



## A DAY IN POTTER'S LIFE



The dawn was past, the sun had grown glorious ; but Potter knew nothing about it. He lay on his little iron bedstead, with one arm pressed tightly over his face, and the bedclothes twisted into the shape of his restless body. One foot showed beneath the blanket, and upon this a fly was walking with that peculiar relish which flies obviously feel for the human form. The room itself was a small one, with dingy walls, and a text, and the lithograph of an all-khaki soldier with a bloody head ; and on the mantelpiece, beneath the mirror (truly the mirror of Mrs. Cavatt, in that it coquetted fantastically with truth), there was an alarm clock. Linoleum covered the floor ; a wooden wash-stand, with the carefully grained paint almost disappeared, stood in the corner of the room rather ashamed of itself. Thus was the room furnished, and here Potter slept out his nights in vague rebellious dreams of the office and old Fudge, dreams that made his body wriggle all the bedclothes round itself and away from the wall. The alarm-clock, after staring steadily through the darkness for many hours, gradually drew near to seven o'clock, and at last rent the air with a frightful and prolonged screech.

“ Oh, damn the alarm ! ” Potter, in a panic, pulled the bedclothes over his head, while the thrilling voice of the bell rang itself relentlessly into a whirring dry echo. It was rotten . . . rotten ! He yawned it until the word sounded like “ rah-rah-hn.” There was a deep pause before his mind developed the instinctive grievance with which he awoke each morning. . . . Have to get up, morning after morning, week in, week out. . . . Every man's hand 'gainst you. . . . Morning after morning. Morn—when you'd gone to sleep at last . . . like a slave, day in, day out. . . . For stinking, filthy wages, like a slave. . . . Every man's hand ag—kh—gaince you. . . .

There was a silence. It was unbroken for ten minutes.

“ Hullo, hullo ! ” Potter sprang up, rubbing his eyes. That bally alarm not gone off ? Again ! Thing was no good ; it failed morning after morning. He could swear he set it. Did he set it ? He'd stood in front of that clock at twenty-three minutes to eleven, and he'd set it to wake him at seven. It was twelve past. Only showed you what

those cheap clocks were like . . . not a bitter good. One and lem-pence ha'penny that clock had cost him. Now the question was . . . had it gone off? Potter drew his knees up, and hugged them, looking vacantly ahead. Got to go down there . . . all day sitting on a stool with those deathly books. . . . Coo, old Fudge waddn't half a driver! Day in, day out, sweating . . .

He put back his bedclothes, and sat on the edge of the bed. Bit chilly, the oilcloth! Then he sent the holland blind whizzing up, while the tassel whirled in the air. The daylight revealed more clearly the yellow sad room, and a stain on the all-khaki soldier, and the wording of the text, which really was an incitement to violent deeds to such a one as Potter. It said, straight at Potter, that though his sins were as scarlet . . . and Potter's sins never rose above a dirty grey. Avoiding the text, which made him uncomfortable, Potter looked in the mirror, meeting his own eyes staring like shiny gooseberries from a face which seemed, in the cheap glass, to run hideously in all directions. While he looked, Potter thought of nothing; he had seen his pink ears, and his shapeless mouth and nose, too often to feel more than a non-descript sense of recognition, such as a dog must feel in similar circumstances. It was always the same face, white and a little puffy, except after what he called at the office a "thick night" (meaning a third glass of whisky), when he had a dark shadow beneath his eyes, and no time for any breakfast. He never thought anything when he looked at himself, though he often let his eyes travel over the grotesque portrait in the mirror, when he was tying his tie, or trying to dodge the bumps in the glass in order to get a straight parting. But then Potter was not in the habit of thinking much, as might be seen from his eyes, which somehow were always under thought, a little ruminative. He liked to know what was going on "in the papers," and he would ask the same question of a political opponent—at the office, for example—with a pitiless insistence; but he was not quite first-hand in argument, because people had a way of putting points that seemed to him absurd. And that made him splutter at their stupidity. Let them stick to the point, he would reiterate . . . make the foreigner pay. . . . Could they deny? . . . Presently he remembered that it was not his day for shaving; that saved a clear seven minutes. His toilet was quickly made . . . watch . . . tickets . . . money—finally he sniffed at the smell of his breakfast bacon.

When Potter arrived in what was called the "dahnin-room," Mrs. Cavatt's girl, Mercy, had laid the table—apparently with her thumbs,

because everything was crooked. That annoyed Potter, who was a stickler for precision. The knife and fork ought to be parallel; the teaspoon ought to be at the right side of the cup. Mercy was a slovenly cat . . . tell where she'd been reared. She always superintended Potter's breakfast, because Mr. Cavatt was always up and out to his work at six in the morning, and Mrs. Cavatt—Madam—accordingly lay in bed until late. Potter always breakfasted with the family on Sunday mornings, and listened to Madam's talk about her rich relatives, and was quite as cowed as Mr. Cavatt; he was "rather glad not to meet the old girl week-days," he had thought. When he was married, he'd . . . Coo, on twenty-five bob a week! He tried to laugh. Well, what he meant to say, other fellows got married . . . where was that sugar? Mercy always forgot it . . . she was a . . . A bumping against the door heralded Mrs. Cavatt's maid-of-all-work. She bore the customary bowl of coarse yellow sugar, and somehow the sight of it, coming close upon his discovery that the bowl was absent, stung Potter into weary indignation.

"Look here, Mercy," he expostulated, jerking his head, "why do I always have this bally sorf sugar?"

Mercy stood before him bony and practical, with a dirty face and dirty hands, and hunched-up falling hair, with deliberate languor in her manner. She was the picture of a slattern; he knew she was "Charity," just as she was always aware of it; nobody, seeing her, could be in any doubt; somebody had christened her "Mercy" with ironic stupidity.

"Corse that's all you get!"

"But, a . . . but a . . . Sundays, we always have cubes!" he protested, almost with a whine. Mercy continued to look at him with complete indifference, as though he aroused no feeling in her at all. But she had caught Mrs. Cavatt's manner.

"All right . . . Ask Madam! See what she'll tell you."

It was impossible. Potter would no more have thought seriously of asking Madam than he would have thought of giving notice at the office; it was one of those things he dreamed about—telling-off old Fudge and Madam. He had dreamed about it ever since he had known either. At the back of his mind there was always the thought of some upheaval of his fortunes which might enable him to say, "Please sir . . . will you get somebody else to do my work. I got a better job." Sometimes he was disposed to omit the "please sir": it wouldn't be a bad idea—mark you!—to wait until old Fudge was



KETTLAND FROM BRACKENBER MOOR

C. J. HOLMES



grouching one day, and then to spurt it out at him. He wouldn't like that, eh? But he'd . . . only thing about that was that he might be nasty about giving a reference. What he meant—it was no good having a row, and if he sauced Fudge, Fudge would simply say he was lazy, or he wouldn't send an answer; and the other people, the new people, would smell a rat. Then he, Potter, having quarrelled with his bread-and-butter and missed his cake, would be on the rocks, and out of a job. No use talking silly reckless talk . . . be a spree if ever he could. . . . Deep in his heart, Potter recognised the simple desire as an ideal. He always thought wistfully of "the other people," where you got off at five, and on Saturdays at one. Where they paid you decently, too, and treated you like a human being, not as if you was a slave—like a gentleman.

"What would she tell me?" he asked, after a long pause . . . daringly.

In the train, to which he descended by the longest Tube lift in England, Potter sat for a couple of stations opposite a black shiny window in which he could see himself looking quite—well, smart. The guard's indistinct shouting, and the ringing of each starting-bell, seemed so familiar that he never noticed them. Once in the Tube he became deaf, and knew only by instinct when they reached Tottenham Court Road station. He liked to look at himself in the window, until the seats filled up, and this morning he noticed—to the point of rectification—that his tie was crooked. Then he turned to his paper. There was, on the first page, a blurred photograph of some people in a divorce case; he turned on, skimming the headlines. "Bridesmaids carry kittens. Pretty Bridal Ceremony. Peer weds" . . . "£5,000 for a buttonhole" . . . "'Liars and Knaves.' Vigorous attack on the Government." . . . Hullo, what was the matter with Alfonso? The man sitting next to him had a newspaper which supported the Government; Potter felt that it was like a magnet; he didn't want to look at it; made him go hot all over. He wondered why such fools existed. . . . Disarmament, and all that rot. What they couldn't tell him was, where would England be now if it wasn't for . . . At the second station there was a terrible swamp of people; they trod past him, and stumbled stolidly in at both doors. A girl was wedged in among the men, and stood, because there was no vacant seat. Potter scowled and read his paper. It was a smoking carriage; if they wanted to sit down, there was non-smokers each end . . . Another fellow

opposite, Potter noticed, got up and offered his place. Why on earth should a man do that sort of thing? Course, she took the seat at once. . . . She'd known . . . . It made him a little cynical. . . . Want to be treated like men . . . expect to get it both ways . . . Gettin' into a smokin'-carriage, the only place men could go to be alone. . . . He stole a glance between the newly risen young man and the next man. She was a pretty girl! Round face, she'd got, and large eyes; he could not tell that her movements were very slightly self-conscious. He looked at her black cotton gloves, which were very neat, at the dirty library book she was carrying, at her large black hat with roses in it. Then he gradually came back to her face, and found that the girl had raised her eyes from her book and was looking across at him as though she understood all that was in his mind. It was that girl he had seen before, going home in the evenings; but never to notice much what she looked like. He wondered what she was thinking; he often wondered about that; they just looked at you with the lower half of their eyes. Took it all in! Potter never could understand, although he pretended he did. He pretended sometimes to be rather bored with all his understanding. He resumed his reading, "Shopgirl Heiress. Romance in Real Life." He didn't believe half what they said about that sort of thing; bet they knew all the time. Something about Marconigrams caught his eye, and he was interested in everything that related to "wireless" or "bird-men." He discussed these things with a certain mechanical understanding; he had seen Grahame White fly, and he could give somebody else's reasons for preferring a monoplane to a biplane. Indeed, he had tried to make a model, with wood, and tin, and elastic; but it had been a failure. He had talked about it to the office for a time, and Mant had been sarcastic about this as he was about everything else; then, abruptly, the subject had dropped. Mercy had swept up the rubbish.

Tottenham Court Road. The girl was getting out, too. They were near each other in the lift; she was a pretty girl; he could see her breathing gently. She did not look at him again; yet he thought she knew he was there. Be rather a lark to speak to her . . . he wondered if she'd answer. Oh well, it was three minutes' walk to the office; and it was three minutes to nine; and the girl went a different way; and he was afraid. He didn't even follow her with his eyes.

Mant was the only one to arrive before Potter at the office that morning. He stood over by the window of the large first floor room,

between the two high long desks which accommodated two on each side—eight in all. Potter glanced over at Mant, and round the office, with half-closed eyes, pretending to be like old Fudge and seeing everything. That calendar had not been altered; Mrs. Slack always forgot it. Some of the mud had been washed away from the floorcloth, but the corners of the room were mercifully dark, and they went undisturbed from one week to another. Potter did not much like Mant; he was a sarcastic devil, and as he was about twenty-eight (six years older than Potter) and didn't mind swanking, old Fudge treated him different to the others. He thought himself bally smart, because he could do double entry. Anybody could do it if they wanted. It always made Potter writhe when Mant laughed or said anything he could not understand.

"Hello, the peerless Potter!" Mant said, lazily cleaning his fingernails. "Pretty fit, old sport?"

"Hullo, Mant . . . Mornin'," said Potter. "Calendar's not altered."

"Ah . . . our good Mrs. Slack . . . Always thoughtful of you, dear Potter."

Potter looked with a malevolent expression at Mant's sandy face and pale eyes, and his indescribable air of lazy contempt.

"Well, it's time she thought a bit more about her work," he said, clenching his teeth. "Give me the fair sick, it does . . . morning after morning . . ."

"'Day in, day out' . . . Finish it, Potter, there's a sport."

"Think you're bally smart. It's her work, man."

"Petty thing like that? How long does it take you to alter? You're dotty about the calendar."

Potter became splendidly argumentative.

"S'posin' I was to write a letter, and mistake the date, and a question cropped up some time. . . . Might mean a law case," he said, at great speed.

"Fool!" cried Mant. "Little pettifogging mind like yours is eaten up with trifles."

"Cawh!" ejaculated Potter. Mant was a sarcastic devil. Sometimes he thought afterwards of splendid retorts, like "Ah, that's what you think . . ."

The principals came, one by one, stalking through the office as they arrived. Some of them nodded to Mant, but all ignored the





**DRAWING**

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others. Mr. Rudge, known as old Fudge, looked sharply round, like a despot counting heads.

"Where's Tadd?" he demanded. Tadd was late. That meant another row. They always listened to rows with a furtive joy, pricking up their ears and grinning even while they appeared to be totting up figures with rapid pens. If by chance there was a retort, there was a quiver of excitement all through the office; and once, when Mant had been rowed and had proved his case, to Fudge's public acknowledgment it had been hard for them to settle down again. They had all said, "Good for you, Mant" when Fudge had gone; and had kept their eyes alert for Fudge's return, as though they had been schoolboys. But nobody expected Tadd to do more than lie in this case, because it was merely a question of lateness. Tadd presently sneaked in, took his rowing with humbled head, and went to his place. He and Potter were rather pals: they told each other they wouldn't stand it much longer, and thus, in whispers, warmed each other's self-esteem. It was as though they stood back to back against the world's conspiracy to ignore them. Tadd was Potter's only friend. He lived two stations nearer town on the same Tube, and they went to the same Tarratonga depot for lunch, playing abortive games of draughts together. Tadd used to take the cheques to the bank during the morning—a jaunt Potter always envied, because when he did it in the summer Tadd was away, and although he could have a couple of smokes, there and back, any dawdling meant that he would have to stay late to finish the extra work. In the ordinary way, Potter arranged to have just enough work to carry him through the day. Some of his subterfuges, such as doing the same thing twice over, were ingenious; but he did not know that old Fudge knew them all. Fudge had said confidentially to Mant, "If he's only got a label to address, it takes Potter all the afternoon. He's a slack devil." Well, the way Potter looked at it was: "If they treated you better, you wouldn't mind doing a bit extra. Treat you as if you was a doormat with 'Welcome' on it!"

Tadd came over to him during the morning, under pretence of looking up an account.

"I say . . . get out slippy to lunch. Got something to tell you."

Potter wondered what it could be: he kept looking at the clock for half-past twelve. Eleven . . . five past . . . twelve past . . . fourteen past . . . Clock must have stopped. What on earth could Tadd have to tell him? Seventeen past. Mant brought over one of his invoices at quarter-to-twelve.

“ Referred back to committee,” he said facetiously. “ Should be three pound fourteen, dear Potter.”

“ Damn,” Potter said. He tried the figures over and over again. If he could only make them different to Mant ! Mant approached him again, finding Potter irritated with his powerlessness and stupid with his irritation.

“ Can’t you do it, old chap ? ” Mant asked, sympathetically—too sympathetically for truth. “ ’Fraid you’re not feeling very fit.”

“ Go to hell ! ” Potter said, because he knew Mant would tell Fudge all about it as one of the sneaking jokes they sniggered over. He was wondering about Tadd’s news. He’d seen Tadd at six-thirty last night, and Tadd hadn’t had a word to say then, except that the Spurs had signed on another Scotchman as centre-half. What had happened since then ? Had Tadd told off his landlady ?

“ Potter, my pet, you can’t seriously mean that nineteen shillings and fourteen shillings make twenty-seven bob,” Mant said, in his gentle voice. . . .

At last it was twelve-thirty, and he could go to the Tarratonga and hear about it. Tadd always went out half-an-hour before him, so he was smoking already, while Potter took what May called “ Welsh-rabbit.” There was a haze already in the smoke-room of the Tarratonga : the be-spectacled May’s lack of physical charm was hardly noticed because of the haze and the elaborate laughter with which she accepted innuendo.

Tadd said :

“ May’s got a new mash ! ” and they all looked at a monkey-faced man in the corner of the room. The monkey-faced man had a joke, it seemed, for he and May always grinned when they saw each other, and May’s high gurgle of laughter was music in his ears.

“ Yes, well what is it you want to tell me ? ” Potter demanded, all fire to know now, since he had been kept in a state of excitement all the morning. Tadd lowered his voice in order to make his news the more impressive.

“ You know I was late,” he said. “ ’Smornin’.” Potter rattled his feet ; the whole office had listened to Fudge’s reproof. “ Well, I got a girl.” Potter stared, fascinated. “ Champion bitter goods. Met her last night, on the Spaniards Road. Well, I saw her in the train ’smornin’. She’s at a place somewhere in Oxford Street. I walked down with her. Waddn’t half a swank ; told her I didn’t care how late I was. She liked that. I’m going to meet her ’sevenin’. . . .

I said I'd be the same place to-night. She said she was goin' to bring her friend—I said I'd bring you . . . ”

“ Me ! ” cried Potter.

“ You can talk to the other one, you fool ! ”

“ Good Lord ! ” From a haze the smoke-room became suddenly a blur.

“ Don't forget. Spaniards Road at seven-thirty. I said you'd come.”

Potter, to have a girl—he was filled with desperate excitement. A girl! For a moment or two he was speechless.

“ Here, half a mo. Ever seen this other girl ? ”

“ A . . . Molly says she's pretty.”

Potter's heart swooned. He swallowed rapidly.

“ No, but tell us . . . ”

“ I don't know her. Never seen her.” Tadd was a little irritable with excitement and a sense that Potter lacked savoir faire.

“ How'd you get to know . . . your one ? ”

“ Oh, she just said 'ahem,' and I said 'Good-evenin',' ” Tadd said. “ We soon got talkin'. She's a milliner. She ain't a . . . a tart, you know. Well, look here, I mus' git back.”

That he, Potter, was to meet a girl, struck him as the wildest thing. He'd hardly ever spoken to one, except May, at the Tarratonga, and she—well, looking critically at May, with her spectacles and her grin—he couldn't have walked with her. That laugh was enough to poison you. After a period of fidgeting at the Tarratonga, he returned to the office, to fidget there. As he sat at his work, Potter longed to go over to Tadd and put some questions. For example, what on earth could he say to a girl? What did they talk about? He was so excited that he fell into a dream. Girls—why, he couldn't even talk to a barmaid until he had had that third, fatal, whisky, and then it was too late. Mant was grinning at him contemptuously, and once drew Fudge's attention with a side jerk of the head. Fudge also watched, wrinkling up his nose.

“ Haven't you got anything to do, Potter ? ” Fudge called out, in his bitter voice.

“ Yessir.” Potter put his hands among papers, and shuffled them busily, in pathetic disguise.

“ Then do it, and don't moon about. D'you hear ? ”

Yet how could he do anything, for remembering the girls he had

seen, the girls whose eyes he had tried to catch, the girls whose eyes he had tried to avoid? Potter had still that sort of despairing, wondering, contemptuous admiration of girls which had arisen in his schoolboy mind. As a schoolboy, he had heard all about girls, he had made jokes about them as all the other boys did; but like their jokes his had been stale obscenity badly remembered from other jokes. He had never known a girl; they were a tantalising possibility, setting his mind in a skir of anxious desire. At the office, girls were not mentioned except as the origin of jokes which the other fellows found in sporting papers; and thus they were a little flyblown as a sex. Individual girls, who transcended these jokes, were, however, as great a mystery to Potter as ever, eating daintily, walking prettily, talking in little high voices—soft, delicate, delightful; but never real. The dusty, unappetising girls he saw wearing thick clothes all the year round only enabled him to enjoy the jokes moderately; elaborately dressed trim-looking women made him self-conscious as a rabbit; such a girl as the one in the train, or the one he was to meet, was something as incomprehensible as “the eternal feminine.”

“Look here, Potter,” said old Fudge, sharply, standing at Potter’s elbow. “Either you do your work, or you do the other thing. Know what I mean?”

“Yessir,” Potter muttered, returning to his book and pen with a paralysed energy.

“I’m glad of that. But understand, if I have any more of it . . .” Mr. Fudge walked away. Potter thought; slave-drivin’ . . . day in, day out . . . Thought you’d sold yourself because they gave you twenty-five bob a week. He wouldn’t stand it much longer . . . It would be grand to say to old Fudge . . . Tell him off . . . Fudge and Madam. If he only could! They didn’t understand you were a man. . . . His thoughts were confused; the one word “girl” alone was clear in his mind.

And then the evening came, and the Spaniards Road grew dark and full of the soft strangeness of evening. Down the roads bordering the Heath lamps twinkled—little sprayed dots of light in the gently moving leaves. People with undistinguishable faces commenced to walk up and down, saunteringly, with their voices artificially hushed if they loved one another confessedly, and artificially brilliant if they had not reached the point of a declared affection. Potter heard shrieking laughter, and “Leave off!”—saw raised hats, and once

heard the whirr of petticoats as a girl pretended to run into the road from her eager swain, one of a party. He grinned a little to himself. From the straggling procession of a few, the crowd grew into a steady stream, so that Potter became each moment more afraid that he had missed or would miss Tadd and the girls in the darkness and the press. He snapped his fingers and jerked his feet at the delay, and said "Oh, well . . ." as though he could persuade himself that it did not matter whether they came or stopped at home. He'd just as soon walk about by himself . . . a girl was an awful drag . . . have to give them sweets . . . Good Lord! he hadn't thought about that! Suppose she was greedy! Twenty-five bob a week was not much to marry on, but it was even less adequate to support pretentiousness or a courtship. He did not know that many of them nowadays paid for themselves; his ideas were still mediæval.

Damn old Tadd! He was a fool ever to have come. Didn't want to know any girl. Mark you! Once you knew them, you never got rid of them! What he meant, you knew them for always. Had to take your hat off to them . . . had to give up your seat to them . . . give them inside . . . and to keep on talking . . . talking. Perhaps this one was a Suffera-geet! He'd got one-and-eightpence in his pocket, and four strip-tickets; a watch that was nearly, but not quite, pawnable, a tie-pin that had cost two-and-three; a ring that Mant had offered to buy for fourpence-ha'penny. That was all. He'd got no money at home, no people to help him out, no anything at all to fall back upon. It was . . . "O God!" groaned Potter, "let's get out of this!" But he took only three steps.

In five minutes, Tadd arrived, and Potter felt flushed and embarrassed to see two girls with his friend. They both had enormous hats and trim waist-banded figures; but he could not, in the darkness and his flurry, see their faces.

"Hullo, here's Potter," Tadd said. "How are you, old man?"

"Nicely, thanks; how's self?" Potter said, mechanically. He shook hands with the girls, not looking at them, just hearing that they both said, "Quite well, thank you." Tadd's girl said "Pleased to meet you," and they stood in silence. Tadd felt a moment's shame at Potter's failure to shine, and said "Yes" once or twice, ruminatively. Then he said, "Yes, that's old Potter, Molly. Told you 'bout him, didn't I?"

"Oh yes, I've heard a lot about you, Mr. Potter," Molly said, briefly. "Now you two, you talk to each other . . . It's my friend,

Hetty Summers.” And with that she started to walk again, by Tadd’s side, leaving Potter, with a furiously beating heart and a red confused face, standing sheepishly in front of the second girl. Even while he cursed Tadd for leaving them in the lurch, the girl swung into step beside him and they followed the others.

“ Nice evening, isn’t it ? ” she said.

“ A-yes . . . oh yes, beautiful,” Potter said. “ Yes, beautiful evening. I-a-I like an evening like this ; it’s so . . . ”

“ Fine,” suggested the girl.

“ Yes,” said Potter. There was again silence. Potter’s fingers writhed together. He thought his companion’s eyes strayed to passing young men, and that she must think him an awful fool. Yet even that suspicion did not suggest anything to say. Fortunately Hetty, true to her sex, was conversationally better equipped.

“ You know, I’ve often seen you in the train,” she said, beginning afresh. Potter took a hasty glance, and met her eyes. It was the girl he had seen in the train.

“ O—oh,” he said. “ Didn’t you—a—’smornin’ . . . ” The recognition made them intimate, as nothing else could have done so quickly.

“ Yes. You know, I was so . . . That fellow that gave me his seat . . . I didn’t like . . . I’d much rather stand . . . ”

“ Oh no,” Potter said. “ I—a . . . You couldn’t a stood . . . —I a . . . ”

“ Well, I know you would . . . ” the girl guessed, brilliantly. “ But you were reading your paper . . . ”

“ Eh ? ” said Potter. “ Oh yes. Yes, I was readin’ my paper. You know, I think . . . I think they oughter have more carriages in the morning.”

“ It’s awfully crowded,” she agreed ; “ I didn’t know it was a smoking carriage. I never go down in a smoking carriage. Sometimes—coming home—I do ; but then there’s sometimes more room at night. If you’re early.”

“ I’ve seen you in the evenin’s,” Potter said. “ Not in the mornin’s.”

“ ’Cept this morning. . . . I always think you look tired in the evening. I’m afraid you work too hard. . . . Course I know you have to, if you’re busy.” She was motherly, but hesitating.

“ Oh, I don’t know. Course, it is very hard. People seem to think you’re a slave—day in, day out—what I mean, they keep you at it

because there's such a lot to do. Our manager, old Fudge . . . he—a—don't like me much—course, the boss does, but Fudge don't, because the guvnor does. See?" Hetty said "N-hn." "I had a row with 'im 'sarf'noon—didn't half tell him off, too."

"Did you," ejaculated Hetty, delightedly. "I wish I could. I can never think what to say . . . She's so sarcastic."

"Oh, can't you?" said Potter, rather splendidly. "We got a chap at our place—very sarcastic. I don't take much notice of him, though. I let him see I don't care."

"It must be fine. I get so wild, you know. I can't think what to say. That's what I always think; a man's so independent. Not like a girl." She named her kind with distaste.

Potter laughed richly.

"Oh, but the girl—she, a—she manages the man," he told her.

"Does she?" asked the girl, very softly.

Potter felt the strangest thrill stealing through him at the inquiry. It rose and rose until his heart beat fast and his breath was choked.

"Oh yes," he gasped, confidentially. "These Suffera-gets . . . You're not a . . .?"

"Oh no," she said, in a rush. "Hate them, losing their . . . getting so . . ."

"Unwomanly," Potter suggested.

"Yes. . . . When I see the pavements chalked, I get so wild," the girl said. "Makes me . . . Oh, where's Molly and . . . and your friend?"

Potter looked; they were nowhere to be seen.

"Lorst 'em," he said, simply. "Well, I don't mind. D'you?" He hardly heard her answer, but it made him jerk his head like a cockerel. "Such a lotter people."

"'Tis a crush, isn't it?"

"Gets quahter, beyond the Spaniards," he suggested, thrilling. They pushed slowly through the crowd in the direction of the Spaniards. It thickened, and dwindled, as the parade ceased. "That's better," he remarked, as they escaped. They were walking quite wide apart, and he intentionally moved closer. His companion's sleeve now kept brushing his, and he flushed at each contact. A girl was such a tender thing, so made to accept the help and the will of the man nearest and dearest to her. "Very nice here. . . . Oo, you can breathe here." He took several deep breaths, and Hetty laughed delightfully, to his great comfort and their better acquaintance.



In a few minutes they passed a seat, upon which they both could not help observing that two people were sentimentally sitting. Potter glanced aside at Hetty, and they both laughed a little, with a self-conscious thickness.

“Yes, it’s much nicer down here,” he said, earnestly. “Don’t you think so?”

“It’s quieter.”

“I’m awfully glad you came to-night,” he burst out. He could not have kept it back another second.

“So am I,” murmured Hetty.

They walked along quietly, without speaking, and the wind pressed the leaves together, gently rustling, and when they looked up at the sky they could see the pale stars shining. Down the road there were only slowly loitering couples like themselves, and an occasional street lamp shedding a dim radiance. And Potter’s heart felt as though it was bursting. He was not like himself, but like a great fountain of sighs.

“Yes, I’m awfully glad you came,” he kept on saying, and Hetty felt her mouth running into uncontrollable little smiles. There did not seem anything further to add. They both understood that Potter was moved, and they both took an innocent pleasure in his condition. Hetty was nerving herself to tremendous avowal, far more difficult than her earlier agreement. When it came, it was explicit.

“Yes, I’m very glad too,” she said, in the darkness.

Instinctively, they turned and walked slowly back along the Spaniards Road, and as they joined the crowd and lost the sense of aloneness and intimacy which the silence and the stars had engendered, Potter explained why a monoplane was in his opinion better than a biplane. His talk stumbled as often as their arms touched, as Hetty recognised; but although she also was confused, her head was cooler, her experience greater, and her confusion was lost in the sense of his. She, living with her friend Molly, longed for some such regard as this quite as strongly as Potter longed for sympathy; she wanted to be important to one person even as he desired to be considered personally valuable. Just as she instinctively expressed sympathy, and drew confidences, so Potter exaggerated his claims to heroic qualities and grew masculinely protective. He tried to explain to her the kind of man he most admired.

“What I say,” Potter said, “is that men—men like Bewmont and Vedrines and Grahame White—are doin’ their proper work. That is, they’re bein’ brave.”

"And I s'pose you think girls aren't brave," said Hetty, without temper.

"Oh—I don't say that. But mark you! Their place is in the home. That's where these Suffera-gets are wrong. Their place is to help men. I mean, to keep 'em up. See what I mean?"

She accepted it. The opinion was almost that which she held herself. It was near enough; and she was not accustomed to leading or holding out against the opinions of others.

"But don't you think," she said, "that bravery's not just flying?"

"That's what I always think," Potter agreed. "There's all sorts of bravery." He desperately wanted her to find room for himself in such a category.

"There's working hard, and not complaining."

"Exackly."

"And girls"—still she urged it, for her own reason—"girls are just as good that—you know—help that kind of bravery."

Potter did not understand for a moment what she meant. He was thinking he had never been so happy before. He thought sentimentally of his "thick nights" and other things, and they grew stale. Then it came to him, and he plunged through the generalisations with which they had been playing round their own relation.

"I know what you mean," he said. "There's something Mant—that's the sarcastic feller, you know—he's always recitin' about 'Woman in our hours of ease.' Something about 'A ministering angel thou.' At least, I think it's 'thou.' Well, you're like that."

They were right along past the White Stone Pond at the top of Hampstead Heath, and again the crush had grown less troublesome. But neither saw the moon on the water, or the black trees against the warmer sky; they were self-engrossed, terrible in their ignorance of the world.

"Oh no, I'm not," she protested. "Wish I was."

"Yes you are. I can tell. Why, even just this evenin' with me—Oh, I can tell. Why, think I can't tell? You must think I'm a fool!"

"Well, I don't know. I wish I was brave. Only I'm silly."

"Silly!" Potter seethed with loyal objections. "Hn!"

"I've never had anybody to tell me anything," she said, very quietly, sober with the curious new emotion which had raised her above her own daily nature. "My mother never liked me. She wanted a boy. I was just miserable all the time. Then she died. I've never had anybody, 'cept Molly . . ."

Potter could not say anything. His mind seemed to try to understand something that was beyond it. He jerked his head and grumbled to himself.

"Silly, indeed!" And in a minute. "Well, I like that. Silly!"

They were past the fire station at the bottom of Heath Street.

"That's my road over there," Hetty said, suddenly. Potter suddenly awoke.

"Oh, I didn't know you were a landlord!" he cried, brilliantly.

"Wish I was." They stood still, quite close to one another, and Potter's eyes were fire.

"No, but really . . ." he said. "When shall I see you again? Soon."

"D'you want to?" Hetty asked, archly, with tears in her eyes. And at his step nearer, she cried, "Saturday?"

"I—a—I—a . . . What time? We'll go to Tott'ridge to tea. I say, I don't . . . Tadd didn't say—a——"

"Hetty," she said.

"Saturday here, at three?"

"Goodbye. . . . Yes, goodbye." She held her hand out, and Potter was shaking like a lover. He stood and watched her walk along the road, and waved his hand in reply to her. Then he walked home, blazing. She was there, she was near him, always and forever. His little girl.

Potter sat once more upon the edge of his bed, and a candle was flickering just in front of the mirror. And Potter was saying the name "Hetty" over and over again; and then "twenty-five bob a week, O God!" He put out the candle, and got into bed, and lay there quite quietly until something seemed to make his heart beat great convulsive beats in his throat, and he began to whimper.

FRANK SWINNERTON.

