

Frances Hodgson Burnett

The Making of a Marchioness

PART ONE

Chapter 1

When Miss Fox-Seton descended from the twopenny bus as it drew up, she gathered her trim tailor-made skirt about her with neatness and decorum, being well used to getting in and out of twopenny buses and to making her way across muddy London streets. A woman whose tailor-made suit must last two or three years soon learns how to protect it from splashes, and how to aid it to retain the freshness of its folds. During her trudging about this morning in the wet, Emily Fox-Seton had been very careful, and, in fact, was returning to Mortimer Street as unspotted as she had left it. She had been thinking a good deal about her dress — this particular faithful one which she had already worn through a twelvemonth. Skirts had made one of their appalling changes, and as she walked down Regent Street and Bond Street she had stopped at the windows of more than one shop bearing the sign "Ladies' Tailor and Habit-Maker," and had looked at the tautly attired, preternaturally slim models, her large, honest hazel eyes wearing an anxious expression. She

was trying to discover *where* seams were to be placed and how gathers were to be hung; or if there were to be gathers at all; or if one had to be bereft of every seam in a style so unrelenting as to forbid the possibility of the honest and semi-penniless struggling with the problem of remodelling last season's skirt at all. "As it is only quite an ordinary brown," she had murmured to herself, "I might be able to buy a yard or so to match it, and I *might* be able to join the gore near the pleats at the back so that it would not be seen."

She quite beamed as she reached the happy conclusion. She was such a simple, normal-minded creature that it took but little to brighten the aspect of life for her and to cause her to break into her good-natured, childlike smile. A little kindness from any one, a little pleasure or a little comfort, made her glow with nice-tempered enjoyment. As she got out of the bus, and picked up her rough brown skirt, prepared to tramp bravely through the mud of Mortimer Street to her lodgings, she was positively radiant. It was not only her smile which was childlike, her face itself was childlike for a woman of her age and size. She was thirty-four and a well-set-up creature, with fine square shoulders and a long small waist and good hips. She was a big woman, but carried herself well, and having solved the problem of obtaining, through marvels of energy and management, one good dress a year, wore it so well, and changed her old ones so dexterously, that

she always looked rather smartly dressed. She had nice, round, fresh cheeks and nice, big, honest eyes, plenty of mouse-brown hair and a short, straight nose. She was striking and well-bred-looking, and her plenitude of good-natured interest in everybody, and her pleasure in everything out of which pleasure could be wrested, gave her big eyes a fresh look which made her seem rather like a nice overgrown girl than a mature woman whose life was a continuous struggle with the narrowest of mean fortunes.

She was a woman of good blood and of good education, as the education of such women goes. She had few relatives, and none of them had any intention of burdening themselves with her pennilessness. They were people of excellent family, but had quite enough to do to keep their sons in the army or navy and find husbands for their daughters. When Emily's mother had died and her small annuity had died with her, none of them had wanted the care of a big raw-boned girl, and Emily had had the situation frankly explained to her. At eighteen she had begun to work as assistant teacher in a small school; the year following she had taken a place as nursery-governess; then she had been reading-companion to an unpleasant old woman in Northumberland. The old woman had lived in the country, and her relatives had hovered over her like vultures awaiting her decease. The household had been gloomy and gruesome enough to have driven into

melancholy madness any girl not of the sanest and most matter-of-fact temperament. Emily Fox-Seton had endured it with an unfailing good nature, which at last had actually awakened in the breast of her mistress a ray of human feeling. When the old woman at length died, and Emily was to be turned out into the world, it was revealed that she had been left a legacy of a few hundred pounds, and a letter containing some rather practical, if harshly expressed, advice.

Go back to London [Mrs. Maytham had written in her feeble, crabbed hand]. You are not clever enough to do anything remarkable in the way of earning your living, but you are so good-natured that you can make yourself useful to a lot of helpless creatures who will pay you a trifle for looking after them and the affairs they are too lazy or too foolish to manage for themselves. You might get on to one of the second-class fashion-papers to answer ridiculous questions about house-keeping or wall-papers or freckles. You know the kind of thing I mean. You might write notes or do accounts and shopping for some lazy woman. You are a practical, honest creature, and you have good manners. I have often thought that you had just the kind of commonplace gifts that a host of commonplace people want to find at their service. An old servant of mine who lives in Mortimer Street would probably give you cheap, decent lodgings, and behave well to you for my sake. She has reason to be fond of me. Tell her I sent you to her, and that she must take you in for ten shillings a week.

Emily wept for gratitude, and ever afterward enthroned old Mrs. Maytham on an altar as a princely and sainted benefactor, though after she had invested her legacy she got only twenty pounds a year from it.

"It was so *kind* of her," she used to say with heartfelt humbleness of spirit. "I never *dreamed* of her doing such a generous thing. I hadn't a *shadow* of a claim upon her — not a *shadow* ." It was her way to express her honest emotions with emphasis which italicised, as it were, her outpourings of pleasure or appreciation.

She returned to London and presented herself to the ex-serving-woman. Mrs. Cupp had indeed reason to remember her mistress gratefully. At a time when youth and indiscreet affection had betrayed her disastrously, she had been saved from open disgrace and taken care of by Mrs. Maytham.

The old lady, who had then been a vigorous, sharp-tongued, middle-aged woman, had made the soldier lover marry his despairing sweetheart, and when he had promptly drunk himself to death, she had set her up in a lodging-house which had thriven and enabled her to support herself and her daughter decently.

In the second story of her respectable, dingy house there was a small room which she went to some trouble to furnish up for her dead mistress's friend. It was made into a bed-sitting-room with the aid of a cot which Emily herself bought and disguised decently as a

couch during the daytime, by means of a red and blue Como blanket. The one window of the room looked out upon a black little back-yard and a sooty wall on which thin cats crept stealthily or sat and mournfully gazed at fate. The Como rug played a large part in the decoration of the apartment. One of them, with a piece of tape run through a hem, hung over the door in the character of a *portière* ; another covered a corner which was Miss Fox-Seton's sole wardrobe. As she began to get work, the cheerful, aspiring creature bought herself a Kensington carpet-square, as red as Kensington art would permit it to be. She covered her chairs with Turkey-red cotton, frilling them round the seats. Over her cheap white muslin curtains (eight and eleven a pair at Robson's) she hung Turkey-red draperies. She bought a cheap cushion at one of Liberty's sales, and some bits of twopenny-halfpenny art china for her narrow mantelpiece. A lacquered tea-tray and a tea-set of a single cup and saucer, a plate and a teapot, made her feel herself almost sumptuous. After a day spent in trudging about in the wet or cold of the streets, doing other people's shopping, or searching for dressmakers or servants' characters for her patrons, she used to think of her bed-sitting-room with joyful anticipation. Mrs. Cupp always had a bright fire glowing in her tiny grate when she came in, and when her lamp was lighted under its home-made shade of crimson Japanese paper, its cheerful air, combining itself with the singing of her

little, fat, black kettle on the hob, seemed absolute luxury to a tired, damp woman.

Mrs. Cupp and Jane Cupp were very kind and attentive to her. No one who lived in the same house with her could have helped liking her. She gave so little trouble, and was so expansively pleased by any attention, that the Cupps, — who were sometimes rather bullied and snubbed by the "professionals" who generally occupied their other rooms, — quite loved her. Sometimes the "professionals," extremely smart ladies and gentlemen who did turns at the balls or played small parts at theatres, were irregular in their payments or went away leaving bills behind them; but Miss Fox-Seton's payments were as regular as Saturday night, and, in fact, there had been times when, luck being against her, Emily had gone extremely hungry during a whole week rather than buy her lunches at the ladies' tea-shops with the money that would pay her rent.

In the honest minds of the Cupps, she had become a sort of possession of which they were proud. She seemed to bring into their dingy lodging-house a touch of the great world, — that world whose people lived in Mayfair and had country-houses where they entertained parties for the shooting and the hunting, and in which also existed the maids and matrons who on cold spring mornings sat, amid billows of satin and tulle and lace, surrounded with nodding plumes,

waiting, shivering, for hours in their carriages that they might at last enter Buckingham Palace and be admitted to the Drawing-room. Mrs. Cupp knew that Miss Fox-Seton was "well connected;" she knew that she possessed an aunt with a title, though her ladyship never took the slightest notice of her niece. Jane Cupp took "Modern Society," and now and then had the pleasure of reading aloud to her young man little incidents concerning some castle or manor in which Miss Fox-Seton's aunt, Lady Malfry, was staying with earls and special favorites of the Prince's. Jane also knew that Miss Fox-Seton occasionally sent letters addressed "To the Right Honourable the Countess of So-and-so," and received replies stamped with coronets. Once even a letter had arrived adorned with strawberry-leaves, an incident which Mrs. Cupp and Jane had discussed with deep interest over their hot buttered-toast and tea.

Emily Fox-Seton, however, was far from making any professions of grandeur. As time went on she had become fond enough of the Cupps to be quite frank with them about her connections with these grand people. The countess had heard from a friend that Miss Fox-Seton had once found her an excellent governess, and she had commissioned her to find for her a reliable young ladies' serving-maid. She had done some secretarial work for a charity of which the duchess was patroness. In fact, these people knew her only as a

well-bred woman who for a modest remuneration would make herself extremely useful in numberless practical ways. She knew much more of them than they knew of her, and, in her affectionate admiration for those who treated her with human kindness, sometimes spoke to Mrs. Cupp or Jane of their beauty or charity with a very nice, ingenuous feeling. Naturally some of her patrons grew fond of her, and as she was a fine, handsome young woman with a perfectly correct bearing, they gave her little pleasures, inviting her to tea or luncheon, or taking her to the theatre.

Her enjoyment of these things was so frank and grateful that the Cupps counted them among their own joys. Jane Cupp — who knew something of dressmaking — felt it a brilliant thing to be called upon to renovate an old dress or help in the making of a new one for some festivity. The Cupps thought their tall, well-built lodger something of a beauty, and when they had helped her to dress for the evening, baring her fine, big white neck and arms, and adorning her thick braids of hair with some sparkling, trembling ornaments, after putting her in her four-wheeled cab, they used to go back to their kitchen and talk about her, and wonder that some gentleman who wanted a handsome, stylish woman at the head of his table, did not lay himself and his fortune at her feet.

"In the photograph-shops in Regent Street you see many a lady in a coronet that hasn't half the good

looks she has," Mrs. Cupp remarked frequently. "She's got a nice complexion and a fine head of hair, and — if you ask *me* — she's got as nice a pair of clear eyes as a lady could have. Then look at her figure — her neck and her waist! That kind of big long throat of hers would set off rows of pearls or diamonds beautiful! She's a lady born, too, for all her simple, every-day way; and she's a sweet creature, if ever there was one. For kind-heartedness and good-nature I never saw her equal."

Miss Fox-Seton had middle-class patrons as well as noble ones, — in fact, those of the middle class were far more numerous than the duchesses, — so it had been possible for her to do more than one good turn for the Cupp household. She had got sewing in Maida Vale and Bloomsbury for Jane Cupp many a time, and Mrs. Cupp's dining-room floor had been occupied for years by a young man Emily had been able to recommend. Her own appreciation of good turns made her eager to do them for others. She never let slip a chance to help any one in any way.

It was a good-natured thing done by one of her patrons who liked her, which made her so radiant as she walked through the mud this morning. She was inordinately fond of the country, and having had what she called "a bad winter," she had not seen the remotest chance of getting out of town at all during the summer months. The weather was beginning to be unusually

hot, and her small red room, which seemed so cosy in winter, was shut in by a high wall from all chance of breezes. Occasionally she lay and panted a little in her cot, and felt that when all the private omnibuses, loaded with trunks and servants, had rattled away and deposited their burdens at the various stations, life in town would be rather lonely. Every one she knew would have gone somewhere, and Mortimer Street in August was a melancholy thing.

And Lady Maria had actually invited her to Mallowe. What a piece of good fortune — what an extraordinary piece of kindness!

She did not know what a source of entertainment she was to Lady Maria, and how the shrewd, worldly old thing liked her. Lady Maria Bayne was the cleverest, sharpest-tongued, smartest old woman in London. She knew everybody and had done everything in her youth, a good many things not considered highly proper. A certain royal duke had been much pleased with her and people had said some very nasty things about it. But this had not hurt Lady Maria. She knew how to say nasty things herself, and as she said them wittily they were usually listened to and repeated.

Emily Fox-Seton had gone to her first to write notes for an hour every evening. She had sent, declined, and accepted invitations, and put off charities and dull people. She wrote a fine, dashing hand, and had a matter-of-fact intelligence and knowledge of things.

Lady Maria began to depend on her and to find that she could be sent on errands and depended on to do a number of things. Consequently, she was often at South Audley Street, and once, when Lady Maria was suddenly taken ill and was horribly frightened about herself, Emily was such a comfort to her that she kept her for three weeks.

"The creature is so cheerful and perfectly free from vice that she's a relief," her ladyship said to her nephew afterward. "So many women are affected cats. She'll go out and buy you a box of pills or a porous plaster, but at the same time she has a kind of simplicity and freedom from spites and envies which might be the natural thing for a princess."

So it happened that occasionally Emily put on her best dress and most carefully built hat and went to South Audley Street to tea. (Sometimes she had previously gone in buses to some remote place in the City to buy a special tea of which there had been rumours.) She met some very smart people and rarely any stupid ones, Lady Maria being incased in a perfect, frank armour of good-humoured selfishness, which would have been capable of burning dulness at the stake.

"I won't have dull people," she used to say. "I'm dull myself."

When Emily Fox-Seton went to her on the morning in which this story opens, she found her

consulting her visiting-book and making lists.

"I'm arranging my parties for Mallowe," she said rather crossly. "How tiresome it is! The people one wants at the same time are always nailed to the opposite ends of the earth. And then things are found out about people, and one can't have them till it's blown over. Those ridiculous Dexters! They were the nicest possible pair — both of them good-looking and both of them ready to flirt with anybody. But there was too much flirting, I suppose. Good heavens! if I couldn't have a scandal and keep it quiet, I wouldn't have a scandal at all. Come and help me, Emily."

Emily sat down beside her.

"You see, it is my early August party," said her ladyship, rubbing her delicate little old nose with her pencil, "and Walderhurst is coming to me. It always amuses me to have Walderhurst. The moment a man like that comes into a room the women begin to frisk about and swim and languish, except those who try to get up interesting conversations they think likely to attract his attention. They all think it is possible that he may marry them. If he were a Mormon he might have marchionesses of Walderhurst of all shapes and sizes."

"I suppose," said Emily, "that he was very much in love with his first wife and will never marry again."

"He wasn't in love with her any more than he was in love with his housemaid. He knew he must marry, and thought it very annoying. As the child died, I

believe he thinks it his duty to marry again. But he hates it. He's rather dull, and he can't bear women fussing about and wanting to be made love to."

They went over the visiting-book and discussed people and dates seriously. The list was made and the notes written before Emily left the house. It was not until she had got up and was buttoning her coat that Lady Maria bestowed her boon.

"Emily," she said, "I am going to ask you to Mallowe on the 2d. I want you to help me to take care of people and keep them from boring me and one another, though I don't mind their boring one another half so much as I mind their boring me. I want to be able to go off and take my nap at any hour I choose. I will *not* entertain people. What you can do is to lead them off to gather things or look at church towers. I hope you'll come."

Emily Fox-Seton's face flushed rosily, and her eyes opened and sparkled.

"O Lady Maria, you *are* kind!" she said. "You know how I should enjoy it. I have heard so much of Mallowe. Every one says it is so beautiful and that there are no such gardens in England."

"They are good gardens. My husband was rather mad about roses. The best train for you to take is the 2:30 from Paddington. That will bring you to the Court just in time for tea on the lawn."

Emily could have kissed Lady Maria if they had

been on the terms which lead people to make demonstrations of affection. But she would have been quite as likely to kiss the butler when he bent over her at dinner and murmured in dignified confidence, "Port or sherry, miss?" Bibsworth would have been no more astonished than Lady Maria would, and Bibsworth certainly would have expired of disgust and horror.

She was so happy when she hailed the twopenny bus that when she got into it her face was beaming with the delight which adds freshness and good looks to any woman. To think that such good luck had come to her! To think of leaving her hot little room behind her and going as a guest to one of the most beautiful old houses in England! How delightful it would be to live for a while quite naturally the life the fortunate people lived year after year — to be a part of the beautiful order and picturesqueness and dignity of it! To sleep in a lovely bedroom, to be called in the morning by a perfect housemaid, to have one's early tea served in a delicate cup, and to listen as one drank it to the birds singing in the trees in the park! She had an ingenuous appreciation of the simplest material joys, and the fact that she would wear her nicest clothes every day, and dress for dinner every evening, was a delightful thing to reflect upon. She got so much more out of life than most people, though she was not aware of it.

She opened the front door of the house in Mortimer Street with her latch-key, and went upstairs,

almost unconscious that the damp heat was dreadful. She met Jane Cupp coming down, and smiled at her happily.

"Jane," she said, "if you are not busy, I should like to have a little talk with you. Will you come into my room?"

"Yes, miss," Jane replied, with her usual respectful lady's maid's air. It was in truth Jane's highest ambition to become some day maid to a great lady, and she privately felt that her association with Miss Fox-Seton was the best possible training. She used to ask to be allowed to dress her when she went out, and had felt it a privilege to be permitted to "do" her hair.

She helped Emily to remove her walking dress, and neatly folded away her gloves and veil. She knelt down before her as soon as she saw her seat herself to take off her muddy boots.

"Oh, *thank* you, Jane," Emily exclaimed, with her kind italicised manner. "That *is* good of you. I *am* tired, really. But such a nice thing has happened. I have had such a delightful invitation for the first week in August."

"I'm sure you'll enjoy it, miss," said Jane. "It's so hot in August."

"Lady Maria Bayne has been kind enough to invite me to Mallowe Court," explained Emily, smiling down at the cheap slipper Jane was putting on her large, well-shaped foot. She was built on a large scale, and

her foot was of no Cinderella-like proportions.

"O miss!" exclaimed Jane. "How beautiful! I was reading about Mallowe in 'Modern Society' the other day, and it said it was lovely and her ladyship's parties were wonderful for smartness. The paragraph was about the Marquis of Walderhurst."

"He is Lady Maria's cousin," said Emily, "and he will be there when I am."

She was a friendly creature, and lived a life so really isolated from any ordinary companionship that her simple little talks with Jane and Mrs. Cupp were a pleasure to her. The Cupps were neither gossiping nor intrusive, and she felt as if they were her friends. Once when she had been ill for a week she remembered suddenly realising that she had no intimates at all, and that if she died Mrs. Cupp's and Jane's would certainly be the last faces — and the only ones — she would see. She had cried a little the night she thought of it, but then, as she told herself, she was feverish and weak, and it made her morbid.

"It was because of this invitation that I wanted to talk to you, Jane," she went on. "You see, we shall have to begin to contrive about dresses."

"Yes, indeed, miss. It's fortunate that the summer sales are on, isn't it? I saw some beautiful colored linens yesterday. They were so cheap, and they do make up so smart for the country. Then you've got your new Tussores with the blue collar and waistband. It does

become you."

"I must say I think that a Tussoire always looks fresh," said Emily, "and I saw a really nice little tan toque — one of those soft straw ones — for three and eleven. And just a twist of blue chiffon and a wing would make it look quite *good*."

She was very clever with her fingers, and often did excellent things with a bit of chiffon and a wing, or a few yards of linen or muslin and a remnant of lace picked up at a sale. She and Jane spent quite a happy afternoon in careful united contemplation of the resources of her limited wardrobe. They found that the brown skirt *could* be altered, and, with the addition of new *revers* and collar and a *jabot* of string-coloured lace at the neck, would look quite fresh. A black net evening dress, which a patron had good-naturedly given her the year before, could be remodelled and touched up delightfully. Her fresh face and her square white shoulders were particularly adorned by black. There was a white dress which could be sent to the cleaner's, and an old pink one whose superfluous breadths could be combined with lace and achieve wonders.

"Indeed, I think I shall be very well off for dinner-dresses," said Emily. "Nobody expects me to change often. Every one knows — if they notice at all." She did not know she was humble-minded and of an angelic contentedness of spirit. In fact, she did not find herself interested in contemplation of her own qualities,

but in contemplation and admiration of those of other people. It was necessary to provide Emily Fox-Seton with food and lodging and such a wardrobe as would be just sufficient credit to her more fortunate acquaintances. She worked hard to attain this modest end and was quite satisfied. She found at the shops where the summer sales were being held a couple of cotton frocks to which her height and her small, long waist gave an air of actual elegance. A sailor hat, with a smart ribbon and well-set quill, a few new trifles for her neck, a bow, a silk handkerchief daringly knotted, and some fresh gloves, made her feel that she was sufficiently equipped.

During her last expedition to the sales she came upon a nice white duck coat and skirt which she contrived to buy as a present for Jane. It was necessary to count over the contents of her purse very carefully and to give up the purchase of a slim umbrella she wanted, but she did it cheerfully. If she had been a rich woman she would have given presents to every one she knew, and it was actually a luxury to her to be able to do something for the Cupps, who, she always felt, were continually giving her more than she paid for. The care they took of her small room, the fresh hot tea they managed to have ready when she came in, the penny bunch of daffodils they sometimes put on her table, were kindnesses, and she was grateful for them. "I am very much obliged to you, Jane," she said to the girl,

when she got into the four-wheeled cab on the eventful day of her journey to Mallowe. "I don't know what I should have done without you, I'm sure. I feel so smart in my dress now that you have altered it. If Lady Maria's maid ever thinks of leaving her, I am sure I could recommend you for her place."

Chapter 2

There were other visitors to Mallowe Court travelling by the 2:30 from Paddington, but they were much smarter people than Miss Fox-Seton, and they were put into a first-class carriage by a footman with a cockade and a long drab coat. Emily, who traveled third with some workmen with bundles, looked out of her window as they passed, and might possibly have breathed a faint sigh if she had not felt in such buoyant spirits. She had put on her revived brown skirt and a white linen blouse with a brown dot on it. A soft brown silk tie was knotted smartly under her fresh collar, and she wore her new sailor hat. Her gloves were brown, and so was her parasol. She looked nice and taut and fresh, but notably inexpensive. The people who went to sales and bought things at three and eleven or "four-three" a yard would have been able add her up and work out her total. But there would be no people capable of the calculation at Mallowe. Even the servants' hall was likely to know less of prices than this

one guest did. The people the drab-coated footman escorted to the first-class carriage were a mother and daughter. The mother had regular little features, and would have been pretty if she had not been much too plump. She wore an extremely smart travelling-dress and a wonderful dust-cloak of cool, pale, thin silk. She was not an elegant person, but her appointments were luxurious and self-indulgent. Her daughter was pretty, and had a slim, swaying waist, soft pink cheeks, and a pouting mouth. Her large picture-hat of pale-blue straw, with its big gauze bow and crushed roses, had a slightly exaggerated Parisian air.

"It is a little too picturesque," Emily thought; "but how lovely she looks in it! I suppose it was so becoming she could not help buying it. I'm sure it's Virot."

As she was looking at the girl admiringly, a man passed her window. He was a tall man with a square face. As he passed close to Emily, he stared through her head as if she had been transparent or invisible. He got into the smoking-carriage next to her.

When the train arrived at Mallowe station, he was one of the first persons who got out. Two of Lady Maria's men were waiting on the platform. Emily recognised their liveries. One met the tall man, touching his hat, and followed him to a high cart, in the shafts of which a splendid iron-gray mare was fretting and dancing. In a few moments the arrival was on the

high seat, the footman behind, and the mare speeding up the road. Miss Fox-Seton found herself following the second footman and the mother and daughter, who were being taken to the landau waiting outside the station. The footman piloted them, merely touching his hat quickly to Emily, being fully aware that she could take care of herself.

This she did promptly, looking after her box, and seeing it safe in the Mallowe omnibus. When she reached the landau, the two other visitors were in it. She got in, and in entire contentment sat down with her back to the horses.

The mother and daughter wore for a few minutes a somewhat uneasy air. They were evidently sociable persons, but were not quite sure how to begin a conversation with an as yet unIntroduced lady who was going to stay at the country house to which they were themselves invited.

Emily herself solved the problem, producing her commonplace with a friendly tentative smile.

"Isn't it a lovely country?" she said.

"It's perfect," answered the mother. "I've never visited Europe before, and the English country seems to me just exquisite. We have a summer place in America, but the country is quite different."

She was good-natured and disposed to talk, and, with Emily Fox-Seton's genial assistance, conversation flowed. Before they were half-way to Mallowe, it had

revealed itself that they were from Cincinnati, and after a winter spent in Paris, largely devoted to visits to Paquin, Doucet, and Virot, they had taken a house in Mayfair for the season. Their name was Brooke. Emily thought she remembered hearing of them as people who spent a great deal of money and went incessantly to parties, always in new and lovely clothes. The girl had been presented by the American minister, and had had a sort of success because she dressed and danced exquisitely. She was the kind of American girl who ended by marrying a title. She had sparkling eyes and a delicate tip-tilted nose. But even Emily guessed that she was an astute little person.

"Have you ever been to Mallowe Court before?" she inquired.

"No; and I am *so* looking forward to it. It is so beautiful."

"Do you know Lady Maria very well?"

"I've known her about three years. She has been very kind to me."

"Well, I shouldn't have taken her for a particularly kind person. She's too sharp."

Emily amiably smiled. "She's so clever," she replied.

"Do you know the Marquis of Walderhurst?" asked Mrs. Brooke.

"No," answered Miss Fox-Seton. She had no part in that portion of Lady Maria's life which was illumined

by cousins who were marquises. Lord Walderhurst did not drop in to afternoon tea. He kept himself for special dinner-parties.

"Did you see the man who drove away in the high cart?" Mrs. Brooke continued, with a touch of fevered interest. "Cora thought it must be the marquis. The servant who met him wore the same livery as the man up there" — with a nod toward the box.

"It was one of Lady Maria's servants," said Emily; "I have seen him in South Audley Street. And Lord Walderhurst was to be at Mallowe. Lady Maria mentioned it."

"There, mother!" exclaimed Cora.

"Well, of course if he is to be there, it will make it interesting," returned her mother, in a tone in which lurked an admission of relief. Emily wondered if she had wanted to go somewhere else and had been firmly directed toward Mallowe by her daughter.

"We heard a great deal of him in London this season," Mrs. Brooks went on.

Miss Cora Brooke laughed.

"We heard that at least half a dozen people were determined to marry him," she remarked with pretty scorn. "I should think that to meet a girl who was indifferent might be good for him."

"Don't be too indifferent, Cora," said her mother, with ingenuous ineptness.

It was a very stupid bit of revelation, and Miss

Brooke's eyes flashed. If Emily Fox-Seton had been a sharp woman, she would have observed that, if the *rôle* of indifferent and piquant young person could be made dangerous to Lord Walderhurst, it would be made so during this visit. The man was in peril from this beauty from Cincinnati and her rather indiscreet mother, though upon the whole, the indiscreet maternal parent might unconsciously form his protection.

But Emily only laughed amiably, as at a humorous remark. She was ready to accept almost anything as humour.

"Well, he *would* be a great match for any girl," she said. "He is so rich, you know. He is very rich."

When they reached Mallowe, and were led out upon the lawn, where the tea was being served under embowering trees, they found a group of guests eating little hot cakes and holding teacups in their hands. There were several young women, and one of them — a very tall, very fair girl, with large eyes as blue as forget-me-nots, and with a lovely, limp, and long blue frock of the same shade — had been one of the beauties of the past season. She was a Lady Agatha Slade, and Emily began to admire her at once. She felt her to be a sort of added boon bestowed by kind Fate upon herself. It was so delightful that she should be of this particular house-party — this lovely creature, whom she had only known previously through pictures in ladies' illustrated papers. If it should occur to her to wish to become the

Marchioness of Walderhurst, what could possibly prevent the consummation of her desire? Surely not Lord Walderhurst himself, if he was human. She was standing, leaning lightly against the trunk of an ilex-tree, and a snow-white Borzoi was standing close to her, resting his long, delicate head against her gown, encouraging the caresses of her fair, stroking hand. She was in this attractive pose when Lady Maria turned in her seat and said:

"There's Walderhurst."

The man who had driven himself over from the station in the cart was coming towards them across the grass. He was past middle life and plain, but was of good height and had an air. It was perhaps, on the whole, rather an air of knowing what he wanted.

Emily Fox-Seton, who by that time was comfortably seated in a cushioned basket-chair, sipping her own cup of tea, gave him the benefit of the doubt when she wondered if he was not really distinguished and aristocratic-looking. He was really neither, but was well-built and well-dressed, and had good grayish-brown eyes, about the colour of his grayish-brown hair. Among these amiably worldly people, who were not in the least moved by an altruistic prompting, Emily's greatest capital consisted in the fact that she did not expect to be taken the least notice of. She was not aware that it was her capital, because the fact was so wholly a part of the simple contentedness of

her nature that she had not thought about it at all. The truth was that she found all her entertainment and occupation in being an audience or a spectator. It did not occur to her to notice that, when the guests were presented to him, Lord Walderhurst barely glanced at her surface as he bowed, and could scarcely be said to forget her existence the next second, because he had hardly gone to the length of recognising it. As she enjoyed her extremely nice cup of tea and little buttered scone, she also enjoyed looking at his Lordship discreetly, and trying to make an innocent summing up of his mental attitudes.

Lady Maria seemed to like him and to be pleased to see him. He himself seemed, in an undemonstrative way, to like Lady Maria. He also was evidently glad to get his tea, and enjoyed it as he sat at his cousin's side. He did not pay very much attention to any one else. Emily was slightly disappointed to see that he did not glance at the beauty and the Borzoi more than twice, and then that his examination seemed as much for the Borzoi as for the beauty. She could not help also observing that since he had joined the circle it had become more animated, so far at least as the female members were concerned. She could not help remembering Lady Maria's remark about the effect he produced on women when he entered a room. Several interesting or sparkling speeches had already been made. There was a little more laughter and chattiness,

which somehow it seemed to be quite open to Lord Walderhurst to enjoy, though it was not exactly addressed to him. Miss Cora Brooke, however, devoted herself to a young man in white flannels with an air of tennis about him. She sat a little apart and talked to him in a voice soft enough to even exclude Lord Walderhurst. Presently she and her companion got up and sauntered away. They went down the broad flight of ancient stone steps which led to the tennis-court, lying in full view below the lawn. There they began to play tennis. Miss Brooke skimmed and darted about like a swallow. The swirl of her lace petticoats was most attractive.

"That girl ought not to play tennis in shoes with ridiculous heels," remarked Lord Walderhurst. "She will spoil the court."

Lady Maria broke into a little chuckle.

"She wanted to play at this particular moment," she said. "And as she has only just arrived, it did not occur to her to come out to tea in tennis-shoes."

"She'll spoil the court all the same," said the marquis. "What clothes! It's amazing how girls dress now."

"I wish I had such clothes," answered Lady Maria, and she chuckled again. "She's got beautiful feet."

"She's got Louis Quinze heels," returned his Lordship.

At all events, Emily Fox-Seton thought Miss Brooke seemed to intend to rather keep out of his way and to practise no delicate allurements. When her tennis-playing was at an end, she sauntered about the lawn and terraces with her companion, tilting her parasol prettily over her shoulder, so that it formed an entrancing background to her face and head. She seemed to be entertaining the young man. His big laugh and the silver music of her own lighter merriment rang out a little tantalisingly.

"I wonder what Cora is saying," said Mrs. Brooke to the group at large. "She always makes men laugh so."

Emily Fox-Seton felt an interest herself, the merriment sounded so attractive. She wondered if perhaps to a man who had been so much run after a girl who took no notice of his presence and amused other men so much might not assume an agreeable aspect.

But he took more notice of Lady Agatha Slade than of any one else that evening. She was placed next to him at dinner, and she really was radiant to look upon in palest green chiffon. She had an exquisite little head, with soft hair piled with wondrous lightness upon it, and her long little neck swayed like the stem of a flower. She was lovely enough to arouse in the beholder's mind the anticipation of her being silly, but she was not silly at all.

Lady Maria commented upon that fact to Miss

Fox-Seton when they met in her bedroom late that night. Lady Maria liked to talk and be talked to for half an hour after the day was over, and Emily Fox-Seton's admiring interest in all she said she found at once stimulating and soothing. Her Ladyship was an old woman who indulged and inspired herself with an Epicurean wisdom. Though she would not have stupid people about her, she did not always want very clever ones.

"They give me too much exercise," she said. "The epigrammatic ones keep me always jumping over fences. Besides, I like to make all the epigrams myself."

Emily Fox-Seton struck a happy mean, and she was a genuine admirer. She was intelligent enough not to spoil the point of an epigram when she repeated it, and she might be relied upon to repeat it and give all the glory to its originator. Lady Maria knew there were people who, hearing your good things, appropriated them without a scruple. To-night she said a number of good things to Emily in summing up her guests and their characteristics.

"Walderhurst has been to me three times when I made sure that he would not escape without a new marchioness attached to him. I should think he would take one to put an end to the annoyance of dangling unplucked upon the bough. A man in his position, if he has character enough to choose, can prevent even his

wife's being a nuisance. He can give her a good house, hang the family diamonds on her, supply a decent elderly woman as a sort of lady-in-waiting and turn her into the paddock to kick up her heels within the limits of decorum. His own rooms can be sacred to him. He has his clubs and his personal interests. Husbands and wives annoy each other very little in these days. Married life has become comparatively decent."

"I should think his wife might be very happy," commented Emily. "He looks very kind."

"I don't know whether he is kind or not. It has never been necessary for me to borrow money from him."

Lady Maria was capable of saying odd things in her refined little drawling voice.

"He's more respectable than most men of his age. The diamonds are magnificent, and he not only has three superb places, but has money enough to keep them up. Now, there are three aspirants at Mallowe in the present party. Of course you can guess who they are, Emily?"

Emily Fox-Seton almost blushed. She felt a little indelicate.

"Lady Agatha would be very suitable," she said. "And Mrs. Ralph is very clever, of course. And Miss Brooke is really pretty."

Lady Maria gave vent to her small chuckle.

"Mrs. Ralph is the kind of woman who means

business. She'll corner Walderhurst and talk literature and roll her eyes at him until he hates her. These writing women, who are intensely pleased with themselves, if they have some good looks into the bargain, believe themselves capable of marrying any one. Mrs. Ralph has fine eyes and rolls them. Walderhurst won't be ogled. The Brooke girl is sharper than Ralph. She was very sharp this afternoon. She began at once."

"I—I didn't see her" — wondering.

"Yes, you did; but you didn't understand. The tennis, and the laughing with young Heriot on the terrace! She is going to be the piquant young woman who aggravates by indifference, and disdains rank and splendour; the kind of girl who has her innings in novelettes — but not out of them. The successful women are those who know how to toady in the right way and not obviously. Walderhurst has far too good an opinion of himself to be attracted by a girl who is making up to another man: he's not five-and-twenty."

Emily Fox-Seton was reminded, in spite of herself, of Mrs. Brooke's plaint: "Don't be too indifferent, Cora." She did not want to recall it exactly, because she thought the Brookes agreeable and would have preferred to think them disinterested. But, after all, she reflected, how natural that a girl who was so pretty should feel that the Marquis of Walderhurst represented prospects. Chiefly, however, she was filled

with admiration at Lady Maria's cleverness.

"How wonderfully you observe everything, Lady Maria!" she exclaimed. "How wonderfully!"

"I have had forty-seven seasons in London. That's a good many, you know. Forty-seven seasons of débutantes and mothers tend toward enlightenment. Now there is Agatha Slade, poor girl! She's of a kind I know by heart. With birth and beauty, she is perfectly helpless. Her people are poor enough to be entitled to aid from the Charity Organisation, and they have had the indecency to present themselves with six daughters — six! All with delicate skins and delicate little noses and heavenly eyes. Most men can't afford them, and they can't afford most men. As soon as Agatha begins to go off a little, she will have to step aside, if she has not married. The others must be allowed their chance. Agatha has had the advertising of the illustrated papers this season, and she has gone well. In these days a new beauty is advertised like a new soap. They haven't given them sandwich-men in the streets, but that is about all that has been denied them. But Agatha has not had any special offer, and I know both she and her mother are a little frightened. Alix must come out next season, and they can't afford frocks for two. Agatha will have to be sent to their place in Ireland, and to be sent to Castle Clare is almost like being sent to the Bastille. She'll never get out alive. She'll have to stay there and see herself grow thin instead of slim, and

colourless instead of fair. Her little nose will grow sharp, and she will lose her hair by degrees."

"Oh!" Emily Fox-Seton gave forth sympathetically. "What a pity that would be! I thought — I really thought — Lord Walderhurst seemed to admire her."

"Oh, every one admires her, for that matter; but if they go no further that will not save her from the Bastille, poor thing. There, Emily; we must go to bed. We have talked enough."

Chapter 3

So awaken in a still, delicious room, with the summer morning sunshine breaking softly into it through leafy greenness, was a delightful thing to Miss Fox-Seton, who was accustomed to opening her eyes upon four walls covered with cheap paper, to the sound of outside hammerings, and the rattle and heavy roll of wheels. In a building at the back of her bed-sitting-room there lived a man whose occupation, beginning early in the morning, involved banging of a persistent nature.

She awakened to her first day at Mallowe, stretching herself luxuriously, with the smile of a child. She was so thankful for the softness of her lavender-fragrant bed, and so delighted with the lovely freshness of her chintz-hung room. As she lay upon her

pillow, she could see the boughs of the trees, and hear the chatter of darting starlings. When her morning tea was brought, it seemed like nectar to her. She was a perfectly healthy woman, with a palate as unspoiled as that of a six-year-old child in the nursery. Her enjoyment of all things was so normal as to be in her day and time an absolute abnormality.

She rose and dressed at once, eager for the open air and sunshine. She was out upon the lawn before any one else but the Borzoi, which rose from beneath a tree and came with stately walk toward her. The air was exquisite, the broad, beautiful stretch of view lay warm in the sun, the masses of flowers on the herbaceous borders showed leaves and flower-cups adorned with glittering drops of dew. She walked across the spacious sweep of short-cropped sod, and gazed enraptured at the country spread out below. She could have kissed the soft white sheep dotting the fields and lying in gentle, huddled groups under the trees.

"The darlings!" she said, in a little, effusive outburst.

She talked to the dog and fondled him. He seemed to understand her mood, and pressed close against her gown when she stopped. They walked together about the gardens, and presently picked up an exuberant retriever, which bounded and wriggled and at once settled into a steady trot beside them. Emily adored the flowers as she walked by their beds, and at

intervals stopped to bury her face in bunches of spicy things. She was so happy that the joy in her hazel eyes was pathetic.

She was startled, as she turned into a rather narrow rose-walk, to see Lord Walderhurst coming toward her. He looked exceedingly clean in his fresh light knickerbocker suit, which was rather becoming to him. A gardener was walking behind, evidently gathering roses for him, which he put into a shallow basket. Emily Fox-Seton cast about for a suitable remark to make, if he should chance to stop to speak to her. She consoled herself with the thought that there were things she really *wanted* to say about the beauty of the gardens, and certain clumps of heavenly-blue campanulas, which seemed made a feature of in the herbaceous borders. It was so much nicer not to be obliged to invent observations. But his lordship did not stop to speak to her. He was interested in his roses (which, she heard afterward, were to be sent to town to an invalid friend), and as she drew near, he turned aside to speak to the gardener. As Emily was just passing him when he turned again, and as the passage was narrow, he found himself unexpectedly gazing into her face.

Being nearly the same height, they were so near each other that it was a little awkward.

"I beg pardon," he said, stepping back a pace and lifting his straw hat.

But he did not say, "I beg pardon, Miss

Fox-Seton," and Emily knew that he had not recognised her again, and had not the remotest idea who she was or where she came from.

She passed him with her agreeable, friendly smile, and there returned to her mind Lady Maria's remarks of the night before.

"To think that if he married poor pretty Lady Agatha she will be mistress of three places quite as beautiful as Mallowe, three lovely old houses, three sets of gardens, with thousands of flowers to bloom every year! How nice it would be for her! She is so lovely that it seems as if he *must* fall in love with her. Then, if she was Marchioness of Walderhurst, she could do so much for her sisters."

After breakfast she spent her morning in doing a hundred things for Lady Maria. She wrote notes for her, and helped her to arrange plans for the entertainment of her visitors. She was very busy and happy. In the afternoon she drove across the moor to Maundell, a village on the other side of it. She really went on an errand for her hostess, but as she was fond of driving and the brown cob was a beauty, she felt that she was being given a treat on a level with the rest of her ladyship's generous hospitalities. She drove well, and her straight, strong figure showed to much advantage on the high seat of the cart. Lord Walderhurst himself commented on her as he saw her drive away.

"She has a nice, flat, straight back, that woman,"

he remarked to Lady Maria. "What is her name? One never hears people's names when one is introduced."

"Her name is Emily Fox-Seton," her ladyship answered, "and she's a nice creature."

"That would be an inhuman thing to say to most men, but if one is a thoroughly selfish being, and has some knowledge of one's own character, one sees that a nice creature might be a nice companion."

"You are quite right," was Lady Maria's reply, as she held up her lorgnette and watched the cart spin down the avenue. "I am selfish myself, and I realise that is the reason why Emily Fox-Seton is becoming the lodestar of my existence. There is such comfort in being pandered to by a person who is not even aware that she is pandering. She doesn't suspect that she is entitled to thanks for it."

That evening Mrs. Ralph came shining to dinner in amber satin, which seemed to possess some quality of stimulating her to brilliance. She was witty enough to collect an audience, and Lord Walderhurst was drawn within it. This was Mrs. Ralph's evening. When the men returned to the drawing-room, she secured his lordship at once and managed to keep him. She was a woman who could talk pretty well, and perhaps Lord Walderhurst was amused. Emily Fox-Seton was not quite sure that he was, but at least he listened. Lady Agatha Slade looked a little listless and pale. Lovely as she was, she did not always collect an audience, and

this evening she said she had a headache. She actually crossed the room, and taking a seat by Miss Emily Fox-Seton, began to talk to her about Lady Maria's charity-knitting which she had taken up. Emily was so gratified that she found conversation easy. She did not realise that at that particular moment she was a most agreeable and comforting companion for Agatha Slade. She had heard so much of her beauty during the season, and remembered so many little things that a girl who was a thought depressed might like to hear referred to again. Sometimes to Agatha the balls where people had collected in groups to watch her dancing, the flattering speeches she had heard, the dazzling hopes which had been raised, seemed a little unreal, as if, after all, they could have been only dreams. This was particularly so, of course, when life had dulled for a while and the atmosphere of unpaid bills became heavy at home. It was so to-day, because the girl had received a long, anxious letter from her mother, in which much was said of the importance of an early preparation for the presentation of Alix, who had really been kept back a year, and was in fact nearer twenty than nineteen.

"If we were not in Debrett and Burke, one might be reserved about such matters," poor Lady Claway wrote; "but what is one to do when all the world can buy one's daughters' ages at the book-sellers'?"

Miss Fox-Seton had seen Lady Agatha's portrait at the Academy and the way in which people had

crowded about it. She had chanced to hear comments also, and she agreed with a number of persons who had not thought the picture did the original justice.

"Sir Bruce Norman was standing by me with an elderly lady the first time I saw it," she said, as she turned a new row of the big white-wool scarf her hostess was knitting for a Deep-Sea Fisherman's Charity. "He really looked quite annoyed. I heard him say: 'It is not good at all. She is far, far lovelier. Her eyes are like blue flowers.' The moment I saw you, I found myself looking at your eyes. I hope I didn't seem rude."

Lady Agatha smiled. She had flushed delicately, and took up in her slim hand a skein of the white wool.

"There are some people who are never rude," she sweetly said, "and you are one of them, I am sure. That knitting looks nice. I wonder if I could make a comforter for a deep-sea fisherman."

"If it would amuse you to try," Emily answered, "I will begin one for you. Lady Maria has several pairs of wooden needles. Shall I?"

"Do, please. How kind of you!"

In a pause of her conversation, Mrs. Ralph, a little later, looked across the room at Emily Fox-Seton bending over Lady Agatha and the knitting, as she gave her instructions.

"What a good-natured creature that is!" she said.

Lord Walderhurst lifted his monocle and inserted

it in his unillumined eye. He also looked across the room. Emily wore the black evening dress which gave such opportunities to her square white shoulders and firm column of throat; the country air and sun had deepened the colour on her cheek, and the light of the nearest lamp fell kindly on the big twist of her nut-brown hair, and burnished it. She looked soft and warm, and so generously interested in her pupil's progress that she was rather sweet.

Lord Walderhurst simply looked at her. He was a man of but few words. Women who were sprightly found him somewhat unresponsive. In fact, he was aware that a man in his position need not exert himself. The women themselves would talk. They wanted to talk because they wanted him to hear them.

Mrs. Ralph talked.

"She is the most primeval person I know. She accepts her fate without a trace of resentment; she simply accepts it."

"What is her fate?" asked Lord Walderhurst, still gazing in his unbiassed manner through his monocle, and not turning his head as he spoke.

"It is her fate to be a woman who is perfectly well born, and who is as penniless as a charwoman, and works like one. She is at the beck and call of any one who will give her an odd job to earn a meal with. That is one of the new ways women have found of making a living."

"Good skin," remarked Lord Walderhurst, irrelevantly. "Good hair — quite a lot."

"She has some of the nicest blood in England in her veins, and she engaged my last cook for me," said Mrs. Ralph.

"Hope she was a good cook."

"Very. Emily Fox-Seton has a faculty of finding decent people. I believe it is because she is so decent herself" — with a little laugh.

"Looks quite decent," commented Walderhurst. The knitting was getting on famously.

"It was odd you should see Sir Bruce Norman that day," Agatha Slade was saying. "It must have been just before he was called away to India."

"It was. He sailed the next day. I happen to know, because some friends of mine met me only a few yards from your picture and began to talk about him. I had not known before that he was so rich. I had not heard about his collieries in Lancashire. Oh!" — opening her big eyes in heart-felt yearning, — "how I wish I owned a colliery! It must be so *nice* to be rich!"

"I never was rich," answered Lady Agatha, with a bitter little sigh. "I know it is hideous to be poor."

"I never was rich," said Emily, "and I never shall be. You" — a little shyly— "are so different."

Lady Agatha flushed delicately again.

Emily Fox-Seton made a gentle joke. "You have eyes like blue flowers," she said. Lady Agatha lifted the

eyes like blue flowers, and they were pathetic.

"Oh!" she gave forth almost impetuously, "sometimes it seems as if it does not matter whether one has eyes or not."

It was a pleasure to Emily Fox-Seton to realise that after this the beauty seemed to be rather drawn toward her. Their acquaintance became almost a sort of intimacy over the wool scarf for the deep-sea fisherman, which was taken up and laid down, and even carried out on the lawn and left under the trees for the footmen to restore when they brought in the rugs and cushions. Lady Maria was amusing herself with the making of knitted scarfs and helmets just now, and bits of white or gray knitting were the fashion at Mallowe. Once Agatha brought hers to Emily's room in the afternoon to ask that a dropped stitch might be taken up, and this established a sort of precedent. Afterward they began to exchange visits.

The strenuousness of things was becoming, in fact, almost too much for Lady Agatha. Most unpleasant things were happening at home, and occasionally Castle Clare loomed up grayly in the distance like a spectre. Certain tradespeople who ought, in Lady Claraway's opinion, to have kept quiet and waited in patience until things became better, were becoming hideously persistent. In view of the fact that Alix's next season must be provided for, it was most awkward. A girl could not be presented and properly

launched in the world, in a way which would give her a proper chance, without expenditure. To the Claraways expenditure meant credit, and there were blots as of tears on the letters in which Lady Claraway reiterated that the tradespeople were behaving horribly. Sometimes, she said once in desperation, things looked as if they would all be obliged to shut themselves up in Castle Clare to retrench; and then what was to become of Alix and her season? And there were Millicent and Hilda and Eve.

More than once there was the mist of tears in the flower-blue eyes when Lady Agatha came to talk. Confidence between two women establishes itself through processes at once subtle and simple. Emily Fox-Seton could not have told when she first began to know that the beauty was troubled and distressed; Lady Agatha did not know when she first slipped into making little frank speeches about herself; but these things came about. Agatha found something like comfort in her acquaintance with the big, normal, artless creature — something which actually raised her spirits when she was depressed. Emily Fox-Seton paid constant kindly tribute to her charms, and helped her to believe in them. When she was with her, Agatha always felt that she really was lovely, after all, and that loveliness was a great capital. Emily admired and revered it so, and evidently never dreamed of doubting its omnipotence. She used to talk as if any girl who was

a beauty was a potential duchess. In fact, this was a thing she quite ingenuously believed. She had not lived in a world where marriage was a thing of romance, and, for that matter, neither had Agatha. It was nice if a girl liked the man who married her, but if he was a well-behaved, agreeable person, of good means, it was natural that she would end by liking him sufficiently; and to be provided for comfortably or luxuriously for life, and not left upon one's own hands or one's parents', was a thing to be thankful for in any case. It was such a relief to everybody to know that a girl was "settled," and especially it was such a relief to the girl herself. Even novels and plays were no longer fairy-stories of entrancing young men and captivating young women who fell in love with each other in the first chapter, and after increasingly picturesque incidents were married in the last one in the absolute surety of being blissfully happy forevermore. Neither Lady Agatha nor Emily had been brought up on this order of literature, nor in an atmosphere in which it was accepted without reservation.

They had both had hard lives, and knew what lay before them. Agatha knew she must make a marriage or fade out of existence in prosaic and narrowed dulness. Emily knew that there was no prospect for her of desirable marriage at all. She was too poor, too entirely unsupported by social surroundings, and not sufficiently radiant to catch the roving eye. To be able

to maintain herself decently, to be given an occasional treat by her more fortunate friends, and to be allowed by fortune to present to the face of the world the appearance of a woman who was not a pauper, was all she could expect. But she felt that Lady Agatha had the right to more. She did not reason the matter out and ask herself why she had the right to more, but she accepted the proposition as a fact. She was ingenuously interested in her fate, and affectionately sympathetic. She used to look at Lord Walderhurst quite anxiously at times when he was talking to the girl. An anxious mother could scarcely have regarded him with a greater desire to analyse his sentiments. The match would be such a fitting one. He would make such an excellent husband — and there were three places, and the diamonds were magnificent. Lady Maria had described to her a certain tiara which she frequently pictured to herself as glittering above Agatha's exquisite low brow. It would be infinitely more becoming to her than to Miss Brooke or Mrs. Ralph, though either of them would have worn it with spirit. She could not help feeling that both Mrs. Ralph's brilliancy and Miss Brooke's insouciant prettiness were not unworthy of being counted in the running, but Lady Agatha seemed somehow so much more completely the thing wanted. She was anxious that she should always look her best, and when she knew that disturbing letters were fretting her, and saw that they made her look pale and less

luminous, she tried to raise her spirits.

"Suppose we take a brisk walk," she would say, "and then you might try a little nap. You look a little tired."

"Oh," said Agatha one day, "how kind you are to me! I believe you actually care about my complexion — about my looking well."

"Lord Walderhurst said to me the other day," was Emily's angelically tactful answer, "that you were the only woman he had ever seen who *always* looked lovely."

"Did he?" exclaimed Lady Agatha, and flushed sweetly. "Once Sir Bruce Norman actually said that to me. I told him it was the nicest thing that could be said to a woman. It is all the nicer" — with a sigh—"because it isn't *really* true."

"I am sure Lord Walderhurst believed it true," Emily said. "He is not a man who talks, you know. He is very serious and dignified." She had herself a reverence and admiration for Lord Walderhurst bordering on tender awe. He was indeed a well-mannered person, of whom painful things were not said. He also conducted himself well toward his tenantry, and was patron of several notable charities. To the unexacting and innocently respectful mind of Emily Fox-Seton this was at once impressive and attractive. She knew, though not intimately, many noble personages quite unlike him. She was rather early

Victorian and touchingly respectable.

"I have been crying," confessed Lady Agatha.

"I was afraid so, Lady Agatha," said Emily.

"Things are getting hopeless in Curzon Street. I had a letter from Millicent this morning. She is next in age to Alix, and she says — oh, a number of things. When girls see everything passing by them, it makes them irritable. Millicent is seventeen, and she is too lovely. Her hair is like a red-gold cloak, and her eyelashes are twice as long as mine." She sighed again, and her lips, which were like curved rose-petals, unconcealedly quivered. "They were *all* so cross about Sir Bruce Norman going to India," she added.

"He will come back," said Emily, benignly; "but he may be too late. Has he" — ingenuously—"seen Alix?"

Agatha flushed oddly this time. Her delicate skin registered every emotion exquisitely. "He has seen her, but she was in the school-room, and — I don't think—"

She did not finish, but stopped uneasily, and sat and gazed out of the open window into the park. She did not look happy.

The episode of Sir Bruce Norman was brief and even vague. It had begun well. Sir Bruce had met the beauty at a ball, and they had danced together more than once. Sir Bruce had attractions other than his old baronetcy and his coal-mines. He was a good-looking person, with a laughing brown eye and a nice wit. He

had danced charmingly and paid gay compliments. He would have done immensely well. Agatha had liked him. Emily sometimes thought she had liked him very much. Her mother had liked him and had thought he was attracted. But after a number of occasions of agreeable meetings, they had encountered each other on the lawn at Goodwood, and he had announced that he was going to India. Forthwith he had gone, and Emily had gathered that somehow Lady Agatha had been considered somewhat to blame. Her people were not vulgar enough to express this frankly, but she had felt it. Her younger sisters had, upon the whole, made her feel it most. It had been borne in upon her that if Alix, or Millicent with the red-gold cloak, or even Eve, who was a gipsy, had been given such a season and such Doucet frocks, they would have combined them with their wonderful complexions and lovely little chins and noses in such a manner as would at least have prevented desirable acquaintances from feeling free to take P. and O. steamers to Bombay.

In her letter of this morning, Millicent's temper had indeed got somewhat the better of her taste and breeding, and lovely Agatha had cried large tears. So it was comforting to be told that Lord Walderhurst had said such an extremely amiable thing. If he was not young, he was really *very* nice, and there were exalted persons who absolutely had rather a fad for him. It would be exceptionally brilliant.