

CHAPTER VI  
CAPTAIN CHARLES OTTERY

“And because time in it self . . . can receive no alteration, the hallowing must consist in the shape or countenance which we put upon the affaires that are incident in these dayes.”

RICHARD HOOKER, *Ecclesiastical Polity*.

## VI. CAPTAIN CHARLES OTTERY

### I

THE announcement on the first page of *The Times*, which Charles Ottery read at Flambard, and every letter of which was printed on his mind, ran thus:

“OTTERY.—Suddenly in London on the 9th inst., Captain Charles Ottery, late Scots Fusiliers, of Marlcote, Glos., at the age of 36.”

It fitted his case precisely. The regiment was right (the dropping of the “Royal” before its title was a familiar journalistic omission), Marlcote was his family place, and in June of the following year he would have just passed his thirty-sixth birthday.

I had known Charles since he was a school-boy, for he was my nephew’s friend, and many a half-sovereign I had tipped him in those days. He was the only child of a fine old Crimean veteran, and had gone straight from school into the family regiment, for a succession of Otterys had served in the Royal Scots Fusiliers, though they had not a drop of Scots blood. They came originally, I believe, from Devonshire, but had been settled for a couple of centuries in the Severn valley. Charles was a delightful boy, with old-fashioned manners, for he had been strictly brought up. He always

called his father "sir," I remember, and rose when he entered the room. He had a rather sullen, freckled face, tawny hair which curled crisply, and pale-blue eyes which could kindle into a dancing madness, or freeze into a curious mature solemnity. What impressed one about him as a boy was the feeling he gave of latent power. He never seemed to put all of himself into anything—there was an impression always of heavy reserves waiting to be called up. He was the average successful schoolboy, not specially brilliant at anything except at court-tennis, but generally liked and greatly respected. No one ever took liberties with Master Charles, for the sheath of pleasant manners was felt to cover a particularly stiff bone.

The War broke out when he had been a soldier for six months, and Charles went to France in September 1914. As his friends expected, he made an admirable regimental officer—one of the plain fighting men who were never sick or sorry during four gruelling years. Being a regular, he had no sensational advancement; he got his company during the Somme, and later had one or two staff jobs, from which he always managed to wangle a speedy return to his battalion. He was happy, because he was young and healthy and competent, and loved his men. After the Armistice he had the better part of a year in Ireland, a miserable time which tried him far more sorely in mind and body than his four years in France. Then his father died, and as soon as

the Scots Fusiliers had finished their Irish tour Charles left the service.

He inherited a large and unlucrative landed estate ; he was devoted to Marlcote, and he had to find some means of earning money if he wanted to retain it. Through the influence of an uncle he was taken into a London firm of merchant-bankers, and in his quiet resolute way set himself to learn his job. He proved to have a genuine talent for business. His mind was not quick, but it was powerful, and he used to burrow his way like a mole to the bottom of a question. Also there was something about his stability and force of character which made men instinctively trust him, and he earned that reputation for judgment the price of which is above rubies. No one called him clever, but everyone believed him to be wise. In three years he was a junior partner in his firm, and after that his advance was rapid. He became a director of the Bank of England, the youngest man, I believe, except Goschen, who ever entered the Bank Parlour ; he sat on more than one Government commission, and he was believed to be often consulted by the Treasury. He figured also in the public eye as an athlete, for he played his favourite court-tennis regularly, and had been twice runner-up for the amateur championship.

Then into his orderly life, like a warm spring wind upon a snowfield, came Pamela Brune. Pamela was my goddaughter, and I had watched with amazement her pass from a

plain, solemn child to a leggy girl and then to the prettiest débutante of her year. Almost in a moment, it seemed to me, the lines of her body changed from angularity to grace, the contours of her small face were moulded into exquisiteness, and her thin little neck became a fit setting for her lovely head. She was tall for a woman, nearly as tall as Charles, but so perfectly proportioned that her height did not take the eye; exquisiteness was the dominant impression, and a kind of swift airy vigour. In her colouring she had taken after her father, and I can best describe it as a delicate ivory lit up, as it were, from within, and nobly framed by her dusky hair. Her eyes were grey, with blue lights in them. Beyond doubt a beauty, and of a rare type. The transformation in her manner was not less striking. She had been a shy child, rather silent and reflective, a good companion on a long walk, when she would expound to me her highly original fancies, but apt at most times to escape notice. Now she was so brilliant to look at that such escape was not for her, and she had developed a manner which was at once defiant and defensive. Young men were a little afraid of her, her eyes were so compelling, taking in much and revealing little, and her deep voice had a disquieting candour.

Charles fell headlong in love, and I could see from the start that the affair would not go smoothly. To begin with, she was very young—scarcely nineteen—and was like a bird preening her wings for flight, whereas Charles was

thirty-five and fixed solidly on his perch. He was a little set in his ways and cocksure in his opinions, while she had the sceptical and critical innocence of youth. They became friends at once, but their friendship seemed slow to ripen into anything deeper. Pamela had nothing of the flirt in her, and though young men swarmed round her, there was no other suitor to give Charles heart-disease. The trouble was that he got no farther forward. One reason, perhaps, was that he was far too eligible. The girl had a notion that everyone desired the match, and that her parents counted on it, so naturally she revolted. Another thing—she was quicker-witted than Charles, and had a dozen interests to his one, so that his circumscription was apt to show up poorly in contrast. This was bad for him, for it cast him into a kind of irritable despair, and bad for Pamela, since it made her more critical. When he was schoolmasterish, the pupil put him to shame; when his mood was humble, hers was arrogant.

So during the month before the Flambard party the course of true love did not run smooth. The effect of a grand passion on Charles's tough solidity was what might have been looked for. His nature was not elastic, and instead of expanding under heat was in danger of warping. He was so desperately in love that all his foundations were upset. He could not fit his passion into his scheme of life, so his scheme of life went by the board. He was miserably conscious of being in a world

which he did not understand, of dealing with imponderable things over which he had no mastery. A hasty word, a cold glance from Pamela, would thrust this man, who had always prided himself upon his balance, into a fever of indecision. . . .

And just before Whitsuntide they had had something like a quarrel. He had been magisterial and she had been pert—no, “pert” is not the word—rather disdainful in a silken way, airily detached and infinitely distant. She had not sulked—that would have been far easier for Charles: she had simply set him back firmly among the ranks of her acquaintances. So he had gone to Flambard in a wretched state of mind, and her treatment of him there had been like an acid to his wounds. He found himself in a condition which he had never dreamed of—cut off from the common-sense world which he understood, and condemned to flounder among emotions and problems as evasive as dreams and yet with a terrible potency of torture. Moe was right: Charles Ottery was profoundly unhappy.

## II

He had entered upon the experiment at Flambard with a vague hope that he might learn something about the future which would ease his mind. What he did learn was that in a year's time he would be dead.

His first reaction was anger. For four years

he had faced the daily possibility, even the likelihood, of death. Now, if during those years anyone had prophesied his certain death at a certain time, he would have assaulted the prophet. That kind of thing was a breach of the unwritten rules of the game: one had to pretend to one's self and to the world that one would continue to live: it was the assumption which alone made war endurable. Therefore Charles Ottery's first feeling was wrathful and contemptuous. The Professor was dead; otherwise he would have had something to say to him.

This mood lasted perhaps two days—no longer. Gradually it dawned on his mind that this was a revelation altogether outside the control of the human will. He had believed completely in Moe, and he had seen *The Times* announcement with a blinding clarity which precluded the idea of a mistake. Pamela had shaken him out of his old world, and now he had fallen into a far stranger one, altogether beyond the kindly uses of humanity. He tried to be sceptical, but he had never had much gift for scepticism. Critical in any serious sense he could not be, for he had not the apparatus for criticism. Anger was succeeded by a fear which was almost panic. Charles was a notably brave man, and his courage had been well disciplined and tested. He had always been perfectly willing to run risks, and, if need be, to face death with his eyes open. But this was different—this undefined but certain fate towards which he must walk for the next twelve



months. He discovered that he passionately wanted to live. Pamela had dropped out of his thoughts, for she was now utterly beyond him—a doomed man could not be a lover—but his passion for her had enriched and deepened the world for him and therefore increased his love of life.

The first panic passed, and Charles forced himself into a kind of stoicism. Not scepticism, for he could not disbelieve, but a resolution to face up to whatever was in store. He felt hideously lonely, for not only was he too proud to confide in anyone, but he could think of no mortal man who had ever been in a like predicament. If he could have discovered a parallel case, past or present, he would have been comforted. So since there was no one to whom he could unburden his soul, he started to keep a diary. . . . I was not at this time in his confidence, but I have had the use of that diary in telling this story. In it he put down notes of his daily doings and of his state of mind, together with any thoughts that seemed to him cheering or otherwise. It is a scrappy and often confused record, but very illuminating, for he was honest with himself.

His first duty was to keep a stout face to the world, and therefore he must try to forget *The Times* paragraph in violent preoccupations. He could not face the society of his fellows, so he went little into the City, but he strove to crowd his life with intense activities. He practised his court-tennis for several hours

each day, played a good deal of golf, and took to keeping a six-tonner on Southampton Water and making week-end expeditions along the coast. From the diary it appeared that this last pursuit was the best aid to forgetfulness, so long as the weather was bad. In a difficult wind he had to concentrate all his faculties on managing the boat, but when there was no such need, he found the deck of his little yacht too conducive to painful meditation.

Presently he realised that these anodynes were no manner of good. Each spell of freedom from thought was succeeded by a longer spell of intense brooding. He had found no philosophy to comfort him, and no super-induced oblivion lasted long. So he decided that he must seek a different kind of life. He had an idea that if he went into the wilds he might draw courage from the primeval Nature which was all uncertainties and hazards. So in August he set off for Newfoundland alone, to hunt the migratory caribou.

Purposely he gave himself a rough trip. He went up-country to the Terra Nova district, and then with two guides penetrated far into the marshes and barrens of the interior. He limited his equipment to the bare necessities, and courted every kind of fatigue. He must have taken a good many risks in his river journey, for I heard from a man who followed his tracks for the brief second season in October that his guides had sworn never again to accompany such a madman. You see, he

knew for certain that nothing could kill him for many months. The diary, written up at night in his chilly camps, told the story fully. He got with ease the number of stags permitted by his licence—all of them good beasts—for, since he did not care a straw whether he killed or not, he found that he could not miss. But the interesting things were his thoughts, as they came to him while watching in the dusk by a half-frozen pond, or lying awake in his sleeping-bag looking at the cold stars.

He had begun to reflect on the implications of death, a subject to which he had never given much heed before. His religion was of the ordinary public-school brand, the fundamentals of Christianity accepted without much comprehension. There was an after-world, of course, about which a man did not greatly trouble himself: the important thing, the purpose of religion, was to have a decent code of conduct in the present one. But now the latter did not mean much to him, since his present life would soon be over. . . . There were pages of the diary filled with odd amateurish speculations about God and Eternity, and once or twice there was even a kind of prayer. But somewhere in the barrens Charles seems to have decided that he had better let metaphysics alone. What concerned him was how to pass the next eight months without disgracing his manhood. He noted cases of people he had known who, when their death sentence was pronounced by their doctor, had lived out the

remainder of their days with a stiff lip, even with cheerfulness.

The conclusion of this part of the diary, written before he sailed for home, seems to have been that all was lost but honour. He was like a man on a sinking ship, and owed it to himself to go down with fortitude. There were no entries during the voyage from St. John's, so the presumption is that this resolve gave him a certain peace.

That peace did not survive his return to England. He went back to the City, where he was badly needed, for the bottom was falling out of business. But he seemed unable to concentrate on his work. The sight of his familiar surroundings, his desk, his clerks, the business talks which assumed the continuity of life, the necessity of making plans which would not mature before the following June, put him into a fever of disquiet. I think that he had perhaps overtired himself in Newfoundland, and was physically rather unstrung; anyhow, on the plea of health, he again began to absent himself from his work. He felt that he must discover an anodyne to thought, or go mad.

The anodyne he tried was the worst conceivable. Charles had never led the life of pleasure, and had no relish for it; so now, when he attempted it, it was like brandy to a teetotaller. He belonged to Dillon's, and took to frequenting that club, and playing cards for high stakes. Now, it is a dangerous thing to gamble if you have the mania for it in your

blood, but it is more dangerous if your object is to blanket your mind. He won a good deal of money and lost a good deal, and he played with a cold intensity which rather scared his partners. . . . Also he, who had always been abstemious, took to doing himself too well. I met him one night in St James's Street, and got the impression that the sober Charles was rather drunk. . . . Then there was hunting. He had not had time for years to do much of that, but now he kept horses at Birkham, and went out twice a week. He behaved as he had behaved in the Terra Nova rapids, and took wild risks because he believed that nothing could harm him. For a couple of months he rode so hard that he made himself a nuisance in the field. . . . Then his confidence suddenly deserted him. It occurred to him that any day he might have a smash, and linger bed-ridden till the following June. So he got rid of his hunters and fled from Birkham.

The result of all this was that before Christmas he had begun to get for himself a doubtful name. At first no one believed that this decorous young man could run amok, but nobody's repute is iron-clad, and presently too many people were ready to surmise the worst. City men reported that he rarely showed up at his office, and was useless when he did. Hunting men had tales to tell of strange manners in the field and an insane foolhardiness. My nephew, who was one of his oldest friends, and belonged to Dillon's, would say

nothing at first when I asked him about the stories, but in the end he admitted reluctantly that they were true. "Charles has got mixed up with a poor lot," he said. "Drunken swine like L——, and half-witted boys like little E—— and fine old-fashioned crooks like B—— He hardly recognises me when we meet in the club, for he knows I don't like his bunch. In the evening he's apt to be tight after ten o'clock.

"God knows what's done it!" said my nephew dismally. "Looks as if he weren't able to take his corn. Too big a success too soon, you know. Well, he won't be a success long. . . . I put it down to a virtuous youth. If you don't blow off steam under twenty-five, you're apt to have a blow up later and scald yourself. . . . No, I don't think it is unrequited affection. I've heard that yarn, but I don't believe it. I saw Lady Pam at a dinner last week, and she had a face like a death's head. She's going the pace a bit herself, but she's not enjoying it. Whoever is behaving badly, it ain't her. My notion is that Charles hasn't given the girl a thought for months. Don't ask me for an explanation. Something has snapped in him, the way a race-horse oes suddenly wrong."

I confess that at the time I was more anxious about my goddaughter than about Charles. I knew him fairly well and liked him, but Pamela was very near my heart. I could not blame him, for it was she who had hitherto caused the trouble, but now it was very clear that things were not well with her. . . . She had refused to pay her usual Scots visits, and had

gone off with the Junipers to their place on the Riviera. The Juniper girl had only been an acquaintance, but she suddenly blossomed into a bosom friend. Now, the Junipers were not too well regarded by old-fashioned people. Tom and Mollie Nantley hated the business, but they had always made it a rule never to interfere with their daughters, and certainly up to now Pamela had deserved their confidence. It must have been gall and wormwood to them to see the papers full of pictures of the Juniper doings, with Pamela bathing and playing tennis and basking on the sands in the most raffish society. . . . After that she went on a cruise to the Red Sea with some Americans called Baffin. The Nantleys knew very little about the Baffins, so they hoped for the best; but from what I learned afterwards the company on the yacht was pretty mixed—a journalistic peer, two or three financiers, and a selection of amorous and alcoholic youth.

Pamela returned to England before the end of November. The family always stayed on at Wirlesdon till well into the new year, but she insisted on taking up her quarters in London. She acted in several entertainments got up for charity, and became the darling of the illustrated press. I saw her once in December, at a dinner given for a ball, and was glad that Mollie Nantley was not present. The adorable child that I had known had not altogether gone, but it was overlaid with tragic affectations. She had ruined her perfect colouring with cosmetics, and her manner had acquired the shrill vul-

garity which was then the fashion. She was as charming to me as ever, but in her air there was a curious defiance. Her face had been made up to look pert, but in repose it was tragic. I realised that it was all a desperate bravado to conceal suffering.

## III

Lamancha had a Christmas party at his house in Devonshire, and I went there on the 27th. After tea my hostess took me aside.

"We've made an awful *gaffe*," she said. "Charles Ottery is here, and I find to my horror that Pamela Brune is coming to-morrow. I can't very well put her off, but you know that things have not been going well with her and Charles, and their being together may be very painful for both of them."

I asked if Charles knew that Pamela was coming.

"I told him this morning, but he didn't seem interested. I hoped he would discover that he had an engagement elsewhere, but not a bit of it—he only looked blank and turned away. What on earth has happened to him, Ned? He is rather quarrelsome, when he isn't simply deadly dull, and he has such queer moping moods. There is something on his mind, and I don't believe that it's Pamela."

"Couldn't you let her know he is here?" I asked.



"I wired to Mollie Nantley, but the only reply I got was about Pamela's train. She is evidently coming with her eyes open."

Pamela duly arrived during the following afternoon, when we were out shooting Lamancha's hedgerow pheasants. I did not see her till dinner, and I had to go off at dawn next morning to London for an unexpected consultation. But that evening I had a very clear and most disquieting impression of her and Charles. Her manner was shrill and rather silly; she seemed to be acting a part which was utterly unsuited to her kind of beauty and to her character as I had known it. The house-party was not exciting, only pleasant and friendly, and she succeeded in making us all uncomfortable. I did not see her first meeting with Charles, but that evening she never looked at him, nor he at her. He drank rather too much wine at dinner, and afterwards played bezique owlishly in the smoking-room. I had tried to get a word with him, but he shunned me like the plague.

What happened after I left I learned from the diary. Behind the mask he had been deeply miserable, for the sight of the girl had brought back his old happier world. He realised that far down below all his anxieties lay his love for her—that indeed this love was subconsciously the cause of his frantic clutch on life. He had tried stoicism and had failed; he had tried drugging himself by excitement into forgetfulness and had failed not less dismally. Pamela's presence seemed to recall him to his

self-respect. He did not notice any change in her—his eyes had been too long looking inward to be very observant: he only knew that the woman who had once lit up his life was now for ever beyond him—worse still, that he had 'dropped to a level from which he could not look at her without shame. He fell into a mood of bitter abasement, which was far healthier than his previous desperation, for he was thinking now less of the death which was in store for him than of the code of honourable living to which he had been false.

That night he slept scarcely a wink, and next morning he did not show up at breakfast. He told the servant who called him that he was going for a long walk, and slipped out of the house before anybody was down. He felt that he had to be alone to wrestle with his soul.

The diary told something of his misery that day on the high Devon moors. The weather was quiet and tonic with a touch of frost, and he walked blindly over the uplands. Charles was too stiff-backed a fellow to indulge in self-pity, but his type is apt to be a prey to self contempt. He can have seen nothing of the bright landscape, for he was enveloped in a great darkness—regrets, remorse, a world of wrath with the horror of a deeper shade looming before him. He struggled to regain the captaincy of his soul, but he had no longer the impulse to strive, since he seemed to himself to have already foresworn his standards. There was nothing before him but a dreadful,

hopeless passivity, what the Bible calls an "awful looking-for of judgment." The hours of spiritual torment and rapid movement wore down his strength, and in the afternoon he found that he was very weary. So he walked slowly homeward, having dulled his bodily and mental senses but won no comfort.

In the dusk, at the head of one of the grassy rides in the home woods, as the fates ordained it, he met Pamela. She, unhappy also, had fled from the house for a little air and solitude. Both were so full of their own thoughts that they might have passed without recognition had they not encountered each other at a gate. Charles opened it, and held it wide for the stranger to pass, and it was the speaking of his name that enlightened him as to the personality of the stranger.

"Good evening, Captain Ottery," Pamela said.

He started and stared at her. Something in his appearance held her eyes, for a man does not go through hell without showing it. In those eyes there must have been wonder; there must have been pity too. He saw it, dulled though his senses were, and perhaps he saw also some trace of that suffering which I had noticed in London, for the girl was surprised and had no time to don her mask.

"Pamela!" he cried, and then his strength seemed to go from him, and he leaned heavily on the gate, so that his shoulder touched hers.

She drew back. "You are ill?"

He recovered himself. "No, not ill," he said. He could say no more, for when a man has been wrestling all day with truth he cannot easily lie.

She put a hand on his arm. "But you look so ill and strange."

And then some of the old tenderness must have come into her eyes and voice. "Oh, Charles," she cried, "what has happened to us?"

It was the word "us" that broke him down, for it told him that she too was at odds with life. He had a sudden flash of illumination. He saw that what he had once longed for was true, that her heart was his, and the realisation that not only life but love was lost to him was the last drop in his cup. He stood holding the gate, shaking like a reed, with eyes which, even in the half-light, seemed to be devoured with pain.

"You must have thought me a cad," he stammered. "I love you—I loved you beyond the world, but I dared not come near you. . . . I am a dying man . . . I will soon be dead."

His strength came back to him. He had a purpose now. He had found the only mortal in whom he could confide—must confide.

As they walked down the ride in the winter gloaming, with the happy lights of the house in the valley beneath them, he told her all, and as he spoke it seemed to him that he was cleansing his soul. She made no comment—did not utter a single word.

At the gate of the terrace gardens he stopped.

His manner was normal again, and his voice was quiet, almost matter-of-fact.

"Thank you for listening to me, Pamela," he said. "It has been a great comfort to me to tell you this. . . . It is the end for both of us. You see that, don't you? . . . We must never meet again. Good-bye, my dear."

He took her hand, and the touch of it shivered his enforced composure. "I love you . . . I love you," he moaned. . . .

She snatched her hand away.

"This is perfect nonsense," she said. "I won't . . ." and then fled down an alley, as she had once fled from me at Flambard.

Charles had some food in his room, and went to bed, where he slept for the first time for weeks. He had been through the extremes of hell, and nothing worse could await him. The thought gave him a miserable peace. He wrote a line to his hostess, and left for London by the early train.

#### IV

He was sitting next afternoon in his rooms in Mount Street when a lady was announced, and Pamela marched in on the heels of his servant. The room was in dusk, and it was her voice that revealed her to him.

"Turn on the light, Crocker," she said briskly, "and bring tea for two. As quick as possible, please, for I'm famishing."

I can picture her, for I know Pamela's ways,

plucking off her hat and tossing it on to a table, shaking up the cushions on the big sofa, and settling herself in a corner of it—Pamela no longer the affected miss of recent months, but the child of April and an April wind, with the freshness of a spring morning about her.

They had tea, for which the anxious Crocker provided muffins, rejoicing to see once again in the flat people feeding like Christians. Pamela chattered happily, chiefly gossip about Wirlesdon, while Charles pulled himself out of his lethargy and strove to rise to her mood. He even went to his bedroom, changed his collar and brushed his hair. When Crocker had cleared away the tea, she made him light his pipe. "You know you are never really happy with anything else," she said; and he obeyed, not having smoked a pipe since Newfoundland.

"Now," she said at last, when she had poked the fire into a blaze, "I want you to repeat very carefully all that rubbish you told me yesterday."

He obeyed—told the story slowly and dispassionately, without the emotion of the previous day. She listened carefully, and wrote down from his dictation the exact words he had read in *The Times*. She knitted her brows over them. "Pretty accurate, aren't they?" she asked. "Not much chance of mistaken identity."

"None," he said. "There are very few Otterys in the world, and every detail about me is correct."

"And you believe in it?"

"I must."

"I mean to say, you believe that you really saw that thing in *The Times*? You didn't dream it afterwards?"

"I saw it as clearly as I am seeing you."

"I wondered what tricks that old Professor man was up to at Flambard, but I had no notion it was anything as serious as this. What do you suppose the others saw? Uncle Ned is sure to know—I'll ask him."

"He saw nothing himself—he told me so. Lady Flambard fainted, and he was looking after her."

"She saw nothing either, then? I'm sorry, for I can't ask any of the men. I don't know Mr Tavanger or Mr Mayot or Sir Robert Good-  
eve, and Reggie Daker is too much of a donkey to count. It would be too delicate a subject to be inquisitive about with strangers. . . . You really are convinced that the Professor had got hold of some method of showing you the future?"

"Convinced beyond any possibility of doubt," said Charles dismally.

"Good. That settles one thing. . . . Now for the next point. The fact that you saw that stuff is no reason why it should happen. Supposing you had dreamed it, would you have allowed a dream, however vivid, to wreck your life?"

"But, Pamela 'dear, the case is quite different. Moe showed us what he called 'objective reality.' A dream would have been my

own concern, but this came from outside, quite independent of any effort of mine. It was the result of a scientific experiment."

"But the science may have been all cock-eyed. Most science is—at any rate, it changes a good deal faster than Paris fashions."

"You wouldn't have said that if you had been under his influence. He didn't want me to die—he didn't make *The Times* paragraph take that form—he only lifted the curtain an inch so that I could see what had actually happened a year ahead. How can I disbelieve what science brought to me out of space, without any preparation or motive? The whole thing was as mathematical and impersonal as an eclipse of the moon in an almanack."

"All right! Let's leave it at that. Assume that *The Times* is going to print the paragraph. The answer is that *The Times* is going to be badly diddled. Somebody will make a bloomer."

Charles shook his head. "I've tried to think that, but well—you know, that kind of mistake isn't made."

"Oh, isn't it? The papers announced Dollie's engagement to three different men—exact as you please—names and dates complete."

"But why should it make a blunder in this one case out of millions? Isn't it more reasonable to think that there is a moral certainty of its being right?"

Pamela was not succeeding with her arguments. They sounded thin to her own ears, in



spite of her solid conviction at the back of them. She sat up, an alert, masterful figure, youth girt for command. She had another appeal than logic.

"Charles," she said solemnly, "this is a horrible business for you, and you've got to pull yourself together. You must defy it. Make up your mind that you're not going to give it another thought. Get back to your work, and resolve that you don't care a lop-eared damn for Moe or science or anything else. Lose your temper with fate and frighten the blasted hussy." Tom Nantley had a turn for robust speech in the hunting-field, and his daughter remembered some of it.

Charles shook his head miserably.

"I've tried," he said, "but I can't. I simply haven't the manhood. . . . I know it's the right way, but my mind is poisoned already. I've got a germ in it that fevers me. . . . Besides, it isn't sense. You can't stop what is to be by saying that it won't be."

"Yes, you can," said the girl firmly. "That's the meaning of Free Will."

Charles dropped his head into his hands. The sight of Pamela thus restored to him was more than he could bear.

Then she had an inspiration.

"Do you remember the portrait in the dining-room at Wirlesdon of old Sir Somebody-Ap-Something—Mamma's Welsh ancestor? You know the story about him? He was on the side of Henry Tudor, and raised his men to march to Bosworth. But every witch and war-

lock in Carmarthen got on to their hindlegs and prophesied—said they saw him in a bloody shroud, and heard banshees wailing for him, and how Merlin had said that when the Ap-Something red and gold crossed Severn to join the Tudor green and white it would be the end of the race—all manner of cheery omens. Everybody in the place believed them, including his lady wife, who wept buckets and clung to his knees. What did the old sportsman do? Told all the warlocks to go to the devil, and marched gaily eastward, leaving his wife sewing his shroud and preparing the family vault.”

“What happened?” Charles had lifted his head.

“Happened? He turned the day at Bosworth, set the Tudor on the throne, got the Garter for his services—you see it in the portrait—and about half South Wales. He and his men came merrily home, and he lived till he was ninety-three. There’s an example for you!”

Pamela warmed to her argument.

“That sort of thing happened all the time in the old days. Whenever anybody had a down on you he got a local soothsayer to prophesy death and disaster in case you might believe it and lose your nerve. And if you had been having a row with the Church, some priest or bishop had an unpleasant vision about you. What was the result? Timid people took to their beds and died of fright, which was what the soothsayers wanted. Bold men like my ancestor paid not the slightest attention, and

nothing happened—except that, when they got a chance, they outed the priest and hanged the soothsayer.”

Charles was listening keenly.

“But the soothsayers were often right,” he objected.

“They were just as often wrong. The point is, that there were men brave enough to defy them—as you are going to do.”

“But the cases aren’t the same,” he protested. “That was ordinary vulgar magic, with a personal grudge behind it. I’m up against the last word in impersonal science.”

“My dear Charles,” she said sweetly, “you’ve let your brains go to seed. I never knew you miss a point before. Magic and astrology and that kind of thing were all the science the Middle Ages had, and they believed in them just as firmly as you believe in Moe. The point is that, in spite of their belief, there were people bold enough to defy it—and to win, as you are going to do. A thousand years hence the world may think Moe and Einstein and all those pundits as babyish as we think the old necromancers. Beliefs change, but courage is always the same. Courage is the line for you, my dear.”

At last she had moved him. There was a light in his eyes as he looked at her, perplexed and broken, but still a light.

“You think . . .” he began, but she broke in. . . .

“I think that you’re face to face with a crisis, Charles dear. Fate has played you an ugly

trick, but you're man enough to beat it. It's like the thing in the Bible about Jacob wrestling with the angel. You've got to wrestle with it, and if you wrestle hard enough it may bless you."

Her voice had lost its briskness, and had become soft and wooing. She jumped up from the sofa and came round behind his chair, as if she did not want him to see her face.

"I refuse to give another thought to the silly thing," she said. "We are going to behave as if Moe had never been born." Her hand was caressing his hair.

"But *you* are not condemned to death," he said.

"Oh, am I not?" she cried. "It's frightfully important for me. On June 10th of next year I shall be starting on my honeymoon."

That fetched him out of his chair.

He gazed blindly at her as she stood with her cheeks flushed and her eyes a little dim. For a full minute he strove for words and none came.

"Have you nothing to say?" she whispered. "Do you realise, sir, that I am asking you to marry me?"

## V

It was now that I entered the story. Mollie Nantley came to town and summoned me to a family conclave. She and Tom were in a mood between delight and anxiety.

"You got my wire?" she asked. "The announcement will be in the papers to-morrow. But they are not to be married till June. Too long to wait—I don't like these long engagements."

"You are pleased?" I asked.

"Tremendously—in a way. But we don't quite know what to think. They never saw each other for six months, and then it all came with a rush. Pam has been rather odd lately, you know, and Tom and I have been very worried. We saw that she was unhappy, and we thought that it might be about Charles. And Charles's behaviour has been something more than odd—so odd that Tom was in two minds about consenting to the engagement. You know how fond we were of him and how we believed in him, but his conduct before Christmas was rather shattering. You are too busy to hear gossip, but I can assure you that Charles has been the most talked-of man in London. Not pleasant gossip either."

"But the explanation seems quite simple," I said. "Two estranged lovers, both proud and both miserable and therefore rather desperate. Chance brings them together, misunderstandings disappear, and true love comes into its own."

Mollie bent her brows.

"It's not as simple as that. If that had been the way of things they ought to be riotously happy. But they're not—not in the least. Pam is as white as a sheet, and looks more like a widow than a bride. She's very sweet and

good—very different from before Christmas, when she was horribly tiresome—but you never saw such careworn eyes. She has something heavy on her mind. . . . And as for Charles! He is very good too and goes steadily to the City again, but he's not my notion of the happy lover. Tom and I are at our wits' end. I do wish you would have a talk with Pamela. She won't tell me anything—I really don't dare to ask—but you and she have always been friends, and if there is any trouble you might help her."

So Pamela came to tea with me, and the first sight of her told me that Mollie was right. In a week or two some alchemy had changed her utterly. Not a trace now of that hard, mirthless glitter which had scared me at the Lamanchas'. Her face was pale, her air quiet and composed, but there was in her eyes what I had seen in Charles Ottery's, an intense, anxious preoccupation.

She told me everything without pressing. She could not tell her parents, she said, for they would not understand, and, if they did, their sympathy would make things worse. But she longed for someone to confide in, and had decided on me.

I saw that it would be foolish to make light of the trouble. Indeed, I had no inclination that way, for I had seen the tortures that Good-*eve* was undergoing. She told me what she had said to Charles, and the line they were taking. I remember wondering if the man had the grit to go through with it; when I looked

at Pamela's clear eyes I had no doubt about the woman.

"He has gone back to his business and has forced himself to slave at it. He is crowding up his days with work. And he is keeping himself in hard training. . . . You see, he has tried the other dopes and found them no good. . . . But he has to fight every step of the road. Oh, Uncle Ned, I could howl with misery sometimes when I see him all drawn at the lips and hollow about the eyes. He doesn't sleep well, you see. But he is fighting, and not yielding one inch."

And then she quoted to me her saying about Jacob wrestling with the angel. "If we keep on grappling with the brute, it *must* bless us."

"I have to hold his hand all the time," she went on. "That's his hope of salvation. He is feeding on my complete confidence. . . . Oh no, it's not easy, but it's easier than his job. I've to pretend to be perfectly certain that we'll be married next June 10th, and to be always talking about where we shall go for our honeymoon, and where we shall live in town, and how we shall do up Marlcote."

She smiled wanly.

"I chatter about hotels and upholsterers and house-agents when I want to be praying. . . . But I think I understand my part. I have a considerable patch of hell to plough, but it's nothing like as hot as Charles's. . . . No, you can't help, Uncle Ned, dear. We have to go through with this thing ourselves—we two—

nobody else. Charles must never know that I have told you, for if he thought that anyone else knew it would add shyness to his trouble. . . . But it's a comfort to me to feel that you know. If anything happens . . . if we fail . . . I want you to realise that we went down fighting."

She kissed me and ran away, and I sat thinking a long time in my chair. She was right: no one could help these two through this purgatory. My heart ached for this child not out of her teens who was trying to lift her lover through the Slough of Despond by her sheer courage. I do not think that I have ever in my life so deeply admired a fellow-mortal. Pamela was the very genius of fortitude, courage winged and inspired and divinely lit. . . . I told myself that such a spirit could not fail if there was a God in Heaven.

I can only guess at what Charles suffered in the first months of the year. The diary revealed something, but not much, for the entries were scrappy: you see, he was not fighting the battle alone, as he had done in the autumn; he had Pamela for his guide and confessor.

He stuck like a leech to his work, and from all accounts did it well. My nephew said that old Charles had "taken a pull on himself, but had become a cheerless bird." People in the City, when I asked about him, were cordial enough. He had been put on a new economic commission at which he was working hard.



One man said that his examination of a high Treasury official was one of the most searching things he had ever heard. Our financial affairs at that time were in a considerable mess, and Charles was bending all his powers to straightening them out.

It was much to have got his brain functioning again. But of course it did not mean the recovery of his old interests. He had only one interest—how to keep his head up till June, and one absorbing desire—to be with Pamela. The girl gave him more than the sustenance of her confidence; there were hours when the love of her so filled his mind that it drove out the gnawing pain, and that meant hours of rest. As sleep restores the body, so these spells of an almost happy absorption restored his spirit.

But he had patches of utter blackness, as the diary showed. He held himself firm to his resolution by a constant effort of will. He could not despair when Pamela kept her courage. . . . But he would waver at moments, and only recover himself out of shame. There were times, too, when he bitterly reproached himself. He had brought an innocent child into his tortured world, and made her share in the tortures. Another life besides his own would be ruined. Out of such fits of self-contempt he had to be dragged painfully by Pamela's affection. She had to convince him anew that she preferred Tophet in his company to Paradise alone.

In March Pamela told me that she had

offered to marry him at once, and that he had refused. He was on his probation, he said, and marriage was to be the reward of victory. Also, if he was to be in the grave on June 10th, he did not want Pamela to be a widow. The girl argued, she told me, that immediate marriage would be an extra defiance to Fate, and a proof of their confidence, but Charles was adamant. I dare say he was right: he had to settle such a question with his own soul.

I met him occasionally during those months. Never in ordinary society: by a right instinct Pamela and he decided that they could not go about together and be congratulated—that would make too heavy demands on their powers of camouflage. But I ran across him several times in the street; and I sat next to him at a luncheon given by the Prime Minister to the American Debt Commission. Knowing the story, I looked for changes in him, and I noted several things which were probably hidden from other people. He had begun to speak rather slowly, as if he had difficulty in finding the correct words. He did not look an interlocutor in the face, but fixed his eyes, while he spoke, steadily on the tablecloth. Also, though his colour was healthy, his skin seemed to be drawn too tight around lips and chin, reminding me of a certain Army Commander during the bad time in '18.

I asked about Pamela.

"Yes, she's in town," he said. "The Nantleys have been up since January. She has

caught a beastly cold, and I made her promise to stay indoors in this bitter weather."

Two days later I picked up an evening paper and read a paragraph which sent me post-haste to the telephone. It announced that Lady Pamela Brune was ill with pneumonia, and that anxiety was felt about her condition.

## VI

The diary told the tale of the next three weeks. Charles had to return to his diary, for he had no other confidant. And a stranger story I have never read.

From the first he was certain that Pamela would die. He was quite clear about this, and he had also become assured of his own end. Their love was to be blotted out by the cold hand of death. For a day or two he was in a stupor of utter hopelessness, waiting on fate like a condemned man who hears the gallows being hammered together and sees the clock moving towards the appointed hour.

Some of the entries were clear enough. He thought that Pamela would die at once while he himself must wait until June, and there were distraught queries as to how he could endure the interval. His appointed hour could not be anticipated, and a world without Pamela was a horror which came near to unhinging his mind. His writing tailed away into blots and dashes. In his agony he seemed several times to have driven his pen through the paper. . . .

Then suddenly the mist cleared. The diary was nothing but jottings and confused reflections, so the sequence of his moods could not be exactly traced, but it was plain that something tremendous had happened. . . .

It seemed to have come suddenly late at night, for he noted the hour—1.30—and that he had been walking the Embankment since eight. Hitherto he had had a dual consciousness, seeing Pamela and himself as sufferers under the same doom, and enduring a double torture. Love and fear for both the girl and himself had brought his mind almost to a delirium, but now there descended upon it a great clarity.

The emotion remained, but now the object was single, for his own death dropped out of the picture. It became suddenly too small a thing to waste a thought on. There were entries like this: "I have torn up the almanack on which I had been marking off the days till June 10th. . . . I have been an accursed coward, God forgive me. . . . Pamela is dying, and I have been thinking of my own wretched, rotten life."

He went on steadily with his work, because he thought she would have wished him to, but he never moved far from a telephone. Meanwhile, the poor child was fighting a very desperate battle. I went round to South Audley Street as often as I could, and a white-faced Mollie gave me the last bulletins. There was one night when it seemed certain that Pamela could not see the morning, but morn-

ing came and the thread of life still held. She was delirious, talking about Charles mostly, and the mountain inn in the Tyrol where they were going for their honeymoon. Thank God, Charles was not there to listen to that!

He did not go near the house, which I thought was wise, but the diary revealed that he spent the midnight hours striding about Mayfair. He was waiting for her death, waiting for Mollie's summons to look for the last time upon what was so dear. . . .

He was no longer in torment. Indeed, he was calm now, if you can call that calm which is the uttermost despair. His life was bereft of every shadow of value, every spark of colour, and he was living in a bleak desert, looking with aching eyes and a breaking heart at a beautiful star setting below the sky-line, a star which was the only light in the encroaching gloom to lead him home. That very metaphor was in the diary. He probably got it out of some hymn, and I never in my life knew Charles use a metaphor before.

And then there came another change—it is plain in the diary—but this time it was a wholesale revolution, by which the whole man was moved to a different plane. . . .

His own predestined death had been put aside as too trivial for a thought, but now suddenly Death itself came to have no meaning. The ancient shadow disappeared in the great brightness of his love.

Every man has some metaphysics and poetry in his soul, but people like Charles lack the gift of expression. The diary had only broken sentences, but they were more poignant than any eloquence. If he had cared about the poets he might have found some one of them to give him apt words ; as it was, he could only stumble along among clumsy phrases. But there was no doubt about his meaning. He had discovered for himself the immortality of love. The angel with whom he had grappled had at last blessed him.

He had somehow in his agony climbed to a high place from which he had a wide prospect. He saw all things in a new perspective. Death was only a stumble in the race, a brief halt in an immortal pilgrimage. He and Pamela had won something which could never be taken away. . . . This man of prose and affairs became a mystic. One side of him went about his daily round, and waited hungrily for telephone calls, but the other was in a quiet country where Pamela's happy spirit moved in eternal vigour and youth. He had no hope in the lesser sense, for that is a mundane thing ; but he had won peace, the kind that the world does not give. . . .

Hope, the lesser hope, was to follow. There came a day when the news from South Audley Street improved, and then there was a quick uprush of vitality in the patient. One morning early in May Mollie telephoned to me that Pamela was out of danger. I went straightway

to the City and found Charles in his office, busy as if nothing had happened.

I remember that he seemed to me almost indecently composed. But when he spoke he no longer kept his eyes down, but looked me straight in the face, and there was something in those eyes of his which made me want to shout. It was more than peace—it was a radiant serenity. Charles had come out of the Valley of the Shadow to the Delectable Mountains. Nothing in Heaven or earth could harm him now. I had the conviction that if he had been a poet he could have written something that would have solemnised mankind. As it was, he only squeezed my hand.

## VII

I went down to Wirlesdon for the wedding, which was to be in the village church. Charles had gone for an early morning swim in the lake, and I met him coming up with his hair damp and a towel over his shoulder. I had motored from London and had *The Times* in my hand, but he never glanced at it. Half an hour later I saw him at breakfast, but he had not raided the pile of newspapers on the side-table.

It was a gorgeous June morning, and presently I found Pamela in the garden, busy among the midsummer flowers—a taller and paler Pamela, with the wonderful pure com-

plexion of one who has been down into the shades.

"It's all there," she whispered to me, so that her sister Dollie should not hear. "Exactly as he saw it. . . . We shall have a lot of questions to answer to-day. . . . I showed it to Charles, but he scarcely glanced at it. It doesn't interest him. I believe he has forgotten all about it."

"A queer business, wasn't it?" Charles told me in the autumn. "Oh yes, it was all explained. There was an old boy of my name, a sort of third cousin of my great-grandfather. I had never heard of him. He had been in the Scots Guards, and had retired as a captain about fifty years ago. Well, he died in a London hotel on June 9th. He was a bachelor, and had no near relations, so his servant sent the notice of his death to *The Times*. The man's handwriting was not very clear, and the newspaper people read the age as thirty-six instead of eighty-six. . . . Also, the old chap always spoke of his regiment as the Scots Fusilier Guards, and the servant, not being well up in military history, confused it with the Scots Fusiliers. . . . He lived in a villa at Cheltenham, which he had christened Marl-cote, after the family place."