**The Treasure**

W. Somerset Maugham

Richard harenger was a happy man. Notwith­standing what the pessimists, from Ecclesiastes on­wards, have said, this is not so rare a thing to find in this unhappy world, but Richard Harenger knew it, and that is a very rare thing indeed. The golden mean which the ancients so highly prized is out of fashion, and those who follow it must put up with polite derision from those who see no merit in self-restraint and no virtue in common sense. Richard Harenger shrugged a polite and amused shoulder. Let others live dangerously, let others burn with a hard gemlike flame, let others stake their fortunes on the turn of a card, walk the tightrope that leads to glory or the grave, or hazard their lives for a cause, a passion or an adventure. He neither envied the fame their exploits brought them nor wasted his pity on them when their efforts ended in disaster.

But it must not be inferred from this that Richard Harenger was a selfish or a callous man. He was neither. He was considerate and of a generous dis­position. He was always ready to oblige a friend, and he was sufficiently well off to be able to indulge him­self in the pleasure of helping others. He had some money of his own, and he occupied in the Home Office a position that brought him an adequate stipend. The work suited him. It was regular, responsible and pleasant. Every day when he left the office he went to his club to play bridge for a couple of hours, and on Saturdays and Sundays he played golf. He went abroad for his holidays, staying at good hotels, and visited churches, galleries and museums. He was a regular first-nighter. He dined out a good deal. His friends liked him. He was easy to talk to. He was well read, knowledgeable and amusing. He was besides of a personable exterior, not remarkably handsome, but tall, slim and erect of carriage, with a lean, in­telligent face; his hair was growing thin, for he was now approaching the age of fifty, but his brown eyes retained their smile and his teeth were all his own. He had from nature a good constitution, and he had always taken care of himself. There was no reason in the world why he should not be a happy man, and if there had been in him a trace of self-complacency he might have claimed that he deserved to be.

He had the good fortune even to sail safely through those perilous, unquiet straits of marriage in which so many wise and good men have made shipwreck. Married for love in the early twenties, his wife and he, after some years of almost perfect felicity, had drifted gradually apart. Neither of them wished to marry anyone else, so there was no question *of* divorce (which indeed Richard Harenger’s situation in the government service made undesirable), but for con­venience’ sake, with the help of the family lawyer, they arranged a separation which left them free to lead their lives as each one wished without inter­ference from the other. They parted with mutual expressions *of* respect and good will.

Richard Harenger sold his house in St. John’s Wood and took a flat within convenient walking distance of Whitehall. It had a sitting room which he lined with his books, a dining room into which his Chippendale furniture just fitted, a nice-sized bedroom for himself, and beyond the kitchen a couple of maids’ rooms. He brought his cook, whom he had had for many years, from St. John’s Wood, but needing no longer so large a staff dismissed the rest of the servants and applied at a registry office for a house-parlourmaid. He knew exactly what he wanted, and he explained his needs to the superintendent of the agency with precision. He wanted a maid who was not too young, first be­cause young women are flighty and secondly because, though he was of mature age and a man of principle, people would talk, the porter and the tradesmen if nobody else, and both for the sake of his own repu­tation and that of the young person he considered that the applicant should have reached years of discretion. Besides that he wanted a maid who could clean silver well. He had always had a fancy for old silver, and it was reasonable to demand that the forks and spoons that had been used by a woman of quality under the reign of Queen Anne should be treated with tenderness and respect. He was of a hospitable nature and liked to give at least once a week little dinners of not less than four people and not more than eight. He could trust his cook to send in a meal that his guests would take pleasure in eating and he desired his parlourmaid to wait with neatness and dispatch. Then he needed a perfect valet. He dressed well, in a manner that suited his age and condition, and he liked his clothes to be properly looked after. The parlourmaid he was looking for must be able to press trousers and iron a tie, and he was very particular that his shoes should be well shone. He had small feet, and he took a good deal of trouble to have well­cut shoes. He had a large supply, and he insisted that they should be treed up the moment he took them off. Finally the flat must be kept clean and tidy. It was of course understood that any applicant for the post must be of irreproachable character, sober, honest, reliable and of a pleasing exterior. In return for this he was prepared to offer good wages, reasonable liberty and ample holidays. The superintendent listened without batting an eyelash, and telling him that she was quite sure she could suit him, sent him a string of candidates which proved that she had not paid the smallest attention to a word he said. He saw them all personally. Some were obviously inefficient, some looked fast, some were too old, others too young, some lacked the presence he thought essential; there was not one to whom he was inclined even to give a trial. He was a kindly, polite man, and he de­clined their services with a smile and a pleasant ex­pression of regret. He did not lose patience. He was prepared to interview house-parlourmaids till he found one who was suitable.

Now it is a funny thing about life, if you refuse to accept anything but the best you very often get it: if you utterly decline to make do with what you can get, then somehow or other you are very likely to get what you want. It is as though Fate said, “This man’s a perfect fool, he’s asking for perfection,” and then just out of her feminine wilfulness flung it in his lap. One day the porter of the flats said to Richard Harenger out of a blue sky:

“I hear you’re lookin’ for a house-parlourmaid, sir. There’s someone I know lookin’ for a situation as might do.”

“Can you recommend her personally?”

Richard Harenger had the sound opinion rhat one servant’s recommendation of another was worth much more than that of an employer.

“I can vouch for her respectability. She’s been in some very good situations.”

“I shall be coming in to dress about seven. If that’s convenient to her I could see her then.”

“Very good, sir. I’ll see that she’s told.”

He had not been in more than five minutes when the cook, having answered a ring at the front door, came in and told him that the person the porter had spoken to him about had called.

“Show her in,” he said.

He turned on some more light so that he could see what the applicant looked like, and getting up, stood with his back to the fireplace. A woman came in and stood just inside the door in a respectful attitude.

“Good evening,” he said. “What is your name?”

“Pritchard, sir.”

“How old are you?”

“Thirty-five, sir.”

“Well, that’s a reasonable age.”

He gave his cigarette a puff and looked at her reflectively. She was on the tall side, nearly as tall as he, but he guessed that she wore high heels. Her black dress fitted her station. She held herself well. She had good features and a rather high colour.

“Will you take off your hat?” he asked.

She did so, and he saw that she had pale brown hair. It was neatly and becomingly dressed. She looked strong and healthy. She was neither fat nor thin. In a proper uniform she would look very pre­sentable. She was not inconveniently handsome, but she was certainly a comely, in another class of life you might almost have said a handsome, woman. He proceeded to ask her a number of questions. Her answers were satisfactory. She had left her last place for an adequate reason. She had been trained under a butler and appeared to be well acquainted with her duties. In her last place she had been head parlour­maid of three, but she did not mind undertaking the work of the flat single-handed. She had valeted a gentleman before who had sent her to a tailor’s to learn how to press clothes. She was a little shy, but neither timid nor ill at ease. Richard asked her his questions in his amiable, leisurely way, and she answered them with modest composure. He was considerably impressed. He asked her what refer­ences she could give. They seemed extremely satis­factory.

“Now look here,” he said, “I’m very much inclined to engage you. But I hate changes, I’ve had my cook for twelve years: if you suit me and the place suits you I hope you’ll stay. I mean, I don’t want you to come to me in three or four months and say that you’re leaving to get married.”

“There’s not much fear of that, sir. I’m a widow.

I don’t believe marriage is much catch for anyone in my position, sir. My husband never did a stroke of work from the day I married him to the day he died, and I had to keep him. What I want now is a good home.”

“I’m inclined to agree with you,” he smiled. “Mar­riage is a very good thing, but I think it’s a mistake to make a habit of it.”

She very properly made no reply to this, but waited for him to announce his decision. She did not seem anxious about it. He reflected that if she was as competent as she appeared she must be well aware that she would have no difficulty in finding a place. He told her what wages he was offering, and these seemed to be satisfactory to her. He gave her the necessary information about the place, but she gave him to understand that she was already apprised of this, and he received the impression, which amused rather than disconcerted him, that she had made certain enquiries about him before applying for the situation. It showed prudence on her part and good sense.

“When would you be able to come in if I engaged you? I haven’t got anybody at the moment. The cook’s managing as best she can with a char, but I should like to get settled as soon as possible.”

“Well, sir, I was going to give myself a week’s holiday, but if it’s a matter of obliging a gentleman I don’t mind giving that up. I could come in to­morrow if it was convenient.”

Richard Harenger gave her his attractive smile.

“I shouldn’t like you to do without a holiday that I daresay you’ve been looking forward to. I can very well go on like this for another week. Go and have your holiday and come to me when it’s over.”

“Thank you very much, sir. Would it do if I came in tomorrow week?”

“Quite well.”

When she left, Richard Harenger felt he had done a good day’s work. It looked as though he had found exactly what he was after. He rang for the cook and told her he had engaged a house-parlourmaid at last.

“I think you’ll like her, sir,” she said. “She came in and ’ad a talk with me this afternoon. I could see at once she knew her duties. And she’s not one of them flighty ones.”

“We can but try, Mrs. Jeddy. I hope you gave me a good character.”

“Well, I said you was particular, sir. I said you was a gentleman as liked things just so.”

“I admit that.”

“She said she didn’t mind that. She said she liked a gentleman as knew what was what. She said there’s no satisfaction in doing things proper if nobody notices. I expect you’ll find she’ll take a rare lot of pride in her work.”

“That’s what I want her to do. I think we might go farther and fare worse.”

“Well, sir, there is that to it, of course. And the proof of the pudding’s the eating. But if you ask my opinion I think she’s going to be a real treasure.”

And that is precisely what Pritchard turned out. No man was ever better served. The way she shone shoes was marvellous, and he set out of a fine morning for his walk to the office with a more jaunty step be­cause you could almost see yourself reflected in them. She looked after his clothes with such attention that his colleagues began to chaff him about being the best-dressed man in the Civil Service. One day, com­ing home unexpectedly, he found a line of socks and handkerchiefs hung up to dry in the bathroom. He called Pritchard.

“D’you wash my socks and handkerchiefs your­self, Pritchard ? I should have thought you had enough to do without that.”

“They do ruin them so at the laundry, sir. I prefer to do them at home if you have no objection.”

She knew exactly what he should wear on every occasion, and without asking him was aware whether she should put out a dinner jacket and a black tie in the evening or a dress coat and a white one. When he was going to a party where decorations were to be worn he found his neat little row of medals automati­cally affixed to the lapel of his coat. He soon ceased to choose every morning from his wardrobe the tie he wanted, for he found that she put out for him without fail the one he would have himself selected. Her taste was perfect. He supposed she read his letters, for she always knew' what his movements were, and if he had forgotten at what hour he had an engagement he had no need to look in his book, for Pritchard could tell him. She knew exactly what tone to use with persons with whom she conversed on the telephone. Except with tradesmen, with whom she was apt to be per­emptory, she was always polite, but there was a dis­tinct difference in her manner if she was addressing one of Mr. Harenger’s literary friends or the wife of a Cabinet Minister. She knew by instinct with whom he wished to speak and with whom he didn’t. From his sitting room he sometimes heard her with placid sincerity assuring a caller that he was out, and then she would come in and tell him that So-and-so had rung up, but she thought he wouldn’t wish to be dis­turbed.

“Quite right, Pritchard,” he smiled.

“I knew she only wanted to bother you about that concert,” said Pritchard.

His friends made appointments with him through her, and she w'ould tell him what she had done on his return in the evening.

“Mrs. Soames rang up, sir, and asked if you would lunch with her on Thursday, the eighth, but I said you were very sorry but you were lunching with Lady Versinder. Mr. Oakley rang up and asked if you’d go to a cocktail party at the Savoy next Tuesday at six. I said you would if you possibly could, but you might have to go to the dentist’s.”

“Quite right.”

“I thought you could see when the time came, sir.”

She kept the flat like a new pin. On one occasion soon after she entered his service, Richard, coming back from a holiday, took out a book from his shelves and at once noticed that it had been dusted. He rang the bell.

“I forgot to tell you, when I went away, under no circumstances ever to touch my books. When books are taken out to be dusted they’re never put back in the right place. I don’t mind my books being dirty, but I hate not being able to find them.”

“I’m very sorry, sir,” said Pritchard. “I know some gentlemen are very particular and I took care to put back every book exactly where I took it from.”

Richard Harenger gave his books a glance. So far as he could see, every one was in its accustomed place. He smiled.

“I apologize, Pritchard.”

“They were in a muck, sir. I mean, you couldn’t open one without getting your hands black with dust.”

She certainly kept his silver as he had never had it kept before. He felt called upon to give her a special word of praise.

“Most of it’s Queen Anne and George I, you know,” he explained.

“Yes, I know, sir. When you’ve got something good like that to look after, it’s a pleasure to keep it like it should be.”

“You certainly have a knack for it. I never knew a butler who kept his silver as well as you do.”

“Men haven’t the patience women have,” she re­plied modestly.

As soon as he thought Pritchard had settled down in the place, he resumed the little dinners he was fond of giving once a week. He had already discovered that she knew how to wait at table, but it was with a warm sense of complacency that he realized then how com­petently she could manage a party. She was quick, silent and watchful. A guest had hardly felt the need of something before Pritchard was at his elbow offer­ing him what he wanted. She soon learned the tastes of his more intimate friends and remembered that one liked water instead of soda with his whisky and that another particularly fancied the knuckle end of a leg of lamb. She knew exactly how cold a hock should be not to ruin its taste and how long claret should have stood in the room to bring out its bouquet. It was a pleasure to see her pour out a bottle of burgundy in such a fashion as not to disturb the grounds. On one occasion she did not serve the wine Richard had or­dered. He somewhat sharply pointed this out to her.

“I opened the bottle, sir, and it was slightly corked. So I got the Chambertin, as I thought it was safer.”

“Quite right, Pritchard.”

Presently he left this matter entirely in her hands, for he discovered that she knew perfectly what wines his guests would like. Without orders from him she would provide the best in his cellar and his oldest brandy if she thought they were the sort of people who knew what they were drinking. She had no belief in the palate of women, and when they were of the party was apt to serve the champagne which had to be drunk before it went off. She had the English serv­ant’s instinctive knowledge of social differences, and neither rank nor money blinded her to the fact that someone was not a gentleman, but she had favourites among his friends, and when someone she particularly liked was dining, with the air of a cat that has swal­lowed a canary she would pour out for him a bottle of a wine that Harenger kept for very special occasions. It amused him.

“You’ve got on the right side of Pritchard, old boy,” he exclaimed. “There aren’t many people she gives this wine to.”

Pritchard became an institution. She was known very soon to be the perfect parlourmaid. People en­vied Harenger the possession of her as they envied nothing else that he had. She was worth her weight in gold. Her price was above rubies. Richard Haren­ger beamed with self-complacency when they praised her.

“Good masters make good servants,” he said gaily.

One evening, when they were sitting over their port and she had left the room, they were talking about her.

“It’ll be an awful blow when she leaves you.”

“Why should she leave me? One or two people have tried to get her away from me, but she turned them down. She knows where she’s well off.”

“She’ll get married one of these days.”

“I don’t think she’s that sort.”

“She’s a good-looking woman.”

“Yes, she has quite a decent presence.”

“What are you talking about? She’s a very hand­some creature. In another class *of* life she’d be a well-known society beauty with her photograph in all the papers.”

At that moment Pritchard came in with the coffee. Richard Harenger looked at her. After seeing her every day, off and on, for four years it was now, my word, how time flies, he had really forgotten what she looked like. She did not seem to have changed much since he had first seen her. She was no stouter than then, she still had the high colour, and her regular features bore the same expression which was at once intent and vacuous. The black uniform suited her. She left the room.

“She’s a paragon, and there’s no doubt about it.”

“I know she is,” answered Harenger. “She’s per­fection. I should be lost without her. And the strange thing is that I don’t very much like her.”

“Why not?”

“I think she bores me a little. You see, she has no conversation. I’ve often tried to talk to her. She answers when I speak to her, but that’s all. In four years she’s never volunteered a remark *of* her own. I know absolutely nothing about her. I don’t know if she likes me or if she’s completely indifferent to me. She’s an automaton. I respect her, I appreciate her, I trust her. She has every quality in the world, and I’ve often wondered why it is that with all that I’m so completely indifferent to her. I think it must be that she is entirely devoid of charm.”

They left it at that.

Two or three days after this, since it was Pritch­ard’s night out and he had no engagement, Richard Harenger dined by himself at his club. A page boy came to him and told him that they had just rung up from his flat to say that he had gone out without his keys and should they be brought along to him in a taxi? He put his hand to his pocket. It was a fact. By a singular chance he had forgotten to replace them when he had changed into a blue serge suit before coming out to dinner. His intention had been to play bridge, but it was an off night at the club, and there seemed little chance of a decent game; it occurred to him that it would be a good opportunity to see a pic­ture that he had heard talked about, so he sent back the message by the page that he would call for the keys himself in half an hour.

He rang at the door of his flat, and it was opened by Pritchard. She had the keys in her hand.

“What are you doing here, Pritchard?” he asked. “It’s your night out, isn’t it?”

“Yes, sir. But I didn’t care about going, so I told Mrs. Jeddy she could go instead.”

“You ought to get out when you have the chance,” he said, with his usual thoughtfulness. “It’s not good for you to be cooped up here all the time.”

“I get out now and then on an errand, but I haven’t been out in the evening for the last month.”

“Why on earth not?”

“Well, it’s not very cheerful going out by yourself, and somehow I don’t know anyone just now that I’m particularly keen on going out with.”

“You ought to have a bit of fun now and then. It’s good for you.”

“I’ve got out of the habit of it somehow.”

“Look here, I’m just going to the cinema. Would you like to come along with me?”

He spoke in kindliness, on the spur of the moment, and the moment he had said the words half regretted them.

“Yes, sir, I’d like to,” said Pritchard.

“Run along then and put on a hat.”

“I shan’t be a minute.”

She disappeared, and he went into the sitting room and lit a cigarette. He was a little amused at what he was doing, and pleased, too; it was nice to be able to make someone happy with so little trouble to himself. It was characteristic of Pritchard that she had shown neither surprise nor hesitation. She kept him waiting about five minutes, and when she came back he no­ticed that she had changed her dress. She wore a blue frock in what he supposed was artificial silk, a small black hat with a blue brooch on it, and a silver fox round her neck. He was a trifle relieved to see that she looked neither shabby nor showy. It would never occur to anyone who happened to see them that this was a distinguished official in the Home Office taking his housemaid to the pictures.

“I’m sorry to have kept you waiting, sir.”

“It doesn’t matter at all,” he said graciously.

He opened the front door for her, and she went out before him. He remembered the familiar anecdote of Louis XIV and the courtier and appreciated the fact that she had not hesitated to precede him. The cinema for which they were bound was at no great distance from Mr. Harenger’s flat, and they walked there. He talked about the weather and the state of the roads and Adolf Hitler. Pritchard made suitable replies. They arrived just as Mickey the Mouse was starting, and this put them in a good humour. During the four years she had been in his service Richard Harenger had hardly ever seen Pritchard even smile, and now it diverted him vastly to hear her peal upon peal of joyous laughter. He enjoyed her pleasure. Then the principal attraction was thrown on the screen. It was a good picture, and they both watched it with breathless excitement. Taking his cigarette case out to help himself, he automatically offered it to Pritchard.

“Thank you, sir,” she said, taking one.

He lit it for her. Her eyes were on the screen and she was almost unconscious *of* his action. When the picture was finished they streamed out with the crowd into the street. They walked back towards the flat. It was a fine starry night.

“Did you like it?” he said.

“Like anything, sir. It was a real treat.” A thought occurred to him.

“By the way, did you have any supper tonight?” “No, sir, I didn’t have time.”

“Aren’t you starving?”

"I’ll have a bit of bread and cheese when I get in and I’ll make meself a cup of cocoa.”

“That sounds rather grim.” There was a feeling of gaiety in the air, and the people who poured past them, one way and another, seemed filled with a pleasant elation. In for a penny, in for a pound, he said to himself. “Look here, would you like to come and have a bit of supper with me somewhere?”

“If you’d like to, sir.”

“Come on.”

He hailed a cab. He was feeling very philanthropic and it was not a feeling that he disliked at all. He told the driver to go to a restaurant in Oxford Street which was gay, but at which he was confident there was no chance of meeting anyone he knew. There was an orchestra, and people danced. It would amuse Pritch­ard to see them. When they sat down a waiter came up to them.

“They’ve got a set supper here,” he said, thinking that was what she would like. “I suggest we have that. What would you like to drink? A little white wine?”

“What I really fancy is a glass of ginger beer,” she said.

Richard Harenger ordered himself a whisky and soda. She ate the supper with hearty appetite, and though Harenger was not hungry, to put her at her ease he ate too. The picture they had just seen gave them something to talk about. It was quite true what they had said the other night, Pritchard was not a bad-looking woman, and even if someone had seen them together he would not have minded. It would make rather a good story for his friends when he told them how he had taken the incomparable Pritchard to the cinema and then afterwards to supper. Pritch­ard was looking at the dancers with a faint smile on her lips.

“Do you like dancing?” he said.

“I used to be a rare one for it when I was a girl. I never danced much after I was married. My husband was a bit shorter than me, and somehow I never think it looks well unless the gentleman’s taller, if you know what I mean. I suppose I shall be getting too old for it soon.”

Richard was certainly taller than his parlourmaid. They would look all right. He was fond of dancing and he danced well. But he hesitated. He did not want to embarrass Pritchard by asking her to dance with him. It was better not to go too far perhaps. And yet what did it matter? It was a drab life she led. She was so sensible, if she thought it a mistake he was pretty sure she would find a decent excuse.

“Would you like to take a turn, Pritchard?” he said, as the band struck up again.

“I’m terribly out of practice, sir.”

“What does that matter?”

“If you don’t mind, sir,” she answered coolly, ris­ing from her seat.

She was not in the least shy. She was only afraid that she would not be able to follow his step. They moved on to the floor. He found she danced very well.

“Why, you dance perfectly, Pritchard,” he said.

“It’s coming back to me.”

Although she was a big woman, she was light on her feet, and she had a natural sense of rhythm. She was very pleasant to dance with. He gave a glance at the mirrors that lined the walls, and he could not help reflecting that they looked very well together. Their eyes met in the mirror; he wondered whether she was thinking that, too. They had two more dances, and then Richard Harenger suggested that they should go. He paid the bill and they walked out. He noticed that she threaded her way through the crowd without a trace of self-consciousness. They got into a taxi and in ten minutes were at home.

“I’ll go up the back way, sir,” said Pritchard.

“There’s no need to do that. Come up in the lift with me.”

He took her up, giving the night porter an icy glance, so that he should not think it strange that he came back at that somewhat late hour with his par­lourmaid, and with his latchkey let her into the flat.

“Well, good night, sir,” she said. “Thank you very much. It’s been a real treat for me.”

“Thank *you,* Pritchard. I should have had a very dull evening by myself. I hope you’ve enjoyed your outing.”

“That I have, sir, more than I can say.”

It had been a success. Richard Harenger was satis­fied with himself. It was a kindly thing for him to have done. It was a very agreeable sensation to give anyone so much real pleasure. His benevolence warmed him and for a moment he felt a great love in his heart for the whole human race.

“Good night, Pritchard,” he said, and because he felt happy and good he put his arm round her waist and kissed her on the lips.

Her lips were very soft. They lingered on his, and she returned his kiss. It was the warm, hearty em­brace of a healthy woman in the prime of life. He found it very pleasant, and he held her to him a little more closely. She put her arms round his neck.

As a general rule he did not wake till Pritchard came in with his letters, but next morning he woke at half past seven. He had a curious sensation that he did not recognize. He was accustomed to sleep with two pillows under his head, and he suddenly grew aware of the fact that he had only one. Then he re­membered and with a start looked round. The other pillow was beside his own. Thank God, no sleeping head rested there, but it was plain that one had. His heart sank. He broke out into a cold sweat.

“My God, what a fool I’ve been!” he cried out loud.

How could he have done anything so stupid? What on earth had come over him? He was the last man to play about with servant girls. What a disgraceful thing to do! At his age and in his position. He had not heard Pritchard slip away. He must have been asleep. It wasn’t even as if he’d liked her very much. She wasn’t his type. And as he had said the other night, she rather bored him. Even now he only knew her as Pritchard. He had no notion what her first name was. What madness! And what was to happen now? The position was impossible. It was obvious he couldn’t keep her, and yet to send her away for what was his fault as much as hers seemed shockingly unfair. How idiotic to lose the best parlourmaid a man ever had just for an hour’s folly!

“It’s that damned kindness of heart of mine,” he groaned.

He would never find anyone else to look after his clothes so admirably or clean the silver so well. She knew all his friends’ telephone numbers, and she understood wine. But of course she must go. She must see for herself that after what had happened things could never be the same. He would make her a hand­some present and give her an excellent reference. At any minute she would be coming in now. Would she be arch, would she be familiar? Or would she put on airs? Perhaps even she wouldn’t trouble to come in with his letters. It would be awful if he had to ring the bell and Mrs. Jeddy came in and said: “Pritch­ard’s not up yet, sir, she’s having a lie in after last night.”

“What a fool I’ve been! What a contemptible cad!”

There was a knock at the door. He was sick with anxiety.

“Come in.”

Richard Harenger was a very unhappy man.

Pritchard came in as the clock struck. She wore the print dress she was in the habit of wearing during the early part of the day.

“Good morning, sir,” she said.

“Good morning.”

She drew the curtains and handed him his letters and the papers. Her face was impassive. She looked exactly as she always looked. Her movements had the same competent deliberation that they always had. She neither avoided Richard’s glance nor sought it.

“Will you wear your grey, sir? It came back from the tailor’s yesterday.”

“Yes.”

He pretended to read his letters, but he watched her from under his eyelashes. Her back was turned to him. She took his vest and drawers and folded them over a chair. She took the studs out of the shirt he had worn the day before and studded a clean one. She put out some clean socks for him and placed them on the seat of a chair with the suspenders to match by the side. Then she put out his grey suit and at­tached the braces to the back buttons of the trousers. She opened his wardrobe and after a moment’s re­flection chose a tie to go with the suit. She collected on her arm the suit of the day before and picked up the shoes.

“Will you have breakfast now, sir, or will you have your bath first?”

“I’ll have breakfast now,” he said.

“Very good, sir.”

With her slow quiet movements, unruffled, she left the room. Her face bore that rather serious, deferen­tial, vacuous look it always bore. What had happened might have been a dream. Nothing in Pritchard’s de­meanour suggested that she had the smallest recollec­tion of the night before. He gave a sigh of relief. It was going to be all right. She need not go, she need not go. Pritchard was the perfect parlourmaid. He knew that never by word nor gesture would she ever refer to the fact that for a moment their relations had been other than those of master and servant. Richard Harenger was a very happy man.