



F

Fair Inez

FAIR INEZ ²⁰

A Romance of Australia

By Douglas Sladen, Author of
"The Tragedy of the Pyramids," "Grace
Lorraine," "His German Wife," "The
Shadow of a Great Light," "The Douglas
Romance," etc., etc. :: :: :: :: :: ::

MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN



Handwritten: Mrs. J. V. Lewis
under the name of Douglas
Sladen
HOBART



J. V. LEWIS
(L.B.L.)
BOOK EXCHANGE
294 ELIZABETH ST.
HOBART

Handwritten: 201

LONDON: HUTCHINSON & CO.
:: PATERNOSTER ROW ::

1418

414610

DEDICATION

THIS ROMANCE
OF
THE LINDSAY GORDONS IN AUSTRALIA
IS DEDICATED
TO MY OLD FRIEND
LIEUT.-COL. F. H. NEISH
GORDON HIGHLANDERS

✓

PREFACE

—:—

I HAVE to thank my friends, Professor Sir W. F. BARRETT, F.R.S., and Lieut.-Col. GRANT, V.D., R.A.M.C., for help in the technical details of this book.

The pedigree of the hero is in accordance with the official proclamation.

To keep a book of this length within the limits imposed by the paper famine, it has been found necessary to print much of the dialogue, not in separate lines, but in paragraphs divided up by long dashes, as in the second paragraph of Page 49. This method of printing is copied from a romance of 1764.

PUBLIC LIBRARY OF VICTORIA

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I.—TO AUSTRALIA IN FIVE DAYS: THE PRE- TENDER MEETS THE LINDSAY GORDONS .	1
II.—INTRODUCING "THE LAKE" AND THE GUNNS	12
III.—IN THE OTWAY FOREST	20
IV.—THE BULL	33
V.—THE ROUND AUSTRALIA AIRSHIP RACE: ENTER BOB STEVENS AND TUDOR LEWIS .	37
VI.—THE OASIS HOTEL: VICTORIA BEACH .	40
VII.—PLAYING WITH FIRE	43
VIII.—THE WRONG BOX	48
IX.—"WILL YOU HAVE PAX?"	55
X.—THE SOCIETY HOGGERS	59
XI.—A MISS IN BAULK: THE HEIRESS	64
XII.—"IF I'D TAKEN YOU THERE"	77
XIII.—WHY CONNIE BROKE OFF HER ENGAGEMENT	84
XIV.—HALLHEAD: INEZ FINDS A CLUE	87
XV.—HOW INEZ UNMASKED THE PRETENDER	95
XVI.—HOW CHRIS CAME BACK	105
XVII.—THE RETURN OF THE PRETENDER	111
XVIII.—THE BALL AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE: A PEN- TENT INEZ	116
XIX.—PAT TAKES A HAND	121
XX.—CHRIS TAKES A HAND	124
XXI.—PLAYING AT BRICKS	127
XXII.—LIN GUNN TAKES A HAND	129
XXIII.—ENTER EROS	131
XXIV.—CHRIS LEARNS HER HUSBAND'S SECRET	133
XXV.—INEZ ON HER METTLE	137
XXVI.—INEZ COMES TO STAY	148
XXVII.—THE ORDEAL OF BOB STEVENS	166

CHAP.	PAGE
XXVIII.—MEPHISTOPHELES	172
XXIX.—COUNTER-PENITENCE	180
XXX.—LOOKING BACK TWO YEARS: ADAM LINDSAY GORDON IV. AT ESSLEMONT	181
XXXI.—LOOKING BACK FOUR YEARS	189
XXXII.—HOW INEZ STOOD	193
XXXIII.—CHRIS'S FIGHT FOR LIFE	195
XXXIV.—AN AIR FUNERAL: THE GORDON TOMB AT BRIGHTON	201
XXXV.—HOW INEZ CAME TO BEAUDESERT	202
XXXVI.—THE TRADITION OF CHRIS: BOB STEVENS TAKES A HAND	204
XXXVII.—HOW INEZ HAD THE COURAGE OF HER OPINIONS	210
XXXVIII.—MARKING TIME	214
XXXIX.—THE RECANTATION OF INEZ	216
XL.—MARRYING IN HASTE	219
XLI.—HOW INEZ LEARNED HIS SECRET	228
XLII.—HOW INEZ PASSED THE FIRST YEAR OF THEIR MARRIAGE	232
XLIII.—GOD SAVE THE KING	236
XLIV.—WHAT INEZ TOLD HER PARENTS ON THE TELEPHONE	240
XLV.—WHAT THE QUEEN ASKED THE KING	245
XLVI.—THE HON. CONSUELO CLARIDGE	250
XLVII.—AT THE MELBOURNE CUP	252
XLVIII.—REVENGE	256
XLIX.—ROUND AUSTRALIA BY AIR	259
L.—"RISE, SIR ALEXANDER"	264
LI.—THE CORONATION	266
LII.—THE KING'S SPEECH	269
LIII.—WHY CONNIE MISSED THE CORONATION BANQUET	273
LIV.—SIR ALEXANDER GORDON OF "THE LAKE"	277
EPILOGUE: THE NEW THEORY OF KINGSHIP	281

INTRODUCTION

THE scene of this book is laid in Australia at the beginning of the third Millennium, when George VIII., third in succession from George V., was King, and Australia was only five days from England by airship.

There had been other changes as immense in the twentieth century. They are barely mentioned in the book, because this is a love-story pure and simple.

It does not help the novel-reader to know that the world in 2000 A.D. was dominated by two great groups of Democracies, the Britains and the Americas, which had established a vast Customs Union, into which their Allies in the Great War had been welcomed; that the Britains were Federated under the Crown and governed for Imperial purposes by a Prime Minister and Council of the Empire, with seven British members, two each from Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, and three from India; or that only the British Empire, Italy, Japan and a few minor States were still monarchies.

It is a little more important for him to realize that Australia had fifty millions of inhabitants, who most of them had ancestors among the heroes of the Great War (half a million Australians had fought in it, and 200,000 British veterans had accepted the generous land-offers of the various States); to know that Melbourne and Sydney were as large as New York had been a century earlier.

But the main point to bring home to him is that the result of flying-machines becoming as universal as motors are now, was to make all parts of a compact continent like Australia accessible, so that a man could run into Melbourne from any part of Victoria as easily as a motorist to-day can run in to

London from a Kent-coast golf-course. This made Australia a sportsman's paradise; for, staying at Port Darwin, he could make day-excursions by aeroplane to coral seas and tropical rivers, peopled by monstrous fishes and reptiles, or to tropical forests, with shorthorns, ponies and buffaloes run wild for generations, and tree-kangaroos, and gaudy Papuan birds.

This romance gets no further than the fringe of such excursions, or the Easter holidays in Japan popular with the rich Australians of that day. It is taken up with a "Fair Inez," like Tom Hood's,* who desolated her lovers and retained their undying affections.

I spent some of the best years of my life, the five years after I left Oxford, in Australia. It is thirty-four years since I left its hospitable shores. I never was in such an enchanting climate, never saw manlier men or lovelier women. I have never ceased to regret the loss of its eternal sunshine, the riding over vast plains, or through open forests of gigantic trees, in the fierce stillness of an Australian summer day. In the Australian bush, it is the day which, oppressed with heat, is silent, the night which is full of Nature's many voices. In the wilds men are driven to introspection, because they have to work so much alone.

I wish I could do justice to the heavenly beauties of Australia, but this is not the time nor the place to speak at large. More than anywhere else Australia is the Briton's place in the sun. There could not be a more ideal land for a home than Australia, with its eternal summer, its gardens hanging over the deep waters of harbours, its gorges of forests and waterfalls going almost as deep into the table-land as the mountains rise above it, and its grassy plains stretching across a Continent. Over it all spreads the dry air of Australia, as exhilarating as champagne. Truly it is God's country.

If Australia had been accessible in five days in my time, I should never have left it. But the call of Classic Lands was too strong for me. In those days I heard the West a'calling—Italy and Greece. In after days, when living in London, I heard the East a'calling—Japan and Egypt. But in none of them, except Upper Egypt in the winter, have I found the conditions for outdoor-life so perfect.

This is a romance of outdoor-life, of outdoor-people. It seemed to me natural that a physically-perfect heroine should be born of a nation bred from heroes in a perfect climate. My story, as naturally, has a background of the scientific marvels

* Hood spells it Ines.

of the twenty-first century. Their possibility has been examined and allowed by an eminent F.R.S. They serve to show the kind of life people led in 2000 A.D., but are sketched in slightly so as to keep them in strict subordination to the story. Its startling dénouement is a legitimate corollary of the Royal proclamation made last year.

DOUGLAS SLADEN.

The Avenue House,
Richmond, Surrey.
February 5th, 1918.

FAIR INES

BY THOMAS HOOD

O saw ye not fair Ines ?
She's gone into the West,
To dazzle when the sun is down,
And rob the world of rest :
She took our daylight with her,
The smiles that we love best,
With morning blushes on her cheek,
And pearls upon her breast.

O turn again, fair Ines,
Before the fall of night,
For fear the moon should shine alone,
And stars unrivall'd bright ;
And blessed will the lover be
That walks beneath their light,
And breathes the love against thy cheek
I dare not even write !

Would I had been, fair Ines,
That gallant cavalier,
Who rode so gaily by thy side,
And whisper'd thee so near !
Were there no bonny dames at home,
Or no true lovers here,
That he should cross the seas to win
The dearest of the dear ?

I saw thee, lovely Ines,
Descend along the shore,
With bands of noble gentlemen,
And banners waved before ;
And gentle youth and maidens gay,
And snowy plumes they wore :
It would have been a beautiful dream,—
If it had been no more !

Alas, alas ! fair Ines !
She went away with song,
With Music waiting on her steps,
And shoutings of the throng ;
But some were sad, and felt no mirth,
But only Music's wrong,
In sounds that sang Farewell, farewell
To her you've loved so long.

Farewell, farewell, fair Ines !
That vessel never bore
So fair a lady on its deck,
Nor danced so light before,—
Alas for pleasure on the sea,
And sorrow on the shore !
The smile that bless'd one lover's heart
Has broken many more !

FAIR INEZ

A ROMANCE OF AUSTRALIA

CHAPTER I

TO AUSTRALIA IN FIVE DAYS
THE PRETENDER MEETS THE LINDSAY GORDONS

ONE summer morning, two months before Christmas in the last year of the twentieth century, the *A. S. Murrumbidgee* descended to the air-docks in the Domain at Melbourne.

The gas-bag of the giant air-liner was almost as large as the ill-fated Cunarder *Lusitania*; but she only carried about a tenth of the passengers and crew. Because the short trip by airship suited people with long purses, her fares were double as high as steamer-fares, though there was a great saving in provisions, since her trips took five days against thirty, and it was impossible to carry much weight of supplies.

In so short a period as five days a great friendship had sprung up between two of the passengers, young men of 24 and 34 respectively, Patrick Gordon and Charles Edward Stuart. The former was a delightful and wealthy boy, belonging to one of the chief families of the Commonwealth.

The rise of the Lindsay Gordons was one of the romances of twentieth-century Australia. Adam Lindsay Gordon II. was a grandson of one of the poet's cousins. By the time that he was born, Gordon's poems were known and loved all over the English-speaking world, so it was a natural thing for him to be named Adam Lindsay. It was as natural for him to visit Australia and stay with a family who had a vast property between Melbourne and Adelaide, because the father of the present owner had been one of the poet's greatest friends.

The visit had important results. The squatter had no one

* Inez Gordon, the poet's sister, spelt her name with a *z* and not an *s*, like Hood's heroine.

† A. S.—Airship.

to succeed him but a daughter; the Major was a V.C. of the Great War, a man of position and property in England and bore the magic name. Both he and the girl were eminently likeable people; her parents lived in memories of his namesake. To be Mrs. Adam Lindsay Gordon fired her imagination. To consecrate his property in this way to the memory of Gordon appealed to her father.

How exactly the marriage eventuated has not been recorded; it resulted in great happiness. The son who was born to Major and Mrs. Gordon, Adam Lindsay Gordon III., did not marry until he was 35, nor the grandson, Adam Lindsay Gordon IV., until he was 36. The great-grandson, Pat Gordon, was in his twenty-fourth year when the stormy twentieth century came to its end, and his sisters, of whom anon, were 19 and 20.

A great deal of Bunyip Swamp, the South Australian station which came to Adam Lindsay Gordon II., was liable to heavy floods. Major Gordon conceived a bold system of using the floods like the inundation of the Nile for cultivation on a great scale, he supplying the capital and the labour being supplied by a co-operative settlement, like the Irrigation Settlements in Victoria. Immense profits accrued for all concerned. With part of them he bought a property in the Western District of Victoria, about seventy miles from Melbourne, for breeding pedigree stock, and erected on it a copy of the old Esslemont mansion in Aberdeenshire, which the poet had so passionately desired, a beautiful Scottish baronial house of no great size. It did not look as incongruous as it might have, because the first owner of the estate, an Englishman of good family, had burnt off the gums and laid down English grass in the home paddocks, and planted numerous deciduous trees round the house.

Pat, who was as capable as he was handsome, was not interested in stock-breeding and fruit-raising to the same extent as his father and his elder brother Adam—the fifth Gordon to bear the names of Adam Lindsay. The burning question of the application of flying-machines to overcome the immense distances of Australia had a fascination for him, and though in the old world he would have been considered a mere boy, he had made this voyage to England to acquire the Australian rights of a patent whose adaptation hung fire, in spite of its immense possibilities. The patent was for a flying-machine hardly larger than a motor-bicycle, which was made possible because it required no furnace, boiler or petrol, deriving its electricity from the air which surrounds us by a collecting system, which the inventor was

trying to perfect, in combination with a light storage battery.

This interested Pat, because his own business in Melbourne was fitting up wireless telephones in private houses and offices. The inventor had not yet succeeded in collecting the Cosmic Electricity in a practical way, though he considered that he had demonstrated its feasibility. In England he was blocked by a difficulty in demonstrating the feasibility of the invention, because his machine required considerable space for making its ascents and descents, and in the old country, especially in towns, it was hard to find the requisite open spaces. But Pat perceived that for the country districts in Australia this drawback would not arise, while it was impossible to exaggerate the convenience. From Esslemont, seventy or eighty miles away, for instance, he would be able to fly to Melbourne in an hour, if he wished to see anyone on business, while a squatter on a Riverina station, four hundred miles from Sydney, would be able to fly there and back and get through a good deal of business in the day. At present only a few private persons had Zeps, and comparatively few had 'planes, on account of their cost for fuel and the necessity of transporting large quantities of petrol for great distances. But if these two difficulties could be got over by collecting electricity from the air, the problem of universal air-communication for Australia would be solved.

Pat perceived that the same principle could be applied to the engines that drew the light road-trains which had almost superseded railway-trains in Australia, because the hard "loam" of Australia can be made into natural roads which will stand any reasonable traffic, in the fine weather which reigns there for so much of the year; to electric-lighting, and, in fine, to every purpose for which electricity was used.

How far conditions had changed in Australia between the beginning and end of the twentieth century may be gauged from the following: Railways, other than mono-rails, were only used for goods trains; the crack mail-steamers were things of the past. Those passengers to England who were willing to pay liberally in order to save time crossed the ocean in air-ships, which flew overland for large portions of the journey, re-petroled three times on the way, and made the trip in five days. Except the persons who preferred to accompany their heavy articles on the road-trains because their journeys were of no use until they had received their baggage, and a few persons who were still timid about aerial journeys, all long internal travel was by public airship or private aeroplane. The air-ships, lighter than air, used by the public, were still enormously

expensive to buy. Only the wealthiest people had them. But less wealthy people had private aeroplanes, which they used chiefly for long journeys, on account of the expense of fuel for their high-power engines.

The beautiful Pat (Patrick was one of the commonest names in the Lindsay Gordon pedigree, outside of which the family never permitted themselves to go in christening a child) had none of the poet's moodiness or quarrelsomeness, though he had a full measure of the grim Australian pluck immortalized in Gordon's poems. He was a merry, sociable person, who loved witty company, and it was this which made him take such a fancy to the Young Pretender, as their fellow-passengers on the *A.S. Murrumbidgee* had dubbed Charles Edward Stuart.

The Young Pretender was a tall, dark man, with an erect figure, and very soldierly face, but the point his fellow-passengers remembered about him chiefly was his friendly brown eye and the way it lighted up when he was introduced to anyone, or was going to make one of the witty sallies for which he became famous while they were "yarning" at night.

By day they were too busy to yarn. Their eyes were glued to their binoculars. To fly across Europe in a day, with world-famous cities, rivers and mountains succeeding each other with cinematographical rapidity, was inexpressibly exciting, and in order to give them as good a view as possible, the airship was advertised to fly as low as was compatible with safety.

The marvellous voyage was over: the great airship lay in the deep cutting which had been excavated to form a wind-proof dock for the airships to be warped into, when they had effected their descent on to the adjoining plateau. Here were the necessary platforms for the disembarkation of the passengers from the ocean-airships and their transfer to the mono-rail which connected with the principal tramway centre in the city. This was for the convenience of those who went to see friends arriving or departing. Those who had luggage and were going to destinations in Melbourne, took taxis, for which no efficient air substitute had been devised. But those who were going to other towns or to the sheep-stations which lay on the way, took whichever of the public airships went nearest to their destination. Every town and every large sheep-station had an airship landing—a few station-owners had small airships of their own.

The Lindsay Gordons had one, and it was grounded in the small airdock at the Domain, while the family were on the platform, waiting to welcome Pat, who on this occasion had been away for a long time, engaged in purchasing the Australian

rights of the Daedalus Flying Company, though sometimes he would return from London in less than a fortnight.

The Pretender had seen a bigger, darker likeness of Pat making his way to them, and guessed that he must be the brother.

"Well, Pat, old man, it is good to see you back again. How are you, any way?"

"Tophole. Everybody right up at the station, Adam?"

"Yes:—they're all here to meet you."

"Good biz. Well, I'm bringing up a pal to stay with us till he's got over the effects of the voyage." The worst feature of the airship-voyage from London was the strain made on the constitution by flying ten thousand miles at a hundred miles an hour, with only three stoppages to take up petrol. "Pretender, I want to introduce my brother, Adam."

"Delighted to meet you, *Mr.—Pretender?*"

"Charles Edward Stuart is the name I acknowledge to, but it naturally lays me open to pleasantries."

"You mustn't mind me—I wasn't trying to be funny."

"I like it—a man who gets a nickname gets friends easily."

"It's nice of you to put it that way, and it will be a great pleasure to us having you up at our place. I'll go and tell them that I've found you, Pat. Ah, there they are!"

The family emptied the vials of affection on the adorable Pat before it noticed that he had a friend with him. Then Inez Gordon noticed him and came forward.

The Pretender thought he had never seen such a beautiful creature in his life. She was a splendidly handsome girl of twenty. In appearance she was no Gordon; she took after her mother. She was not dark, but exquisitely fair. Nothing could be less suggestive of the poet than the provoking charm of her short, straight nose, her short upper lip, her small, snow-white, perfectly set teeth, which gave her such a lovely smile when her face did relax, the delicate curves of her face and eyebrows, the long dark lashes, the rose of perfect health in her cheeks, the burnished gold of her hair. Nothing about her was Gordonian, but the eyes, which gave the face its character, for they were not the habitually gentle or merry eyes which might have been expected of the type, but the resolute steel-grey of the family, though they could sparkle with fun or be nobly gracious when she unbent.

It was this beautiful creature's whim to be a boy-girl. She wore her hair short, in little wavy curls.

She was proud; she had leonine courage; she was as hardy as a man and had almost masculine strength. But though she

was tall, her slender, sinewy figure was very light. Even at her early age she had modelled for herself, from a close study of Gordon's poems, a set of melodramatic ideals which made her the Queen of the Western District and a thorn in the flesh of her governesses—a mass of contradictions. Strong in her robust celibacy, she would strike up a violent friendship with a man, guest or neighbour, and spend day after day with him in various kinds of sport, full of merriment and frank enjoyment, until he fell in love with her and had to be put in his place with fierce indignation at his having mistaken her. But she had also fits of pessimism, during which the emptiness of life struck her as grimly as ever it had struck the poet when he felt the meshes of fate closing round him. She was fond of repeating such lines of his as :

“ Life is mostly froth and bubble,
Two things stand like stone,
Kindness in another's trouble,
Courage, in your own,”

not realizing that it was not *life* which was empty, but *her* life, given up to sport, with only dancing and desultory reading to relieve it.

Bush-hospitality made her give the Englishman a dashing greeting, but as Pat, in answer to her inquiries, had told her that he was as close as a tomb about his life, she intended to examine him straitly thereon. The subject was a bee in her brain. About his personal qualities she did not suppose that she would have to trouble. She was sure that the home-grown English must be, by her standards, degenerate.

When Inez had introduced herself, Pat presented the Young Pretender, as his chief friend of the voyage, to his mother and father. Adam the elder was a hugely tall old man, with a frank, hospitable face and a well-trimmed white beard. Mrs. Gordon had remains of singular beauty, though she was nearly seventy. The mother always came first at Esslemont, though the father was the principal inhabitant of the Western District. When they had finished their welcome, the other daughter came forward and shook hands, unIntroduced, though the proud Pat hastened to repair the omission with, “ And we must not forget Christian Elizabeth.”

The Pretender was much attracted. She was as elegant as her sister, though she was soft, and Inez was a Gainsborough Duchess. She was as fair, though her face lacked the glorious

colouring, and her hair was light-brown ; her soft violet eyes were significant of her gentleness and femininity, a welcome foil when Inez was riding her hobby. She was good at sport, though not much addicted to its pursuit (her motto, which she constantly had to quote to her sister, being, “ Sport was made for man, not man for sport ”), and she was lively and sympathetic, as well as gentle—a most lovable girl.

Pat was as good-looking as his sisters. He had Chris's features, Inez's colouring, and with his boyish, clean-shaven face, looked hardly a day older, though he had such ambitious business interests.

As soon as their baggage was transferred, the party boarded the Esslemont airship, which could carry a dozen passengers and a reasonable amount of luggage. The gondola was divided into three parts—open and closed parts for the family, and a closed part for luggage and servants. The cabin-walls were taken up with windows and elaborate mechanism for ventilation, but the whole family, in motoring coats and flying men's caps, sat out in the open. The Pretender wore the coat and goggled-hood which he had used on the air-voyage from Europe.

Except when they were near Geelong, easy to distinguish by its bay's resemblance to the Bay of Naples, and the dead Vesuvius of the Anakies, the scenery was uninteresting, though the wide, bare plains, intersected by small rivers, are some of the best sheep-country in Australia. As they approached the station, dark clumps of lightwood trees and plantations made the scenery look almost like an English park.

In less than an hour they came down in the paddock, and an automatic electric lorry conveyed the luggage to the house, which abounded in electric appliances, a very necessary thing, since, including the cook, it was run entirely by four women servants. The resident electrician-mechanic, who looked after the airship, kept the house machinery in order, when Pat was away. Pat was an electrical genius ; much of the labour-saving machinery in the house was of his invention.

“ We never wear evening-dress up here, Pretender,” said Pat, when the family retired to have their baths before dressing for dinner. “ The girls wear something half-and-half, and we wear anything dark.”

The something “ half-and-half ” was rather elaborate—Australian women dress beautifully—but it was something which would not look as incongruous as a low-necked dress if the fit seized them to take the terriers out after 'possums and native cats, as a Colonial novelty for the new chum.

Pat, knowing how an amusing person with a new lot of stories is appreciated on a station, proudly drew his friend out. The Pretender kept them laughing all through dinner, except Inez, who, in her attitude to new chums, was one of those saturnine young Colonials who depreciate everything which is not Australian.

"I hate jocular people," she said to Chris, when they left the gentlemen and her mother had gone to see if every arrangement had been made for the Pretender's comfort. "Besides, Pat hasn't a notion who he is—I asked him."—"I'm prepared to like anyone who is such a good sort, whoever he is," said Chris.—"I think that's rotten—that's the attitude which spoils Australia."—"I think the reverse."—"You get such a lot of cheap people round you that way."—"We have exactly the same lot of people round us, only I make friends of them and you don't."—"I should think not!"—"Well, everyone has her own idea of pleasure."—"It seems so," sneered Inez.

* * * * *

After dinner they generally sat out on the verandah. Mosquitoes had been eradicated from Victoria; it was not difficult in a country which has so little stagnant water. The verandah was brilliantly lit. They had their own power-station.

In the drawing-room, which opened on to the verandah, there was a fine electric piano, with a great selection of popular music. Usually, when the Gordons were alone, Inez idled with the music while the men read the newspapers and her mother and sister worked.

To-night she lured the Pretender to the Electra by inquiring if he cared for music, and when she had inserted a record and turned on the current, began to ask him questions, as if that was her form of conversation.

Her cross-examination of Pat had been unsatisfactory. She did not approve of asking a man, who had brought no introductions, to stay with them. She was up-in-arms about the dignity of Australia, and thought it quite beneath that dignity to make a fuss over young men or young married couples who had come out from home, on slender introductions, just because they were nice or they happened to have handles to their names. At the same time, she knew her Peerage, because through the poet's great-grandmother, the lively Lady Henrietta, she was a descendant of the Dukes of Gordon. For knowing the Peerage

she was regarded by many of her fellow-countrymen as a snob.

She elicited from the Pretender that he was not related to any of the Stuart Peers. She did not ask him to learn if he was eligible as a suitor; it was part of her Lindsay Gordon cult to think no-one good enough for her husband but an Australian, if she had been willing to marry.

He shook his head, which she attributed to a fear of betraying his ignorance. But his ease and *savoir-faire* showed her that he was well-bred; she admitted this.

Presently she asked him, "What made you come to Australia? Are you doing the round trip?"—"I thought I should like to settle here."—"You won't like it as well as England, will you?"—"Better, I thought. I wanted to get out of the groove I was in."—"Chambers in the West End—dining out—invitations to country houses—that sort of thing?"—"No! I have never been a butterfly. To put it briefly, I found my relations oppressive."—"I suppose they wanted to manage you?"—"Yes, you might call it that. Do you still have kangaroos and funny birds like cockatoos in these parts?" he asked, to change the subject.—"We've had no kangaroos here, except those which my father preserves in the forest, for more than a hundred years, and I'm thankful to say that we've extirpated those diabolical white cockies—I should think in my grandfather's time. But there are still a few parrots. The fruit brings them."—"I hope your brother'll take me out to show me anything there is left of the natural zoo?"—"He's quite safe to do that. It's part of the programme, when you're taking a 'new chum' round the show."—"Do you shoot, Miss Gordon?"—"Not here—there's nothing worth shooting. You have to go a long way for that."—"What do you call worth shooting?"—"Turkey, duck, geese."—"Not kangaroos?"—"I like hunting kangaroo better, though it isn't bad fun stalking an 'old man' with a rifle: but you have to go to one of the other colonies for an unreserved one. I don't like shooting preserved things—it's like England."—"After a while her sister joined them. "You're not giving us much Electra, Inez. I suppose you're busy talking. Don't you like music, Mr. Stuart?"—"This sort of thing, very much. I'm not musical."—"You choose the records for him, Chris," said Inez.—"Should you like some more?" asked Chris. "What sort of things do you like?"

Inez had made no such inquiry—she had appeared to choose the pieces à la bran-pie and play them as a bore. Nor had she paid

him any sort of regard except as a thing to answer questions. Her cat and mouse air amused him: he had sufficient sense of humour, and, after all, she had a right to sift him carefully—a casual acquaintance whom her brother had picked up on board ship. But it was not conciliatory.

Chris was on terms with him even before she sat down. Her whole attitude breathed hospitality. She went into the drawing-room to welcome him to Australia, and their home, to give him a better evening, if he enjoyed the Electra, than Inez was offering by her desultory playing, to find out how he would really like to spend the evening, and his visit to them, to learn the good points of the man about whom her adored brother was so enthusiastic.

To his admiration she did not give a thought. She knew she was very pretty and was glad of it; it gave her such delightful friendships, but she desired lovers even less than her contemptuous sister did. The man who fell in love with her, unless he kept it out of sight, was at once put on rations in her friendship. She did not dislike him for it, as Inez was apt to; she was quite human about it. But it must not degenerate into a nuisance. She had formed the idea that women were happier where they did not marry until they were 24 or 25.

If she had shared Inez's opinions, she would have put Stuart on the list of suspects at once. Inez had an innate suspicion of all sympathetic people; he was overflowing with *simpatica*—"beastly friendly," she called it. But Chris, if the man's society gave her pleasure, welcomed his friendliness until it became oppressive.

She tried to find out, not his antecedents, but his tastes. She wished his visit to be as enjoyable as possible.

She found him prepared to be interested in every phase of Australian life, to decide whether he would like to make Australia his home. He was fond of games, though not near the first-class in any. He was well up in current events, and appeared to have read most books by leading authors in recent years, having been impressed by the saying of Queen Christina of Sweden that "reading is part of the duty of an honest man."

"From which," he said, "you will perceive that I am a very ordinary young man, interested in everything, excelling in nothing."—"I don't call that ordinary. I have not met many men who are so interested in any subject that turns up, and so well-informed as you seemed at dinner." Chris was not speaking without experience. It generally fell to her lot to assist her parents in entertaining the public men who were

guests at their hospitable table.—"I only know enough to take an interest in the conversations of clever people. My knowledge is too shallow to be of any value."—"I don't agree with you."

At that moment Pat came in, and putting his arm round his sister affectionately—he was so delighted to see her again—said, "What should you like to do to-morrow, Pretender?"—"I'll leave that to you. I want to sample everything. I don't care where we begin."—"Well, I won't take you up in the 'plane, because I pointed you out what you could see in that way when our Zep was slowed for coming down, and you must have had about enough of the air for the present. We might motor over to Corangamite for a shoot. My cousins own a big stretch of country on it, and have boats for shooting. I'll telephone to them to arrange for a couple of men who know the habits of the game to be there with the boats."

"I suppose you are all on the telephone, however out of the way you are?"—"Yes—the wireless system for which I hold the patents in Victoria has made it quite easy. You remember that one of the Popes had it just after 1900. It was difficult then, and needed the intervention of very scientific people. But Edison invented wireless telephones, which to the person sending or receiving the message work just like ordinary telephones, though the installation is a bit elaborate and expensive. I expect you don't use them in England; they're not suitable for use in crowded places. A town's wireless telephone office has to be some way out, and messages to the town have to be re-transmitted by ordinary telephone. The wireless is only for trunk calls. The Daedalus rights I've been home to secure now are Edison rights."

The mention of the rights made Pat forget all about the shooting. He launched out into the openings they presented. He had talked about them on the voyage, but the Pretender had not seen Australia then, so he had a fresh flow of ideas.—At last Chris laughingly put her hand in front of his mouth. "You're forgetting the shooting, Pat."—He went off to telephone, and came back saying that the boats would be ready at 9.30 next morning.—"Weather permitting," said the Pretender.—"The weather always permits in Australia," laughed Chris.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCING "THE LAKE" AND THE GUNNS

AT 8.30 a.m. the car, an open one with an awning, was ready; the lake was a little over an hour's run.

"Thick boots, breeches and leather leggings, Pretender," said Pat, as he accompanied him to his bedroom. "There's too great chance of a snake for you to put on tennis-shoes and flannels. The two first rules of the bush are, never to pick up anything until you've turned it over with your foot, to see if there's a snake underneath it, and never to sit down in the bush till you've made sure that there is nothing which could harbour one near you. Some of our venomous beggars are little chaps that take hardly any room. Above all, beware of a log—our logs are apt to be hollow and hold a snake."

The girls wore breeches and leggings like their brothers, shooting coats like long-skirted Service jackets, and the flat-brimmed khaki felt hats immortalized by the Anzacs in the Great War. Their fair beauty contrasted charmingly with the thin pale khaki gaberdine of their mannish-looking jackets.

The cousins, Lin and Sandy Gunn, themselves were there with the boats. They were tall, straight men, with dark hair and grey eyes, much more the stamp of the poet than either of the Gordon boys. They were not better riders than Adam Gordon, but made more of a cult of horses. They were two of the best polo-players in Australia and rode a great deal at Hunt Club races and horse shows. They also made a cult of boxing and Sandy cultivated a saturnine wit—in a word, not bearing the surname of Gordon, they did their best to emphasize the fact that they were Gordons on their mother's side.

To-day, of course, they were overflowing with Australian hospitality, and they were fond of their cousins.

Lin Gunn, who had been christened Adam Lindsay Gordon Gunn, was not a man of many words. He spent the winter on their Riverina station, which was far back. It had no women on it and this increased his propensity to silence. But Alexander Lindsay Gordon Gunn, better known as "Sandy," was a great talker, and could be troublesomely egotistical,

"We had these motor-boats specially built for the lake shooting, Mr. Stuart," he explained. "They draw next to nothing; their screws are very quiet and specially protected

from weeds; the shooters are kept out of sight by a camouflage which does not interfere with their aiming, and does not excite the suspicion of the game."—"I've done most of my waterfowl shooting on the Norfolk Broads; we had no boats approaching these."

"The way we generally work the lake is for one boat to run down to the end where it narrows into a creek, and lie up among the tall waterplants. The other goes up the lake to a big bit of marsh a dozen miles above, works that and the other bits which lie between. A good bit of game will get up and whatever doesn't get shot mostly goes to the end of the lake before it strikes away from the water and heads for other swamps. The boat which is going to lie low will get to its post before the other. Which will you go in?"—"Oh, either."—"No, it's for you to choose. The boat which lies low will get the best shooting, only the other is more of an outing. You see more of the lake and its conditions."—As the Pretender was too polite to decide, Chris said, "Come with me in the boat which goes up the lake, won't you? We shall be able to talk because we want to disturb the game and you're sure to ask questions."—This suited all parties, for it induced the beautiful Inez, who was keen on this kind of shooting, to go off alone with Sandy, who had always meant to marry her. Adam and Pat went up the lake to exhibit Australia to their friend and to enjoy being with each other after their long parting.

As the motor-boat glided silently out on the great lake, the best marshes for game lay on the further shore. They were glad of the camouflage of marsh-plants, though it was only 10 a.m., for the sun was terribly hot on the lake. The scene filled the Pretender with elation. Lake Corangamite was a magnificent body of water, nearly a hundred miles round, though it had no value for stock, because its waters were so salt. Still, its broad edging of green marsh-plants along the northern slope made it an oasis in a dry land, and there was quite a grove of willows along the south shore, which seemed to be able to filter the water for their roots, judging from their size.

The Pretender did not appreciate greenery like one who had been long in the country. He was more taken up with the pelicans, ibises and black swans floating lazily on the middle of the broad expanse. It gave such a touch of the wilds. On general principles, the sentry swan gave its shrill single note of warning, as the motor-boat approached him. The swan is suspicious and stands sentry for all the other wildfowl.

They got up and sailed away, the pelicans going up the centre

of the lake and other birds to the marshy belt on the north shore, though no shot was fired.

As they neared the marsh, a Native Companion, the gigantic crane of Australia, which was wading, rose high and flew away just as Adam was telling the Pretender to have a shot at him—"Chance it! we haven't many of them." The Pretender did not fire; his eye told him that it was out of range.

"Pull the keels up, Adam. We're getting into shallow water," called his cousin, explaining to their guest that without her keels the boat had the lines of a spoon, so that provided there was a little channel with sufficient water for her propeller, she could make progress when her sides were right on the top of the weeds. "The propeller has a special protector against weeds, Pat's invention."—"Now then," he said, when the keels were up and secured, "are your guns ready, because I'm going ahead?"—"I'm not going to shoot," said Pat, "nor is Chris. We're going to point things out to the Pretender. It's difficult to see birds in a swamp till you're accustomed to it. Besides, somebody'll have to take the birds from Warry."

Warry was a coarse-haired fox-terrier, all white, no beauty to look at, which up to this moment had been asleep and forgotten, though he came over from Esslemont in the motor. Experience had taught him that he was going to have a busy day, when he was taken out with guns.

As the boat nosed its way over the swamp like a *tank*, there was a running fire of exclamations. The birds were plentiful, but hardly rose above the tops of the reeds, as Warry dashed at them.—"It's wonderful how a dog keeps from sinking!" said Pat. "You or I would be up to our elbows in the soft mud. I have waded here, once in a way, after something rare, before we had Warry."

As Inez was not there, with her severe standards for what was game and worth shooting, the Pretender was allowed to be more interested in shooting an ibis or avocet or bittern than the various pleasant kinds of duck, and Adam was applauded for the destruction of a cormorant which was too wily for the Pretender to get a shot at him. They kill off the Blackfish in the creeks.

The Pretender soon saw that Adam was shepherding him like the others, that he shot nothing until the guest had passed it. He himself was making a fine bag, but disappointed, because he had not bagged one of the big birds he coveted most—the swans, cranes and pelicans.—"You won't see any more swans before the end of the lake," said Pat. "If

there are any, they'll keep to the water—they won't get up for a small dog."

Neither boat could tell what sport the other was having, for twenty-first-century "powder" made no flash and no more noise than an air-gun.

The spectacle enthralled the Pretender. The tall water-plants which framed the narrow channels through which the motor-boat was working, were almost tropical in their luxuriance; the place was full of strange birds, insects and reptiles, including a few snakes, which were promptly named by the Gordons and their venomousness or harmlessness estimated. None of the other fauna seemed to take any notice of them, except a lizard, pursued for food.—"Wherever there are many lizards," explained Chris, "look out for snakes. They're their easiest food."

Presently the Pretender noticed that there was no longer open water on their left.—"We're getting near the end of the lake. It's all swamp at the end," said Pat. "There'll be a lot of game hiding here headed off by the other boat." Then he gave a peculiar whistle, which was answered from not very far away.—"Don't fire that way—that's the other boat."—Soon there was a crashing in the reeds.—"Hush! Look ahead—don't talk, there's a swan getting up," said Adam.

A mass of black and white rose a good many yards in front, and headed away. It was almost out of shot before Pat secured the Pretender's attention to it, but *phit!* went the right-hand barrel, and the mass turned somersault.—"I never thought you'd get it," said Pat. "It's always good enough to loose at a thing on the off-chance, as these compressed-air cartridges don't make any report or flash, but old swans have such tough feathers that I didn't think you'd penetrate them. It was a nailing good shot."—"I fired at its head," said the Pretender.—They worked to where it fell, and there, piled in a queer heap on a reedy patch, was the huge swan, showing the white under his wings, and with his head submerged in the water—a sure sign of death.—Warry made a dash at his enemy, but was called off.—"You'll want to skin him," said Chris, "your first swan. I'll show you how."—The bird, which weighed more than twenty pounds, was dragged on board, shot through the head, surely enough, and Pat and Chris took up their guns.—"We must bag some of the duck we've rounded up for the larder," said Pat, pouring both barrels into a flight as he spoke. The firing, until they reached the other boat, was very hot

They found that Inez had a much better bag than they had,

because she had picked off the game which they had driven, including a gigantic crane which stood over four feet high.—“That’s that Native Companion,” said Pat.—“It was a nailing shot,” said Sandy, proud of the beautiful cousin on whom he had set his affections, “he was flying very high. It’s about time to land for lunch, isn’t it? Those who are in favour of the motion hold up their hands! Carried, *nem. con.* We must run back to the boat-house; we left the lunch there; there’s a good clump of willows near it, with a nice bit of shade.”

When they reached the trees, to which the chauffeur was carrying the lunch, Chris’s quick eye saw a brown snake disappearing into a willow root. It made the Pretender quite sick with fear, as he saw this lovely girl, just passing the threshold of womanhood, seize the deadly brute by the tail. It roughed its scales to resist, but she had almost lugged it out—the others standing still and silent, so as not to distract her attention—when there was the *phit* of a gun, and the reptile fell in halves.

The Pretender turned round and saw Pat taking the cartridge out. He hardly recognized their beautiful, good-natured Pat, he was so livid with rage.—“I told you never to do that idiotic swank again, Chris!”—“Inez does it.”—He was about to retort, “I hope you’re not going to be such a fool as Inez,” but he contented himself with saying, “I hope you’re not going to imitate her!”

“If you do it right,” he admitted, “there’s not much danger—but it’s a fool’s game.”—“You know that father likes us to kill every snake we see,” pleaded Chris.—“Yes, but not that way—kill it with whip or stick or shot, ride over it, drive over it, any way but that ‘fool’ way.”—“How was she going to kill it?” asked the Pretender, intensely interested, though he had been paralysed with anxiety.—“Flick it in the air like a towel—that breaks its back. The danger in trying to pull it out of a hole is that you don’t know when it’s going to give way. If it can once rough its scales properly, you can get it out.”—“I’m thankful she didn’t get it out, though I should have been wildly interested to see the feat performed,” said the Pretender. For a while he was quite shaken. Chris, except that she had called down the wrath of her beloved Pat, did not feel as if anything had happened.

They had a prodigal lunch, off all sorts of canned delicacies. The station store at Esslemont was as well-stocked as a shop with the productions of Service and Co., the Melbourne Harrods and alike in flesh and fruit, Australia presents great opportunities to the canner. Bottled Bass and Guinness had been provided

and barley lemonade.—“If you don’t want to go to sleep while we’re cruising round for a pelican, you’d better take the barley stuff, Pretender,” said Pat. “Bass or Guinness will make you dreadfully sleepy. Two to four’s the hottest time in the day in Australia, and it’s slack work going round in a motor-boat.”—The Pretender noticed that all the young Australians drank it. He found it as palatable as Moselle cup.

Force of habit made even Inez do a good deal of waiting on the men. Women on Australian stations become so accustomed to attending to the feeding of men who have rushed in from some important station-job to snatch a meal, or have had stiff work in the heat before they come up to the place where their lunch is to meet them, on a distant part of the station. Australians pack a good deal into the daylight hours, for in a country which has no twilight they are short. None the less, the men were deferential to the girls, and eager to wait on them. It was only custom that interfered. On such occasions Australian girls don’t “sit round waiting to be waited on,” as Pat put it; they hurry things up. Beyond running the car up to the willows and lifting out the lunch-basket, the chauffeur did nothing.

“Let me wash up!” cried the Pretender. “I’m awfully good at that.”—“Waste of time,” said Chris. “We don’t wash up—we wrap the things in grease-proof paper and take them home to the electric washer. All we have to do’s to see that no grease gets on to the baskets.”

After lunch the men strolled along the shore for half-an-hour, to see if they could get a few plover, but they only shot a brace.—“It’s no good without a horse,” said Lin Gunn. “They’re too fly.”

An hour or two’s cruising, sweeping the lake with strong glasses, convinced them that the pelicans had gone for the day, so they went back to the landing-place, and motored on to the Gunns’ cottage, which stood near some springs, on a small freshwater lake two miles from the big lake, to have a long, lazy tea. The cottage was a rambling, one-storey, wooden house, which covered about half an acre, and, as Inez said, needed a coat of paint badly.—“It’s hardly my idea of a cottage,” said the Pretender to Chris.—“In Australia anything is a cottage which has only one storey.”

“The Lake,” the Gunns’ station, was not a show place like Esslemont, but it stood on rising ground and the broad verandah under which they had tea commanded a glorious view of the little freshwater lake and the big lake beyond, which extended further than the eye could carry.

It was just beginning to be cooler when they sat down; the atmosphere was as delicious as the view. There was a telephone at the boathouse, in case anything had been forgotten or used up when they went on the lake, so, when they arrived, tea was ready for them, with the Gunns' mother and their charming cousin, Consuelo Claridge, to minister to the wants of the hungry and welcome the stranger. Mrs. Gunn, Mr. Gordon's sister, was a tall woman, dressed with austere plainness. She had never put on colours since her husband's death. But she wore a benignant smile. She had managed her property so capably that her sons would be rich men. She was not so rich as her brother, for he had speculated with conspicuous success, while she had merely saved by good management. But she had inherited half her father's fortune, and the freshwater lake in front of her house had been a Cornucopia, for it was fed with springs and emptied itself into the river Barwon, which took a winding course through her own and her brother's properties.

It was fortunate that she was economical, for her sons, to whom she gave liberal allowances, had the Old Colonial School's recklessness, and the rich young Western District squatters were a gambling, racing, polo-playing set. Mrs. Gunn would have been glad to see Lin and Sandy out of it, and promised them big stations of their own in the Riverina, if they married suitably and settled down. So far the only girls they had cultivated were her nieces—Chris and Inez. She had no objection to marriage with cousins, and the girls would be as well-off as themselves. She was glad they did not favour their other cousin; Connie Claridge hated station-life, except for a change, and Mrs. Gunn intended her sons to work. Connie had not gone out shooting, because she disliked it. When there was no polo-match to watch at the Lake, or some neighbouring station, she spent most of her time reading novels in the hammock on the verandah. That afternoon she had been amusing herself with playing Chopin—resounding pieces like the "Polonaise Militaire," and the "Ballade in A flat"—on the piano, with its lid raised, and all the windows open. In their silent-running car they could hear her a mile away.

"You've got Connie staying with you!" cried Inez to Lin. "No one else could play like that. Why didn't you tell us?" — "Sandy wanted to get a surprise off on you, but Connie's kicked the pot over—on purpose, I expect." — "Doesn't she play gloriously, Mr. Stuart?" said Chris. — "Like a professional." — "She really is almost as good as a professional." — Stuart wondered what she was like.

As the car drew up, he caught a glimpse of an elegant figure, in a lace frock that was out of keeping with station-life, and an elaborate hat. When he was introduced he noticed that, though she was not as lovely as the Gordons were, she was a very pretty girl, with her beautiful complexion, fascinatingly freckled, and her piquant features, which resembled Chris's strikingly, just as she resembled Chris in her *simpatica*. She wore a town frock to show that she thought Australia too hot for exercise. She took little exercise except dancing. She made herself agreeable to the Pretender. She liked men just out from home, and she knew that her men-cousins expected her to clear the field for them with Inez and Chris. Lin and Sandy went little to town, and Inez and Chris were the women they knew best, in addition to their being so very good-looking. To the girls their attentions were flattering, because among the young squatters who tried to live up to Gordon's poems, Sandy Gunn was looked-up-to as the beau-ideal of the school. Any girl in the Western District would have changed places with them. Inez ought to have been the Gunns' sister. They would have made a wonderful trio.

"Can you enjoy that novel you were reading when we came in?" the Pretender asked Connie. — "Very much indeed." — "Then you must be pretty fond of reading, for it's about the stodgiest I ever tackled, though it's amazingly clever." — "I am—I hardly do anything else here. I've got quite a library of modern fiction in my den in Melbourne. I hope you'll come and see it when we're all in town." — "I should like to very much." — They spent about half an hour in looking at the books she had with her and discussing them. She really was a serious reader, for she had a good knowledge of the great Japanese and Chinese novelists. In the year 2000 A.D. both the Japanese and Chinese had been writing in English for the best part of a century.

When they went back to the verandah they found it empty, but they heard the car "gnashing its teeth" on the other side of the house, and going through, found Adam and Pat impatient to get off, since they had been doing nothing all this time. The Gunns had wandered off with Inez and Chris. — "What sort of chap is he, Chris?" asked Lin, who, in an indolent, matter-of-course way, was very fond of his lovely cousin, indicating the Pretender, before they came within earshot. — "I like him, though I don't know much about him yet, except that he hasn't the ordinary failings of new chums."

CHAPTER III

IN THE OTWAY FOREST

“WHAT is your friend going to do for a living? He can't live on us for ever,” said Inez, who had a runaway, shrewd tongue, to the indignant Pat one day, when the Pretender had been with them for several weeks. — “You'd better ask Dad—he's advising him.” — “In other words, trying to find him a billet?” — “In other words, he's not. He's turning down one proposal after another which our lawyers are sending to the Pretender for the employment of his capital!” — “So he has some money?” — “More than ten thousand pounds to his credit in the Union Bank.” — “Why doesn't he make a move?” — “I say again—ask Dad.” — As Inez was seldom backward in coming forward, she tackled her father.

“How long Mr. Stuart stays here is my affair, Inez, but, to set your suspicions at rest—I think you talk more to amuse yourself than with intention to injure—I may say that there are three very good reasons for his staying on for the present. The first is that I am enjoying his society more than I have enjoyed anyone's for years; I like to have him riding with me round the station; I like my game of billiards with him; I find him very amusing; and he can converse intelligently on most subjects, a great thing when one is buried in the country.”

“Does he ever tell you anything about his people, Dad?” — “Never. I should fancy that he was a man of very good family and thinks it bad form to blow about them.” — “I'm glad you think so. My experience is that when people won't talk about their antecedents, it is because their antecedents won't stand talking about.” — “I'm willing to credit you, Inez, with all the wisdom and experience which would be natural for a person of your age, and pass on. My second reason is that he has brought out a considerable sum of money, and at the present moment all manner of investments are being offered to him. If he was up in Melbourne with no one at his elbow to advise, he might be tempted to close with some offer which was not sound. My third reason is that . . . I think I had better keep that to myself.”

Seeing her father's attitude, Inez, who was not mischievous, decided to make the best of things, and as a visitor, she acknowledged that the Pretender “had his points.” He held himself

at the disposal of the womenfolk—a useful thing on a station, where the men are always busy. But if left to himself, he joined her father or the boys in whatever had to be done, and did his best to be helpful. He was familiar with horses and a good shot; he played more than a decent game of tennis and billiards. Adam, though he saw less of him than the others, pronounced him the best new chum he'd run across.

Chris, the person with whom he had most sympathy, was the one whom he saw least alone. He never went out with her, as he went with Inez: his talks with her were when they were all together after a meal, or when he was with her father and Pat and she joined them. She thought sometimes that he avoided her, though this seemed difficult to reconcile with the pleasure he showed in her society. Her instinct was right: he did avoid *têtes-à-têtes*. He had a reason. He saw how easily he could fall in love with her and did not think it honourable where he had unbounded opportunities and no credentials.

Mr. Gordon might not object if he told him about his family and his reasons for leaving England. This was exactly what he did not wish to do. He was trying to bury his wholly unblemished past, and one of the points which endeared the Gordon household to him was that, with the exception of Inez, none of them ever seemed to remember that they knew nothing about him until he dropped from the skies—literally—in the Domain air station at Melbourne in November, 2000 A.D.

Of course, neither Mr. Gordon nor Inez let their conversation go further than themselves, but Inez felt that Stuart had divined her suspicions and that it would be more sporting of her to make some *amende*, especially since her notion that he was an adventurer had fallen to the ground. So two nights afterwards, when Pat had announced his intention of 'planing to Melbourne on business for a day or two, before he had time to invite the Pretender to accompany him, she struck in with, — “You'll be rather lost without Pat, Mr. Stuart. Should you like to ride out to the forest with me to-morrow and see what you can find to shoot? The game, such as it is, is different.” — “I should love it,” he answered, not thinking of Inez at all, except as he would have thought of Adam, if he had been free to take him out in Pat's absence. He had never enjoyed himself more than he did on the day that his beloved Pat took him in the forest soon after his arrival.

He was surprised by her offer. Her next question surprised him more. “Is seven o'clock breakfast too early for you? It's a good thing to do the journey before the heat begins, be-

cause we shall find the forest very stuffy if we are hot before we get there." — "Not at all. But will you like leaving your bed so early?" — "No, I shan't," she said, laughing pleasantly, "but I shall like it better than looking purple in the face. I hate that—and I do when I am overheated."

Stuart wondered while he was dressing how Inez would array herself. He rather expected that she would wear the service jacket and breeches which she had worn on the lake. He felt certain that she would ride astride. — When he entered the breakfast-room he found Inez there before him, in breeches and boots, certainly, but wearing over them a long full-skirted riding-coat, which would be as good as a skirt in the saddle, and showed off her superb young figure to perfection. She was faithful to the khaki cowboy hat, which went so well with her proud, boyish features, and protected the pink and white of her skin from the sun.

"Good morning. How punctual we both are!" he said pleasantly. — "I should despise myself if I could not get up early. Men have to, so women can." — "Of course they can, but they don't always will." — "A woman without will-power might just as well be a rabbit; you know what we think of them." — "How long shall we take to get there?" he asked. On his former visit to the forest Pat had sent the shooting ponies ahead and had motored him over to shorten the riding for him as he had so recently come off the airship. — "About a couple of hours if we take it easy." — "Well, I'm ready when you are." — "I've ordered the horses at eight."

When they came round, the Pretender noticed that Inez's horse, contrary to her usual custom, had a side-saddle. The beautiful foot which she put into his hand for him to hoist her into the saddle was in an exquisitely-cut field-riding-boot; her coat and breeches matched the khaki of her hat, though they were very thin. The only brighter note was a white stock. Her dress, like the side-saddle, was designed to bring out the feminine side which she was generally at pains to conceal. With the closely-fitting coat showing off the slender grace of her upright young figure, and the white at her throat showing off the exquisite fairness of her beauty, she was a lovely woman. It was her rôle, too, to be gracious. His mind could hardly reconcile this smiling creature with the cynical Amazon.

"I wonder what Inez's game is?" said Adam Gordon the younger, to himself, as he watched them round the corner of the drive. Had he been accompanying them, he would not

have been less mystified. For Inez apparently had no object except to make the Pretender enjoy himself in expiation of her suspicions.

When the Pretender saw Inez so carefully-turned-out and riding in the time-honoured fashion of women, he felt that he had never done justice to her beauty before. She was for once letting herself go and allowing herself to be frankly pleased; her grey eyes sparkled; her white teeth gleamed; her dimples discovered themselves. As might have been expected from a Gordon, and so ardent a disciple of the poet, Inez had a perfect seat and never looked so well as on horseback. She noticed that the new chum, whatever his antecedents, was certainly familiar with horses—even Sandy, a ruthless critic, would have to acknowledge that.

A canter of a couple of miles brought them to the fine three-chain road, with a hawk every few yards along its fences, which was the main road from Geelong to the forest.

She had evidently determined to constitute herself his guide, philosopher and friend for the day, because while she was allowing herself to be natural and pleasant, she also took pains to point things out, from the wooded ranges with thin columns of smoke rising from them here and there which rolled away so finely in the distance, and were their objective, down to the scraps of natural history which presented themselves. Inez made a point of knowing the bush as well as her brothers. The immediate scenery was not inspiring. The pasture was too good; the gum trees had all been burnt off, unless they were noble specimens, though the dark lightwoods, filled with common-wealths of chattering parakeets, had been spared, for the shade which they gave to the stock, and the honeysuckles, with their crimson "bottle-brushes," had been preserved for some occult reason, probably because they could be trusted to die off on their own account.

Coming to a gate on the side of the road—Mrs. Gunn thought her brother was absurdly extravagant in gates; she always used slip-rails—Inez asked him to open it, and turned into the paddock alongside of the road. "It's worth while, if you're interested in our birds," she said, "to ride up to the lightwoods which come in our way, to watch the parakeets. Don't shoot any to-day. Their feathers would be spoilt before we got home, and we only kill them for specimens nowadays. They do no harm, except eat a little fruit, and we don't take any stock in our fruit here. We get it all sent over from our irrigation station in South Australia, which is given up to it entirely.

Father rather likes to see them in the fruit-trees here to gauge how their depredations are balanced by the insects and caterpillars which they kill. Caterpillars are the very devil here. The Fawsides, beyond Beaufort, had a whole avenue of blue gums killed by caterpillars."

Presently they came to a big clump of lightwoods and rode under them. "Keep the muzzle of your gun down and 'camouflage' it—not that they're as gun-shy as the hawks are—they're so seldom fired at." The sight was a wonderful one. This clump was not far from water, and every well-shaded bough, almost every twig in it, had its group of the gay little birds, all of them bobbing, all of them cheeping, as if they were having an animated conversation—a very Parliament of birds. When he had taken in the scene, she said, "Now come outside," and as soon as they were in the open, rode round the coppice, in the direction of the next big clump, and said, "Now fire one shot. There's a rabbit in that tussock which would be better dead. These horses will stand fire if you fire to the left and not over them."—He carried out her instructions. Pat had already shown him the difficulty of aiming far enough round on the right side to keep the flash out of the horse's eyes.

The moment the shot rang out the whole nation of parakeets seemed to dash out from their clump and fly on to the next. As they flew, Inez pointed out the bright blue Lories (she called them lowries), with their scarlet heads, the green Parakeets, all green, the Blue Mountain Parrots, with their bright green bodies and bright blue underwings, the Rosellas (she called them Joys and explained that they were Rosellas) with their bright cheeks and mottled backs. "We haven't any Budgerygahs here," she said, "though the Fawsides—the caterpillar people—have plenty."—"Budgerygahs?" he queried.—"You know them—the Fortune-tellers' Love-birds, little pale-green things, with a bit of yellow and a patch of black and white checks like Shepherds' plaid trousers."—"I suppose I do."—"Oh, there's a pair of shell-parrots," she pointed to two dear little grey birds. "They're very pretty close-to," she said. "They have such delicate crests—something between pink and yellow. Those screeching things are minahs, not 'parrots'—the best thing about them is that you can teach them to talk. They're beastly birds—they bully the others so."—"Parrots, did you say?"—"Oh, we generally call parakeets parrots. We may see a real parrot or two in the forest, near the edge of the cultivation."

This was a new Inez to the Pretender. She was as animated

as the parakeets, while she warmed to the subject of natural history; her cheeks were flushing with the unusual excitement of trying to make herself interesting. She generally tried not to be interested. *Nil admirari* was one of her standard poses. Pat always said that Inez, if she went to Europe, would be as bad as his friend Saltbush, who was thirteen months over there, spent five thousand pounds, and had nothing to show for it but a bundle of sticks and the blotches on his face. But to-day she was showing how clever and observant she was, and doing it in the most gracious way.

Then they rode on again. The country gradually changed from flat open paddocks, with their gums burnt off and laid under English grass, to undulating country, with hollows between the hills, which in a wetter climate would have contained streams. Here there were the tall tussocks of native grass, with hares' ears showing, and dead gums, killed by ring-barking, still standing, in a more economical age, until their timber was needed, instead of being burnt off.

"Did you smell anything?" she asked. "No? I did, and I know what it is. It comes from over the ridge. I prophesy that we shall find it in the next dip. Have your gun ready and put in cartridges with number 1's." She rode up the slope, but checked her horse short of the top and rode along under the crest, telling him to keep below her. She did not have to sniff any more; the odour was overpowering.—"What is it?" he asked.—"A dead beast—a dead bullock, I think, there's so much of it. Don't talk. Keep as quiet as you know how."

Presently she stopped and whispered, "We're about abreast of it. Now dismount and give me your horse to hold and creep up as if you were stalking a deer. You may have to fire any instant. See that you don't crawl on a snake, though it's rather too open for them, and they're almost eradicated here, since we've had turkeys." He obeyed. When he reached the crest he had his reward, for there on the tops of dead gums sat three great Eagle-hawks, as large as Golden Eagles. They were all within shot, for the ridge was as high as the tree-tops. He fired at the furthest; it fell like a log. At the sound of his gun, Inez dashed up in time to see him tumble the second over and re-load. The third was a very long shot and the eagle-hawk's wing-feathers are tough and stiff, but the Pretender, as he had done with the big swan, fired at its head and brought it down.

"That was a ripping shot!" cried Inez, with enthusiasm.

She gave a glance to each to see that it was dead. One was kicking: she cried, "Go after that one, and if he rises, give him another cartridge; if he doesn't, save it for a rabbit. There's what you owe your bag to," she said, pointing to the mangled carcass of a bullock which had fallen into a narrow drain back downwards and been unable to extricate itself.

"What shall we do about them?" he asked. "I should like to have the two best set up."—"Leave them where they are, and I'll tell the man who has taken our lunch to pick them up in the spring-wagon on his way back. I can make it understood where he'll find them. I'm glad it's the spring-wagon, not the buggy; he can sloosh that out, and these brutes are full of vermin."—"Thanks so much."—"I'll tell him to skin them directly he gets home. He skins things beautifully and these carrion-eaters go bad in a few hours."—"How did you know that they would be there?"—"I did not know, but I had a strong presumption, for the bullock smelt so high that if we could nose it all that way off, an eagle-hawk could smell it for miles; he doesn't get such a prize every day. Looking at them, can you see the picture in Lindsay Gordon's 'Gone'?"—

"What matters the sand or the whitening chalk,
The blighted herbage, the black'ning log,
The crooked beak of the eagle-hawk,
Or the hot, red tongue of the native dog?
That couch was rugged, those sextons rude,
Yet, in spite of a leaden shroud, we know
That the bravest and fairest are earth-worms' food,
When once they've gone where we all must go."

"Indeed I can! Are we heading the right way?"—"Yes. It's rather shorter, if we take down a slip-rail here and there."

Presently she asked, "What shall you do with the eagles when they are set up?"—"Send them home."—"Do you mean, send them to England, or send them to your people? We always talk of England as 'home,' though most of us belong to families which have been settled here for generations."—"I mean to my people."

It was in a penitent mood that Inez had volunteered to take him out. She had registered an unspoken vow not to pump him in any way about his private affairs, but the impersonality of his reply aggravated her. If he had only said "to my mother," she would not have minded; but the vague "to my people" was too much for her inquisitiveness.

"You're a jolly good shot," she said, "and a jolly good rider. Has your father a lot of horses and shooting?"—"My father's dead," he said, "but he never had a country place. He lived in town. I learned to ride and shoot when I was staying with friends."—"What sort of friends?" she asked, her inquisitiveness getting the better of her.—"Schoolfellows." She was not satisfied. She could understand his schoolfellows having him to stay with them a great deal. He probably had the same attraction for them as for her father and brothers. But the information told her nothing. "Where were you at school?"—He could not evade this, but "Loretto" conveyed nothing to her. Though patriotic Scotsmen are apt to send their sons there instead of to the great English Public Schools, she had never heard of it.

He felt that he had had a narrow escape, and must be more prepared to parry her questions. Fortunately they had come to the place in the fence where the first slip-rails were. Inez could not resist the temptation to show her skill and put her horse at the three-foot "post and rail" without waiting for him to manipulate the slip-rails. He only asked if his horse could jump and without a moment's hesitation followed her. She said nothing, but raised her long, dark, curling lashes and shot him a glance of approval from her clear eyes, for which Sandy would have been ready to murder him. The jump set her blood dancing, and she said, "A canter across this paddock and another jump will land us in the fringe of the forest." She suited the action to her words and soon they found themselves in the chequered light and shade of the great Otway Forest.

The Pretender learned that an Australian forest was as unlike the tropical forests he knew as anything could be, for instead of the hardly broken shade and entangling lianas, the stifling closeness and humidity, here was hardly broken sunshine playing between the tall white columns of gum-trees, whose bark was flapping in long strips, or had been blown away. There seemed to be hardly an inch of the baked ground not covered with ants or other insects; lizards darted about in extraordinary numbers. There were not many birds discoverable, and no animals.

The first bird they saw looked like a gigantic kingfisher, a moment afterwards it burst into discordant laughter. The Pretender raised his gun. "No, you mustn't shoot it, unless you want to contribute two pounds to the Revenue. That's our dearest friend, the Laughing Jackass."—"And why

mustn't I kill a jackass?"—"Because it kills snakes."—"I beg its pardon. Shall we see any?"—"Quite likely I daresay he's looking for one now. The first thing we've got to do is to pick a place for lunch, because if we have the basket put there two hours before we want to eat, it leaves the forest birds and beasts time to settle after the excitement of the spring-wagon clattering up to deposit its load. And then, if we are pretty quiet over lunch, you will have about the best chance you can get of observing forest life."—"Right-ho."—"Reed will have to come along the track, so we had better strike it as soon as possible," she said, turning her horse.

She struck into the high brushwood on the chance of putting up a wallaby. But it would have been easy to avoid it, because there were large stretches where the ground between the tall Stringybarks and Whitegums was as open as the track itself would be—just littered with tattered bark and green with trails of sarsaparilla and other ground-creepers. Lizards raced away in every direction, but they saw no snakes, for the noise and vibration made by the horses scared them away before the riders came in sight. Every now and then they had to cross a gully which needed skilful riding for its sharp dip and ascent, but had no stream at the bottom, and nothing picturesque in the way of rock or vegetation. "If we had plenty of men to head the wallaby in the direction we wanted, the best way to get them is to post yourself where they have to 'fly' a gully, because there you can get a clean shot at them," said Inez.

Presently she cried, "We've struck the track; Reed has come." She pointed to the wheel-marks, which the Pretender could see plainly, especially where the spring-wagon had struck a soft tea-tree bottom which almost bogged it. They could see where he had made a detour in the bush to avoid one fallen trunk, and where he had driven right over a smaller one. They came up to him by a muddy creek which ran past an open space clear of brushwood, where they could boil a billy without fear of setting the forest on fire. Inez saw the basket deposited exactly where she wanted, and told him where to find the eagle hawks and what to do with them. "The overseer 'll be glad to hear of them handing in their checks, Miss. They killed thirty young turkeys last week before the turkey-boy could drive them off."—"He ought to have a gun," said Inez.

As they rode through the tall brushwood, often as high as their heads, though they were mounted, she said, "If you want to get a wallaby, don't fire at anything until you see one. When you've once heard the *phit* of a gunshot, though we hardly

notice it, they mightn't let us get near them again; you won't see much in the forest. The Lake's the only place round here for sport. There are no 'bears' left, no 'foxes,' and you won't see 'possums in the morning—or anything, except stray wallaby and a few birds. Our best chance of seeing birds is at the edge of the cultivation. The man in charge of the forest-paddocks has a bit of corn. We'll ride on there.

"Yes, there's something!" she cried, as they reined their horses up. "At the top of that tall Stringybark—do you see them?" He looked up and saw two large white birds with hooked beaks. "What are they? A different kind of cockatoo?"—"No, those are parrots—Corellas."—"I'd love to shoot them."—"Better wait for a wallaby—you can eat him."—"What about parrot-pie?"—"Parrot-pies aren't made of parrots. They're made of parakeets—Rosellas," she added quickly. "If you're not particular about a kangaroo, there's something to fire at—those bronze-wings," she pointed at some large pigeons. "No, I'll wait for the wallaby. They're more of a novelty for me than pigeons."

"It's eleven now," she said, glancing at the watch set in the flat of the little gold stirrup locked round her wrist. She wore it outside the soft kangaroo-skin glove, which fitted her slender hand so charmingly, and was loose enough in the arm to be drawn over the sleeve, to keep out March flies and other insect pests. "If you can do without food for a bit, we'd better work the forest until two, because it won't be so hot as it is from two till four. I've chosen a nice shady place for us to have our lunch. The trunk of that big Whitegum gives enough shade for two people. We can work round it, according to the direction of the sun."

"It's an awfully high tree."—"Adam says 200 feet. Now, I think we had better ride deeper into the forest. The riding's a bit stiffer, but we get into real bush there, because my father doesn't use this part of the station for anything except to try and preserve the forest primeval, and prevent the fauna of the district from being exterminated. You know what I mean?"—"Flora and fauna make nature," he answered, with a smile. While they were talking, they were joined by Reed, who had brought a saddle in the wagon. "Shall I come with you, Miss?" he asked. "It's the old stock mare."—"Yes, Reed—much obliged."

The ground now became more broken. The hills, though not very high, grew steep, the gullies, too precipitous for horseback, extensive and lined with scrub. From the distance

mustn't I kill a jackass?"—"Because it kills snakes."—"I beg its pardon. Shall we see any?"—"Quite likely. I daresay he's looking for one now. The first thing we've got to do is to pick a place for lunch, because if we have the basket put there two hours before we want to eat, it leaves the forest birds and beasts time to settle after the excitement of the spring-wagon clattering up to deposit its load. And then, if we are pretty quiet over lunch, you will have about the best chance you can get of observing forest life."—"Right-ho."—"Reed will have to come along the track, so we had better strike it as soon as possible," she said, turning her horse.

She struck into the high brushwood on the chance of putting up a wallaby. But it would have been easy to avoid it, because there were large stretches where the ground between the tall Stringybarks and Whitegums was as open as the track itself would be—just littered with tattered bark and green with trails of sarsaparilla and other ground-creepers. Lizards raced away in every direction, but they saw no snakes, for the noise and vibration made by the horses scared them away before the riders came in sight. Every now and then they had to cross a gully which needed skilful riding for its sharp dip and ascent, but had no stream at the bottom, and nothing picturesque in the way of rock or vegetation. "If we had plenty of men to head the wallaby in the direction we wanted, the best way to get them is to post yourself where they have to 'fly' a gully, because there you can get a clean shot at them," said Inez.

Presently she cried, "We've struck the track; Reed has come." She pointed to the wheel-marks, which the Pretender could see plainly, especially where the spring-wagon had struck a soft tea-tree bottom which almost bogged it. They could see where he had made a detour in the bush to avoid one fallen trunk, and where he had driven right over a smaller one. They came up to him by a muddy creek which ran past an open space, clear of brushwood, where they could boil a billy without fear of setting the forest on fire. Inez saw the basket deposited exactly where she wanted, and told him where to find the eagle hawks and what to do with them. "The overseer 'll be glad to hear of them handing in their checks, Miss. They killed thirty young turkeys last week before the turkey-boy could drive them off."—"He ought to have a gun," said Inez.

As they rode through the tall brushwood, often as high as their heads, though they were mounted, she said, "If you want to get a wallaby, don't fire at anything until you see one. When they've once heard the *phit* of a gunshot, though we hardly

notice it, they mightn't let us get near them again; you won't see much in the forest. The Lake's the only place round here for sport. There are no 'bears' left, no 'foxes,' and you won't see 'possums in the morning—or anything, except stray wallaby and a few birds. Our best chance of seeing birds is at the edge of the cultivation. The man in charge of the forest-paddocks has a bit of corn. We'll ride on there.

"Yes, there's something!" she cried, as they reined their horses up. "At the top of that tall Stringybark—do you see them?" He looked up and saw two large white birds with hooked beaks. "What are they? A different kind of cockatoo?"—"No, those are parrots—Corellas."—"I'd love to shoot them."—"Better wait for a wallaby—you can eat him."—"What about parrot-pie?"—"Parrot-pies aren't made of parrots. They're made of parakeets—Rosellas," she added quickly. "If you're not particular about a kangaroo, there's something to fire at—those bronze-wings," she pointed at some large pigeons. "No, I'll wait for the wallaby. They're more of a novelty for me than pigeons."

"It's eleven now," she said, glancing at the watch set in the flat of the little gold stirrup locked round her wrist. She wore it outside the soft kangaroo-skin glove, which fitted her slender hand so charmingly, and was loose enough in the arm to be drawn over the sleeve, to keep out March flies and other insect pests. "If you can do without food for a bit, we'd better work the forest until two, because it won't be so hot as it is from two till four. I've chosen a nice shady place for us to have our lunch. The trunk of that big Whitegum gives enough shade for two people. We can work round it, according to the direction of the sun."

"It's an awfully high tree."—"Adam says 200 feet. Now, I think we had better ride deeper into the forest. The riding's a bit stiffer, but we get into real bush there, because my father doesn't use this part of the station for anything except to try and preserve the forest primeval, and prevent the fauna of the district from being exterminated. You know what I mean?"—"Flora and fauna make nature," he answered, with a smile. While they were talking, they were joined by Reed, who had brought a saddle in the wagon. "Shall I come with you, Miss?" he asked. "It's the old stock mare."—"Yes, Reed—much obliged."

The ground now became more broken. The hills, though not very high, grew steep, the gullies, too precipitous for horseback, extensive and lined with scrub. From the distance

came the clear note of a bird, "Come back, come back."—"That's the bell-bird," said Inez.—"Are you good enough bushman to follow up its call and give me a chance of seeing it?" Nine days out of ten, Inez would have retorted grimly "Ask me something easy!" but to-day she only smiled and said, "A bell-bird is as elusive as Ariel. It always retreats into the distance and draws you on."—"Aren't you rather a bell-bird?" he asked suddenly.—"I suppose I am—I don't mean to be. I regard it as a kind of curse."

The gully on whose edge she reined up was a regular canyon with almost perpendicular cliffs. Few people would have cared to take such an uneasy, spirited animal to a dizzy verge, but she sat there in absolute serenity, with her beautifully-chiselled profile and the noble grace of her figure silhouetted against the void of the canyon and the sapphire skies of Australia. The pleasure and exercise of riding had given her a heightened colour. Regret lent a wistfulness to her beauty. He had never seen her look so attractive before, but he permitted himself to read no more than friendliness in it.

"Well, I suppose we must ride back to our lunch," she said. "We shan't get there by two, even if we flush nothing to delay us." All the way back the Pretender kept his gun across his knees, with his right hand on the neck of the stock, ready to bring it to his shoulder in a flash if they heard the welcome thud of the wallaby or saw some *rara avis in terris*, like the black cockatoo, of which she had been telling him. But they met nothing large or outstanding, though he had some interesting glimpses of the zoology of Australia from the lips of Inez as they rode along. The pity was that she was not equally interested in the flora, though in this respect the Cape Otway ranges are not to be compared with the mountains of New South Wales—the gorgeous crimson Waratah, the stately Rock-lily, the ripening clusters of blossom on the Christmas Tree, do not grace this barren barrier. Inez pleaded that as her reason for ignorance.

While they were stalking along, Reed rode ahead and unpacked the lunch, and was ready to tether their horses beside his own. He then sat down beside the horses to eat his own lunch. "If you see anything coming, Reed," said Inez, "give one soft whistle for mark right, and two for mark left." And she added to the Pretender, "The game don't notice whistles like they do voices. If the horses get uneasy, give three whistles."—"Horses notice the approach of game much sooner than we do, and show it directly," she explained. "But there doesn't"

seem to be anything about in this part of the forest to-day. Oh, isn't lunch nice?"

Inez had an excellent appetite and was not ashamed of it. She was soon posting sandwich after sandwich, fine solid sandwiches, made with slices of Ramornie pressed beef, followed by huge slices of plum cake, and a liberal variety of fruit. When she had done thorough justice to the viands and smoked a few cigarettes, while the Pretender had his pipe, she went to the creek to fill the billy, and when she got back, kicked a little pile of fallen bark and sticks together, so as not to run risks from snakes, lit them with her flint and steel, and fanned them into a flame with her hat. Then she ground the billy down into the middle of them and stretched herself out to watch it boil, a picture of vigour at rest and grace.

While she was watching the billy, she had not withdrawn her eye from the horses. Suddenly she gave three soft whistles just before they came from Reed, to warn the Pretender to grip his gun. She had pre-warned him to do it as furtively as possible. Hearing the whistles he looked at the horses too. Their ears were pricking; their nostrils dilating; a little tremor passed through them; they made a noise with their hoofs. Inez slipped her hand into her pocket very quietly, and brought out a palm-full of big shot, to show him which cartridges he ought to have in his gun. He gave a little nod to show that he had them right.

Presently they heard a faint *thud, thud* in the distance. He noticed that Reed had slipped away. The thuds came nearer and more frequent. "Get up and stand with your back to the tree," whispered Inez. "They're coming from that direction, and can't see you. You must jump out when I tell you and take them as they approach, or just as they're passing. They're difficult to kill from behind, because you can't see their heads." Thuds were now very regular and loud. Then they grew a little fainter. "I'm afraid they're breaking away," she whispered. "We mayn't get a shot."

The thuds grew louder again. "Reed has headed them," she whispered, "to drive them back on us." Louder still came the thuds. "Now jump out," she cried. "They're as near as we shall get them."

He did and met a wonderful sight. There was a drove of kangaroo—not wallaby, but the big Foresters, headed by an old buck, coming at him at a terrific speed, with bounds as long as a big room, and higher than his head in the centre of their span; as they leapt, they seemed to arch themselves like por-

poises, and spread out to their full measure from nose to tail. He did not lose a second in firing right and left. There were two heavy thumps; he did not look to see what they were; he re-loaded with lightning rapidity. But the other kangaroos were already out of sight in the tall "bush."

"See whether those ones you brought down want another cartridge," shouted Inez. "Wounded kangaroos travel a long way. You won't get any more to-day, as we have no drivers." He dashed up to them. But they were lying—very humanly—dead. "My word, you're a good shot, Mr. Stuart!" said Inez, when she came up. "A kangaroo coming towards you is an unsteady thing."—"All my family are good shots," he said. "It's a kind of tradition which we have inherited from my great-great-grandfather, who was one of the best shots of his time."

Reed harnessed the mare to the spring-wagon and asked the Pretender to hold her head while he lifted the kangaroo into it. "And watch out," he said, "for she means mischief. Keep a very tight hand on her." He did as he was bade, and was astonished by the violent efforts she made to break away. "What's the matter?" he asked.—"The smell of fresh blood," said Inez and the groom simultaneously. "Horses hate it."

Until they reached the avenue of Esslemont Inez was as natural as Chris could have been. She had forgotten her poses and was just a beautiful woman, letting herself be agreeable to an interesting and intelligent man. Yet somehow he felt as if there would never be more than an armistice between them. He was justified of his opinion sooner than he expected, for seeing one of the others in the distance, she suddenly stiffened as if she felt the necessity of keeping up her tradition before them. And, with that feeling, her penitence was exhausted and her suspicions reappeared. Why could he not have been more open when the conversation turned accidentally upon his family? There must be some skeleton in his cupboard.

This *tête-à-tête* with Inez was typical of many others. He did not avoid them, though they produced difficult situations. He disliked the Byronic pose which she had developed from her study of Gordon's poems; he disliked posing of any kind, but this especially. He disliked her questions about England; he winced under her suspicions. But because he felt them, it seemed cowardly to keep out of her way as he kept out of Chris's. Nor did he conceal from himself the pleasure which he felt in the company of such a gallant and beautiful creature.

Her open declaration that she never intended to marry and the hostility which she so often displayed towards him, seemed to take away the excuse for avoiding her. But though he reciprocated advances at the time, they created no feeling of affection. To him she was always the Bell-bird; it was for this reason that he did not think a *tête-à-tête* with Inez a disloyalty to his host and Pat. Inez was amusing herself and he was humouring her—that was all. Chris's society he avoided because he was afraid of falling in love with her; this he considered that he had no right to do.

CHAPTER IV

THE BULL

THE Pretender's one desire was to go into partnership with his dear Pat, for bringing out the fuel-less flying-machine, registered as the *Daedalus*. He shared Pat's belief in its future. So did Mr. Gordon, but his belief in its *immediate* future was so hesitating that he, as the party financing the *Daedalus* Company for his son, suggested Stuart's investing only $\frac{1}{5}$ of his capital in that, and $\frac{3}{10}$ in the *Ether Electric Co.*—Pat's wireless-telephone business—drawing £200 a year as general secretary of the two companies, which had a common office, besides his share of such profits as should accrue. It was necessary to have a sort of partner in Pat's absence, to receive people who came to make inquiries about the *Daedalus* or give orders for telephone installations.

Pat could not be there regularly; his fair beauty was generally obscured in grime and overalls at the works, which were down at Kingscliff, and he meant to make a personal canvass, on one of his *Daedalus* machines, as soon as they were on the market, at all the big sheep-stations. He judged that if he arrived at a station 400 miles from Melbourne, without any motive power but what he could draw from the air, the squatter would be convinced of its genuineness, if he doubted its practical value.

Mr. Gordon's lawyers helped the Pretender to lend the remainder of his money safely and profitably on mortgage.

The Pretender doubted his capabilities as General Secretary. But Pat would not listen and Mr. Gordon insisted on his having a salary because the dividends on the *Daedalus* were so problematical. "You have sufficient knowledge of electricity to explain the prospectus of the *Daedalus*; you have the right manners, and all you are required to do is so persuade the client

to come and witness a practical demonstration at the works. Manners are all-important, because most of the clients will be wealthy and dominant people, who will need both to be impressed and to be stroked the right way. As regards the telephone-installations, all you will have to do will be to take instructions from people who want to see one of the firm instead of a clerk, and promise to send them estimates."—"On those terms, I will accept," said the Pretender, "that is, I will come until you are convinced that I am incapable."

That night, while he was building castles in the air—or, as he called them, castles in the ether—with his friend, Chris joined them. "I'm so glad that you're going into Pat's business," she said, with the frank camaraderie which he dreaded in a woman whom he so admired, and with whom he did not think he had a right to fall in love. "It will make you one of the family." She had almost called him "Pretender," when she remembered Inez's sneering allusions to its appropriateness.

He determined to make an excuse of wishing to begin work at once; pretty Chris was becoming dangerous to his peace. But Mr. Gordon insisted on his waiting another week, to see the Zeps pass over Esslemont in the Round Australia Air-Race in the first week in January. "You see them much better here than in Melbourne, for they're going at top-speed when they pass, and you see them many miles before they get here and many miles afterwards. Then, if I were you, I should go to Victoria Beach for the rest of the month. None of the people you want to meet in business will be in Melbourne; most of them will be at the Beach."

Even Inez urged him to stay; she wished him to be impressed; she had a kind of craving for his society, though she would be sure to give him many hard knocks. Chris said nothing, but left him in no doubt as to how much she wished it. She had never enjoyed two months on the station so much; ordinarily she liked being in Melbourne better; she was fonder of tennis-parties and dancing than of country-life. None of her menkind had the gift of conversation; talk at meals had generally been confined to Wireless or Station business and Inez's poses. The Pretender kept every meal alive with his gay wit and the variety of his experiences—in which, as Inez complained, he never gave any clues as to his identity. It was she, trying to draw him out, who elicited that he seemed to have done everything you expect of the well-bred young man of means.

One day, he was out for a walk in the big paddock, a mile from the house, to look for a clump of wild lobelia which he

had noticed when riding with Inez. As he was passing the home-paddock, he heard screams, and saw Chris running hard in the middle of it, where there were some cattle. Her brothers or Inez might have laughed and gone on with what they were doing, for Chris was notoriously as afraid of cows as she was fearless about poisonous snakes, but if Chris was frightened, that was enough for him! He clambered over the three-rail-fence to go to her assistance. He had not gone far, when he perceived that she had a reason for her fright, since the savage shorthorn bull, which was always kept penned up, had got into the paddock, and was chasing her. He looked as big as a hippopotamus, as he lumbered after her, but in spite of his clumsy gait, he travelled very fast. She was a long way from the rails, and as she was wearing high-heeled slippers and a longish dress, she could not run fast.

The bull would catch her, unless he could divert its attention. The only way to do that was to attack it, and the Pretender had no stick. But there was an iron pail lying about, used to fill the row of troughs with water for the cows. He picked it up, and as Chris ran towards him, followed by the bull, banged it at the bull's face. The bull, recognizing an assailant, turned on him. "Run to the rails and climb over," he called out, while he faced his dilemma of making the bull chase him and at the same time making his escape. The troughs were his only chance; he could stride over them backwards and forwards much quicker than the bull, which made no attempt to cross them sideways, but always turned full round and jumped them.

How was the Pretender to save himself? If he left the troughs and ran for the rails, the bull could easily overhaul him. If he was running away from it fast he could not keep his eye on the animal. This was a fresh danger. But he found that he could dodge it easily, while he kept to the troughs. The bull was horning them to pieces in his anger. But even in their damaged condition they prevented him from charging, and since the Pretender was not exhausting his wind, he continued the manœuvre in the hope that the bull would change his mind. But the patience of the vengeful animal was inexhaustible. At last the Pretender's care relaxed, and failing to clear the troughs in his stride, he fell flat on his face on the further side. The huge mass of the bull passed right over him. Its hind feet only just cleared him. It was a miracle that he escaped crushing.

The bull saw him and checked his pace to turn and rend him. He scrambled on to his hands and knees and faced the bull, but by trample or toss the end must be, unless . . .

Was that the crack of a stockwhip? Did it mean help? It came nearer, with the swiftness of the wind and the thunder of galloping hoofs. The stockwhip ceased to crack. A skilful hand used it to lasso the forefeet of the bull and throw him down. Then at last the Pretender dared to look to see what had happened. It was Inez. "Get out of the paddock, while I settle the bull," she cried. When he had climbed the railings, the Pretender turned to look for his deliverer. She was cracking the whip again and the bull was trotting back to his pen in front of her.

Halfway up to the house Chris came running down to meet him. "Thank goodness you are safe, Mr. Stuart! I should have been dead if it hadn't been for you."—"I'm as thankful as you are, Miss Chris. But tell me what you were doing there."—"Taking some sugar to a foal. The bull had no business to be there."

She spoke lightly, but it was plain that she had something more to say, which she felt a difficulty in saying. Presently she startled him by beginning, "Pretender . . ."—"What is it, Miss Chris?"—"I have something to ask you."—"I'm listening."—"Why can't you be as natural with me as you are with Inez?"—"You know."—"I'm sure I don't."—"He was silent for a little, then he blurted out, "Because if I let myself go, I might like you too much."—"I'm not dreadfully afraid."—"It's true."—"Oh, you stupid boy! I mean, I don't care if it is. I've liked you awfully ever since you've been with us and you've just risked a horrible death to save me, so why shouldn't we be ever such pals?"—"I mightn't be able to stop there."

At that moment Inez came in from rounding up the bull. He went up to her, breathing gratitude. "Thank you for saving my life, Miss Gordon. Didn't I look an awful idiot, skipping backwards and forwards over the troughs?"—"No, I admired your coolness."—"How did you come to be my guardian-angel?"—"I was starting to ride over to Colac when Chris came running into the stable for help. When I found out what was on, I called to the boy for a stockwhip and jumped my horse into the paddock. Then I rode at Old Nick—the bull—he's very savage. You know the rest."—"Yes, you saved me."—"Well, ta-ta—I must get over to Colac now. I never leave myself too much time." She galloped off to hide her feelings. The accident of saving his life had given him a value in her eyes which she was unwilling to acknowledge, but which might make her, from time to time, show him favour that she allowed no one else.

PUBLIC LIBRARY OF VICTORIA
CHAPTER V

THE ROUND AUSTRALIA AIRSHIP RACE—
ENTER BOB STEVENS AND TUDOR LEWIS

THE Round Australia Airship Race was past. Esslemont had been filled for it. The Gunns and their mother, Connie and her father, a young squatter named Bob Stevens and a big business man named Tudor Lewis, had made up the houseparty. Bob Stevens was of a class who generally only come down to Melbourne in the summer—Victorians with large stations in the north run south during the great heat. But he had been lucky and had a good manager, so he paid long visits to Melbourne whenever his fancy moved him, and returned to his stations without any warning, to see if everything was working smoothly. In his magnificent aeroplane, he could do the journey comfortably in three days, and at a push in two, and since his stations were fitted with Pat's wireless, he could always be summoned if his presence was needed.

He was a typical member of a Gordon Club, a man of splendid physique, with a bluff face and manner. On the station, when he was dressed in khaki cord breeches, top boots, a khaki shirt with a broad muffler round the neck, as a protection against sunstroke, and a khaki Cowboy hat, with a broad flat brim of the 1914 war pattern, he was a grand specimen of humanity, both in appearance and action. But in Melbourne, dressed with tailors' and hosiers' correctness, there was a touch of the disguised bandit in his appearance, while his bluntness looked like brusqueness and super-self-satisfaction. He was in reality a good-hearted and hospitable man, of great capacity, who had sold the moderate estate in the Western District, which he inherited when he was twenty-one, to his brother, and in less than ten years had become a wealthy man, by speculation and station-property in the tropics of the Northern Territory. By a study of the cattle and horses which had run wild he had successfully gauged the kind of stock which would suit the climate and find a good market. Inez and Connie were rather dominated by his fine physique and dashing career. He was a young man after Gordon's own heart, except on the intellectual side. He read nothing but Gordon's poems, the *Turf Guide* and the *Australasian*. Success on the Turf formed his remaining aspiration, as soon as he had acquired enough wealth to race on the proper scale.

The Pretender liked him altogether better than Tudor Lewis, whose very name was an offence. Owen Tudor Lewis was not an Australian by birth, though he came to the Colonies so young that he was accepted as one. Conscious that he was not a "native," he out-Heroded Herod in matters of Colonial "swank." For the rest, he was a strong, active man, particularly good at sports, with a handsome, clean-shaven face, of rather a bulldog type, and curly black hair. His face habitually wore a rollicking, half-defiant smile, which expressed his attitude in business, for he was known all over the Colonies for the audacity of his speculations, which seldom turned out wrong—for himself. Unlike the others, he had some literary faculty, that occasionally took the form of passable verses in the Paterson or Ogilvy style, but more often of witty essays, with a touch of Ade's fables, written in slang on the topics of the day, which, in the columns of the *Australasian* appealed to a wide public. In spite of his aversion to him personally, the Pretender acknowledged the brilliance of Tudor Lewis's conversation.

To marry Connie would have suited Tudor Lewis's plans admirably. Secure in the income arising from her £100,000 which no creditor could touch, he could defy prudence in the speculations he made with his own money. He was a born gambler, and she was of a type which maddened him with physical longing—the woman of all others who appealed to his senses. He was passionately in love with her, and she knew it, since he showed her his best side; he posed as her gratification demanded. He got up charming parties for her and any man and girl she liked to bring with her, at Sandringham, which had developed into an Australian Ranelagh, at the theatres, at Tivolis, or in his big aeroplane, which seated four beside the chauffeur, for a day in the Gippsland Alps or the Southern Mountains of N.S.W. He never regarded expense when he could give her a pleasure. In Melbourne she asked him to their house a good deal. At times his affection made an impression. But in her heart she was afraid of him—not of physical violence—fears of that kind were unknown to her. It might be that she had fears for his sanity, though she had never told herself so.

Mr. Gordon did not like the man. He was invited as a very prominent Gordonian, although, not being a native he could not be a member of a Gordon Club.

Fourteen, besides the steward and the crew, was more than the airship could comfortably carry for a long trip, but they could easily be accommodated for the short time in which anything could be seen of the race. They went up half-an-hour

before it began, and through their powerful telescopes, mounted like machine-guns, which had a magnifying and intensifying power not dreamed of a century earlier, they could distinguish the Domain where the race was to start, from its size and its freedom from houses in the midst of the city, which covered as much space as New York in 1900. Of the airships themselves they could make nothing until they rose to take up their positions for starting, and then until they started they were invisible units, but collectively they formed a dark patch in the air. Pat, who was the family authority on airships, would not hazard an opinion as to what point on the map they had reached when they first began to differentiate into units, but he was willing to hazard that it was before they got to Geelong.

From that point onwards the race became more interesting every minute. The Pretender, who had never seen an airship race before, grew wildly excited when they were near enough to look like a barrage of shells, each over a hundred yards long, fired at him point-blank, and approaching, if not with the velocity of a projectile, at three times the pace of the fastest nineteenth-century train. The Gordons' airship, cruising over Esslemont seemed to lie in the path of the barrage. If he had not known how expert Pat was, he might have asked if it was safe to stay where they were. It was only a matter of minutes, of course, before the airships passed high overhead, and began to diminish in a way that heralded rapid disappearance. At this stage there was no indication of their relative power; the most noticeable feature of the race was their equality; they were almost in a line as they passed over. None had an advantage in the ruck, though a few were at a disadvantage from a bad start. It seemed incredible that there should be so many of these monsters racing round a continent in the air, like a pack of hounds, at more than 200 miles an hour.

Since he was too near the start to see anything of the racing, his mind flew to the patent of which Pat held the Australian rights—the Daedalus apparatus which dispensed with fuel by drawing electricity from the air. If that succeeded every man who could have afforded a carriage in the old days would be able to afford some sort of airship now. If the initial expense was infinitely greater, the cost of operating would be so infinitely less. He made an incidental remark about it to Bob Stevens. It was like setting a match to dry grass. In a moment everybody was talking about it. The immediate path to success Bob did not discern, but he was certain that the success would be complete, and that its range would be impossible to estimate.

In any case, its success was essential to the realization of Australian possibilities. Therefore he was willing to spend up to a tenth of his income annually in forwarding the great purpose. His enthusiasm fired his fellow-squatters. His was a good lead to follow; he had been uniformly sagacious and successful. In any case, he inspired them with the notion that patriotism demanded their backing it with all their might—especially the men of the Western District, in which Pat had been born and bred, Pat, who was not only the godfather of the great idea, and a scion of Australia's historic family, but had been the joy of the whole community since he was a child, for his adorable personality and his boyish beauty.

Tudor Lewis's happening to be present made it possible to formulate their aspirations. He was one of the chief company promoters on the Melbourne market, and at once undertook to convert the Daedalus into a limited company. Before he left Esslemont he blocked out the prospectus with Mr. Gordon, and as soon as it was in shape, ascertained by telephone the amounts of the stock which the men who had been so enthusiastic about it would take up. The vendors took the bulk of the shares; for the present it was only necessary to call up half the money subscribed—sufficient to pay the purchase-money for the shares which were sold and lay down the plant for experimenting. The results were not sufficiently forward to begin manufacturing the machines for the public yet.

CHAPTER VI

THE OASIS HOTEL—VICTORIA BEACH

IT was the custom of the rich Western District squatters to go to Victoria Beach for a month at the New Year. The women, if they were amused, often remained until the end of the hot weather. Victoria Beach was a sort of Australian Nice, with palm-avenues, wonderful public gardens, a Casino, and a race-course, golf-links and polo-ground combined, like the Sports' Club at Cairo. It had been laid out by a company. People who were content with ordinary bedrooms and required no private sitting-rooms were taken in at any of their hotels at a standing rate—a pound a head per diem, though extras were high. People who needed cheaper accommodation, or had their children with them, could live at Garfish Bay, a few minutes distant by mono-rail, where there were glorious sands. It belonged to the same company and helped to make the amusements pay.

“I hear that the old man has been recommending you to come to the Beach when the air-race is over,” Pat had said to the Pretender. “I advise you to come. It isn't cheap, but it's a rare place for getting to know people, because you get squatters and big business men from all parts of Australia there. You'll have mother and me and the girls to fall back on—we're going for a month, though I shall often have to fly across the bay to the works.”—“But what about business?”—“You can do more for the business there than you could in Melbourne at this time of the year.”—“Well, I don't mind if you'll let me go about with you and introduce me to a few people when we get there.”—“You can use our sitting-room as your own, and sit with us at meals. We always dine in the public room.”—“Then it'll be delightful. I should love to see the Beach in full blast, like Ostend.”

He found it a lovely place, with white villas stretching up the sides of the Anakies, twin mountains as beautiful as Vesuvius, overhanging a bay like the Bay of Naples. Though Mrs. Gordon would have preferred the quieter Anakies Hotel, they went to the popular Oasis Hotel, for its famous Oasis. This was a bathing pool 200 feet long, excavated in the shore and lined with cement, as smooth and white as marble; it had groves of palm-trees right and left, and at the back broad flights of steps leading up to the terrace of the hotel. There was a tunnel under the terrace, by which bathers could reach the lifts, so that they could dress and undress in their own rooms. For bathing, men, as well as women, were required to be covered from neck to knee. The pool was made more picturesque by little islands, for people to swim to, with Moorish kiosks to shade them from the sun.

Inez was a beautiful swimmer. The poet Gordon's devotion to swimming, and his exquisite rhapsody on it, had made swimming an essential part of the cult of Gordon Clubs.

“I would that with sleepy soft embraces
The sea would fold me—would find me rest
In luminous shades of her secret places,
In depths where her marvels are manifest;
So the earth beneath her should not discover
My hidden couch—nor the heaven above her—
As a strong love shielding a weary lover,
I would have her shield me with shining breast.

* * * * *

"Oh! brave white horses! you gather and gallop,
 The storm-sprite loosens the gusty reins;
 Now the stoutest ship were the frailest shallop
 In your hollow backs, or your high arched manes,
 I would ride as never a man has ridden
 In your sleepy, swirling surges hidden,
 To gulfs foreshadowed through straits forbidden,
 Where no light wearies and no love wanes."

Inez spent hours in the pool. It was so much more interesting than the shark-proof stockades in which Australians generally have to bathe. The Pretender would have preferred the open; he was not a trick-swimmer, though he had won swimming races at school.

He soon found out that the Australian despises a lady's man, and the Australian girl is so accustomed to having all her men busy that she "does things in droves" with other women. At the Beach, except on race days, the average man saw little of the women until the cool of the afternoon. The women kept indoors, or under the shady verandahs, until tea-time. They did their bathing, golf and tennis after tea. In the evening after dinner there was always dancing in the Casino, to which the young of both sexes went. The girls went to bed quite early, because their mothers wanted to play cards, and the young men to go off to cards or billiards, or to "shout" each other drinks, and yarn, an occupation of which the young Australian seldom tires.

The Pretender had several reasons for following an example he detested. Firstly, the Gordon girls were great heiresses, as well as beauties, and people would be prone to say that he was running after them. Apart from that, he dreaded growing to care for them too much, while the secrecy which he had to maintain about his past prevented his contemplating marriage. Secondly, he had gone to Victoria Beach to win the esteem and friendship of the men he was likely to meet in business, and hanging round beautiful heiresses was the worst way of achieving that. Thirdly, he was fond of men's society and playing games with them. He did not care about playing games with a woman unless she was, like Inez, very proficient and sank her sex entirely while playing.

Pat and the Gunns, who had brought their mother to the Beach, chiefly to be near their cousins, formed the nucleus of a set of men who played cards and billiards and outdoor games together pretty regularly, though three of them—Tudor Lewis

and two young Riverina squatters, named Sam and Albert Hogger, were men Pat disliked. In the morning they went fishing or played golf.

These nights were not to the Pretender's taste. He endured them to enlarge his acquaintance with young Australians. Tudor Lewis—a Welshman—was a shade better than the Hoggers, because he not only had brains for speculating, but sufficient to write those brilliant articles. He was, unfortunately, the type of the successful business bouncer. In the Hoggers the Pretender was unable to discover any good qualities which might not have been discoverable in a bookmaker. They were loud; they were aggressive; they were conceited; they were stupid; no graceful action had ever been recorded of them. If they were losing money at a game because they played so badly and so recklessly, they were offensive to everybody who was not as reckless as themselves. They were ostentatious about their money, though everyone knew that the fortune which their father had made out of stations came originally from keeping a bush-hotel on the great road down from the North, where he fleeced the stockmen coming down to Sydney, with pockets full of wages, for a holiday. They were handsome boys enough, big and strong, and played the game of "bush" swank well, but they would have judged Darwin, or Raphael, or Shakespear, by their inefficiency as grooms. The sacred laws of Australian hospitality made them cordial to the Pretender when Pat introduced them; they judged it meritorious in him that he was willing to give them a game at anything, and could "put up" a much better game than they did, but in their hearts they despised him for not having more money, and for the poor-spiritedness of his ideals. The most worthless member of the set was Gus Orriss, a witty drunkard.

CHAPTER VII

PLAYING WITH FIRE

WAYWARDNESS was part of the pose of the Gordon Clubs, and Inez Gordon made a fine art of it, if she did not owe it to Nature. She did not sing the Pretender's praises like the rest of her family, but it was she who expected his attentions whenever he was with them, and she treated him like an old friend in more ways than the very frank censure which she considered herself at liberty to address to him. It was not long before she drifted into the habit of expecting him

to play golf or tennis singles with her daily. He gave her just the game she wanted. She was in the first flight of women players, but unequal to men players of the first rank. He was good enough to play her even, and she generally beat him on the post by excelling herself at the critical moment. He played so keenly and could be so sporting when robbed of victory by a superstroke, that she liked playing with him better than anybody. When they were playing together, she smiled satisfaction on him in a way that was rare for Inez Gordon.

How was Sandy, passionately in love with his beautiful cousin, and making little progress, to be convinced that it was only vanity and sport? It rankled in his moody heart that Inez, whom he expected to be his wife when the time came, should prefer a stranger, above all, a new chum, who had nothing of the superman about him. Not that he ever used the word "superman"—or knew what it meant; he just said that the Pretender was "of no account." Sandy did not watch them like a cat; that would have been against his code. But he raked them with the swift, intuitive bushman's eye, which sweeps a paddock in search of a missing horse, as they came in from a game or a dance. Even this was a false move; Inez, too, had the falcon vision, and could not brook being watched.

One day, the Pretender thought he had squared, if not won, a golf match with her, for they were all square when "they went to the eighteenth" and his ball was on the green in three, practically dead, while her second had landed her in a bad lie on the other side of the bunker which guarded it. Inez was extremely good at chip shots, and took infinite care over her stroke. It pitched about a yard from the hole and had just enough "legs" to reach it. The shot was a superb one; she had taken desperate pains to achieve it. But she might have tried a hundred times before she achieved it again, and was as likely to send it so far beyond the hole that she would miss the put and give him the game.

The magnificence of her stroke gave him far more gratification than winning the game.

"What a lovely, lovely shot!" he cried. "If we'd had a 'note' on the game, I'd sooner have lost it than missed that shot, Miss Inez!"

"Pretender," she cried impulsively, "you *are* a sport! There isn't anybody I like playing with so much as you!"

When she had settled with her caddie and told him where to leave her clubs, she turned round to the Pretender with the smile of friendliness which came to Inez's beautiful face so

seldom, and thrust her arm through his to walk to the clubhouse.

"I've got a confession to make to you, Pretender," she said, in a voice full of camaraderie. "I like playing with you not only because you're such a sport, but because you're really rather better than I am, though I generally manage to beat you. It makes it so gloriously exciting."—"You certainly are continually selling me."—A sudden thought struck her; she snapped out, "Pretender!"—"What is it, Miss Inez?"—"Are you quite sure you never fail on purpose?"—"Dead certain! I'm much too keen."—"Because if you did, I'd never forgive you. At any rate, I'd never play with you again."—"I never do."—"I hope not. I couldn't stand being patronized."—"Fancy my attempting to patronize you!"—She saw that he was sincere, and was so penitent that she looked quite lovely.

The episode was not lost on Sandy. He put his own interpretation on it, and having a mashie in his hand, played an unfortunate lizard, which crossed within his reach, into eternity fifty yards away. His evil temper came back at the Casino that night, when he had been dancing with Inez and the music for the next waltz struck up. The Pretender came forward to claim it, and a smile of unadulterated pleasure, such as she hardly ever vouchsafed to himself, came over Inez's face. All it meant was that Sandy, who despised dancing, but was permitted to drag her round, as a cousin with proprietary rights, had been treading on her dainty feet and bumping her into collisions, while the Pretender, whatever his shortcomings might be, was a perfect dancer, and she was therefore looking forward to her dance with him. Sandy made a personal question of it and was furiously jealous. The Pretender was merely gratified by the disdainful Inez's unbending.

Sandy need not have tormented himself. Inez's graciousness was extorted partly by the Pretender's generosity as an opponent, partly because she liked to have more than her share of the best dancer in the room. At other times she relapsed into her old distrust of him. She had made up her mind that he was an adventurer, who had taken her family in; that he had a lurid past, which he intended to conceal until he had carried out the coup in his mind—possibly marriage with her or her sister. And here the perversity of her mind came in. If he was to propose to either, though she never meant to marry herself, she was determined that it should not be to her sister. She suspected him; she rather hated him for the good temper

and patience with which he received her assaults ; but she could not tolerate the idea of his preferring her sister.

" You're not so down as usual on Mr. Stuart to-night, Inez," remarked the fascinating Connie.—" I'm never down on him, but I think that my family have acted wrongly in foisting him on their friends when they know no more than Adam about his family or his antecedents."—The word " Adam " made Connie smile—the cap fitted Inez's brother.

" Do you suspect him of being an adventurer ? " she asked. " Do you know what he does for money ? "—" Oh, he has a little money—not enough to speak of, but enough to keep him going without sponging on his friends. Father invested it for him, so we know that it isn't in the clouds."—" Then what's wrong with him, Inez ? "—" I don't know, but I'm convinced that there's a great mystery about him. Directly you ask him anything about his past, or his home, he shuts up like an oyster and you can't get another word out of him. That's fishy."—" I don't see that it follows. The worst that is likely to transpire is that he is married. Mammams with marriageable daughters are quite right to be careful about him. These fascinating young men are so inclined to marry early and often. Has he proposed to either of you yet ? "—" No, of course not."—" Then if you know that he pays his way and he isn't trying to get off anything on you, I don't see what you have to complain of."—" I hate having to keep people at arm's length because I don't know about their antecedents."—" What a wicked fib ! You keep every man you know at arm's length, and the better he likes you, the more you do it."—" It's only to prevent them from proposing. Why won't they understand that I don't want to be married ? "—" Because you're so pretty and provoking. But where does Mr. Stuart come in ? He, I gather, is the one man in your acquaintance who does not try to propose to you."—" And therefore I should like to make a big pal of him. But while he persists in this air of mystery, I can't."

" And so you miss your only chance ! It's a wicked and perverse generation, Inez, but I think you do pretty well, all the same. I saw you hanging on his arm and smiling up into his face this afternoon."—" That was because he had been such a sport. He's an awful dear. Only I'm not going to let myself go with him until he clears up the mystery."—" But why should you ? You always say you're not going to marry, and if he isn't trying to make the running with you, I don't see what more you need do. You're quite as nice to him

as an ordinary friendship demands—a little nicer, I think. Sandy thinks so—he looked as if he could have killed him this afternoon."—" Bother Sandy ! What's he got to do with it ? "—" Only that it's always been understood that you two would make a match of it."—" Me marry Sandy Gunn ? No, thank you. I'm never going to marry at all, and, if I was, I couldn't stick Sandy."—" He's just the type you admire—one of the old Colonial school, of whom Lindsay Gordon sang, and a very good one, too," said Connie.

Sandy was her cousin, as well as Inez's, so she thought that she ought to stand up for him, though she had never shown him much favour herself. " I used to think you liked him very much."—" So I do," said Inez, and added quite disingenuously, " But I have to treat him as I do to prevent him getting sentimental."—" Poor Sandy ! " laughed Connie. " And you are nice to Mr. Stuart because he isn't taking any ? It's a high old world, isn't it ? "

" I hate you, Connie ! " said Inez, and leaving her, walked up to the Pretender, saying, " Take me back to the hotel, will you, Pretender ? I'm not enjoying myself to-night."—" Why, what's wrong, Miss Inez ? " he asked, as they passed out into the palm avenue, where the air was scented with the heavy odours of the tropical flowers which grew between the walks, and the sky was black velvet studded with diamonds. " Have I been putting my foot in it again ? I haven't done it on purpose, I assure you. I wasn't aware that I'd done anything wrong. We seemed to be getting on so smoothly."—" It isn't you, Pretender," she said, laying her hand on his arm impulsively. " I wish all men were like you. You never presume, or sulk, or grouse—you're just a good pal of the kind I appreciate. Men are so cocksure of themselves, as a rule, that they give me the fair hump."—" I'm glad it's not me. I sometimes think that you're very annoyed with me."—" So I am, but it's always about one thing, and you know what that is."—" Yes, Miss Inez, I know what that is."

Her mood changed in an instant. " We shall never be friends while you keep that up, so I think you had better leave me," she said, icily.—" Not until we reach the hotel," he answered. But they walked the rest of the way in silence ; at the garden-door he thanked her for his dances and left her.

When he got back to the Casino, he saw Connie regarding him with an amused smile. " So she's had a tiff with you, too ? "—" I've annoyed her, without the smallest intention."—" Why don't you transfer your lack of devotion to me ? "

asked Connie. "I shouldn't give you half so many bad half-hours. As a proof, I'm not going to scold you for missing our dance while you were trying to pacify Inez—with such bad results. What have you done with her? Sent her to bed? She deserves it!"—"I took her back to the hotel, as she asked me. The Gordons have been so frightfully kind that I feel that it is only decent for me to be at their service like a brother."

"I think you're a model," said Connie enthusiastically. "Most men would lose their heads if they saw such a lot as you do of the Gordon girls, who are uncommonly pretty, and such personalities. You stop at friendship and politeness. But Sandy doesn't think so. He's beginning to hate you pretty badly."—"I suppose he'll have to. Nothing that I could do would convince him to the contrary, if he's once got the idea into his head. So I must put up with his hatred."—"Sandy's my cousin," said Connie. "I know what an ugly temper he's got. I advise you to beware of him."—"It won't disturb me," said the Pretender, laughing.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WRONG BOX

SANDY GUNN had observed Inez go up to the Pretender and leave the Casino with him, and rushed back to the hotel mad with jealousy. He reached it before they did, and went to the Gordons' sitting-room. Knocking at the door, he found it empty, but went in, and turning on the electric light, sat down to wait for Inez. As she was as fond as a subaltern of her cigarette, he had no compunction about taking out his pipe. He filled it with elaborate care—anything to kill time—and then puffed at it deliberately. He meant to have it out with her. She came in a few minutes later, saw him glowering, and put on her most *insouciant* expression. "Well, Sandy," she began, "to what am I indebted?"—"It's no good beating about the bush," he cried, "we have to understand each other."—"Oh, have we? Then you can understand that I'm not going to be talked to like this. Good evening." She marched out of the room and went to bed in a royal rage.

It was a breeze to his. When she went to bed, he went to the bar. "A Scotch, please, Lizzie."—"Water or soda, Mr. Gunn?" He looked at her for several seconds before he answered: "Oh, water'll do." She handed him the bottle of whisky to help

himself, as is the custom in a good-class Australian hotel. He nearly filled the tumbler. "That isn't a portion," she said, "you must play fair."—"Charge me as many portions as you like," he said, tossing it off and preparing to fill his glass again.

She snatched the bottle from him. "You're not going to do that, Sandy. It always means trouble."—"You can't refuse me."—"Oh, can't I? Well, I won't serve you."—"Be sensible, Lizzie!"—"You be sensible. I'm doing it for your good. What's put you out?"—"Nothing."—"Tell that to your grandmother. As if I hadn't watched you! You're going to be ugly, that's why you're drinking, and I'm not going to take a hand in it. That's flat."—"You won't stop me that way. I've got a bottle just begun in my room."—"Then, go to your room and stay there. Use it to put yourself to sleep. That's the best thing for you—to sleep on it."—"I think it would be a jolly good thing for you to mind your own business, Lizzie."—"Stop calling me Lizzie then."—"Good-night, Miss Larkin," he said, going off.—"I wish his brother was here," she muttered. "He can make himself such a nuisance when he's like this."

He only got as far as the verandah when he ran across friends. All three had glasses in front of them, as might have been expected at such an hour. "Hallo, Sandy! What'll you drink?" called out the man who had given the last order.—"Green chartreuse." The "shouter" called to the waiter. "Waiter, a 'certain death' for Mr. Gunn."—"How do you find yourself, Sandy?" asked another of them.—"Bored stiff. This place is getting on my nerves."—"Poor fellow! Why don't you try falling in love? There are lots of nice girls about."

Sandy glared at him. The remark was obviously innocent. "I call that Satan's last chance—they're in league with him, the whole lot of them."—"Do you find it so? Well, I don't, though I think it's a good thing that their mummies send them to bed early and leave us to our comforts, instead of having to sit in the most out-of-the-way corners of the garden, saying things about their looks or our hearts."—"Oh, shut up, Ormskirk," said Sandy, testily. Then, seeing that the other man was offended, he added, "You mustn't mind what I say—I'm a bit off to-night. I don't want to be uncivil."—"That's all right—have another drink?"—"I don't mind if I do. I need bucking. But stay, let me have this turn. I don't feel as if anything would pull me round except wine. What's your wine?"—"Pommery Naturel or Bollinger.' Wine has only

one meaning at an Australian bar. Sandy pressed the alarm on the table; the waiter came. "A magnum of Bollinger 1990—that's the prime."

The champagne seemed to revive Sandy. He became lively and talkative. It had struck him that where they were seated on the verandah was a good place for his purpose. It was close to the garden-door of the hotel, by which everyone came in except from the Airship station. He would just sit there and have drinks and yarn until he got his opportunity. Presently the men who had been dancing came in and went off to the bar to quench their thirst. Sandy, as the person who had called for the last drinks where they were sitting, was the person who with best grace could suggest following them. His three friends, who were distinctly jolly as the result of drinking half a bottle each of his champagne, on the top of the mixture which they had consumed, began ragging each other, and when they reached the big, cool room, strewn with iron tables and big cane chairs, which faced the bar, looked about for fresh developments.

While they were doing this, Sandy singled out the Pretender and said offensively, "I want a word with you, Mr. Stuart!"—"As many as you like," said the Pretender, carelessly, "But you must expect to get as good as you give." Sandy glared at him. "What I wish to say is that I won't have you getting my cousin Inez talked about."—"You're doing your best now, aren't you?"—"Never you mind that. Not content with dragging her off for lonely car rides and singles, and dancing with her till everybody stares, the way you and she managed that assignation in the ball-room this evening . . ."—"Really, Mr. Gunn, this is getting past a joke. May I suggest that it would be more decent if you took all this to her people, than made a public scandal of it by discussing it before everyone in the bar?"

Ormskirk was by this time conscious that one of the rows in which Sandy delighted was brewing. They generally led to a stand-up fight, in which, to do Sandy justice, he was quite willing to encounter a better man and receive a thrashing, though it did not often happen, since, like his forbear, the poet, he had cherished a passion for boxing since he was a boy. Ormskirk stepped between them. "Shut up, Sandy," he said. "Stuart's perfectly right. It's a matter for her people, and believe me, old man, you're not putting the case fairly. I'm sure that everyone here will agree that Stuart hasn't gone an inch beyond the O.K. You must remember he's one of their party."

"Out of my way, Ormskirk! I've plenty to remember.

And you, sir," he said to the Pretender, "I give you your choice between taking your coat off or taking a licking!"—"I shall do neither. There's no reason why two civilized beings should fight before a room full of spectators, because one of them's drunk and insulting the other. The drunkard had better look out, or he may find himself in the wrong box."

Sandy was beside himself with rage. Several men tried to drag him off, but he tore himself out of their grasp, and rushing at the Pretender, tried to smack him with his open hand across the face. But he found his man quite ready. Stuart darted out a hand and caught Sandy's wrist as he made the attempt; then there was a swift *ju-jitsu* movement and the astonished spectators saw Sandy, a big, strong man with muscles like iron, turn a somersault and land a dozen feet away, on his back. They rushed to help him up, but he was stunned and bleeding from the mouth.

The Pretender went up and examined him with deep concern. "I don't think he's hurt," he said, "except that he's stunned and badly shaken. The blood's from biting through his lips. But someone had better run over for Anstey. I'll stand by in case there's anything to answer for."—While one of the spectators went for the doctor, the Pretender said to the rest, "I hope you chaps don't think badly of me for 'dropping' him. I look upon it as a duty. Society has to be protected from people running amok, especially if they're such bruisers as Gunn."—"It wasn't your fault at all," said Ormskirk, and half the room joined in "No, it wasn't."—"You must allow me to say that in my view it does not make the least difference if the person they attack is bigger than themselves—which I am not. No man has a right to take the law into his own hands."

"What's happened," asked the doctor, who was smoking at his front door when the messenger arrived.—"Gunn tried to hit Stuart—the new chum, who's always about with the Gordons—and got more than he asked for. Stuart pitched him on his head to the other end of the room."—"Pitched him on his head?"—"Gave him the finest *ju-jitsu* tumble that was ever seen in Australia—made a regular cartwheel of him."—"Phew!" said the doctor. "It's a stone floor, isn't it?"—"Tiles."—"Same thing—we mustn't lose time."

He walked up to Sandy, who was lying where he fell, though Lizzie Larkin had fetched a couple of cushions and put them under his head. He was still unconscious. The doctor felt his pulse and looked at his pupils for irregularities and into his ears for any welling of blood, so carefully that the spectators grew

anxious. "Is he hurt badly, doc.?"—"Not worse than he's often been hurt out hunting or steeplechasing, I expect. It's a pretty bad concussion, because the floor's hard, but there's no fracture."—"Is the blood from his lips what Stuart thinks?"—"Yes, fortunately."—"Do you think I ought to communicate with the police?" asked the Pretender.—"No, I don't," replied the doctor, after a few seconds, "but there'd be no harm in telephoning for the Chief Inspector while I'm here. I'm the Police Surgeon of this place and he might like to hear my opinion before you leave. You'd better come with me while I put him in his bed."—"I'd like to help you. I've learnt ambulance work."

Dr. Anstey was struck by the tenderness and solicitude which he showed to the man who had hated him so violently. When the Inspector came, he said, "It's all right, Steegman—no serious damage, nothing like such a squeak as it was at the Cape Otway Steeplechases. Mr. Stuart, who gave him the fall, insisted on sending for you, but there's no occasion for you to detain him."

"If you want me, Inspector, you'll find me here, unless his mother objects," said the Pretender.—"Is his mother in the hotel? Has anybody sent for her?" asked the doctor.—"Yes, I have," said the Pretender. "I sent word that there was no danger, so she's dressing before she comes. She had gone to bed."—"Slip away before she appears," said the doctor. "It might pain her dreadfully to see the man who had nearly killed her son. I'll tell her that you volunteered to sit up with him and it wasn't your fault."

"Is there anybody here who saw the whole thing?" asked the Inspector.—"I did," said Robert Ormskirk. "I tried to prevent it. It was entirely Sandy's fault. Stuart had done nothing, but Sandy was full of liquor and a grievance; his mother'll know what that means."—"Now, go, Mr. Stuart, please," said the doctor. "I want to avoid this rencontre. . . . I'm afraid you're too late—I hear footsteps."

It was not Mrs. Gunn. It was Inez—ill news travels fast. She turned on the Pretender like a tigress. "I wonder you're not ashamed to show yourself, after nearly killing my cousin by a foul trick!"—"It wasn't a foul trick, Miss Gordon," said Ormskirk, courageously. "Sandy deserved all he got. He'd have half killed Stuart if he'd got the chance, and he'd have done it purposely, while Stuart, I'm sure, would rather not have hurt your cousin, if he could have given him the throw without. He'd much sooner have done it in a padded gymnasium than on that tiled floor."—"Indeed I would!"—"So you

say!" retorted Inez icily. "Just wait till Sandy's well again!"—"My dear Miss Gordon," said Ormskirk, "Sandy's learnt his lesson. He won't be such a fool. By that time, if he's the gentleman I take him to be, he'll want to apologize to Stuart for his unjust accusation."

"What was it all about?" asked Inez when Stuart had gone. Ormskirk looked horribly confused. "I can't tell you," he said. "Except that there was a woman involved, and that Sandy was quite in the wrong."—"I'll believe it when the poor boy comes back to life and tells me so!" cried Inez, with undiminished wrath, and bending down began to smooth his curly hair. "Don't touch his head, Miss Gordon," cried the doctor. He had no need to moderate their voices; he would have been thankful if they roused him. "I forgot!" she said, biting her lip until the blood came.

"Here's Mrs. Gunn."—"Then you'd better all go, except Miss Gordon and myself," said Dr. Anstey.—"Oh, aunt!" groaned Inez, "isn't it terrible?"

"Is it terrible, doctor?" asked Mrs. Gunn bravely, though Sandy was her darling.—"No, Mrs. Gunn—I don't think it is, for a man who has often been stunned before and none the worse for it. There's no fracture, but the concussion was very severe."—"Then I'm not frightened," said the old lady, "though I'm terribly distressed, and don't mean to leave him until he comes to."

Presently she asked, "How did it happen? Mr. Stuart sent word that he was the cause, and expressed his regret and anxiety."—"They were fighting, Aunt Elizabeth, and Sandy got knocked down," interposed Inez, almost curtly, to take the words out of the doctor's mouth. He stared in blank astonishment at this girl, who had just hounded Stuart out of the room. "Fighting? What about? Two gentlemen. . . ." asked Mrs. Gunn, though she knew how irascible and pugnacious Sandy was. The doctor was more astonished when Inez snapped out, "It was all a mistake—they flared up before it could be explained."—"Were you there, Inez?"—"Of course not, aunt. They wouldn't have fought before me."

"Then how do you know so exactly?" Her aunt spoke gravely. She was accustomed to Inez's vehemence. "Mr. Ormskirk told me. He tried to stop them. I've repeated what he said, doctor, haven't I?" She looked at him beseechingly. He hesitated. He was a plain man. "I understand," said Mrs. Gunn, gently. "Inez is shielding my boy. She is very fond of him. . . . as a cousin." Inez gave her a grateful look.

Mrs. Gunn had something to say—she hesitated—finally she got out, "How did he contrive to get in such a knockout blow? Sandy is a fine boxer and very strong."—"It wasn't a blow, Mrs. Gunn," said the doctor. "I believe Mr. Stuart refused to fight—said it was bad form in the bar—your son tried to goad him into it by slapping his face. Then it was a case of *ju-jitsu* against boxing. Mr. Stuart, who must be an expert, and a good boxer as well, caught your son's wrist, as he tried to hit him and threw him head over heels." Mrs. Gunn did not know what to say. She hardly knew what to think.

"Mr. Stuart's awfully distressed about it. We had great work to get him away before you came—he wanted to sit by him all night."—"Then he did not mean to do him any injury?"—"I would pledge my reputation on it."—"I shan't believe it until I hear it from poor Sandy's lips," said Inez, with another wave of wrath. Mrs. Gunn said nothing; her distress was too great. Presently she asked the doctor to stay until Sandy came to and was out of danger. "Of course I'll stay, Mrs. Gunn. Miss Gordon had better go to bed."—"Miss Gordon does not stir," said Inez.

They did not have many hours to wait, for the earliest rays of daylight seemed to reach Sandy's consciousness. He suddenly opened his eyes and asked, "Where am I?"—"In your bed," said the doctor. "Don't excite yourself—you have had a bad fall."—"The deuce I have! How's the horse?"—"You weren't riding."—"Then I must have had a knockout. I feel aching all over. Who was I fighting with?"—"You were trying to make Mr. Stuart fight."—"I remember! I tried to hit him, and he threw me out. I never had such a buster in my life."—"Don't talk any more," said the doctor. "It's bad for the concussion. You must rest for at least 24 hours, perhaps more."

He was quiet for a minute, then he said, "I must ask one question or I can't."—"Well?" said the doctor, unwillingly.—"Was he anxious?"—"He feels it so badly that he wanted to stay by you until you came to."—"Then he's a sport, though I can't forgive—about her. Promise me you'll send him word that I've recovered and I'll be as still as you like. I know what to do to get well. It isn't the first time."—"I'll tell him, Sandy," said his mother, kissing him. "Is there anything else before you rest?"—"Yes, but I can't tell you." His eyes told. The beautiful Inez stooped and kissed him several times. Mrs. Gunn smiled enigmatically.

CHAPTER IX

"WILL YOU HAVE PAX?"

WHEN Inez had kissed him, Sandy resigned himself to oblivion, and in a few days was pronounced out of danger, and on the way to recovery.

Then the real crisis began. A minor crisis had been proceeding in the Gordon circle. Inez was at open war with the Pretender; Mrs. Gunn could hardly be expected to fraternize; Mrs. Gordon was exceedingly distressed, and wondered why it could not have been avoided. Lin and the two Adams were up on their stations, and Pat, whose magic presence might have prevented the breach, was absent in Melbourne.

There remained Chris, whom the Pretender avoided; he felt that she might sympathize, and in his unhappy position feared that her sympathy might make him untrue to his resolve. Mrs. Gordon was his best friend, for she was anxious to be fair to him, and did not believe that, if he was to blame, he could look her in the face so squarely, and continue taking his meals beside them. He kept away from their sitting-room. Inez neither played games nor danced with him, though she maintained a decent armistice at meals. What an empty existence life was, compared to a week ago!

In the circle the Claridges made the one bright spot. Outside, had he but cared to cheer himself with it, the tide of opinion ran strongly in his favour. Australians admire grit: all that strangers saw in the episode was that Sandy, whose pugnacity and boxing powers were notorious, had fastened a quarrel on him and nearly got his neck broken. Mr. Claridge, who was bored with Sandy, was disposed to agree. Connie inclined to hero-worship. Had she not warned him that Sandy could be "ugly?" Had he not given her to understand that it did not concern him? It had sounded like "swank," but the Pretender had justified it. Therefore Connie was ready to put her admiration into a concrete form by being as nice to him as she could whenever she had the opportunity, and since she had never permitted cousins to play dragon to her, opportunities were not wanting. For one thing, since he was so afraid of losing his head with Chris, instead of dividing the dances which Inez used to give him between her and Connie, he danced them all with Connie.

Inez had confided her suspicions to her from the beginning and, since the fracas, had been very bitter. "I don't care who

he is, or who he isn't," said Connie. "He's as nice a man as I know, and dances beautifully. I'd marry him, if I wanted to, without asking a question. The worst I could believe is that he's left a wife in England, and I don't see why he shouldn't, since he's so gun-shy of women out here."

In spite of his entreaties, Inez had not kissed Sandy or let him kiss her since that morning, though she spent a great deal of time with him while he lay on a couch by the open window, during the cool hours of the day. "If I hadn't been afraid that you were going to die," she said one morning, when he was bothering her, "I shouldn't have kissed you then. They were good-bye kisses; you deceived me by coming back to life."

Sandy was mending fast, for he began to quarrel with her. "If it wasn't for that feller Stuart, you would not talk like this: we might have fixed our wedding-day."—"What do you mean?" she blazed out. "He's nothing to me."—"Nothing to you? Well, putting aside all that dancing and golf and tennis business, didn't I see you, with my own eyes, on the night when all this happened, go up and touch his arm and go off together? Into some corner of the garden, or God knows where! Something that you could not talk about when you got to the hotel, any way."

"I told you that I wouldn't account for my actions to you, and I don't mean to. You've no more right to question me than Mr. Stuart has, and he would not dream of it, however much he might want to. But I'll answer you this once, to show how utterly wrong you are. What I asked him to do that night was to take me home, because I was so bored. You may be interested to know that I quarrelled with him violently going home because I asked him a question I had no business to, and he wouldn't answer it. Let me tell you further, that far from making the running, as you politely call it, the only reason why he makes more of a pal of me than he does of Chris is that I've warned him that I never mean to marry, and send men about their business if they suggest it. So he knows that he can't be suspected, if he makes a pal of me. For some reason—perhaps he is married—he has made a fetish . . ."—"A how much?"—"A fad of avoiding anything which could be taken as an advance to me or Chris, while he has been the *most delightful man-friend I ever had*."—"Great Christopher! I thought that he was trying to cut me out, or having a spoon with you." Inez walked to the door. "I won't be spoken to like that."—"Sorry, Inez, but I'm so illiterate that I can't think of a nice dictionary word which expresses it."

She came back, not much mollified. "Well, that's what I thought, anyhow," he said; "that's why I was so mad."—"And you'd been drinking, Sandy," said Inez, who owed him one for the ungarnished expression which he had used. "Yes, I had. I was so sick of life when you bounced out of the room, that I went and tossed off a tumbler of whisky neat."—"And had your usual drinks with the other . . . *beasts* afterwards."—"Yes, I had," he said stoutly.—"And were ready to quarrel with your own shadow by the time that you saw Mr. Stuart."—"I suppose so."—"How did you manufacture the quarrel?"—"Manufacture, Inez? What do you mean?"—"I mean what I say—you had no cause for it."—"No cause, indeed!"—"No, you hadn't. The point is, what was the quarrel you tried to fasten on him?"—"That's strong language, Inez."—"Get on with it or I shall assume the worst. . . ."

"I told him that he was making you get talked about by playing games with you all day and dancing with you all night, and that matters had been brought to a head by his making that assignation with you in the Casino ballroom."—"Assignation is a nice word to use of your cousin in the bar! We'll pass it for the moment. Get on. Did you tell him that it would have to stop? Did he object to being dictated-to by you?"—"Not exactly that."—"What did you say to him?"—"I said he'd have to take his coat off or take a thrashing. I didn't wait to hear if he had any explanation. I didn't want any. I had the evidence of my own eyes."

"As it happened, your eyes had fooled you. The reason why I played so much with him, danced so much with him, asked him to do everything for me, like taking me home when I was tired, was that I could trust him to do just that and not try to make love to me, or bother me to marry him. He's the only one of you all who's honestly content to be a pal. It's such a blessing that I made a tremendous pal of him. But I've interrupted you. What did you say to him? What was the delicate way in which you expressed that he'd have to stop doing what I asked him?"—"I said that he'd have to take off his coat or take a thrashing."

"How very delicate! Did your friends applaud your delicacy? Did they stand round and cheer, or egg you on, or what?"—"No, they didn't. They didn't seem to want a row."—"I should think they didn't want to see a quarrel foisted on a new chum by a notorious fighter, who had drink in him. Why didn't they stop it?"—"Bob Ormskirk did his best. He stepped

between us and tried to shut me up."—"Why didn't you shut up? Was Mr. Stuart's blood up by that time, making the thing out of hand?"—"His blood may have been up, but I'll do him the justice to say that he kept his temper."

"What did he do?"—"He said I ought to go to your people about it—it was their business, not mine."—"So it was."—"I didn't think so. You're as good as engaged to me."—"Since when?"—"Ever since we were kids."—"Oh, indeed? Did he leave it at that?"—"No. He said he didn't mean to do either, that there was no reason why two civilized beings should fight in public because one of them was drunk and insulting, and finished up with this, which has come back to me—'The drunkard had better look out, or he may find himself in the wrong box.' That finished me, and I walked up to him to slap his face."—"You slapped his face?"—"No, I didn't. He meant more than I expected by 'the wrong box.' He meant he was a *ju-jitsu* man, and as I held my hand over him he caught it—and threw me a complete somersault, Ormskirk says. I landed heavily on my back and was stunned."—"Didn't you deserve it?"—"I admit that. But I don't like it any better."—"Sandy," she said, "it was giving Australia away," and left the room.

She had not been gone long before the doctor paid his daily visit. "Good morning, Mr. Gunn. How are you?"—"Mending fast, thanks, Doc. Aren't I well enough to leave my room yet?"—"I'll examine you and see. I have a message for you from Stuart. He caught me *coming in* this morning. He generally lies in wait as I *go out*, to know how you are. He wishes me to tell you how sorry he is for laying you up; he had no desire to injure you."—"I'm sure he hadn't; he's a sport. Tell him he might make amends by coming to have a yarn. I'm a bit lonely—if you're still going to keep me on my back." Dr. Anstey examined him. "I think you'd be the better for a day or two longer."—"Oh, all right, but don't forget my message to Stuart."

A few minutes later he heard the Pretender's lively tread. "How are you, Gunn, old man? I say, I'm damned sorry for laying you up like this. Nothing was further from my thoughts, I swear."—"I know it," said Sandy, not to be outdone. "The mischief of it is that the whole thing was a mistake—my mistake," he added, with a grim smile. "Inez has told me that you weren't asking her anything, and she was only asking you to take her home, because she'd had enough of the old show; that I'm quite wrong about the other thing, too. I just made a fool

of myself. It's a melancholy reflection, but I've had it before."—"It's very handsome of you to say so. I should have told you so, if you'd given me the chance of doing it without showing the white feather."

"I didn't give you much chance, did I?" laughed Sandy, good-naturedly. "But I say, old man . . ."—"What?"—"I'd like you to give me a few lessons in *ju* . . . what'd-you-call it?"—"Ju-jitsu."—"That's it. It's a great game. Where did you pick it up?"—"In Japan."—"Good old Japs!"—"I hope you're not injured by the concussion?"—"The doc. says not."—"It was rather a dangerous place for *ju-jitsu*, but you gave me no choice. I'm no great boxer—just enough to know what I have to look out for when I pit my *ju-jitsu* against it."—"You made a very neat job."—"Well, by-bye. Is there anything I can do for you?"—"No thanks. By-bye."

* * * * *

Going out of the room he almost stumbled on Inez carrying a bundle of new magazines which had just arrived from Melbourne. She was going to give Sandy the first look. Seeing the Pretender, she turned round and went back to their sitting-room, to leave the magazines and have a word with him in the garden. But as the room was empty, when she put the books down, she stood at the door and gave him a look, half comical, half penitent. "Will you have *pax*?" she asked.—"I think that's a good way of putting it, then neither of us need have been in the wrong."—"You weren't in the wrong anyhow."—"I did your cousin a bad injury."—"I said *pax*, Pretender, which means by-gones be by-gones."—"I suppose that is a free translation of it."—"I won't say *pax*. I'll say I'm beastly sorry for misjudging you. I think you're a ripping sort, Pretender."

CHAPTER X

THE SOCIETY HOGGERS

THE more Stuart saw of the Hoggers, the less he loved them. He ceased to play billiards with them because Sam Hogger in the hotel tournament had chaffed him out of "putting down the white" as unsportsmanlike when the miss-in-baulk was to Stuart's advantage, and had blandly put it down himself a few turns later when the advantage was his.

When the Pretender expostulated, he retorted: "You shouldn't have been bluffed by me." To which the Pretender replied: "I can't compete against such cleverness. I give you the game." For a moment, seeing what the people in the room thought, Sam Hogger, who was not of an amiable disposition, looked ugly, but with the fate of Sandy before him, he reflected that the Pretender was not a safe man to play tricks with. So he covered his retreat with the remark, "That's one round nearer the stakes anyhow!"

Sam had a pretty sister Ruby, who spent more money on her clothes than any girl in the hotel, but like her vulgar mother (whose clothes she chose), had the misfortune always to be ahead of the fashion; six months later everyone would be wearing what was condemned as bad style in her. This had become a matter of such notoriety that she and her mother were nicknamed "The Society Hoggers." Ruby was quite "a jolly girl," but her clothes frightened the people in the best set, like the Gordons and Connie, who confined themselves to a bowing acquaintance, though Pat and Sandy danced and played tennis with her. The Pretender did not, seeing how the land lay with the women whose society he coveted. Pretty Ruby was greatly annoyed, for he was the right kind of Englishman, and the right kind did not bring out introductions to the Hoggers; she only met them at seaside hotels.

In their first days of playing cards and billiards together, Albert Hogger had introduced the Pretender to his sister, and was disgusted at his not asking her for dances at the Casino. He and Ruby were indulging in a grouse about it when Sam intervened grandly with a remark about Ruby's not needing Stuart. Mrs. Hogger agreed with the others in regarding it as a snub, and in the Hogger circle the Pretender became unpopular. He became more so when he kept out of card parties in which there was a chance of the Hoggers participating. Sam Hogger felt the rebuke; which was intended. The Pretender was also glad to escape so much card-playing. The other men, who, most of them, spent their lives in the open air on station-work, liked to pass their holidays in playing billiards, or cards in the verandahs. He, freshly out from England, wished to enjoy the outdoor life of that perfect climate—to bathe in the Oasis lake, to sail or fish on the vast sheet of water which reflected the sapphire of the skies, to walk in the forest which surrounded the beach, and to play games unspoiled by rain or mud.

Now that matters had been cleared up between him and Inez, she found something for him to do with her nearly every day in

one or other direction. Where three was company, Chris accompanied them. Inez never regarded her sister as a rival, and Chris had a way of doing whatever she happened to be doing for itself—without ulterior motives—which added to her attractiveness in the Pretender's eyes, though he had the good sense not to betray it. In mixed bathing, for example, while Inez, who, made a passion of swimming, astonished him with her accomplishments, Chris behaved like an ordinary mermaid, resting on one of the islands after a long swim, quite unconscious of her fair loveliness. Both girls were supremely elegant in the water, and astonished the Pretender, who was a good swimmer, by their expertness.

All of them could sail a boat, and spent delightful days, when there was a breeze, in spinning for the handsome arripis, as fishermen in England spin for mackerel. His forest walks were *tête-à-têtes* with Chris—Inez had a Colonial contempt for walking, as her sister, and better-read. The Pretender loved these walks with her, though he had qualms about taking them, as she grew more and more desirable in his eyes. But he had great self-restraint, and she was never conscious, so they escaped pitfalls, and accumulated respect for each other.

Of Connie Claridge, until she found the attraction which her music had for him, he saw less, except at meals, where the Claridges and Gunns sat with them, for she had the same lazy notions as the young squatters about seaside life, and spent most of her days in sitting about or playing Millennium Bridge, though she danced energetically at night. No Australian girl is too lazy to dance. If he was anywhere in the hotel when Connie sat down to the splendid "grand" in the Palm-Court (whose roof rested on a clear-story of open arches 20 or 30 feet high) and sent her impassioned renderings of wild Hungarian music reverberating through the hotel gardens, he was at her side in a few minutes. Which he was glad enough to do, for Connie was not only dazzlingly pretty, she had personality and independence, and never showed the least inquisitiveness. So long as he amused her, she did not care who he was. She would have been perfectly ready to associate with the Society Hoggers if they amused her with anything but their vulgarity.

But for these Hoggers, the rest of the month would have flown imperceptibly. In the second-rate set, in which Ruby was the star, a good deal of practical joking went on. The men only played jokes on each other, but the girls played jokes on the men as well as on each other. Sam Hogger resented it.

It let Ruby (who was on the social climb) down. His own wife was a quiet little thing, whom everyone would have been glad to know, if it had not involved the admission of Ruby. He was determined, if necessary, to take strong measures to put a stop to this joking.

One day he was particularly annoyed. The girls were "ragging" Gus Orriss, some of them holding him while the others tried each other's hats on the bald head which capped his red, dissipated, ridiculous face. Ruby was not actually touching him, but she had acceded to the clamour that she should lend her hat for the joke. Being very elaborate, it was the best of all for guying him. There was worse to come, for Gus, when at last he freed himself, commenced chasing the girls about, pretending that he was going to kiss them. He had a drunkard's artfulness, and probably would only have allowed himself to catch the girls, who would not mind! He would have taken care not to catch Ruby, for he had had experience of the unpleasant temper of her brother.

Sam was not in a mood for discriminating, and when Gus caught Sally Strong, who objected so little that she allowed herself to be caught to keep the fun going, Sam suddenly jumped up, crying: "I'm not going to have this kind of thing!" and caught hold of the unfortunate Gus by the ear and dragged him towards the garden-door—the romping had been in the Palm-Court. The Pretender was standing by the door, talking to Inez and Connie, when they were disturbed by the expostulations of Gus, who knew that he was going to be subjected to something very humiliating or painful. "What's he done?" he asked, knowing how physically incapable Gus was of taking his own part.—"Mind your own business!" said Sam, getting angrier.—"Not at your bidding. Let him go."—He let him go, saying, "I'll settle with you presently." At the same time, Albert Hogger elbowed his way towards the door to stand by his brother. "Now," cried Sam, "what do you mean by interfering with me?"—"Make yourself scarce," said the Pretender, sternly. The two men confronted each other. Inez had a Gordon interest to see what would happen. Connie was rather frightened. After a few seconds of tenseness, the Pretender said, "You'd better come outside—there are ladies here."—"I'm your man," said Sam. They went out into the garden, followed by Albert, two or three men and Inez.

From the garden-door a broad path led to a *rond-point*, where all the palm avenues met. The Pretender walked down to this, and then, turning round, said, "Now, sir." Fairness made no

appeal to Sam. "Here, Albert," he cried, "lend us a hand, and we'll give this damned cocky Englishman a damned good hiding." Albert started forward, but Inez caught him and said, "You won't lend a hand while I'm here."—"Don't worry about him, Miss Inez," said the Pretender. "I'll settle this coward in a jiffy." Inez did worry, and the other men came to her assistance.

Seeing that he had only Sam to deal with, the Pretender, relying on his *ju-jitsu*, as he had in his "scrap" with Sandy, fainted, as if he was going to catch him by the throat. Sam put out a hand to ward him off. Like lightning the Pretender seized the wrist in the most fatal of *ju-jitsu* locks. "Now, don't you move," he said, "or you'll break your arm. And I shall break it for you if you don't take your oath that neither you nor your brother will touch me or Mr. Orriss, when I let you go. I wouldn't say this to a gentleman, but you're a common ruffian, who tried to get your brother to set on me two to one. You must be taught a lesson." Though he meant to get his brother's help in thrashing such a formidable adversary, Sam had plenty of physical courage and was not the man to take an insult lying down. "I'm not frightened of you, you ——!" he yelled furiously, and gave a wrench to shake the Pretender off.

There was the briefest struggle, a sharp snap and a cry of "Oh, my God!" His right hand was hanging from his wrist like a door-knocker. He made a wild attempt to square up and hit Stuart with his left; the Pretender swerved and gave him a *ju-jitsu* touch which robbed him of his balance and threw him heavily on his face. He tried to get up, but the pain was too great, and muttering through his clenched teeth, "counted out," he sank back.

The Pretender walked up to Albert. "Now, then, sir, I've got you to deal with. Will you give me your word not to interfere with me or Mr. Orriss?"—"Only too glad, my dear chap. I don't bear you any ill-will. I had to stand by my brother when he called on me, but I didn't like the business a bit—two to one to do a feller in—I'm jolly glad I was blocked. I don't think old Gus meant any harm, either. I was sorry to see Sam mauling the old boy. I'll shake hands on it if you like."

It was clear that Albert Hogger was speaking, not from fear—he was brave—but out of relief at being freed from a business he did not like. He had, ever since he came down to the Beach, shown a weakness for the Pretender's society, and a tendency imitate him. The offer to shake hands meant more than any oath. The Pretender held out his hand, and he knew from

the way Albert took it that he was sincere. "It's a pity Sam loses his wool so easily," said Albert.—"You look after him while I try and find the doc. Get him up to his room through the bathing-tunnel, so that people won't see him."

Having tried to let his adversary down lightly, he started off to find the doctor. Inez caught him up and slipped her arm through his in her way. "I love you, Pretender," she said. "You *are* such a sport!"—"I'm glad you love me, Miss Inez," he replied, gratefully. "Since we're neither of us going to marry, I suppose it's the same as 'Like' with a big L."—"Leave it at that," she said, laughing to cover the very real tenderness which she was feeling.

CHAPTER XI

A MISS IN BAULK: THE HEIRESS

IT was the middle of winter in Melbourne. The Pretender was living over the Ether and Daedalus offices in Hughes Street, the main thoroughfare of the new business quarter, which had spread from Richmond to the Ocean Airship Terminus in the Domain. The Ether wireless telephone works, at Kingscliff, were having the machinery for the Daedalus erected at them, but experiments were to be conducted at Esslemont, for privacy, when the preparations were sufficiently advanced.

A question innocently asked by the Pretender at the Round Australia Airship Race had excited a wide interest in the new company. He had asked why only Zeps, not 'planes, had Round Australia Races. He had not seen that the answer was self-evident—that aeroplanes could with difficulty carry the fuel necessary to propel them across the long stretches between Perth, Roeburne, Port Darwin and Brisbane. "They'll have to wait till the 'planes are fitted with Daedalus engines, old man," said Pat. When once aircraft had an apparatus for drawing their electricity from the air all aeroplanes and airships would go any distance without fuel, and the cost of locomotion would be reduced to installing the machinery and keeping it in repair. This was of more importance than the original idea of the Daedalus Company—that of supplying flying machines as small as motor-bicycles, driven by this Cosmic Electricity. The office and the warehouse had been established as near as possible to the Airship Terminus because if the Daedalus Company's patent succeeded, the Ocean Airships would be driven by it, and if once they adopted it, its universal use must follow.

Pat had almost made his father promise that when he had to buy another airship, he would buy a racer instead of an omnibus. It was not so convenient for transporting the family to Melbourne, or visits to other States, but it could be used for that, and Pat had always longed for Esslemont to have an airship in the Round Australia Race. His father was one of the few who could afford airship-racing, and since his own business aspirations now included air-locomotion, he urged on Mr. Gordon that there would be no waste or ostentation about it. The only question was, would it serve the purpose for which the Gordons kept an airship?

* * * * *

The Pretender was getting to know his way about the city of two or three million inhabitants, which had suburbs spreading beyond Caulfield and Heidelberg. The city itself now extended to the Airship Docks, as well as the docks at Port Melbourne and Williamstown; many important head offices were at the Domain end of the city. Living in Melbourne had become as expensive as living in New York; single people and childless married couples lived in boarding-houses, or apartment hotels, with service according to their means; people with children, if they were not rich, had to live in the country. The monorail and air services made getting in and out of town extraordinarily rapid and easy. Many well-off people did the same, because the expense of living in the city made houses and flats so small, though to compensate there were numerous public gardens, beyond the conception of anyone who has not lived in hot climates—gullies and jungles overgrown with brilliant semi-tropical creepers taking the place of stolid London squares.

When the Pretender went up to Melbourne in the beginning of February, he found himself rather cut off. The rich squatters' families whom he had met at Esslemont, and to whom the set in which he had moved at The Beach was almost confined, if they had houses in Melbourne at all, would not return to them until after the summer. Even Pat's clients, most of them, came from the same class. This was specially tiresome, because for the present his work was so light that he had a good deal of leisure.

He spent his off-time in the day watching cricket at the M.C.C., a minute's run by monorail from his office, and he spent his evenings at the Melbourne Club with Pat, who was living at Kingscliff and came in just in time for dinner. He was never dull at the M.C.C. If there was a match on, people, seeing that he was a stranger, entered into conversation and explanations

for his benefit. If there was no match he changed into his flannels and joined anyone who was practising in having ten minutes' innings in his turn. He enjoyed not only the cricket but the making the acquaintance of young men in various grades of life who swarmed out to get a bit of cricket as the hour approached five. They told him what their businesses were, and they enquired what his was; he had the sense to say that he was the secretary of the Ether Electric Co., without mentioning that he was also a partner.

After a short time, the Pretender found himself practising on one night or another with pretty much the same set of men. They liked him because he was keen and good-natured, and had little "swank"—less than any of them, in fact. When it became too dark to see, he changed and went up to the Melbourne Club to smoke and chat until it was time for dinner. After dinner he sat with Pat in the billiard-room smoking until the Club pool began, when he took a hand—welcome because he played respectably, but not too well, and was pleasant to talk to between turns. Few men using the Club just then had their womenfolk in Melbourne. The women were still at the seaside or up on stations, the men only there because they had business and could not help it. Had it been winter, when the ladies had come back, he would have had many invitations from men, to whom Pat introduced him, to dine with them at their homes.

He had been living this bachelor existence for a couple of months when one night he heard a crotchety voice say, "Well, young man!" and turning round, perceived Mr. Claridge limping into the billiard-room. The older man's pleasure when he saw the Pretender's face light up at the sound of his voice was marked, and the lighting-up of the Pretender's face was sincere; friendliness was an instinct with him. It was not everyone who liked John Claridge. He was so candid; he wanted nothing and feared no-one. But he liked intelligent conversation and people who had an *aura* of vitality.

"How's Miss Claridge, sir?" asked the Pretender, when he had finished enquiring after Mr. Claridge's own health. The intimacy of the reply showed how much the squatter liked him. "Connie's as full of beans as usual, but you'd better come home with me to dinner and see for yourself."—"Oh, thanks very much." He pulled out his watch. "Then I think I'd better go and dress—I shan't have too much time."—"I shan't ask you if you do. Don't you know that I'd very much rather have you here talking to me until it's time for dinner than sit with people I don't care about, while you are careering round Mel-

bourne to get into a swallow-tail and a starched bow?"—"I'm glad to think so. But what will Miss Connie think?"—"She isn't allowed to think. You'll be keeping me company, remember. Changing clothes is difficult for a person who's so crippled as I am."

"Thank you very much; then I won't go home."—"Where is 'home,' Stuart?"—"Over the office in Hughes Street."—"Rather a dull hole at night, isn't it?"—"I only sleep there, sir. I stay here till bed-time."—"Do you always dine here?"—"Practically always. I don't take any meals in my chambers except breakfast and occasionally afternoon tea."—"I envy you," said John Claridge. "It all sounds so young."

The Pretender helped him to a seat. As soon as he had established himself, he said, "My car'll be round for us at 6.45. We dine at 7.0 because Connie likes to go somewhere in the evening if we've no one with us—generally to one of those literary talkees-talkees when the season begins. I don't do much after dinner except have my sleep and go to bed."—"Doesn't an after-dinner nap spoil your sleep in bed, sir?"—"I don't sleep in bed—not for several hours; my valet reads to me, and he reads so badly that I gradually go off while I'm trying to make sense of what he is saying. Then I don't wake until it's time for my morning tea."—"Then, why do you go to bed so early, sir?"—"Because if I go to bed two hours later, I don't get my beauty sleep, and that isn't good for me."

Mr. Claridge then talked with a minute remembrance of what the Pretender was anxious to forget—his *ju-jitsu* achievements. There was nothing he regretted so much in the past ten years as not having witnessed them. The Pretender's surprising and elastic vigour delighted him.

Presently he asked, "Do you know my house?"—"I don't even know where it is."—"East Melbourne, the land of boarding-houses and apartment-hotels. It is called Balranald after a station my grandfather had, and it hasn't a decent house near it, but it has a bedroom on the ground floor, which suits me, and the oldest palm garden in Melbourne—the palms aren't arranged in avenues like lamp posts, but stand about in groups like friends. I spend much of the year in Melbourne. I'm such an invalid that I can do nothing at Colac Downs when I'm up there, and as my other stations are up in the Riverina, it's more convenient for business for me to be in Melbourne. Besides, I like being near my favourite doctor—I'd have one in the house if it wasn't for Connie, and she'd have a medium in the house if it wasn't for me, and often threatens to leave

me because I won't let her. But she hasn't the heart to do it. She's too fond of me—God knows why.”——“Is Miss Connie a very earnest Spiritualist?”——“Earnest? No. She isn't in earnest about anything except having her own way—merely a very inquisitive one, who has read everything imaginable upon the subject.”

The under-porter came up to say, “Your car's here, Mr. Claridge.” He prepared to help him as usual. “No, you give me your arm, Stuart—I like to feel your vitality.” A drive of two minutes took them to Balranald. “Show Mr. Stuart into the blue dressing-room, Jane, and when he's ready, take him to the drawing-room. I hobble straight into the dining-room to save my miserable legs.”

When Jane took him up to the drawing-room, the Pretender found himself in a long, low room, with French windows, about three feet above the floor, whose open doors revealed the heads of lofty palms outlined against the starry sky, and silvered by the electric light. It was sumptuously furnished; he paid no attention to that, for advancing towards him, looking perfect, in the chiffons and laces of an elaborate and very low-cut evening frock, was Connie.

“How do you do, Pretender?” she said. “I wonder if you're as glad to see me as I am to see you?”——“A great deal gladder, I should say.”——“I wonder?”——“I must be. You have so many friends, and I, until I saw your father just now, had not one of my real friends to speak to except Pat.”——“You needn't be glad, if you've heard much from Pat—he's no use for me.”——“We haven't mentioned you.”——“Ought I to feel complimented?” He looked puzzled. “Well, I won't tease you, but tell you how glad we are to see you at Balranald.”

“I hope you'll forgive my not being in evening dress. Your father would have it.”——“I know—he feels like the fox which had lost its tail, poor dear. He's such an invalid that his dressing never goes beyond a smoking-jacket.” He looked at her rather quizzically as she said these words. “The daughter does not take after the father.”——“She never knows when she may be going to entertain an angel unawares,” retorted Connie, dropping him a most beautiful curtsey. “Miss Connie, I believe that you have been presented.”——“I have. It isn't hard when expense is of no consequence.”——“And you learned . . .”——“That monkey trick for the occasion—yes, your Majesty.”——“I don't know what on earth I should do if you started doing this to me in earnest.”——“What a

funny idea—what put that into your head?”——“I was thinking of the very shy person who is the titular ruler of the Empire. How he must hate presentations! I believe I should rather like it.”——“It's a pity you can't take his place! Have you ever seen him?”——“I haven't seen as much of him as the man who sells newspapers at Hyde Park Corner.”

Ting, ting! went the dinner-gong. A few seconds later Jane entered the room to announce dinner. It was quite a dinner-party dinner, though no guests were expected, and, but for Mr. Claridge's valet, who attended to him, it was served by women. In his tired way, Mr. Claridge was brilliantly witty. The Pretender and Connie filled in the gaps of conversation. Soon after Connie had left the table, the valet whispered that it was time for Mr. Claridge's nap, and went and held the door open. “Don't think me a worm,” said the host, “but it's just while I feel the inertia of having dined well that I am able to sleep.” The Pretender caught the appeal in the valet's eye and saying good-night quickly, made his way to the drawing-room.

Connie was singing as he entered. No-one had told him that she sang as gloriously as she played. She was singing the old Jacobite ballad:

“Over the sea! Over the sea!
Hark what a little bird said unto me,
Over the sea! Over the sea!
Somebody's coming to me.”

She rose as he entered. “Do please go on,” he pleaded.——“No, I have so many things to say to you.” She left the piano and seated herself on a sofa, drawing in her skirts to leave him room to sit beside her. It was the heat of the evening, perhaps, which had brought such colour into her clear cheeks and made her red-brown eyes burn.

“Well, Pretender, how do you generally spend your evenings?” If she was angling, he did not rise, for he answered, “Playing pool at the Club, I'm afraid.”——“Every night?” she asked, with amused incredulity.——“Pretty well.”——“Rather waste of time, isn't it?”——“It's the only place where I meet anyone I know. Pat and I always dine together there. Besides, we sometimes go into the library and read—we have all the best new books there.”

“We're great on literature in Melbourne. We've tried to make it the Boston as well as the New York of Australia.” He suspected this; the long table in the Club library was strewn with Australian magazines, such as “The Paved Court,”

"A.D. 2000," "Mullen's," and "The Holiday Magazine"—all of them something like the "Century," and "Harper's" and "Scribner's" had been in America a hundred years before—and reviews like "The Commonwealth Review," and "Aeropagitica," finer productions than ever "The North American" or "The Forum" had been. In the Australian Literary Year Book he had read that fifty publishers were bringing out books in Melbourne.

"You seem to have a lot of literary clubs," he said. "I hardly ever pick up a paper which hasn't a report of a gathering at one or other."—"Yes, we have. I know half a dozen by name—there are the Academical, the Authors', the Millennium, the University, the Thespians, the Diogenes, and the Lunch Club, besides dining-clubs, such as the Bel Eyse, the Boswell, the Playgoers', and the Canopus. And there are seven literary societies, which have meetings once a week, the Saturday Club, the Sunday Club, the Round Table, the Salon, the Tatlers, the Idlers' Club, and the Thursday Night."—"You're better off for them than London."—"You see, the Australian climate is conducive to reading, in the long summer days, when any woman who can afford it sits in the shade or behind Venetians, until the cool of the evening."

"Where do all these institutions meet?"—"The clubs, in houses of their own, except the dining clubs. They have no premises, but dine together at one of the great hotels—generally 'Scott's,' which is quite an institution itself—it has been going for 150 years."—"The literary societies—have they premises?"—"They all of them have accommodation in the premises built for learned societies, in the Gordon Memorial Building. Each has one very large room for club room and library, with a secretary's room, dressing-rooms and pantry—they only serve teas. They don't hold their weekly meetings in their own rooms—there wouldn't be sufficient accommodation. Each has the use of the Twin Halls once a week, that's included in their lease—the Gordon Club has its own hall."

"The Twin Halls? What are they?"—"They're an Australian idea, to keep the lecturer from being interrupted. They both open out of the lobby, but one is reserved for reading the paper of the evening and the discussion which follows, and the other for tea and coffee, ices and conversation. Experience has proved that the only way to keep people from talking during the proceedings is to give them a separate room to talk in, since lots of them go to meet their friends. The arrangement works splendidly. The majority of the Society and its friends go into

the Discussion Hall and behave like angels, because the ices in the Social Hall don't begin until the discussion is over."

"The dining clubs—are their dinners like ours, banquets of both sexes to fête some celebrity and hear singing of sorts?"—"Yes, all the literary clubs, except the Diogenes, are for both sexes."—"How do you manage to keep up such a lot?"

"The same people go to the entertainments at most clubs. The members of one club bring guests from other clubs and are guests in turn. In the winter the people in the literary set go to some literary entertainment nearly every evening; those who only want to meet their friends run in after the play if they've been to a theatre. Plays and discussions end about the same time; the conversation goes on until one in the morning. Would you like to come with me to some of them?"—"I should very much."—"Then you are a better brought-up Englishman than Mr. Lewis. I can't induce him to go—he declares that the one thing he will not do for me is to go and be bored in a crowd. He says that he would not be allowed to draw an unaccompanied breath with me, and would be forced to talk to a lot of people whom he always makes a point of cutting because they are so tiresome."

"I hope you don't cheapen yourself by pressing him?"—"No—his manners are not good enough."—"I should love to go with you."—"You shall. They aren't on yet—they don't begin until April. In the summer and autumn the people who are in Melbourne go to the Tivolis or Sandringham* when they want an evening out."—"What are they like?"—"Sandringham, I suppose, is like your Ranelagh—they call it the Ranelagh of Australia. It's an open-air club where they have polo and gymkhanas in the season, golf and tennis all the year round—and wonderful swimming-baths, with a club-restaurant, which gives the best food in Melbourne. The Tivolis are gardens with palm trees, and jungly plants, in which you can dine or get any form of refreshment, while you look at an open-air performance or an open-air cinema."

"What sort of performances are there at these Tivolis?"—"Music-hall turns by the best people. The drink and dinner business is so profitable that the star company which runs most of the music-hall Tivolis as well as most of the 'halls,' pays very high prices to its artists."—"What about the cinema Tivolis?"—"They're run by all sorts of people. Some of the higher priced ones are nice, and some of the lower no better than public-houses."—"Do you ever dine at any of them?"

* This is Sandringham in 2000 A.D.

"Only when Sandy takes me or I go in a party. Father can't go; he's so dependent on his sleep after dinner. Mr. Lewis is very good about getting up parties for me at them."

"On my income I can't run to parties at Tivolis, but if your father will allow me, as a friend of the family, to take you to dine at a few good ones, I shall think it a great privilege."

"Oh, he'd let me right enough. I believe he'd let me go alone with Tudor Lewis. It's I who wouldn't trust myself with him. He's in love with me, and I don't like the idea of him as a husband. I avoid seeing him alone. I don't mind his getting up parties for me—if he didn't get them up for me, he'd get them up for somebody else. He has to splash his money about as a business advertisement."—"Will you ask your father, then, and fix a night?"—"Not for dinner, Pretender—it's a useless expense. And it's really better style to come in a bit later and take your coffee and liqueurs there. The best people don't dine there much—they leave it to bachelors and their lady-friends. Melbourne hates fastness really."—"But you go there with Sandy Gunn?"—"Sandy's my cousin and all my friends know that I go there to keep him out of mischief. He thinks it a lark. Aunt Rachel wouldn't let Chris or Inez go, so if I didn't, he'd probably take some dreadful woman."

"I should like to return your hospitality better than by only taking you out to coffee."—"Stuff and nonsense! Dinner's the only pleasure in life father has, except talking to men at the Club, so he insists upon the same elaborate dinner whether he is alone or has friends. He likes to be able to ask them as he meets them, without any warning to the cook, and naturally he likes me to be here."—"Do you mean it?"—"Yes, I do. When he wakes from his nap and sends for us to say good-night, I'll spring it on him, so as to arrange a night before you go."

* * * * *

Mr. Claridge seldom opposed his daughter's wishes, knowing that if he did she would take care not to ask him next time, and go on picking the forbidden fruit until he heard of it and stopped her. She had great respect for her father's cynical shrewdness, and would take his advice where she would flout his orders. When she indicated her wish that the Pretender should take her to coffee at the Tivolis, he said, "I've no fault to find with Stuart. I like him very much; I think he's sensible. But if people see you going to these places with him alone, they'll look for something wrong in it, and, considering your escapades, they'd have a right to."

"Oh, father, I never thought you'd go back on me."—"I'm not going back on you, but the only way I see to let you have your wish is for Stuart to come and stay here for the rest of the month. It's natural for us to ask him when he's rooming it alone, and natural for you to make use of any man who is staying in the house. Then no one will think anything of it."—"Yes, but how will people know that he is staying here?"—"I'd tell a few people at the Club."—"A Daniel, a Daniel," said his daughter. "Will you come, Pretender?" She addressed him as "Pretender" on purpose, that her father might know that she called him by his nickname.

"It would be perfectly delightful for me, but it would be imposing on your hospitality."—"Australians don't reckon hospitality in that way," said John Claridge. "Australian hospitality was founded in the days when a guest was a link with the world to a lonely man, and I hope that we shall never forget it. I must go to bed now, Stuart, so good-night. Remember that I shall expect to find you installed here before dinner to-morrow night." With these words he limped to the door at the far end of the dining-room, assisted by his valet. "That's father's bedroom," explained Connie. "He has to economize every inch of locomotion."

When they passed from the other door into the hall, she said, "Come back into the drawing-room and have a cigarette and a whiskey and soda before you go. Everyone does," she added, since he seemed unwilling. He made the excuse of having to do some packing before he went to bed. "To-morrow and for many nights afterwards," he reflected, "there'll be nothing in it, so why begin to-night?" She did not go down to the front door with him, but rang the bell for Jane. He supposed that she was offended, but before he had got his overcoat on, she sat down to her piano and poured forth the most sensuous music with a ravishing touch. He did not go back.

* * * * *

When Pat Gordon came into the office next morning, the Pretender said, "If you don't mind, Pat, I shan't come down after lunch. The letters are all done, and perhaps Jenkins could see people instead of me?" Pat did not ask the reason; he supposed that he would tell him if he wished to. The Pretender hesitated a little, so Pat opened the door to go. "Don't think me a sweep for deserting you, old man, but the Claridges have asked me to spend the rest of the month at Balranald, and I'm going to move my things across."—"Did Claridge ask you,

or Connie?"—"He did."—"That's all right. She's a terror. She's always up to some game."—"How do you mean?"—"You'll have to be pretty careful with her."

The Pretender coloured painfully. "I don't mean anything of that kind. I mean that she's such a harum-scarum that she puts you in deuced awkward positions. If you say no to one of her wild suggestions she gets her wool off. And she's such a darling really, that you'll get beastly fond of her; I did."—"Shall I be poaching on your preserves, Pat?"—"Far from it. I ran away from her long ago. I knew I should never have any peace of mind if I didn't."—"What am I to say to her if she mentions you?"—"Say that I shall always love her, but never come near her again without the protection of a crowd. We've been brought up as cousins, you know. We call Mr. Claridge, Uncle John, though he's only Aunt Elizabeth's brother-in-law. He married her husband's sister."

When he left the room the Pretender sent a telegram to Connie, "Shall be with you in time to dress for dinner. Messenger will bring my things.—STUART." He did not telephone because he did not wish to be argued into coming earlier. He was packing until tea-time. Then he went to the Club and played billiards with an honorary member from Fiji, until just before Mr. Claridge's usual time for coming in. Mr. Claridge found him reading the evening paper. "You here, Stuart? I thought you would be over at Balranald."—"I thought Miss Connie wouldn't want to be bothered with me before dinner, sir."—"Then you thought wrong, and I don't believe you thought it at all. You're just being polite to me—now, confess it!"—"I felt that it was the right thing to do."—"You mustn't be so damned polite out here, or you'll get yourself suspected," said John Claridge, with his accustomed cynicism. He was none the less pleased by the attention. "I suppose you've sent your things over?"—"Yes, I told the office messenger to take them."

Presently, quite an hour before his usual time, Mr. Claridge remarked to old Mr. Colquhoun, who was seated on his other side, "I shall have to work my way home now. Young Stuart is coming to us to-day for a month's visit, and he'll want to settle in before dinner."

As Connie meant to welcome the Pretender before she went up to dress, fortified in the resolution by the fact that the frock in which she had just come back from a wedding was exceedingly handsome and becoming, she opened a novel which she had ordered because it was about the Young Pretender—it was called

"Scotland's Romance," and she hoped to find in it an armoury for a battle of wit with their guest. She had only read a few pages when she heard a ring; she closed the book and descended the fine, double staircase which faced the front-door, with leisurely grace, in case it should be her father, and saw not him, but the Pretender, for whom as host he insisted on making way. As she came forward, smiling and radiant, to shake hands, he realized what a sumptuous woman she was, how very well-disposed to himself. "Run up to the drawing-room, will you, Pretender?—you don't know your way anywhere else yet—while I look after father, to see if there's anything that he wants which is not to his hand. I'll join you in a minute or two."

Presently she came up. She shook hands with him again—with both hands, this time. "Wasn't it jolly of father?" she cried with dancing eyes. She did not say what was jolly, and took it for granted that he agreed. He did. "You'll like to see your room, won't you?"—"Yes, I should like to lay my things ready for dressing."—"Father's valet's done that while you were at the Club. As he's busy with father now, I'll show you the way and see that you have everything you need."—"Please don't bother, Miss Claridge."—"It isn't a bother—I want to look after you."

She took him to a room more like an English bedroom than the one which he had occupied at Esslemont. That had all sorts of curious labour-saving arrangements, chiefly electrical, installed by Pat, and was less luxuriously furnished. "What a charming room?" he said. "I like these white linen covers—they make everything look so cool."—"Linen has the advantage of not holding the dust on hot-wind days—that's why I chose it. There's a bathroom leading off your bedroom. I had all the dressing-rooms converted into bathrooms—they're far more useful in this climate. Have you everything you want?"—"Yes, thanks."—"Well, then, I'll leave you. I like my full hour for dressing, and I shall hardly get it."

* * * * *

The Pretender had been staying with the Claridges for a week now. Every afternoon, as soon as he got away from the office, he had taken Connie to tea at Sandringham, and most evenings after dinner they had spent at one of the great Tivolis. She did not sit long after tea, but wandered about the gardens, which were an unfailing delight to the Pretender, with their gorgeous flowering creepers and lianas. Besides, though the monorail took them there in a few minutes, they had none too

much time; Connie liked to be back at six to dress. People in Melbourne had the habit of dining at seven because they went out afterwards. Nothing happened at Sandringham, except that, since she did not trouble to inform them that the Pretender was staying at Balranald, some people were scandalized at her going there with him so much. But they always were scandalized with her—and asked her to all their parties, in spite of it.

One night in March, when a hot wind had been blowing all day, and the air was as languorous as the tropics, they were sitting in the "half-dollar enclosure" at the Hopetoun Tivoli, looking at a banal, but rather funny, open-air farce, when they heard a familiar voice, and Tudor Lewis stood before them. He greeted both in his florid way, and asked if they would have some supper with him. "No, thank you, Mr. Lewis. We have not long finished dinner." He might have guessed that it was not at the Hopetoun, since they were not sitting at a dining-table, but he chose to ignore it in order to snub Stuart. "I ought to have remembered that you never dined at these places without a party. I'd have got one up for you if you had let me know."—"It's different when you have a man staying in the house," she answered sweetly.

"I wasn't trying to criticize," said Lewis, who generally had his wits about him. "I was placing myself at your disposal. Dining at one of these places is the best thing to do in weather like this."—"I don't agree with you," retorted Connie. "I'm fond of dust, but I like to take it separate from my food. We dine with closed windows on hot-wind days at home."—"Why dine at home, when you can be in the open-air, with an entertainment to amuse you?"—"I said that I don't like dining in dust, and really, I find the conversation at our table" (a pointed reference to Stuart) "much more interesting than stuff like that."—"Beati possidentes," was his comment; he was well-educated.—"What does that mean? Dead languages in conversation with a woman are like the Bible's dead flies in the ointment."—"It is the Latin for 'a miss in baulk,'" he said, moving off in a very unenviable temper. "Damn that feller Stuart!" he said to himself. "He might kick the pot over for me—she likes him a lot, that's evident. He's got such chances of playing for it, if he's staying with them. She has a cool head, but she's reckless, or I shouldn't have had a look in. Damn him!"

As soon as he was out of earshot, Connie said, "We've made an enemy—he's as jealous as a goat."—"Does a man like that matter?"—"Not in the least, unless you keep a skeleton

for him to rattle."—"I do," he said, "but it's a tame one, as you'll know if ever I go back to England."—"Why?"—"Because I've no wish to disappoint laudable curiosity when I'm not here to answer questions about it."—"You mustn't breathe a word in Australia if you don't wish the birds to hear it."—"It isn't being talked about that I'm afraid of; it's being talked-to—everybody here seems to have time to talk till they're tired."

"You're snubbing me pretty severely, aren't you, Pretender?"—"Haven't you lived long enough to find out that *Beauty* is the grand exception, Miss Connie? When you're entertaining yourself, and not her, the only thing you can do with a beautiful woman is to talk to her—it's the only thing you can do without taking your eyes off her."—"That's a very gallant speech. I forgive you," she said, laughing. "It doesn't much matter how unintelligent her replies are, if she allows you to prolong the conversation?"—"I don't agree; many pretty women extinguish their looks with their banality."—"Am I banal?"—"I should want to talk to you just as much if you'd had smallpox, and showed it."—"Take care!" she cried warningly. "Freckles are skin-deep smallpox, and I suffer from freckles."—"Beauty isn't so skin-deep as freckles. There are some freckles which only draw attention to the beauty of the skin."—"There are some lips, Pretender, which, like Shelley's *Goatherd's*, are touched with the muses' honey. I know where to find them."—"I'm honest about freckles," he protested.—"That's what I call 'candied peel'—I can enjoy that kind of candour."

Tudor Lewis came back. He had got over his temper and wished to ingratiate himself. A very witty 'turn' was in progress; it put them all in the humour to be cordial, and incidentally it showed Lewis that though Stuart was not a wit like himself, he had a lively gift of conversation. He was destined to have a surprise in this connection.

CHAPTER XII

IF I'D TAKEN YOU THERE

IT was not Connie's habit to do things by halves; her vagaries had never landed her in a serious trouble; her father took only a cynical interest in them. Before the Pretender had been with them three days she had admitted him to close friendship. She had two, to her, good reasons. The first was

that she could be as provoking as she pleased, since he showed so distinctly that he was not a man who took liberties, the second making her mischievous. With her, friendliness implied a great deal more than it had with Inez. Inez desired him as a partner for a waltz and an opponent in games. She wanted him to dance attendance on her whenever they were in public together. But Inez dreaded rather than encouraged any resultant affection. Her unsatisfied curiosity in his secret had always thrown a shadow over their friendship.

Connie wanted to make him fond of her; she wanted to encourage him into demonstrations which she could welcome or snub according to her mood. She made him take her about because she liked to make other women jealous of her dresses and her liberty, because she liked going to Sandringham and public amusements like Tivolis if she had an enviable young man to escort her. When her father asked her why she let herself be talked about with an ineligible whom she had no intention of marrying, her excuse was that she needed an escort, who was not dangerous himself, to protect her from the men who meant to marry her for her money, and the more ineligible he was, the greater her safety. He saw the force in her reasoning, and took her side against the old ladies who urged him to interfere.

The Pretender, who wished to justify Mr. Claridge's confidence, and was determined not to court any woman until he had earned the right-to by clearing up the mystery, which had so far troubled no one but Inez, began to feel embarrassed by Connie's camaraderie. He did not mind the public part of it, the being her chosen and almost exclusive cavalier wherever she went; it was pleasing both to his eye and to his vanity to have such a very pretty and smart girl going about with him as if she was engaged to him. She was always pleasant and amusing; she was exceedingly good company, for she had brains as well as beauty, and at the back of all her capriciousness, was merry and good-hearted. Though she was seen everywhere with him, unchaperoned, Connie was discreet in public. She liked to be in eyeshot of people, but not in earshot, and comported herself as if she was being looked at.

But at Balranald the Pretender had need to walk warily, for there she seldom ceased to be provoking. She had a dangerous way of laying a hand on him when drawing his attention to anything, or if they were looking at a picture-paper together, and Connie's light hands were magnetic. At first he thought

of begging her not to do it, but it would be so marked that it might engender an explanation, worse than the trespass. When he had yielded once or twice it seemed as natural as it was friendly. It vexed her that he did not allow himself the same liberty. To cure him she developed a fancy for waltzing at odd times; it also gave her genuine pleasure; he was a perfect dancer. It was an obvious and easy pastime, for the Electra played itself like a gramophone, and they had no carpets at Balranald, merely rugs which occupied but a small space on a beautifully-polished floor.

No further excuse was needed for having his arm round her delicious waist, and her fingers reposing in his. If she wanted it without the formality of turning on the Electra, she had only to pirouette and say, "Come on, Pretender!" A brain wave taught him that he need not hurry to take away his arm when she stopped pirouetting. But it did not teach him to initiate the dancing, even though he held her quite reciprocally when they started. One thing he failed to perceive—or, if he perceived it, failed to care—this was that his resolution not to touch her until she forced it, incited her above everything else into trying to provoke him. She was not in love with him in the sense of desiring a proposal, but she wanted him to be at least brotherly, and she was something more than sisterly to him.

He was troubled, for it did not seem fair to her father, though Mr. Claridge might have shrugged his shoulders at his daughter's choosing to do it with any pal, and might have been glad to see her attracted to the Pretender, to whom he was so attracted himself. One thing the Pretender was determined—that she should not indulge in these caprices in the hours between the office and dinner, when callers might be dropping in to tea, or her father be coming back from the Club, and lead to the servants interrupting them at an untoward moment. This he made impossible by leaving her on the doorstep and going on to meet her father at the Club when she came back from Sandringham or a party in the afternoon. He had more reasons than one: It allowed him to devote an hour to showing his appreciation of his host; it served to show men at the Club that he was Mr. Claridge's friend as well as his daughter's, and it kept him out of mischief at Balranald. There were also Pat's interests to be considered, and keeping in with the people, who were beginning to filter back to Melbourne, by regular attendance at the Club was of importance.

The Pretender realized that there might be opposition from

Connie, but she would have to learn, even if it brought down her displeasure, that when he saw the right way clearly, he was not to be diverted. The imperious Inez Gordon had learned how inflexible he could be. No opposition came. Connie was pleased by his consideration for her father, and would rather have over an hour than under to dress herself for dinner. She did other things besides dress in the dressing-hour; and made up for the loss of his company in the afternoons by staying at home more after dinner. She allowed him to think that it was due to her fear of meeting Tudor Lewis, though it would have been more consonant with her nature to exhibit her new caprice to him as a snub. But she went to the literary societies which were beginning their meetings now, occasionally to parade the Pretender, which worked in well with the Tudor Lewis theory, since wild horses could not drag him there.

One night they went to a meeting of the Thursday Night Club. The subject of the debate was "What does the Novel-Reader demand?" It was well-sustained, because most people explain to the clerk at their library the kind of reading with which they expect to be supplied, and have therefore formed opinions on the subject. The chairman was growing impatient, as attempts to make speeches petered out into egotistical sentences from stupid people. One man jumped up and said, "I like Crockett," and everyone in the room who had not spoken tried to favour the audience with the name of a favourite novelist, from Walter Scott to Elinor Glyn. The chairman rapped the table and remarked, with Colonial directness, "we've had enough of this kind of thing. Has nobody anything more to contribute to the debate?" The Pretender rose. He had read nearly all the popular novels of recent years, and for twenty minutes alternately convulsed and paralysed his audience while he dissected the stock tricks of the novelists, as Jerome K. Jerome dissected the conventional artifices of the dramatist in his "Stageland."

From that moment he was a marked man. Every dining-club, literary-club and literary-society in Melbourne wanted him to speak at their next gathering. The impromptu coining of witty commonplaces and witty nothings is priceless in an after-dinner speaker. He was even bespoken as the principal guest at the annual Christmas dinner, nine months off, of the Associated Chamber of Soft-Goods-men—without knowing what a soft-goodsman was.

Connie was immensely pleased. She felt rewarded. She took him to the meetings of the literary-societies they had

yet visited. She felt that it was due to them, and wished to enjoy his oratorical triumphs a few times; Pat accompanied them, bursting with pride. Soon she realized that she would see nothing of him at these salons, that from the moment he entered the room he would be the victim of bores who came up and introduced themselves—or, at the best, of club-secretaries trying to make fixtures—besides having to go and sit on the platform with those who were to make speeches. She decided to give club-meetings a rest, and spend the few remaining evenings of his visit in her own drawing-room.

John Claridge was elated over the Pretender's success; he had a great respect for a good speaker, and wondered if he could be turned to account in politics by the Squatter Party, who were badly off for speakers. As he wished to hear him speak and had such difficulty in moving, he persuaded all his friends at the Club to put it down in the Suggestion Book that the Pretender should be invited to speak at the next monthly dinner of the Club, the opening dinner of the season. The Committee gladly assented; some of them had heard him speak and the guest of the evening happened to be Mr. Gordon, in honour of his having just completed his fifty years' membership of the Club.

This was to be in April, and the Pretender was going back to his chambers on March 31st, because while he was staying at Balranald he foresaw a difficulty in being as attentive as he ought to the Gordons. The Gordons had returned to town a few days before; the whole family except Adam was there. He had been out to dine with them one night. Connie, who had of course been invited, had developed an engagement. She had no mind to see the slaying of the fatted calf which she imagined would ensue—though she would have liked Inez to see the proprietary air which she could have put on. She and Inez were really fond of each other, but they were generally skirmishing over something, because they both moved in the Gordon Clubs set, and the same sort of men admired them, though Inez was an Amazon and Connie essentially feminine. Dancing was unfortunately a field of action in which it was easy for them to clash.

On the night that he dined with the Gordons, Stuart had so much to say to them that the Parliament clock was striking twelve as he stepped out of the monorail station, a minute's walk from Balranald. He found the lateness of the hour rather comforting, because he had a latchkey and wanted to escape a discussion of Inez. As he went up the front-door steps he

noted with satisfaction that the house was pitch-dark, except the hall-light, which was kept burning all night. Connie must be in bed; her room looked on the street. He had rather dreaded seeing a light in her room. He let himself in very quietly and was tip-toeing up to bed when the drawing-room door opened and Connie came out.

He expected reproaches, but instead of scolding him, she drew him in most cordially, saying, "I sat up for you, because a sleeping house is such a funereal thing to come back to. What an age you've been! I read a novel and a half while I was waiting."—"So sorry. If I'd known you were going to sit up for me I'd have been back an hour earlier."—"Oh, Pretender, why weren't you? We could have had such a nice time!"—"Partly because I had a lot to say to the ladies, after not seeing them for two months, partly because when they'd gone to bed, Pat and I had a business-talk with Mr. Gordon about the Daedalus."—"You expect me to believe that, Pretender? I mean, the part about the Daedalus?"—"Of course I do; it's true."

She grunted. "What I want to know is, what did you do with Inez?" She spoke in a voice that made him look up, but her face was very friendly. "What did I do with Inez? Nothing much until after dinner, when she took me for a walk in the garden, to show me how wonderfully Pat had lit the glen with electric light."—"I can imagine it. I know Inez Gordon."—"If you think that either of the Gordon girls is anything to me," he said hotly, "you are very much mistaken. I've made a point of keeping clear of entanglements of that sort. It was the least I could do since they were so hospitable and knew nothing about me."—"Who wants to know anything about you? Have I asked anything about you? Your face, your breeding, your personality were sufficient for me."—"Thank you, Miss Connie."

"But don't tell me that Inez Gordon took you in the glen at night to show you electric lighting. I wonder she didn't turn it off!"—"You're quite misjudging her."—"Perhaps I judge others by myself," said Connie, who knew he was telling the truth.—"I don't understand you . . . ?"——"If I'd taken you there, it would have been because I wanted to be kissed."—"But you'd never do such a thing."—"Who knows? Can't you see how jealous I am of Inez?"

It was Inez she was jealous of! He need not deceive her. "How could you be?" he asked. "I want you for myself."—"Want me?" he cried in amazement.—"Yes,

you dear, stupid man," she replied, putting her hands on his shoulders and looking at him with her burning eyes. Her small scarlet mouth was close to his, and quivering. He could not mistake her meaning. "If I'd taken you there, it would have been because I wanted to be kissed," she said. How could she be standing as she was standing now, if she had not meant to be kissed?

The Pretender was human. To refrain from proposing to Chris because he could not tell her who he was, and her father trusted him so absolutely, was a point of honour. But kissing a girl to whom he had no claim was equally wrong or harmless, whether he could reveal his identity or not. This was not a question of being her equal. Some think that it is very wrong, and others that it is purely a matter of liking between the two people concerned. He put his arm round her. She came eagerly; his kisses poured on her lips. "Oh, Connie," he said, when at last he released her, "you are a darling!"—"I don't think I am, but I was born to be a lover."

Almost any man in his place, when the great heiress invited his embraces, would in an interval of kissing have asked her to marry him. The Pretender did not see why she should wish to bestow a fortune on a stranger merely because she enjoyed being kissed. He was right. Had he chosen to besiege her with his whole magnetism, she might have been carried away, but marriage had not been present in her mind when she let him know that she craved his kisses. It was an impulse, not a reasoned desire. Connie would hesitate long before she promised to be any man's wife. She dreaded marriage. She would not have minded so much if Australia had adopted the practice, followed in Norway since 1950, of allowing a man and a woman to live together, to see, before they took such an intensely serious step as marrying, if they were well enough suited in temperament to be happy. She had found the Pretender a charming companion, but he was not the superman physically that she had depicted as the only type she could tolerate for a husband.

A week ago she felt no desire to surrender to him. It was the thought that Inez had more power over him than herself which inspired her with it. How was it to end? The Pretender was unable to imagine such a thing as an intrigue with the daughter of a man who had shown him such friendship, however delightful he found the affection and kisses of such a lovely and fascinating woman. He could only interpret her attitude in one way—that she had fallen in love with him in the *jeune*

fille's headlong fashion—she was not much over twenty. Having kissed her with an ardour responding to her own, he felt it only honourable to make her an offer of marriage, though she was not the woman in Australia whom he contemplated as the ideal wife. He had a great affection for her. He was not the man to enjoy her constant companionship, to receive so many kindnesses from a girl of her beauty, sex-attraction and giftedness, without the response which reciprocitiveness dictated. He had not intended his attentiveness for courtship, but she seemed to have taken it in that light, and since it had made her fall in love with him, he must propose, and was able to anticipate great happiness from such an union. One proviso he must make—that it should not be considered binding on her, or be mentioned to her father, until he could lift the veil which he kept so closely-drawn over his antecedents.

Connie's reception of his offer was difficult to comprehend. She did not accept it with the eagerness natural after her display of affection. She was most caressing, but would not give him an answer forthwith. That in itself did not surprise him. It was a question to which women postpone their answer, though they have no doubt what it will be. In his case, as he had deprecated a formal engagement, there was less reason than usual for giving a decisive answer.

Connie did not like a lover to take a *no*. She did not see how she could swear to love, honour and obey such a man. She would rather have him for a friend than a husband. Docility was a good point in a friend, but did not bode well for the peace of her married life. She meant to accord him the privileges of a lover, though she would not betroth herself. But honour would not allow him to accept them until he was engaged to her, though he was very chivalrous and tender in his friendship, during the few days that remained of his stay.

CHAPTER XIII

WHY CONNIE BROKE OFF HER ENGAGEMENT

HE decided to go back to his chambers on April 2nd, a Monday. On Sunday morning after breakfast—her father did not get up until noon—Connie suggested having a smoke in her den, but made no move to light up when she got there. "I asked you up to have an undisturbed talk, because I think we ought to straighten things out before you leave.

They aren't very satisfactory, are they?" She was camouflaging her feelings with a mischievous smile. He hesitated. "You're too sweet to say what you think, but you'll admit that we ought to have a straight talk?"—"One is never the worse for that," he said, "if one keeps one's temper. I'm not likely to lose mine."—"Or I mine, with you."

"You have something to say to me, Miss Connie?"—"Not if you call me *Miss*."—"Connie."—"Connie dear."—"You have something to say to me, Connie dear?"—"Yes, I've been thinking over things." She paused, as if she expected him to say something, but as he remained silent, after feeling her way for words, she proceeded: "I'm not going to be engaged to you, even in the nebulous way you suggested."

"Are you making an April fool of me?"—She shook her head sadly. "I feel more like one myself."—"Why are you making this announcement, Connie?" he asked, conscious only of a feeling of escape.—"For two reasons—this is not the sort of engagement to satisfy my temperament, or my *amour propre*; it is, frankly, not what I pictured when at last I accepted a lover; and though you are very fond of me, and were willing to give up your life to me, when I made you kiss me . . ."—"Made me kiss you?"—"Yes, dear loyal person—you would never have kissed my father's daughter while you were his guest unless I had insisted—by moral pressure, of course, not by words." He could not help smiling. "Moral pressure is a correct enough expression, though it sounds humorous, but we'll use 'suasion,' if you prefer it."

"I don't mind what you called it. I know what you mean," he said. He had only interrupted her because he hoped somehow to turn the conversation.—"You were so insensate, that I was determined to move you. My *amour propre*—I make a fetish of that, don't I?—was hurt because all the sympathy I felt and bestowed had so little effect on you. I was not accustomed to it. Ever since I was a flapper I have had to keep men off—they were always on the look-out to kiss me at the smallest sign of my relenting. I have boxed many ears."

He was going to ask something, but changed his mind; after a short pause, she proceeded: "I won't pretend that I always boxed their ears, but I did not like any of them as much as you, Pretender." She was evidently not to be diverted from the dreaded subject, for she said, "I hadn't given you my second reason when I had to revise my terminology, and it is more important than the first. It is that although having been betrayed into kissing me, you felt compelled to propose, you

were killing your own hopes, because you are in love with Inez and want to marry her."

He tried to protest, but she had not finished.

"I'm sure that if I did marry you, you would make a loyal and affectionate husband, but I'm not going to do anything so unkind. I was determined to win you, but having won my victory, I can retreat with honour. I shan't marry you, Pretender. You are free to go to your Inez." What was he to say? It was true that he had been constantly in Inez's company all the time they were at Victoria Beach, that she had been less guarded with him than with any of her former "pals," that their names had been freely coupled by those who were not familiar with her waywardness. How were people to guess the real reason why he saw so much of Inez, to guess that the one to whom his heart went out so naturally that he dared not trust himself with her was Chris, who did nothing to merit it but look lovely and be amiable?

Connie should not know it—from him. She should be jealous of Inez, if she was going to be jealous, and he could not see why she should, if he was not to be her fiancé, even to the provisional extent proposed. There were much better fish than he, not only in the sea, but in her net. Chance or contiguity had given her a passing fancy for him, but this would pass with the occasion, and she would then relapse into an intimate friend. He had no fear that Connie would look upon a dismissed lover as an enemy. That she did not was clear, when he said good-bye next day, for he found himself expected to kiss her, and was warned that she would never forgive him if he "slacked off about coming to see her."

His departure made her *triste*. To be honest, her whim was not worn-out; a very little would have made her deeply in love. Connie was no fool; she knew that he was the best type of man who had yet crossed her path, as intelligent and lively as he was brave and cool, and with a loyalty which she had been unable to overcome by passion or wiles. That he moved in good society was clear from many little traits, though not from anything that he said, and she had not found any man so interesting as a "pal."

Then why had she cut herself off from him by her own act? Though their engagement was only provisional, it was ample to hold a man so reliable as he was, and at the same time it gave him nothing, for it was not to bind her until she confirmed it when he felt justified in lifting the veil which hung over his antecedents. She did it from an innate sense of fairness. She felt that she had lured him into the declaration while his desire was to another

woman. Since she liked him so much and did not know if she loved him enough to marry him, she considered herself bound to release him, but felt pretty sorry for herself.

Her regret was tempered when she found how little difference it made to his attentiveness. Having a general invitation from Mr. Claridge to dine with them, he went there two or three times a week, to escort Connie to any reception or party she wished to go to, or sit and chat with her at home. She often preferred this, because if she could have the man she wanted to herself at home, she did not see the use of going where she would have to share him with other people, and drop unconventionalities.

Tudor Lewis, whom her father brought in to dinner one night, was greatly concerned over the liking she showed for the Pretender. She meant him to be. He noticed also how careful he was not to presume on her friendliness, and thought him a fool. But the Pretender based his attitude not only on his duty to her; he wished to show his gratitude for her recognition of his affections being engaged elsewhere. "Perhaps I may get home while this blighter is muddling away his chances," thought Tudor Lewis. That any man could help loving the exquisite Connie and her fortune was inconceivable to him.

CHAPTER XIV

HALLHEAD: INEZ FINDS A CLUE

HALLHEAD, the Gordons' town-house, was a pleasant southern villa, copied from the Villa in the Azores in which the poet Gordon was born. It was a delightful house for a hot climate, with a famous glen in its garden, formed out of a sharp dip in the hill. An artesian well gave it a cascade and stream, and a conduit supplied the garden with water from the fish-pool above the cascade. To heighten the illusion, the vegetation of the Azores had been acclimatized in the garden. The glen was rich in brilliant sub-tropical exotics.

The night that the Pretender went from Balranald to dine with the Gordons, Inez had taken possession of him as she did at Victoria Beach, had "yarned" with him, and shown him all over the house and gardens in her gladness to see him. After that, she saw comparatively little of him, except at dances. Circumstances were throwing her into the society of Bob Stevens, who delayed and delayed about returning to his stations in the Northern Territory. His telegrams from his manager were

satisfactory, and he was so much in love with Inez that he always stopped to make hay when the sun shone from that direction.

Bob had intuition. Unlike Sandy Gunn, he perceived that the way to handle Inez was not to pursue her, but to wait for her. At The Beach, while she was absorbed in the Pretender, he did some sea-fishing and bathing, for the sake of the ozone he needed, since he lived in the tropics, but he enjoyed spending the rest of the day at billiards and cards and in the society of Connie, whom he might have liked almost as much as Inez if only she would have lived up to Gordon Club ideals. He was determined that the mother of his children should be a sports-Amazon, so he never contemplated marriage with her. His chance came when the Pretender went up to Melbourne in February to begin work. Inez was lost without him and looked round for someone she liked to play games with. There was Sandy, but he was too strong for her. Living with a mother who did most of the management of the station herself, he did as little work as he liked, and really devoted his life to games and sport. Having splendid nerve and physique, he excelled in most of them. He might have been tennis-champion if he had lived in Melbourne, and had a succession of first-class opponents to improve his game. Also Sandy, if she saw too much of him, was likely, in his present jealous condition, to pester her to marry him. Bob was as anxious as he was—or more anxious—but he had more sense and less proficiency, so Inez gave him the call. He had been very good at games when he lived in Victoria, but he did not get the practice in the Northern Territory, so he did not overwhelm her at tennis, which is not so handicapable as golf. Tennis was what Inez wanted now—the Loam Courts' Ladies' Championship at Melbourne took place on the first of May, and she had a good chance of winning it. She and Bob played their four sets daily, as soon as the heat began to pass, and then had a bathe before dinner. Bob took the Pretender's place beside the Gordons at dinner, and at the Casino afterwards was once more the favoured cavalier, for everything but dancing. She made herself pleasant to Sandy also. Dividing her favours prevented Bob from hoping too much. But since she would not play games with him, or waltz more than once in the evening with such a bad dancer, Sandy drifted back to The Lake. He could not quarrel with an old friend like Bob.

The Gordons stayed at The Beach until the end of March, instead of returning to the station until it was time for them to go to Melbourne. The summer was a hot one and Mr. Gordon, no longer young, felt the better for generous week-ends at the

seaside. He was not sorry to see Inez going about with Bob, the type of man whom she might marry, if she got over her prejudice, and whom he would have welcomed as a son-in-law. When the Gordons went to Melbourne, Bob went with them. He had chambers there—his only *pied-à-terre* in Victoria, though he spent some time every year on his brother's station. He had arranged this with Inez, to continue to give her practice for the tennis championship. Whenever the Pretender went out to dinner at Hallhead in April, he found Inez pretty tired and as often as not with Bob in possession.

He was not worried. Chris was his attraction. Inez was less at ease in her mind. Bob, with all his fine qualities, in which generosity and sportiness were prominent, was not such pleasant society as the Pretender. He dressed aggressively well; he could only talk "shop" or sport. He had read practically nothing. Above all, the Pretender, who could give no more account of himself than a charity-child, had an indefinable suggestion of high-breeding which none of her other "pals" possessed. Inez was essentially an aristocrat. Her hostility to him whenever she recollected the mystery, and his lack of introductions, was a proof of that. As Bob had a great respect for this quiet, pleasant-mannered new chum, who had shown himself such a master of self-defence, and was a sterling, if not distinguished performer at games, Inez was sometimes able to draw the Pretender into what they happened to be doing. It did not happen often, because, to do things *tête-à-tête* was an instinct with her, and the Pretender had an instinct against intrusion. Any time spent with them was due to the demands of courtesy.

Inez was further disturbed by his intimacy with Connie. He had been her pal until he came to Melbourne, and she disliked having her pals "mopped up," as she contemptuously phrased it, by other women. That the Pretender had been "mopped up" she could not doubt. She knew that he had been staying at Balranald and going about with Connie as if he was engaged to her. He might not be engaged to her; the heiress was often reported engaged. But Inez understood Connie better than Connie understood her, and knew that Stuart could not see much of her without considerable intimacy accruing. She only discredited the worst stories because she had personal reasons to know the restraint which the Pretender put upon himself, as a consequence of having no introductions. If the best of her other pals, say Bob, was given the opportunities which he had with Connie, the stories she was told about him would be told about them, and would be true. It made her mad to think of her pal

being exposed to the wiles of Connie night after night, while Mr. Claridge was having his after-dinner nap. Their being seen together at various Tivolis was a bad sign. Tudor Lewis had reported it to her, with much wit and innuendo.

She did not visit her indignation upon the Pretender, or seek Connie; she revenged herself by being amiable to Bob, and the cure might have worked if there had been no Chris. But for Chris, the Pretender would have felt hurt at the change in her demeanour. When he left her at The Beach, she had, minus the engagement, made nearly as much of him as Connie had at Balranald.

So time sped, until the fateful first of May, when Inez won the Ladies' Loam Court Tennis Championship of Australia, and as a consequence, saw more of Bob than ever. She attributed her victory to the unremitting practice he had afforded her, and she constituted him her escort at the round of tennis-parties which her friends got up in her honour, in their own gardens or out at Sandringham.

Just after she had won the championship the Pretender yielded to Mrs. Gordon's hospitable solicitations, and went to spend a week at Hallhead. It suited him rather well, because Pat Gordon dined at home now that the family were back and he remained at the works, studying, so late that to stay at Hallhead was the best chance of talking business. He was more than ever thankful that his engagement was broken off. For Pat liked to have Chris with them when he was describing the progress they were making at the works, where new machinery had to be erected for working out the Daedalus principle. Pat may have divined the liking and shyness which his sister inspired in his friend, or he may have had secret wishes. His enthusiasm for the Pretender was unbounded. Chris was beginning to share it.

Since the office, like most Australian offices in 2000 A.D., closed at four, and the aerial monorail took him to the station near the house in a few minutes, the Pretender got back to Hallhead early. It was now Chris who was waiting to give him tea and entertain him when he returned. Inez did not come in from her tennis parties until it was time to dress for dinner. In the winter, since the light was short and most of the men were in business, it was the custom of the young men and maidens to postpone their tea until it was too dark to play, and then dawdle over it for an hour.

Inez's success gave the Pretender a fresh wave of admiration for her; it not only showed what a super-woman she was at sport, but brought out a new charm in her character; she was modest

about her championship. The Pretender thrilled with pride to think how much of her society this gallant creature had given him down at The Beach, to think how often he had played with her at tennis, though not quite up to her form. When they met at dances, where Bob was restricted by his inefficiency, Inez lavished her friendship on the Pretender. She may have had an eye on Connie, who went to the same parties, but the Pretender had too big a nature for the idea to occur to him. All that he read in her warmth was regret that her ardour for the tennis-championship had prevented her meeting him as they used to meet at The Beach, and a wish to make up for lost time in maintaining their friendship. Finding him so sympathetic about it, Inez was sympathetic herself, but there were Chris and Connie to be considered now. So the dancing could not restore the camaraderie of Victoria Beach. When she was actually enjoying his perfect dancing, her pleasure in his society was as marked as ever, but she sat out with Bob, not because she found it as interesting, but to express her favour.

Connie, with whom he danced as much—she was his greatest woman friend in Australia—was frankly puzzled by his relations with Inez. It was not that at the moment he was seeing more of Chris than her. This often happened, when Inez drove admirers to despair, for being with Chris kept them more or less in touch with Inez, and her sympathetic nature prompted her to bind up the wounds which Inez dealt. But he did not look wounded, and Inez did not look as if she was trying to wound him, a process in which she was generally quite obvious.

Had the fact that he was as unready for marriage as herself robbed the affair, which seemed to be going so nicely at The Beach, of its interest? Inez was contrary enough for anything when you once got her outside the domain of sport. In any sport she was single-visioned; she thought of nothing but improving her game and showed all her charm to a sportsmanlike opponent who taxed her skill—she seldom played with women, except when forced to—for tournaments or medals. Of one thing Connie felt certain—that Inez would come round, because the Pretender was the type of man to appeal to her. She was more than half in love with him herself.

Chris, who had no more thought of getting married than Inez, she did not regard in the matter. That the Pretender was enjoying himself in her sympathetic society she did not doubt. Men always did—Chris was the type of the good listener; she let the other person supply the personality; such a disposition is almost the best gift that a beautiful woman can have, because to such

women men love suggesting—a proposal of marriage itself is only the super-suggestion. Nobody could accede more delightfully than Chris. She could have had more suitors than her superb sister if they had allowed themselves to be courted. She had not the Amazon's objection; she thought that marriage was the crown of life. It was early marriage that she dreaded—perhaps because her mother had not married until she was thirty and had been so ideally happy. Most of the young wives she knew were only happy-go-lucky. With the Pretender Chris had the welcome feeling of not having to be on her guard. For she knew how afraid he was of her.

Chris's first idea of entertaining him, as long as the light lasted, was tennis, because he had played so much with Inez at The Beach, but after two days they gave themselves up to the beauties of the old sub-tropical garden, which, being partly made out of a quarry whence the blue stone used for mending the Melbourne roads had come in the early days, was wonderfully picturesque. Chris delighted in one of the fascinations of Australian gardening—the acclimatization of plants from the islands of Oceanica and Japan. These being largely rock plants, the old quarry and the rockeries formed from it gave great opportunities, and Chris showed much taste and skill in availing herself of them. It was, therefore, an immense pleasure to have a man of taste like the Pretender as a witness of her exploits. "My grandfather had a famous rock-garden," he said one day, forgetting his reticence about his family.—"Where?" asked Chris, not for curiosity, but from politeness.—"In the west," he said guardedly. "We have hardly any rocks in the east of England."

To the Pretender it was a delight to see these wonderful rock-gardens, especially the Japanese garden, for which they kept a skilled landscape gardener from Japan, named Ikegami. This was Chris's. Her father had had it created for her after the visit to Japan which he and she had made two years before, when he was recovering from a severe illness. The "lake" was studded with rock-islands, on which lanterns, pagodas, and *torii* were erected; the cascade emptied it into a little river, crossed by numerous rainbow-arched bridges, and the shores of lake and river were abandoned to the marvels of Japanese gardening. The Pretender was never weary of having its minutiae pointed out by Chris. They got to know each other very well while they were exhausting its beauties. There is nothing which brings people so close as a common hobby, and both had been in Japan.

Now that the Pretender had lost his shyness with Chris, and

had the favour of Inez, if he did not enjoy much of her society, the whole family seemed to be drawing closer, when a disagreeable incident happened. At a tennis-party given at Mrs. Headley's on the Saturday afternoon that he was staying out at Hallhead—Mr. Headley was the manager of the Union Bank—he met an Englishman, of about his own age, who was passing through. Inez heard his friend say something like: "Hullo, Winsor! What are you doing out here?"—"Seeing how I like the country. I've pretty well made up my mind to stay."

They talked for a few minutes cordially, until Miss Headley came up and said, "Won't you come and have some tea, Mr. Belcher?" As she came away from the tea-table, Inez, whose suspicions had been started afresh in an aggravated form, said to her, "What a nice man you've just been talking to."—"He's an Englishman named Belcher, who presented a business letter of introduction to father. Father liked him and asked him out. He's going on to Sydney by the night Zep."—"Does he know anybody here?" asked Inez.—"No, poor beggar."—"Introduce him to me, if you like—I've just done a sett and should like a rest."—"I'll bring him up to give you some tea."—"All right." Inez had just had a very large tea, but that was of no consequence, and the Englishman was naturally pleased at being introduced to the Beauty.

When he brought her tea, saying that she had just been playing and wanted to sit down, she led the way to a couple of chairs under a large wattle away from the crowd. "You know Mr. Winsor, don't you?" she began, hazarding the name which she thought she had caught.—"Well: we were at Loretto together."—"He's staying with us."—"He's an awfully nice chap—we used to call him Banjo because he knew such a lot of coon-songs."

"Do you know his people?"—"I don't know anything about them—boys at Public Schools never know anything about each other's people, unless they happen to be friends at home, or have spent the holidays together."—"How funny! It's just the reverse here."—"Perhaps there are more of them who know each other at home?"—"There might be—most decent people in Melbourne know each other by sight, at any rate, and if they didn't, the boys would ask questions."—"We never ask questions at our Public Schools, but you might hear of it from the masters if a new boy was son of the Prime Minister, or anything of that kind."—"Our friend, Mr. Winsor, wasn't anything of that kind?"—"He was one of the ruck, who scraped into the last place in 'the fifteen' in his last term. The only

other thing I can tell you about him is that he was very popular, because he never played for his own hand in anything. That's what the Public Schoolboy regards as the sign of a gentleman more than anything else."

This was not what Inez wished to hear, so presently she made the excuse that she was wanted for another sett. One thing she had learnt. She seemed to have caught his name right, and it was not Stuart. The bee was buzzing furiously in her brain. She made her mother ask him to stay on for another week or two in the hopes that she might discover some clues. There was no risk about it, with such an excellent character as Mr. Belcher gave him.

The first clue she found was on going into the pantry when one of the maids was cleaning the silver tops belonging to the Pretender's dressing-bag. She took them up and examined them, with a curious look on her face, for the monogram on them was no combination of C.E.S., but simply a C. on a W. She compared this with the fact that the bag itself, instead of having his initials stamped on it, bore a brass plate on its side. Might not this be to cover up initials already on the bag? Now that her suspicions were aroused, she noticed that same C. on W. on his silver match-box and on the gold band round his fountain-pen. The first time she had the opportunity of borrowing his matchbox to light a cigarette, she asked: "Why have you got 'C.W.' on your belongings?"—"They are the initials of the person these things used to belong to," he answered, after a moment's hesitation, not lost on her, though she could say no more. She kept a sharp look-out for other clues, but the only one she discovered before he returned to his chambers was "C.W." on a silk handkerchief he was using.

The chief upshot of her Sherlock Holmes operations was to give him the opportunity of devoting himself more to Chris, at the moment when she was stranded by the departure of Bob to the North. While she was following up her clues, she could not, with any regard for her Gordonian ethics—she was President of the Union of Women's Gordon Clubs—cultivate his friendship. He believed her to be gracefully making way because she had divined his preference for Chris, and spent the time in helping Chris to lay out a water-garden like the Roehampton Club's, which she planned from his descriptions, and meant to have ready for planting in the spring. He sketched well, and drew a charming picture of the original for her and Ikegami to work from. He helped in the spade and stone work himself and was simpler than a labourer would have been about it. When the big job of

excavating so many cubic yards of earth to make the sunken square was finished, they required no labour except that of a mason for laying the stonework solidly.

The work served to emphasize to Chris various charming points about him—his imaginativeness in seeing what a scope for a water-garden the glen of Hallhead presented; his handiness and taste in showing how the result was to be achieved; his industry and simplicity, his absence of self-satisfaction. He gave her all the credit. She used a woman's brief and comprehensive expression for it all by telling her mother that he was a dear. She referred to his way of work. She was aware, and her mother was aware, that her appreciation was not confined to this. Chris Gordon was proud of belonging to Australia's most honoured family, the House of the National Poet, which incidentally traced its descent in official pedigrees, through the ducal Gordons, from Adam O'Gordon himself, but she—and all the family, except Inez and her cousins, the Gordon Gunns—were too simple for the Old Colonial School swank, inculcated by the Gordon Clubs, which made many Australians, especially Victorians, as arrogant as the *Samurai* of Japan. It would be a relief to her to marry someone "from home," born outside the whole Gordon business. Had she contemplated the Pretender as a husband? She may have noticed that he was of the urbane type whom it would be pleasant to go through life with—nothing more.

CHAPTER XV

HOW INEZ UNMASKED THE PRETENDER

INEZ had the decency to restrain her curiosity until his visit was concluded. On the Monday that he went back she telephoned to ask him if he could see her alone in his chambers on the earliest day that would suit him. "Why not to-day?"—"To-day, then, at four o'clock." When she arrived she refused tea. "I've come to see you," she said, "because I have proofs that you've been passing here under a name that is not your own."—"Excuse me, that's not so."—"I happen to know that it is." She had the sense to hold back the evidence of his initials until she had confronted him with the testimony of his old schoolfellow. "I heard Mr. Belcher, the man who was at Loretto with you, call you some name that sounded like Winsor, but, at any rate, was nothing like Stuart."—"The fact remains that my name is Stuart."

"It's up to you to explain."—"Well, what have you to say to this?" he asked, unlocking a dispatch-box and taking a passport of the pattern introduced after the war, made of leather, pocket-size, and containing the portrait of the grantee. It was made out in favour of "Charles Edward Stuart, no occupation," signed in the ordinary way by the Foreign Secretary, countersigned by two persons who testified to personal knowledge of the grantee, one of whom was described as Lord Chamberlain.

"Will you swear to me that you have never been known by any other name?"—"I shall swear nothing. You've no right to ask me."

"If you won't answer it, I don't think that you've any right to visit our house."—"My dear Miss Gordon, you will relieve me of a painful duty if you will go to your father and mother, repeat your discovery to them and tell them exactly how I replied to your questions. I shall be happy to show your father my passport."—"Will you . . . ?"—"And if you promise to do this to-night, and send me a note by Pat to say that you've done it, from the moment that I receive your note, I will not set foot in your house until either your father or mother invite me to do so." She promised—not without reluctance. She was conscious of a surviving affection for him, though she still felt it to be her duty as far as she could to hound him out of Melbourne society. Her parents were likely to be chivalrous; they might regard the whole matter as a mare's nest. When she held out her hand to say good-bye, he refused it. "You might regret it. I cannot regard you as a friend."

She did not go straight home; she drove first to the Claridges. After Pat, Connie was the person in Melbourne who knew him best. She asked her if she suspected anything. "I don't go about suspecting people if I like them. I don't care who they are. If I don't like them, I don't bore myself by seeing them." She did not mean to tell Inez that he had confessed that there was a mystery about himself which would have to be cleared up before he consented to be engaged to her. She liked the Pretender; shew as jealous of Inez; she jibbed at betraying a man she had kissed. It was too like Judas.

The next morning Pat brought the Pretender a note. He knew its contents and damned about them. It announced that Inez had spoken to her parents and had the honesty to admit that they had laughed at her, but added that she was not convinced and meant to warn her friends, unless he explained.

After lunch at the Club, Mr. Gordon mentioned what Inez had told them, and said that he must come to the house as if nothing

had happened. "I don't think I ought to. There is something which I am withholding. I can tell you that I'm sure you would approve of it, if I could take you into my confidence, but I cannot, so I'd better keep away."—"I won't hear of it, Stuart. We are all of us—I think even Inez, in her way, attached to you."—"I'd rather."—"Since you are in business with Pat, it would create a wrong impression if you absented yourself altogether. If you do not, after Inez's behaviour, feel inclined to come so often, we cannot complain, but we should like you to come as if nothing had happened."—"I think I'd rather not enter your doors at present; we can talk as much as usual at the Club?"—"As you wish, but I'm very cross with Inez," said her father. "I shall want to see more than ever of you at the Club."

Inez's craze did its work. People did not go to the length of excluding him from their dances and tennis-parties—in 2001 A.D. it was recognized that winter was the proper season for tennis-parties in Australia, since most large houses had loam-courts as well as grass-courts. But he was distinctly avoided by many girls, acting, no doubt, under maternal orders. Amy Vibart, when he asked her for a dance at the Hunt Club ball, said her programme was full; and when Tudor Lewis asked her for one directly afterwards, gave him two. Amy was a good dancer, and Tudor Lewis an execrably bad one. The moral was not difficult to draw. Men did not feel the same about it. Finding him "an awfully good chap," in whatever way they tested him, and knowing from Pat Gordon that his financial position was sound, they did not care whether his name was Stuart or not. There were various reasons why a man might want to cover his tracks.

The two people most annoyed were Inez's brothers. The handsome Pat, missing their after-dinner talks out at Hallhead, took to dining with his friend regularly at the Club when neither of them was engaged elsewhere. They were host and guest alternately. Adam, a most even-tempered person, was furious, because the Pretender had promised to pay him short visits in the winter to hunt with the Esslemont Harriers, and now felt bound by his promise to Inez to write that he could not come. He did not say why; he inferred that they were too busy at the office. But Adam had the whole story from Pat over the telephone. He wrote to say that Pat had told him everything and begged that this might make no difference to the intended visit; but the Pretender felt his honour involved and was obdurate. His will had to prevail, though Adam was

more insistent when he knew the true cause of his refusal, because he wished to make the visit a declaration of his sympathies.

The warning started by Inez was not countenanced by all the Gordons' set. Some of them preferred to follow the strong lead which Connie Claridge gave. Directly she heard that he had left off going to Hallhead, she wrote :

"MY DEAR PRETENDER,

"I've just heard about Inez's crazy goings-on. Father doesn't know whether to be derisive or disgusted. He says, anyhow, will you pack up your traps and come at once to spend another month here, to show people what tomfoolery we think it ?

"With warmest regards from us both,

"I remain,

"Your affectionate

"CONNIE.

"Do come to please me."

The Pretender did not write a reply to the note, which he received at the Club by the evening post. Connie timed the letter to get there when she knew that he was likely to be in. As it was so near Balranald, she thought that he might answer it in person—at any rate, it would be more likely than if he received the letter at his distant chambers. She was nearly right. He went for his hat and coat and was about to step out of the Club when he fancied that he would be more in command of his actions at the end of a telephone, than if he was in the drawing-room at the mercy of her affection. He went to the telephone in the library, which was much more private and seldom used, and called up Balranald.

When the hullo came, he asked, "Is Miss Claridge at home ?"—"Speaking," said the voice. "Who is that ?"—"It's me, the Pretender, Connie. How are you ?"—"Very well, of course. Have you got my note ?"—"Yes."—"And you're coming ?"—"No, I'm not, thanks awfully, all the same."—"Why not ?"—"I think it might vex Mr. Gordon."—"And Chris !"—"And Chris—and the rest—even the bellicose Inez."—"She doesn't deserve any consideration."—"I don't think she does. But the rest do, and they've begged me to take no notice of it, but to go on exactly as before."—"Which, of course, you can't do. Inez must learn that if she plays with fire, she'll burn her fingers, and the best way of teaching her is for you to come and stay with us."—"That

may be, but it wouldn't do, Connie."—"I want so desperately to show that we are loyal to you."—"It does not want any showing—I know it."—"I know you know it, but I want to show other people."—"They'll see, if you give me as many dances when you meet me at balls."

"Pretender, don't stand talking to me over a wire. Let me remind you that there is a monorail station almost opposite the Club and that the next station is about thirty yards from our house. Jump into the train at once and come and hear your fate."—"Hold the line a second." She wondered why, and concluded that someone was speaking to him. He wanted time for reflection. He came to the conclusion that the telephone was not a good medium, after all ; politeness would not allow him to break off if he got into a tight corner. It would be safer to confront the lioness in her den ; it would give him time to decide a line of conduct while *en route*. "Hullo ! Are you there ?" he called, as if his interruption had just ceased. "Yes."—"I'll come right away." He thought hard in the ten minutes he had between door and door.

"Miss Connie's expecting you, sir," said Jane.—"Is Mr. Claridge still asleep ?"—"Yes, sir. Will you walk up ?" Jane gave no sign of showing him the way.—"Confound you, Jane !" he said, under his breath. Even Jane would have been a chaperon. He was afraid that Connie would expect him to kiss her. But Connie was too shrewd to do anything to scare him on the threshold. She contented herself with looking very pretty and very sympathetic and giving him both hands.

"Pretender," she said, when the greeting was over, "how much are you going to allow me to do for you ?"—"What do you mean, Connie ?"—"We'll give a dinner-party and ask the wives of your chief pals at the Club to meet you."—"Oh, please not !"—"Why not ?"—"Well, for one thing, it would focus their attention on what I want to keep from their notice."—"How do you mean ?"—"That, as Inez forced me to tell her, my name was not always Stuart, though it is now. I changed it, and I have my own reasons for not yet wishing to say why. There's just a chance that the whole thing might settle itself some day. Until it does, wild horses will not drag my secret from me—nor will one of the prettiest and nicest women I ever met, Connie."

"Do you mean me, Pretender ? I don't want to know if you don't want to tell me. I'm quite able to fall in love with a man under an alias."—"You'll distress me very much if you do it with me."—"Yes, I'm afraid I shall."—He blushed,

as she did not think a man with so high a colour could blush. "Well, what will you let me do, old thing?" said Connie, laying her hand on his arm in her impulsive way.—"I won't let you do anything. It's a question of how much I'm justified in doing."—"I don't follow you?"—"Well, Connie . . ."—"Connie, dear."—"Well, *Connie, dear*, I recognize the purpose of your generous note, and my necessity clearly, and I'm not going to be such a churl or fool as to refuse your assistance."

"Cut a long story short, Pretender, and hear your sentence."—"Very well," he said, laughing. "I'll see if I can obey it."—"You've got to do exactly as you used to do before the Gordons came back to town. You've got to be my escort out to parties, and to dine with us three or four times a week."—He looked distressed, "I can't do that, Connie."—"But why? It's nothing for a girl to be taken to parties by a man to whom she has been engaged, and would be engaged still if he hadn't been so ridiculous! Besides, you used to do it."

"Things have changed since then. I wonder if I can tell you something, under a strict pledge of secrecy?"—"Of course you can, dear. I want to be the biggest friend you have."—"Well . . . I'm in love."—"In love? *Who* with?"—"Chris."—"Then you've more sense than I gave you credit for. Any woman would know that Chris is the one to marry. As a wife she'd be worth a dozen of Inez or me."—"You're not very flattering to yourself."—"You've taken the conceit out of me, Pretender. But are you going to propose? Does what you have confessed to Inez remove your scruples?"—"Oh, dear no! I shan't let her know."—"Let her know!" repeated Connie, with withering scorn. "Women don't have to be told these things! They 'sense' them."—"I hope to goodness not, or I shall never be able to go to Hallhead again."

"In that case you'd have to console yourself with me—I mean, with my friendship. I not only have faith, but force you to accept it. I say, Pretender . . ."—"What?"—"I'm sure that Chris's faith would be just as robust as mine, if you would only give her the chance."—"I should never inflict it on anyone—you seized it. *And* I am not going near Hallhead again until . . ."—"Until you have more sense."

So it was Chris, was it? That altered the state of things entirely. If it had been Inez, she would have done her best to marry the Pretender to spite her. But for Chris, she must do her best to patch things up. She remembered a rumour that Inez had done it because he had been paying attention to Chris

This she did not believe for one moment. That would be against Inez Gordon's ethics, even if she were a marrying woman, and Connie knew that she was not. She also knew all about the bee which was buzzing so loudly. For the present, the most important thing for Chris and the Pretender was to prevent him from drifting outside their set and getting cut off. Nothing was likelier. His popularity as a speaker at clubs had made him a public personage. Everybody felt that they knew him; more and more of the people whom he met at dinners and literary functions would ask him to their homes. There was a wealthy set, excluded from the Melbourne Club, which would be only too glad to absorb him. They would not care what his antecedents were—they would know that he was all right in business, and they would be making him a friend for personal reasons. If the Gordons' set neglected him, he would certainly be commandeered. She would not allow it. She would attach him to her car, not to the damage of Chris, but in order to range her friends behind him.

"Pretender," she began, "before you hear my plans you've got to realize that I'm playing for Chris, not for myself. Incidentally, I shall want you to be very sweet to me and spoil me a lot, but I'm keeping it perfectly clear before me that you're in love with Chris—lucky girl!—and everything which I do will be for the purpose of bringing and keeping you together, until . . ."—"Until what, you dear person?"—"Until you see what nonsense it is to allow this piffling little Rubicon to flow between you."—"It will be a long time before I cross the Rubicon."

"I'm afraid it will. In the interval, allow me to assume direction. The first rule I lay down is that you've got to do exactly what you used to do before the Gordons came back to town—be my escort to parties and dine here whenever you have no other engagement."—"I shall love to do it, since you understand how I feel to Chris, and realize how Inez has cornered me. I don't mind confessing to you—a man can make a confession to a woman to whom he has been engaged!—that I shall be desperately lonely without Chris and without Hallhead."—"Come here as much as ever you like, and if you'll let me know, I'll do my best to be in to cheer you. In the evenings, you'll be safe, for if I am going anywhere, you'll be taking me, and if you're not taking me anywhere, you'll know that I shall be at home."

"You are a ripper, Connie!" he said. "I should like something to happen which by a chapter of accidents might happen, that I might show my gratitude to you!"—"You mean

that you have an off-chance of something big?"—"Exactly, but promise me never to allude to it; it slipped out."—"I'll swear I won't. I'm glad you didn't mention it before, or my offer would have looked like cupboard love."—"Good-night, Connie."—"Good-night, old thing. Take care of yourself."

* * * * *

Next morning about ten she had a telephone from Tudor Lewis, to know if he might take a cup of tea with her. She smiled before she 'phoned her assent. She thought she knew what was coming; she was not wrong. He could hardly say "How do you do?" he was so anxious to give her the news. "It's come out about that feller Stuart at last!"—"Come out? What's come out?"—"What I tell you—that this man, whom you have been receiving in your drawing-room . . ."—"Take care!" Her eyes were burning ominously.—"In your house as Charles Edward Stuart is living under an assumed name."

"Really, Mr. Lewis, it is very painful to me to hear this kind of thing said about a friend whom I value so much. Unless you can give me very strong proofs of what you say, I must decline to believe it. I would rather not hear anything about it. If there is anything which you think it necessary for me to know, you must write it? Not another word about it now, please."—"But . . ."—"I mean what I say. If you utter another word about it, I shall ring for Jane to take my tea into another room." He could hardly believe his ears, but he realized that Connie was in earnest, and brought his visit to a hurried close. His car was waiting. He damned all the way back to his office. She must be in love, or she never would dare to treat him in such a way. She should pay for it. He would not spare her. He would write her such a letter that she could never allow Stuart in the house again.

Full of his grievance, he sat down and wrote an aggravated version of what Inez had told her friends.

"Dandenong Chambers, Elizabeth Street, Melbourne.

"June —th, 2001.

"DEAR MISS CLARIDGE,

"As I tried to tell you, your fine friend C. E. Stuart has been living under an assumed name all the time he has been in Australia. When confronted with the fact by Miss Inez Gordon, your cousin, he made no attempt to deny it. The discovery was made through an old school-fellow named Belcher, who addressed him by his own name at a party at the Headleys'

in the presence of Miss Gordon. She obtained an introduction to Mr. Belcher. What he told her confirmed the suspicions which she has for some time nursed.

"You see the sort of man this Stuart is. I write you the facts at your own suggestion. You will now, I trust, repent of having been so abrupt with me this afternoon.

"Yours sincerely,

"OWEN TUDOR LEWIS."

To which Connie replied:

"Balranald, East Melbourne.

"June —th, 2001.

"DEAR MR. LEWIS,

"I am glad I refused to listen to you. I happen to know the 'real facts,' with which Miss Gordon will doubtless acquaint you. Let me inform you that you have been the victim of a woman's wit. I forced you to write your charge against Mr. Stuart because I wished to stop your intrigues against my friend. The possession of written evidence helps me considerably. Let me further inform you that Mr. Stuart's passport proves beyond dispute that his name is Stuart.

"I have deposited your letter with my bankers, in a sealed envelope. If Mr. Stuart brings an action against you for libel, it will be at his disposal. I should fancy, however, that he is too gentlemanly to be vindictive. Meanwhile, let me counsel you to be careful about spreading the libel. You are dealing with a determined man. This day week I shall repeat all you have said to him, and if by then, after consulting with Miss Gordon, you write me a letter withdrawing what you have said, and apologizing for it, I will hand the apology to him, which will doubtless mitigate damages should he bring the matter into court.

"Yours faithfully,

"CONSUELO CLARIDGE."

When he received this, Tudor Lewis was greatly disconcerted. It did not help matters that he was right in his assumption that Connie was very fond of Stuart; it turned her into a dangerous enemy. He was not beaten yet, however; he had only Connie's word for it, and she might have been as inaccurately informed as himself. Inez Gordon might throw quite a different light on it. Before he succumbed he must see her. He wrote her a careful letter, stating that he wished to see her. She replied with a laconic postcard: "Here 3 p.m. the day after to-morrow. I.G."

When he was shown in, he had a further shock. Mr. Gordon was with Inez, who was suffering from a fit of repentance, and had taken her father into her confidence, an almost unprecedented step. Tudor Lewis, however, was not a man to quail before anyone; they received him civilly. Seeing that Mr. Gordon was there, he was business-like, and addressing him, said: "I am threatened with a libel-action for repeating the warning which Miss Gordon felt compelled to issue to her friends, about Mr. C. E. Stuart. I must, of course, quote my authority."—"What are the words complained of, Mr. Lewis?" asked the squatter. Tudor Lewis repeated the statement attributed to Inez.

"What have you to say to this, Inez?" asked her father.—"I can show you the letter I sent, father. I mime'd it on the electro-style, and have one that I did not send."—"Go and fetch it, please, dear."

When she returned her father held out his hand for it. "Have I your permission to read it aloud, Inez?"—"Yes, father."—Mr. Gordon read out:

"Dear —,
 "You know my opinions about the damage done to the dignity of Australia by our not exercising more care over the introductions of people out from home, whom we entertain and ask to stay with us. I am sorry to tell you that we have transgressed ourselves. 'Mr. Stuart,' whom we introduced to you, was not known by this name in England. An old schoolfellow of his, passing through Melbourne lately, addressed him by another name, and apparently did not know him as Stuart. I taxed 'Mr. Stuart' with it. He has admitted having changed his name, but refused any explanation, beyond showing me his passport, which was issued to him as Charles Edward Stuart, and contains his portrait. I have had my suspicions ever since he arrived. Unlike most new chums, he would tell us nothing of his people at home—even when I asked him about them. But I did not feel justified in mentioning what I feared to other people, until I had direct evidence. Now that I have the evidence, I have a duty to fulfil.

"Yours —,
 "INEZ GORDON."

"I see nothing in this to justify your statement that my daughter has informed people that Mr. Stuart is passing under an assumed name. Mr. Stuart admits having changed his name in the way prescribed by law, as you or I or anyone else could

change ours, but that is a very different thing from passing under an assumed name, as you must know. I am convinced that my daughter does not wish in any way to reflect upon his honourableness."—"I would sooner trust him than any man I know, outside of my own family," said Inez, blushing scarlet.—"It's a pity you didn't say so in this precious letter!" said her father, dryly—"It did not occur to me," replied Inez, in a tone whose import baffled Tudor Lewis.

"I will have the portions of my daughter's letter which govern yours transcribed and sent to you, Mr. Lewis," said the squatter. He could not be other than polite, however much he disliked a man. Inez merely bowed when Tudor Lewis said good-bye. Mr. Gordon shook hands with him ordinarily. He was willing to give him the benefit of the doubt, since he had not seen Inez's letter and might have supposed that he was repeating the substance of the announcement she was promulgating.

When he had gone, he said, "You really mustn't do this kind of thing, Inez. Remember there are two ways of looking at it—some people might label it duty, others might label it slander—I myself should be disposed to sympathize with them. Mr. Lewis, if you had written about him, would have labelled it libel, and spent his last shilling in trying to make you rue it. I don't think that he would have succeeded. I think you've just kept outside the law in warning your friends against Stuart. But it was more luck than judgment and I entreat you not to do it again."—"I'm not likely to, father. I regret having done this to the Pretender more than I'm going to admit. It's only helping his enemies—not my friends, as I intended. I hate that bounder Lewis!"—"I daresay he thought that he was currying favour with you by doing it. You can't prophesy how a thing will strike people."—"No, you jolly well can't!" said Inez, as he stooped his six foot six to receive her kiss of penitence. Inez, with all her unmanageableness, adored her parents.

CHAPTER XVI

HOW CHRIS CAME BACK

THE first time that the Pretender met Inez Gordon at a party after her visit to him, she greeted him pleasantly, and later on came up to him, to say: "I'm in dreadful hot water at home for driving you away from the house."

Did she mean it for an apology? Chris he had not seen at any of the parties. He wondered why. It worried him. But

about three weeks later, when he had finished a sett of tennis at a big party at the John Watkins', he found Chris waiting for him as he came off the court. People were left in no doubt as to Chris Gordon's attitude. Her eyes shone with welcome. She was blushing, as Chris always did when she was excited. She explained as they went off to tea together that she had felt so angry with Inez that she had been back to Esslemont with her father. "Then you know what Inez said to me?"—"Yes. She told father before us all."—"And didn't you believe her, Miss Chris?"—"It wasn't a case of believing. I was ashamed that she had been prying into your private affairs."—"But supposing that what she said was true?"—"Oh, well, we know you as the Pretender, so we ought to be glad that you really are a Pretender. But I'm sure that you aren't."—"Perhaps I am. But I don't care, so long as you and your parents and your brothers have faith in me."

They remained together, sitting under that wattle, in full view of everyone all the afternoon. Some thought her most unwise, in view of what her sister had discovered. Others, who prided themselves on their sagacity, thought that jealousy of his attentions to Chris might have set Inez's bee buzzing. "When are you coming to see us again, Pretender?" she asked, as they were saying good-bye. "I told your father that I thought I had better not come."

It was an unsatisfactory winter for Chris, when it had bidden fair to be so delightful, until Inez's suspicions introduced a blight. But for this, the Pretender's enjoyment also would have been greatly increased, for he would have spent much of his leisure with the friends who had been so kind to him. But there was this great difference. He loomed large in Chris's plans for the winter, but had not allowed himself to think of her as an element in his. To have his visits to the Gordons cut off was not altogether a disadvantage; it made him able to spend more time at the Club and the Claridges', and to accept the invitations which poured in from all sides. The rumour of his passing under an assumed name affected no-one outside the Gordons' set; other people sought his acquaintance because he was such a brilliant speaker, and did not care whether his name was really Stuart or Snooks. The fact that he had been taken up by the Gordons and introduced to their friends without any guarantee that he was respectable, or even honest, signified nothing in face of the fact that (with Mr. Gordon as his proposer and Mr. Claridge as his seconder) he had been elected a member of the exclusive Melbourne Club and was universally popular there. The two great Western

District squatters, men of vast estate, whose fathers and grand-fathers had held their stations before them, had not only been his sponsors, but saw a great deal of him when they were in the Club.

His "good company" and lack of affectation made him popular everywhere. He laid himself out to please everyone, reflecting that people who were dull and disagreeable in themselves might help him in acquiring information about the Australia in which he meant to settle. And he thoroughly enjoyed visiting and playing games with the new friends whom he made. The hospitable Australians were such frank, manly people that they appealed strongly to one so prepared to take men as he found them.

Connie Claridge saw to it that he had invitations for all parties which she accepted. It was clear that she would not appear unless the invitation was sent. And since she was one of the prettiest girls, as well as one of the greatest heiresses, in the Colony, she would be missed. She also saw that he went to the parties, because he had to take her. Otherwise, he would certainly have refused such invitations as he received from her friends, and gone to parties given by people in the other set, because he never met Chris anywhere, and he would have missed her less in the houses of people who did not know her. Yet he enjoyed himself, for Connie gave him as many dances as he allowed himself to take, and the favoured footing on which he stood with her, and his own good dancing, made him a popular partner with other girls. He found Connie a delightful friend, who could give real companionship without forgetting that he was in love with another woman; but he was astonished and distressed at never meeting Chris, though he did not confess it.

Nor did he mention to Pat how he missed Chris, because he was shy of associating himself with her name. But one day Pat mentioned incidentally that she was devoting herself to Lin Gunn, who was paying them a long visit while he was under the care of an oculist. Lin had been in the habit of attaching himself to Chris, as Sandy attached himself to Inez, in their constant meetings at Esslemont and the Lake, and it had been taken for granted in the Western District that when Lin Gunn settled down in marriage, it would be with his lovely cousin. Though he was as good as Sandy in steeplechasing, boxing and other Gordonian exploits, he was nothing like so grim and assertive, and he would do anything for Chris. So it was natural for her to devote herself to him when he had eye troubles, and as natural for him to be fond of her. A silent man, he made no attempt to express his increasing purpose. He merely was more anxious for her society and assumed more proprietary airs. And she, condoling with

him in his affliction, and for years accustomed to solid affection from him, made no remonstrance.

Lin did not care about parties; his sight prevented him from playing tennis, and like many young squatters, he despised dancing. His chief pleasure by day was to get Chris to run him down in the car for a walk by the sea, or to sit with her in the garden, and by night to sit with her in the hall. The oculist's having forbidden him to smoke pressed hardly on him, and incidentally on Chris, as it would have kept him occupied and saved them from having to talk. But, having imbibed the Gordonian philosophy, his feeling was one of deep content, for he was enjoying the society which he sought most, and his affair was progressing. When he had laid sufficient siege with this mild blockade, he might advance to the assault.

* * * * *

One day there was a tennis party at the Claridges'. They seldom gave parties, except their annual ball. Little dinners were their form of hospitality—the only form which Mr. Claridge could enjoy. As Connie was his first cousin and Lin admired her a good deal, Chris induced him to go. It really made little difference to him, since it was in the open air, and he expected to have Chris with him all the time that he was there. Chris did sit with him, watching the tennis, answering when he happened to make a remark; and keeping an eye on his comforts, since his sight was affected. The day was no duller for her than any other day that winter. Many friends exchanged greetings, or stopped for a talk with her. But the Pretender, who had been there from the beginning, had never attempted to come near her, because he thought that she had been staying away from parties to avoid him. He just raised his hat when she passed.

He was out of pride with himself. For Lin's air was proprietary, and Connie had just learned from him how long he had been staying at Hallhead, and mentioned it to the Pretender.

He feasted his eyes from a distance, until Connie, thinking that a little distraction would be good for him, packed him off into the dining-room, which had French windows opening on to the lawn, to give Flora Livingstone—one of the flowers of Melbourne—tea. Tea took some time, because pretty Flora, who had followed Connie's lead from the first, made herself very agreeable.

When they went back, she was snapped up for another sett of tennis. He remained standing where she left him, letting his eyes follow her. Suddenly he heard a well-known voice say, "Aren't you going to talk to me?" and looking up, saw the

beautiful and blushing Chris.—“Do you want me to?” he asked. She had seemed so occupied with Lin Gunn.—“How can you be so unkind as to ask? Of course I do! Take me in to tea now. I don't want any, only we can choose a quiet corner, and so long as we have full cups in our hands nobody will disturb us.”—“I don't mean to be ungracious, but I can't think that you really want me.”—“Oh, Pretender . . .” this was only the second or third time that he remembered her using his nickname. “I have never wanted you so badly before. I'm bored stiff, and I've been wanting you for weeks.” He answered her with a look, which spoke more than any words.

Connie, passing, saw the look on her face and felt rewarded. Bob Stevens had flown down from the North for a few days, and Chris had taken advantage of his coming up to Lin; she had so much to say to the Pretender. Anyone who was watching her would have been astonished to hear that what she was saying nearly all related to a certain water-garden. Her face did not look as if she was talking about gardening. But the point of it, like the point of a woman's letter, came in the postscript. “If you stay away any longer, Pretender, it will be too late to plant the new garden this spring.”—“I'm afraid I must,” he said. “I told your father that I wouldn't enter your doors again until . . .”—“It wouldn't be entering our doors, would it, if you went straight into the garden, especially if you climbed the wall.” Hallhead had a bluestone wall round it.—“White lies!” he answered. “But I'll come to-morrow.”

She stayed with him until Lin came to look for her to take her home. He made himself quite pleasant to the Pretender. He had taken a fancy to him when he was up on the station, and like Bob, he had taken shares in the Daedalus. If he had been watching Chris through that long-drawn-out tea, he might have felt less cordial.

“I don't see Inez,” Bob Stevens had said to Lin.—“She's not here. She isn't taking any from Connie just now,” said their mutual cousin.—“Why, in the name of thunder?”—“Haven't you heard about it?”—“No. What?”—“Well, Inez, who is crazy on the subject of new chums' introductions, discovered that our friend Stuart was not known by that name to a school-friend of his, who was passing through, and demanded an explanation. Naturally he refused it, and she went about apologizing to people for her family having introduced to them a man who was here under an alias. Some took it up and dropped him, but the family are all against her, and Connie is red-hot. She lets him escort her everywhere and won't go anywhere unless he is invited.”

"Is he engaged to her?"—"Not a bit of it! You know how she lets men take her about without giving herself away."—Bob looked at him rather hard, but Lin either knew nothing or his eyes were too bad for him to notice. Bob had once been the favoured cavalier himself, though never so favoured as the Pretender. "Yes, I know," he said, and to change the subject, continued, "How fond Inez Gordon is of kicking the pot over!"

"You're right there!" said Lin. "And the rum part is that she's really fond of him. I've been staying with them for weeks, while my eyes are being treated, and the family gets its head snapped off if it dares to say a word about him. He seems to be her model. I believe she'd break through her rule and marry him if only he'd tell her his secret, upon my Sammy, I do!"—"What the blazes does it matter?" said Bob. "The feller's as good a chap as I've met. If ever he wants bail for ten thousand, he can come to me. He's such a quiet chap, and yet he's got such a lot in him. You must excuse my saying it, Lin, but I'd have given a good bit to see him settling Sandy or Sam Hogger. Wouldn't old Adam Lindsay have smiled!"—"Sandy deserved all he got," said his brother, going off at a tangent. "I should certainly have taken Stuart's part if I'd been there."

"Inez was at the bottom of that, too, wasn't she?"—"In a way. She was having one of her friendships with Stuart—the same sort of thing as Connie is having now. They're good girls, both of them, and there is nothing the least bit wrong in these friendships, but they're confoundedly irritating to a man who happens to be in love with a girl, as Sandy is."—"You're right!" said Bob, with conviction. His cavaliering of Connie would have ripened into a proposal if she had been more athletic: he had come down now because the tennis-friendship which he had enjoyed with Inez for two months before the Championship had left him in love with her. He had, of course, gone straight to Hallhead. Everyone was out, and the brisk parlourmaid, Teresa, who had not been observing the signs of the times, concluded that Inez had gone to Balranald because she had heard Chris tell the chauffeur to take herself and Lin there. Bob had gone back to the N. T. directly after the Ladies' Championship and heard nothing of the Gordons since. Inez was not fond of writing. He was sick when he got to the Claridges and could find no trace of her, but stayed on, because, like all her friends, he was really attached to Connie, and wanted to hear a more enlightening account of his beloved Inez's indiscretion.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RETURN OF THE PRETENDER

"MEET me accidentally to-morrow afternoon," the Pretender had said. "Leave your house exactly at 4.45 and walk down Anzac Avenue towards the monorail station." Precisely at 4.45 p.m. Chris left their gate to buy a penny stamp, as you buy a tube railway-ticket in England, from the machine outside the railway station. Almost exactly halfway she met the Pretender, who, when she told him her errand, said, "I'll give you a stamp."—"No, Pretender, our meeting would not be accidental if you did . . . unless I gave you the penny."—"Well then, give me the penny. I want to be a real Pretender to-day."—"All right; it's your show. As far as I'm concerned, you might ring the bell like a real visitor."

At Hallhead they went in by a side-gate nearer the glen. The new water-garden looked as if it had been planted. There were weeds sprouting in every direction, but there was no water. "Where's the water?" he asked.—"Can't you guess?"—"No."—"Waiting for you," she said simply. "It would never have had any if you hadn't come." He looked at her. She was blushing divinely. "Chris," he said—he had never called her Chris before—"have I been behaving rottenly? I was trying to act up to my lights."—"No—it's the world which has been rotten."

He thought that it was time to say something about letting the water in. "How are you going to do it?" he asked. "With the Australian pump, as Pat suggested."—"What's the difference between an Australian pump and any other?"—"It isn't like a pump at all—it's a sort of an automatic syphon which fits into a two-inch hose. It was invented by a fruit-farmer, to draw the water from the Murray. We shall get our water from the stream."—"Do let me see the Australian pump."—"It's fitted into the hose on that drum there. You've got to leave the pump-end on the edge of the stream, where there will be water enough to cover it well, when you put it in, and roll the drum back to our paved pool and let the rest of the hose run into that. Then you can immerse the business end in the stream. Only don't do it before, or you will flood the whole place out."

He carried out her directions and immediately the water began to flow into the pool with the full capacity of the hose. "And when we've got enough, I suppose I've just got to pull the end

out of the stream?"—"That's all, but we're going to leave it until Pat has time to put in a pump with an iron pipe."—"What's that for?"—"It's against the laws to have standing water in a town. Now that we've stamped out mosquitoes, we intend to keep them out."—"And it can't overflow, because of that waste-hole just below the edge at the lower end, I suppose. Where does that waste-hole lead to?"—"That channel," she answered, indicating it by a glance.—"Channel," he said, looking at a trench no wider than a spade and a few inches deep, scratched in the ground.—"Yes, it will run along that and back into the stream, what is left of it. If you go a little further . . ."—"Irrigating?"—"Yes, dad let on after you'd gone that the reason why he let me have the labour for such a big bit of excavating was that the pool would make a reservoir for irrigating a new orchard—if you go a little bit further on, you will see a lot of arteries branching off the main channel."—"How do you turn the water into them? With a turf?"—"Turfs aren't so common here. We use lumps of fibre like the fenders they have at landing stages." They watched until the pool was full, which did not take many minutes.

"And now to real business," she said. "I want your advice in planting out. I thought we could do it best with these two boxes of garden labels. There's a gross in each. We'll use the plain ones for size, and the striped ones for colour. I know the plants we have available, the conditions they require, their size and their colour. What you have to do is to stick a label of each sort into each pocket of the stonework. On one you will write pale or dark blue, lavender, salmon-pink, or any colour which works in with your scheme there, and such remarks as pale or dark foliage; on the other, dwarf, one foot high, tall, slender, creeping, bushy—any directions you have to write about the size and shape of the shrub or flower. Having this to guide me, I will carry out your scheme with my materials. Where you have a fancy for a particular flower, take another plain label and write on it century plant, cactus, caper-plant, fuchsia, heliotrope, or whatever you wish. Fuchsias and heliotropes, of course, grow into small trees here."—"I'm sure you'd do better without my interference, but I'd love to be allowed to do it."—"I couldn't do it without you."

The winter night of Australia, falling like a black curtain, without any grey of twilight to give warning, overtook them before they had half decided what should be planted in the sunken squares, the pockets in the walls, and the deep troughs in their tops. In the midst of it all a fresh idea had struck him. Finding

that the silent automatic pump could raise water twenty feet just as easily as it could raise it five feet, he suggested conducting the iron pipe, not to the pool itself, but to the top of the terrace which surrounded it, so that it might dance down an Arab step-fountain. He explained how easy and inexpensive it would be to imitate the step-fountain of La Zisa itself, minus the mosaics.

"Now, Pretender," she said, putting her arm through his when the night caught them, "you've got to come in and stay to dinner. You can't escape unless you drag your arm away from me, and I shan't let you do it without hurting me."—"I don't want to escape a bit, Chris—it's only that I ought to."—"I say please," she pleaded, and tightened the clasp on his arm. Then he remembered that Lin was staying at Hallhead and regarded Chris as virtually engaged to him, though he had not yet found words to make the formal request. This would prove a safety-valve. It would not only be natural, but tactful for him to talk to Mrs. Gordon, whom, of course, he would take in to dinner. But there was still an insuperable barrier in his promise to Inez. Quoting this, he returned a firm refusal.

Chris was inconsolable. Presently she said, "I must run in to tell my maid what I'm going to wear for dinner, but if you'll wait, I'll come out again and stay with you until the last minute." On her way to her room she hunted for her mother, and when she found her, said: "Mother, the Pretender is in the glen. He's been gardening with me; I lured him. I've been trying to make him stay to dinner, but he swore to Inez that he would not enter the house again until you or father had asked him. If you are a good little mumsey, you'll go straight away and ask him now."—"Of course I will, Chris. In the glen, did you say?"—"Yes, mother."

The Pretender was sitting in the glen in a brown study when he heard footsteps approaching. He was longing that he had never made that promise, though it still seemed inevitable. He did so want to be in Chris's society again, not at chance parties, though doubtless she would keep him posted as to where she was going, or might even make appointments at the Claridges', but here at Hallhead, where he could enter into the life of the family with her, from the library to the garden—could be of the household with her, without any declaration of his feelings. The footsteps drew nearer; they were a woman's, but not Chris's light footsteps, which was tiresome, because Chris might be back at any minute, and they would not be alone. He looked up with the best pretence of patience which he could manage, and beheld Mrs. Gordon. His air of assumed patience gave

way to a genuine air of pleasure, for he was sincerely attached to the woman who had been so motherly in her kindness.

"Mr. Stuart," she said, "I've come to ask you to resume your visits to our house, and in particular to stay and dine with us to-night—because I understand that you vowed to Inez that you would not set foot in it until either her father or I invited you to do so. Are you satisfied?"—"It's 'Are you satisfied?' Mrs. Gordon. I haven't given the information required yet."—"Don't let's quibble, Mr. Stuart; it isn't friendly. We miss your society very much. We all want you back."

He suffered himself to be persuaded, and Chris came round the corner. He was a little disconcerted when they sat down to dinner, and he found that Chris was seated on his other side, not next to Lin, and diverted as much of his conversation as he could to Inez, who was sitting opposite to him, between Lin and Bob. He was anxious not to betray his real feelings towards Chris. She did not misunderstand him and addressed her conversation across the table to Lin.

Inez was troubled. She had greeted him quite naturally when he came in. Since everyone seemed to regard her as a Cassandra, she did not see why she should pursue her crusade, but she was not prepared for him to treat her with the same frank friendliness as he showed to the rest of the family. He was able to do it sincerely, because he was sure that she was sincere in regarding the warning about him as her duty to Society. The fact that it might have caused him grave humiliation, if no worse, did not affect the question to his equitable mind, and against the self-banishment which had resulted from it there had to be set off the friendship which she had given him down at The Beach. He therefore meant to meet her, before others, as if nothing had happened, though he would avoid *têtes-à-têtes*.

Bob's conversational powers were limited, and what he wished to say Inez did not wish to hear. Her usual perversity by itself would have made her wish to talk to someone else, and finding herself opposite the Pretender, whom she had expected to ignore her as far as politeness allowed at her mother's table, but who seemed ready to bury the hatchet, she did not pretend to take any interest in Bob's lame efforts. Seeing his mortification embarrassed the Pretender almost as much as being seated next to Chris. Fortunately he was as good a diner-out as he was an after-dinner speaker, and with great tact addressed his conversation to Bob, but talked for Inez's and Chris's edification.

He told them, in tit-bits between the courses, of a trip on

which a relative of his had taken him, across Canada, from Nova Scotia to Vancouver Island. He had been enchanted with the idea of such a panoramic journey. But his relative turned out to be interested in nothing but Indians. They began in the Hinterland of Nova Scotia, where there was nothing but a desolate lake and a few fir trees and fireweeds. This was because the last survivors of a decaying tribe of Micmacs were fishing there—with a patent trawl of the latest pattern. They did not see the Grandpré of Evangeline or the Annapolis of the Ordre de Bel Eyse, or the mighty tides of Fundy—they saw nothing but Micmacs.

At Quebec he had pictured himself visiting the Falls of Montmorency and the Heights of Abraham. Not a bit of it—they went to see a Huron chief, who was also a Nonconformist clergyman and wore a tall silk hat, with a silk sash of early Victorian blue tied round it, like an undertaker's scarf, as the insignia of royalty. At the Rainy Lake they had a whole tribe of Ojibways arrayed in their war-paint for them, but the only thing the tribe did was to charge a shilling each every time that they were photographed. They passed by the Great Lakes as they had passed by Quebec sitting on its heights, and the Thousand Islands of the St. Lawrence, without looking at them, because there weren't enough Indians handy. Out on the Prairie, which they saw because they were three days crossing it in the train, and could not help themselves, he thought that they had at last come to something fine and romantic in the way of Indians—they were promised a Sun-dance by 2,000 braves, but it was contingent on each of the braves receiving a quarter of a pound of tea and a quarter of a pound of tobacco, so it fell through, and there was almost an insurrection (although he did not mention this) because his relative refused to buy the honour of the head chief's wife for a bottle of whisky. There were no Indians for the moment at Banff, the beauty spot of the Rocky Mountains. So they passed it in the night, and at the Glacier House, the beauty spot of the Selkirks, they never moved a hundred yards from the hotel, because there was a wretched Stony Indian encamped there, who pretended to be a Medicine Man, and had a collection of properties that rivalled a stock company theatre. From there they ran straight through to the coast, where they scorned the forest primeval and the stately firds, to hold colloquies with the undersized and degenerate Siwashes—Esquimaux made ridiculous by civilization, who spent most of their time in collecting oyster-shells for Japanese knick-knack carvers.

This was the outline of his immortal tour, which the Pretender drew, embellished with his lively wit and a practical grasp of the subject that impressed Bob, as much as the brilliant talk and suggestions of a wider horizon impressed Inez. Her face glowed. She almost monopolized him with comments and questions, for the rest of the dinner. Chris was equally impressed, though she showed it less and said nothing. It was fortunate for good feeling between the parties concerned that he got involved by Bob's questions in a long comparison between Australia and Canada, for Inez was not pretending to take any interest in what her latest pal said to her, though nothing was further from the Pretender's intentions or wishes.

When the men joined the ladies, Inez had disappeared to her room. Chris came straight over to the Pretender, and seating herself on a sofa and making room for him beside her, plunged into fresh plans for "our" garden. That the conversation related entirely to cuttings, seedlings and weeds did not affect the situation. She was oblivious of the rest of the room. Her own family barely noticed it, beyond the fact that Mrs. Gordon offered to read the "Evening Herald" to her nephew—which was generally Chris's job, he being forbidden to read. But he felt as if the sun was lost.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BALL AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE: A PENITENT INEZ

TUDOR LEWIS went back from Hallhead with a disagreeable sense of defeat. As a man who was too sharp in business, he had found it useful to acquaint himself with the law, and, in particular, the law of libel had engaged his attention. The victims of his shrewdness sometimes expressed themselves strongly. It was essential to him to know whether he could intimidate them or not. He wondered how he could have been such a fool as to write that letter. The incentive was obvious—he wished to dish the Pretender's chances with the heiress, but instead of turning Connie against him, it would, by what he considered treachery on her part, supply Stuart with a most formidable weapon against himself, and if he moved another inch in the matter, Connie would hand his rival the weapon—that was certain. This was bad enough, but more was implied, because Connie would not have played him such a trick if she had not definitely closed her account with him. Inez Gordon was not more sympathetic. It was a bad business.

The first thing was to write to Connie and say that he had seen Inez and that Connie was right. As he could not fight her, it was just as well to give in gracefully and avert an action. Inez was almost as worried. It was not often that her father interfered with her, and she had been the more affected because, instead of scolding her, he had tried to see what justification could be found for Tudor Lewis. With the odd kink in her disposition which came from over-study of Gordon's poems and ideals, by doing this he put her on her generosity, as he might have put her on her honour; and Inez, when she was not suffering from waywardness, was generous to a fault. Although her enemies attributed her attack on the Pretender to the circumstance that he was now paying attentions to Chris, the reverse was the fact. Inez had an innate objection to being married, but a brother-in-law whom she liked, she was prepared to welcome as she would have welcomed a long-lost brother.

The Pretender remained in ignorance of the battle which was being waged round him, until Connie introduced the subject when he was dining with them, to take her to the winter ball at Government House. While they were waiting in the drawing-room for coffee, she described Tudor Lewis's call on her, and showed Stuart a copy of the letter which she had induced him to write.

"If you intend to take proceedings, you can have the original," she said. "I left it at the bank for safe keeping."—"Why should I? The sum total of the whole ridiculous business is that there are about twenty girls who are not willing, or not allowed, to dance with me at balls. As I should like to divide all my dances between you and Chris, the result is nil. But I'm none the less grateful to you for fighting my battles, Connie. I don't know what I've done to deserve it."—"You are my best friend," she said simply.—"I've done nothing to deserve that, except propose, in a very half-hearted way."—"You've given me the most interesting friendship I ever had in my life. I've loved it."—"So have I, Connie, but all the advantage has been on my side."—"I think the same."—"Well, you can't know what you've meant to me—a homeless, kinless man, who had to face a social crisis."

At that moment Jane walked in. "The car is waiting, miss." "I do wonder when these young people are coming to the point!" she remarked, as she closed the front door on them. "Why take a month of Sundays, when they seem to know their minds so remarkably well?"

Government House balls in Australia have the distinguishing feature of the company arriving about an hour before the

dancing. The Governor-General's A.D.C. does not allow His Excellency to enter until there is a full house to receive him, and dancing has to wait for H.E.'s arrival, and the presentation of all the guests to him, which takes time, no matter how it is slurred over by a bored official. When it came to the Pretender's turn, the A.D.C. said: "What name, please?"—"C. E. Stuart."—"Charles Edward Stuart?"—"Yes."—"His Ex. got your note—he says 'all right.'"

"What have you been writing to the Governor-General about?" asked Inez, who had been presented just in front of him. "Or oughtn't I to have asked?"—"What do you expect? Could I come here without telling him that I had changed my name?"—"Is that a fact? Or are you gibing at me, Mr. Stuart?"—"Solemn fact."—"Well, I deserve it, anyhow. I say, Pretender, ask me to dance to-night. I want to tell you how penitent I am."—"You needn't do that. It wasn't very gratifying, but I know you did it from a sense of obligation. It would be impossible for you to be mean."

"Do you really think that?" she cried, with her beauty so illuminated that no woman could have been lovelier. "Then you've won a lifelong friend. There's no greater thing in the world than greatness of soul, and a man must be the limit of magnanimity before he can forgive a person for trying to destroy his whole position in a land where he's a stranger."—"I'm glad that we're friends again, Miss Inez. I don't like not being friends with the most beautiful woman I've ever met."—"You must have a bit of the Blarney Stone in your pocket to-night, Pretender. Besides . . ."—"Besides what?"—"Besides, I thought it was Chris, not me?"—"As you have vowed never to marry, I don't mind telling you that I'd sooner marry Chris than any woman living, but as I have also vowed never to marry until I feel free to clear up the mystery, there's so little prospect of it ever coming off that she might have to wait for me till doomsday. Besides, without any disloyalty to her, I can say that I don't call Chris beautiful, but awfully pretty and a perfect darling."

"She is a perfect darling. I'm so glad that you're fond of her."—"Are you glad?"—"Of course I am."—"Then you wouldn't object to me as a brother-in-law—when I have explained myself?"—"Don't bring that up again, Pretender. It isn't fair. I'm very penitent, though I did it as a duty. When you are my brother-in-law I'll show you now nice I can be."—"Let us pray for deliverance from the spell. Amen."

The prelude to the State Lancers struck up, and presently

the Governor-General's A.D.C. came up to Inez, who, as the Beauty of the State, and a daughter of one of the chief families, was always one of the girls selected. "Will you and your partner take a place in the Governor-General's set?" This was the only dance in which etiquette allowed His Excellency to participate. It was a great compliment. "Are you engaged, Pretender?"—"No," he answered simply. "I was not going to dance them."—"Then will you dance with me in His Ex.'s set?"—"No, indeed, I won't," he said. "I'm a nobody, and I should be overcome with bashfulness. I'd love to dance them with you—on the other side of the room."—"Then I must chase after Captain Blatchford."

The Captain, taking it for granted that no one would refuse such a compliment, had passed on to nominate other couples.—"Captain Blatchford! Captain Blatchford!" she called out. "My partner's too modest—you must get somebody else."—"The deuce he is!" and he added under his breath, "Damn him!" because he had intended to place the beautiful Inez on his own left hand in the set, where she would be his partner almost as much as the Pretender's.

"Which set shall we make for?" she asked, when she had settled the Captain.—"Personally, I should like to go into the set over there, with those five Subs. of King Edward's Horse in it. I've just got my commission in the Regiment."—"Lucky man! They're awfully smart. How did you get it?"—"I can answer that question."—"Have I transgressed again?"—"No."—"Then tell me how," she asked as they dashed across the room and secured a place, with one of his new brother-officers as a *vis-à-vis*.—"Because I had a commission in King Edward's Horse at home. They have a couple of regiments of them in England, as well as here."

"I never knew that. While I'm on dangerous ground, may I ask another inquisitive question?"—"You may."—"How could you prove it?"—"I had my commission with me?"—"As Charles Edward Stuart?"—"Yes."—"Then why didn't you show me that the day that I came to your chambers?"—"Do you think it would have convinced you?"—"I wouldn't swear," she answered, with a very, very friendly smile.—"Besides, I don't think that I should have been willing. You had no right to expect that."—"But you showed me your passport."—"That was a different matter. Anybody has a right to see my passport where I am a stranger in the land."

Then the band struck up and they were immersed in the

business of the Lancers, danced with the customary gusto of a Service set. When it was over, with a deprecating smile, which was strange to her haughty beauty, she said, "Are those old Lancers the only dance I'm going to have with you to-night, Pretender? I really am a most awfully penitent woman."

"We're friends again, I know it, Miss Inez, but I shall have to settle up with Chris. To-night she was going to let me have all the dances I used to have with you, and have you got any disengaged yourself?"—"To be perfectly frank, I kept some for you, because I meant to try and make it up to-night." They struggled through the *mêlée* to the Observation Post, where he and Chris had arranged to be found for the evening. She came up soon after them. She seemed very pleased to see them together again, and the wish being father to the thought, said: "I suppose you'll be wanting to transfer those five dances back to Inez to-night?" They looked at each other and laughed. The sisters compared their programmes and fitted in the transfers. There was no fear of Chris having to sit them out. She was lovely and she had not a single enemy.

One person viewed these proceedings with dismay—Bob. It came at an unfortunate moment for him. He had journeyed from the N.T. to propose to Inez. When he went North there really seemed to be a chance for him. There was, of course, the obstacle that Inez had sworn that she would never be married; to that he did not attach more importance than to other girls' vows. But she had quarrelled and was hardly on speaking-terms with his most dangerous rival. Now she had reached a fatal point for his interests. She had evidently just made up her quarrel, and Inez, when she made up a quarrel, could be quixotically generous. There was no saying what burnt sacrifice the occasion might not seem to her to demand. His only chance, he felt, lay in the fact that the Pretender was apparently in love with Chris. Even that might not save him. Inez was accustomed to bear down all opposition. It might, however, save Stuart, who had shown a considerable will of his own. How he wished that he could dance better! He pictured how Inez would scintillate with the Pretender.

He was gratified with Inez as the evening wore on. She showed a tendency towards moderation that was unusual in her. Instead of going off with the Pretender to where the pelican builds her nest between the dances, she made him take her back to the Observation Post. Bob's vision was not delicate enough to discern her object; he attributed it to consideration for himself, whereas she did not wish Chris to be pained, as

she might very well have been if Inez had monopolized her lover as she used to at The Beach. Inez meant to limit herself to the enjoyment of the Pretender's dancing, and to return him to her sister for the intervals. When she brought him back, there were opportunities for Bob. The laughter of the gods was reserved for the ladies who had received her warning as to the danger of entertaining "Mr. Stuart." They shrugged their shoulders, and said, "That is Inez Gordon all over."

CHAPTER XIX

PAT TAKES A HAND

INEZ having given him back her friendship with no grudging hand, the Pretender soon drifted into spending most of the leisure hours which he did not owe to Connie at the Gordons'. But the magnet which drew him to Hallhead was Chris. The spring was rapidly advancing—their blood as well as their eyes told them that—and their garden, their joint creation, had already fulfilled its promise in verdure, and was showing flashes of the colours which were to emblazon it. Chris and he pored over it, pegging the trailers in the directions which they were to follow, and filling in failures with fresh plants. It was "love me, love my dog," reversed. Tea was always ready for him. Chris boiled the water herself, in the Japanese tea-house, which had a balcony built out on piles over the pool at the top of the cascade. The long-plumed wistaria was already coming into flower. September was on them now, and the Japanese garden and the glen at Hallhead were the ideal spots for realizing the magic of Kendall's "September the Splendid." Kendall was beginning to voice them in that September which was opening in the glen at Hallhead.

Chris was a lovely girl. Her transparent cheeks, though colourless when she felt no emotions, were apt to crimson with tell-tale blushes, and her soft violet eyes, so often veiled under drooping lashes, were wells of affection and sentiment; their colour the Pretender had never seen matched anywhere; the little rose mouth held teeth as perfect as her sister's; her bright bronze hair looked as soft and fine as spun glass; her features were delicately regular. Though she was not a Diana like Inez, whose regal figure was Amazonian in its spareness, she was a far better rider and tennis-player than one would have predicted from the soft grace of her slender figure.

The Pretender had been finding the frank affection in the

smiles with which she greeted his arrival, unbanishable from his memory, in his sleeping as in his waking hours. All day long, whenever he was not writing letters or interviewing clients, he could think of nothing but Chris. His whole hopes in life centred round Chris. It began to work upon him so that he knew not how to resist the longing to beg her to be his wife—though there were at least two barriers which he had no right to scale. He could not confess the reason why his school-friend called him by one name and he called himself by another, and the income which he could offer her, though it was ample for a single man of quiet tastes who had to pay no rent for his chambers, would be insufficient to offer to a girl who had been brought up as she had. In Australia 2000 A.D., though it was not as ruinously expensive as America, where a dollar counted for less than a shilling in England, half-a-crown would certainly not buy as much as the shilling at home. This was not so serious an obstacle as the other. If Chris liked him well enough to marry him, she would be willing, he felt sure, to live on an "urban selection," the liberal Australian equivalent of an "allotment," on which the grantee was bound to erect a house and fulfil rather rigid conditions about cultivation. There were plenty of these "urban selections" within easy monorail of his office, and the Canadian Government had yards in all the great Australian cities, where you could buy a wooden bungalow, shipped over in pieces, and erected by the staff at prices from £100 to £200.

The prime obstacle to offering her his name was that he could not offer the name to which he had been born. He wanted her for his wife so acutely that he was greatly distressed. At length Pat moved in the matter. "Pretender," he said one day, looking so like his pretty sister in his boyish beauty and bashfulness, that he made the lover's heart ache, "why don't you and Chris come to the point? Anyone with half an eye can see how fond she is of you, and I don't think that I am wrong in supposing that you'd be much easier in your mind if you were married to her. You know how I should like it, old man."—"I don't see how you could contemplate it, after Inez had found me out, even if I were such a scoundrel as to contemplate it, which I am not."—"I never heard such rot! If it's true that you are passing under an assumed name, and I think you said so, I don't see what it matters to anyone but yourself."

"I didn't say so. Stuart is my name. I assumed it with proper legal forms."—"Then Inez discovered a mare's nest."—"Not quite a mare's nest, because I have not told a soul

in Australia what my original name was, or why I changed it. Nor would I. That's where the shoe pinches. How can I ask Chris to marry me, when there is something in my past—though nothing to my discredit—which cannot be told?"—"My dear chap, you're only making a new start, and I should think that there must be at least a million people out of our fifty millions who came out here to wipe the slate, or who have an ancestor that did."

"Do you honestly think, Pat, that I could without dishonour discuss the situation with Chris?"—"I do."—"But not before I've spoken to your father."—"No, speak to Chris first. We Australians are rather touchy about that. You in the old country bow down to the fifth Commandment without having any commandment about honouring your children. You think that if a parent protects his children from bodily injury and evil associations, and provides them with maintenance and education, he has a right to starve and bully their souls as he pleases. We don't. We've no use for the widower who uses his daughter as a housekeeper until she's too old to marry—or the father who won't let his daughter marry a man for personal dislike. All paterfamilias can do is to withhold his money, if he likes, during his lifetime. But when he dies, it goes in equal portions to all his children, obedient or disobedient. If he wishes to discriminate, he must deprive himself during his lifetime of the money with which he wishes to favour one and not another. It is for Chris to say whether she is to marry you, unless dad brings it before a judge and he decides that you are not a proper person, and grants an injunction."

"I expect the judge would grant it, if I can't give an account of my past."—"I'm jolly well certain that dad won't apply, if Chris sets her heart on marrying you."—"If . . ."—"Well, you try your luck, old man."—"I can't tell you how grateful I am to you, Pat, but I don't see how I can. First of all, there's that beastly question of money. You know exactly how much I've got—£300 a year, perhaps, from those mortgages your governor's lawyers recommended to me, £200 more as salary, and the profits on the £3,000 I have in the Ether Electric Co., and on the £2,000 in the Daedalus—when there are any—you know how long we may have to live before that happens. We may call it £900, and however far will that go for the man who marries Chris, in Melbourne? We couldn't exist unless we took up an 'urban selection.' Fancy Chris pigging it on an urban selection, with one old bush woman to burn the food, and break the crockery, and let the dust accumulate!"—"

"You don't draw a very inviting picture. But Chris would manage better than that, and she could stick a good lot. Besides, you've forgotten something."—"What's that?"—"Chris wouldn't come to you empty-handed. My sisters would . . ."—"She'd have to come empty-handed if she married me. That's the one condition on which I could contemplate marriage at present—that nobody should be able to say that the man without a character had run after an heiress."—"You do talk through your neck sometimes, Pretender!"—"Perhaps I do. But that's flat."

* * * * *

Dear Pat was troubled. Outside of the science and business in which he had specialized, he was not original. He did the wisest thing he could: he went to Chris. She thanked him with all her affectionate nature for what he had done, but did not confide in him beyond mentioning that she should have it out with the Pretender.

CHAPTER XX

CHRIS TAKES A HAND

SHE bound him to secrecy and gave no-one the slightest inkling of her intentions. But she asked the Pretender to come to lunch on Saturday and let her motor him down to the Middlesex Fells, well-known in connection with a gay poster of the Lands Office.

The Fells themselves, at the terminus of one of the monorail lines, were barren, stony rises overlooking the sea and at certain points sloping down to little sandy bays. Raising any kind of produce off them seemed out of the question, but they afforded healthy and picturesque sites for houses, and the Government combined large grants of this stony dyke, with standard plots of fertile soil a few yards inland. The idea was that since the high, barren ridge along the shore was useless to selectors for any purpose except house-sites, and the fertile land was shut off by the ridge from the sea and sea-breezes, it would be a good thing to give generous grants of the ridge for house-sites, with a patch of the nearest decent land to cultivate. The rent was only a pound a year for the house-site and a pound a year for the vegetable plot. The Middlesex Fells lay on the Bay, about twenty miles from Melbourne; neither of them had ever actually been on the spot, but they knew what a handsome piece of coast it was, because the manufactory of the Ether Electric Co. was

at Kingscliff, an unpopular watering-place half a mile away, where the land could be bought, and there was a small harbour with a pier, useful for landing stores. Pat did most of his work there.

When they walked round to their garage for the car—young people seldom took a chauffeur in Melbourne in the 21st century—Chris carried a large envelope with "Lands Office" on it. "My mind was inflamed," she said, "with the grand poster in the stations about the Middlesex Fells, so I got the papers about it and thought we would play round with them."

Half the road lay through various outer suburbs, at first occupied with rich men's houses in large grounds and afterwards by Suburban Selections, half-acre plots held from the Government at a nominal rent, and after so many years becoming freeholds, with wooden cottages on them, occupied by married people of moderate means employed in the city. These Selections afforded the only possible way of bringing up a family in such an expensive place as Melbourne. Having water laid on by the Government, it was easily possible to raise enough fruit and vegetables to feed the families, and a good deal of market-gardening was done, where two or three members of a family had selections adjoining each other and worked skilfully. The cottages were imported in sections, and either purchased outright or on the hire-system. They were kept the monopoly of the Canadian and Australian Governments to prevent poor people being swindled over them. Between these Suburban Selections and the Middlesex Fells were a few miles of paddocks, chiefly occupied by dairymen. None of the Middlesex Fells Selections had been taken up, though there was that unpopular watering-place half a mile off. They were too barren to be worth anyone's consideration, until the Lands Office made them house-sites for better land behind them.

"It doesn't quite come up to the poster, does it?" said Chris, who had left the car at Kingscliff and was comparing the reduction of the poster on the outside of the prospectus, which made it look like an antipodean Corniche, with the boulder-studded down before them.—"Not yet, but if one secured one of these combes going down to a little sandy bay, one would have the site of a Clovelly."—"I've heard so much about Clovelly that it makes my mouth water."—"But the question is, of course, do the two sides of any of these combes come into the same selection?" They studied the plan attentively. "No, here you have it!" he cried. "In order to give as many occupiers as possible access to the sands, the two sides of each dip will be granted in separate selections."—"That could

be got over by two friends taking the two sides. You could take one side, and I the other."—"Yes, I don't see how two friends could be prevented doing that, if neither plot had gone."

"Let's do it," she said, with the air of a sudden inspiration. "A year would not ruin either of us, and just think what a rock-garden we could make, with all these natural boulders cropping out!"—"Yes, that's all very fine, but you have to put up a house, within twelve months, on each plot, and live in it for not less than 100 days in the year, until the freehold has matured. You could not live in a house, with only a servant, next door to me, without setting people talking about my conspiracies worse than ever!"—"I am afraid I couldn't," she admitted. It was not what she intended.—"We might get over it by Pat and I taking the two plots, instead of you. He could put in most of the 100 days when he's sleeping out of town in summer, and he's very fond of bathing." She was just going to remark that it would not be at all the same thing if Pat took the adjoining plot, when an idea struck her and she agreed.

"Then, if you'd really like the fun of making a rock-garden out here, Pat and I will put in our applications on Monday." He knew that Pat would share his enchantment at the idea of burying themselves together.—"Yes, I should. It would make such a change—spending the summer here with Pat instead of on the station, if you were here, too, Pretender—just to do the garden. And when Pat's proper holiday was over, and he had to go to the works every day, instead of just getting his week-ends and his nights out of town, he'd be in the cottage and having tea by the time that it was cool enough to do anything. Between two and four is the hottest time of the day out here. The works close at four, don't they?"—"Have to, by Act of Parliament, unless you get a Government licence because the work is 'for the public safety.' Sweet are the uses of democracy."

"How long does it take putting grants through, Pretender?"—"Five minutes, or so, I suppose: it depends on the swollen-headedness of the clerk who is attending to you."—"That won't keep us waiting, I know that you can get Army pattern beds, tables, chairs, sea-chests, clothes' hooks, camp-ovens, and everything, from the same Government Stores that sell you the bungalows. We ought to be able to get settled in before the summer, if Pat agrees."—"You're really serious, then?"—"Quite serious. I kill a terrible lot of time up on the station."—"Right-ho. Let's choose our plots."

They chose lots J.3 and K.3 on the Lands Office plan, because

the sea-frontage consisted of bold cliffs here, with a gorge leading down through a break to the sea. Overhanging the left-hand end of the gorge was a fine site for a bungalow, a plateau with end precipices on two sides. "That will do for your house," she said. "Pat will want his on the road, so that he can rattle up and down to the works on his motor-bike."—"How about you?"—"You'll let me read on your verandah, won't you, when I've done the housework—I shall have to do it myself. Servants don't like being so far from town."—"Yet you're contemplating it?"

"Anything to get away from the everyday sort of life I am leading. What do I do when I'm up on the station except play tennis, have meals with our neighbours, ride, motor and occasionally go on the airship—none of them except to amuse myself? I don't even garden, because of the water difficulty. Mother takes us girls to the seaside every year, but I know she'd rather be with father, and he thinks that he ought to spend the summer at Esslemont or the irrigation-colony on our South Australian station, as he spends so much of the winter in town. Inez could, of course, have her time at the seaside here, though I don't think she'd care about it without the dancing and games she gets at The Beach. But then, Inez likes being up on the station, or going away to stay with people on other stations. I'm the only one who finds station-life empty. Pat can't remain long away from his works, and Adam really manages the station."

"And what more would you be doing here than you do at Esslemont?" asked the Pretender, in his plain way. "I should be busy keeping a man's house for him. I love the sea. I should have you to talk with about the things that matter which we never discuss at home. I was head of the school, you know, Pretender," she said, blushing her rosiest, "and it's lovely to have a person who's read a lot to talk to."—"I may have kept up with the books of the day, but I'm afraid that you'll find me very disappointing where intellect is required. I haven't any. I'm merely intelligent."—"I've been wanting to meet an intelligent person all my life," she said, with unconscious naïveté.

CHAPTER XXI

PLAYING WITH BRICKS

PAT was enchanted with the scheme and put it through without delay. He and the Pretender became "suburban selectors," bought their bungalows and camp-furniture, had the former erected on the sites chosen, and in a few weeks were ready

to go in. At Chris's suggestion, the Pretender furnished more elaborately than Pat—all from the Government Store. He had book-cases and corner-cupboards. Coming straight from Canadian mills, they were not expensive; Australia has no soft wood. "You're taking much more trouble about my house than Pat's. It's awfully nice of you, but what will he say?"—"The liker his is to camping out, the better he'll like it—it leaves him more room to put up electric labour-savers—while we appreciate pleasant surroundings."

Directly the bungalows were up, the Pretender came down every afternoon after business to meet Chris, and the Japanese gardener and another man who worked for Mr. Gordon, to do what they could towards making a rock-garden of the portion of the gorge visible from the cliff. Ikegami was wonderful in carrying out Chris's wishes, and the Pretender and the other man helped to excavate and move boulders. He knew how well the wild scarlet azalea of Japan grows in sandy soil by the sea, and there were plenty of young plants in the Melbourne nurseries, which Chris presented to the garden from her liberal allowance. These and tamarisks he planted in broad patches on the plateau, while with the clustering yellow and crimson mesembryanthemum, which Australians call pig's face, and with patches of azalea where there were a few square yards between the rocks, and above all, with the gay and noble epacris of the New South Wales coast, he created a garden stretching up both sides of the gorge which, in full blossom, would be like a vision of Miyanoshta. It was the Pretender who suggested Ikegami's being made to lay out the gorge in this way. Ikegami also raised marvellous crops of vegetables from their two allotments of fertile land behind the ridge.

Pat came too, most days, to insert humble electric contrivances, like bells, but more particularly to instal a very strange-looking apparatus, concerning which he refused to talk. He did the necessary carpentering, too; he was an adept, having taken carpentering as the manual side of his education at school. In Australia 2000 A.D. every boy, however rich, was taught a trade as part of his schoolwork. It was like Pat to be busier over the Pretender's house than his own.

The excitement of preparing their houses—especially as it was all done in Chris's delightful society, made the Pretender half forget his troubles. If he could not marry Chris, he was, at any rate, going to spend his summer in her society for part of every day, and all day during the holidays. He was not blind to the perils of this, but he must be strong. A man need not marry

his female neighbour to enjoy her companionship if he can behave like a gentleman. Of this he was sure. It was bred in him. The parents had raised no objection to her keeping house for Pat.

CHAPTER XXII

LIN GUNN TAKES A HAND

IT dawned upon Lin that Chris was slipping from his hands when, day after day, she was missing, from before tea to just before dinner, and if anyone looked for her was found working at the new garden; and when, a little later, while he was still up in Melbourne being treated for his eyes, she began to make daily excursions to the Middlesex Fells to work at the new garden there, he was forced to the conclusion that she was more than ordinarily interested in this Charles Edward Stuart.

He did not try to hit below the belt by suggesting that a girl ought not to be so constantly in the society of a man who was no relation, or by reviving the suspicions which Inez had excited. He merely suggested that it was high time that she should be getting married, and that he was willing to enter at once upon the marriage which he had always intended. "But, Lin," she said, "I don't love you. I have never thought of you in any light but a cousin, who has always been like a brother. I should be miserable as your wife; we have no tastes in common, and I don't want to live on a station. I want to see the world."—"I'll give you a year in Europe for our honeymoon."—"I did not mean Europe in particular. I want to live in the heart of things, meeting interesting people and seeing everything that is going on. I'd sacrifice that and everything else if you were really the right man. Only you aren't."

"Is there someone in the way, Chris?"—"No, I have made no promise to anyone."—He was not satisfied. "There might be someone in the way for all that, and I can guess who he is. Hasn't he asked you, Chris?"—"No, he hasn't. Be a white man, Lin, and don't worry me."—"I shan't worry you, Chrissy. I'll do anything in my power to help you. You're the only woman I ever loved. If you don't want me, I'll help you to the man you do want."—"I'm afraid that you can't help. I know you would if you could, dear old Lin."

* * * * *

Lin Gunn meant to help his pretty cousin. He could think of no better way than going to her mother. "Aunt Rachel.

don't you think that it's about time that Stuart said something to Chris?"—"Indeed I do, Lin, but he's so humble about it that I'm afraid there is no chance. He's explained to Pat why he hasn't said anything, and the view he takes is certainly to his credit, though its only result is to worry them both—I mean Mr. Stuart and Chris."—"Can't you put your spoke in?"—"I never have interfered with the liberty of any of my children."—"I don't think Chris would consider this interfering."—"Well, I'll see what can be done."

* * * * *

"Mr. Stuart," she said to the Pretender, after dinner, "may I have a little talk with you?"—"Certainly, Mrs. Gordon."—"Not here. I don't want to be disturbed. Come into Mr. Gordon's library—no-one ever goes in there while he is away." There were not many books in the library, except one of the best collections in Australia of the various editions of Adam Lindsay Gordon's poems and all the books which had been written about them, and a few dozen handsomely bound volumes of type-written copies of all the articles about him which had come to light. These were kept in glass cases, carefully locked.

"You know what I must want to talk about?"—"Yes, I think I know."—"I believe that you and Chris entertain a strong affection for each other?"—"It is certainly true of me."—"Pat has told me why you don't think yourself at liberty to propose to her. May I say that I think that, knowing the girl's feelings towards you, you had a perfect right to propose to her and throw the responsibility of making objections upon us?"—"I could not behave so dishonourably to you. I am not in a position to propose marriage to her."

"Because you don't feel able to tell us about your past life, or why you . . ."—"Changed my name? Yes."—"Well, I'm like my husband. He has engaged men on the station whose character from their last place was a very bad one, if his instinct told him that they were all right. 'I would rather get a good character with a man than a bad one, Rachel,' he would say to me, 'but why should I trust Mr. Jones of Melbourne, or Mr. Smith of Sydney, whom I have never heard of, more than my own judgment?' " The Pretender's face, in spite of his anxieties, assumed an expression of humorous deprecation.

"No, dear Mr. Stuart, I don't mean to insinuate that. I mean that I am sure that my husband will be willing to 'take you blind,' as Pat would say, if you and Chris wish to marry each other."—"I couldn't ask him to do it."—"You love

her, don't you, Mr. Stuart?"—"More than that—she is my life to me."—"May a woman make a suggestion?"—"Chris's mother may say anything to me."—"Then I think that the matter might be settled quite easily by your saying to me, 'There are reasons why I cannot be frank with you about my life, but I am ready to swear that there is no reason why I cannot marry with a clean conscience.'"—"I could swear a great deal more than that."—"My husband will be as ready to take your word as I am. But there is one thing, Mr. Stuart. . . ."—"What is it?" he asked, with his face falling.—"Don't you think you'd better give me a reason for wirelessly to him by hearing what Chris has to say about it?"

CHAPTER XXIII

ENTER EROS

"CHRIS," he said, "it's awfully hot indoors. Do you feel inclined for a walk in the glen?"—"I'd love it." It is not difficult to find your way in the starlit nights of Australia—starlight there is as bright as half-moonlight here, and if it had been dark, Chris had the instinct of one who has been born in the bush for finding her way and avoiding obstacles at night. "Let's go to the Japanese tea-house: the balcony of that is so cool: the wistaria smells so ripping; and I want to see the Southern Cross reflected in the lake."—"Are you hunting for an omen?"—"Indeed I am."—"Oh, you funny old thing, Pretender!" she cried putting her arm through his in the way she and Inez had to show friendliness, and thereby materially easing him in his appointed task. They went on the tea-house balcony, and leaned over its solid Japanese railings, to see if the yard-long plumes of pale purple wistaria which hung like grapes, were sweeping the waters of the pool with their tips.

"Chris," he whispered—his arm had stolen round her as they traced the wistaria-tips straying towards the wooing water. She submitted wonderingly. He had never allowed himself such liberty before. There was sufficient light to see the love in her face; he said the rest without words.

"Chris!" called Mrs. Gordon from the library, as she heard them come in. The girl slipped her arm out of her lover's and went to her mother. "Has he spoken to you, Chris?" inquired Mrs. Gordon, when she had closed the door.—"No, mother," answered Christian Elizabeth, but, feeling that she had been disingenuous, she added, "He was kissing me all the time."

"I think it comes to the same thing. Come here, Chris—I want to look into your eyes."

It was a pity that the Pretender was not there to see her blushes; they made her exquisitely lovely. "Do you think you know your own mind, Chris, or do kisses bewilder you as they used to bewilder your mother?" Chris made no direct reply. She said, "I've been waiting for him to kiss me ever since we came to Melbourne. While he was with us all day up on the station I did not think about him—I took him for granted. But when I met him at a dance, or he just came here to dinner, I knew what a difference it would make to my life if there was no good-bye at the end of the evening."

* * * * *

Later that night she came back and threw her arms round her mother. "Ned has told me what you said, you dear, dear mumsy! How can I ever thank you?"—"By being happy, baby Chris. You were my last baby. I hope that it will be a long time before you know what that means to a mother." Her voice grew gay again as she continued, "So it's Ned; is it, not Charlie?"—"They call him Ned at home. He's confessed that much about his lurid past."—"Then I think I must call him Edward."—"Oh, mother, please! Picture my feelings if everybody spoke of him as Edward!"—"There's not the least prospect of its happening in Australia, where they make saccharine pilules of all Christian names; there's much more fear of its getting to Ed."—"I hadn't thought about Ed. Bob Stevens's brother is Ed."

* * * * *

A little later still Mrs. Gordon went to look for Chris. She found her talking to Lin, while the Pretender was pretending to select Electra records. She overheard Lin say, "Are you properly grateful to me for speaking to your mother, Chrissy?" Chris answered him with one of her grave nods.—"I've been telephoning to your father up at the station, Chris. As Lin had such a big finger in the pie, I can tell you before him that your father agrees to the terms. I knew by his voice how pleased he was." Mrs. Gordon began telling her nephew his uncle's exact words. When she looked round, Chris had flown.

CHAPTER XXIV

CHRIS LEARNS HER HUSBAND'S SECRET

"NED STUART" did not go to the office next day. It did not really signify, because the Daedalus machinery had not reached the manufacturing stage. He wanted a long day at Middlesex Fells. Chris motored him down—she liked driving, though she had found that he was accustomed to cars, and being a man was probably a much better chauffeur than she. His bungalow was rapidly approaching completion. Most of the furniture and fittings were there. In Australia 2000 A.D. thieving, except in business, was unknown. That, unfortunately, exists in every country. "Didn't you guess that I always meant this to be *our* house?" asked Chris, when they had paid their sacrifice to the *lares et penates*.—"No, I thought it was another instance of the overflowing Australian hospitality."—"Oh Ned, shan't we be happy here? We shall be so alone!"

* * * * *

They were married in November, on the day after the Melbourne Cup, when the relatives would be in town; they had the happy omen of going to a honeymoon in a house which had never been occupied. "Are you sure that he isn't an adventurer?" asked Murdoch MacDonald of Mr. Gordon at the Melbourne Club after the wedding, when the Stuarts had motored home. "I have this security—that he won't take any allowance with my daughter until he is able to tell me everything about himself which a son-in-law should tell his wife's father."—"I have never heard of a similar instance," said Murdoch MacDonald.

Chris and her husband found their home an earthly paradise. The Japanese gardener had revealed that he had been cook and housemaid to a foreigner in Japan, and that he should like to be O-Chris-San's servant, so that he could amuse himself with forming their garden when he was not working. Already he had half-scooped, half-built of rough polygonal stones, a breast-work three feet high, with a seat against its inner face, round the edge of the cliffs which bounded the angle of their property, and had made himself a backyard behind his kitchen by building a bark fence, on which the gourd-plants he had trained were a yard high and beginning to show baby gourds. He had also a white cockatoo, which he was teaching to talk

his extraordinary English. He had given the verandah a Japanese railing, with some wood begged from Pat's works for the purpose. It gave the effect of that tea-house in the glen where their love had been sealed. From it, leaning on the rail as they had leaned on that historic night, they looked out on thickets of scarlet azalea over-running the cliff-top inside the belt of tamarisk; on that Japanese parapet, and the blue waters of Port Philip beyond; while below on their right, they looked down into that Miyanoshita gorge, with its rocks half buried in blossom.

"Oh, Ned," she said, "I was so frightened that you wouldn't ask me, though I felt how you wanted it!"—"I should have asked you long before if my lips had not been sealed. If you and your mother and Lin had not helped me, I am afraid that they would have been sealed still. But since you helped to unseal them that far, I am going to unseal them further, if you'll promise never to repeat what I tell you."—"Of course I will, Ned. Are you going to tell me *the* secret?"—"I am. I don't think that a man ought to have any secrets from his wife. Their enjoying it together and concealing it from the world is one of the greatest links they could have. It's a promise, isn't it, Chris?"—"I swear it."—"Well, then, come and look me in the face while I tell it to you. You shall give me your asseveration with your eyes."

She obeyed, with the prettiest wifely surrender, and the Pretender unfolded his tale. As it developed her eyes opened wider and wider. She flushed with pride and excitement. She began saying things which died away in her throat. When he had finished and looked into her eyes for an answer, her eyes dropped, and she said: "I think I could reply better if I was sitting on your knee." When he had sat down and drawn her on to his knee, she hid her eyes and pressed a hot cheek against his, and said, "It's lucky you did not tell me, Ned, before I married you, or I couldn't have done it. I should have been too shy. And you're a darling, darling Ned for not telling me."—"Inez wouldn't say so."—"Shall you ever tell her, Ned?"—"Not unless something further happens."

For a whole two months they had holidays, starting the day by bathing in their own little bay, guarded from the blood-thirsty sharks by the stockade Pat had built across its mouth. He loved bathing best of all the gifts of summer; so did they, and bathed with him in the cold waters of the morning to brace themselves for the day, and had another swim when the fury of the sun was over and the water was warmed through. After

their dip in the sea and breakfast on the wide verandah, if they were not motoring, they spent the morning in sailing or fishing—and the afternoon in gardening and their sunset swim. Dinner, like breakfast, they had on the verandah; lunch inside, with the blinds down and one of Pat's punkahs purring.

The first evening revealed Pat's great secret. They began to use the electric light apparatus which he had installed; he had succeeded in collecting his supply of electricity from the powerful electric currents in the deeper regions of the earth. He had discovered that there was an upper region of the air and a lower region of the earth, where the electric potential was higher than near the earth and prevented from discharge by the intervening non-conducting layers, which he bridged by the wonderful new collecting antennae of the Daedalus. At intervals, it was true, the current broke down, and Pat had gone away for their honeymoon. But they were not left in total darkness, for Ikegami had hung the row of fine old Japanese lanterns which were his most cherished hoard, along the face of the verandah, just underneath the roof, making the bungalow, from the sea, look like one of those adorable tea-houses on the bluff above the Bay of Shinagawa. When the electric light failed, they ate on by this summer light of love.

They also had acetylene in reserve to read by. But what man would think of reading in the hours before bedtime when the summer was young in Australia, and a bride as pretty, as affectionate and as wholly delightful as Chris was inviting him to worship? Candles veiled in globes of mellow paper, painted with exquisite scenes from the land which is the darling of the Gods, furnished just the soft light the hierophant desires.

"Oh, Chris," he whispered, "why am I, who had no right to speak of marriage, accorded such perfect bliss?"—"People might say that it is because you obeyed the Sermon on the Mount, and were so modest in your expectations. If I am the perfect bliss, it was not undue to the fact that my happiness was so much at stake that I took a hand."—"And was your happiness so much at stake?"—"Do you know, Ned, that if you stick where you are, and never make another ha'penny all your life, that if your secret bears no more fruit than the South Sea Bubble, that if you turn out a mere dreamer, as unpractical as the Simple Life people, I shall still have had all that I asked from life—the privilege of a perfect day-dream in a climate where, when the heat is heavy on the land, one rests in the day to compensate for the loss of rest in the night. I was glad when you said that the most perfect gift which the genius

of Italy had given to the world—the most perfect because it is free to all who have leisure—is the fine art of aesthetic enjoyment.”——“I think the poor Italian’s habit of holiday-making when he cannot get work is just as fine or finer.”——“Our people call strikes ‘playing’—it’s a good name, but not so praiseworthy.”

The Pretender would have loved a swim in the open bay, for at school he had won one of the long distance swimming races. But its impossibility was clear, not only from the stockade against sharks built across their own little bay, but from the fossilized sharks’ teeth, looking like blue marble triangles two inches long, which they found on the beach, where long ago there had been a landslide from the cliffs on which their house stood. To make up for it they used to go out catching sharks and often caught them ten feet long. Tennis they could have on the loam court beside Pat’s bungalow. They seldom played, for Mr. Gordon had given them, as a wedding-present, a *Simplicissimus* car, an improvement on the little Ford run-about of a hundred years earlier, which they kept and had cleaned at the Ether works, and in which they made expeditions when they were not too busy boating and gardening. Once Bob Stevens took them a flight in his famous four-seater to the glorious gorges in the Southern mountains of New South Wales, while he was on the scent for an oil-spring. It was the most heavenly holiday which either had ever had.

Like all things else, it came to an end. But when he began work again, she went to the office to help him. The law compelled all girls to learn some useful business, just as all boys had to learn a trade, and she had chosen that of clerk, which meant expert shorthand, typewriting and book-keeping. Hitherto he had no secretary, because the business did not warrant it. While he was not busy, she did any shopping she could not do by telephone; if business was very slack, she went home or amused herself. They did not lunch together, he made a point of lunching at the Melbourne Club to meet people now that he was living out of town, and left every day at four. She lunched at her Club—the Gordons were very day out of town—and always returned to the office in time to go home together. There was one great advantage about her being at the office every day—that if he had to go out and see anyone on business, she could, as Pat’s sister, take his place.

CHAPTER XXV

INEZ ON HER METTLE

THE first person to occupy their spare room was Inez. She had been down for the day with the family as soon as Chris had settled in. Pat, after the first week, had come over for his meals, and to spend his spare time. He had a genius for not intruding upon their happiness, but it was not needed, for they saw as much of each other during the day as was wholesome for them, and they loved his society in his hours of leisure. It was Inez’s own idea to come down and spend a week-end before she went to Esslemont for Christmas. She had to conquer regret. “I’m afraid that you’ll be bored stiff,” said Chris.——“I’m not going to be bored, dear.”

There was really no reason why she should be in a visit of a few days. For Pat’s loam-tennis-court had been made by the same expert who made their loam-tennis-courts at Hallhead—Ikegami—and they had bathing a few yards from the house, to which she could walk down barefoot in her bathing-gown, with a path of sand as soft as velvet from their door to the edge of the sea—the paths in their garden were all sand. There were no snakes on the Middlesex Fells, because there was no “bush” and no fresh water. The fact had been established while the garden was in the making. The place was so over-run with ants when the ground was disturbed, and there was human food to attract them, that one of the turkey “boys,” another Japanese, named Tora, had been sent over with a small flock from Esslemont. Turkeys will eat ants as readily as crickets. The boy was instructed to drive the turkeys, which had been winged, backwards and forwards about the Fells, to ascertain by their gabble if there were any snakes. The turkeys, a cock and his harem, throve so that Mr. Gordon presented them to Chris, as a nucleus for her poultry-yard, following them with a present of fowls, when the two Japanese had rigged up a fowl-house, which was as picturesque as anything in the garden. It was not above a week before the turkey “boy,” in spotless Japanese clothes, was sufficiently instructed to wait on them at dinner, and act as man-housemaid in the morning before he took the turkeys out to feed. Inez, who knew him well by sight up at Esslemont, in untidy white men’s clothes, did not recognize him in his neat, dark-blue kimono and skin-tight hose. He took her fancy immensely.

"What would you like to do with yourself, Inez?" asked the Pretender when she arrived, towards tea-time on a Friday afternoon. "Make myself useful to Chris."—"I'm afraid you won't be able to," said Chris. "The two Japanese look after us like a couple of babies. All we can do to help is to eat what they provide for us, and to let them prepare hot baths for us at all hours of the day, when Pat's Daedalus heat-generator is in the mood to work."

"Have you got a boat? I'd rather like to see your house and garden from the sea."—"We've got a motor-boat," answered Chris proudly, and added, so as to be truthful, "it's a fishing-boat which Pat has fitted with an engine—not a Daedalus; you won't be running any risks—though I daresay that the electricity in the accumulator was provided by a Daedalus. He has such wonderful dodges that I don't trust him in the least."—"Can you work it?"—"Oh, yes. I'm always having lessons in electricity with a husband and brother in the business."—"A husband who does not know much more than you do," chimed in the Pretender, "who is only a clerk really, but has to pretend to customers."—"What's the use of our having called you the Pretender so industriously, if you can't pretend, old thing?" said Inez. "I don't know. I only know one thing—that I feel like a spoilt child, with nothing left to cry for but the moon."

"I expect I shall give you the chance," said Inez, "but I'll try not to. Where do you keep your boat?"—"In the harbour at Kingscliff. The turkey-boy runs for it when we want it—half a mile is nothing to him. He used to be a riksha-boy in Japan."—"I should get a riksha if I was you," said Inez.—"And use man-power, when my business is to do away with man-power altogether, and substitute electricity!"—"Oh, I forgot about your business. Does this heaven-born 'general' understand the motor-boat?"—"Of course—the Japanese take as naturally to engineering as our boys take to shanghai-ing."—"So you know what shanghai-ing means?"—"I bet our Japanese do," said Chris. "It is impossible for the young Australian savage to resist trying to catapult an Asiatic when he sees one. But there aren't many human boys—the ordinary variety—at Kingscliff—they despise it, because the recreation-ground is closed."—"You must be thankful for small mercies," said Inez.

While they were talking, Tora had run to Kingscliff, and the Pretender, who had been following him through glasses, proclaimed that the boat had started, and in a few minutes would

tie up at the little wooden gallery along the bathing stockade where they embarked. "Why, it's a regular pier!" said Inez, when they got down to it.—"You don't want to risk a tumble into the water where there are so many sharks, and as Pat was making an addition to the wharf at the works, we had men and materials on the spot—the Teredo, or whatever the sea-microbe is that feeds on wharves, won't touch this wood." Both girls were as active as cats; it did not take a minute for them to jump on board.

"You want me?" asked Tora, laconically. "Not until I give three hoots."—"Ollehlight," he said, and since they were all right, gave the boat a push at the head with his boat-hook, and as she swung off, ejaculated, "Bait there."—"We always try and bring in some fish," explained Chris. "It seems absurd to bring it down from Melbourne to the seaside, and nobody sells fish in Kingscliff."—"What are we going to fish for?" asked Inez. "Garfish—there's a good spot for them a little bit along; they're the best eating of anything we get inside the heads."—"I'm very fond of garfish."

"As we go along, we shall get a good view of the bungalow and the gorge."—"What do you call it?" asked Inez. "Windsor Castle," said the Pretender gravely. Inez looked at him and blushed. "Oh, Ned," protested Chris, "you called it Beaudesert."—"And it hits it off to a nicety. Doesn't old Ikegami's garden look delightful from the sea? It's as good in its way—a very small way—as the big palm gardens at The Beach."—"Seriously you've most awfully good taste, Ned," said Inez. "I'm glad you like it. I simply adore the flowering gorges of Japan—there, of course, the flowers are wild."—"So they are round the North head at Sydney," answered Inez, suddenly firing up on behalf of Australia.

As the Pretender amiably admitted that the flowers at Sydney must be superior to the flowers of Miyanoshita, Inez's attention was diverted to admiring the way in which the Beaudesert bungalow nestled on the cliff-top. When the boat slowed down at the fishing-ground, they soon caught all the fish which could be eaten at dinner and breakfast by themselves and their two Japanese, whose voracity for fish was remarkable; they seemed to live on fish and cold rice and strange sauces.

The garfish were plentiful; they threw everything else back from the fish-well before they turned the boat's head to the channel which led into Kingscliff harbour, so that they could run in without fear of grounding. The whole trip had been so quick and easy that Inez was remarking, with a facetious

smile, that they might have been fishing at Kingscliff pier, for all the trouble that it had been, when suddenly the boat ran on what seemed to be a shoal with a terrific jar. "Hullo!" cried the Pretender. "I didn't know that there was a bank here! No, it isn't a bank—stand by, girls, and be ready to save yourselves—it must be a whale. It's moving."

That it was a sea-monster of some sort was clear; it dived under their boat, throwing it right out of the water and capsizing it. Inez and the Pretender rose to the surface almost directly they were immersed, in spite of their clothes and the shock. They looked for Chris and the boat. Chris was nowhere to be seen. The boat was bottom upwards. "She must be under the boat," cried Inez; "we haven't a moment to lose. The sharks will be round, though the commotion may scare them for a bit. You look out for sharks—you'll see their back fins sticking out of the water like submarine periscopes when they get near." Saying which, she dived under the boat, while he trod water and looked round.

Inez's head came up again. "I haven't found her yet," she said. "Scramble on to the boat so that you can give us a hand up when I find her. The sharks won't be long now. Splash for all you're worth when they come." She dived again; he had hardly clambered on to the upturned boat, helping himself up by the rudder, the only thing he could reach that offered him a hold, when he saw, still some distance off, but coming steadily towards them, the dreaded triangular fin, cutting the surface of the water, which proclaimed one of the tigers of the deep. The great fish came nearer and nearer. The Pretender had to change his position and kneel with one knee on each side of the keel—he was afraid of getting his legs snapped off unless he kept them right against the keel, for the shark was beginning to swim round the upturned boat in quest of prey. Kneeling had another advantage; it was the position in which he could move most quickly to the girls' assistance when they rose. He was almost sick with apprehension—physically sick. What could have happened to women who swam so well, except to have been dragged down by sharks?

He could do nothing but wait and watch, and imagine these two beautiful creatures devoured by monsters, like the great brute which was waiting for him. Minutes seemed like hours. Did he hear a faint sound? It might have been the washing of the waves or the creaking of the boat. He lost it. Then he heard it again. Then he lost it. Then he heard it more faintly. He took it as a sign that someone was under the boat. How was

he to communicate with her? He had only the little pocket-knife with which he cut pencils and tobacco. To make a hole in the upturned bottom with that would take an age. He must do it with all his might. His eye fell on a bung of cork, jammed with a packing of oakum, in the bottom of the boat, close by where he had fancied the noise. Cork gave him a better chance: his knife was sharp: he cut skilfully, paring the edges down in slices, instead of trying to bore or cut deep. In a minute he had cut away one side of the cork. He felt his knife going through. Then he did a little boring, until he had a clean hole half-an-inch in diameter. Through that he called down "Chris! Chris!"

It was Inez who replied, very faintly, "Chris is here; insensible for want of air. Give us some air! We're lying on the planks of the half-deck—not in the water. The sharks can't get at us."—"Were you trying to pull out the bung!"—"Yes, but I couldn't see; it's so dark. Can you get it out?"—"I'll have it cut out in a minute. Drag Chris as near it as you can, I'll try and make them see us from the town."—"Try your hardest. I get enough air now," she said, as he cut away the last of the bung; "but she may have gone too far unless help comes soon."

He knelt up to try what he could do; there was no-one on the pier or wharves, and there was small chance of attracting the notice of anyone else with a handkerchief, dragged by sea-water. It was maddening. Would no-one look his way, when he saving of two brave women depended on it? For himself it was a matter of indifference. The precious minutes sped to the limits of despair. Hope was failing when the old tug in the harbour, which would founder when the first wave struck her, but was sufficient to bring stores to Kingscliff in selected weather, gave a cracked whistle. Was that a signal to himself? He strained his eyes and waved the stringy handkerchief. She cleared the harbour-entrance and stood towards them. She must see them, for they lay across the channel.

"Inez!" he called through the hole. "Are you there?"—"Yes," replied a faint voice. "How could I be anywhere else?"—"There's the shark," he thought, but did not say so. What he did call down was, "Help is coming—the *Royal Alfred*."—"Thank God! Chris is insensible, but she isn't turning cold yet."

He shuddered at the nasty detail and made ready to receive the *Royal Alfred*. He supposed they would throw him a rope. He saw Tora on board, and was glad; he had more hopes from him than the ancient mariner who commanded the *Royal Alfred*.

They did not throw him a rope; the Japanese, who had bare feet, jumped with it and made it fast to the rudder. The shark's fin was retreating into the distance. "Missis and Inez San—where they gone?" he asked. "Under the boat," shouted the Pretender. "I see—cappy-size. That for air?" He pointed to the bung-hole.—"Yes."—"Suppose better makee larger, take out Missis and Inez San."—"Yes," said the Pretender again.

"If you tow it in, you can right it with a crane," objected the ancient mariner, "and save damaging the boat."—"As if the boat mattered!" said the Pretender, sternly. "Orlright! Orlright! It's your boat, not mine—make firewood of it, if you like," growled the Captain. "How are you going to enlarge the hole?" asked the Pretender. "Saw have got," said Tora, diving into his sleeve and dragging out a saw, a keyhole saw fitted into a brass handle, like a clasp-knife. With it, in about twenty minutes, he cut a hole big enough for him to slip down and push the two ladies up through it—first Inez, who, beyond being very wet, very dirty, and half-stified, was not much the worse; then the inanimate Chris, who was hardly wet at all, having been flung under the half-deck instead of into the water when the boat was capsized.

The Pretender could not make out if she had been injured and stunned by her fall, or was suffering from asphyxia by want of air. Though she had no severe injuries apparent, and seemed to him to be breathing sufficiently well, his anxiety was dreadful. Devoted to Chris as Inez had believed him, she had had no conception of the depth of his infatuation. Even the queer old Captain was not insensible to the pathos of an accident having befallen such loveliness, and ordered the crew, consisting of one boy and the resourceful Japanese, to buck up and see that the line made fast to the rudder would hold as a tow-line. Then the boat was towed in stern foremost, with Tora perched on her like a monkey.

The doctor of Kingscliff was, like the rest of its inhabitants, on the wharf when the *Royal Alfred* came alongside. Chris was put under his care for first aid, while Inez, draggled as she was, went off to her brother's office to telephone for their doctor in Melbourne, though after a brief examination Dr. Clincher pronounced this totally unnecessary, and said that a little fresh air would bring her round. She could not get it for the crowd until she was carried into the Ether Electric Company's yard. The Pretender had this done at once, and sent Tora racing after Pat. Inez had been unable to send the telephone message because the premises were closed. But Pat was running towards them now

as hard as he could—he had been reading in the gorge and could not be found at first. He was sick with anxiety as he came up, but when he had seen her he said, "I don't believe there's much wrong with her"—he had seen many cases of asphyxia in his business, as well as sundry steeplechase accidents, but added to the Pretender under his breath, "I wouldn't trust old Clincher—he's a clever old buster, but too fond of lifting his little finger; we don't want to run any risks with Baby Chris."

Then the Pretender remembered that he had been so anxious about Chris that he had hardly given a thought to Inez, who had swum about under water hunting for her, in such peril from the sharks. Only a tried swimmer can estimate the feat of climbing out of the water on to the reversed half-deck of a cap-sized fishing-boat, in the pitch-dark, weighed down by all her clothes, and in momentary danger of being snapped in half by a shark. Nor did her achievement stop there; she had not only had the presence of mind to imagine Chris lying trapped there, and to follow her into the trap to rescue her, but when she was there and had found her sister insensible and she herself in danger of sharing her fate, in a flash she thought of the bung, and it was her scratching to shift it in the dark which had attracted Stuart's attention and made him chip it out. Not the least of her achievements was the calm courage with which she had endured that terrible half-hour's imprisonment between the devil and the deep sea, in peril from asphyxiation and the sharks. Not once had she relaxed her fortitude. She was game from the beginning! She had only screamed for help because her sister might be dying.

The Pretender expected resentment, even if modified, at the neglect which she had suffered, but met with nothing but solicitude for Chris and a smile of sympathy, such as Chris might have given, for himself. "Oh, Inez dear, I am a brute not to have thought of you before!" he cried.—"There's nothing to apologize for, old thing. I love concentration—the way you have concentrated on Chris has been simply fine."—"I'm so glad you're not hurt, Inez—hurt either way, I mean," he added, realizing the tremendous risks she had been through.—"I'm never going to be hurt by you, Ned," she answered. "I've made up my mind to that."

He felt a touch on his arm; it was Tora. "Mrs. Stuart speaking," said that waste-no-words. "Thank you, Tora, thank you very much," said his master, flying to Chris's side. "Are you feeling better, old girl?" he asked anxiously.—"Have I felt bad? I'm not awake enough to know."—"No, I don't suppose you've really felt anything, because you have been insensible for

half-an-hour. What I meant was, how are you feeling now? How much less well than usual?"—"Very tired, rather dizzy."—"At all knocked out?"—"I don't think so, dearest." She managed to get up. "May I have your arm?"—"I shall make you so wet—I've been in the sea."—"I'm past caring for that."—"Take Pat's arm—he's dry."—"Yes, Pat's arm," she said wearily.

"The car's here. I'd better take her up to the house, and lay her on her bed, hadn't I?"—"It will be about the best thing to do, since neither of the two people who could put her into it will be available until they have changed. Will you go up with her, doctor?"—"If Sir Geoffrey is coming, I think not. There's not the smallest occasion for being anxious."

The Pretender and Inez followed them on foot, feeling somehow not in the mood to jest at each other's appearance, in their drenched and clinging garments. The sun was still so fierce that their wetness was rather a relief than a menace. "Well, Inez, how did it happen? That's what I want to know," said the Pretender.—"We simply ran on to a basking shark, a very large one, and he got frightened and upset us in his commotion."

"Was he the chap who was nosing about to see if he could get a meal off us?"—"No, he's perfectly harmless—he just behaves like a whale, and is sometimes over thirty feet long. It's the other chaps, the blue sharks, who have much leaner figures and only get about half as long, that are so murderous."

"How awfully quick you are, Inez! While I was on the top of the turtle, keeping my legs out of old shark's way, you were running the gauntlet of him and his friends hunting for Chris."

"My good Ned, it was no earthly use your stopping in the water for sharks to gobble, when you can't swim under water with your eyes open. When I couldn't see Chris on the bottom or anywhere round, I pretty well knew that she must be entangled in the boat, and swam under it to clamber into it. I could have got back into the water and come up alongside of the boat if the sharks let me, but I ran such a chance of being bitten while disentangling myself from the boat that I was afraid to try. And if I succeeded, I should have had to leave Chris, which I didn't want to do at any price, while she was insensible."—"You amaze me with your pluck and your resourcefulness."—"Do I, Pretender? Then I'm happy; there's nothing in the world I want so much as your good opinion."

* * * * *

The great doctor, Sir Geoffrey Twyford, was not long behind

them. He was at home when the telephone message came. He made a point of finishing his work by tea-time, except in life or death cases, but felt no reluctance in combining a run down to the sea with a visit to the two beautiful Gordons. The monorail, travelling at 200 miles an hour between stations, extinguished distance. Inez and the Pretender were still in their drenched clothes when he arrived. "Oh, dear," he said, as he shook hands, "is it in connection with this?" Inez explained what had happened. "Of course she may have got a knock in falling through the hatchway. I'll examine her. Otherwise, as old Clincher says—we were at the shop* together—there wasn't any occasion to send for me."

When he heard that in default of assistance Chris had managed to put herself to bed, he hoped for the best; a careful examination revealed nothing but a few bruises. The faint was due to stifling. He told her to stay in bed until the morning, and finding the Pretender and Inez "changed" when he came out from the room, he sat with them in the "Miyanoshta" until the darkness fell. Australia is not like Italy; it has no sunset chill. "You have made a wonderful transformation here, Mr. Stuart. I've known these fellows since I was a boy."—"It's my Japanese gardener who has achieved it."—"It's Ned's own taste," said Inez.

* * * * *

Next morning Chris accompanied the others to the bathing-pool about 7 a.m. while the water still held some of the freshness of the night. She was the better for her swim, but did not feel quite herself. After breakfast, she called out to Inez, who was standing on the parapet, looking down the cliff to test her nerves: "Can you amuse yourself this morning? Ned's going down to see about another boat, while our own is being repaired. Ikegami can do it quite well at the Ether's yard, if we let him go to Port Melbourne to get the materials. He says he's often repaired a hole like this, because he was once employed on the boats which shoot the rapids near Kyoto, and they constantly ran on the rocks and knocked holes in their bottoms. He'll do it in a day, if he can get the stuff."

"Good old Ikegami!" said Inez. "What are you and I to do?"—"We can have another bathe, if you like. It isn't so awfully hot yet."—"What did you think of doing?"—"Well, I expected that you'd want to go with Ned, so I was going to help Tora with the cooking; Ikegami mayn't get back in

* The Melbourne University.

time."—"I'll help Tora with the cooking, Chris. A hot kitchen isn't the best place for you after yesterday."—"Would you, Inez? I do rather funk it, though I haven't let on to Ned. It will be a day out for Tora, who worships the ground you tread on."

The captured garfish—little half transparent fish with bodies like herrings and noses like sword-fish—were lying all over the 'tween-decks of the capsized boat when she was towed in. Tora had noticed them when he was delivering the ladies and ran back to fetch them when he could spare time. No-one had touched them, and the thermos-safes of the 21st century kept meat or fish like cold storage. A dish of them, deliciously fried, was the *pièce de résistance*, followed by steak done to a turn, and sweet omelette made with admirable lightness. "I think I shall make Tora cook," said Stuart. "It isn't Tora, you stupid. It's Inez—she's been cook this morning, because I still felt shaky."—"Inez!" cried Stuart, with admiration. "This is an unexpected accomplishment! Where on earth did you pick it up?"—"All girls in Australia are taught cooking at school, and I've had some practice, camping out."

"You have a *flair* for it, too."—"I think I have. It's a pity I'm such an undomesticated person."—"It is! You're a goodwife spoilt."—"Ned, you must do something to amuse Inez this afternoon. She didn't come down here to be slavey."—"I don't want to be amused. I'd rather take a hand in whatever you're doing. What would you be doing, Chris?"—"Lying down, until the heat's right off, I think, and then having another bathe."

"Did you get that boat, Ned?" asked Inez.—"Only a sailing-boat."—"Well, that will do to discipline our nerves. I always believe in doing the same thing again after an accident."—"I'm with you—it's the safest thing you can do, because the odds are a million to one against its happening again directly."—"That's not my point. I do it to eliminate funk."—"I'm with you still. Shall Tora bring the boat round or will you walk down to the harbour?"—"Let Tora bring it round—I mean, I'll walk down."

Tora ran ahead to see that it was ready. When they got there, they found the place in a mild excitement. Captain Kortwright, of the *Royal Alfred*, when he had inquired after the "young ladies" pointed out its source—a line of seabirds far out on the bay, hovering over a shoal of "salmon." The salmon, which is really an Arripis, is a toothsome fish, which the upper classes shun for its habit of eating carrion and causing fish-poison, but

the lower classes gorge and tempt Providence. The women were bewailing that the shoal might have gone off before the men came out from work. "They're most of them wives of our men," said the Pretender to Inez. "Let's go out and try and get them some."—"That's a little bit of all-right," she said. "I hate pulling live things out of the water when they're going to be wasted. I wouldn't eat a salmon for anything, but I love catching them."—"Why?"—"You'll see. As good old Lindsay said:

" 'No game was ever yet worth a rap,
For a rational man to play,
Into which no accident, no mishap,
Can possibly find its way.' "

"I suppose you can get the proper tackle?"—"We have all sorts of tackle in the office. I know we've got a lot of jolly good spinners."—"In we get then. You'll let me sail the boat, won't you?"—"If you want to."—"You bet. You can pull the fish in and take them off the hooks—that's a nasty job. You'll have to cut out half of them—you can't spare the time to disengage them."—"I wish we'd got an 'auxiliary,' for this boat," she added. "They may get away before we're up to them, though there's a nice breeze."

When they had started, Captain Kortwright said, "He has a good chance of another bath this afternoon, with that mad thing sailing the boat. No man would take such chances as she does—while he was sober." The Pretender had been out spinning for arripis before, in a quiet way, but never as Inez took him. The wind began to blow very freshly, and the arripis, which love broken water, came up to the top so thickly that they made the waves look like silver, with their flashing scales. "Have you got nerve for sailing, Ned?"—"I think so."—"Then sit on the gunwale; do your best to keep her from capsizing, and I'll keep on all the sail I dare. The faster we go the more we shall catch. They fight each other over a flying boat. Get out your lines."

He did. The other gunwale began to dip ominously; the water rushed in. All he said was, "You'll get beastly wet if you don't take care, Inez."—"I don't mind," she said. "Nothing will sink this old Noah's ark. The best I can do is to capsize it and give you another ride on a turtle." Every time they hauled the lines in and tacked they nearly capsized, but the boat flew and he caught fish as fast as he could throw the lines in and pull them out. She was glad to see that his only solicitude was for her clothes. "They don't matter," she said. "They're the

things I got drenched in yesterday. Pat's electric-dryer is a marvel."—"It needs to be."—"Don't be horrid," she said. "I can't stand it just when we have to give it best. I think we shall sink if we ship any more water."

She let down the main sail with a bang. It only just missed the Pretender's legs as he sat on the gunwale; he would have been thrown in the water backwards by the suddenness with which the boat righted herself, if he had not been looking out, and hooked one foot round a thwart. "She's all right now," said Inez. "She isn't too full to be safe on an even keel. We'll take her in very close-reefed. You're not anxious, are you?"—"Not a bit. I see that you can handle a boat. I never had such sport in my life—they simply jumped at it."—"Well, I'm glad that it wasn't too much for your nerves. There are people who think that for pure pleasure, golf's a better game than arripis fishing."

When they got in, not without some difficulty—the boat was so full that some of the fish jumped back into the sea—Tora was there to help the Pretender distribute the salmon to the workmen's wives. Captain Kortright took the opportunity to approach Inez confidentially. "Did you scare the life out of him, Missie, with your antics?"—"No, he didn't turn a hair."—"Then all I can say, Miss, is that it's a pity he hasn't married *you*, instead of his Missis, for you won't get another in a hurry to face your music so well." Inez did not resent his free-speaking. It was the custom of the country. But it made her think. She might go a very long way before she found a husband whom she could like as well.

CHAPTER XXVI

INEZ COMES TO STAY

ON Christmas Day the Pretender had a telephone call. "Is that you, Ned?"—"Yes, Inez."—"A merry Christmas to you both! I say, Pretender . . ."—"What?"—"I've got something to spring on you."—"What is it?"—"Will you do me a favour, Ned? Let me come to you this year, instead of going to The Beach. I have threatened Chris with this visitation already. Mother'd far sooner stay with father, and just go to The Beach when he goes."—"We shall be only too delighted, dear. It will be just ripping if you will. But it will be awfully dull for you, compared to The Beach; no golf! no casino! no young men!"—"You

know my views about marriage, Ned," said Inez rather crossly.—"I do, but it does not prevent your enjoying the society of nice men."—"Don't be horrid, Pretender, else I shall be afraid to come. I want to come so badly."—"I'll go and tell Chris the good news, and she can come and put it through with you."

Chris was not really sure whether she wanted Inez, who had a way of ruling the roost, but had no doubts about letting her come, and appreciated the convenience of having another woman on the Middlesex Fells, where the population consisted at present of herself, two white men and two Japanese "boys." She determined to put up with Inez's requisitioning her husband at all hours for games of tennis, or waltzing to the gramophone. On one point she had no anxiety; there was no fear of her wanting him for long walks. Inez never walked, except when chasing a golf-ball. When Inez arrived, directly after the Airship Race, Chris was mystified. She was in such high, boisterous spirits that she made their meals delightful, but quite studious in her desire not to intrude upon the second half of their honeymoon. She seemed to have made up her mind to spend her days in amusing herself in the bathing-cove, and reading in the little tea-house erected by the two Japanese in the style of their country. It consisted of four wooden pillars and a tip-tilted roof, to command a view of the beauty spot of "Miyanoshita," where you were out of sight of everything, except a bowl formed of the blossoming sides of the gorge and filled with sapphire sea. Here she browsed on magazines and picture-papers, and the latest hits in novels.

Though the Pretender had not seen this side of her nature, Inez was rich in young Australia's capacity for idling about, reading magaziny stuff, smoking interminable cigarettes, spitting out desultory remarks, or spinning interminable yarns, of an autobiographical kind. Meeting her weighed down with light literature on her way to the gorge on the first morning, Tora watched for her on the second, with an arrangement like a gigantic pair of scales, made of squares of board with ropes attached to a flat bamboo, which he carried across his collar, like the shoulder-piece of the old London milkman. When she emerged with her armful, he shouldered his scales. "Make mountains," he said, pointing to them, and as she did not show much aptitude for balance, took her literature from her and packed it to his own satisfaction. "Now, liddy*—you go first."

As she stepped down with her peculiar grace—she was splen-

* Ready.

didly sinewy; her figure was beautifully slender—his eye followed her lovingly. He had been in her father's service at Esslemont for two or three years, and was an unrecognized adorer. She led the way to the tea-house and arranged herself on one of its benches, while he arranged her literature on the other. He expostulated. "Chair have got," and returning to the house, with the usual trot of Japanese servants, reappeared with a very long deck chair, up-side-down, on his head, and the dinner-bell in his hand. As the dinner-bell was principally used by Ikegami for summoning the Stuarts when they were sitting in the gorge, its sound would carry as easily back to the house. "Turkey stay at home to-day," he said. "Me listen for bell."—"Turkey not stay at home, Tora; his dinner wants."—"Ollertlight. Ikegami look out for bell—me tell him." She had no objection to this; Ikegami was really the gardener, and only incidentally cook-housemaid.

Chris and the Pretender, wishing to learn how she intended to spend the day—they felt a little shamefaced because they had forgotten her existence for at least an hour after breakfast, while they were occupied in the living-room, where they had gone to let down the Venetian blinds (though the windows were in the shade)—missed her. "Inez San, where is she?" Chris asked Ikegami.—"Reading many paper in Miyanoshita"—he always called the gorge "Miyanoshita." Chris gave a happy little laugh. "Inez is growing discreet."—"I am so glad, dear. This is the only thing which worried me about her coming."—"I don't mind your petting me before Inez," said Chris. "It would be rather good for her to realize some of the advantages of marriage."

They found Inez a picture of insolent repose, lying stretched on a long deck-chair, with soft cushions piled under her glittering head, and Ikegami's tea-tray of stitched reeds, with his own little tea-pot and tea-cup, and salted cherry-blossom in place of milk or sugar, beside her. "What game are you playing at, Inez?" asked Chris.—"What I'm always going to play at, while I'm here—reading in the garden until I'm wanted. It's heavenly to rest in this beautiful gorge, with the flowers and the sea to fill one's eyes whenever one lifts them from one's paper, and one's doing that all the time, for one can't light a cigarette without." Chris noticed, but Inez did not, that the Pretender looked rather worried, for she was looking straight at Chris, and Chris kept one eye on her beloved. He meant to speak to Inez about her cigarette-smoking; she got through dozens every day; her graceful fingers were stained with nicotine.

"You've got to decide what you'll do this afternoon."—"I won't," said Inez. "I'm not going to decide things while I'm here. I am having a holiday from that, as you might want a holiday from housekeeping."—"Then I shall sentence you to play golf, for I'm sure that you'll miss the golf you would have had at The Beach. Where can she play, Ned?"—"Sandringham, I think; she has a set of clubs in her locker there. She'd have to go home and get some if she went anywhere else."—"If we don't have tea until five, you and Ned can fly across to Sandringham and get in a round, Inez," said her sister. "Pat's got a 'plane down at the works. Would you like that?"—"I'd just love it."—"You men are both free, aren't you?"—"I've nothing to do," said the Pretender.—"I can easily take them and go back for them," said Pat. They did not waste any time after lunch, but got ready and went down to the works. There was no place for an aeroplane to alight at the Fells. The Pretender had his clubs with him. When once the 'plane started, it was there in about five minutes. But it took them a few minutes to wrap up, for they naturally had on the very thinnest clothes for golf on a January day.

* * * * *

They had finished their round half-an-hour before Pat came back for them, and sat down on a shady part of the terrace, where he could find them easily, for Inez to suck ice-cream-sodas through straws. She had three, while Ned had a long drink of barley-lemonade iced. Inez had been playing brilliantly, and was a complete child over American iced drinks. The greatest surprise which he had received about her yet was the restraint which she had been keeping on herself in not playing the spoilt child for nearly twenty-four hours. The only person she met, whom she knew, at Sandringham was Amy Vibart, who had struck the Pretender off her dancing-list when Inez warned people against him. Amy was not particularly pretty, but she was distinguished and malicious, and counted in Society. She did not indicate her presence to them. She was glad of the opportunity of watching them to know how Inez was taking the marriage after all she had said against the Pretender.

"She seems to have resigned herself to the inevitable fairly well," was her comment, for Inez was being thoroughly nice, and liberal of the gentleness which she generally dispensed so charily. She wondered if Inez had found her master, and was the happier for it? Or was it a flirtation because the man had

preferred her sister? She wondered. There was nothing more to be discovered by watching, so she advanced to where they were sitting. "Why, Inez, what are you doing here?"—"Waiting for my brother Pat," said Inez, not very pleased to see her, because it made her feel like a traitor.—"Why have you turned your back on The Beach?"—"Because I'm staying with my sister and Ned at their place."—"Is it on the sea?"—"Yes," said Inez, shortly. "But there's no golf-course, so we had to come here for a game."

Amy admitted to herself that there was nothing in this. She could not imagine Inez doing without her games. "How do you get here?"—"Pat brought us in his 'plane to-day—we haven't been here before."—"Why, when did you go to your sister's?"—"Yesterday."—Amy laughed, a rather artificial laugh. "Well, you couldn't have been here much, could you?"—"What are you doing here yourself, Amy?" asked Inez, in an effort to be less abrupt.—"We're in town on our way to Tasmania. We're going to spend the summer there."—"I hope you'll enjoy yourselves. I don't feel as if I wanted to stir from my sister's garden. Ned's made it so beautiful. Ah, there's my brother! Good-bye, Amy. Say good-bye to Amy, Ned, old man, and get a move on."

Inez's animation as she hurried off with her brother-in-law to meet the beautiful Pat puzzled Amy. "Either Inez Gordon is a minx," she decided, "which, honestly, I don't think, or the man has some subtle attraction which I haven't discovered." Then an idea struck her, and she sneered, "Why didn't I see it before? She must be playing Delilah to make Samson tell her his secret."

"Ned, dear," said Inez, as they hurried along the terrace to meet Pat, "I don't like that Amy Vibart. She is one of the girls who turned against you, when I warned her that you had changed your name."—"But that was your object in warning her, wasn't it?"—"I don't know what I wanted *them* to do. I wanted to clear *ourselves* for having taken them in, and I don't think I thought much about what they'd do. I hated myself for doing it. I'd trust you about anything now."—"My dear sister, I should have forgotten all about it before this, if you'd only given me the chance."—"But I don't want you to—I want to do penance."—"Then I shall be very cross with you. Why won't you allow me the luxury of forgiving?"—"I will if you want me to, Ned, but I was a horrid outsider."

* * * * *

They found Chris with a headache when they got back—she had been gardening too much in the sun—and went to bed after dinner. Pat was dining at the Melbourne Club, to meet a friend of Bob Stevens', interested in his attempt to draw electricity from the earth-currents. Inez and the Pretender had a *lôte-à-lôte* evening. They sat on cane lounges in the verandah. Since the electricity was supplied by a Daedalus, and cost nothing, they had a very powerful arc-light on the flag-staff in the corner of the parapet. This gave light enough to read by in the verandah, while illuminating the garden and "Miyanoshita" (which looked like bits of Japan at night), and silvering the sea beyond. For a long time they sat there smoking, the Pretender his pipe and Inez innumerable cigarettes, hardly talking at all, but taking in the beauty of the still summer night.

At last he asked, "What would you like to do to-morrow, Inez?"—"I don't care. I'll fall in with anything you arrange."—"We might arrange something you wouldn't care for at all, and you're a 'visitor.' This is your holiday."—"I tell you I don't care what you arrange. Doing as I am told will be the greatest change for me. It's years since I did what I was told. I don't defy father and mother; but it has been their theory never to command their children. They only indicated what they thought was right, or preferable, if no question of right or wrong was involved, and trusted to our right feeling to make us do it. I'm afraid that I hadn't much right feeling, and in any case, I was so bored by their not asserting themselves, that it made me naughty. That was as a child."

"And afterwards?"—"Afterwards, I belonged to Gordon Clubs, with their cult based on the poems and the opinions and philosophy of Lindsay Gordon, as handed down by his friends. The code of honour and generosity laid down there was very strict, and though a good deal of the code would appeal more to Sandy than to you—indeed, some of it might seem rotten to you—it is a fine, manly creed, and the heroism of the Australian soldier, which illuminated the great war, was built-up upon it."—"I shouldn't have thought it exactly suitable to a girl."—"I don't think it is. But some of us have wanted to rival our men in their devotion to this ideal, and I have been one of them."

"There's something rather great about you, Inez."—"I've tried to be great in the soul. It isn't easy for a woman to be great any other way. Have I made it clear why it will be such a change for me to do what I'm told?"—"Not altogether."

—“Put it another way, I suppose that I’ve been about the most independent woman in the State, not only independent of my parents, but independent of any kind of opinion, except the Gordon cult. I haven’t cared what people thought; I’ve been a law unto myself. I might have got myself into pretty serious trouble with men if it had not been for my repugnance to the idea—I can speak plainly to you, as my sister’s husband—of sexual endearments.”—“I think I see your point.”—“Not quite all. There is still some of the old Adam left in me, which is so strong in all descendants of Adam O’Gordon. I know that your will is Chris’s will, that she will defer to you in every arrangement, but I like to cherish the pretence that I am falling in with the wishes of my married sister, like a properly-constituted young lady. Besides, think of all the reparation I owe her in this line!”

As he was shaking hands with old-fashioned formality to bid her good-night, he said, rather shyly: “Shall I tell you a sacrifice you might make to please Chris?”—“Yes, do.”—“It’s a big sacrifice.”—“The bigger the better.”—“Well, nothing would strike Chris as such an effort of self-restraint as your making a big cut in the number of cigarettes you smoke.”—“I’ll try and give up smoking—I couldn’t do it all at once, but I might manage it by degrees.”—“No, I shouldn’t do that, dear. I see no harm in girls smoking in moderation. But I draw the line at their staining their pretty fingers.”—“Oh, I know. You can’t think how ashamed I am of mine. I’ve almost knocked off cigarettes once or twice when I’ve looked at my fingers. You say how much you think a girl can smoke without spoiling herself, Ned.”—“Two or three after lunch and two or three after dinner.”—“That’s all right. I’ll make it two.”—“Good-night, dear.”

* * * * *

When March came and Inez returned to Melbourne, she felt that she had never spent such a happy two months. All through January they bathed all together before breakfast; they generally made improvements in the garden from the time that Chris had done her ordering until lunch; while Chris was giving her orders Inez read in the garden. Chris did all her catering from Melbourne, and the orders were delivered almost as quickly as if she had lived in town by the excellent Parcels’ Delivery Clearing System, by which, using a modification of the electric “sorters” of the Goods’ Transport Clearing System, all parcels sent from the shop to the Parcels’ Delivery Clearing-house were auto-

matically sorted into crates and automatically delivered at their station of destination. Chris, giving her day’s orders at 9 a.m. from Beaudesert, 20 miles from Melbourne, would generally get them delivered before 11 a.m.; 10 a.m. being the time fixed by the clearing-house for the reception of all parcels to be sent by the morning delivery. Towns up to 100 miles round Melbourne were served in this way. After lunch Chris sometimes got Pat to take them all to Sandringham on his ’plane, and sat on the terrace and listened to the band while her husband and Inez played golf. Chris was not keen about the game, and knew how well-matched the others were. After tea they went back to Beaudesert for their afternoon bathe; and then played with the garden and gazed at the sunset until the darkness fell and they went in to dress for dinner.

In February, the Pretender was at the office from ten until four, except on Saturdays and Sundays. On work days the programme was generally tea at the Miyanoshta tea-house, an hour’s tennis and a sunset bathe. The bathe in the morning was unaltered, and while Chris was looking after her household, the Pretender wandered about the garden with Inez until it was time to catch the 9.30 monorail. That was a very pleasant hour, for, since Ikegami had no cooking to do, and Tora could do his housemaid work for him in the bedrooms, it was generally spent in his helping them to plan out wonderful Japanese terraces and flights of steps, with the hundred tons of rough building stones from the local quarry, which Mr. Gordon had bought and presented to them as his contribution to the garden. The stone being very poor, was ideal; it looked old a few months after it had been cut. The Pretender and Ikegami between them evolved wonderful effects, reminiscences of Japanese tea-gardens, which enchanted Inez, who had a sense of gardening developed in her already by the Japanese garden at Hallhead, though the freer style which suited “the Miyanoshta” appealed to her more than the conventionalities of the formal garden at home.

Perhaps the greatest of her pleasures was the expansion of Chris, as the regent of a husband who adored her, from the retiring Chris who had given way to her ever since they were children. One morning in January Bob flew over from The Beach to see them. He was relieved to find Inez gardening with Chris and Ikegami, while the Pretender was down at the works, inspecting, so as not to waste all his time during the holidays. He would have been less surprised to find Chris at the works, for someone to talk to, and the Pretender away with Inez playing some game. He, of all men, had reason to know how exacting Inez could be—

and also how liberal of her society she could be to a pal. Still more surprising, she was not cross at being left to domesticities, but was in one of her reasonable moods. He was more than ever determined to marry her, and hearing that she was to be back in Melbourne in March, he left The Beach at once and went back to the Northern Territory, to stay there until March, making preparations for a prolonged absence in the South and enlarging the house at the head station, on a bluff commanding a beautiful view of the Fairy River, which had contributed so much to his fortune.

When he returned to Melbourne, he was assiduous in his visits to Hallhead. He suggested much tennis, in view of her having to defend her Championship. Inez agreed gratefully, and was as hospitable as ever in carrying him home for meals. There was a gap in her days which she was anxious to fill. She missed her life at Beaudesert acutely. While she was there, she had done little of the hanging-about, undecided how she should occupy herself and what man was to receive her patronage, which usually engaged her thoughts. She had her day mapped out for her, and thoroughly enjoyed being a reasonable being. She did not sew—that she would never do; but it was the solitary exception to her leading a normal life. He found that she was not quite so disposed to be monopolized as in the previous year. She went down often to see Chris. He was welcome to accompany her if he chose, and sometimes did. For one thing, he liked to see the progress which was being made at the Daedalus Works. When Inez volunteered to accompany him on the first visit that he made, he was dumbfounded. But he attributed it to a desire to please him, and was proportionately encouraged.

He grew more and more in love, for while she was as frank in her friendships and as dashing in sport, she was much less spoilt. It must be the dawn of love. He did not mean, however, to propose before the Championship. For one thing, he was averse to doing anything to unsettle her. For another, though physically a lion in courage, he was a coward where there was a chance of losing Inez, and Sandy was the only man who had ever proposed to her and not forfeited her friendship. She did not take Sandy so seriously as a lover as she did as a cousin. As Bob had played her into the Championship in 2001 A.D., by the chance which he had given her of full daily practice with a man who, when he was in form, was one of the best players in Australia, she was likely to be in his company, almost his sole company, for a considerable period of every day, and he meant to have this two months of what he valued most of anything in life—her society—to the full,

undamaged by any action of his own, like risking a proposal. Behind this lay the hope that during these two months, if he took no risk, he might make her fonder of him by ingratiating and establish a further claim on her in tennis.

Inez saw how things were tending, and at first was worried. Why could not men, knowing her aversion to marriage, be satisfied to remain her friends? She was liberal in her interpretation of friendship. She liked her men-friends to be lovers, if they would keep it to themselves, instead of forcing it on her attention. She appreciated a man's love, and could give him an ardent friendship in return. But she did not mean to marry, or to be kissed by any man who was not a relation. Even the Pretender, whom she considered a relation, and was sincerely fond of, had never kissed her, except in the presence of his wife, and then quite formally. She rejoiced when the danger of a more active demonstration from Bob seemed to have passed, and showed her gratitude by increased friendliness and diminished precautions. Yet all the time she felt that she was being hunted, and friends showed their interest.

Bob himself felt tender towards her for another reason. In 2001 A.D. in all his daily setts with her to give her practice, he never put in use against her the smashing game with which he had come within an ace of winning the men's championship. He employed instead the orthodox game with which a very skilful opponent—who ultimately won, just put him out. In this his great reach gave him such an advantage that he had hopes that he might some day pull off the championship on those lines. One day, in Inez's presence, playing against Sam Hogger, whom he disliked, he played his smashing strokes, to make an exhibition of Sam, who was not a sound enough player to pit skilful placing against terrific hitting. Inez, who shared his dislike, was delighted; his best chance might have been to propose then. The net result was only to make her ask him to play his smashing game against her, for two out of the four setts which they played daily.

She could make little stand against it. He broke down her defence time after time by sheer strength and pace. He felt a brute for playing such a game against a woman. But she insisted.

She had heard that a great woman hitter from America who had carried all before her in Sydney by her terrific service and volleys, was coming to Melbourne for the Championship. This woman, Miss Polly Dexter, a big brunette, belonging to one of the best New England families, met her in the finals. The contest

was an Olympian one, but Inez was the sounder player and the better stayer, and she was not put off her game, as other women had been, by the American's furious onslaughts, because Polly, hard hitter as she was, was not terrifying to a player who had stood up against the strength and pace of a giant like Bob Stevens. Inez kept her head. She noticed that quite half of Polly's first serves were faults, and that she was afraid to let herself go with her second when her first had failed; Inez's returns of the easy seconds were so difficult to reach that a slogger like Polly put most of them out of court. In consequence, Inez won all her opponent's services in the first sett, while she held half her own. The sett went to her six-three.

Polly, realizing that she was up against the most formidable opponent she had met in Australia, was warier in the second sett, and playing a magnificent game, beat Inez by six to five. Bob came up to Inez while she was washing her mouth out. "If you carry your game to the fifth sett," he whispered, "you'll win it hands down. She can't last." Inez came up fresh and smiling to the third. Polly was smiling, too, but not fresh. Inez noticed directly that the pace of her opponent's first serve, which she had moderated to avoid serving faults in the last sett, was now slower, without achieving accuracy. She was able to place them where she liked and only by superhuman activities could the American hold her own at all. The sett fell to Inez, six-four. Bob was right about Inez outlasting Polly, but the end came sooner than he prophesied. In the fourth sett the American, utterly done-up by her exertions, could not win a game. There was wild cheering when the Australian, the idol of sporting Society, won the Championship by three setts to one, "without turning a hair."

"I owe all this to you, Bob," said Inez, with the frankest gratitude. "You discounted her hitting for me with yours—thank you a thousand times!" The Pretender was there all the time, keeping out of sight, lest he should distract her attention. Now that it was all over, he remained one of the clapping and cheering crowd. But Inez saw him, and her face became very feminine and lovely as she nodded and smiled to him. It was Bob who shared the motor with her out to Hallhead, where he was made to stay on to dinner without going home to dress; and Bob to whom she went straight when she came back after taking her bath, dressed with the greatest care in her loveliest evening frock. Yet the man to whom she wished to show how womanly and graceful she could look after her splendid exhibition of virility was not Bob, but the quiet brother-in-law, whose version of

"spoils to the victor" was that Inez belonged that night to the man who helped her to victory. He was talking to Sandy, who, like himself, Chris, Connie and Lin, had hurriedly been bidden to the feast when Inez had won. Inez would not have anyone asked until the game was over.

"Well, Ned, old man," said Sandy, in tones which showed how he had grown to like his new cousin, "it was almost as good as a scrap, wasn't it, to see the way in which Inez wore her down?"—"Inez was quite right—it was letting Bob slog at her every day which did it. It took all the stuffing out of the Yankee's hitting."—"Used you to see them practising together?"—"Sometimes."—"I thought Bob had given up that slogging game and taken to the regular thing?"—"So he has, but Inez was told by the girls who had played against her in Sydney that Miss Dexter's great stroke was a terrific drive, straight into her opponent's skirts, so she got Bob to slog at her skirts. I wonder she wasn't scared of some of the drives he sent down."—"How did she meet them?"—"On a sloped racquet, held almost stiff, which dropped them just over the net like a dead ball. She played it once or twice in the match, and each time, in trying to return it, Miss Dexter touched the net with her racquet. But she did not get many of her drives—she was put off by Inez's tactics."—"Good old Inez!" said Sandy. "I suppose Bob will go in and win?"—"I hope he will, present company excepted. He's an awfully good chap, and he has swotted to pull this off for Inez."—"Well, I jolly well hope he won't!" said Sandy, with a grimace. "She can't be in two places at once, and I want her up at the Lake."—"I said 'present company excepted.'"

At that moment Connie came up. "How do you think you're behaving to me, Pretender, wasting your eloquence on Sandy? Lin's doing his duty by Chris like a gentleman." Lin was enjoying the society of his favourite cousin immensely; Chris did not forget how much she owed her happiness to him. "Chris is very fond of Lin."—"Well, aren't you fond of me?"—"I don't seem to be wanted here," said Sandy, "I'm going outside to have a pipe. I always eat a better dinner if I do."—"Barbarian!" shouted his cousin after him. "Connie," said the Pretender, "you know you're my biggest woman friend."—"Do I? I'm not sure. I know that I have a very affectionate friend, that I could rely on for anything but one."—"What's that?"—"I'm not going to tell you. Perhaps you know and perhaps you don't. But if ever I say 'I told you,' remember this conversation."—"Mysterious and

vindictive witch!"—"Don't call me a witch! I don't think that they were ever young and pretty."—"One often talks of a girl being a witch."—"Yes, but you don't mean what you say, only *enchantress* is such a long and inconvenient word."—"What shall I call you, Connie dear?"—"Call me *dear*—that's what I want."—"Connie, you're incorrigible. I meant what I said, *dear*, when I declared that you were my greatest woman friend after my wife."—"And I meant what I said. If Aunt Rachel doesn't put you next to me at dinner, and you aren't just your old interesting self, I shall salt my soup with tears, I swear I will."—"You won't be giving me much time to show my eloquence."—"Then I'll salt my pudding, or my almonds. You're a dear old thing, and you play straight."

"Mother," called the Pretender to Mrs. Gordon, as she rose to tell the men whom they were to take in, "may I take Connie in to supper?"—"Yes, do—though I suppose you ought to take me in, as Bob is sure to want—someone else. Dear me, I seem to be at a discount to-night," said Mrs. Gordon, but her tones were affectionate. "Of course, you must take in Aunt Rachel," said Connie, politely. "Stuff and nonsense!" said Mrs. Gordon. "It will be nice for you two to get a good chat. You're such friends, and my new boy is as much my son as he could be his mother's, so I suppose he oughtn't to take me in."—"Whose name you don't know—such is my villainy!"—"No—isn't it dreadful?" laughed Mrs. Gordon. "You're really as bad as I am, Aunt," said Connie. "We've had the faith that moves mountains in this Pretender!"—"I must leave him in your care now, and go and be tactful with Inez! She's dreadfully touchy over these matters, and I don't want to spoil this of all evenings, for her!"

When Mrs. Gordon went up to Bob, Inez came across to them. Halfway she summoned Ned, with that little backward toss of the head, almost imperceptible. Connie opened her bag and pretended to be looking for something. To his astonishment Inez began, in a low voice, "How am I looking, Ned?" He took a full glance at her, and was struck by the glory of her femininity. She seemed to have every womanly grace—in contrast to the battling Amazon of the afternoon. He had never seen her look so girlish or so beautiful.

"You look a perfect darling to-night, Inez; I think I know why."—"I wonder if you do?"—"I was proud of you this afternoon. You did show splendid grit. I watched every stroke."—"I hoped you would, but I did not see you until the match was over."—"I took good care that you shouldn't. I

was afraid of putting you off."—"I'm not that sort: nothing puts me off. I like to see a good ring of supporters, and I was more anxious that you should be there than anybody else. But you'll think I'm making love to you. Ta-ta! I'm sure Bob's getting anxious."

Bob was not. The care Inez had taken over dressing could mean only one thing: what she said when she got back to him was disarming. "It's the first time I've really spoken to Ned since the match. I hardly had a word when we came in. I wanted his congratulations." Bob had the Australian love of congratulations himself. The Pretender returned to Connie, who only that moment appeared to have found the gold mirror for which she had been looking, though she knew where it was all the time.

"Doesn't Inez look lovely to-night," she said.—"Victory is very becoming to her."—"I'm green with jealousy. You'll have to make love to me all dinner. It ought not to be difficult for people who've been engaged to each other."—"Connie, if you're so blatant, I shall have to tell Chris."—"Does Chris know?"—"Of course she does. I've no secrets from her."—"None?"—"Absolutely none."—"That's all right. What has she got to say about me?"—"She said, 'Be as affectionate as ever you like. I can't be sufficiently grateful to the woman who was so loyal to my husband when Society pointed her finger at him.'"—"Did she say that?"—"Honestly."

"How like darling Chris! She is a 'white man.' Well, you shan't make love to me at dinner. You shall only be as interesting as ever you can. I expect that Chris will have plenty of trouble without me, when she has such a prize talker for a husband. There's nothing women like so much as a man who speaks." He looked at her inquiringly. "I mean in public, of course. They'll grovel to him. It means such power—in a democracy."—"I know that you're pulling my leg, Connie, but I can't see in what direction."—"I'm glad of that. It's a good sign. Chris is safer with Lin than I am with you. He's such an old-fashioned sort of admirer. I heard Aunt tell him to take her in. Fancy Aunt Rachel having to go in with Sandy! It's a funny old world, isn't it? Adam will have to head the procession alone. He ought to have bagpipes and be playing 'Cock o' the North.' Oh, no, here's Aunt Elizabeth, just in time to save him."

Mrs. Gunn had been 'phoned-for to grace the victory. As she never varied her costume, it had been easy for her to catch the 6.30 Zep. from Colac to Melbourne, which brought her to

Hallhead in time for dinner. They had been waiting for her. Adam the younger, who had been talking to his father and Pat, had been up in Melbourne for the Championship. The rich young Australian is not given to missing such occasions. He was as proud as Lucifer of Inez's great exploit. When he first came into the drawing-room he had had a long talk with Connie. He was one of her weaknesses; and seeing so little of women as he did, he was like clay in the hands of the potter. He was the finest-looking man of them all, except his venerable father. But he kept right outside of the gaieties at Melbourne and the seaside. He cared for nothing but polo and prize-stock; steeplechasing and hunting with his harriers. He was Master of the Esslemont Hunt, which he had taken over from his father several years before. He was still sore about the Pretender's not having come for the hunting to Esslemont in the previous winter.

* * * * *

The order of sitting at table from Mrs. Gordon's right to Mr. Gordon's left was the Pretender, Connie, Pat, Chris, Lin; and from Mr. Gordon's right to Mrs. Gordon's left it was Mrs. Gunn, Adam, Bob, Inez, Sandy.

Mrs. Gordon had put Inez next to Sandy to console him for having to go in with herself, and Adam on Bob's left to make Bob give Sandy a chance. She put Pat on Connie's other side, so that she might enjoy an occasional word with her son-in-law. She was agreeably surprised by the conversation which took place between him and Connie. Instead of being all "ragging," as she had expected, it consisted a good deal of upbraiding him for neglecting the literary functions after making such a good start. "I don't like leaving Chris."—"Why should you leave her? Persuade her to come with you. Chris will enjoy seeing her husband's triumphs; and there are plenty who will enjoy talking to anything so pretty and sympathetic. I'll take you both under my wing."—"You implant the desire in Chris, Connie; I shall be only too delighted."—"You can always dine with us before we go on to the functions. Father enjoys Chris's society—she's one of the women who don't get on his nerves."—"I'll talk to Chris, too," said Mrs. Gordon. "I certainly think you ought to keep up your speaking."

When the ingenuous Pat found that Connie was not "ragging," but willing to talk sense, he lost his timidity of her. He was surprised at the intelligence she showed in her questions about

the Daedalus. She asked him many; there were various points from conversations she had had with the Pretender about his business which she wanted to clear up. Mrs. Gordon saw that she could leave these three to themselves. Inez needed her help more, since both Sandy and Bob desired to monopolize her. But since both wished to pay their homage to her victory by technical comments on various fine strokes and rallies, it was not difficult for an experienced hostess to steer them into a conversation *à trois*, most gratifying to Inez, who, not wishing Bob to grow too personal, took care not to let Sandy feel *de trop*. Inez hoped the Pretender overheard what they were saying, and observed with some concern what a serious conversation he was holding with Connie. While he found pleasure in observing how Chris laid herself out to make Lin enjoy himself. Lin had done him yeoman's service, and was unlikely to mistake her affection.

* * * * *

Inez had won her victory at tennis. In a way it was a Pyrrhic victory. At Hallhead, except when they were assembling for dinner, the family generally sat in the hall, which was very large, and rich in comfortable sofas and lounges, and contained the newspaper and magazine tables. It was a very cheery room, for its two great open fireplaces were kept well supplied with huge red-gum logs from the ring-barked trees at Esslemont. Inez, though extremely hardy, was like a cat in her love of warmth, and when she came out from dinner, threw herself into a lounge in front of the nearest fire, with a sigh of content, expecting her two cavaliers to follow her when they had finished their wine. But Sandy, who wished, in his grim way, to give Bob sufficient rope to hang himself, or may have thought that the Gordonian code demanded it, went off to the billiard-room with Adam, and the womenfolk deserted at the critical moment, for some notion of their own. Therefore Inez, who felt too comfortable to move, and looked supremely lovely and feminine as she sunned her exquisitely-slippered feet in the glow, found herself confronted with Bob.

He began, as might have been expected of a man who took such bold plunges in business: "Inez, you look ripping to-night."—"It must be self-satisfaction. I'm very pleased with myself." She hoped he would let the conversation continue in this lighter vein. He was not to be diverted, but blurted: "I can't keep it in any longer. I've enlarged my house up at Port Stevens, and made it quite a comfortable place to live in."

—“Then you don't mean to spend so much time in the South as you have been doing?”—“That depends on you. So long as you are willing to stay there, I shall never want to leave it.”—“What have I got to do with it, Bob? I sincerely hope that I shall never see the N. T.”—“Inez,” he begged—he was desperately in earnest—“don't fence. You must know that I want to marry you as soon as you'll give your consent.”—“Which I can never give, for the reason just mentioned.”

“You can't take refuge in that. I'm ready to live in Melbourne, or anywhere else you please, just paying flying visits to my stations once a month, or when I'm needed for anything—such as sales or signing a contract.”—“It's all beside the point, Bob. If I were a marrying woman, I don't think I could marry an N. T. squatter. I'm a station-bred girl; I couldn't be party to such a farce as making my husband live away from his stations because I wanted to amuse myself in the capital. But I am not a marrying woman. You've heard me declare this repeatedly. I feel it more strongly than ever. A woman ought not to marry a man unless she is willing to give herself up to his interests, and if he's a busy man, to his amusements, to any reasonable extent. This is just what I couldn't do for you. I want to live my own life, like a man, because I've wasted 99 per cent. of it so far. When I think of Pat, always at work, if he's not actually playing round, I feel ashamed of myself.”

—“You've nothing to complain of. You've just won the tennis championship of Australia, and you've pulled off ever so many prizes at riding.”—“I don't care. These championships and prizes may develop the skill and endurance of the race, but they must be deadly for the mind, because they're nearly always won by people who haven't got any minds, like me.”

“But you must have a mind, Inez, or you wouldn't be thinking. . . .”—“Or I shouldn't be talking through my hat—that's what you'd say if you were honest.”—“No,” he said, “I don't believe that, but I believe that Australia has done pretty well without too much ‘mind,’ as the papers grandly call it.”—“The Australians are the outstanding example of how much more profitable intelligence is than intellect, but they get less enjoyment out of beauty than any equally-civilized people.’ I read this in a book by Dagincourt, the Frenchman who did the grand tour of Australia.”

“Please be serious, Inez. You don't realize what it means to me. I'm asking you to be my wife, not having a literary discussion. Will you marry me, Inez? You don't know how passionately I love you, because I'm not clever at expressing

myself.”—“Yes, I do know, you dear Bob! And I love you—quite a lot. But I couldn't be happy if I married you. I was trying not to have to say ‘no.’ If you want a definite answer, it can only be ‘no,’ and that's final.”—“I suppose that I shall have to go into the cold shades of exile, like others who have pressed you for an answer?”

“Oh, please don't! We can remain just as big pals. You're not like some of them, Bob—I can trust you. When you promise that if I go on seeing you, you won't take advantage of me to re-open the question, I know that I can depend on you. If I get sufficiently fond of you to change my mind—and you may try your hardest to make me, so long as you don't ask me, in any way, or make love to me. . . .”—“Yes, yes?” he said, so eagerly that she almost melted.—“I say, if I get sufficiently fond of you to change my mind, I'll come to you of my own accord, and say, ‘Bob, do you still want to marry me?’”—“It's sweet of you, Inez, and I accept your terms gratefully. But I can't do it yet—I'm too fond of you. I should break my word.”—“Don't be in a hurry to cut off your nose, Bob. My old nurse used to say that I ‘had the peculiars.’ I have them still. I've never cared how peculiar I was, and I'm going to be very peculiar now. I'm going to teach you to use the hair of the dog that bit you.”

“What do you mean by all this, Inez?” he asked doggedly.—“I mean—well, first we'll assume that nobody will know that you have proposed; nobody will, unless you tell them. That being so, there's no reason why you should not go on seeing me as much as you like. People will watch for the affair to come to a head, but it won't, because it's come already, and is on the way to a cure.” He made an effort to protest. “Hold your tongue, Bob, until I've done! Then you can have your say, and I'll listen to it, quite patiently, because I'm fond of you.”—“Sorry, old girl, but I'm hard hit.”—“And I'm jolly sorry for you, but it's not going to be bad, if you'll make an effort.”—“How am I to make it?” he asked, “not much comforted.”—“Give me the promise I demanded.”—“But I couldn't keep it, Inez, not yet.”—“That doesn't matter.”

“Doesn't matter? What do you mean?”—“What I say. If you'll first of all make that promise, and then make a second promise—as a Gordon Club man, who would scorn to tell a lie except to shield a woman, or be loyal to a friend. . . .”—“What's the second promise, then?”—“That you'll do your darndest to keep the first. If you do that, I'll forgive you if you sometimes fail, unless it happens so inexcusably that

I think you a degenerate. If once I think that, it will be all over between us. But if they're only honest failures, I won't deprive myself of a friendship on account of them. Are you going to try, Bob?"—"Yes, I will try, and thank you a thousand times."

"I won't be hard on you if you realize from the first why I'm making you this offer. I don't think there's the smallest chance of my ever being willing to marry you, but I want to cure myself of my beastly trick of being a man's best pal one day, and not on speaking terms with him the next, because he's broken the unwritten compact and proposed to me. I'm too fond of you, Bob, to treat you like this, unless you compel me. But you don't misunderstand me, do you? It's only a hundred to one, a thousand to one chance. Indeed, I can't see that it's any chance at all."—"But I may try to make you change your mind, so long as I don't ask you or make love to you?"—"Exactly."—"Here's my hand on it, Inez. I'm not making an exhibition of you because it's good-bye for a bit. I'm going to fly up to Port Stevens. When I'm at the other end of Australia—and it's the whole length of the continent—I shall be able to see things in their true light. And they were making some arrangements there which needn't be finished. . . ." Inez's face assumed an inquiring look. "Which needn't be finished yet."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE ORDEAL OF BOB STEVENS

IN less than three weeks Bob Stevens was back from the N.T. He telephoned to Hallhead that he was coming out to tea. When he arrived only Inez was at home, and she received him with obvious—almost radiant—pleasure. "Oh, Bob," she cried, "I am glad that you have come back! I was finding it very dull without you—until tea-time."—"Why did you spoil it by saying that?"—"Partly so that you shouldn't mistake my being so glad to see you, partly because you're the only man who is idle before tea-time, and I love to have a man to do things with. After office-hours, I only have to monorail out to Beaudesert to find Ned, and sometimes Pat, at home."—"Is it within the rules to tell you how jealous I am of your 'Ned?'"—"Perfectly. I rather like you to be jealous. But you needn't be jealous of Ned—the tame brother-in-law, if ever there was. I wish I could make him jealous, then there might be some chance of his waking up."

"Is he such an icicle?"—"He isn't an icicle, but he's—I must say it, though mother hates my using the word—he's so *beastly* correct. You run down to Beaudesert a few times with me and see for yourself! I did not think any man could be so backward in coming forward as Ned."—"Have you ever found out anything more about him, Inez?"—"Not a word, and I don't want to. He is a white man. He won't let Chris draw a penny of her allowance until he is able to tell us that celebrated secret!"—"He isn't rich, either. That's a jolly good sign."

"However, we're not white-washing Ned. We want to know if Robert Stevens, Esq., feels himself strong enough to be my pal again?"—"He does."—"Then all is well in the best of possible worlds. Citizen Stevens, what is it your pleasure that we should do to-morrow?—to-night I am engaged."—"May I ask where?"—"Certainly. I am going with Chris and the same Ned to the Thursday Night Literary Society, to which wild horses would not drag you."—"They mightn't, but you can, if you'll take me."—"I shall be delighted, if you care to come. Stay and dine with us. You need not dress. It's quite optional for the 'Thursday Night.'"

This was what Bob would not do. On his stations in the Northern Territory, he went about dressed like one of his own boundary-riders, except that his breeches and boots were of a superior cut. But when he was down in Melbourne, he had a horror of not being correct in his costume. If he had not time to dress for a function he stayed away; the occasion was of less importance, to him, than his being correctly attired for it. He insisted on going back to his chambers and returning as immaculately arrayed as if he had come from Pall Mall, instead of Port Stevens.

He was rather bored with the proceedings at the "Thursday Night." The only interest it possessed for him was hearing the Pretender speak. The subject of the debate was, "Should Australia try to develop a civilization of its own?" Treading warily, he congratulated Australia on the real progress it had made in producing a literature and affording the opportunities for a literary life, pointing out how far ahead of the America of 1850 was the Australia of 1950, though America had been colonized nearly two hundred years longer than Australia. He showed a wide and discriminating knowledge of the productions of Australian writers, painters and architects, between 1900 and 2000 A.D. But when it came to the question of Australia developing a civilization of its own, he examined the whence

and the how. He reminded Australians that the only new elements which they had to draw on were bush-life and the customs of the aborigines, and, leaving the former alone, as a branch of European civilization which Australians-born had a better right to handle than he had, he addressed himself to an examination of the manners and customs of the Australian "aboriginal," which differed from those of older and more effete civilizations under the British rule, to discover what could really be recommended for adoption in Europe, Asia, Africa or America. He held a delighted audience spellbound with his ironies.

Bob, who had many aborigines on his stations, shouted with laughter at his sallies, and wondered where he could have got such a knowledge of the Black Fellows' idiosyncracies. "He's a great chap, this 'Ned' of yours." Inez, who had laughed until the tears rolled down her cheeks, agreed. "But I'm horribly jealous."—"You needn't be. To-morrow I am yours to do anything you like."

His mind did not run on original lines. "What about a game of tennis?" he asked. "Certainly. Where would you like to play?" He longed to say, "At Hallhead," but prudence forbade it. A *tête-à-tête* was dangerous until he had felt his way a little, and he would cut a much better figure among a crowd who admired him than in the presence of one woman who held his fate in her hands. Furthermore, it had been his experience that the shortest road to Inez's good graces was to make her cut a good figure. If it had not been for the Championship, his proposal might have been rejected contemptuously. So he asked, "Where is there any good tennis going?"—"Sandringham. It's the height of the winter season. The band plays every afternoon. There's some hot stuff about in tennis."—"Will you be my partner?"—"Of course."—"Then we'll arrange some good matches. I think we should be too strong for any mixed double, but it would be easy to find a couple of men just too good for us, and that's what I enjoy."—"I too. I love having to play up." Playing in a sett with three men cracks Inez covered herself with glory, and grew very "pallish" with Bob.

There were no dances that week to which she desired to go. She was equally willing to go to the theatre or to stay at home and play billiards with Bob. He had not made any serious *faux pas*. But in the following week she had three balls in succession, and Chris and the Pretender were going to stay at Hallhead to chaperon her, though Chris was not dancing. The

first ball was the Claridges'. Bob looked forward to that greatly, because Balranald was a rambling house, with all sorts of odd corners for sitting-out, and he knew their topography. He dined at Hallhead and went with the party. There was a jar, just before they started, because when Bob, expecting great things, caught Inez by herself and asked her how many dances he might have, she answered: "The supper dance and one other."—"Is that all?" he demanded ruefully. "You know I have a passion for dancing, Bob, and though I bow down to your tennis, you're not up to my form in dancing. I'm willing to stand up to you in one dance, and let you tread on my toes and knock me about—for the sake of appearances—and I'll go into supper with you if you wish me to. But I'm going to dance the rest with my specials, and there are heaps of girls who won't mind dancing with you. It's positive pain to me; I'm sure you don't want to be cruel to me."

He saw what she meant and yielded sulkily. Inez forgave his sulks and turned to the Pretender. "Do I get my stroke at the evens, as usual?"—"Where does the supper-dance come in—odds or evens?"—"Odds—it's number eleven."—"At the evens, as usual."—"Does that mean that you're giving him every other dance?" asked Bob, looking the reverse of pleased.—"Yes, I always do. Chris prefers my doing it that way." He was about to say, "Why? can't she trust you?" but checked himself and just asked "Why?"—"Because we go back and keep her company when we've done our dance, if she's sitting alone. Chris isn't accustomed to being a wallflower."

This was consoling, but he was worried by Inez's beatified content as she began each new dance with her brother-in-law—and by the animation with which she thanked him when the dance was over. He might have known that there was not necessarily anything personal in it. The Pretender's beautiful dancing and the perfect harmony of their movements were quite sufficient to account for her enthusiasm. Bob was not sufficiently a dancer to realize this. Inez doubted if he did, but it was a matter of indifference to her. She did not mean to cultivate false pretences. She desired that he should know what he was in for. When Lin Gunn, who did not dance, turned up, because his cousin was giving the ball, and devoted himself to Chris, Inez deliberately took her brother-in-law to all her favourite sitting-out places, as an assertion of her liberty.

Bob was in no mood to dance with other women. He sat down by Chris, who drew in her skirts to make room for him

on a sofa, just large enough for three. She had no desire for a tête-à-tête with Lin—not from any apprehension of flirtations, for which he had no capacity, but because his conversation was easily exhausted. Bob sat on one side of her and Lin on the other. She smiled more to Lin and talked more to Bob. "Does Inez have as many dances with Stuart when you're dancing?" asked Bob. "Yes, I think so."—"Don't you mind?"—"Mind? No. Why?"—"You might want him to dance them with you."—"I don't let him dance any with me. Living out of town as I do, I want to keep up with my friends when I do come in."—"She seems very devoted." He smiled significantly.

"Don't be hateful, Bob, or we shan't be friends. The reason why Inez likes him so is that at last she has found a pal who is content to be a brother. All the rest were lovers in disguise, waiting to trap her. She's so sick of it that when she's found one that she can be sure of, she lets herself go."—"I am glad you think so, Chris," he said, so bitterly that she saw how hard hit he was and forgave him. But she was not pleased and turned to Lin to show it. He had heard their conversation and asked, "Are you as sure as she is, Chris?" Chris gave a little joyous laugh. "Aren't I just? He's a darling of a husband, Lin, and I have to thank you for him."—"Then it's about the best day's work I ever did."—"I'm dead sure of that." Bob felt that it was time to choose a new observation-post and moved off.

At that moment Connie came across to them. "Go and have a cigarette, Lin," she said, "I want to have a talk to Chris. I have a partner who can't dance, so I said I thought Chris looked ill and I must look after her. Bring a glass of water when the music stops and be prepared to receive a scolding for taking such a time, but don't bring it a moment before if you value my friendship."—"You're only just in time, Connie, because we're going after this dance."—"Going at the fifteenth?"—"Yes. We have three nights in succession, and Sir Geoffrey says I mustn't overdo it."

Connie proceeded at once to the danger spot which had proved fatal to Bob; but she was one of the family. "Inez is having a pretty good time, isn't she? I never saw her smitten with anybody so much as she's smitten with Ned."—"She isn't smitten with him," said Chris, hotly. "She's only showing what a nice woman she can be when she meets a man who will give her a chance. She's accustomed to be spoilt and proposed to, and he does neither."—"I believe you're right, Chris—

though it doesn't look like it to the naked eye."—"I never expected Inez to be so nice to him," said Chris, proudly. "He must have a good influence over her."—"I've no doubt he has," said the practical Connie. "The man's a perfect dear, and Inez for once has the sense to see it. The best of it is, that you can trust him with her to the devil. He never takes liberties."

"That's so nice, isn't it?" said his wife, rather naïvely, "but how do you know so much about it, Connie?"—"Because I tried to make him," she answered, unabashed, "I know what I found myself up against. Now I suppose you'll be jealous of me, Chrissy?"—"Me? No. Ned owes far too much to your friendship, and we were brought up as cousins, and most people think we are."—"Has he told you that we were engaged?"—"Yes, and he's told me what a brick you were, when he confessed that he was in love with me. That was very 'big' of you, Connie. I was still more in love with him, in spite of the mystery."

"Your husband's a jolly nice man, Chrissy, if he had twenty skeletons in his cupboard."—"I sincerely hope that he has at least one great big one," confided Chris to Connie, "so that I may have the chance of proving my gratitude. He has made me so happy, Connie. I used to think that a girl was a fool if she married before she was twenty-five, except to a man she had known all her life. And I went and married at twenty, to a man whose very name I didn't know, and instead of making 'a mucker' of my marriage, I'm the happiest woman in Melbourne."—"You deserve all you've got, Chris. He couldn't have found a nicer woman if he'd been a king, and ordered all the girls in Melbourne to be brought before him, for him to make his choice."—"It's ripping of you to say that, Connie, but I feel desperately unworthy of my happiness. I'm just pretty and nice; I haven't two ideas in my head outside of open-air things."

Connie rambled on in ignorance that Chris knew his secret. "The only skeleton in the cupboard I expected him to have was a wife in England, but I know now that he's incapable of deceiving us. It's something to do with a will, perhaps: some cracked old man may have left him money with all sorts of restrictions; or he may be trying to prove his title to something; he might even have come out here as next-of-kin to some intestate's fortune advertised in the *Times*. He might be a whole lot of things, and we might go on guessing for a year, without getting any nearer. I am sure that when it does come out, it will be an utter surprise to all of us."—"Thank you, Connie," said Chris, with a good deal of feeling.

The band had not begun, but Lin was looking so disconcerted by holding the glass, that Connie beckoned to him, and insisted on Chris taking two gulps of the water, to set her right with the disappointed partner. Just then Inez came up. "I must say good-night, Connie. I promised Chris I'd go after that dance."—"But you promised me the fifteenth, Miss Inez," said Hugh Patterson, one of her oldest friends and favourite partners. "It's begun already. I'm sure Mrs. Stuart wouldn't mind waiting until it's finished."—"I'm sure she wouldn't, but I have to protect her from herself. Good-night, Mr. Patterson. Are you going to the Watkins' to-morrow night? Because if you are, I'll keep the *fifth* for you. You would have the *fifteenth* to-night, though I told you I shouldn't be here!"

"You'd given away everything earlier."—"And you thought I should be weak. I'm never weak now."

Bob saw them making their move and flew to Inez's side. "Can I get your cloak for you, Inez?"—"Please, Bob. It's no good our offering you a lift, is it? We don't go your way."—"But I'm going your way. I can take the monorail back to the city." In 2000 A.D. the night service on the railways was almost as good as the day service, and Bob had no intention of missing the aspect of ownership conferred by escorting Inez home.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MEPHISTOPHELES

THE position became increasingly difficult. Bob, after watching the Pretender and Inez with dog-like patience at the other two balls, was persuaded that Chris was right—that there was nothing between them but the sheer pleasure which two very good dancers took in each other's skill, and two very nice people found in each other's friendship. If Inez had felt more Stuart would have shrunk back into his shell, and her opinions about sex Bob knew only too well. But instinct told him that his chance of winning Inez's consent was imperilled by the fact that she found the Pretender so much more sympathetic, that she could not consider himself as a husband. His instinct was correct.

It did not prevent Inez from being perfectly fair to him. She had promised to let him know if she changed her opinion, and she considered this a promise that she would try to change it. She saw Bob's good points. He was kind and really broad-minded, in spite of his intellectual limitations; he was honour-

able; he was splendidly strong and courageous, and a great sportsman; and since he had won his wealth by his own capacity so young, there seemed every chance of his becoming one of the most prominent men in Australia. He was, certainly, passionately in love with her, and she liked him very much, and had known him since she was a child.

The question of their relations at balls became acute by no fault of either. Tudor Lewis was their evil genius. Having himself fallen into the pitfall which he had dug for the Pretender, to clear the way for his own marriage with Connie, he owed him a bad turn. And his feelings towards Inez were not benevolent. There was not only her attitude to the Pretender to be taken into the reckoning, but the attitude she had always adopted to himself. Inez, being one of the most beautiful girls in Australia, as well as the idol of the sporting set for her being such a typical Gordon, so courageous and brilliant at all forms of active sports, was supremely attractive to a man of strong passions and physique, like Tudor Lewis. Though she had not the present wealth of her cousin, she would be a great heiress, while even her freaks might be turned to account by one who made it his profession to live in the public eye.

He had succeeded in entering the Gordon circle, but he had enjoyed no success with Inez. The barrier between them was insuperable, though he was too hide-bound in his bumptiousness to recognize it. Inez admired his writing—there was no one who wrote so brilliantly in advocating the ideals of the Gordon Clubs—but she felt a repugnance to him personally, and in any case, since he had not had the fortune to be born in Australia, would not have contemplated him for a husband. Had he been a good dancer he might have had a chance of removing bad impressions, but his dancing was execrable. Inez put him on the black list the first time she saw it. Now he had a fresh grievance against her. In spite of his bonhomie, he had a narrow and bitter soul, and easily convinced himself that the reason why she had thrown him over was that, in the interval, she had fallen in love with his chief rival in Connie's favour. From Connie—(he supposed because she also was in love; what could all these women see in the man?)—he had received the biggest setback of his life. But Bob Stevens was a man, to whom he had suggested successful speculations, and who had no reason to love the Pretender.

He had sufficient knowledge of character to understand that Bob would need skilful handling. His chance came at a ball. Being such a bad dancer, he was often standing out. He and

Bob took cigarettes and refreshers together, and hung about the doors of the dancing-rooms. They had done this many times before he ventured to broach the subject. He thought out his campaign carefully, before he broke the ice. "Have you noticed what a mesmeric power that feller Stuart seems to exercise over women, Stevens?"—"I don't think I know what mesmeric means."—"I mean that he seems to hypnotize them, in a way."—"I haven't noticed it. He's such a nice chap that one likes him, though one has pretty good cause for doing the other thing."—"There's more in it than that, Stevens."—"Is there?" asked Bob, in a bored sort of way. Questions like hypnotism, spiritualism, and that sort of thing—he lumped all occult subjects together—did not interest him.—"Yes, there is."—"How do you make it?" he asked more for politeness than anything else.

"Take the instances of three women whom you know well enough to judge—his wife, her sister and Connie Claridge. Mrs. Stuart always declared that she would not marry until she was 25. She married this man when she was 20 and had only known him a few months. Her sister, Miss Inez" (he spoke of her rather formally, because he knew the state of Bob's feelings), "has always declared herself to be a Diana" ("Bother the man!" thought Bob. "Why need he be so flowery?"), "who meant to have nothing to do with men except as fellow-sportsmen—there isn't much Diana about her now." He indicated with a movement of his head that Bob was to look at Inez. Inez was dancing with the Pretender, and was not being Diana at all, but a merry, feminine creature, thoroughly natural and happy. "And Miss Claridge . . ."—"Now we're near home," said Bob. ". . . Though she never had ideas of this sort, is a regular handful to everybody else, but so sweetly reasonable to him that he could have picked up the biggest heiress in Australia if he hadn't been in such a hurry to snap up one of those Gordon heiresses."

"I don't like this talking about heiresses, Lewis. It seems a bit low down. No doubt chaps do think a lot about that, when they're not independent, like you and me. But it's better left out of conversations."—"Certainly. I was emphasizing that the three girls, upon whom he has used his powers most, happen to be the three greatest 'catches' in Victoria."—"I don't see that he has used these powers," said Bob, still rather displeased. "Besides, anybody with half an eye could see that it did not need a hypnotizer to make Chris Gordon change her opinions about marriage; she was born for matrimony and motherhood, if any

woman ever was, and only meant to make sure that she was choosing wisely."—"Well, pass on to the others. Have you ever seen them so reasonable before?"—"No, I can't say that I have."—"It isn't precisely their game, is it?"

Bob did not like this expression, either, and showed restiveness, but did not break off the conversation, because Tudor was a friend with whom he constantly exchanged hospitalities, and was always showing the cloven hoof. "I can see," said the offender, "that you don't like my way of speaking. It concerns us too closely. But I'm talking facts."—"—m," said Bob.—"If only you'd let me be frank."—"Spit it out, and have done with it!" said Bob, with a wry face. "You'll keep hinting until you have, and the whole subject riles me."

"To put it into a nutshell, he can't have any designs on Miss Gordon's hand, because he's married to her sister."—"And deuced fond of her!"—"I admit it. But he doesn't mean her to marry anyone else, and uses the hypnotic influence which he possesses over her to increase her fantastic objection to marriage. She's a beautiful girl, and he is in no mind to give up having her at his beck and call for dancing and games. I'll be bound they have a gramophone and a polished floor, and a tennis-court, and all they require for having a good time down at Stuart's place."

"I've had enough of this," said Bob, angrily. "I don't choose to discuss ladies in this way."—"Don't get shirty, Stevens. You told me I could speak to you frankly."—"But there are limits."—"Well, I'm sorry if I've offended you. I meant to do you a service."—"Save us from our friends."—"You can be as sarcastic as you like, because I know that I've done you a jolly good turn in pointing out the uncanny influence which is preventing you from realizing your hopes."—"I don't see what right you have to talk about it."—"None. I have run the risk of forfeiting a friendship which I value very much. But I couldn't stand by and see this sort of thing going on without trying to stop it."—"I believe you're a good fellow, Lewis, though you do rile me confoundedly. You mustn't mind my going off. I can't stick it any more at present."

"He's swallowed it all right," said Lewis to himself, smiling inwardly. He was too good a poker player to show feelings unless he meant to advertise them. "Mesmerist or no mesmerist, Connie likes Stuart a damned sight too much. She's not the sort of girl to care whether a man is married or not. She knows that a woman who is as pretty as she is and has £100,000 will be forgiven anything by her future husband. It's lucky that he's such

a mug." That Connie never asked him to the house or accepted his invitations now, he attributed entirely to Stuart's affair, and could not understand how any girl in her right senses could prefer Stuart to himself; he was as puffed-up as a bull-frog. His object in unsettling Bob had been to pay Stuart out for Connie. In some form which he did not yet visualize, he meant to carry on a vendetta, in which Bob would be an invaluable ally.

Bob was terribly unsettled. The scanty allowance of dances which he got from Inez was put down to Stuart's account, though she never had given him more—in fact, she had formerly only given him one. Before very long he had a fresh grievance; their tennis was docked two days a week because she went out hunting with her brother-in-law. The Pretender only absented himself from the office under pressure from his father-in-law, who was the chairman of his companies, and wished him to try the Australian hunting. He was shocked to find how easily he could be spared, but now that he was one of the family, it was natural for him to be more partner than secretary, and Mr. Gordon was not sorry to have this emphasized. His going down to Esslemont for some hunting in the previous winter had been frustrated by Inez's action, which had made him as unwilling to go there as he was to go to Hallhead. Adam wanted him to go this winter instead, but Chris's condition made her remain at home, and the Pretender would not leave her, except for the day. Fortunately there was a stag-hunting Club at the Werribee, halfway between Melbourne and Geelong, where deer had been running wild for a century and the fences were all suitable for hunting. The portion of the Werribee property that had been ruined for sheep by the deer was rented to the Werribee Hunt Club, which had stabling for hundreds of hunters. A great many wealthy Melbournians kept hunters there, and went out by monorail, though the clubhouse had a good many bedrooms. All the Gordons, except the parents, were members. Adam sent up four hunters to be stabled there for them, and Inez and the Pretender used to run down for the day.

Inez kept herself at his disposal whenever he wanted to go, because she was penitent at having deprived him in 2001. His fondness for the sport gratified her. She was genuinely pleased that he cut a good figure in the hunting-field. She would have hated that the "new chum," who had married into the Lindsay Gordons, should be found deficient in horsemanship. He had evidently hunted a good deal, and this, added to his having Inez with him, made him as popular with the hunting set as he was already with his brother-officers in King Edward's Horse. Inez

Gordon, with her beauty and brilliant riding, had been a Queen of the hunting-field since she was seventeen.

That Inez always went to the Werribee with him was "the unkindest cut of all" to Bob, though she would have welcomed his company as well, for Bob, naturally, was a splendid horseman and as well-known in the hunting-field as any man in Victoria. Not knowing Inez's reasons, he considered that if she wanted to hunt, *he* should take her. Inez did not wish to hurt his feelings, but was glad of an opportunity to assert her liberty, in case she should change her mind and accept him. After all, failing her brothers, her brother-in-law was the most natural person to escort her.

For consolation Bob went, not to Chris, who would have shown him how unnecessarily he was troubling himself, and offered him her aid and sympathy, but to Lindsay Gordon's poems and philosophy, with which, as a prominent Gordon Club man, he was familiar. While Inez, in the midst of much dancing, hunting and tennis—the last entirely with him—was living the least blame-worthy and most humdrum existence she had lived for years, he on sleepless nights was repeating to himself such lines as:

"Let us thank the Lord for His bounties all,
For the brave old days of pleasure and pain,
When the world for both of us seemed too small—
Though the love was void and the hate was vain—
Though the word was bitter between us twain,
And the bitter word was kin to the blow,
For her gloss and ripple of rich gold rain,
For her velvet crimson and satin snow—
Though we never shall know the old days again."

The mantle of the poet did not cover Bob's broad shoulders. For the time he could sympathize with Gordon's unsatisfied longings, with the bitter contrasts which Gordon found between the glittering Australian days and his own disappointments, with Gordon's fierce regrets, hates and jealousies. But Gordon's poems are permeated with failure, the failure of all his hopes and strenuous endeavours, in which love plays a small part, being confined chiefly to regret for losing the privilege of associating with the women of his own class. Bob's life had been a singularly successful one, marred only by this single failure. To express Bob's feelings, Kendall's "Rose Lorraine" would have been worth more than all Gordon's poems:

" No woman lives with power to burst
 My passion's bonds, and set me free ;
 For Rose is last where Rose was first,
 And only Rose is fair to me.
 The faintest memory of her face,
 The wilful face that hurt me so,
 Is followed by a fiery trace
 That Rose Lorraine must never know."

The poetry of regret ill-suited the stout-hearted giant, who by his own exertions had won such a great place in the torrid North. In that mood he came into conflict with Inez. Instead of pursuing his ordinary life and trusting to win her acquiescence by camaraderie and esteem, he felt it due to his dignity—perhaps it was!—to bring things to a head. He chose his time well. That afternoon they almost scored a sett against the two men who won the open doubles at the last championship meeting. After dinner they were left in sole possession of the great hall, whose mighty log-fire was both heartening and romantic. Inez's beauty softened in the rosy light, and she was in an indulgent mood.

" Inez," he began, " you make me very unhappy by paying such marked attentions to Stuart in public."—" What do you mean, Bob?" She spoke hotly.—" Well, you dance half the evening with him, and show how you like him every time you go to a ball, and you go off hunting with him about twice a week."—" What if I do? He's my brother."—" Brother-in-law."—" There's no difference. I treat him like a brother."—" But, unfortunately, that's liable to be mistaken."

" I treat you like one, too! So you've nothing to complain of," snapped Inez. " I should like to know what people say about you!"—" Probably the truth—that I'm desperately keen to marry you and doing my darnedest."—" Exactly, but not many men are allowed so much liberty with a girl they admire."—" I grant that. Both you and your mother are most frightfully good to me. I appreciate it awfully."—" Then what are you shouting about?"—" I don't think that you ought to show such dependence—on your brother-in-law, while I am trying to make you my wife."

" Perhaps not," she said dryly. " Perhaps also it is a good thing that I am doing it, if it causes you to challenge my liberty to do it. I'm glad to have the opportunity of asserting it if it's questioned. Understand this quite clearly, Bob, that I always mean to do exactly what I choose, whether I remain Inez Gordon, or become Mrs. Stevens, or Mrs. Anybody Else. If you hope ever

to receive from me the announcement that I'm willing to marry you, you can scrap this idea of interfering with my liberty—at once. Can't you accept my statement that he's nothing to me but a brother?"—" I believe anything you tell me, Inez. I was not questioning your behaviour."—" I should think not!" she fired up, " or I should show you the door pretty quick."

He looked so infinitely hurt that she said, " I take that back, Bob—it was ungenerous. I believe you, too, but I think it's up to you to explain what you mean by 'dependence.'"—" I will, willingly. I've got an idea—I'm not the only person who's got it—that Stuart influences everything you do."—" He does. Until I met him I never let anyone decide things for me. My decisions were often, perhaps generally, erratic. But I felt that I could not let anyone else decide. Now I feel that on many points I would rather he decided than me. I have such confidence in his judgment."—" That's what I complain of. I and my friends think he's so attached to you . . ."

Inez started up impatiently. " No, I mean no insinuation—I give you my word—I simply mean that he's as attached to you as your mother might be with a similar result, that he uses this hypnotic influence."—" Don't use that word 'hypnotic' to me again, Bob, or it's good-bye."—" Sorry—he uses this influence over you to prevent your contracting any obligation which would take you away from him."—" Bob, you're inviting your fate. You shan't talk to me like this—even if I was your wife."—" You're fond of talking as man-to-man, Inez. Why can't you talk as man-to-man over this? Hang it all, you know that I only do it because I love you so much!"—" Talk away, then, though it only puts you farther from me."

" What I want you to promise is, that you won't let Stuart influence you against me any longer, that you and he will give me a fair chance."—" It's he who's given you the chance you're enjoying now—tell your noodles of friends that Inez Gordon would have given you the go-by long ago if Ned Stuart hadn't begged her to be patient, and see if she couldn't make up her mind to have you!"—" Has he? Has he done that, while I was thinking all these things about him? What a ripping chap he is!"—" He is a ripping chap."—" Have you come to a decision?"

" That's breaking our compact, Bob, but I'll forgive you this once. No, I haven't," said Inez, regarding with something like affection the big man before her, who had done such big things in business and was now distracted with his love for her. She felt as if she almost must consent in order to give him back his

health and his balance, if only she could face the prospect of life with him. It was miserable to see him like this. "Then I think I'll go back to Port Stevens. I shall only stick my foot in it again if I stay on here. Besides, I want to try the experiment."—"What's this wonderful experiment, Bob?" asked Inez, smiling indulgently. "You won't count what I say as a proposal!"—"Then I suppose it will be one, but I'll forgive it."—"Well, I'm going to pretend that we're married and that business compels me to live at the station, which is too hot for you. You would be living in Melbourne and we should only meet when I came down for holidays or business. So you would be as good as unmarried."—"Except that I might have a baby."—"I'd give up even that, until you wanted it."—"Poor old Bob!" she said. "I'm not worth your thinking about. Get a normal girl, who'll value you at your true worth. You're far too good for me, with my monkeying disposition. But if it must be me, you won't do yourself any harm by putting two or three thousand miles between us for the present."

CHAPTER XXIX

COUNTER-PENITENCE

INEZ promised to write once a week, and said that she would welcome his letters if there was no love in them, but just details about his life in the Australian tropics. As a proof of the consideration which she wished to show him, when she was telling the Pretender about it she said to him, "I think that we might smooth him down by knocking off our hunting. He's very sick about that."—"Do. I shall be rather glad, because, though I enjoy it frantically, I don't think it's very good for the office that I should take holidays in the middle of the week."

Inez did not tell him how it pleased her. She was on the "renunciation tack," as far as he was concerned. Nor did she welcome him in her usual impulsive way when he came-in on the following night, wearing for the first time in Australia his uniform as a subaltern of King Edward's Horse, as attractive as it was workmanlike, with its flashing steel chain shoulder-pieces, and brown top-boots. He did not notice any holding-back on her part, but went and sat on the arm of Mrs. Gordon's chair, to pay her affectionate attentions. "Well, little mother!"—"I like to hear you say that, Ned. It was a happy day for me when you married Chris. I always feel as if you were my own-born."—"You must make haste and get some grey hairs, or you won't

be a proper grandmother."—"You ought to have been Irish, not Scotch, Ned. You're an incorrigible blarneyer."—"I protest for two reasons—I'm adhering to solid fact, and, in spite of my name, I'm no more Scotch than I'm Irish, being principally pure English."

"I like you in your uniform, boy. How much will you have to wear it?"—"Just for drills, and when we're doing our annual training."—"Is the charger my husband sent you all right?"—"He's a perfect beauty, the envy of all the subs. who are riding Government horses. You know I have to keep him here because they don't allow private chargers at headquarters?"—"Yes, I know, dear. I can't say that I'm sorry, because I suppose that when you bring him back to the stables, you'll sometimes give us a look-in?"—"I'm afraid I shall; I never can pass your door."

"Is he in the stable now?" asked Inez.—"Yes."—"Then I'm going to have a look at him."—"Shall I come with you?"—"No, stay with mother," replied Inez, strong in her new resolves.—"What's the matter with Inez, Ned? Are you quarrelling about something again?"—"Nothing, dear. I'm hoping that she's engaged herself to Bob."—"What a good thing it would be, Ned! He's a man I have a thorough respect for, and he might be strong enough to have his own way—Inez needs that."—"Inez is a girl in a thousand, mother, if she'd only allow herself to see it."

Inez did not come in to say good-night, but as the light of the big lamp over the front-door fell on his retreating figure, looking so erect and sinewy in the cavalry khaki, she called out from her bedroom window, "Good-night, Ned. I'm only trying to be good."

CHAPTER XXX

LOOKING BACK TWO YEARS: ADAM LINDSAY
GORDON IV. AT ESSLEMONT

MANY preparations had to be made for the birth of Chris's child, which was expected between Cup-time and Christmas of 2002 A.D. Their £200 bungalow, luxurious in accommodation for a childless couple, would henceforth be none too roomy. The £200 bungalow did not cut accommodation so fine as the £100 type, which consisted only of a kitchen, a dining-room and two other fair-sized rooms, and two small rooms, with the necessary offices—hall, bathroom, scullery,

etc. These were built round three sides of a court, which could be used for either garden or yard, at the discretion of the owner. If content with a single living-room, in a land where so much of the time is spent out of doors, he had two good and two small bedrooms, and if, owing to the expense, he had no servant, this was not bad accommodation, since the wide verandah in front of the two rooms designed for sitting-rooms could be used as dining-room and lounge for more than half the year. The court was designed with the idea of being roofed over, to give further accommodation when the owner wished. On the urban selections between Middlesex Fells and Melbourne there were few bungalows which had not been tinkered to increase their accommodation—the first move usually being to block up the verandah and turn it into two extra bedrooms, though a shady verandah is so welcome in a summer land. The £200 bungalow was an altogether superior article. Instead of a court, it had a central living-room, as large, releasing one or two of the better-sized rooms as bedrooms, according as people insisted or not on a separate sitting-room for meals. It had also two extra small rooms and a verandah all round the house.

The Pretender and Chris used one of their three fair-sized rooms for a dining-room and the other two for their own bedroom and their spare-room; two of the four small rooms they used for extra bathrooms—they wanted one for their visitors as well as one for themselves; the third Stuart used for a dressing-room; the remaining one for the Japanese servants, who had the original bathroom of the house to themselves, a source of never-ending joy. They boiled themselves two or three times a day. Chris had no proper drawing-room, but the big central room, which had a clear-story window round the three closed sides, and a window coming right down on the open side, made it a delightful living-room. While they were two only with two Orientals to wait on them, they had been prodigal of their accommodation, so now, with a coming event casting its shadow before, they were confronted with problems.

These were surmounted by Ikegami, who, with an Oriental's eye to the main chance for which Stuart had not previously credited him, offered to take up allotment L.3, adjoining his master's, and to put up a £100 bungalow on it, if his master would lend him the £100, and repay himself by renting it from him at £2 a week when it was built. He had saved enough money to make the furniture himself, he said, and would erect the bungalow in the corner of the allotment nearest to his master's bungalow, and put up a covered passage between them.

He could comply with the regulations of the Lands Office to the letter by having his sleeping room in it. His master accepted his offer gladly and was more pleased still when the building was completed, and he discovered that the two sides of his servant's bungalow, which could be seen from his garden, had verandahs encased in *shoji*, added by Ikegami's dexterous hands, which made it look like a Japanese house. Into this house he and the Japanese transferred themselves, when Mrs. Gordon arrived, with a cook and a housemaid, who likewise slept in Ikegami's house.

* * * * *

When the child was born, early in December, and proved a daughter, Mrs. Gordon was astonished at the keenness of the Pretender's disappointment. They managed to conceal this from Chris, his devotion to whom was delightful. By Christmas Day Chris was well enough to go with mother, husband, child and nurse to Esslemont—the journey by airship was so smooth compared to railway journeys of a hundred years before.

As the Pretender sat in the open part of the airship, heading for Esslemont—Mrs. Gordon thought it more prudent to take Chris and the baby into the cabin—he could not help dwelling on the changes since, about two years before, he had made his first flight to Esslemont. Then he was a stranger in a strange land, with hospitable hosts, who, he felt, would develop into friends, but still, with no one in the land on whom he had any claim of kinship or family, friendship or schooldays, and he was about to live on a new Continent, which, seen from the gondola of an airship, looked mere pasture-land, seamed with petty rivers, as bad to live with from the mental standpoint as a great new town. Now, when the months had only twice revolved, he was going back to that first oasis, but under what different circumstances! For though still a man of restricted means, it was because he had refused to receive a fortune with his wife, and he was married to one of the beautiful daughters of the house, and as dear to every member as if he had been born into it. While in the great city where he earned his daily bread, and which he had just passed over, he had won an honoured place by his tactful and brilliant speeches, delivered on all manner of non-political occasions. With politics he never mixed himself up, though he read the daily papers diligently, and was a student of all Australian questions—such a student, in fact, that the Governor-General himself liked to discuss them with him.

Another man might have felt flattered at the frequency with which he was invited to Government House, but he never accepted, except to "omnibus parties," like the two big annual balls, or to take a cup of tea in the library when H. E. wanted to talk with a disinterested observer upon some burning political question. None of the family or the staff were present—there was no social side to these talks. "He's a queer chap, Stuart," His Excellency used to tell them. "I shouldn't get a word out of him if any of you came in. He'd make an excuse and go home."—"Is it that he's so democratic?" asked the A.D.C.—"Looks like it, Blatchford; according to what I read and hear, he gets on like a house on fire everywhere, except at Government House."—"I call it rather rot, sir. He's an Englishman—he ought not to be gun-shy."—"Call it anything you like, Blatchford. There's only one point that I see—he's the one man I know in Australia who hasn't got an axe to grind, which makes him a mighty useful person."

In the review of the two years which was passing through Stuart's brain, he did not even remember those chats with the Governor-General. He would not have had them, if he had not felt it to be his duty to obey the King's representative; he really had a strong objection to going. As they neared Esslemont, he went into the cabin to see if his wife wanted anything. It was a great occasion to her—the first time she had been to dear old Esslemont since she was married; and she was bringing something so interesting with her. The excitement made her radiantly pretty. She got up, ostensibly to look out for the first glimpse of Esslemont, but she would have been very hurt if his arm had not found its way round her. Her mother had the baby, as grandmothers will.

* * * * *

Presently they descended in their aerodrome yard. Odd as everything had seemed in his meditation, it seemed odder still when they descended and climbed out of the gondola, to have Inez coming forward to kiss him before the airship man and the stable men, who came to lend a hand if they were wanted. She kissed him as perfunctorily as she kissed her mother, or her sister or the baby. She was always perfunctory about kissing her relations, but the kiss she gave him was extra-perfunctory compared to the last one she had given him, and that was chiefly "eye-wash" for the servants. He kissed her with more warmth than she kissed him; he had always been so abstemious about it that he saw no reason to change. But he did not linger with

her, for he was eager for the handshake of his father-in-law, who, of all men in Australia, commanded his affection and respect.

Mr. Gordon's lines had fallen in pleasant places, but he had shown his worthiness of them. He was born heir to much wealth, and the headship of the best-known family in Australia. His commanding height and frank, honourable features, added to great strength and activity when he was younger, had been combined with notable courage, both physical and moral, humanized by singular fairness and good temper. The extravagances of the Gordon temperament, which came out again in Inez and Sandy Gunn, skipped his generation. His justice and generosity were proverbial among the working-classes, in spite of the fact that he had a horror of democracy and had opposed it, wherever he could, all his life. "Big Gordon" was his nickname, because of his stature, but his nature was equally big, and as simple as it was big. If one had asked him what he desired most at that moment, he would have answered, "A game of billiards with my son-in-law."

In that son-in-law he found a man after his own heart—intelligent, interested in affairs, but personally inclined to take a back seat in public and enjoy the society of his wife's family and his friends. It was an irony that he was seldom permitted to achieve the privacy which he desired, on account of the fatal gift of eloquence which robbed him of many domestic moments. Not that he disliked popularity. It was his keenest pleasure to have everybody fond of him. Inez had dealt him a shrewder blow than she knew when she tried to make him that pariah, a new chum under a cloud.

Adam Lindsay Gordon V., just such another as his father, but still in the making and hardly known, except among his neighbours and his school and college friends (it was a tradition of the Lindsay Gordons to be educated entirely in Australia), was equally delighted to see the brother-in-law, who, while at Esslemont before, was never tired of studying the working of a station. Pat and Mrs. Gordon had been with the Stuarts for the last month, so did not count.

After lunch Inez, who had forgotten her resolutions, called out, "I say, Ned"—the whole family called him Ned now—"how would you like to come and have a look at the old bull which so nearly squared accounts for you?"—"I don't mind," he said. "What made you suggest it?"—"That's a secret which I may tell you some day." The bull, which was in a pen, stood with his back to them, occasionally half

turning his head to take a side glance with a red eye. "It's a vendetta still," said Inez. "If you're game to go without tea, let's order the horses and have a long spin in the paddocks. I know what it will be all the afternoon—Baby! Baby! Baby!"

Seeing him hesitate, she said, "Or perhaps you'd rather have a game of billiards with father until tea, and then have a few singles?"—"Yes, I would," he said, partly because he was so anxious to have a chat with Mr. Gordon, partly because he wanted to be handy. He said quite frankly, "I'd rather not be out of the way if Chris needs me."—"If Chris needs you!" said Inez scornfully. "As if she wouldn't have mother and all the servants buzzing round her!"—"Chris is my wife, Inez," he said. She bit her lip, and, waiting for him to walk beside her, trailed slowly back to the house. Neither spoke until Inez caught sight of Mr. Gordon, and said, "Father, Ned's dying for a game of billiards with you. I can do nothing with him."

The older man's pleasure was evident. He headed straight for the billiard-room, to open the cabinet which held his choicest cigars. He was no match for Stuart, but the latter handicapped himself by talking, which damaged his game. When they had finished their hundred, Mr. Gordon put his cue back into the rack. "I don't think we'll play any more before tea, Ned. I've so much to say." He sat down on one of the lounges and the Pretender followed suit.

"Well, first of all . . ." he hesitated " . . . you must have been put to a lot of expense over the baby—what with the new bungalow and the rest of it."—"You know our bargain, sir."—"Only too well. It's a most iniquitous bargain. Tell me, at any rate, Ned, are you worried at all about money matters? Because, since you've been married a year, there's £1,000 accumulated to Chris's account already, and it will go on accumulating at the rate of £250 a quarter."—"Chris won't touch it until I can tell you . . . what Inez is anxious to know."—"I'd like to have your assurance that you're not worried."—"It's rather the other way, sir. The Ether has been doing very well. I've taken out 20 per cent. in the past year on the £3,000 I put into that. It's made us quite rich."

Mr. Gordon smiled indulgently at the thought of £1,300 a year making anybody quite rich. "I suppose you must have your own way, Ned. Another thing I want to know is, how do you, a level-headed man, as fitted to give a dispassionate opinion as any man I know—specially qualified, moreover, by

visits to the works and by having the correspondence passing through your hands—how do you think the Daedalus is going?"—"You couldn't say that it was going yet. Pat has had a certain success with his magnificent conception; the electric-lighting apparatus, fed with electricity from the earth currents, which he installed in my bungalow, gives us an excellent light, and for that purpose, with acetylene to take its place if it goes out of work, it's all right. But it does stop working pretty frequently, which doesn't matter in lighting if you have an auxiliary service, but might be very serious in an airship, and would mean certain death on an aeroplane."

"Of course it would. But it seems to me that you have demonstrated its commercial usefulness by making it supply the light . . ."—"And heating."—" . . . Of a fair-sized bungalow."—"The heating is, of course, like the lighting. You must have your gas or coal fires as well, in case of accidents."—"I don't care—you've established the possibility."—"It isn't me—it's Pat. He's a genius."—"I'm speaking of you as the Daedalus Co., not as Ned."—"I'm sorry for interrupting, sir."—"I was going to say that you've established the possibility and the rest will follow in good time. You'll be in such a position some day, Ned, that you won't know yourself."—"I hope so. I shall be the first of our family that ever was enriched by the sweat of his brow. Up to this, we've always tried to live on what we had, and the stream is becoming pretty attenuated in my branch."—"Never mind—there are better things than money, Ned."—"There are, but I can't forget what an old Irish servant of ours said about it."

"What was that?"—"I can't imitate her brogue, or her odd choice of words, but they were to this effect: 'They say there's better things than money, Master Ned—there's generally better things to eat on your father's table than bread. But it's difficult to get along without it—and it's the same thing with money.' "—"There's something in that. And now to the most important thing of all—Baby. You can't think how grateful I am to you, Ned, for making me a grandfather. I thought that I never should be one. These young people of mine have all had an aversion to marrying. Inez would not have it at any price; Adam never looks at a girl; Pat has burnt his fingers and dreads the fire; and Chris thought that a girl could not know her own mind until she was 25, though she seems to know it quite well now, 4 years short of that. It looked as if I might have to hand in my checks before ever I heard a baby bleat for one of my children. The Australians are not as long-lived

as the English—three-score years and ten are apt to be three score here, and I'm long past that. But I can go where the Pelican builds her nest now."

"I hope not, sir. I hope that you'll live to see something else."—"I don't follow you, Ned."—"I didn't mean you to, sir. It slipped out. I hope you'll top the four score."—"I should be a burden to everybody if I did. But never mind. The greatest joy of my life, since Adam, my firstborn, arrived, has been the birth of Chris's baby, Baby Chris's baby—only I wish it had been a boy."—"So do I, sir. But it cannot be so bad for you as if Adam were to marry and did not have a boy."—"You must take Adam in hand, Ned, and bring him to a sense of duty. To change the subject again, are you still in love with Australia?"

"Absolutely. Australia, with its supermen, is the country of the future, when once they have learnt . . ."—"Learnt what, Ned?"—" . . . Learnt to learn. There are too many of them who won't be taught anything except by one of themselves, and . . ."—"And what?"—"They haven't got the plant for teaching—not all they want. Europe and America have the sum of achievement in the two continents—with a dash of Asia thrown in—to aim at and copy. What they can't learn here, our people could learn there, but they think that what they get here is sufficient. It *is* sufficient to make them a wonderful race, but not so wonderful as they might be!"

Ting! ting! ting! went the electric gong for tea. Inez had already attired herself for tennis. "I won't keep you, Inez," cried the Pretender. "I don't need tea."—"There's no hurry, Ned!" she said. But he had gone before she could stop him. It took him a good many minutes, because he had to go right to the bottom of both uniform cases which he had brought before he found them. When he came down, Mrs. Gordon apologized for the tea being cold; he reiterated that he did not want any, but Chris marched in, carrying a fresh pot of tea, which she planted in front of him, with some cakes of a kind which she remembered his being fond of when he was at Esslemont before.

"Now, Ned, eat your tea like a good boy and mumsy'll give you a kiss." He did eat a good one, partly because he was hungry, and partly out of love. "I won't keep you five minutes, Inez, but since Chris has taken the trouble to go and get it. . . ." Adam looked for a demonstration from Inez, but she smiled indulgently, as if to say, "Don't hurt Chris's feelings. . . ." She knew that Chris would be giving the baby

an airing while they were at tennis, because it was the cool of the afternoon, so she was not depriving her of the pleasure of taking her husband round her favourite haunts on the first day that she was at home again.

But after dinner pretty Chris had paid her visit to the nursery before the men came out of the dining-room, and her husband carried her straight off to the drawing-room, where he had never flirted with her yet, since he had not lifted his eyes to her in the days when they were at Esslemont before. Her first remark, when they got there, was, "Now, imagine that we are at Hall-head on the evening that you first were nice to me."—"That night, when we went to the Japanese tea-house, to get something said, and came back without having said a word."—"Yes, Ned. I should like to have the words now, please."—"Oh, no, I shall propose just the same way to you again, except that you can have a seat—you know where."

The Pretender's devotion to his delightful wife gave Inez un-mixed pleasure. It removed from her path the opportunities for indulging her inclinations towards pal-ishness, which presented a danger they had not presented before, now that they would be with a man whom she was accustomed to kiss, in however perfunctory a way, on certain occasions. Chris, she knew, wished her to show affection to Ned, but she doubted if Bob, to whom she refused the right to object, would look at things in the same light. Chris had a belated honeymoon, which on most afternoons took the form of a long *tête-à-tête* car-drive with Ned, to have tea with some distant neighbour to whom she wished to exhibit him; which they varied once or twice a week by letting Lin take them on the big lake in the camouflaged motor-boat, doing a little lazy shooting when it presented itself. In the evenings, Ned soon settled down to playing billiards with his father-in-law, with Chris as a marker. Inez came in at odd times, and wrote letters to Bob, in which she made gentle fun of the aftermath of the honeymoon. It relieved her feelings and would be appreciated by the exile.

CHAPTER XXXI

LOOKING BACK FOUR YEARS

IN the year 2004 the Ether Electric Co., whose principle business was the installation of wireless telephones, had been established some years and was doing a steadily increasing business, but the problem of the Daedalus was not yet satis-

factorily solved. That the principle of extracting electricity from the earth currents was possible had been established. But though the Stuarts' bungalow on the Middlesex Fells had been lit by it for more than two years, it still had no standard value, because so far they had not overcome its liability to breakdowns. There had been some bad accidents in the attempts to apply it to aeroplanes, owing to the sudden failure of the current, and some laughable mishaps in the attempts to apply it to Zepps. The flying machine which had given the Daedalus Co. its name had been a failure. But every year saw the Daedalus lighting apparatus applied to an increasing number of squatters' houses on distant stations, because, though it sometimes broke down, and had to be supplemented by the apparatus for acetylene, when it was working it was infinitely the cheapest and most agreeable way of lighting, and it did not signify how distant the house was from a town.

A by-product, the Flying Scooter, had become an immense source of profit. This was the conception of the Pretender, who was not scientific, but ingenious. When immediate success seemed out of the question, Pat transferred the testing of the Daedalus to their works at Kingscliff, where he and the Pretender could play with it after business hours. The Pretender soon noticed that, though they occasionally got a sustained flight, it generally resolved itself into a series of glorified kangaroo jumps, or short flights like those of a flying fish, with spans of seventy to a hundred yards, mostly at an elevation of twenty or thirty feet above the ground. This was of no use for aerial transport, but for the adventurous Colonial boy, always on the look-out for a new way of breaking his neck, he perceived that this would supply an ideal new pastime. He tried it often himself, coming back the half-mile from their works at Kingscliff to his bungalow. Standing on the footboard of the Daedalus, he could get home in about fifteen leaps, timing the last to land him from the level of the sands on to his garden, forty feet above. If distance was no object, he could rise to a hundred feet.

Before he made his suggestion to Pat, he went home with the Daedalus every night for a month and satisfied himself that it was a really efficient aerial scooter. Then he told Pat and Pat tested the idea and pronounced it a gold-mine. They patented it, and put it on the market, and the boys of Melbourne went mad over it. As it cost as much as an expensive bicycle, all but the rich had to hire it.

Co-operative Scooter Clubs sprang up everywhere. In the city proper they were forbidden. In the outer suburbs life was

hardly worth living, for there were boys buzzing through the air like a barrage of artillery, alighting in front of you, whizzing past you, knocking your hat off with their feet, yelling at you to get out of their way; boys being taken off to the hospital to get mended and to the police-station to be taught the rights of others; boys in every species of trouble and mishap; but boys in the seventh heaven of delight and excitement over the new sensation of at last being allowed to play with the air, which had hitherto been even more prohibited than fire and water. The firm could not make its scooters fast enough. The motto of every boy was "Daedal" and adults went and Daedalled a hundred miles instead of motoring.

Success did not make the Pretender change his mode of life. He and his lovely wife still lived in their inexpensive bungalow, with their two Japanese servants. They had, it was true, another bungalow connected with their own by a covered way, which they rented from their servant Ikegami, to give them a couple more spare bedrooms for visitors and accommodation for two young persons, respectively a year and two years old, whose names were Elizabeth Australia Stuart and Inez Mary Stuart. Their nurse and their father discovered that not the least invaluable of his innovations was the idea of having the nursery under a separate roof. The scooter having now been on the market for nearly two years, they were much easier in their circumstances, but though they might have the family to stay with them in the bathing season, they did all their entertaining up in Melbourne. It was much simpler to give dinners or tea-parties at clubs, like the Sandringham, and people also enjoyed them more than parties in a private house: they themselves arrived at the same time as their guests and had nothing to do, except order for so many and pay the bill. It took them hardly any time to get from Middlesex Fells to Sandringham, when they flew there in the aeroplane kept at the works for Daedalus experiments.

Melbourne had quite forgotten that it knew no more of the Pretender's antecedents than on the day when he alighted from the *A.S. Murrumbidgee* four years before. It had made up its mind about him that "he was one of the best." He had an assured position at the Melbourne Club, where he continued to lunch every day, and cut a conspicuous figure at the literary societies and clubs to which he belonged. He was not literary, but kept up his habit of reading the leading books of the day and being a diligent consumer of newspapers and magazines. One of his extravagances lay in having the bungalow full of picture-

papers and magazines. He knew that Chris loved them and since she had a good deal of exercise and housework, it was a relief to her after dinner to sit on the sofa beside him, browsing on popular literature, when affection allowed it.

His fame as an after-dinner speaker was mounting. He was witty; he was urbane; he smiled delightfully; he had a royal memory for names, an excellent acquaintance with current literary topics, and a genius for voicing the opinions of the average man. There was little depth in his speeches, but they were amusing and convincing. Not the least of his recommendations was that the wife who accompanied him to these gatherings was a pretty and delightful woman, in her earliest twenties.

Australia of 2004 A.D. had not forgotten the Great War. It had a nucleus of regulars and a huge and efficient citizen army, who were called up for a few days in the year after they had gone through their training, which could be spread over five years or concentrated into one. The Pretender had done his training in England. No-one was allowed to train unless he was Australian-born, or had been in Australia at least a year, so that it might be known if his character was satisfactory. The Pretender's reputation as a speaker prevented there being any discontent over his receiving a Commission without election by the regiment, since it added to the conviviality of regimental gatherings if there was an officer who could make a rattling speech. The training of the citizen army, known as the Commonwealth Militia, was conducted so as to take up no unnecessary time. Except when the men were in camp, uniform was only worn for drills, and then was optional; there was no barrack-life, except for the little Permanent Force. Ordinary drills were at various times between five and nine p.m. In the winter they were after dinner, since most of the drill, anyhow, would have to be done by artificial light. In the Australia of 2004 A.D. all work, except what you chose to do for yourself, was over at four p.m. For the best part of a century there had been a six-hour day. The Pretender, like most cavalymen, made a point of drilling in uniform. He had a great idea of duty.

* * * * *

When he landed in Australia in the last days of 2000 A.D. he had been a young man of thirty-four, with no idea of what he was going to do in life, beyond a general intention of settling in Australia. By the end of 2004 A.D. he was married and the father of two children; was a director in two Melbourne companies; a lieutenant in King Edward's Horse; and one of the most popular

men in Melbourne. Liking the climate and being connected through his lovely and delightful wife with one of the leading families, he looked forward to a happy and prosperous life in Australia, in which his ambitions were entirely domestic.

CHAPTER XXXII

HOW INEZ STOOD

INEZ and Bob stood almost at the same point as two years before. She was generally understood to be engaged to him. He did not claim it: she did not deny it. He was never seen to take a liberty with her, but was allowed a generous measure of camaraderie. Even Ned had never been a greater pal. But though, for her, she treated him with much consideration, she still allowed him no veto on her liberties. If she wished to go about with another man, to dance or play games with him immoderately, she did, and if Bob was restive, did it more than ever. There was no doubt of her liking him very much, and of his enjoying a great deal of happiness under the arrangement. But in point of fact, they were merely friends; he was not engaged to her; he had never kissed her since she was a child, playing children's games; he had had the sense not to try to kiss her. Whenever he came down to Melbourne, which was pretty often, he spent most of his time in her company, playing games with her or taking her to entertainments. Her mother did not interfere; she still hoped that it would come to something.

Inez was not half so troubled about her relations with him as she was about her relations with Ned. So long as Bob did not bother her, it suited her to be considered engaged to him. It kept other men off: he understood his position. But there was one whom it could not keep off, the man who never transgressed her code, but whose position as brother-in-law brought him into constant contact with her. There was no man whom she admired so much. In his domestic life she saw him as an adorable husband and father. Her beloved Chris could not have prayed for a better husband. At dinners and receptions, until he was called on to speak, and the whole room rippled with expectation of the man who never failed to amuse and charm, he disliked prominence. Seats near the chairman at a dinner, or on a platform anywhere, had no charm for him. He was generally to be found out of the current, in a knot of friends, beside his pretty Chris.

It was not because he was ill-at-ease when prominence was thrust on him. No man was less troubled by it, and he sometimes

was subjected to a severe test, for the Governor-General, who, in addition to his official position, was the holder of an ancient earldom, seemed to have contracted a great liking for him in their informal conferences, and would take his arm and walk him about when they met in the paddock at the races—the one occasion which Stuart found it difficult to elude, since he loved horses and his wife's relations always dragged him to the paddock. He wished devoutly that Lord Wessex would not do it, but it was not for him to object when he heard that cheery voice say, "Morning, Stuart. I've something I should like to say to you—you never come near me now." He was always charmingly deferential to the Governor-General, but Inez could think of no-one in her acquaintance who would be so little put out by the attention.

"Did you know Lord Wessex in England, Ned?" she once asked. "Know him? I never set eyes on him until I came out here."—"You're quite at-home with him."—"That's because he's such a very *grand seigneur* that he can afford to be cordial to anybody who interests him, if he's only a chimney-sweep."—"You're not a chimney-sweep, Ned."—"No, more like a crossing-sweeper."

When he was staying with the Gordons or she was staying with the Stuarts, she presented her cheek when she said good-morning and good-night. He kissed her like his sister, but never like a pretty cousin who was also a "great pal" and when they were at balls together rather lost her head in the pleasure of his dancing. He seemed to find no more occasion in that for flirting with her than if the play which they were seeing together happened to be a good one, but he was as deferential and took as much pains to make her enjoy herself, as if he was a lover who meant to propose to her. When she was staying with them, he was overwhelmingly kind and attentive, but was guilty of not one familiarity. When they were at a club like Sandringham, a brother might have been friskier. Yet he was extremely entertaining and agreeable; she could not want a better "pal."

Inez did not know how to take him exactly. She could see that his attitude was due to chivalry, because he considered her engaged, but she thought it rather ridiculous and did not know how to stop it, short of taking him to task in plain language. In the interval, she paid him the greatest compliment she had ever paid a human-being. She habitually asked his advice. No-one had ever had such influence over her; there was no-one to whom she had given such unquestioning friendship. So things stood in the summer holidays at the opening of 2005 A.D.

CHAPTER XXXIII

CHRIS'S FIGHT FOR LIFE

AS the money-question was much easier now, Ned arranged to take Chris and the babes for a holiday in the Australian Alps. Chris had never seen Alpine scenery; he thought the complete change of air would be good for her and the children. He succeeded in getting a nice, weatherboard cottage on the foot-hills, commanding a view of high peaks like Mount Selwyn, and charmingly situated in a bit of open forest near a river with good fishing. They took Ikegami with them; he had a genius for improvising and they knew what a picnic the whole affair would be. They were delighted with their first impressions. The rooms were clean, if small, and the views magnificent. There was a waterfall near enough to fill their ears with music at night, when the interruptions of the day were still. That sound brought the Old Country back to the Pretender more than anything which had happened to him since he landed in Australia. It affected him so profoundly that he talked to Chris about his old home and his people in England all the evening. It brought husband and wife nearer than anything had ever brought them before.

Food would have been a difficulty if they had not brought scooters with them, for meat was only to be procured from a township twenty miles away, except when one of the "selectors" was killing a beast, which was seldom. They relied chiefly on the abundant blackfish in the river. One lovely summer morning, towards noon, Ned and Ikegami had gone to catch the fish for their midday dinner; they had brought plenty of lard in one-pound tins for frying it. Chris had put the babies into their cots for a sleep before their food, and gone into the kitchen to see that everything was ready for cooking the fish when it came. She remained doing one thing and another for half-an-hour—the house was so small that she would hear the lightest cry. She had given the nurse leave to go fishing.

When she got back to the room where the children were, she saw a sight which froze her blood. A large black snake was on the table quite near the children, with its back arched and its head in the jug of milk which was going to provide their dinner. She had no weapon in her hand; she could see nothing that would do for one, except the table-knife, lying beside a loaf of bread. It was very sharp; it had been cleaned on a knife-board so often. But what use was it? She could not kill the snake

with a slash of it. If she had dumped the water-jug down on it, she might have broken its back and crippled it if she did not kill it. She never thought of the jug; it seemed so obvious to use the trick which she had done so often with impunity—to seize the snake by the tail and break its back with a flick. She forgot the narrowness of the little bedroom. She had not room to flick it. She did not realize it until she had its tail in her hand. She tried to flick it. In vain. She tried to dash its head against the wall. In vain. The angry snake turned on her and fastened on her hand like a vice and was able to squeeze every atom of the poison from its fangs.

Chris did not give up. She seized the table-knife and while its fangs were buried in her right hand, sliced its head off with her left. If only they would come and cut the bite out and give her brandy, she might be saved. If only the wound had been in her left hand, not her right, she might have cut it out herself. But she was clumsy with her left. She dashed out of the house to meet them.

There was no sight of them. The single chance she had left was to fly to the river and find them and get them to hack out the bite and carry her back. She had the presence of mind to take the knife with her and run as hard as she could, screaming: "Help! Help! Ned!" at the top of her voice, before the poison spread in her veins and she fell into that fatal coma. She ran. But where were they? Not a trace of them could she see. She ran on and on. Her strength was beginning to fail. Her sight was leaving her. Her head was bursting. She fell.

An hour afterwards, when they found her, she was quite dead, with a ghastly wound hacked in her right hand in her clumsy efforts to cut out the bite. "Chris! Chris!" shouted her husband gaily, as he came into the vegetable-patch in front of the house. There was no reply. "To liver has gone," said Ikegami. "Told you heard call. You said 'No, animal.'" —"Then fly to the river as hard as you can to help her. She must have fallen in. I'll be after you in a minute. Nurse, you fly to the children and see that they're all right." She flew in and called, "Yes, they're all right, Mr. Stuart." He dashed on after Ikegami.

Ikegami, running as hard as he could, had been going for several minutes before he came upon Chris, lying perfectly motionless, with her mangled right hand in a little pool of blood. He raised her up. Oriental intuition told him that she was dead. He supposed that she had bled to death, and bellowed

for his master. Ned, coming up, thought the same. He could see no other explanation. But who could have dealt her such a wound? It passed his understanding. "I'll carry her home, Ikegami. You run take scooter—fly to township for doctor. If he knows how to use scooter, give it him and tell him where we are, and wait until he comes back, unless he has orders for you. If he gives you orders, you do. See?"—"I see," said Ikegami, making his beautiful Japanese obeisance, and ran as fast as he could for the scooter.

When he had gone, Ned, who knew that his efforts must be in vain, for Chris had the *rigor mortis*, and an unearthly chill and colour already coming over her, poured kisses on the inanimate face, and clasped her convulsively to him, before he made any attempt to carry her to the cottage. He did not dash water into her face or use other first-aid methods. He knew that they would be useless; he wanted all the precious moments in which he had his dear dead to himself for paying his last homage of affection.

Then the terrible idea struck him that there might still be danger lurking for the children. It was as reasonable to try and kill them as the lovely and innocent mother. How could any fiend have had the heart to do it?—unless she was defending her honour. Perhaps she had been defending her honour, and his. There must be traces which would lead to the detection of the murderer. He might still be in the vicinity of the children. Kissing her reverently once more, he carried Chris to the cottage in his arms. He was a strong and sinewy man, and that graceful body, which would so soon have parted with all grace, was pathetically light to him. He craved for her to have been heavier, that he might feel that he was doing more for Chris on this last opportunity.

The nurse screamed when she saw her mistress. "Oh, my, what has happened to Mrs. Stuart?"—"Stop screaming, May. Don't wake the children. She's dead."—"Dead, Mr. Stuart?"—"Yes, dead. No hope."—"My God!" screamed the nurse.—"Stop, stop, May! The children!"—"Yes, poor little motherless dears!" she said, making a step towards their beds to embrace them—"Don't disturb them, woman, but try to help me," he said, carrying Chris into her room and laying her reverently on the bed.

"Help? How—if she's dead?"—"By trying to find the culprit."—"Oh, I can't," she moaned. "How was it done?"—"With that knife, I suppose. Look at her hand."—"It's the knife I used for the bread." Bringing her mind

down to practical details made the nurse pull herself together. "That wound wouldn't have killed her," she said. "She must have been kicked over the heart when she was down."—"Kicked? Oh God! Help me to undress her, May." She helped quickly and deftly. There was no mark of any blow, but the body presented such a curious appearance that the girl, who was bush-bred, said, "I believe it's a snake."—"A snake?" cried Ned, in horror. "Then it may be in the house still! We must look for it—the children's room first."

There was a hippopotamus hide stick in the rack, heavy, but pliant. Perhaps the owner of the cottage kept it for snakes, if there were many—a question which Ned had not asked. He caught it up and went into the nursery. One of the first places where he looked was under the bed. There, sure enough, was a great black snake. How on earth was he to get the brute out without risking the children?

"Quick, May—go outside and stand by the window."—"What are you going to do?"—"Hand you out the children."—"But the snake will fly at you while you're doing it—it'll think you're cutting off its escape. There's nothing makes them so savage."—"I'll risk that. I have gaiters on and it'll go for my legs, I suppose. At any rate, you go to the window." She flew round; he almost threw the children out. He expected to be attacked every second.

When the children were safe, he grasped the stick again, to have it out with the murderer of his wife, and stood back from the bed, to eye the snake carefully and see how he could get at it best. But May, putting the children down in the grass, flew back to the room and dragged him out. "You can't touch the snake while he's there," she said. "He can strike and you can't. Haven't you got a gun?"—"Yes, there's one on the rack."—"Is it loaded?"—"I have cartridges."—"Well, load it and give him both barrels."—"But the children—won't the report scare them?"—"It may wake them. What if it does?"

Ned loaded the gun and went back. Then, taking careful aim—the shot at that distance would go like a ball—he fired and blew the snake to bits. May came in to clear up the mess of snake and splintered wood. "Why, you cut his head clean off. No, you didn't—that cut was done by a knife. It was dead before you shot it."

"Did you notice anything funny when you came in, May?"—"No, Mr. Stuart. I was so bothered with the milk being upset and knowing we couldn't get any more."—"Was it

knocked clean over?"—"See for yourself. It's all on the floor behind the table with the jug in pieces. That's what brought Mr. Snake here. Poor Mrs. Stuart must have seen it and tried to chase it out."

She stooped down to pick up the bits. She was hardly on her knees before she screamed like a maniac. "I almost put my hand in its mouth. Don't touch it!—the head can bite after death."—"It can't," he said, picking it up with fearless curiosity to examine it, though avoiding the mouth.

"Dear brave Chris!" he cried. "Do you see, May, she must have cut off its head with that knife."—"Yes, I see. I know snakes. He was fastened on to her hand when she cut his head off, and she tried to cut the bite out afterwards."

Stuart left the nurse with the children and flew back to Chris, to pour fresh embraces on the lifeless body in his passion for her devotion. Lying beside her—it must have dropped out of her clothes when they were undressing her and remained unnoticed in their horror—was an envelope. It was a stiff envelope, which contained nothing, but on it was written, in Chris's handwriting, strangely unsteady:

"In case you're too late Ned it was snake Tried to kill usual way Not room to swing Bit me but killed it Had such a perfect life with you darling
CHRIS."

"Oh, Chris, you were a ripper!" he said, using slang in the midst of his grief, because he could not think of other words to express her. Her presence of mind in writing to him, and putting the envelope in her dress where it could not be missed if he came too late to save her, was so of a piece with her sane, useful, resourceful life. Her loving forethought in telling him in one sentence that she had been happy with him quite overcame him, and increased the awful void in his heart left by her death.

"Oh, Chris, why did I leave you?" he moaned. "If only I had been in the house, it would have been mine to meet the snake!" But, he had a monition that she would not have called him. She dreaded snakes so little; she was so sure of her method.

This regret was crushed out by one more terrible. Why had he not flown to the spot where Ikegami heard the cry? He could have saved her life, if only he had left nothing to chance.

The nurse came to him. "Come along, Mr. Stuart—a bit of lunch will do you good."—"I couldn't eat," he said. "My place is by your mistress, now that I know the children are safe and that accursed snake dead."—"You must eat—she got

it ready for you," persisted the nurse. "You can do nothing for the poor lady. She's dead long ago. See the colour she is already."—"I know. But please leave me with her, May." His tone was so full of entreaty that the girl burst into tears and left him. He hardly heeded whether she had gone or not, but threw himself on the bed and clasped the lifeless body to him, and poured out his soul in kisses on the damp, corrupted face, so swollen, and changing to such a terrible hue.

"Oh, Chrissy," he moaned, "why need it have been? Why should there have been such evil lurking here, the very first time that I have brought you for a real holiday? Was this fore-ordained? Can this be any kind of dispensation which makes me desolate and those children motherless? This should have been a judgment for an undetected murderer, for the foulest secret villain in Australia, not for one who was so good and gentle and beautiful!"

Then he turned to a fresh moan. Why did not the doctor come? He knew that when he did come, he could do no more than give a certificate of the cause of death. But he was oppressed with impatience for his arrival. One minute he was embracing his dead wife and filling the air with fruitless prayer and regret—the next he was flying outside to strain his eyes into the distance.

At last the doctor came, looking more horseman than doctor, a man in hard training, ready at a few minutes' notice to ride to a serious case miles away, and to attend to it the moment that he was out of the saddle. "Why can't we perfect the Daedalus?" was Stuart's thought when he saw him. "It would double or quadruple this man's usefulness, and reduce his fatigue to a fraction of what it is!" The men felt an instinctive liking for each other. "I'm sorry that I can do nothing," said the doctor, when he had examined the body. "If, as you say, she was dead in half-an-hour, the snake must have been an old male with his fang-glands full. You say that his belly was deep orange?—that shows that he was an old male. It's not only a most unfortunate thing, Mr. Stuart—it's an almost unheard-of thing for one to enter an inhabited room, though they're so fond of milk that they do occasionally invade a dairy. He wouldn't have gone near the children if your wife had left him alone."—"Don't say that! I should hate to think she had died in vain!" cried Ned. "Don't bedclothes attract them?"—"Yes, blankets do," admitted the doctor, seeing how the land lay, and wondering how the children could have had anything but a sheet over them on a summer-day.

CHAPTER XXXIV

AN AIR FUNERAL: THE GORDON TOMB AT BRIGHTON

LATER on in the day, when the doctor had got to the township and allowed Ikegami to return, Pat came down by 'plane and the others in the family-airship, to see the last of poor Chris. The doctor had said that anyone killed by snake-bite ought to be buried in twenty-four hours, especially in hot weather. They were all heartbroken, especially Mrs. Gordon. "Baby Chris," with her radiant prettiness, and sunny temper, had always held the warmest spot in her heart.

"Do you remember how I scolded poor Chris for doing exactly the same thing on your first day over at The Lake, Ned?" sobbed Pat. "I never dreamed that she'd come to any harm by it. That scolding seems like a prophecy now."—"Only too well, Pat, and I remember how I shuddered when she seized it."

Inez was terribly affected; she felt that she had been a vampire on Chris all her life. "You will have her buried where we can see her grave, won't you, Ned?" she pleaded.—"What else could I do? Where can we have her buried, sir, do you think?" he asked Mr. Gordon.—"The Gordons have always been buried in the Brighton cemetery, because of Lindsay. We have a family-vault there, as near as it could be bought to his grave so long afterwards."—"She must be buried there," said the Pretender.—"I wish those lines of Lindsay Gordon's could go on her tomb," said Inez, with a dry sob, white with grief.—"Which ones, Inez?" asked Pat, dejectedly. "Chrissy would suit so many."—"I was thinking of:

"No man may shirk the allotted work,
The deed to do, the death to die,"

she answered, "but perhaps they're no better than:

"The Lord shall slay or the Lord shall save!
He is righteous whether He save or slay—
Brother! give thanks for the gifts He gave,
Though the gifts He gave He hath taken away."

To Ned there seemed something inexpressibly solemn and majestic in having the dead body of his girl-wife, who had died so heroically, so worthily of the Gordon cult of her country, trans-

ported in the great airship to the graveyard by the sea, where the poet rests. It was the first aerial funeral. The gondola was heavily-draped in black and the cabin lined with white lilies during the night, while it was waiting for the coffin, for which Mr. Gordon dispatched it to Melbourne an hour after his arrival. It brought the coffin and the necessary undertakers back the next morning—the flight only occupied an hour or two. In the afternoon it flew mournfully back from the Gippsland Mountains, where they were to have spent such a happy holiday, to the Gordon vault in the Brighton cemetery.

No friend or relative was bidden to the funeral by the heart-broken family. But the engineers of the airship had told the story in Melbourne. The morning papers were full of it and thousands assembled to see the funeral airship arrive, and to pay their tribute of admiration and regret to the girl who had died so heroically to save her children from a snake. That funeral was one of the most wonderful sights ever seen in Australia.

On the coffin, to be repeated afterwards on the headstone, was engraved :

" Chris, the beloved wife of Charles Edward Stuart,
Who fell in battle for her children,
January 5th, 2005 A.D."

CHAPTER XXXV

HOW INEZ CAME TO BEAUDESERT

THE airship went on from the cemetery to take the children to their home. Only Ikegami was left in Gippsland to bring back the household goods which the Stuarts had taken with them for their holiday. The Japanese have an intuitive capacity for this. It may be dreadful to transport children in a funeral-car, but to Ned's practical mind it seemed far more dreadful to leave them in a house which a snake had invaded, for bushmen have a tradition that a snake's mate will try to avenge it, and is attracted to its mangled remains. The Gordons had a contempt for the tradition, but Ned was not the man to take the risk with infants.

He himself was to follow them when the funeral was over in Pat's plane. In it, to his surprise, he was joined by Inez. " I'm going with you, Ned," she said. " It's very dear of you to wish to see us in, Inez, but it would not be fair to let you

come to-day, when you must be so tired as well as prostrated by the blow."—" I'm not coming to see you in, Ned, I'm coming to stay. My place is with Chris's children; if you won't let me have them at Hallhead, as I suppose you couldn't, when you are suffering from such a bereavement, I must come to them at Beaudesert. Please, Ned, let me come! I won't get in your way or be a worry of any kind, indeed I won't!"—" How could you be a worry, Inez?"

" I know what you're going to add—that people will talk if I live with you there alone. Have I ever cared what people said?"—" No."—" Do you care what they say?"—" Except as far as you are concerned, no. But they are bound to talk when the most beautiful girl in Australia defies convention in this way."—" Well, let them talk. If there's no reason for their slanders, we shan't care. Besides it's not defying conventions exactly. A deceased wife's sister often does it."—" And what about Bob?"—" Bob has nothing to do with it."—" If you're engaged to him, you must consider his feelings."—" Who says I'm engaged to him? I'm not, and I never have been. If he isn't sensible, it won't be my fault."—" I think that everybody would say that it was your fault."—" Let them."—" We could make dear old Pat come to Beaudesert, too, and all three live together."—" We'll do nothing of the kind! It would be tantamount to saying that we could not be trusted with each other; I refuse to rest under such a stigma. Besides, Pat has to live on his allotment, or he'll forfeit it."—" The children are in Ikegami's bungalow. There's a spare room next to the nursery—you'll use that, won't you, Inez?"—" If you wish it," she said, coldly.—" It would be better. For one thing, you'd be where your own ears will tell you if anything goes wrong in the night."—" That's the only reason which weighs with me. I don't see why we should take any notice of people's evil thoughts."

He said nothing, and then she remembered how her own evil thoughts had driven him away from Hallhead, which was like home to him. How could he help thinking of it? " Forgive me, Ned. I know how you feel about that. I have long since eaten every word I said. You see how I trust you."—" Yes, I know you trust me, and I know that I can be trusted. If you *will* have it so, you must. But be careful of appearances, little sister, for your own sake."—" I'm not little, but I'll try to do what you wish."

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE TRADITION OF CHRIS: BOB STEVENS TAKES A HAND

"NED," said Inez, the morning after the funeral, "I want to do exactly what Chris did for the babes, down to the smallest item. We must make a full chart before you forget anything. I regard this as a trust."—"That's the best tribute we can pay to her memory," he said. And added, after thinking a little, "Those two Japanese can help more than I can—Orientals have a photographic memory for every action of the day of their master or mistress. I'll have a shorthand writer up from the office while I talk to them and tell her to take down every word they say."—"You needn't do that, Ned—secretarying was the trade which poor Chris and I learned at school. I couldn't get much speed at first for want of practice, but Japs are so slow when they are describing anything in English that I could get down everything they say, and I shouldn't distract their attention like a stranger."—"No, they'd be quite anxious for you to put down things."—"Have you got a typewriter in the house? I shall want to type out my shorthand while it's quite fresh in my memory."—"I'll bring one down from the office, or perhaps Pat has an extra one at the works."

Inez spent all the time she could spare from the children for a week in taking down what Ikegami and Tora remembered of Chris's daily programme and habits. She took it down in their quaint English, not altering a word. When it was typed, and she and Ned read the narrative together, they found it a little gem, this picture of a good and delightful white woman in her home, as she had appeared to watching and worshipping Orientals. There was nothing which Chris had been wont to do in her day which was not photographed for Inez's contemplation. Their worship of the beauties of Chris's simple character as they were brought out one after another, in the naïve narrative of those plain wise men of the East, brought Inez and Ned very close together. They lived in Chris. They spoke or thought of her all day long. They did the things she had been accustomed to do, and almost saw her before them. Beyond Pat, who took his meals with them, they saw no one from outside. All their friends were away. Ned was not needed at the office. Chris's garden in the "Miyanoshta" was a dream of beauty and restfulness. The sea-breeze brought them ozone morning and

evening. They swam and tennised for exercise; all the rest of the time they thought of Chris and her babes. They did not perceive how they were endearing themselves to each other by their selflessness, but honest Pat, who had so often been indignant with Inez, changed his opinion of her entirely.

Though their affection for Chris burned just as brightly, time soon began to deal gently with them in that delicious climate. When Ned had to go to the office again, Inez settled down to giving the day to domestic duties and the babes, and being ready to welcome Ned back at tea-time, with as perfect content as if she had never led a different life. She never kissed him now that there was no presence to regularize it. She had left off saying the little nothings which testified her pleasure in doing things with him. But she had never felt so steadily affectionate, so eager for his approbation and content. Their attitude was that of husband and wife who are lovers no longer, but have learned each other's good qualities.

On her return from Tasmania that year, Amy Vibart wondered how things were getting on at Beaudesert, when she heard that while she was away Chris had died and Inez gone to keep house for her brother-in-law. The replies she received told her so little that she paid them a visit at tea-time to judge for herself. Seeing them so complacent to each other, her suspicions were aroused. Their attitude must be "eye-wash." "What do you do with yourself all day down here, Inez?"—"Look after the house and the babes."—"You must find it dull after The Beach."—"I won't say that I never felt happier, but I can say that I never felt more contented, except when I think of our loss."—"I suppose Mr. Stuart feels the same?"—"How can a man feel contented when he has just lost the wife whom he adored?" asked Inez, with obvious disgust.—"Having the beautiful sister-in-law to keep house would help a good many," thought Amy, but she dared not say so. Inez's temper was not one to rouse lightly. "I meant, all things considered."—"In weather like this, slacking often does a man good; he hasn't had the heart to do anything but slack this year."

Amy Vibart had her own ideas as to Ned's reasons for slacking, and asked to see the children. She really wished to see how Inez shaped with babies and if the babes took to her. She was a woman of intuition and recognized that Inez mothered them delightfully, that the children had accepted her in the place of their own mother with perfect content, and did not notice the difference. With the children Inez let herself go. She romped with them and showered affection on them.

"What a minx she is!" *thought* Amy. "She's in this mood! She knows how to set her cap at her Ned. That's the direction in which the game lies. No wonder they're living in such retirement."—She only *said*, "What darling little children! How nice it is for you to have them when you're left so completely alone!"—"Oh, not completely—Pat and Ned generally come in about tea-time, and don't leave the place much afterwards."—"Will they be long now?"—"I don't know. They sometimes have trials with the Daedalus after office hours."

Amy talked on for the chance of their coming, and they arrived soon afterwards. Like most other girls, she found the beautiful misogynist, Pat, adorable. Ned appeared to have forgotten her taking action against him after Inez's warning, and welcomed her quite cordially, but Inez remembered it painfully. Amy eyed them narrowly when they met. They smiled like ordinary acquaintances, and he asked what the children had been doing during the day. After tea he said, "As you have someone to talk to, I think we'll go and do a few trials."—"Very well, Ned," she said, and resumed her conversation with the self-invited.

When he came in just before dinner, after Amy's departure, she said, "I must tell you again how contrite I am for that original sin. I'd sooner die than do you a deliberate hurt now, Ned. You know that?"—"Please don't die. I'd rather be hurt by you every day, any number of times a day."—"Oh, Ned, we're getting sentimental. We must have a cold tub before we dress."

Amy Vibart went back to Melbourne and spread her suspicions. The seed fell on stony ground, until she met Tudor Lewis, to whom she rehearsed her little drama carefully, since she thought him an interested personage. He pooh-poohed her suspicions and spoke of Inez very nicely as a girl whose really good points were not half known. This did not prevent his writing to Bob.

"Australian Club,
Melbourne.
February 2nd, 2005.

"DEAR STEVENS,

"Are you prepared to sell township lots at Port Stevens yet? Just now there's a considerable demand for town lots in coming ports. I suppose you have heard all about the tragic death of Stuart's wife—Chris Gordon that was—by snake-bite in Gippsland last month? Her sister has gone to

keep house for the bereaved widower and look after the children. She hasn't been in Melbourne since. Miss Vibart saw her the other day and said she was growing quite domesticated. She is even letting her hair grow.

"Let me know about the township lots. I suppose you won't be down yet awhile?"

"Yours sincerely.

"OWEN TUDOR LEWIS."

Bob was so troubled by this barbed letter that he 'planed down to Melbourne shortly afterwards. He did not go straight out to Beaudesert, much as his inclinations urged him. He called on Ned at the office and received the warmest of welcomes. "We've not been seeing any company, Bob, but if you can amuse yourself until four, I'll take you out with me, and you can dose yourself with the sea breezes of the south until it's time for a bit of dinner."—"Thanks, old man, I'd like to awfully," said Bob, who saw in this the easiest way of rebreaking the ice.

When Ned got back that afternoon, he called with an eagerness which he had never allowed himself since she came to keep his house: "Inez! Inez!"—"Coming!" answered rather a doubtful voice from "Nippon," as Ikegami had grandly called his bungalow, so that he might go back to Japan every night. When she emerged from the connecting-passage into the garden by sliding back a paper shutter, she called out, "Why, what's the matter, you tiresome man? You're so late for tea that I'd gone back to help May in getting ready for the children's baths before she takes them out in the cool." Then she saw the intruder. "Oh, it's you, Bob!" she cried, with Australian welcome. "When did you drop down from the skies?"—"This morning, as far as Melbourne is concerned," he answered, well-pleased. "Will you give us some tea, Inez, at this late hour? We're both of us famishing for it."—"It's out of my hands by this time. Ikegami will be three parts on the way with it: that electric combuster of Pat's boils water like lightning."

"You take care of Bob while I 'phone to Pat that I've arrived. He said that he should stay at the works until I came, so as to put things in train to give our big shareholder a good show."
—Inez believed the telephone message to be fudge, but managed to conceal her belief from the *tertius gaudens*. "Well, I am glad to see you, Bob! It's such an age since you were down last."—"I'm making a little polo sports and gymkhana

ground at Port Stevens," he said, "so as to make it a sort of white person's afternoon club—both sexes—for the N.T. We think nothing of distances there—we all have cars or 'planes. Water-carriage makes British-Borneo petrol very cheap." Inez knew why he was making that Port Stevens Ranelagh, but expressed no opinion, beyond asking if the turf presented no difficulty. "No, we've got a kind of couch-grass which is wonderfully docile."

Ikegami approached where they stood at the edge of the cliff. Bob was quaffing the cool southerly breeze blowing off the bay, with huge gusto; he had come straight from the tropics. "Tea liddy, please come." R's were a difficulty with Ikegami; he never got nearer *ready* than *liddy*.—"Tell Stuart San," said Inez.—"Will tell." Ikegami never wasted breath and confined himself to verbs and nouns.

Bob could not help eyeing Inez as Ned came out, little as he wished to spy on them. She was sisterly, attended to his wants with precision, gave him a little friendly smile and resumed her conversation with Bob, who noticed how contented and matronly she looked—not quite the old Inez—and how very handsome. This might have disturbed him had she not been so absorbed in her conversation with him. A big shade hat covered her hair. Presently Ned, having finished his tea, said, "Will you excuse me? Pat's waiting for me down on the sands," and prepared to leave them. "You're coming down to have a look round, aren't you, Bob? If we're not at this end when you're ready, Inez will 'phone to the works and we'll send the car."—"I think I can walk half a mile."—"Inez won't, if she can help it."—Inez laughed indulgently. "He can't make me go for walks," she said.

"Well, ta-ta, I see Pat just below. You'll get a very good idea of what the Daedalus can do, if you watch us from the garden, Bob."—"All right, old man," said Bob, without enthusiasm; he had something to say to Inez before he went down to the works. When they were left alone, he was not so sure that he wanted to say it; he ended by not saying it. Inez, to clear herself of the aspersions on her walking, conducted him down to the works on foot. He could see that she must have been there pretty often, by her eagerness to explain things. She seemed to know almost as much about them as Ned. She evidently thought so, because it was always Pat to whom she appealed if she was in doubt.

When Bob had been shown everything in the works, Pat asked him if he'd like to try the Daedalus, his new flying-machine,

which was very like the cage used for descending coal mines, but only large enough to contain a single person, and built chiefly of *Australium*, a new alloy discovered in Australia, as light as aluminium but as tough and rigid as steel; the actual frame was of wood. The flying-apparatus and light storage batteries were fixed round three sides of the cage, the back being left open to allow free ingress and egress when the gate was unfastened. The propulsive power was Cosmic Electricity, drawn from the atmosphere by collecting antennae. And this use of Cosmic Electricity to get rid of the weight and bulkiness of machinery and fuel, was the chief difficulty overcome by the Daedalus, which took no more space than a motor-bicycle. Bob, who drove his own aeroplane a good deal during the day watches when he was journeying between Melbourne and the N.T., learned the fresh instructions necessary for working a Daedalus in a few minutes. He was greatly delighted with the measure of success it had attained—especially with the automatic parachute, which, in case of the electric current being cut off, operated the moment the propeller ceased to revolve. He left an order for the first Daedalus completed for sale; this Pat hoped to have ready before the end of the year.

But though Bob was delighted with the Daedalus, he left Beadesert a disheartened man. He was not angry with Ned or Inez, but somehow he was not satisfied with the way things were going. He determined, however, not to risk quarrelling with her, like Sandy, but to consult her father. So when he returned to Melbourne after dinner, he wirelessed to her father at Esslemont, to know if he could 'plane over after breakfast to have a chat with Mr. Gordon.

"By all means," came the answer. By 11 a.m., Bob, though he liked plenty of bed when he was holidaying in Melbourne, was with him. "What's the matter, Bob?" asked Mr. Gordon, when they had shaken hands.—"Inez," said Bob shortly.—"What's wrong with her?"—"I don't think anything's wrong with her, but it's all wrong for me."—"How?"—"Frankly, Mr. Gordon, when it's pretty well understood that she's going to be my wife, I don't like her keeping house for Stuart."

"You don't insinuate . . .?"—"I don't insinuate anything. You couldn't insinuate anything where either of them is concerned. They're white people, and I know it. It isn't what they do, but what people may say—what they do say."—"They don't dare!"—"No, they don't dare, but they insinuate that it is not safe for such a beautiful woman to live in the same house with a man she knows so well and likes so

much."—"Have you been at Beaudesert since she went to live there?"—"Yes, I was there yesterday."—"Did you notice anything?"—"No, I did not. Inez seemed just as provoking to him as she is to me—to treat him like a comparative stranger, while she makes it plain that he occupies her thoughts."

"Is that how she treats you, Bob?" asked Mr. Gordon, repressing a smile with difficulty, in spite of the seriousness of the situation.—"I'm afraid it is."—"It's rather an intolerable situation, I think. If she's going to marry you, she ought to do it quickly, or put you on the proper footing of a fiancé."—"I'm afraid she doesn't mean to do either."—"What can I do? Why do you come to me?"—"You can exercise your authority as a father, and make her come home."

"But, Bob, I've always considered it wrong to exercise authority over children when they've come to anything like years of discretion; I cannot begin with Inez now, when she's almost 25."—"Surely she would take advice from you, or receive you as an envoy from me?"—"She would receive me in the most affectionate manner, but she might draw a sharp line between receiving me and receiving advice. In any case, what do you want me to say to her?"—"I want you for her own sake to get her away from Beaudesert."

"To put it plainly—that means for the sake of her reputation," said her father.—"Hardly that—you might call it 'to stop people talking.'"—"I must tell you that she went there with her mother's and my approbation. We thought her the fittest person to take care of poor little Chris's children."—"She is that, but everything else about it is wrong. She's so terribly self-willed, so defiant of conventions which everybody accepts, that she gives people the chance of thinking what is wholly untrue. I had a letter on the subject myself."—"Who dared to write it?" asked Mr. Gordon, with a fierceness which Bob had never seen in him before, but which to contemporaries like Mr. Colquhoun would have recalled his high-spirited youth.—"The letter was marked private," said Bob.—"I'll go to her," said her father.

CHAPTER XXXVII

HOW INEZ HAD THE COURAGE OF HER OPINIONS

MR. GORDON wirelessed to Inez to know if he could see her alone by arriving soon after two. He meant to go to Kingscliff, where he could come down on the sands just outside the Ether works, and to eat his lunch on the airship,

which was comfortably fitted for meals. This would give him the chance of a long talk with Inez before Ned, who lunched at the Club and went back to the office until four, could be expected home. "By all means, dear father, but come to lunch, won't you?"—"No, Pat will be with you at lunch and I want to see you alone."—"Pat starts back about half-past one or quarter to two."

When Mr. Gordon saw Inez, he felt reassured. She seemed so serene, so at peace with herself and the world, as she ran forward to kiss him. "It's nice of you to come and see me, father," she said, and with an intuition of what was to come, added, "I don't care what you came for. I've never seen you since that sad day."—"This isn't a very bright day, either, Inez, for I've come to say that you must leave this and return home."

"Bob's been to see you," she said calmly. "I thought he wasn't feeling comfortable."—"What do you mean, Inez?"—"Well, he wasn't exactly jealous, because Ned's behaviour is so perfect, but I could see that he didn't like it."—"To be frank with you," said her father, "he didn't."—"What's it got to do with him?" she asked.—"Everything, since you're engaged to him."—"Who put that funny old idea into your head?"—"It's a matter of common knowledge, I thought. At any rate, of common report."—"Common report's telling a lie then. I'm not engaged to him, and never have been—and, what's more, never shall be, as he's taken it into his head to try and force my hand."

"Gently, Inez dear. He hasn't tried anything of the sort. He's merely told me how distressed he is to have people talking about you."—"He'd no business to go to you about it."—"Have you forgotten, Inez, that when Sandy had his quarrel about you with Ned, you said that Sandy ought to have come to me?"—"Yes, I did. I'd forgotten that. But I'm just as annoyed with Bob."—"That's not fair."—"No, I don't think it is, and in any case, I don't care. I'm not going to leave Beaudesert, father, until Ned commands me to."

"I'm not sure myself that you ought to be influenced by what people say, if you feel that your duty bids you stay with poor Chris's children."—"And poor Chris's husband," said Inez, boldly.—"I think your duty lies more in the direction of avoiding him than staying with him."—"I don't agree with you, father. He's awfully down on his luck, poor chap! He adored Chris and nobody could cheer him up so well as her sister. He'd be most desperately lonely if he was left here with

the babes and their nurse and the Japs. I'm not going to desert him when he's like this."

"You've got yourself to think of, Inez."—"Myself!" she echoed ironically. "They can say what they please about me! They could say it, *if it was true*, without my caring. If I wanted to live with a man without being his wife, I should do it and laugh at the consequences. As it happens, I have such a prejudice against living with a man that I don't want to be anybody's wife. If Ned and I wanted to marry each other, we are at perfect liberty to do so by the laws of the State."—"I should not have the slightest objection to your doing so, after a decent interval, if that seemed your best way of doing your duty by the children—and Ned."—"There isn't any question of it, and as to the scandal, if people only knew what a chivalrous philosopher Ned is in his treatment of me, they would laugh at him, I should think."

"As they don't know, don't you think that it would be wiser for you to come away?"—"I don't think at all, father dear. I know that I'm not going to be driven away from here by old women's chatter."—"It isn't wise to make a scandal, Inez, unless you feel it to be a duty."—"I do. But that's neither here nor there. I've never cared what people said about me, so why should I care now, when there's such a really important thing at stake as Ned's happiness?"—"And Bob's—does that count for nothing? Why don't you make up your mind to marry him, Inez?—your friend from childhood, a very steady man, whom we should all welcome, a man with a great career, solidly founded, whom you must like very much indeed, from the way in which you have made him . . . your 'pal'—isn't that your word?"—"Yes. I have made him a great pal and I'm quite fond of him. But, oh Lord! to marry him, after I have known what it is to sit at the head of the table of a man like Ned! I should be mad."

"He seems to me to be a much more suitable husband."—"In point of wealth even I doubt it, if the scooter progresses at its present rate; but in any case, since I don't mean to marry anyone, it doesn't matter at all. I've quite made up my mind to be an old maid and keep house for Ned, to bring up his children. Shall I tell you something, father?"—"I very much want you to tell me something which will explain things better."—"I will. I couldn't marry Chris's husband. The old law against marrying your deceased wife's sister seems to me a law of Nature, an instinct of decency."—"Yet you refuse to come away?"—"I do."

"Then there's no more to be said, Inez dear. We must prepare ourselves to live down calumny. You can count on me to believe in you."

Inez threw her arms round him and buried her eyes against his shoulder. When she raised them again, she had not been weeping—that would not have been like Inez. It was to look straight into his, with these words: "I will arise and go to my father and will say unto him, 'Father I have not sinned against Heaven or before thee.' I shall continue to act in the only way which I think worthy of your daughter." He said not another word, but kissed her and wrung her hand and walked rapidly down to Kingscliff, to fly home.

When he'd gone, Inez sat down and wrote to Bob

"MY DEAR BOB,

"It is not fair to keep you in suspense. I never shall be able to marry you. I don't mind your having gone to father, but I know now that the only man I could have married is Ned, and the idea of marrying my dead sister's husband is to me unthinkable. So I must plough my lonely furrow in his house, bringing up their children, and keeping him faithful to her memory.

"Think of me kindly if you can.

"Your affectionate,

"INEZ."

To which Bob wrote back :

"I do think kindly of you, Inez. I'm going to be a man about it. May I continue your friend, doing things with you as I always have done, and come and help you and 'Ned' in your 'lonely furrow'? I should like to be as big a friend of his as I am of yours. I think he's absolutely straight. I like him no end."

"Bob."

From that time forward Bob was constantly one of the little family party at Beaudesert, and when the cool weather came, they went up in Mr. Gordon's airship to spend several weeks with him at Port Stevens—which was a perfectly wonderful trip for them, because, having plenty of water-borne petrol, Bob took the airship for voyages over tropical Australia and the islands and coral-seas to the north of the island-continent.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

MARKING TIME

BOB STEVENS'S coming out to Beaudesert, and their long visit to him in the N.T., knocked off corners in the relations between Inez and Ned. With Bob there, whether they were playing games, making expeditions by 'plane and car, fishing in the N.T., or sitting about the "Miyanoshta," there was not the same necessity for keeping a restraint upon themselves as when there was no third person present. By degrees Inez became her dashing, high-spirited self again.

The Pretender had not changed so much; it was more natural for him in any phase of life to reciprocate than to initiate in his dealings with individuals, although when he was making a speech, he could capture a whole audience so quickly. He met the advances of the other person most genially, but he waited for them. This was especially the case at Victoria Beach, when Inez constituted him her chief pal. All those delightful intimacies had been begun by her; she had found a special fascination in luring him on, because he never took a liberty or an advantage, but lent himself to her whims as she fancied, and because everyone—her family most—seemed to expect it.

In the dances at Melbourne it had been the same. He was always conscious that he was receiving an undue amount of favour, modest about accepting it, impelled to retire if opportunity offered. He never felt the same ease with her as he felt with Connie, who, after that brief flirtation, conferred on him an out-and-out friendship, very affectionate and enthusiastic, but a regular friendship, which had no skirmishing like a love-affair. Inez, who had made up her mind never to marry and discharged her friends like cabs when they forgot her orders and proposed, constantly drifted into skirmishing, which had a fascination for her. When she promoted a friend to be her pal, he entered the danger-zone. But the Pretender had proved an exception. Feeling that he had no right to fall in love with either her or Chris, so long as he could present no credentials, he had consistently kept out of the skirmishing-line and forced himself to remain a plain friend. It was, therefore, simple for him, in spite of the deep affection he now felt for Inez, to maintain the reserve with which he had been accustomed to treat her,

except in the long visit which she paid to Beaudesert about a month after his marriage, when Chris made him lower the barriers and treat Inez like a brother in her presence.

He still hoped that Inez would marry Bob. He liked him and respected him, the marriage was eminently suitable. Why else had she let her glittering hair grow its full length and crown her feminine charms? He therefore always made himself the by-stander in their triangular parties and contests, although (or was it in consequence?) he broke down his barrier of reserve a little. Sometimes when they were alone, because their beloved Pat, who out of working hours did everything except sleep at Beaudesert, was busy, she began to tease him about it. "It's no good, Mr. Matchmaker, you won't make me marry Bob. The affair's off, never coming on again. Bob's a dear fellow. I like him better as a friend than I have during all the years that we've known each other, but I've learned his limitations, and I shouldn't be satisfied with him for my life's companion—stable-mate, I should have called it once. But that's all set behind me long ago and fur away, as Kipling said, or something like it; and there 'ain't no busses running from the Benk to Mandalay'—if I'm the Benk and Mandalay stands for the N.T."—"The simile doesn't work out, Inez—the Tommy of the song was homesick for Mandalay."

"Well, I'm not. I want my life here with the babes, our books, our talks about books, and other civilized things, and the garden you have created—with the tennis and the morning's swim, of course."—"The time was, Inez . . ."—"I know it was, but I suppose I'm changed inside, and sense the things which matter."—"Well, it is a good life in this delicious climate. I know that I want nothing better to come home to, when I have finished my work, than the babes and the person they call 'mummy,' who keeps us all in order, and the sea and the garden and the books."—"Am I dreadfully stern with you, Ned?"—"Not half stern enough," he replied, appearing to tell himself the reason.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE RECANTATION OF INEZ

ONE morning at breakfast—it was July 18th, 2005—when he picked up “The Argus” and read the summary, he gave a sudden start. “What is the matter, Ned?” asked Inez, noticing his agitation, in spite of the fact that she was engaged in the much-criticized operation of spreading Elizabeth’s jam for her. “Nothing,” he said, taking a glance through the leader-page to see the news at more length. “Mysterious as usual!” —“It’s something about old friends,” he said. “I should feel an ass if I told you why it affected me so.” —“I don’t see why you should feel an ass in telling me anything, Ned. Aren’t I a good enough pal?” —“Rather, but I couldn’t tell you this.” —“Don’t tell me if you can’t. I’m not like that now.”

Nothing more was said at breakfast, but after breakfast he followed her into the kitchen, where she had gone to give her orders. “Are you going down to the gorge afterwards?” —“To ‘Miyanoshta,’ Ned?—No—I’m going into the living-room to write to mother.” When she got into the room she found him outside the open French windows, cleaning his pipe. “Don’t hurry,” he said. “I’ve rather a long job before me.”

Inez’s letter did not appear to worry her. She stood at the table, a picture of beauty and vigorous health, dashed off a few lines, pushed them into an envelope, licked it, and was at his side. “I’m ready now—sorry to keep you waiting.” —“You haven’t kept me waiting. I wanted the time to be longer.” —“Why?” —“Because I have something rather dreadful to say.” —“Out with it! I’m not frightened.” —“I am, I assure you. I’m thinking of taking a long trip home.” —“You’ll take us with you, I suppose?” —“No, I shall leave the children with you.” —“Leave me,” she gasped, paling, “when I’m dying to see England with you?” —“That’s the point of my going, Inez.”

“Are you pulling my . . . are you chaffing? If you aren’t, I don’t understand you.” He shook his head. —“I never was more serious in my life.” —“Then what do you mean?” —“My people will be thinking that I ought to marry again.” —“Your people? I didn’t know you’d any left. It’s the

first time I’ve heard you mention them for five years.” —“Yes, I’ve got some, *and* I’m afraid they’ll worry me about marrying.” He watched her as he said this. She did not see him watching her; her brave eyes were downcast. He thought he had never seen her look so beautiful or so feminine.

“Why have you suddenly thought of this?” she stammered. —“It isn’t sudden. I’ve been thinking of it for some time.” —“Of going home?” —“No, of marrying again.” Inez wondered, but did not give expression to her thoughts for a little. Then she asked, with a sorry smile: “Am I a failure as housekeeper and head nurse?” —“Do you think I should leave the children with you if you were? You’re the dead opposite of failure in every respect.” —“I almost wish I wasn’t, then perhaps you’d take me home with you.”

“You wouldn’t like to go when I was trying to find another woman to marry, though you’ve told me quite definitely that you could never marry me yourself—for a certain reason.” —“I don’t like your going at all. I don’t want to lose you, Ned.” —“Nor I you, dear Inez.” —“Then why do you do it? Aren’t we happy as we are?” —“We are indeed! I shall never be so happy again, and if the kids were boys I wouldn’t do it. But it’s necessary for me to have a son. It will affect my people very much if I don’t.”

“I don’t want to pry into your affairs—I’ve had my lesson—but is it one of those funny things they have in England, and don’t have here, entails and primogeniture and that kind of thing?” —“Yes, you might call it ‘that kind of thing.’ I don’t mind your asking me any questions you like. I’ll apologize if I can’t answer them. It’s easy for me to do that now, when we are so much to each other.” —“Thank you for saying that, Ned.”

They were silent for a little; he was regarding her with an affection which had never been allowed to manifest itself in his eyes since Chris’s death. “Tell me one thing, Ned. If you marry ‘at home,’ shall you live there?” —“I shall have to some day.” —“Oh, Ned, I shall feel inclined to shoot myself, like poor Lindsay.” —“If you’re really determined never to marry, what’s to prevent your coming too? What would the children do without you?” —“Could we live in the same house with you?” —“You don’t suppose I should allow my children to be separated from me?” —“I’m too miserable to suppose anything.”

“There’s no reason to be downhearted. I shan’t take the children with me, so you’ll have hostages to ensure my coming back again as soon as possible.” —“Still, there’ll be those awful

months without you. You don't know how you fill my life, Ned, because we always hide our affection from each other like two guilty things, though we've really been paragons of innocence."—"I shall be very unhappy if I marry anyone else. But there's no help for it. If I don't do it I shall fail in my duty in a way which you for one would never tolerate, when I can tell you the facts, which I hope to, before many years."—"Before many years!" echoed Inez, smiling in spite of herself, but instantly relapsing into pensiveness and regret.

At length her brow cleared a little and she called him to her softly. He leapt forward. She moved to him and offered him her proud lips. "Does that mean that you will marry me?"—"I don't know," she stammered. "It means that I want to be asked."—"Inez," he said, between the kisses which she was suffering so gladly, "will you really marry me?" She could feel his delight. "I don't know."—"Why don't you know?"—"I'm not being coy, Ned dear, but I had to know for certain that you wanted it before I could discuss it."—"Discuss it?"

She could feel his utter disappointment, but proceeded: "It's necessary for us to discuss it honestly. I love you enough to marry you. It must be a long time since you found that out. But my objection to marrying you is just as strong this minute as ever it was, especially since your acknowledged object in marrying me would be to have sons. I must speak plainly—my objection to marrying you lies in my repugnance to giving myself to the father of my sister's children. But there are things to weigh against it now. The first is, can you declare on your honour that it is absolutely necessary for you to have a son?"—"I can and do."—"The second is, is there an equally good reason for your marrying someone at home if you don't marry me?"—"On my honour, there is."—"The third is for me, not you. If I do not overcome my repugnance, Chris's children will have a stranger woman for their stepmother."

"I can't advise you."—"I know you can't. My judgment tells me that it will be worse treason to Chris if I don't marry you. But I can't decide it on that." The thrill in the hands which held her ebbed away again. She felt desperately sorry for him and for herself. "What can decide you then, Inez?" he asked, with a ring of despair in his voice, because when she raised the question of the children, he believed that she had persuaded herself. She released herself from his hands. He was doomed.

But a wave of love swept over her, and she pressed herself into his arms, crying, "You!"

Afterwards, as they were rambling down the flowery gorge,

happy lovers, she in an encircling arm, she said: "I won't conceal from you that I feel that I'm doing just as wrong in giving myself to you in marriage as I should in giving myself to you while you were another woman's husband. But when I think of your going to England without me, I know that I would do even that to keep you."

* * * * *

"To-day I am the happiest man in the world, for the woman I love best has given herself to me, and I know that I shall be able to repay her for her sacrifice."—"I'm not myself to-day, Ned, or I should say, 'The Lord give us a good conceit of ourselves.' I can only devoutly echo your words, for I know that you will."—"Well, I'm feeling very much myself, so I shall say, 'You mark my words—this eighteenth day of July, 2005.'"

CHAPTER XL

MARRYING IN HASTE

THEIR walk in "Miyanoshita" was of brief duration, for it took them straight to the bathing-room, tunnelled in the face of the cliff, lined with timber like a mine, to keep it from falling in, and fronted with glass. It was furnished with little iron tables, cane armchairs and bamboo deck-chairs—there was nothing that the most sopping bather could spoil. When the hot winds were blowing from the north, this bathing-room, which faced south and could be hermetically closed with its glass-front, was the coolest spot on the whole of Port Philip. Their engagement having been put on a proper footing—Inez submitted to the first thorough kissing she had ever received in her life, and emerged much handsomer and more womanly—she was at length permitted to write a fresh letter to her mother. There was a writing-table—always provided with materials—in the bathing-room, and there she wrote:

"DEAREST LITTLE MOTHER,

"I think I ought to tell you that I'm a very much engaged girl. In spite of what I feel about marrying a brother-in-law, I have promised to marry Ned, and I'm awfully happy over it. Tell me you're glad, if it's only for my sake, mother.

"Your affectionate

"INEZ."

To which Mrs. Gordon replied by return of post :

" MY DEAREST INEZ,

" You know how fond I am of Ned. I love him as if he was my own son. No woman could be anything but happy with him for a husband. I am very, very glad for your sake.

" I am sorry for poor Bob ; he is such a good chap. But I know that you will be happier with Ned, so I congratulate you and give the engagement my blessing.

" Your affectionate
" MOTHER."

While Inez was writing her letter, Ned went up to the house and wirelessed to his father-in-law to ask if he could see him if he 'planned over during the morning ; he explained that Inez had done him the honour of promising to be his wife, and he wished to ask Mr. Gordon's approval and to consult him about a very important matter in connection with the affair. Mr. Gordon gave his cordial approval and said that he thought it would be better if he Zepped over and lunched with them, so that he might see Inez as well.

The airship descended as usual at the Ether Co.'s works. Ned was there to meet him. They had arranged to walk up together, to get their talk over before Mr. Gordon was occupied with Inez. " Well, Ned, my boy," he said, when they met, " I am truly glad. I hoped that this would happen, for two reasons—it's not only much the best thing for the children, but desirable for her own sake also ; no-one has ever had such a good influence over Inez."—" I am glad that you approve, sir. I naturally had to ask her first, or I might have been troubling you for nothing."—" In Australia, Ned, as you probably have found out, the children are always consulted first, unless it is an arrangement to combine businesses or properties."

" There's another matter, sir, in which I'm afraid that I shall have to ask you to take me, once more, on trust."—" I'm quite prepared to do that, Ned. What is it ?"—" I want you to help me to get married—the civil marriage—to-morrow."

" My goodness, Ned ! You take my breath away."—" It's only the civil marriage, sir. We will not be married in church until we have had time to make the proper arrangements."

" But why such a hurry ? Why have a civil marriage at all ? The church marriage is sufficient for all legal purposes."

" I'm afraid I can't tell you, sir. Of course, if you don't approve of it being done in such a hurry, I shall have to accept your verdict. But it really is exceedingly important."

" I take your word for it, Ned. If you say that it's so important as that, I'll do my best to get it done to-morrow. We'll go and see the Lord Mayor—civil marriages are municipal affairs with us, as they are with the Latin races on the Continent—directly after lunch. His office doesn't close until four. That, with the 24 hours' minimum notice, will allow you to be married to-morrow afternoon, and since the wedding-journey will only consist of Inez's walking from Ikegami's bungalow to yours, the afternoon will do you as well as the morning. This is your statutory right. If you want it earlier, I'll see what I can do with his lordship."

" It will do quite well, sir ; I don't think that the difficulty which I wish to avoid will have presented itself in that time."

" You're very mysterious to-day, Ned, but my mind's quite easy about that."—" Thank you a thousand times. Some day I shall be able to show you how necessary it was for me to act with promptitude."—" I am sure you will. Hullo, there's Inez !"

Inez flew to her father, to receive the kiss of peace, with a very heightened colour. He noticed the added charm of femininity, the glow of happiness. " Ned told me that you had given it your benediction, you dear old dad. It is jolly, isn't it ?"—" It is indeed, dear. Nothing could give me greater pleasure."—" And mother—she's all right about it ?"—" Yes, your mother's as pleased as I am. We both think that Ned is the ideal man for you."—" I'm sure of it," said Inez, " because he's the only man that I have ever allowed to master me. I'm not like mother—I need mastering."—" You never spoke a truer word, my child, so long as it's not done by breaking your heart."

" Will you impress on Ikegami to give us lunch punctually, dear ?" said Ned. " We have to go into town directly afterwards. . . ."—" I don't see that you're doing much discussion with me, father !"—" I don't need to. Your face told me quite enough."—" Did it ? I'm ridiculously happy."

" Can Inez and I go back with you to Esslemont to-night, sir ?" asked Ned, as they came out from the office of the Registrar.

" Why, of course. We shall be absolutely delighted. We'd better wireless to the mother before we leave town for Beaudesert, or we may find that she has started for Melbourne. When she learns that the marriage is arranged for to-morrow, she'll want to spend the interval with Inez somehow."—" And I'll 'phone to Inez to be getting ready. I'm like Pat and Bob—I always keep a suit-case packed."

When they arrived at Beaudesert they found that Pat was

going to accompany them. He did not want to be the only one left out of the family-party. When he got to Esslemont he went off with his brother. "What do you think about it, old man?" he asked. "Are you as pleased as I am?"—"I don't know how pleased that is, as I can't see inside you, but I can tell you that I'm jolly relieved that Inez is going to marry a man who understands her. She's capable of being so jolly unhappy."—"And he's such a good 'un, through and through, Adam. I've spent a bit of nearly every day with him for the last five years, and he's wanted to take the thick end of the log every time."—"I'd have bet my life on that. I say, Pat, doesn't being in love suit Inez?"

Before they left for Esslemont, Ikegami was informed that he did not know where they were, but that they had gone a trip with Mr. Gordon for a day or two. At the same time, he was to telephone to Ned the questions which any caller asked. This was a delicious stroke of humour, because beyond the person's name, Ikegami would be quite unintelligible on the telephone. The family party that night exceeded expectations. Towards lunch-time next day, when the whole family were making preparations for going on board the airship, where they were to take their meal, in order to arrive at the Melbourne Town Hall directly the twenty-four hours were up, Ned was called to the telephone. Ikegami wirelessly the name of a very important caller, who had been most anxious to know where he could find him. He was so insistent that Ikegami of his own accord changed the venue, and said that he thought that his master had gone to Port Stevens, N. T. "Good old Ikegami!" said Adam. "These Asiatics are a slimy lot."—"Ikegami's one of the most faithful chaps I ever met," protested Ned.—"I know that. I was only trying to be funny."

They reached the Melbourne Town Hall without interruption, and there, with her family present as witnesses, Inez was married to the Pretender. The Lord Mayor was present himself, out of compliment to Mr. Gordon, being very gratified that a man of such position in the State had lent his countenance to the Civil form of marriage, which, after having been recognized by law for a century as the alternative of Church Marriage, was still little used by decent people. When the brief ceremony was performed, Mr. and Mrs. Stuart motored home in Pat's car. They were anxious that Mr. and Mrs. Gordon should accompany them, but the parents stoutly persisted in using their own car. Pat went off to an advertisement office to arrange for the insertion of this notice of their marriage in all the *Dailies*:

"MARRIAGES"

"On July 19th, at the Melbourne Town Hall, before the Lord Mayor, Charles Edward Stuart, of Beaudesert, Middlesex Fells, Victoria, to Inez, daughter of Adam Lindsay Gordon, of Hall-head and Esslemont."

* * * * *

When Ned got home, he phoned to his insistent caller to ask if he might go and see him after tea. Tea was a very solemn ceremony. Ikegami had provided a wonderful tea-banquet, half Japanese, half Australian, with the most delicious cakes, in the Japanese tea-house in the "Miyanoshta," now an absolutely charming little edifice in the classical Japanese style. He and Tora waited on them, in Japanese clothes, entirely new. Japanese servants always put on new clothes for great occasions, and their joy at their master having married their mistress, though limited by Japanese decorum, was extraordinary. The novelty and poeticality delighted Inez, and her mother no less. Her son Adam may have expressed Mrs. Gordon's feelings, though she would hardly have chosen his words: "Fancy those two Japanese mopokes, who have been muddling on with vegetables and turkeys all this time for us, running a show like this!"

When Ned reached his mysterious caller's abode and was shown in, he was approached on the topic he expected, and glad of the precautions he had taken, which were greeted with laughter as well as vexation. They passed to another subject, which Ned thought of no immediate import, though they talked over it for half an hour. He could not spare longer, because he wanted to have a family conclave over the Church Marriage before Mr. Gordon, who was attending to it the next day, left. "I don't see why you want to have it at all," said Inez. "I'm sure I don't want to be on exhibition."—"Shall I talk plainly, dear?" asked the Pretender.—"Not to me, Ned, please. I've been so horribly practical all my life that I want a little romance now. Do your plain talking with father and mother, or the family. What you and the parents decide I'll obey."

It was characteristic of the Gordons that the parents wished the brothers to discuss it. "What is the position as it appears to you, Ned?" said Mr. Gordon.—"At the risk of appearing unrefined, I think that we are up against two rocks—the Church extremists who still object to marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister, and the people at the other end who might be disposed to raise a scandal because Inez did not marry me before she came to

live at Beaudesert. There are a certain number of both, I suppose, who will refuse to know us, and we may just as well make them come out into the open."—"I can answer for it that there won't be very many," said Pat, "because most people we know seem to have given me the benefit of their opinions already, and nine-tenths of the talk was milk and honey."—"Then there's no excuse for opposing Ned's wishes," said Mr. Gordon. "Anything else, Ned?"

"Yes, sir. I should like the wedding to be as public and regular as possible, to show people that I had the complete approval of the family in marrying dear Chris's sister."—"That is a distinct point," said Mrs. Gordon, "which I don't think we ought to neglect."—"Anything else, Ned?"—"There is another reason, as weighty as either of them, but I don't feel able to mention it. You'll excuse me, all of you, won't you?"—They all expressed their assent in some way, Adam the younger adding, "It will be a *beano*, Ned, the day when that secret of yours comes out."—"For me *it will!* I'm sick of all this mystification."—"Good old Ned!" said the brothers.

Mr. Gordon, taking no note of the interruption, said, "It's settled, then, that there is to be a big wedding, and that you are to be married again in a church. The next question is, what church it shall be."—"You'd better hire the cathedral," said Pat. To his surprise, Ned said, "I should prefer the cathedral. Most of the big weddings that I've been at since I've been out here have been at the cathedral. Unless they're Roman Catholics, it doesn't seem to make any difference what sect the bride and bridegroom belong to."—"I don't know how they manage it. I suppose there are some regulations," said Mr. Gordon. "In any case, you are Church of England, Ned?"—"Of course," he replied—they could not quite make out how seriously—"It's the Established Church."

"The Dean must do the deciding," continued Mr. Gordon; "as he's a friend of mine, I'll go to see him early to-morrow morning." To his utter surprise, Mr. Gordon received a blank refusal. Any clergyman of the Church of England was, by the laws of Victoria, excepted from the obligation to marry a deceased wife's sister to a brother-in-law in his church, although the law legalized such marriages. The Dean, who was a "strong Churchman," would have none of it, much as he esteemed and respected Mr. Gordon.

"What do you think we ought to do, Ned?" asked Mr. Gordon over the telephone. "Ask the Minister of the Scots Church in Collins Street, I think, sir—you belong to his con-

gregation—informing him, of course, that the Dean has refused."—"Very well, Ned. Shall you be at home, if I have to 'phone to you?"—"I shall be in all the morning, sir."—An hour later, Mr. Gordon rang up. "Dr. Munro-Menzies does not approve," he said, "but as I am an elder of the Church, and I approve, he will not carry his opposition to the extent of refusing to celebrate the marriage. Do you care to accept such a half-hearted acquiescence?"—"I think so, sir. After the cathedral, it is the most natural place to hold the marriage, and we may meet with some opposition in almost any direction from the reputable clergy. So I, personally, am in favour of closing with Munro-Menzies. Where are you speaking from?"—"From his house. Shall I fix a day? What day shall it be?"—"Yesterday fortnight; the First of August is a day I have a fancy for."—"Then let it be the First of August."

* * * * *

Almost everyone who was asked accepted the invitation to be present at the religious ceremony in the Scots Church, and the reception at Hallhead afterwards. Popularity was far in advance of prejudice. The Governor-General himself, who was hardly ever seen at a social function, wrote to him:

"MY DEAR STUART,

"Since I have so often had occasion to consult you on affairs, and you have been so very courteous in coming whenever I asked you, I should like to testify to the very pleasant relations upon which we stand by being present at your wedding. And my family would be present with me at the church.

"Lady Wessex and I must not, I think, come to the reception, as we have made a rule to the contrary, though this need not apply to my daughters, who were at school with the two Miss Gordons and have stayed at Esslemont.

"I congratulate you both on the choice you have made.

"Believe me, my dear Stuart,

"Yours very truly,

"WESSEX,"

"Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief

"Of the Commonwealth of Australia."

To which Ned replied:

"DEAR LORD WESSEX,

"I cannot tell you how grateful we are to you for your courtesy, and the honour which you are conferring on us. My mother-in-law will send you the formal invitations.

"Inez sends her love to Lady Diana and Lady Patricia, and with compliments and renewed thanks,

"I remain,

"Yours sincerely,

"CHARLES EDWARD STUART."

To His Excellency

"The Right Honble. The Earl of Wessex, K.G., G.C.B.,

"Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief

"Of the Commonwealth of Australia."

"That's dorny on Mr. Dean," said Pat, when Ned handed him Lord Wessex's letter. "Are Di and Pat coming?" cried the delighted Inez. Ned nodded. "Then I don't mind the old wedding—we must put up a proper show for them. They've never been to any Old College Girl's wedding yet." She half expected him to object to "Di" and "Pat" as too familiar, and, though for some reason he did not, she felt bound to offer the explanation. "They were always Di and Pat at the College—Toorak College, dear. It's *the* College to us *alumnae*."

* * * * *

The great day came. The Scots Church, with its fine approach from the stately spaces of Collins Street, made the right setting for a wedding of such dimensions. It was a huge wedding, for not only were the Gordons one of the chief families of Victoria socially, and connected with most of the great land-owners, still known locally as the Squatters, but they were the family of the National Poet, and Inez was President of the Union of Women's Gordon Clubs. Every Gordon Club in Australia had asked to be allowed to send its representative to the wedding. On Ned's side, since he had no kinsfolk in Australia, invitations had been sent to the officers of King Edward's Horse, who were all of them, apart from unavoidable detentions, present in uniform. Ned himself was to be married in uniform—he was a Captain now—and the Guard of Honour was of sergeants from the Regiment, and the Regimental Band was in the street, to play "Cock o' the North" as Inez drove up with her parents, and "Come o'er the Stream, Charlie," when Ned motored up with his bachelor Colonel, as best man, which was hurriedly changed to "God Save the King" when the Governor-General's car dashed up almost simultaneously. "They're paying you a great compliment," said the Colonel, who considered himself a wit, alluding to the change in the music, and Stuart innocently

agreed with him, understanding him to refer to Lord and Lady Wessex. For which he was roundly chaffed at the Mess dinner given in his honour a few weeks later.

As Lord Wessex had been assigned one front pew of the nave, and Mr. Gordon the other, they had a moment's conversation as the Governor-General was shown to his place by one of the Majors in Stuart's Regiment. The officers were acting as stewards. In that moment H. E. said, "You must let me be one of the signatories of the register."—"I shall be most proud, Your Excellency, and I cannot tell you how Mrs. Gordon will be honoured and delighted by the compliment." She was not more delighted than Dr. Munro-Menzies, who was glad to have such countenance in a function which he only half-relished. He made the service a short one, apart from the music. He was a man with a sense of humour, and since the parties had already been man and wife for a fortnight and he did not approve of these marriages, he omitted sundry matters to which allusion is generally made, concentrating his eloquence on the fair promise of the future for bride and bridegroom, though to what he referred exactly, beyond the chance of the Scooter becoming a colossal commercial success, he did not really know.

Ned would much have preferred Bob Stevens to his com- placent Colonel as best man. But he thought that it might be indelicate to ask him, although Bob's attitude when he arrived showed how gladly he would have assumed the position. Ned had asked him to come into the vestry when the register was being signed, and when the signatures were appended, and the family and His Excellency, most gallantly, had kissed Inez, she said, "You must kiss me as well, Bob. You shall always come next to the family." They were left standing alone a few minutes while the signatories were attending to some detail. "First godfather and that sort of thing," he said, trying to conceal his feelings under a jest. "Yes," she said, quite seriously, "you shall be first godfather, if Ned agrees."—"You've given up not having children, then, Inez? Do you remember what you used to say about it? That's why I was so cheeky about being 'first godfather.'"—"I married him to try and give him a son, Bob. That's why he said he must marry again. Otherwise, we might always have gone on as we were."

Then the wedding-march struck up as a sign that the pro- cession was to form, and Inez took her place beside the man to whom she had been wedded twice, as if it was an occasion of unusual import. As the bride and bridegroom passed down the great church, between the sunburnt faces and under the

crossed swords of King Edward's troopers, Stuart was so flushed with pride at the beauty of the woman who was his, and the welcome which he had received from everybody, from the Governor-General downwards, that he looked a different person from the man whom everybody always hailed as "such a good fellow;" he did not seem just a partner in a Melbourne business, but a somebody, whose ancestors had been embalmed in story. People could not do more than glance at him, because Inez looked so radiantly beautiful, so radiantly in love. "Who'd have believed it of Inez Gordon?" was the idea that presented itself to everyone who had known her.

CHAPTER XLI

HOW INEZ LEARNED HIS SECRET

THE procession of cars which followed the bride and bridegroom from the Scots' Church out to Hallhead was nearly two miles long. The reception had to be held in the grounds. Hallhead was a fine mansion, but could not have accommodated half the guests, and at 3 p.m. on a winter afternoon the climate of Australia can be charming. Ned and Inez stayed for two hours, that everyone who wished might have a chat with them. It would only take them half an hour to motor out to Beaudesert, where they were spending their honeymoon. Inez stood by her mother. Bob stayed by her husband to support him when he was disengaged. He did it to proclaim that he cherished no ill-feeling, and Mr. Gordon and his sons showed how much they approved when they brought up guest after guest to be introduced.

Once they came for him to introduce him to the Anglican Archbishop, who was present to show that he did not share Mr. Dean's views about a Deceased Wife's Sister. Inez he had known since she was a winning and wayward child. Before he had chatted ten minutes with her husband, he applauded her choice. Many high Anglican clergy, besides the Archbishop, were present, as were most of the leaders of the other Protestant churches. But it was known that a section of the Church of England, and the Roman Catholic clergy, without exception, would not have come if invited. To Inez the absence of non-approvers was a matter of indifference. If she had looked radiantly lovely and in love in church, she was girlishly happy and natural in receiving congratulations and

chatting to her friends. No girl in Melbourne had ever had so distinguished a wedding. She did not waste any of the two hours in changing into a travelling dress, for she knew how Ikegami and Tora, who had not been to the wedding, would want to see her in her wedding-dress—Japanese etiquette demanded that they should remain at the house to receive her, on her return. And she guessed that the inhabitants of Kingscliff, most of whom she knew as having menfolk in the service of her husband and Pat, would like to catch a glimpse of her as she walked up the gate.

So it was that she went through the rice-shower to their car "in gloss of satin and shimmer of pearl." Once at Beaudesert, it was not long before she was in shirt and skirt, wandering down "the Miyanoshta" to the cave-house in the cliff. Its great glass doors were wide open to the opalescent sea, giving a sense of freedom and infinity, and by standing a few feet back the intervening sands were shut out. But they were not looking at infinity: they were looking into each other's eyes. "Should you like to know a great secret, Ned?" she asked—"Why I let my hair grow?"—"Yes," he said, kissing the lustrous coils. "Because I wanted you to have eyes for no other woman."—"Oh, you blessed thing! I brought you here to tell you my secret."

Her eyes laughed with sheer happiness. "Are you really going to tell me, Ned?"—"I am. As my wife you *have* a right to know, and I am so in love with you that I wanted you to know if it would give you any pleasure."—"You *are* a darling. It's the greatest proof of your affection which you could give me."—"You'll promise not to tell anybody?"—"Not even the parents?"—"No, I think even they had better not know, because things might never be quite the same if they did."—"I shouldn't have told them without your leave, Ned."—"Well, don't, dear. I'm sure you'll see the reason when you know."—"Then tell me. I'm dying to know what this wonderful secret is!"

He told her. She made him tell her again two or three times before she could believe her ears. "And is this solemn earnest, Ned?"—"It is."—"Then why wouldn't you tell me before? There certainly wasn't anything disgraceful in it. Why couldn't you have told me under pledge of secrecy the very first time I asked you? I can keep my word."—"Because you had no right to ask, Mrs. Stuart. Besides, things had not developed. It was only a possibility—a practical impossibility then."

"M," she said doubtfully, and, an idea striking her, added, "You saw the news in the 'Argus' that morning?—the morning that you compelled me to promise against my will."—"Yes, I did. Was it very much against your will?"—"It was. I fought as hard as I could against it. But I was so in love with you, so afraid of losing you, that I gave in. I never gave in so completely in my life."—"Do you regret it?"—"Do I regret it? There isn't a happier woman in Australia! Nor was there a prouder, even before you told me your secret. But why didn't you tell me before you made me marry you?"—"Because I wanted to get your promise for my own sake, not because of what I have just told you, and because, too, I was afraid you might refuse, lest people should say you had married me for that."—"You were wise there, Ned darling—I mean the second reason. I don't believe that I should ever have had the face to marry you if I had known—after what I'd done."

"But now that you do know . . . ?"—"Now that I do know, and can't by any possibility undo it, of course I am the proudest woman in the world. And oh, Ned—there's nothing among all the lovely things which I have found out about my husband which pleases me half as much as his being willing to bear any obloquy rather than confess this."—"I am glad that you agree with me now that you know the facts."—"Dad will too," she said. "Tell me one thing more—that was . . . ?" She was too shy to go on. "That was what?"—"That was the reason why you wanted to have a son?" He nodded. "I want one just as much as you do now, Ned, to try and repay you."—"Inez, you're a darling, because I know how you feel about it."

"That feeling has gone. Every other feeling is merged in the desire to consecrate myself to your happiness. I meant it literally when I promised to obey you as well as to love and honour you."—"You'll never get the chance. I shall always coax."—"I shall counter by saying outright, 'What do you wish me to do, dear?' and doing it."—"I shall counter back by only offering advice."—"I hate advice: you're the only person I ever allowed to give me any. I should have to say, 'Please decide.' I want you to make me a promise, Ned."—"I suppose it's something against yourself?"—"Yes. But you must do it. Promise me this much—that where a thing matters, you'll decide. You'll have to, sooner or later, because when *that* happens, people will say dreadful things about you if you let me decide things. I run no risks. I know perfectly well what a queen you'll make of me in the things which

are not Cæsar's—will you promise?" Words halted. It was the kiss that punctuated his acceptance.

"I must go and dress now, dear. What frock shall I put on? You know what I've got, and our Chris taught you to discriminate. I've been watching her picture while we've been sitting here. If I were a Catholic looking at the image of a saint, I could have sworn that she smiled."—"Put on that old frock you took down to Esslemont with you the other day—the one which you have kept for family festivals, because it was the frock you wore the night of your second Championship, when you won your famous victory. That was the night when you looked lovelier in my eyes than I ever remembered you before. Were you conscious of looking specially well?"

"I longed to. Did you guess that I was trying to be lovely for you—that I was regretting something in the midst of my triumph?"—"I thought that Love was the Enchanter, but not for me."—"You thought it was for Bob? How could it be Bob?" asked Inez. "Instead of thinking of the Championship I had won, I was sore at having let you slip through my fingers. That feeling came back to me with double force when you told me that you were going to England to get married, for I wanted your love, oh, so badly! I wanted you to care for me so deeply that you never could marry anyone else. I did not want you to marry me—I had sworn that I never would marry, much less marry you, who were taboo to me. But I wanted you to remain true to Chris through her children—the only way we have remained true to her, and I wanted to go on eating the lotus with you until the end of my chapter."

"I thought . . . by that time I dreaded that you were growing to care enough for Bob to tell him that you would marry him."—"No, no! I knew by that time that I never could leave you for him. My dread was that some day you might come to leave me. When you told me that you were going to England to get married, my heart stood still. And now you are mine for ever. You can't think how glad I am that I was untrue to my principles. We Gordonians are above all people liable to look to the thistles for our figs, to sacrifice our happiness to a creed."—"You are honestly glad?"—"It has made me gladder than anything in my life, except one thing."—"What is that?" he asked, with a faint shiver of jealousy.—"That you made me marry you before I knew your secret, or I might have felt that I had been bribed."

CHAPTER XLII

HOW INEZ PASSED THE FIRST YEAR OF THEIR MARRIAGE

ANOTHER year had passed, and Melbourne was astonished at the development of Inez Stuart. Soon after her marriage she wrote to the Committee of the V.L.T.A. to say that she did not intend to defend the Tennis Championship, as she would not be able to give so much time to sport now. She still played a round of golf pretty frequently or an hour's slashing tennis at parties; but there's a vast difference between games played for exercise and games played in training for championships, which mean wasting some hours a day. Inez was cutting down this waste, because she meant to go with her husband to the functions of his various clubs and societies—a kind of going out for which she had never cared. Nor would she have endured it now, except for the pride which she felt in her husband when he rose and held an audience. But she meant to go with him to functions and make herself agreeable to his friends, as Chris had done.

So ungrateful is the world that people appreciated advances from the erst-contemptuous Inez with a zest never inspired by the gracious Chris. An additional charm was lent to her advances by her half expecting people to repel what she had been so long in making. This gave her a diffidence which, coming from Inez Gordon, was adorable. And Inez in love, deferring to her husband, with her hair beautifully feminine, made a mighty pretty picture. She had, too, the charms of young motherhood before she was a mother; she never remembered that Chris's children were not her own, and they having never been allowed to know that she was not their mother, were always hanging round her, fair as herself, for they had her colouring, not Chris's. There was no trait in her character which her adoring husband loved more than this confusion of *meum* and *tuum* in the orphans whom Inez motored two or three times a week into Melbourne to fetch their father from the office to have tea with her mother, and to spend an hour with them in the water-garden which he had made with Chris, to prevent it from losing its identity. This constant sacrifice to Chris's memory was half duty, half delight to him, and Inez entered into its spirit. At home, out at Beaudesert, Chris's portraits in characteristic attitudes were in every room. Inez arranged

them so that the eye could not glance without falling on one or other of them. They spoke of her as often as if she was still alive, but in some other place.

They were married on 19th of July and August 1st, 2005, and, mindful of poor Chris's fate, determined to spend their honeymoon at home, where also they could see more of each other than elsewhere. And of this, who can be more avaricious than two supremely attractive persons of opposite sexes who have lived long under the same roof, denying themselves every privilege and demonstration of love, because an angel with a sword stood at the gate of Eden? Now they had a right to give to love every moment they had together of a glorious Australian summer by the sea. They had to fear neither wrong nor shame. They were not untrue to the memory of Chris, because it was with them all the time; they had their children (for they seemed to belong to both), their books and their garden—all the sources of happiness—within the reach of an outstretched hand.

They felt as if they would never tire, but in March, 2006, came an offer which they could not refuse. Mr. Colquhoun, the old bachelor at the Melbourne Club who so often entered into the conversation when Ned was with his father-in-law or Mr. Claridge, was chief owner of the Japastral, the line of ocean-crossing airships which plied between Australia and Japan, carrying the mails and doing an immense holiday business. Commerce on a great scale by airship there could never be, unless the Daedalus patent for Cosmic Electricity became a commercial success. In March, 2006 A.D., Mr. Colquhoun persuaded his company to give the Daedalus Co. the finest opportunity they had yet received, by commissioning them to fit the Airship *Columbus* with their apparatus. For the present, however, the *Columbus* was to retain all the usual machinery, in case of breakdowns, though she was, if possible, to be driven solely by Cosmic Electricity. Mr. Colquhoun invited Pat and Ned to make the trip in the *Columbus*, and Ned, having hardly finished his honeymoon, was invited to bring Inez. He hesitated for two reasons. He had a presentiment that the ship would be lost with all hands—an odd thing in a man so cool and brave. So strongly was he impressed with this presentiment that nothing would have induced him to take the children. He also felt that to extend his holiday was trespassing on Pat's good-nature.

Against this he had to set another presentiment—that if he did not go back to Japan now, he would never see it again—and Inez would never see it at all, the Japan which had played

so large a part in their surroundings at Beaudesert. He also longed to spend some of the large cheques which they had received as wedding-presents on buying picturesque old wooden buildings, a small temple, mossy balustrades and the most picturesque Japanese trees and plants, so as to lay out a Japanese landscape on a hilly and wooded bit of land on Corio Bay, just beyond Victoria Beach, which Mr. Gordon had given him to make a summer home handy for Esslemont as well as within easy reach of the gay life of The Beach. If he could run over to Japan, buy what he required, and engage a few skilled Japanese landscapists, he knew that he could make his Corio Bay estate an earthly paradise.

* * * * *

Inez would never forget the sheer delight of that visit to Japan. That the Daedalus apparatus was not a complete success, but necessitated employing the ordinary machinery for quite half the voyage, did not spoil their enjoyment. It even lent an added interest by having Pat's struggles with the elements to watch. Bob Stevens went too, and all three of them—Inez, Ned and Bob—enjoyed this visit to Japan as much as anything in their lives, and came back immensely benefited. Bob, as well as Ned, bought a great deal of old Japanese timber work and masonry, which he shipped to Port Stevens to remain there until he had seen how Ned worked up his materials on his Corio Bay property.

The ship which brought Ned's purchases did not reach Geelong, the port where they were to be disembarked, until June, and his Japanese landscapists were not engaged until the following December, when he expected to go to Victoria Beach for two or three months, so that Inez might have a pleasant place to stay in while he was laying out his Corio Bay property, which was within easy reach of The Beach. They got back to Melbourne in time for Inez to witness the Tennis Championship, which she was not defending. Ned naturally had arrears of work to overtake after his long absence, though efficient assistants had done their best to prevent its accumulating. As she was not in a condition to play games much longer, she amused herself chiefly with watching Ikegami, and her husband, on holidays and as soon as he was back from the office, erect and utilize the various Japanese decorations selected for the ornamentation of Beaudesert, which they had kept in mind as much as their new property on Corio Bay while they were making their collections in Japan. This was a new occupation

for Inez, and interested her immensely. She had seen Chris and Ned do a little of it when she stayed with them, but they had no real Japanese materials to work on then.

In this pleasant fashion June soon arrived and with it Inez's child, a magnificent boy, to whom Bob duly became godfather. Shortly before his birth she moved into Hallhead, which had belonged to the Gordons since Adam Lindsay II.'s time. She went there to be near the family doctor, and have the sentiment of the child being born in the old Gordon mansion. But a month later she returned to Beaudesert, to have more time alone with her husband and see all the new Japanese effects in the gorge. In September the flowering shrubs and trees, which made it a "Miyanoshita," would be in their spring glory.

January and February were two glorious months. Inez had not been at The Beach for five years. Then she was a madcap hoyden, playing games, making pals, breaking hearts. Now she was an adored and adorable young wife, with a baby of her own, and two lovely and idolized stepchildren, whom she was teaching to swim like little ducks in the palm-girt bathing pool of the Oasis. This was in the cool of the day; in the heat the nurse put them to bed, while Inez scootered with her husband to The Bluff, their little estate, which was, as its name implied, a high bluff over the sea. Their Japanese landscapists for a month past had been terracing its sea-face, felling the trees on its highest point, where the temple was to stand, cutting down the brushwood where there were to be glades of soft couch-grass, making clearings where the thickets of scarlet azalea were to be planted at the proper season, laying the foundations for the zig-zag flights of steps for which the ancient mossy balustrades had been brought from Japan.

The timber, masonry, and other bulky articles from Japan, had been landed at the goods pier of Victoria Beach, and taken thence to the foot of The Bluff by electric haulage, and to its top by an electric inclined-elevator. The Daedalus machinery gave them their electricity for the cost of fitting it. Small electric cranes which Pat kept for hire, laid the stonework of the terraces and steep flights of age-worn steps with astonishing rapidity in the deft hands of the Japanese. The little temple was pieced together in a few days. An electric pump and a hundred yards of piping gave them salt-water baths in the bungalow, and a salt-water cascade, which could be seen from The Beach. The bungalow had been the priests' house of the temple, brought in pieces, like the temple itself, and the European kitchen and servants' offices, added for Inez's comfort, had

the wooden wall which had surrounded the temple precincts built round them, to prevent them offending the eye. The whole effect—the temple at the top of The Bluff, the priests' house embosomed in the foliage, the steps and terraces embellishing the face of The Bluff—looked like a bit of the landscape at Lake Biwa in Japan.

Pat had not only a holiday, but an education; for the landscapists imported from Japan were wonderfully suggestive in the new problem which was exercising his mind, the adaptation of the Daedalus patent for supplying Cosmic Electricity to the various electrical-machinery employed in building operations. Without its aid hauling so much heavy and damageable material up The Bluff would have made the cost of Ned's operations prohibitive.

CHAPTER XLIII

GOD SAVE THE KING

AT nine a.m. on Saturday, November 11th, 2007 A.D., the sparse inhabitants of Middlesex Fells were astonished to see the Governor-General, the Prime Minister of Australia, the Admiral of Australia, the Field-Marshal Commanding the Australian Army, and the Archbishop of Melbourne, with various A.D.C.'s, all in full official dress, arrive in motor-cars. They were looking about for someone to direct them to Beaudesert, when His Excellency saw Pat Gordon, who was on the private visiting-list of Government House. "Mr. Gordon," he said (Pat noticed the unwonted "Mr."), "can you direct me to the residence of . . ." he hesitated; he seemed in some doubt as to how he should describe the object of his search, and finally blurted out, "your brother-in-law?" For a few seconds Pat gazed in amazement. Then he said, "I'm going up there myself, to find out when they're starting for *The Cup*. We're all going to see Sandy Gunn ride in the '*Cup Steeple*.'"—"They are going to the races, then?" said H.E. "That's an excellent idea. Of course they should!"

Pat wondered why the Representative of the Crown was taking this sudden interest in Ned, and what the other bigwigs were doing there. He came to the conclusion that Ned must, after all, have influential relatives in England, and they had suddenly remembered his existence and written to Lord Wessex about him. H.E. thanked him, and he and the others were moving towards their cars when Pat called out, "You can't

take your cars up—there's no road. Will you let me show you the way, Your Excellency?" Though he did not ask them what they had come for—he thought it would be an impertinence—for once in his life he felt inquisitive. They did not volunteer information. He thought he had better ring the bell, with all this quality to see Ned. At that hour Ikegami would make his appearance, not at all the butler, but a mere man-housemaid, with a towel tied round his head, to which he was addicted, and trailing a broom.

For the credit of the household he led them into the garden, intending to enter the house by the back. He could trust Inez not to be in a dressing-gown, but as spruce as if she was on her way to a tennis-party. As they turned sharp round the corner, they came upon Ned, sitting upon the parapet, pretending to be interested in the baby, but really kissing Inez, while his two little daughters, aged respectively four and three, were impartially sharing their endearments between their small half-brother and their aunt, who was to them their adored "mummy." Lord Wessex, advancing with the deputation, made signs to Pat not to disturb them. Ned had his back to them and Inez her eyes glued upon her baby.

When she happened to look up she saw the Governor-General, the Prime Minister and the Archbishop of Melbourne in court dress, and the Admiral, the Field-Marshal and the A.D.C.'s in full uniform, in front of them in a small semicircle. His Excellency stood in the centre, holding a large envelope, which bore no address, but the Royal Arms of England in one top corner and the Arms of Australia in the other. And while Stuart sprang up to apologize, and Inez, with a flaming face and hurriedly setting the baby down beside his sisters, followed his example, the Governor-General fell upon one knee and tendered the envelope.

Inez thought that she must have taken leave of her senses and looked in an agonized way to her husband for a lead. He was now perfectly serene and waiting for H.E. to proceed. Although the whole deputation, except the Prime Minister, who came from New South Wales, knew Inez quite well, none of them took any notice of her, beyond a profound and distant bow. Nor did any of them speak. The Governor-General remained on one knee, proffering the envelope, while the rest tried to look through the ground—perhaps to see what was going on in England under their feet. Ned hastily took the envelope, to relieve the tension of His Excellency and Inez, and because the baby, who had escaped from his sisters, was clutching

at it, crying, "Pitty! pitty!" Even at that moment it seemed to Ned an omen for his small heir to be doing this.

He tore open the envelope; he could guess its contents, but he was curious to see how they were worded, and he knew that Inez must be demoted with curiosity. There were two telegrams in the envelope, one very long. He read the shorter first, and though he knew what its tenour must be, he started as if he had been shot. Recovering quickly, he handed it to his wife, saying, "Can you believe this, Inez?"

Her eyes were starting out of her head as she read:

"To His Majesty King Edward VIII. Sire, I have to inform Your Majesty that by the demise of His Late Majesty King George VIII. Your Majesty has this day succeeded to the Throne. Your Parliament respectfully prays that you will assume title as above. Norfolk, Earl Marshal."

The longer telegram was addressed to the Governor-General of Australia, and directed him to find the Marquess of Sandringham, styling himself Charles Edward Stuart (late Charles Edward Stuart Windsor), who had married the daughter of Adam Lindsay Gordon, Esq., of Esslemont in the State of Victoria, and to place in his hands the telegram addressed to him.

"Everything is all right?" he asked the Governor-General in his simple way.—"Yes, Your Majesty."—"Then, gentlemen," he said, with absolute dignity and ease, "I will introduce you to Her Majesty." Except Lord Wessex himself, they were all of them Australians born, and their hearts swelled with pride as they stepped forward to kiss the hand of this lovely, blushing creature, their fellow-Colonial, who, not yet twenty-eight years old, had become the first woman in the world, the Queen of all the Britains and Empress of India.

When the officials had finished, Pat, blushing like his sister and almost as handsome, came forward and, bowing very low, kissed her hand. She submitted shamefacedly and, as he raised his head, said, "Now kiss me properly, Pat. No!" she said, correcting herself with charming dignity, "you must wait until the King has done it—no-one must come before him." The kiss which Edward VIII. gave her, in its mingled love and pride, was the best she would ever have in her life. She was so affected that it was a little time before she repeated the invitation to her brother. That over, she turned to the officials, and said, "Now, Lord Wessex and gentlemen, I hope I may have the pleasure of greeting you in a manner which is more in accordance with Colonial traditions, by shaking hands with you all."

After this H. E. said, "Your Majesty, I have not yet spoken to the Clerk of the Parliaments, but I imagine that while you are in the Commonwealth, Sire, I cease to exist, because your representative is not needed while Your Majesty is present."—"I hope not, my lord, but if it is so, I must ask my Parliament of Australia to help me out of it."

"May I have Your Majesty's orders upon another point?" asked the Field-Marshal who Commanded the Australian Army, coming forward and saluting. "Does it please Your Majesty to assume the rank of Colonel Commanding your Regiment, and to have your Guard of Honour drawn from them while you remain in Australia?"—"Certainly," said the King. "And if you will step aside with me, I wish to ask your opinion upon a further matter connected with the Regiment."—"I am at Your Majesty's service." The King led the way into the house, leaving the rest of the Officials talking with the Queen and her brother. He came out again almost immediately, saying to the Field-Marshal, "You're quite sure that it will be well received?"—"I'm positive of it, Your Majesty."—"Then please put in into the orders."

The Prime Minister then came forward to discuss the immediate programme. "It would be greatly appreciated by your people, Your Majesty, if you and Her Majesty occupied the Viceregal box at the Races to-day. It would enable so many of them to see you."—"But . . ." what the King said was intended for the Premier's ears only. "The Commander-in-Chief has seen to that, Your Majesty. He brought the foreman out with the requisite articles, beside his chauffeur."—"Then I will occupy it, if there are no presentations. We shall want to look at the racing. Her Majesty's cousin is riding in the Steeple-chase."—"There shall be no presentations, Sire."

The Commander-in-Chief gave an order to the Staff-Captain, who saluted the King and left hurriedly. The Admiral, having no special errand, was paying his devoirs to his Sovereign's beautiful Consort. The Archbishop, who must have thanked Providence that he had gone to the wedding-reception, gave a sort of benediction, which suited the circumstances of this young couple, going from living in a small way in Australia to occupy the greatest throne of the earth, the last throne left, except those of Italy and Japan and some minor Powers. With that they bowed themselves out, the Staff-Captain having returned with the Regimental tailor's foreman, who had brought the rank badges of a Colonel-in-Chief to be put on the Captain's uniform hitherto worn by the King. Also observing that the bungalow

had a flagstaff, he bent the Royal Standard, which he had brought on chance, on to the lanyard and proceeded to hoist it, as a sign that the King was in residence. It did not signify that it would have to be hauled down and taken to Government House in a few hours' time. It had already been arranged that the King and his family should not return to Beaudesert, but should occupy the Royal wing of Government House.

The Governor-General returned to town in the Prime Minister's car, leaving his own to bring Their Majesties to Government House, from which they were to proceed to Flemington in the Governor-General's state carriage, drawn by four horses, just in time for the great race of the day.

CHAPTER XLIV

WHAT INEZ TOLD HER PARENTS ON THE TELEPHONE

WHEN they had all left, except the tailor who was altering the King's uniform under the verandah of the nursery, the Queen, observing that Pat was escorting them down to the gate, drew the ex-Pretender into their living-room. "I want to feel that a King can be as fond of me as a Pretender," she began, and when she was satisfied on that point, continued, "And now I'm going to ring up father to tell him your dreadful secret!"

"I want Colac 127, please."—"Colac 127?"—"Please."—"Hullo!"—"Is that Esslemont, Mr. Gordon's?"—"Yes, Miss."—"Is Mr. Gordon there?"—"Yes, Miss. Who shall I say?"—"The Queen."—"I beg Your Majesty's pardon for not recognizing your voice!" It was old Martha, who had been Inez's nurse and was now married to the overseer, but always came in as housekeeper when Mrs. Gordon was away. "This is a blessed day, Your Majesty! Your father had a 'phone from the 'Argus' an hour ago, while he was waiting for Mr. Adam to come in from the paddocks for breakfast; he's been trying to get on to you ever since. I'll run and fetch him."

"Is that you, Queen Inez?"—"Yes, dad, your daughter Inez, your undutiful daughter Inez, who won't be undutiful any more. I'm sorry that you've had such a worry over trying to get us on the 'phone. Lord Wessex and Captain Blatchford have been using it for official messages."—"Did they come out to announce Ned's—Edward's accession?"—"Yes, dad."—"Then it's a solemn fact! Inez, I congratulate you and myself, from the bottom of my heart! It's a marvellous honour that has come to our House."—"It's so marvellous, so unbelievable

that I shouldn't know if I was awake or asleep, if I hadn't known that Ned was heir."

"So you got his secret out of him, after all?"—"I didn't get it out of him. He took me down to the cave-house when we got back from being married at the Scots' Church, and announced, 'I brought you here to tell you my secret.' You can guess what I said. And he made a clean breast of it."—"I must interrupt you a second. Did Chris know it?"

"Yes, he told her, but could not tell her as much as he told me. He was not heir in those days. His father's elder brother had children. But he and his family were lost in the wreck of that airship crossing the Atlantic in July, 2005."—"Then he was a Marquess when he married you and that was why he had a presentiment about that airship trip to Japan?"—"Naturally."

"Did he tell you that you were a Marchioness?"—"No. Wasn't it wonderful of him to refrain?"—"Or what brought him out to Australia?"—"Yes, he told me that. To make a career, as anyone else might who had a little money. What I'm going to tell you is truly like Ned. He thought it would be such a bore if everyone knew that he was George VIII.'s cousin, and asked him questions about Windsor Castle as soon as he was introduced. So he took the legal steps to drop the name of Windsor, which was such a give-away, and kept his three Christian names—Charles Edward Stuart."—"I can't understand his not telling us—he could have trusted us to keep the secret, instead of letting you go on suspecting him for all those months, and do—what you did."—"You can imagine how humiliated I was when he told me his secret!"

"I hate to throw things in your teeth to-day, but I did urge you to take him on trust. I always supposed that Edward was a person of more importance than he was willing to let us think, but I did not dream of the possible good fortune which he was unwilling to mention being anything more than considerable wealth or descent from a peer. I thought he might be better-born or better-off than we imagined, and didn't care if he wasn't, because we derived so much pleasure from his acquaintance. To find that he was even connected with the Royal Family would have staggered me; to find him, owing to a recent accident, our King, is almost unbelievable."—"Fortunately he is, and I, who did my best not to deserve it, am Queen! Fancy me, who swore never to be anybody's wife, finding myself a King's wife! How I wish I'd been like you, father, able to trust him! I should have felt so much more a lady than I do now, although I am a Queen."

"You must try and make it up to him by affection."—"How can I, when I love him so much that even without this I can't give him all the affection I want to? This man was always making me love him, even when I hadn't the right; and he wasn't trying."—"Well, Inez, if you love him as much as that, nothing matters. For I if mistrust my eyes, everyone tells me how beautiful you are, and the absolute love of a beautiful woman is as much as man can desire."—"Then you think I may be forgiven?"—"I do. Now tell me, little Inez, how you received the great news."

"I'm glad the telephone doesn't betray my blushes. For when Lord Wessex came with the official announcement of the great news, we were disgracing ourselves horribly. We were sitting on the garden-parapet, in full view of the servants if they chose to look, and Ned was kissing me under the pretence of taking an interest in little Edward Auster. His Ex., the Prime Minister, the Admiral, the Archbishop, and the Commander-in-Chief must have witnessed the whole proceeding. His Ex. waited until we had finished, and then, advancing a yard in front of the others and dropping on one knee, presented Ned with an enormous envelope. Ned, knowing that he was Heir-Presumptive . . . Took it as a matter of course?"—"As much as one could take such news as a matter of course. He was awfully dignified. He looked the King, receiving a message from an envoy."

"Do you feel very proud and happy?"—"Yes, but more because the King fell in love with me than because I am the Queen."—"There is one thing I'm truly grateful for, Inez—that he made you marry him before you knew that he was heir to the throne. It was fine of him not to tell you when he knew, and your knowing it would have made it so hard for you to refuse him."—"I never could have refused him anything when he pressed me in earnest. He could have made me marry him in those first days at The Beach if he'd cared to. He mesmerized me always."—"Well, you ought to be the happiest woman in the world. Have you told the little mother yet?"—"No, I couldn't have the 'phone before. His Ex. was using it."—"Well, ring her up now, dear. She'll be dying to hear it from your own lips."—"I will at once, father. See you at lunch. His Ex. is going to invite you all."—"Then you'll see us before lunch. We shall come out to Beaudesert and drive to Government House behind you. Ring off now."

Inez did, and as soon as the receiver was asleep, took it off again and called; "Toorak 7, please. . . Is that Toorak 7? I

want to speak to Mrs. Gordon." The maid fetched Mrs. Gordon. "Is that you, mother?"—"Yes, Inez."—"I suppose you've heard that I'm Queen?"—"What?"—"Queen."—"Spell it."—"Q-u-e-e-n—Queen."—"Yes, I hear—queen. But I don't understand."—"I'm Queen—Queen of England."—"Are you getting up some private theatricals?"—"No, I'm your Queen—Her Majesty, the King's wife."—"My brain's reeling, Inez. Do explain."—"Mother, dear, this is Ned's secret which he never would tell me. He's the King."—"Do you mean to say that he was King all along, and would not confess it?—No, it couldn't be that—they couldn't have done without him for seven years."

"No, he's only been King since the small hours of this morning in Australia. I don't know what time it was in England, because I don't know how they manage being so many hours behind, and its taking so long to telegraph, but he must have been dead here several hours before he died."—"You're joking, Inez? You can't solemnly mean to tell me that Ned is King and you are Queen of England?"—"I'm quite serious. We have just had a State visit from Lord Wessex, the Prime Minister, the Admiral, the Commander-in-Chief and the Archbishop, to announce it."—"My goodness, Inez! Whatever shall you do?"—"I don't know beyond to-day, mother. We have to lunch at Government House and occupy the Governor-General's box at the Melbourne Cup."—"I don't envy you. I don't suppose that either of you envy yourselves!"—"Oh, Ned's quite calm. He did start when he read the telegram from the Earl Marshal, which His Ex. handed to him, but since then he has been going on as if it was all in the day's work."

"Did he know that he would succeed?"—"Ever since that airship went down with Lord Sandringham and his family—the day before we were married."—"Did you know?"—"He told me on our wedding-day—not the day that we were spliced at the Town Hall, but our real wedding-day in church."—"Did you tease him into telling you?"—"No, he volunteered. He thought it was my right to know."—"Why didn't you tell your mother? I suppose he made you promise?"—"He didn't make me, but he thought it better."—"Why? Couldn't he trust us?"—"He was afraid that you wouldn't be so natural with him if you knew that he was Heir-Apparent. And he loved you so as you were."

* The second Marquess of Sandringham and Lord Charles Windsor, Ned's father, were sons of the first Marquess, a grandson of King George V.

"How like Ned! By the by, are you going on calling him Ned, dear?"—"In the family circle; officially he is Edward. The British Parliament has already had a session, some time this afternoon or this evening—I never can understand how our ten hours ahead in time works—in which it said the necessary complimentary things and prayed him to style himself King Edward VIII."—"Then we must call him Edward. Do you remember what poor Chris said about her feelings if everybody spoke of him as Edward? Now it has come to pass."—"Yes, I remember. How Chris would have laughed when you reminded her!"—"What relation was he to George VIII.?"—"A very distant cousin. Their nearest common ancestor was George V."—"So that's his secret! Has anyone telephoned to your father? He must be told at once."—"Yes, I've just telephoned to him. He and Adam are coming up to lunch at Government House and share our box at the Races, and as soon as His Ex. gets back Lady Wessex is going to invite you."

"Well, Inez dear, I shall put on my best, so as to be ready for any emergency, and come alone at once and see my child and—support her—in any way I can."—"She needs it, mother, badly. She does not know whether she's standing on her head or her feet. She has to accept this great paralysing fact of her being Queen of England, but her brain is almost reeling."—"How do you feel as Queen, Inez?"—"I feel as if all the world had proposed to me, and one of them had run away with me, and I was never going to be allowed to be with him alone."—"Do you feel frightened at your responsibilities?"—"Not very—the thing I am most frightened of is that I shan't be able to smile enough. You know, I never could smile very often, and it's an appalling thing to think of—that so many people will be made happy if I smile, and will be disappointed if I don't! It's only when joy surprises me that I smile of my own accord."

"In your favoured position, let us hope that it often will. There is no gift that a Queen can have like graciousness. And you will have it if you remind yourself that you owe it to our darling Chris's memory, for she would have been Queen if she had not faced death for her children. Think how infinitely gracious she would have been!"—"It sounds as if you regret that it's me, mother!"—"Only because it means that Chris is dead. I don't feel it disloyal to her to confess that if you were both alive and I had to choose which of you should marry the King, I would choose you, for you were born to be a Queen much more than she was. I can tell the telephone what I should be shy

to tell you to your face—that your mother can feel that when you are crowned in Westminster Abbey, there will have been no lovelier or queenlier Queen in all the long history of England than you, my Inez. When you were a child, I used to wonder where such a ruling spirit would find its level. I know now that it must have been that you were born for this high destiny. Only, Inez, let the mantle of Chris's graciousness fall upon you, of Chris, who never sat upon her throne, though history will not forget the story of the uncrowned Mother who should have reigned in your place."

"We must get the best sculptor in Australia to carve the scene of Chris's death to stand in front of the Abbey at the door where we go in to be crowned."—"No, not there, Inez, but in the Broad Walk of Kensington Gardens, where all the children go to play, that Londoners may know from their childhood what an Australian mother dared for her children—a real mother, not a Peter Pan mother."—"You're right, mumsy, and I'm not jealous any longer, and you must run away now and dress, and I must run away, too, to tell the King the sky is falling."

CHAPTER XLV

WHAT THE QUEEN ASKED THE KING

THE King was in the garden, regretfully studying his watch, wishing that his pretty wife would not waste so much time on the telephone on a day when he would have so little of her to himself. As she came out, she saw that he was so much in love with her that even on the day that he had acceded to the Crown, her presence was uppermost in his thoughts. Her heart smote her afresh for the blow she had dealt him in the days of his obscurity. He was distressed by her regret. "What is troubling you, little woman, on our Accession day?" he asked.

"I was thinking of that low-down trick I played you. I regretted it fiercely almost as soon as I had done it. Do you remember, I wonder, how I used to hang about as if I was going to ask you to make it up, and never came to the scratch? That was because I was rather in love with you even in those days. I'd really been in love with you at The Beach, when I thought I was only making a pal of you, worse than I'd ever been in love with anyone. And you had let Connie take you from me, and I was pretty sick all round. If you hadn't danced so nicely, I shouldn't have been Queen now. I *am* Queen of

England, aren't I, Ned? I'm not dreaming it all?"—
 "You're not dreaming, but I don't think Queens are allowed to say 'aren't I?'"—"I shall. I'm a common Colonial Queen, not a pukker Princess Queen, like my predecessors."
 "When you and I are alone, you shall always say 'aren't,' my beautiful Inez, or anything else you like."

"That's all right. But I say, Ned, won't it be awful this afternoon? I shan't know what to do," she said, drooping in pretended collapse.—"Ask Lady Wessex to be Mistress of the Robes, and you'd better make Lady Diana and Lady Patricia your Ladies of the Bedchamber or Maids of Honour or something, while we're in Australia."—"Shall we have to go home?"—"Of course we shall."—"To live at Windsor Castle and Buckingham Palace, and that sort of thing?"—"Sandringham, Balmoral and the rest of it!"—"Don't tease, Ned. I suppose you've always contemplated the possibility of this sort of thing, but it makes me so shy that I should like to sink through the earth to England, instead of going there by air or water. Tell me one thing," she suddenly cried, recovering her volatility at the thought that she was not only Queen, but had a King madly in love with her, "did Lord Wessex know all along who you were?"

"I'm afraid he did. Not that I ever went to Court functions—I wouldn't. My parents died when I was a child and I always concealed my connection with the Crown. That was one of the reasons why I came to Australia. George VIII., who was adored by his people for his humanness, was very decent to me. He gave me ten thousand pounds from his private purse to start myself in business, when I told him that I meant to emigrate to Australia, and he said, with a twinkle in his eye, 'I daresay I can find you a bit more if you need it.' And he added, 'I think I should do the same if I were in your place. It was a rotten thing of Sandringham to marry again and get that young family when you had always looked forward to following him if he survived me.' When I told him that I never had looked forward to it, he said, 'Well, you might have.'"
 "Lord Sandringham was the uncle who was lost in the air-ship?"—"Yes. He had two little boys about the age of our girls."

"I'm beginning to see things now, Ned. You really have been very decei—diplomatic. When Captain Blatchford told you that it was 'all right,' he meant that Lord Wessex would pretend not to know you?"—"Exactly."—"And when you went to have those supposed conferences with him about

the burning questions of the day, the Wessex family were killing the fatted calf for you in private, as one of the Royal family?"—"Oh, dear no. Though I was heir to the Throne, I didn't rank as one of the Royal family until I received those telegrams this morning. I really did go to discuss those questions with him, because the Windsors . . ."

"Windsors, Ned? Then I caught the name right from Mr. Belcher! I thought I heard him call you Windsor. All your little camouflages are coming out. But I interrupted you—you were saying that the Windsors . . ."
 "Were always neutral in politics. So I had no axe to grind while we were discussing things, and he knew that, having been expected to succeed to the throne, until my uncle Sandringham married again, and had sons, I had made a study of public affairs from this neutral point."—"Why didn't Mr. Belcher know anything about your being in the running for the Throne? He told me that you were a most ordinary person."—"That's the impression I tried to convey to everybody. If there was no chance of my succession, I wanted to cut clear of the whole business. That's why I worried my guardians into sending me to a Scotch school."

"Another piece of inquisitiveness is coming, Ned. What had the death of your uncle and his family, which you read in 'The Argus' on that 18th of July, 2005, to do with your sudden resolve to marry me?"—"It made me the Heir-Presumptive to the Throne."—"You must tell me what that means, and how you got there, Ned."—"It meant that unless the King, who was nearer 80 than 70, married again and had issue, I must succeed him. How I got there is a longer story. George VIII. and my uncle Sandringham were the last surviving great-grandchildren of George V. George VI., George VII., and George VIII. were all eldest sons of the reigning monarch. My uncle Sandringham and my father, Lord Charles Edward Windsor, were sons of the first Marquis of Sandringham, who was grandson of King George V. by one of his younger sons. To come to a younger generation, I and the two infant sons of my uncle, the second Marquis, were the sole surviving great-great-grandchildren. Therefore, when my uncle and his children perished, except the King, I and my daughters were the only survivors of the Royal House. I, of course, succeeded my uncle as third Marquis, but had to let it lie in abeyance or betray my secret."—"Have I been a Marchioness all this while without letting my friends know it?"—"Yes."—"How sad! But I think I should have blushed every time I heard my title, when there was a

club of the same name to which they all belonged!" gasped Inez. Then pursuing her subject, she asked, "And your people—by which I suppose you meant the British people—would want you to have a son?"—"Exactly so, and that being the case, I knew that Parliament would want to marry me to some Royal princess, a daughter of one of the exiled Royal Houses, who would cut the proper figure in a pedigree, instead of the woman I loved."—"I hope Parliament won't take it into their head to divorce me to make room for a first-class princess."—"They can't. The limitations of Royal marriages were abolished more than a hundred years ago."—"Thank goodness for that! I might get over not being Queen, but I couldn't survive seeing another woman rush my place as your wife, Ned."

"But they certainly would have tried if they'd caught me a widower, and they did, pretty nearly."—"How?"—"Hadn't you any suspicions when I carried you off to Esslemont on the night before our marriage, and was dogged with telephones from a mysterious stranger?"—"Who was, of course, Lord Wessex?"—"Who was, of course, Lord Wessex, instructed by the British Parliament to get me home to marry a Princess, and, above all, to prevent my marrying one of the Colonial heiresses and beauties who were expected to fling themselves, or be flung by their relations, at the Heir-Presumptive if he continued to reside in Australia."

"Think of the risks you might have run from Connie," said Inez dryly, "and now she can only be the first Colonial Maid of Honour—the first Colonial female Honourable, when there have been such thousands of male Honourables! We will have Connie for a Maid of Honour, won't we, Ned? I owe it to her because she was faithful to you when I was not." She added a Parthian shot, "A Queen must be generous, mustn't she? Was there ever such a lucky girl in the world as me?—to have the man I love best for a husband, and to find that my Fairy Prince is a King—not a Fairy King, but the greatest King on earth, the King of all the Britains."

"How they will love you for your beauty when you get to England, my Inez! History shows us how the English adore beauty in their Queen."—Inez did not ask her husband if she was beautiful. All her life everyone who met her had admitted it. She was the beauty of Australia, a land in which extreme prettiness is to be found among its women.

The thought that her husband was King, and his praise of her beauty, set her day-dreaming for a little, but presently she laid a hand on his arm and said: "We must have father and

mother and the boys in the Royal box at the Races this afternoon. I suppose that we can do anything we like, Ned?"—"Anything of that kind. I'll just give Blatchford a list. Their Ex.'s and their daughters will be there, ex-officio, and Blatchford to advise and attend on me. Is there anyone else you want, Inez?"—"Connie, so as to start her on her duties at once. It will really be a great advantage to have one of my own kin among my ladies. I can be intimate with her, and I know that the worry of my life will be the hedge of dignity with which we shall be surrounded!"

The King-Emperor went into his £200 bungalow. Only six years ago it had been the limit of what he could afford. The telephone was in his study; his study was hardly twelve feet square; his Empire was more than twelve million square miles. The discrepancy did not strike him. Nor did it strike him as any odder that he should be walking up to his telephone to tell the secretary at the other end to call the Governor-General of Australia to speak with him. When a respectful and genial voice told him that H.E. had arrived, the telephone was very busy for half-an-hour, and so were the A.D.C.'s and secretaries suddenly summoned to their Chief.

Lord Wessex thought Inez's suggestions unimprovable. His wife was certainly the only woman in Australia who had the experience needed for a Mistress of the Robes. His daughters were by their position, and Connie Claridge by her kinship to the Queen, the most natural Maids of Honour. Captain Blatchford, being Vice-regal A.D.C., would be the most useful A.D.C. to His Majesty. The family of the Queen should of course be in the Royal box at the Races. He had already wirelessed to Esslemont to inform Mr. Gordon of the great thing which had happened and at the same time had asked him and his family to 'plane over to be present at the luncheon which he was offering to Their Majesties and a few of the great Officers of State. Mr. Gordon, who was quite overwhelmed, meant, it appeared, to bring his airship down as usual at the Ether Co.'s works at Kingscliff. The family would go to Government House in Pat's car, at the same time as His Excellency's car conveyed Their Majesties.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE HON. CONSUELO CLARIDGE

WHEN he came out, Inez said, "I'm awfully sorry to have to leave you again, Ned, but talking of Connie—she is still in blissful ignorance of the greatness which is to be thrust upon her. I see you looking at your watch rather ominously—what is the time?"—"Eleven o'clock."—"My goodness, Connie'll be late!" She dashed into the telephone room.

"Have you heard the news, Connie?" she asked.—"Yes, Your Majesty, I'm curtsying by 'phone."

"Be serious, Connie dear," she said, and proceeded to tell her what they proposed. Connie was enchanted, especially when she realized that she was to go to England as a Maid of Honour, and not only to be *pro tem*. Inez talked to her cousin in a fever of happiness and excitement until she suddenly realized that it was nearly 11.30, that they had to start from Beaudesert at 12.30. Connie had never been known to dress in under an hour. "Connie," she said, "I'm going to be as stern as Queen Eleanor was to Fair Rosamond. You've got to be out at this house by 12.25, if you mean to make your entrance into the Domain in our car. Or, if you can't manage that, you must drive direct to Government House and join us there. Remember that you've got to look ravishing, and, if you can't manage that and come out here in time, you must 'scrap' coming here."

"Oh, my dear, I've got my very wickedest frock on already. I've been trying for the last hour to summon up the pluck to come out to Beaudesert and see what sort of a reception you'd give me, because I've been an anxiety to you at times."—"And *vice versa*. You need have no qualms, Connie. I shouldn't half enjoy being Queen of England if I hadn't one of my girlfriends there to see me doing it, and write letters to make the others jealous."—"You're going to be human still?"—"Very human. But hurry into your car; it will be twice as nice talking to each other instead of having old Mr. Telephone as go-between. I'll do my dressing while you're on your way. Washing apart, I never could take three-quarters of an hour. I suppose I shall be made to now that I'm Queen."—"No, you won't, dear—Queens have to be quick-change artists. Ta-ta! Be with you in half-an-hour."

Inez was ready when Connie arrived and received her most affectionately. When the King came in, looking splendid and soldierly in his full-dress Cavalry Colonel's uniform, Connie dropped him a curtsy even finer than the one she had dropped him at Balranald—saying, "It's the monkey-trick learned for the occasion, Your Majesty." He held out both hands to her, saying, "This is something like doing it in earnest, isn't it, 'Our Trusty and Well-Beloved Cousin'?" Then he kissed her as frankly as he would kiss Mrs. Gordon when they met, a few minutes later.

"Is this allowed, Inez?" asked Connie. She did not wish to spoil her cousin's happiness on the great day of her life. "I'm afraid that it's not for me to say," replied Inez. "It's the King's privilege, I understand, to kiss any of his female subjects." She said it with such a happy laugh that Connie knew that she was not vexed. She had never known Inez slow to wrath. "Honestly, I don't mind a bit," said Inez. "I have asked you to be my closest companion in my difficult position, quite conscious that there will be times when you'll want him to kiss you, and won't rest until you have made him. I'm so sure of him that I can afford not to mind, and hope that your knowing I don't mind will make you like a sweet-shop girl, who's allowed to eat as many as she likes."—"If this is the way you look at it, Inez, I believe that I can be quite good."

"Any way, nonsense apart," said the King, "one of the things which pleases me most at coming into my own is to be able to show how grateful I am to you, Connie. Do you remember my hinting at this once."—"I shall cry if you go on, Ned and Inez," said the emotional Connie, "and that'll make my eyes red, and I'm extra-anxious to look pretty to-day. So please will Your Majesties forget me till it's time for me to be facing you in the car? And couldn't I have Pat to sit beside me and keep me in countenance?"—"That's a great idea," said Edward VIII. "It reminds me that, come what may, unless I have dear Pat beside me, as he's been nearly every day for the past six years, life wouldn't seem possible. I don't know what I shall make him. I think it would be rather humorous if I turned round on him and made him my secretary, as I was his! This requires thinking out, but Pat, my partner, must certainly drive in the car with us to Government House. Ah, there come the parents and Adam, quarter of an hour ahead of time!"

They wished to salute him as their Sovereign. He had reluctantly allowed Lord Wessex and the great Officers of State

to do so, but his relations he would not allow. The long-drawn kiss with Mrs. Gordon, the long-pressed handshake with Mr. Gordon and Adam, was all that he would suffer. Their embracing of Inez was more like a parting than a meeting.

"You know everything now, sir," said the new King to his father-in-law. "In all my life I never met anything so fine as the way in which you trusted me. I could only tell you that the secret which I could not divulge was one which would not prevent you, if you knew it, from consenting to your daughter's marrying me. You believed me and have allowed not one, but both of your daughters to marry me. To-day you see for yourself that I did not depart from the truth. It may have been a foolish pride which would not allow me to disclose my nearness to the Throne until I was certain that I should not be disappointed. Rightly or wrongly, I made it my policy, and resisted every effort to force a disclosure. You trusted me and I hope you feel that the turn of Fortune's wheel is a reward?"—"Inez's happiness, which has always been a matter of anxiety, would be a sufficient reward, Your Majesty."—"Not Majesty, sir, please—Ned."—"We must start now, Dad," came Pat's winning voice.

CHAPTER XLVII

AT THE MELBOURNE CUP

MELBOURNE was paralysed by the news. People left off working, or whatever they were doing, to obtain confirmation of the news that old King George VIII. was dead, and the new King of England was in their midst, a man with whom many were intimate and with whose appearance many more were familiar. This carried with it the still more exciting news that, as his wife, the beauty of Australia, Inez Lindsay Gordon, whom everybody knew for her skill and daring in sport, a girl born and bred in Victoria, an Australian of several generations, was Queen of England.

They doubted the "Herald" extras; they would have doubted any newspaper. The first confirmation which seemed at all official was a message from the Commander-in-Chief, posted outside the Headquarters of King Edward's Horse: "The Guard of Honour during His Majesty's stay in Australia will be furnished by King Edward VIII.'s Horse. Those members of the Regiment who are in Melbourne will parade, mounted and in full dress, at Headquarters, 12.0 noon to-day." It was

ascertained from the Adjutant that telegrams had been dispatched to every member of the Regiment on receipt of the telephone. The name of the Regiment had been changed, in compliment to His Majesty, who was its Colonel-in-Chief, said the Adjutant. He added that the trumpeters had gone with the Governor-General to proclaim His Majesty from the steps of the Parliament. The trumpet calls, which rang out just after, attracted an immense rush of people and gradually the facts that there was a new King of England, and that he was in Melbourne, were accepted.

The paralysis of business continued. Those who had not intended to take a holiday for *The Cup*, put up their shutters now, in the hopes of catching a view of the Melbourne King. The first glimpse they caught of him was about 2 p.m., shortly after the band of the Regiment had moved out of the grounds of Government House and taken up its position beside the gates. It was followed by the Regiment, which trotted up the road towards Prince's Bridge. Immediately behind them came the State carriage of the Governor-General, drawn by four white horses, while the band struck up "God Save the King," followed by "Advance Australia."

In it sat the man they knew as Charles Edward Stuart and the beautiful woman who, previous to her marriage, was Inez Gordon, of Eslesmont, facing the horses, while the Governor-General and Lady Wessex sat back to them. These were their new Majesties. The crowd yelled themselves hoarse. Many of them, in spite of the heat, ran beside the carriage all the way to Prince's Bridge, where the crowds were gigantic, and the band of the Australian Guards was waiting. No-one was allowed to pass the bridge except the State-carriage and its escort. As the carriage rolled off the bridge into the city proper, founded more than 150 years before, the band clashed out the National Anthem, and the voice of Australia rose to heaven in it and "Advance Australia." The King, in his Australian Colonel's uniform—he had really served in the Australian Army—and his lovely Queen did not bow. Australian common sense had prohibited that long ago in all processions; it interfered with the view of the crowd, as well as with the comfort of Vice-royalties. It was sufficient for them to smile and draw each other's attention where it would be courteous.

From here to the racecourse, though the footpaths were crowded, the roads were clear, because all traffic in front, being motor-traffic, had already reached the racecourse, and the traffic behind had not been allowed to pass Prince's Bridge, but had

been sent round by Queen's Bridge. At the racecourse a band outside the gates gave the two National Anthems as they entered the grounds, and another gave them in front of the Grand Stand, as the Royal party stepped into the Governor's box. It was estimated that more than a million people saw their King and Queen between the Bridge and the racecourse.

As stipulated, no introductions were made. Nor was anyone (beyond the relatives on the A.D.C.'s list) who knew them already allowed to come to the Royal box. This was the only alternative to their being inundated with congratulations and well-wishers. A space about ten yards wide was hurdled off round the Royal box, and no-one was allowed inside it. A thick crowd gathered outside it to look at their King and Queen, who sat right in front of the box to give their people a good view of them. They were in their places half-an-hour before the great race. At the back of the box were the Queen's father, her brothers and her cousin, Lin Gunn, with a few great officers like the Prime Minister, the Admiral and the Commander-in-Chief. In front of the box sat the King and Queen, surrounded by Lord and Lady Wessex, the Queen's mother, and the three newly-appointed Ladies in Waiting, among whom the crowd were delighted to see a pretty Australian. The appointment had been announced in the one o'clock "Herald," bought by everyone for the latest starters.

The Melbourne Cup Steeplechase, run immediately after the Melbourne Cup, had a special interest in view of the morning's surprise, for the best outsider in the race, "Joyous Garde," a big, queer-tempered chestnut, was owned and would be ridden by the Queen's cousin, that well-known amateur, Sandy Gunn. When Sandy, a length in front of the next horse, rode past the winning post, he recalled to everyone the portrait of the poet Gordon, in the Public Library, which was painted from the old daguerrotype of the poet, preserved by his family in England. The crowd cheered frantically. His victory seemed such a compliment to the Queen, such an omen for the reign. Those near noticed almost as much that the beautiful young Queen had sprung up and clapped her hands as her cousin galloped past, the winner, and as she gave the final clap, had turned round and smiled to his brother.

When the race was over, the King spoke to H.E., who called his A.D.C., who spoke to the Police, who, from under the Grand Stand, produced stakes and cords and roped off a broad path to the paddock, where Sandy was unsaddling and weighing in. Down that path passed the whole of the Royal and Vice-regal

party, except Lady Wessex and Mrs. Gordon, and when Sandy had weighed in duly and the numbers had gone up, he was told that the King and Queen were in the paddock to see him and his horse. As he approached, leading the big chestnut, amid a roar of cheering from the crowd outside the hastily roped-off enclosure, the Queen called Lin to her side and whispered to him that when Sandy came up he was to take "Joyous Garde," while she shook hands with Sandy, whom she had not seen since she was Queen.

As soon as the horse was halted in front of Their Majesties, Lin stepped forward and took it, saying: "Inez wants to shake hands with you, Sandy." As Sandy, wearing Lindsay Gordon's old racing colours, the Gordon Tartan, slouched bashfully up to his beautiful cousin, his likeness to the poet was more accentuated than ever, for he had his cap off, showing the steely-grey eyes, the thin, determined lips, the long, straight, thin nose, the big, deeply-lined forehead and the curly, dark brown hair, worn rather long, which had been concealed while he had his cap on. "I congratulate you, Sandy. I never saw such a splendid win!" said the King, going halfway to meet him with outstretched hand. "Thank you, Ned . . . Your Majesty. May I be allowed to offer you my congratulations?"

"Why not? We shall always be cousins, Sandy," said the King simply. "Inez wants to congratulate you, too." She was holding out her hand, and when he took it and looked straight into her eyes in his direct way, bursting with admiration for the woman he loved and pride at her great fortune—clean forgetful of his own victory—Inez bent forward and kissed him. "That's my congratulation, Sandy," she added, "for starting us with such a good omen as my cousin's winning the Cup Steeplechase on his own horse. And now, show me 'Joyous Garde's' points."

When the crowd became aware of what had happened, it cheered and cheered. "She always was a sport," went from mouth to mouth like the name of a winner.

When Sandy bade good-bye, he said, in a low voice, "I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart, Inez. It's all too good to be true, but even if it wasn't, and he was no more than what we thought he was, there was no man in the world for you but him."

Before Sandy led "Joyous Garde" away, Lord Wessex, who loved a fine horse, went up to congratulate him and admire its points, and said: "I hope that you and your brother will join the family-party at Government House to-night. I am sure

that I am expressing Their Majesties' wishes."—"We shall feel most honoured, your Excellency," replied Sandy, and was turning to go and change his silk, when an astounding thing happened.

CHAPTER XLVIII

REVENGE

EVERYTHING seemed to be ending as merrily as Inez's marriage-bells, when a tall, well-dressed man broke through the police and rushed up to the Royal party, who recognized him, although his face was so distorted that anyone might have been excused for not knowing him. Before the constables realized what he was doing, he made straight for the King, and, as he got near, pulled out a Browning pistol. There was no doubt as to his intention; the spectators were appalled. What could save the King but a misfire, if the pistol was loaded and the assailant was resolved? One of the first to see this was the King, who neither blanched nor shrank at the fatal turn which the day of promise had taken.

The assailant, knowing his man, kept out of *ju-jitsu* distance, and levelled his pistol. "What do you want?" asked the King, undaunted, looking every inch the successor of the Edwards, his ancestors, who had led the English on the great battlefields of the Middle Ages. "To save the world from you, mischief-maker!" cried Tudor Lewis. It was he. Most of the party knew the grievances which he had cherished on account of Connie and Inez, but these were not of the magnitude or intensity to prompt the murder of a monarch on his Accession-day.

If the King had supplanted him in Connie's affections, which was not the case, since she never had contemplated the Welshman seriously, no great harm was done while Connie remained unmarried. If Inez had refused to listen to the conspiracy he suggested against the man whom she had since married, there was no deadly insult in her refusal. She was not bound to conspire. The attitude of both ladies to him, doubtless, seemed due to the regard in which they held the man who was now King. But there was no matter for murder in this, especially for the murder of the last adult male of the Royal House of England, on the day that he ascended the throne.

But reason was not going to count. It was plain that Tudor

Lewis was mad. His finger was on the trigger of the pistol. The assassin aimed low. He was afraid of missing the head in his excitement. The deadly place at such a moment is the pit of the stomach. It was plain that he knew this. The report of the pistol rang out once, twice, thrice. There was a heavy fall. It was not the King.

Sandy, who had just handed over his horse to one of his men, and was standing beside him, threw himself in the way at the moment when he judged that Tudor Lewis would fire. He judged right. His body received the three bullets, and before he could fire a fourth, Tudor Lewis was shot through the head by a policeman, who had drawn his revolver, but not quickly enough to stop the three shots. Inez flung herself down beside Sandy. "Has he done you in, old man?" she said.—"You bet. But I've done something for you, Inez."

"Get a doctor," said the King, peremptorily, and knelt down beside Sandy, to raise his head and see if "first aid" could do anything. A doctor and an ambulance were present, for race-course accidents. The doctor made a swift examination. It was easy to get at the injuries in his thin racing silk. A rip or two stripped it off and laid bare three bleeding wounds. As he laid Sandy on the ambulance, the Queen, in a voice full of poignant anxiety, asked, "Will he live?"—"Not necessarily fatal, your Majesty," said the blunt Police-Surgeon, "but very doubtful."

"Find Twyford, Blatchford," said the King. "I saw him by the Totalisator—please." The A.D.C. saluted and dashed off at full speed. He ran into his arms. The great surgeon had heard the shots and run to help. "Thank God, Twyford!" said the King. "They've shot Sandy Gunn—you take charge."—"Yes, Sir." The ambulance had only gone a few yards.

"Where are they taking him?" asked Inez. "To the hospital, Your Majesty. It's in the paddock."—"I wish to go, too," said Inez. "But, Your Majesty," cried the Governor-General.—"You don't think I'm afraid to see things, do you?"—"I know you're not, but . . ."—"If Sandy's moments are numbered, Lord Wessex, I'm going to spend them all with him. Please show me the way, someone." Lin had been in the hospital himself. He took her, with Connie in attendance, closely followed by the King and the Gordons.

H.E. was going to accompany them, when the King said: "You're needed on the course, Wessex, to reassure the crowd. When a crowd is frightened and angry, things may turn serious."—"If I may say so, Sir, I think you ought

to show yourself, to let them see that you're safe."—"You're right, my Lord. I'll come."

When they got back to the Royal box, the condition of the crowd was indescribable, beyond that the murmur of blank fury was alarming. "What has happened? What has happened?" cried Lady Wessex and Mrs. Gordon. "A man tried to shoot me, and Sandy threw himself in the way. He's very badly hurt."—"Killed?" asked Mrs. Gordon, in horror. She knew how most men understate a tragedy. She had not learned how literal her son-in-law was. "Not killed: 'not necessarily fatal,' was the best the Police-Surgeon would say."—"Has he only the Police-Surgeon with . . ." Lady Wessex began to ask.

But the crowd was growing so threatening that the King did not answer her. "Blatchford," he said, "tell the police I'm going to speak to the crowd." The police understood their job. They prefaced the announcement with seven words to secure attention: "Pass the word 'the King's safe and going to speak.'" His power of ready speech was priceless at that ugly moment. He was cool, almost humorous. His tone rallied them as nothing else could. Unescorted, he mounted the Judge's box, as the most public place on the course, and began:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, I did not expect to address you so soon. There has been an attempt on my life. I'm only going to tell you now that a very gallant gentleman, the Queen's cousin, who has just won 'the Steeple,' threw himself between me and my murderer and received the shots. I hope and believe that he will live. The lunatic who tried to murder us is dead, shot by a vigilant policeman. Only one thing more—no more racing to-day, boys! I hope you will get home as quickly and quietly as you can, and put up a prayer for Sandy Gunn."—"Three cheers for the King!" shouted a policeman, unrestrained by the responsibilities of officialdom, and not three, but thirty, or a hundred, rounds of "God save the King!" swept through the vast assemblage.

The King was wedged in the crowd. He found himself beside Albert and Ruby Hogger. He shook hands cordially and talked to the proud Ruby until he was freed by the band striking up the National Anthem, which served as a signal for dispersal as well as a demonstration of loyalty. As soon as the ambulance left with Sandy in it, the King and the Queen slipped away with Connie and her father, in John Claridge's car.

CHAPTER XLIX

ROUND AUSTRALIA BY AIR

WITH the perfect appliances of the 21st century, Sir Geoffrey was able to accede to the ardent desire of the Queen that Sandy should be taken to the wing of Government House which H.E. had put at their disposal while T.M. continued in Australia. He was taken on an electric ambulance invented by Pat, with springs so delicately adjusted that jarring was almost eliminated. The banquet of that night resolved itself into a very quiet family dinner, for Their Majesties were anxious to join the hurriedly-summoned Mrs. Gunn in the suite where Sandy was lying. Sir Geoffrey's report had been more hopeful. When he had finished his examination, he said, "He's coughing blood, which shows that his lung has been penetrated; that he's breathing easily shows that the blood is not collecting in the lung. *Ice to suck and locally applied, Nurse, and complete rest, of course.* If there's no further hæmorrhage to-night, there'll be less still to-morrow."

The Flemington Race-Course was in all the world's *Dailies* next day, as the scene of the attempt on the King's life. Melbourne papers concerned themselves with two things, the great qualities shown by the King and the motive of the murder. For the King the papers, like the people, could not say too much. His sang-froid with death staring him in the face, his masterfulness and coolness in dealing with the crisis afterwards, were the themes of universal admiration. Australia likes "men," and augured the fairest prospects for his reign. Over his Queen they waxed poetical. She won all hearts when she gave her cousin a kiss as her congratulations for his splendid win, and she won them twice over when she flung herself down beside his body with such affection and concern. All were impressed by the knowledge of horse-flesh which their Queen showed when she went into the paddock to examine the winner of the Steeplechase.

The case of Tudor Lewis was astonishing. Until recently he had been very wealthy, having started some of the most famous speculations in Australia. But in the last few years the markets had turned against him. Especially had he failed in the attack which he led on Pat Gordon's two companies, the Ether Electric Co. and the Daedalus, where he had squandered immense sums in trying to depress the stock, that he might buy a controlling interest. He was defeated because the stock was largely held

by rich squatters from the Western District, who had bought them for a sentimental reason and were determined to hold them until they came round again, no matter how depressed they became. These shares had not come into the market, and Tudor Lewis's sacrifices were in vain. That was only one of the reverses which ruined him. With the loss of his money, he lost his self-control and drank himself out of his mind.

As he had no relatives and his friends were chiefly *bons-vivants*, no-one worried about his mental collapse, except his doctor; even he had no conception that he was going out of his mind. He drank more heavily every day and his valet deposed that the inquest that on the day of the races he must have drunk nearly three dozen *petits verres* of green Chartreuse. "Why did you let him have them?" asked the coroner. "If you saw us side by side," replied the valet, a foreigner, "you would not ask. I was sometimes afraid that he would eat me. It was my master's habit to indulge when he went to the races." Pressed by the coroner, he admitted that he had often heard him uttering threats against Mr. Stuart (meaning the King), and Mr. Patrick Gordon, especially the former, against whom his animosity was furious.

As Inez refused to leave Government House until Sandy was better, and the King had to be absent a great deal, Pat yielded to her solicitations to be her guest. Connie, the only Maid of Honour who slept in the royal apartments, added hers. For, since she was chained to the spot by Inez's anxiety, she needed a tame cavalier. The King, having no staff of his own, used the Governor-General's, and they, working for two masters in an unprecedentedly busy period, had little time for frivolities.

The King, consulting his Ministers in England by the wonderful wireless telephone through the bowels of the earth, between countries at the antipodes to each other, like England and Australia, had decided to be crowned in Australia and New Zealand on his way home, and in Canada, South Africa and India as soon as he could manage it afterwards. Before being crowned in Australia, he determined to visit all parts of it by airship, making a stoppage, longer or shorter, at every important town, and some of the leading sheep-stations and fruit-settlements, to acquire a bird's-eye acquaintance with the resources of the Continent. The airship selected was the *Columbus*, as being fitted with his Daedalus apparatus. Mr. Colquhoun was to make the voyage in charge of the Royal comfort.

The King was better than his word. He visited not only the important cities, but many bush-townships also. It was

true that he stayed only a few minutes, except in very large towns, but in that short time it was possible for every inhabitant to see him, because in 2007 A.D. the apparatus of the airships, popularly called Zeps, had improved so greatly that they could come down to within fifty feet of the ground and hover to lower a cage by an inverted parachute, for picking up a passenger or goods. The dates where he would make his descents were announced ahead, so that most people in Australia had had the opportunity of seeing their Sovereign before the coronation day arrived.

Much as he would have liked to take his beautiful Queen with him, he saw that the best time for him to make his round would be while she was helping Mrs. Gunn to superintend Sandy's convalescence, and he realized that the pleasure which he himself and the populations he visited would have derived from her company, was set off by his being able to devote his whole time to discussions of the problems of Australia with the Ministers who accompanied him, and the leading public men he met. This was specially the case in his limited visits to the other State capitals.

It was a marvellous trip. In no other way could he have acquired such a comprehensive idea of the elements which constituted Australia, a Commonwealth embracing an entire Continent, but with few exceptions containing nothing which could be termed a city that was not either sea-port or mining centre. The great manufactories were all at mining places, because in the old days only miners, whose necessities were immediate, would buy Colonial-made articles. The rest of the country was taken up practically with agriculture, pasture and deserts. Mountains and, except on the coast, forests, were as rare as pleasure-parks. Rivers, though some of them were of immense length, seemed part of an irrigation system, and hardly counted for navigation; lakes, though some of them were enormous, did not count for either, because of their shallowness and intense saltness, until a great South Australian Premier had boldly started the gigantic scheme of separating their water and their minerals, by passing powerful electric currents through them, which resulted in turning vast quantities of desert into country as fertile as the irrigated parts of the Nile Valley, and establishing one of the greatest chemical industries in the world.

Australia, as the airship flew over it from that height, still looked a continent of vast deserts, for the corn was all harvested and the grass was as yellow as the sand, and the dusty browsing animals were almost invisible. Except in the great mining

districts, the townships were scattered and microscopic. That they had hardly grown since the first part of the nineteenth-century was largely due to air facilities. People did not need local institutions or shops when the public airships brought every part of the continent within a few hours' journey of a capital. They only needed a day of rest on Wednesday or Thursday, instead of Sunday, to enable them to visit their capital when all the institutions and shops were open, instead of on a day when nothing was open, except churches and restaurants and clubs. Visits to the capital have always appealed to the Australian bushman.

In tropical Australia the forests spread farther inland, and there were rivers as yet unharnessed, more capable of navigation. But it was less developed than the tropics of Africa, and the King had earnest discussions about its future with the Australian Prime Minister, for much of it was under Federal Administration. The Prime Minister was staggered when, at the Northern capital, the King addressed the Administrator of Public Lands as "Bob," and the Administrator was bidden to refer to the Queen as "Inez," not as "Her Majesty." But this same Administrator, who had himself done more for the development of tropical Australia than anyone, had schemes for its future so wide and sagacious that the Prime Minister welcomed his Sovereign's decision to ask the Hon. Robert Stevens* to accompany them back to Melbourne, to discuss schemes for working up the N. T., especially since their journey for hundreds of miles after leaving the N. T. would be over the almost unexplored tropics of Western Australia.

For the rest of that Royal progress over the gigantic length of the West Australian Coast Districts, the mighty West Australian gold-fields, studded with cities, and the vast and rich colony of South Australia, the King spent most of his leisure with Bob. For one thing, Bob was a Director and very large shareholder in the Three Lakes Corporation, the largest of the great companies engaged in using the salts of the vast lakes for chemical manufacture, and the water separated from them for irrigation. Having such quantities of mineral manures and water at their disposal for the cultivation of the thousands of square miles granted to them for 99 years to provide the interest upon the millions sunk in this gigantic and beneficial scheme, the acres they had put under cultivation ran into eight figures, for the crops they handled were not fruit, but great staples like cotton

* The Administrators of the N.T. were called Hons., like Ministers of the Crown.

and cereals, which made South Australia a sort of Australian Egypt, the labour difficulty having been partly met by wonderful electrical machinery, driven by a current brought hundreds of miles from a power-station at the pit's mouth near the coast of New South Wales.

"How does it pay you, Bob, to use all this electricity?" asked the King.—"Like a low-grade gold-mine, Ned" (the King insisted on "Ned" when they were talking privately). "The percentage is so low that it is only just a paying proposition, but the quantities of our crops are so large and we are such good customers to ourselves, between our manufacturing and our agricultural orders, that we manage to pay a handsome dividend."—"Has it struck you, Bob . . . ?"—"It has—I know what you mean, that if we can apply your Daedalus system of obtaining Cosmic Electricity, the saving to the Three Lakes' Corporation by not having to bring that current from Newcastle would be larger than the National Revenue of some independent States."—"It looks as if at no distant date I shall be able to surrender the Civil List of the Royal family to the nation, and endow my descendants with fairy gold, produced from the earth, in the shape of electricity. We shall be getting something out of *moonshine* next. I hope we do. I should like to scrap that superannuated simile which has been used by generations of shell-backs to retard the wheels of development."

"Well, anyhow, it won't be ten years, Ned, before you will be giving us our electric power from the earth and we shall in consequence be able to multiply our gigantic operations. We might even take the last ditch by applying the patents and machinery which we use to the separation of minerals from sea-water."—"Do you mean, Bob . . . ?"—"Yes, I mean that if once you can get your machinery into complete working order, and give us free and illimitable electricity from the earth, at the cost of installing your patents, we shall be able to use sea-water for irrigation—think what that means to Australia! and make untold millions from the chlorine and sodium we acquire in the process of making the salt water fresh. Just think of what a lot one might make out of the Dead Sea."

"The very prospect makes me gasp!" said the King. "But, of course, it follows from the other, as does working all factories by electricity, which Australia has not yet done for want of waterfalls. Why—hang it all, everything in every house will be done by electricity—lighting, heating, cooking, sweeping, typing, moving things, mowing and watering the garden, and flapping your private pair of wings. And they'll all have to buy their

Daedalus from us, or go without free electricity! The firm will be so rich, Bob, that you and Pat will be able to buy kingdoms for yourselves! How fast the world has moved since the Great War lent wings to invention!

* * * * *

When they got back to Melbourne, about noon, the King said to Bob, "You'd better come along with me and see Inez. We'll give you lunch. There'll only be Connie and Aunt Elizabeth besides ourselves."—"May I go to my chambers first and join you at Government House—Your Majesty?" The two words were added for the benefit of the Prime Minister, who had suddenly come into earshot.—"Certainly, Bob," he replied. "Do you want me?" he asked the Prime Minister.

"With reference to your Coronation, Your Majesty—will the date stand, February 5th, at noon?"—"Oh, yes, Sir Joseph—it was the date you and His Excellency agreed on. I have no views on the matter."—"Ought not Her Majesty to be informed before we announce it, Your Majesty?"—"You're quite right, Sir Joseph. I'll ask her." Inez, he reflected, might like to be asked, although she would make him decide.

CHAPTER L

"RISE, SIR ALEXANDER"

WHEN he reached the royal apartments, he was overwhelmed with the embraces of wife and children, like a Tommy from the wars. Inez was delightfully feminine—her sincerest form of affection. It was nearly two months since she had seen her husband and King, though she had been talking to him at odd hours in the day by a marvellous new extension of wireless telephoning, which enabled a genius like Pat, who was staying in the royal apartments, with an installation on the high tower of Government House, to get in touch with the airship, which he knew to be flying at a certain height within approximate points on the map, and to give not only the voices but the features of the telephoners. With the Government House at Melbourne, a fixed high point, in the present advanced state of wireless telephoning, the airship could connect at any time, and the King, after every meal, had himself put into connection with his beautiful Queen, if she was in the Royal apartments.

After a few days she had all her meals in the retirement of her family, partly on account of the inconvenient formality which her

presence imposed when she took them at the Viceregal table, partly because Sandy's condition was so very grave that she had no heart for meeting strangers. An incessant cough, which prevented sleep and sapped even his great strength, showed that the bullet in his lung, which had not been extracted, was pressing on a nerve, although he had intervals of comparative quiet. His Excellency and his family generally took some meals each week in the Royal apartments, to keep the Queen company, and answer her innumerable questions about the etiquette she would have to observe in England. Before the King's return he had decided by telephone that Inez would feel much more at home in her new position if her present Mistress of the Robes accompanied her to England. He indicated at the same time that some suitable post, like Lord Chamberlain, could be found for the Governor-General. Their daughters' appointments as Maids of Honour could only be temporary, because the post was not held in England by persons with the courtesy-title of Lady.

The first thing the King did on his return, after embracing his family, was to inquire anxiously, "How's Sandy?" He had known from his daily inquiries of Sandy's dangerous condition. "Very poorly," said Inez. "They have not been able to attempt the extraction of that third bullet yet."—"Then I must go and see him at once."—"Pat's with him. I'll telephone to know if he's able to see you. We have to keep him very quiet, and a visit from you must excite him." Pat had installed a temporary telephone between the two rooms.—"He'd like to see the King. Nurse thinks it won't do him any harm," phoned Pat.—"Me, too, Pat?"—"Your Majesty as well, Inez."—"Then we'd better go directly, Ned," she said, drawing her arm through his, and walking him to the sick-room very pensively.

It was a magnificent room, with lovely views of semi-tropical landscape gardening. It had been intended for the Queen's bedroom, but Inez had insisted on giving it up to Sandy, to lighten the tedium of his recovery. Pat came out into the passage to receive the welcome of his Royal brother-in-law—his bosom friend—so that the King could give his whole attention to Sandy when he entered the room. When they went in, Inez said, "Ned's come to pay you a little visit, Sandy, before he sees anyone else—even Lady Wessex."—Sandy's pale face lit up.

"How are you, Sandy?" said the King, advancing to grasp his hand. "Nearly recovered from saving my life?"—"I'm afraid not, Sir."—"Ned' in the family, Sandy."—"I'm afraid not, Ned; but as you were saved, I'm ready to say my *Nunc Dimittis*. As old Lindsay would have said:

"I've had my share of pastime, and I've done my share of toil,
And life is short—the longest life a span;
I care not now to tarry for the corn or for the oil,
Or for the wine that maketh glad the heart of man."

"I shall never forgive myself if you die, Sandy."—"That's the truth," said Inez, with a tender smile to the wounded man. —"And what I said was truth, too, though I should like to charge it as dying for Inez when I hand in my checks."—"If you get to making pretty speeches, you'll make Ned jealous, Sandy," said Inez, trying to veil her sadness with a jest. "It's too much of a surprise from you."—"He needn't be. I should be mighty sorry if you'd been married to me instead of him."—"Well, Sandy," said the King, "the thing which I want most in the world now is that you should be spared."—"Thank you, Ned."

"But that isn't all, as you'll find when you are well enough to kneel. The Government will have something to tell you on that point."—"Make haste and be well enough to kneel, Sandy," said his lovely cousin. "You know how I hate Ned's mysteries, what trouble I get into over them."—"Well, good-bye, old man," said the King, just as he would have said in pre-reign days. —"Good-bye, Ned, and thank you so much for coming to see me first."

CHAPTER LI

THE CORONATION

THE great coronation at Melbourne took place in the open air. This multiplied a hundredfold the number of spectators who could witness it, and originated in the fact that the C.E. Cathedral, which had more prestige than any other church in the State, could not be used for the coronation, because the Dean's old-fashioned prejudices had made him refuse to celebrate the King's marriage there, two years before. On all sides an open-air coronation was felt to be more democratic. A circular stadium was erected, which accommodated more spectators than the Circus Maximus at Rome—not less than 300,000. It was built of wood, with tiers of seats as high as the Colosseum. The seats had awnings over them, which did not interfere with the view of the lofty and beautiful canopy which stood in the centre of the arena, to be the scene of the actual coronation, and to seat the family of the Queen and the great officers of the six Australian States. Only Australians

and Australian Officials had seats under the canopy.* There was one occupant already, a very ill man on an ambulance, the Queen's cousin, Sir Alexander Gordon, who, at the suggestion of the Governor-General and the Prime Minister, had been knighted by the King's own hand for saving his life at the Melbourne Cup. He had also been allowed by special Royal licence to change his name to Gordon. He was so obsessed with the idea of seeing his cousin crowned that his doctor thought it wise to humour him.

Neither King nor Queen put on the hot velvet and ermine coronation robes until they went into the robing-room, erected for them beside the stadium. The King wore the uniform of the Australian Regiment in which he was serving when he succeeded to the Crown, and the Ribbon of the Garter sent from England by airship with the robes. The Queen, who wore a superb necklace of Northern Territory pearls—a coronation offering from Bob Stevens—had no note of colour, except the Ribbon and Grand Cross of St. Michael and St. George, and a large bouquet of wattle-blossom, long out of season. The pure white of her dress showed her fair, flushed beauty to perfection. The crown of Australian gold and Precious Stones, which was to be placed upon her head, might well have been awarded to her as Queen of Beauty at a tournament. She drove bare-headed, with a parasol to keep off the sun; the King wore the Regimental hat with the emu plumes. His crown, also of Australian Stones and gold, was to be placed on his head as the clock struck twelve. The Royal children were with their grandparents.

The trumpets of the King's Regiment sounded: a great column of choir-boys in white surplices marched in, singing, "Come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant," followed by the Archbishops of the six States of Australia, the Bishops and other heads of churches, walking in pairs in inverse order, the last two being the Primate, the Archbishop of Sydney, and the Archbishop of Melbourne. The Primate crowned the King, and the Archbishop of Melbourne, as Metropolitan of her own State, the Queen. In that sublime part of the ceremony, when the new British Sovereign is presented to the four corners of the World, as emblems of his possessions in all parts of the

* By the King's command, no representatives of the Home Government were present at the Colonial Coronation on account of the difficulties of precedence. A vast number of wealthy persons, including more than a hundred peers and peeresses, came out unofficially by airship.

earth, instead of the Primate giving the service singly, the whole body of clergy of all denominations repeated it in unison, as they afterwards repeated the Blessing. It was a noticeable feature that the King was presented to them by the Prime Minister of Australia, not the Governor-General. It was H.E.'s own suggestion, because he himself represented the King, not the people of Australia.

If not so symmetrical as its prototype in Westminster Abbey, the service was framed with great care to typify not only the King's consecration to his People, but their spontaneous acceptance of him as their Sovereign. When the Primate of Australia placed the crown of Australian gems, specially presented for the ceremony by the city of Melbourne, on the King's head in the open air of a perfect Southern summer day, the roar which went up from nigh a million throats of the children of a new country, hailed not only the crowning of a new King, but the beginning of a new era, in which the King was one of his people, having lived in their midst and earned his living in competition with them, and married one of themselves, and—a triumph of irony—been familiarly known as "The Pretender."

Sir Alexander, who had felt the heat of that February day severely, fainted as soon as he had seen the crown pressed on the beautiful brows of the Queen. Only a preternatural determination to witness this part of the coronation had sustained him so long. The incident was concealed from the Sovereigns, who drove off to the Town Hall amid the plaudits of their people, to the huge coronation lunch, given in their honour to all the magnates of the State of Victoria by the Lord Mayor, who, holding office for the third year in succession, happened to be the Mayor before whom they were married—which he did not forget in a speech, bursting with loyalty.

When they arrived at the Royal apartments, to take a cup of tea and rest before the great banquet of the evening, the first thing they did was to go and see how Sandy was. He appeared none the worse; as they talked to him, they thought him better. He talked so excitedly about the great event of the morning, and how gloriously beautiful Inez had looked, as with heightened colour she offered her head to be crowned. He quoted Lindsay Gordon's famous lines about Guinevere in "Joyous Garde," the poem after which he had named his great horse. "I won't quote the next verse," he said, "because—on my life—it isn't true. I have not been jealous though you took my all in love, Ned."

They had their tea with him. Then the nurse said, "I think

you must go now, Your Majesty. He's had more excitement than's good for him already."—"Well, good-bye for the present, Sandy," said Inez. Then she had a sudden impulse. "Perhaps the kiss of a crowned Queen will have an effect like the King's touch on your illness," she said, stooping to kiss the bloodless lips. "I'm sure it's the best medicine in the world for him," said her Maid of Honour, feeling rather weepish.

The banquet that night was given by the Governor-General to the principal representatives of all six States and their wives, instead of being confined to the State of Victoria. Pat and Connie were asked in the Royal Suite, but excused themselves to be within call of Sandy, who, they thought, would feel particularly lonely, and might be taken suddenly worse. The occasion was one of superlative interest. It was known that at the close of the dinner the King would make a speech, as the Pope speaks on the day of his election—an unheard-of departure for a British monarch.

CHAPTER LII

THE KING'S SPEECH

FEW Representatives from the other States had heard him speak, but the Victorians knew that the unaffected citizen-soldier, who had that morning become the Lord's Anointed over a thousand million human beings, was in a wise, witty and unrheterical way, the man the great city of Melbourne would sooner hear than anyone in the State. There had been deep disappointment because he had felt unable to speak at the lunch, but it was obvious that the first set speech of his reign ought to be to the Ministers and magnificos of the six States at the Governor-General's banquet for his Monarch's coronation.

The occasion was marvellously impressive to a Colonial audience, unaccustomed to the pomp and circumstance of great Royal ceremonials. In Lord Wessex, they had a man old in Courts, who knew how to invest the occasion with all possible pomp. The Peers and Peeresses who had come out to see the coronation, were present, the walls of the great hall had been lined with the stalwart troopers of the King's Regiment, in the hats with the emu plumes which the world for more than a century had associated with desperate valour, and the flashing steel shoulder-pieces. Through the wide-open windows glad and patriotic music had been wafted from the Regimental band, playing to the thousands outside. When the Governor-General

rose to propose the health of the first King and Queen who had ever been crowned in Australia, Regimental trumpeters blew from the music-gallery the time-honoured call which comes from the silver trumpets of the Life Guards on similar occasions at home—an unexpected feature, which fired the assemblage to a passion of loyal expectation.

H.E. was brief; he had a toast which needed no eloquence, for the King had won the respect and liking of all classes, as an ordinary citizen, during six years' residence in Australia, and her fellow-citizens, before she had greatness thrust upon her, had been as proud of Inez Gordon as of anything in Australia—the girl whose uncommon beauty was matched by her courage and greatness as a sportswoman. To say that they would like to see Inez Gordon go home and "show people the way round" had been common parlance. Now she was going as Queen Inez, to dazzle the capitals of Europe with her graces, and share the Throne of the Plantagenets.

When their healths had been drunk with an enthusiasm begging description, the Governor-General asked the King when he would be ready to reply—a mere formality, for he knew how spontaneous he was. "Now, I think." At the preconcerted signal, the trumpeters sounded again, and the toastmaster intoned, with regal pomp:

"My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, Pray silence for His Majesty the King."

The monarch followed him in quiet tones, with a saving grace of humour, which took the great audience by storm. It was democratic, a keynote of the new monarchy, which was to revolutionize all precedent. His opening words were typical:

"I was a Pretender when I landed, and now you are honouring me as your King." The laughter soon died away. The jester turned into a preacher, who spoke winged words, which made every man present—and nearly every man present was a speaker—a strained listener. In plain language, made weighty and beautiful by its Biblical phraseology, he told them his sense of unworthiness, his conception of the duties of kingship, his purposes.

He confessed that he had known that he would succeed for nearly two years. He had remained in Australia because he did not want to spend his time of waiting for the Throne in that State, Official and Court atmosphere which surrounds Royalty, but wished to ascend his Throne fresh from competing for his living among Colonials, who had no notion who he was, and would not all of them have been impressed if they had. This,

he said, kept him in touch with the realities of life. He told them that there was only one thing he regretted—that he had come to the Throne before he was important enough to get into the Legislative Assembly, which he could only have entered as an Independent. He thought that it would have done him good to be a "member of the House of Commons" before he succeeded to the title.

He told them how he had come out to Australia to invest the ten thousand pounds, which was his share of the crumbs that fell from his Predecessor's table, in some business which would yield him a decent living; how he had meant to marry an Australian, in which he had succeeded beyond hope (here all eyes were turned on his beautiful Queen). To be Mr. Charles Edward Stuart Windsor, living on an income in a terrace-house in a cheap suburb in a country which his ancestors had ruled, had seemed to him to be "a poor sort of job," so he took the requisite legal steps to drop the Royal Windsor, and sailed, or rather, flew for Australia, where he was most appropriately nicknamed "The Pretender." He confessed that he had never contemplated this contingency when he dropped the Windsor. There was a brief peal of laughter when he told them how Her Majesty had made the painful discovery that he was a Pretender, that he was not known as Stuart at school. He did not think that she quite caught his original surname when she heard his old schoolfellow accost him by it. At all events, she did not associate it with the Crown of England, or he supposed that she would not have denounced him in quite the ruthless fashion which she adopted. At the time, there were several lives between him and the Crown. The accident which carried off the late Lord Sandringham and his family had not happened.

He proceeded to remark that he was sure that he ascended the Throne under better auspices than any of his predecessors. None of them had been a private citizen in England, let alone the Colonies. But he had been earning his living in a Melbourne office; he had been spending it in a ready-made house, which he had bought for £200; he had made his garden out of the hummocks primeval. Until the day when he left Beaudesert—which sounded so much grander than it was—he had kept two servants, apart from the nurse, and they were a Japanese who had been a gardener, and a Japanese who had been a turkey-boy.

He told his audience how comparatively poor he had been. That assemblage knew what a little way nine hundred a year went with a wife and children, in Melbourne Society. He con-

fessed to a struggle while his brother-in-law and he were endeavouring to harness Cosmic Electricity to the service of aerial locomotion. They had not quite succeeded yet, though at times it acted perfectly well. What wealth he had, until he could touch the British Treasury, he had made with his own brains. From one of the failures of his firm, a flying-machine which was to be as small and handy as a motor-cycle, but which instead of flying properly, would only hop like a kangaroo, he got his idea of the Aerial Scooter, which was his fortune until he struck oil in another direction. Now, for the first time, the Throne would be occupied by a man brought up as a plain citizen, who had had to count his sixpences and approach policemen with awe, who was able to regard every political and economical problem from the standpoint of the people, a man who intended to have his own private life, although he was a King.

The audience could at last laugh heartily while he was telling them how, when he got to England, he was going to have a house small enough to be run by three maids, erected in the garden of Buckingham Palace, with a private entrance from the street: but if he had to have a man with a Lewis gun walking up and down outside, and a policeman in the hall, like they did at the War Office, he would submit to that, to secure privacy. For the tradesmen he would have an electric-hatch, specially invented by his brother-in-law. He told them that he meant to live there just as he had lived in his bungalow, and should go to his duties in the palace exactly as he went to his office in Hughes Street, except that he would have a subway so that he could pass from one to the other unobserved, and keep all his State robes and uniforms at the palace, and be an ordinary citizen in his own house.

They must not imagine from this that he did not take his duties as Sovereign seriously. He could assure them that he assumed them, not only with the utmost seriousness, but with delight. To become King of all the Britains seemed to him the grandest honour that could befall any human being, and above all, he welcomed the opportunities which his position would give for advocating ameliorations for the human race. He did not say this with any dark Socialistic significance. He was not a Socialist of the Syndicalist species. He was a Socialist like those monarchs of industry who built model towns, and were always studying the advantage and pleasures of their workmen. If a poor man had a fine patent, for which he could not find a market, if a poor scholar wanted a holiday—all those things of which a man said, "If I were King, I should do so-

and-so"—all those things, he hoped to do. He hoped to be a publicity agent of the best kind—a sort of fifth estate, to supplement the work of the Press.

And now he came to the most serious point in his address. He hoped that he should never for a single day forget the welfare of his Empire and the world. The Great War had left the three Anglo-Saxon peoples—the original people in the United Kingdom, the United Oversea Britons, and the people of the United States—in an unique position to benefit the world. The Oversea Anglo-Saxons, who had produced two of the world's great Statesmen in President Wilson and Premier Hughes, had a much clearer idea of the conditions requisite for the third Millennium than the tolerant English, who were willing to allow fantastic dreamers and rapacious rascals in their own country and Russia to imperil with their pacifist and Maximalist lunacies the democratic ideals of the world.

The King's speech made a profound impression. The easy and spontaneous way in which he expressed himself had not disguised the fact that in the new monarchy, the Crown would be in direct touch with the people, as well as the Cabinet; that the reign of common sense had begun. When he made his two references to the Queen, he laid his hand proudly on her shoulder, and she looked up into his face with a frank delight and confessed love, which enchanted the audience. It was humanity triumphant.

CHAPTER LIII

WHY CONNIE MISSED THE CORONATION BANQUET

CONNIE and Pat, who might have been at that wonderful coronation banquet, dined alone in the Royal apartments, to be handy if they were wanted, as they impressed upon Sandy's nurse, though she considered it unnecessary. They seemed in a hurry to get through dinner, and retire to Connie's sanctum, where Connie swung herself upon the table and lit a cigarette, and Pat stood eyeing her.

"Connie," said Pat, "I'm not so afraid of you as I used to be."—"It doesn't seem like it."—"I think you're altered. You used to go the pace so."—"Is that what you call it? I used to try what men were made of, and egg them on until they showed me—if I thought they were worth it."—"I hated that way of yours. It seemed so unwomanly."—"Excuse me, it was the primitive woman."—"Well, I don't

like primitive things. That was what used to worry me about old Sandy—he was so primitive when he was roughed.”——“I’m afraid it will be a long time before poor Sandy’ll be primitive again.”

“Don’t let us talk of him. It makes me sad to see such a splendid man shrunk to skin and bone. Did you know yourself that you have altered?—You have, you know.”——“Yes, I know right enough. Can’t you guess why?”——He shook his head. “It was Ned—the King.”——“What had he to do with it?”——“I tempted him like I tried to tempt you.”——“Don’t tell me that you had a flirtation or . . . with him?”——“I tried to. For a brief while we were engaged, only because I maddened him into kissing me and he felt bound to propose.”——“Ned proposed to you? Think, Connie—you might have been Queen!”

“Yes, I tell myself that. But you never heard such a half-hearted proposal. I wasn’t to consider myself engaged until he could tell me that wonderful secret which made Inez so mad, and he was to be engaged, but was not to have any of a lover’s privileges. As if I wanted a lover of that kind! Though I really was quite in love with him, and always shall be.”——“Oh, Connie!” he said, with so much feeling that she raised her eyebrows. “Why, what’s the matter, Pat?”——“Only that you’ve made me very unhappy.”——“How?”——“By what you said.”——“That I shall always be in love with Ned? Who could help it? Inez knows what a hopeless victim I am. She’s forgiven me in advance if I disgrace myself by showing it too much.”

“I shan’t forgive you.”——“You! What have you to do with it, Pat?” The Misogynist could not find words. He could only look troubled. “Besides, what’s the good of it? I found out how little power I had over him before we’d been engaged a day. Nothing would shift him from his code of ethics. Of course, he’d been a tremendous pal of Inez’s down at The Beach, but I knew there was nothing in that. He was quite unmoved by her in those days, to anything except friendship. But when your people came up to Melbourne, I soon found out which way his heart was pointing.”——“Chris?”——“Yes, Chris.”——“So you gave him his freedom.”——“Well, I’d freed him from the engagement before that. I was just making him a pal like Inez, but when I found out his feelings about Chris, I helped them as much as I could.”——“Being still in love with him?”——“Of course. A woman can’t help being in love with the most delightful friend she’s

got, who’s devoted to her in the most chivalrous way, and won’t take anything from her, except sterilized thanks. It’s enough to madden her. The worst of it is that he does it still, when he’s King and has a wife he’s dotty about. It makes him very difficult to live with. You’re an oyster, too, Pat—you have rather his way with you.”——“My solitary merit.”——“It is a merit. It’s the thing I like best in a man.”——“Do you mean . . . ?”——“Yes, you stupid, I mean that. And you’ve been several weeks finding it out, though we’ve been together every day, and I’ve taken you as much for granted as if we’d been engaged.”

“May I consider myself engaged to you now, Connie?”——“If you put a little more ‘buck’ into it. First of all, let us clear it up about His Maj. I’m not silly about him—I don’t try and flirt with him as I’ve flirted with other men, and with him before we were engaged. I just admire him more than anyone in the world, as the average man made perfect. I love being with him, but I only want to admire him. I don’t care if he doesn’t notice my existence, though I love him to take notice of me.”——“I always have liked him better than anybody, ever since I’ve known him,” said Pat. “He has been such a ripping chap to work with. And to think that I’ve been his boss!—the King’s boss, though really he was my boss, because I made him decide everything, except questions of science and manufacture. He knew nothing of them when he came, and has only an elementary knowledge now—and won’t admit that he has any.”

“How like Ned! You aren’t jealous any longer, after this confession, are you, Pat?”——“As if I could be jealous of Ned! I say, Connie . . . ?”——“What is it, old sport?”——“I’m no match for you. You’re so abominably rich and pretty.”——“That’s the most original compliment I ever had! I like you, Pat—you’re so fresh. And talking of prettiness, I’ve coveted you for your looks ever since we were kids. . . . Speaking of filthy lucre, the root of all evil—I have my money now, it’s true, but you’ll have a great deal when your father dies, which I trust may never happen—he’s such a good ‘un—and if your Daedalus ideas did come off, you’d be rich beyond the dreams of avarice, as Dr. Johnson, or Barclay and Perkins, or somebody, said. So you needn’t jib at the money, dear.”

The “dear” escaped her and gave him confidence. “I was going to say, Connie, that though I am no match, I might be a matter of convenience. Ned has made me promise to go to England with him, because he thinks that there, with all those

brilliant F.R.S.'s to give him their help and their advice—I suppose a Fellow of the Royal Society must help the King if he asks him—we ought to be able to solve the problem of getting Cosmic Electricity without breakdowns more easily than we can here, where there is no one who has the ability to share our researches, except our rivals in business, to whom we can't afford to betray our secrets."

"And since you're going with him, and I'm going with the Queen, you think we'd better make a match of it, like the butler and the cook?"—"Don't be horrid, Connie."—"I'm not horrid. Has it escaped your attention that a married woman cannot be a maid, even a Maid of Honour?"—"Don't Queens have any lady attendants except Maids of Honour?"—"Yes, they have Ladies of the . . ."—"Of what, Connie?"—"I think I'd rather not tell you until we're married. Inez will discover something to call me. It would be lovely to have a husband of whom you're very fond on such a long voyage."—"But will you be my wife, and could you be very fond of me?"—"I always have been very fond of you, you stupid old thing! If you'd proposed to me, instead of running away when I was testing you to see what there was in you, I should have accepted you right out. I've known what a good sport you are, Pat Gordon, ever since you were a schoolboy, and I think that you and I ought to join hands to make a sort of body-guard for dear old Inez; so that's arranged. But what about your business?"

"The main works for making the Daedalus machinery we shall transfer to England, to be under the King's own eye; the plant is not enormously bulky. The rest of the business, for fitting up wireless telephones, making the scooters, etc., we shall form into a limited company, of which Bob will be chairman and my father one of the directors. Bob has a splendid head for business—he'll develop it tremendously."—"I say, Pat, isn't it a sarcasm . . .?"—"What?"—"Why, if he hadn't gone queer, Tudor Lewis was just the sort of man who might have managed the conversion into a company."—"He might."

"Don't bother about your old business now!" she cried, quite forgetting that she had introduced the subject. "But just let me know if I'm an engaged woman or not. His Majesty was not a very forward proposer, but he was a Don Juan compared to you. I must be a very unattractive woman! How I wish you were a fortune-hunter!"—"Why?"—"Because then you would pretend that I was an irresistible Venus and devour me with endearments, instead of proposing to me as if

I was standing at the other end of one of your wireless telephones."—"Shut up, Connie!" he said, putting his arm round her and drawing her off the table, to stop her teasing with his kisses.—She struggled free for a second to say, "Oh, now you're talking!" and then submitted again with an ardour which showed how long she had been thinking of Pat as a husband.

"Oh, Pat, you *are* an angel!" she said.—"Almost as ethereal as Ned?"—"Better. I could never establish a circuit—isn't that the phrase you use?—with him, and I'm a warm-blooded, breathing human being, a Galatea who wants Pygmalion to make the running, not an Oriental waiting in a row of wives to catch her husband's eye."—"I shall try and oblige you, Connie," said Pat, waking up into a joyousness and irresponsibility of which she had not believed him capable. "Oh, Pat dear!" she said, "why didn't you let me see this side of you before? I could have made up my mind to make you make up yours so much sooner!"

While they were lotus-eating in their late-discovered garden of the Hesperides, there came a rap at the door. The nurse entered. "Sir Alexander's very wakeful to-night. He keeps asking if the Queen has come back; he wants to speak to her before he goes to sleep. I wonder if you can do anything with him, Mr. Gordon."—"Good old Sandy!" cried Connie. "He is doing his bit in the coronation ceremonies! Let's both go, Pat, and keep up the illusion until Inez comes."

CHAPTER LIV

SIR ALEXANDER GORDON OF "THE LAKE"

FROM that glittering banquet the King and Queen passed to Sandy's sick chamber. For when they got back to their apartments, the footman gave them a message from Pat that it was impossible to get Sandy to sleep until they had come to say good-night to him. Inez had worn her crown at the banquet. She did not stop to take it off. She thought it might please Sandy to see her in it close. "Why, Queen," he said, "it's good of you to come and see a poor sick man!"—"We were delighted to hear that you were awake, and could see us," she replied, rather conventionally.

"I had something to say to you, Inez. I'm not for this world long. I know that, because I am beginning to see things clearly, as I've never seen them before. . . . This Lindsay

Gordon idea, which you and I and all the best fellows we know—male and female—have been trying to live up to is good enough in showing you how to die, but it's 'not much account' in showing you how to live. I've lived up to it to the best of my ability, and nobody could call me a success, except in riding winners and that sort of thing. Ned, here, who knocked me out when I butted up against him at The Beach, has a much better idea than we have, and he's gone further than any of us ever will."—"An accident of birth," said the King, good-naturedly.—"It's a fortunate accident for the world that you, not *me*, are you."

"Poor old Sandy!" murmured Inez, affectionately.—"It is poor old Sandy! But let me get on; I haven't much time. What I'm getting at is that I hope you won't have any more to do with these Gordon ideas, Inez. Just make him the sort of wife Chris would have made him if . . ."—"If what, dear Sandy?"—"If God hadn't taken her. Promise me this, Inez—I've been very fond of you. Do you remember those lines I was so fond of quoting to you:

"Love of my life! we had lights in season—
Hard to part from, harder to keep—
We had strength to labour and souls to reason,
And seed to scatter and fruits to reap.
Though time estranges and fate disperses,
We have *had* our loves and our loving-mercies;
Though the gifts of the light in the end are curses,
Yet bides the gift of the darkness—sleep!"

She nodded and smiled. "Do you remember that I used to call you 'the fruit which hung too high on the tree,' even when you were a kiddy. You did hang too high for me?" She smiled again.

"Do you mind if I repeat *Podas Okus* to you? It's so awfully applicable, though I don't bear old Ned the malice which Achilles bore Agamemnon. That isn't where the likeness comes in. It's your graciousness in coming direct from your coronation banquet to my deathbed, which makes me long to voice those lines for the last time."—"Oh, don't be so gloomy, Sandy!" said Inez, forcing herself to tender laughter, with tears in her heart. "You're not going to die! Think how much better you've been to-day."—"I'm not better," he said, smiling, half affectionately, half grimly. "It's a flicker—it's the last flicker, Inez. But I'd like to get that poem off my chest before

I go."—"You're not going, Sandy. I refuse to believe it. But you won't be happy until you've recited *Podas Okus*. It was always a favourite of yours. We'd love to hear you do it."—"May I, Ned?"—"I'd love it."

Sandy, who knew the whole of Gordon's poems by heart, declaimed them well. He was feeling this poem and the occasion so strongly that they were all deeply affected, especially when he recited the opening lines:

"Am I waking? Was I sleeping?
Dearest, are you watching yet?
Traces on your cheeks of weeping
Glitter, 'tis in vain you fret. . . ."

and when he came to passages like:

"Dry those violet orbs that glisten,
Darling, I have had my day;
Place your hand in mine and listen,
Ere the strong soul cleaves its way
Through the death-mist hovering o'er me
As the stout ship cleaves the wave,
To my fathers, gone before me,
To the gods who love the brave!

* * * * *

"Yet the Elysian halls are spacious,
Somewhere near me I may keep
Room—who knows?—The gods are gracious;
Lay me lower—let me sleep!"

Except Sandy himself, all who were present felt how tragical it was. There were so many passages in the poem which were applicable to the grievously wounded man and the beautiful young Queen, still wearing her crown, to whom he had given his heart, though she had never pretended to give him hers. When he had finished reciting it, he said, "Ned, I want to say something to you."—"What is it, old man?" asked the King, affectionately.—"It's this. You needn't be worried at my taking the poem so personally, at my putting the words into my own mouth and picturing them as addressed to Inez."—"Say what you like, Sandy. I shan't take it wrong."—"You're right, Ned. There'll be no Romance of Joyous Garde for me. I feel like Lancelot when he said:

" I have done for ever with all these things—
Deeds that were joyous to knights and kings,
In days that with songs were cherished.
The songs are ended, the deeds are done,
There shall none of them gladden me now, not one ;
There is nothing good for me under the sun,
But to perish as these things perished.' "

He had exhausted himself. He sank back, with his eyes fixed on Inez. " He's doing too much, I'm afraid, Your Majesty. He'll pay for it to-morrow," said the nurse. Presently he raised his head a little, to say, " You mustn't misinterpret things, Ned. There's no Guinevere about Inez, except that she's Queen of Britain . . . and . . . married to a King Arthur. . . ." Then by a supreme effort he lifted his head from the pillow, murmuring :

" Hold hard, Ned ! Lift me down and lay me in the shade.' "

With these words he fell back insensible.

The nurse said, " Go quickly, Your Majesty, for if he recovers before you've gone, he'll tax himself again. I shan't let him see anyone to-morrow."

* * * * *

Sandy Gordon had no to-morrow. The excessive strain which he had gone through brought on acute pneumonia, followed by heart-failure in the night. But he had a King for one of his pall-bearers, and a Queen with bowed head beside his grave, which by special leave was dug beside the poet Gordon's in the Brighton Cemetery at Melbourne.

In the paddock of the Flemington Racecourse, on the spot where he fell, was placed a copy of Adam Lindsay Gordon's broken column and laurel-wreath, on which was engraved :

" In affectionate memory of their cousin,
Sir Alexander Gordon of The Lake
' Sandy Gunn,'

who was mortally wounded in saving the life of his King,
just after he had won the Melbourne Cup Steeplechase
on his Ch. h. Joyous Garde, on Nov. 11th, 2007.

Erected by Their Majesties King Edward VIII.
and Queen Inez."

* * * * *

On Chris's tomb in the Brighton Cemetery before he left for England, the King had these words added :

" In affectionate memory of Christian Elizabeth, daughter of Adam Lindsay Gordon, of Hallhead and Esslemont, and wife of King Edward VIII., ' The darling of all ! '

" ' No man may shirk the allotted work,
The deed to do, the death to die.' "

" Gordon."

EPILOGUE

THE NEW THEORY OF KINGSHIP

WHEN the British Cabinet heard on July 18th, 2005, of the death of Lord Sandringham and his whole family by the loss of an air-liner, they telephoned to the Governor-General in Australia, to respectfully represent to the new Marquess that, being now Heir-Presumptive to the Throne, and sole remaining male scion of the Royal Family, it was important that he should return to England at once, and marry a Princess, so as to make the succession safe, and to inform him that on his doing so, Parliament would vote him some Royal title, like Crown Prince, and assign to him the revenues of the Duchy of Cornwall and the other revenues usually enjoyed by the Prince of Wales, which had been in abeyance since King George VIII.'s accession.

Ned was so certain that something of the kind would happen, and so uncertain of how far he could legally oppose the British Parliament's wishes, if he were still a widower, that he determined to rush through a marriage with the woman he loved, before he let the Governor-General see him. The British Cabinet was annoyed at his having anticipated them, and the proposals to confer on him a Royal title and the revenues of the Prince of Wales were not brought before Parliament. To repair this, the late King had written him a cordial and affectionate letter, offering him an appropriate income and the use of one of his palaces if he wished to bring his Australian wife to Court. Ned did not show the letter to his beautiful Marchioness, lest she should beg him to go—for his sake, so that he might resume his proper position, more than for her own.

He felt that if he went to England as Crown Prince by Act of Parliament, he would have to submit to an elaborate system of

duties and advice, which the Cabinet imagined to be the best preparation for the position of Sovereign. And this system of preparation was exactly what he wished to avoid. They would try and fit him into the grooves and if he went home as Crown Prince he must conform. But if he postponed returning to England until he was King, he would be under no obligation to them, but only to the Constitution, and within the limits of the Constitution he meant to sweep away the rubbish-heaps of red tape and be as free in his private life as the President of the United States.

Likewise, since it was really the Prime Minister who reigned, and the King who humbly tendered his advice, he meant to be in direct touch with his people, to hear himself what public bodies and deputations and petitioners had to say, and if his judgment confirmed theirs, to ask the Prime Minister to have the subjects debated in the House of Commons. He did not intend that individual members of the Cabinet should have the power of burking a public demand by refusing to see a deputation, or meeting its petition with a blank negative. He did not mean to interfere with existing avenues for bringing a matter to the notice of Parliament, but he meant to exercise his Constitutional privilege of taking the advice of his Parliament upon what he considered matters of import, and not merely to hold a pen to sign the Prime Minister's orders. Labour had now a Parliament of its own, as independent as the L.C.C., and it was obvious that the Sovereign's relations with the representatives of Labour might be satisfactorily adjusted where the new Sovereign had been working for his living as an ordinary citizen in an ultra-democratic community.

* * * * *

When the new King, in a Colonial military uniform, and his exquisitely beautiful Australian wife made their entry into London, from Portsmouth, where they had left the giant battle cruiser which had brought them and the Gordon family home, their welcome was overwhelming. England was brimming with expectation. Portraits of Edward VIII. and the lovely Inez, transmitted by wireless, had appeared in the world's Dailies on the day after the accession. Fresh negatives of them both, taken that day, and duplicate negatives and as many prints as could be scraped together of the Lady Champion's numerous photographs, went to London for sale in the express airship, full of journalists and speculators, which flew to England that day, to exploit the happy accident of the new Queen being an Australian.

A day or two later London blossomed with their portraits; the rich tourists who made the airship trip for the Coronation, when they returned confirmed the reports of his fine physique and her extraordinary beauty.

They entered their capital in a touring-car, which enabled them to be seen better than any State carriage, and the Queen unveiled directly the car slowed down to take its place in the military procession. Most encouraging reports had come from Australia of the new King's capacity and common sense, and he was a picture of strength and health, whereas George VIII., who was much loved by his people, had outlived his physical vigour. It was difficult to imagine any woman more physically perfect than the lovely Queen.

Inez was depressed by Buckingham Palace, though it made her realize that she was Queen. Awed by the late King's Household and oppressed by his servants, she was not relieved until Connie and Captain Blatchford brought her all the evening papers, with whole columns in her praise. "Now we shall 'see ourselves as others see us,'" she said, and was further relieved when the A.D.C. informed her that the programme for the evening was a star-performance at His Majesty's Theatre. "You will be the star, Your Majesty," he said gallantly.—"It's worse than being tennis-champion, Inez," said the King.—"I'm sure it is."

"I suppose you won't go in for the Tennis-championship here, ma'am?" said the Lord Chamberlain, late Governor-General of Australia, to make conversation.—"Indeed, I shall! The King has given his permission." He raised his eyebrows politely to the King, who was being shown tit-bits in the "Evening News" by his mischievous sister-in-law. "Certainly I have," said Edward VIII. "Did you think that I should neglect such an opportunity of exemplifying the new theory of Kingship?"