it from me,' he said pompously, 'that I have, and have had, no more than the most ordinary acquaintance with Mrs. Trevalla.'

She nodded her head in satisfied assent. 'No, he's just stupid enough,' she concluded, smiling and yawning behind her fan. She had no compunctions—she had told nearly half the truth. Mrs. Bonfill never gossiped about her Ministers—it would have been fatal—but she was sometimes rather expansive on the subject of her marriages; she was tempted to collect opinions on them; she had, no doubt, (before she began to vacillate) collected two or three opinions about Beaufort Chance and Trix Trevalla.

Trix's brain was whirling far quicker than her body turned in the easy swing of the waltz. It had been whirling this month back, ever since the prospect began to open, the triumphs to dawn, ambition to grow, a sense of her attraction and power to come home to her. The *pensions* were gone; she had plunged into life. She was delighted and dazzled. Herself, her time, her feelings, and her money, she flung into the stream with a lavish recklessness. Yet behind the gay intoxication of the transformed woman she was

conscious still of the old self, the wide-awake, rather hard girl, that product of the lodging-houses and the four years with Vesey Trevalla. Amid the excitement, the success, the folly, the old voice spoke, cautioning, advising, never allowing her to forget that there was a purpose and an end in it all, a career to make and to make speedily. Her eyes might wander to every alluring object; they returned to the main chance. Wherefore Mrs. Bonfill had no serious uneasiness about dear Trix; when the time came she would be sensible; people fare, she reflected, none the worse for being a bit hard at the core.

'I like sitting here,' said Trix to Mervyn after the dance, 'and seeing everybody one's read about or seen pictures of. Of course I don't really belong to it, but it makes me feel as if I did.'

'You'd like to?' he asked.

'Well, I suppose so,' she laughed as her eyes rambled over the room again.

Lord Mervyn was conscious of his responsibilities. He had a future; he was often told so in public and in private, though it is fair to add that he would have believed it unsolicited. That future, together with the man who was to have it, he took seriously. And, though of rank unimpeachable, he was not quite rich enough for that future; it could be done on what he had, but it could be done better with some more. Evidently Mrs. Bonfill had been captured by Trix; as a rule she would not have neglected the consideration that his future could be done better with some more. He had not forgotten it; so he did not immediately offer to make Trix really belong to the brilliant world she

saw. She was very attractive, and well-off, as he understood, but she was not, from a material point of view, by any means what he had a right to claim. Besides, she was a widow, and he would have preferred that not to be the case.

'Prime Ministers and things walking about like flies!' sighed Trix, venting satisfaction in a pardonable exaggeration. It was true, however, that Lord Farringham had looked in for half an hour, talked to Mrs. Bonfill for ten minutes, and made a tour round, displaying a lofty cordiality which admirably concealed his desire to be elsewhere.

'You'll soon get used to it all,' Mervyn assured her with a rather superior air. 'It's a bore, but it has to be done. The social side can't be neglected, you see.'

'If I neglected anything, it would be the other, I think.'

He smiled tolerantly and quite believed her. Trix was most butterfly-like to-night; there was no hardness in her laugh, not a hint of grimness in her smile. 'You would never think,' Mrs. Bonfill used to whisper, 'what the poor child has been through.'

Beaufort Chance passed by, casting a scowling glance at them.

'I haven't seen you dancing with Chance—or perhaps you sat out? He's not much of a performer.'

'I gave him a dance, but I forgot.'

'Which dance, Mrs. Trevalla?' Her glance had prompted the question.

'Ours,' said Trix. 'You came so late—I had none left.'

'I very seldom dance, but you tempted me.' He was not underrating his compliment. For a moment Trix was sorely

inclined to snub him; but policy forbade. When he left her, to seek Lady Blixworth, she felt rather relieved.

Beaufort Chance had watched his opportunity, and came by again with an accidental air. She called to him and was all graciousness and apologies; she had every wish to keep the second string in working order. Beaufort had not sat there ten minutes before he was in his haste accusing Lady Blixworth of false insinuations—unless, indeed, Trix were an innocent instrument in Mrs. Bonfill's hands. Trix was looking the part very well.

'I wish you'd do me a great kindness,' he said presently. 'Come to dinner some day.'

'Oh, that's a very tolerable form of benevolence. Of course I will.'

'Wait a bit. I mean—to meet the Frickers.'

'Oh!' Meeting the Frickers seemed hardly an inducement.

But Beaufort Chance explained. On the one side Fricker was a very useful man to stand well with; he could put you into things—and take you out at the right time. Trix nodded sagely, though she knew nothing about such matters. On the other hand—Beaufort grew both diplomatic and confidential in manner—Fricker had little ambition outside his business, but Mrs. and Miss Fricker had enough and to spare—ambitions social for themselves, and, subsidiary thereunto, political for Fricker.

'Viola Blixworth has frightened Mrs. Bonfill,' he complained. 'Lady Glentorly talks about drawing the line, and all the rest of them are just as bad. Now if you'd come ——'

'Me? What good should I do? The Frickers won't care about me.'

'Oh, yes, they will!' He did not lack adroitness in baiting the hook for her. 'They know you can do anything with Mrs. Bonfill; they know you're going to be very much in it. You won't be afraid of Viola Blixworth in a month or two! I shall please Fricker—you'll please the women. Now do come.'

Trix's vanity was flattered. Was she already a woman of influence? Beaufort Chance had the other lure ready too.

'And I daresay you don't mind hearing of a good thing if it comes in your way?' he suggested carelessly. 'People with money to spare find Fricker worth knowing, and he's absolutely square.'

'Do you mean he'd make money for me?' asked Trix, trying to keep any note of eagerness out of her voice.

'He'd show you how to make it for yourself, anyhow.'

Trix sat in meditative silence for a few moments. Presently she turned to him with a bright friendly smile.

'Oh, never mind all that! I'll come for your sake—to please you,' she said.

Beaufort Chance was not quite sure that he believed her this time, but he looked as if he did—which serves just as well in social relations. He named a day, and Trix gaily accepted the appointment. There were few adventures, not many new things, that she was not ready for just now. The love of the world had laid hold of her.

And here at Mrs. Bonfill's she seemed to be in the world up to her eyes. People had come on from big parties as the evening waned, and the last hour dotted the ball-room with celebrities. Politicians in crowds, leaders of fashion, an

actress or two, an Indian prince, a great explorer—they made groups which seemed to express the many-sidedness of London, to be the thousand tributaries that swell the great stream of its society. There was a little unusual stir to-night. A foreign complication had arisen, or was supposed to have arisen. People were asking what the Tsar was going to do; and, when one considers the reputation for secrecy enjoyed by Russian diplomacy, quite a surprising number of them seemed to know, and told one another with an authority only matched by the discrepancy between their versions. When they saw a man who possibly might know—Lord Glentorly—they crowded round him eagerly, regardless of the implied aspersion on their own knowledge. Glentorly had been sitting in a corner with Mrs. Bonfill, and she shared in his glory, perhaps in his private knowledge. But both Glentorly and Mrs. Bonfill professed to know no more than there was in the papers, and insinuated that they did not believe that. Everybody at once declared that they had never believed that, and had said so at dinner, and the very wise added that it was evidently inspired by the Stock Exchange. A remark to this effect had just fallen on Trix's ears when a second observation from behind reached her.

'Not one of them knows a thing about it,' said a calm, cool, youthful voice.

'I can't think why they want to,' came as an answer in rich pleasant tones.

Trix glanced round and saw a smart, trim young man, and by his side a girl with beautiful hair. She had only a glimpse of them, for in an instant they disentangled

themselves from the gossipers and joined the few couples who were keeping it up to the last dance.

It will be seen that Beaufort Chance had not given up the game; Lady Blixworth's pin-pricks had done the work which they were probably intended to do: they had incited him to defy Mrs. Bonfill, to try to win off his own bat. She might discard him in favour of Mervyn, but he would fight for himself. The dinner to which he bade Trix would at once assert and favour intimacy; if he could put her under an obligation it would be all to the good; flattering her vanity was already a valuable expedient. That stupidity of his, which struck Viola Blixworth with such a sense of its density, lay not in misunderstanding or misvaluing the common motives of humanity, but in considering that all humanity was common: he did not allow for the shades, the variations, the degrees. Nor did he appreciate in the least the mood that governed or the temper that swayed Trix Trevalla. He thought that she preferred him as a man, Mervyn as a match. Both of them were, in fact, at this time no more than figures in the great *ballet* at which she now looked on, in which she meant soon to mix.

Mrs. Bonfill caught Trix as she went to her carriage—that smart brougham was in waiting—and patted her cheek *more materno*.

'I saw you were enjoying yourself, child,' she said. 'What was all that Beaufort had to say to you?'

'Oh, just nonsense,' answered Trix lightly.

Mrs. Bonfill smiled amiably.

'He's not considered to talk nonsense generally,' she said; 'but perhaps there was someone you wanted to talk to

more! You won't say anything, I see, but—Mortimer stayed late! He's coming to luncheon to-morrow. Won't you come too?'

'I shall be delighted,' said Trix. Her eyes were sparkling. She had possessed wit enough to see the vacillation of Mrs. Bonfill. Did this mean that it was ended? The invitation to lunch looked like it. Mrs. Bonfill believed in lunch for such purposes. In view of the invitation to lunch, Trix said nothing about the invitation to dinner.

As she was driven from Grosvenor Square to the flat by the river, she was marvellously content—enjoying still, not thinking, wondering, not feeling, making in her soul material and sport of others, herself seeming not subject to design or accident. The change was great to her; the ordinary mood of youth that has known only good fortune seemed to her the most wonderful of transformations, almost incredible. She exulted in it and gloated over the brightness of her days. What of others? Well, what of the players in the pantomime? Do they not play for us? What more do we ask of or about them? Trix was not in the least inclined to be busy with more fortunes than her own. For this was the thing—this was what she had desired.

How had she come to desire it so urgently and to take it with such recklessness? The words of the shabby man on the boulevards came back to her. 'Life has played with you; go and play with it. You may scorch your fingers; for the fire burns. But it's better to die of heat than of cold.'

'Yes, better of heat than of cold,' laughed Trix Trevalla triumphantly, and she added, 'If there's anything wrong, why, he's responsible!' She was amused both at the idea of

anything being wrong and at the notion of holding the quiet shabby man responsible. There could be no link between his life and the world she had lived in that night. Yet, if he held these views about the way to treat life, why did he not live? He had said he hardly lived, he only worked. Trix was in an amused puzzle about the shabby man as she got into bed; he actually put the party and its great *ballet* out of her head.