CLASSICS TO GO

THE ASTONISHING ADVENTURE OF JANE SMITH

PATRICIA WENTWORTH

The Astonishing

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Patricia Wentworth

CHAPTER I

The dining-room of Molloy's flat had not been built to receive twenty-five guests, but the Delegates of twenty-five affiliated Organisations had been crowded into it. The unshaded electric light glared down upon men of many types and nationalities. It did not flatter them.

The air was heavy with the smoke of bad tobacco and the fumes of a very indifferent gas fire. There was a table in the middle of the room, and some dozen of the men were seated at it. The rest stood in groups, or leaned against the walls.

Of the four who formed the Inner Council three were present. Most of the Delegates had expected that the head of The Council, the head of the Federated Organisations, that mysterious Number One whom they all knew by reputation and yet had never seen in the flesh, would be present in person to take the chair. But the Delegates who had entertained this expectation were doomed to disappointment. Once again Number One's authority had been delegated to the other three members of The Council. Of these, Number Three was Molloy, the big, handsome Irishman who rented the flat. He sat facing the door, a fine figure of a man in the late forties. Number Two leaned forward over the fire, warming his hands, his pale, intellectual face expressionless, his eyes veiled. Belcovitch, who was Number Four, was on his feet speaking. They were large, bony feet, in boots which had most noticeably not been made for him. He spoke fluently, but with a heavy foreign accent.

“Propaganda,” he said, and laughed; really he had a very unpleasant laugh—“propaganda is what you call rot, rubbish, damn nonsense. What else have we been about for years—no, generations—and where are we to-day?”

Number Two drew his chair closer to the fire with an impatient jerk. Number Four’s oratory bored him stiff. The room was cold. This gas fire was like all gas fires. He pulled his fur coat together and spoke sharply:

“Molloy, this room’s most infernally cold, and where in the world does the draught come from?”

“Propaganda is dead,” said Number Four. He looked over his shoulder with dislike at Number Two, and mopped his brow with a dirty handkerchief. Molloy, just opposite him, turned a little and laughed.

“You bring the cold with you, Number Two,” he said. “Here’s Number Four as hot as his own speeches. You’ve got all the fire, and the door’s shut, and a screen in front of it, so what more do you want?”

“Propaganda is dead,” repeated Number Four. He stood with his back to the door. Only the top panel of it showed above the black screen which had been drawn across it. The screen had four leaves. On each leaf a golden stork on one leg contemplated a golden water-lily. The light shone on the golden birds and the golden flowers.

Number Four thrust his handkerchief back into his pocket, and rapped sharply on the table. It was covered with a red cloth which had seen better days. Number Fourteen had upset the ink only a few moments before, and a greenish-purple patch was still spreading amidst the crimson.

Belcovitch leaned forward, both his hands on the table, his raucous voice brought to a dead level. “Instead of propaganda, what?” he said. “Instead of building here, teaching there, what? That is what I’m here to-night to tell you. To-morrow you all go to your own places, each to his post; but before you go, I am authorised to prepare you for what is to come. It will not be to-day, but it may be to-morrow, or it may not be for many to-morrows yet. One final stage is lacking, but in essentials The Process is complete. Propaganda is dead, because we no longer need propaganda. Comrades”—his voice sank a little—“there are enough of us. Every city in the world has its quota. What The Process will effect”—he paused, looked round, caught Number Two’s slightly sardonic expression, and struck the table with his open hand—“what The Process will effect is this,” he cried—“in one word, Annihilation of the whole human race! Only our organisation will be left.”

“Now what I am instructed to tell you is this,”—he spoke evenly, swiftly, statement following statement—never had the attention of an audience been so fully his; and then suddenly the thread was broken. With a loud grating sound, Number Fifteen, sitting next to Molloy, pushed his chair back, and sprang to his feet.

“The door!” he shouted. “The door!” Every man in the room looked where Fifteen was looking. Above the water-lilies and the storks, where the top panel of the door had shown, there was a dark, empty space. The door was open.

Number Four whipped out a revolver and dragged the screen away. The door was open, and in the doorway stood a girl in her nightdress. Her hands were stretched out, as if she were feeling her way. Her eyes, of a greenish hazel in colour, were widely opened, and had a dazed expression.

Her brown hair hung in two neat plaits. Her feet were bare. Molloy pushed forward quickly.

“Well, there, if that wasn’t the start of our lives,” he said, “and no reason for it when all’s said and done. It’s my daughter, Renata, comrades, and she’s walking in her sleep. Now I’ll just take her back to her room and be with you again.”

“A minute, I think, Molloy,” said Number Two. He got up slowly out of his chair, and came across to where the girl stood motionless, blinking at the light. “I *said* there was a most infernal draught. Will you come in, Miss Molloy?” he added politely, and took the girl by the hand. She yielded to his touch, and came into the room, shivering a little. Some one shut the door. Molloy, shrugging his shoulders, pulled the crimson cloth from the table and wrapped it about his daughter. The ink-soaked patch came upon her bare shoulder, and she cried out, cast a wild look at the strange and terrifying faces about her, and burst into a flood of tears.

Molloy, standing behind her, looked around as she had looked, and his face darkened. Number Four had his back against the door, and his revolver in his hand. There was only one face in the whole circle that was not stamped with suspicion and fear, and behind the fear and the suspicion there was something icy, something ruthless. Number Two, with a slightly bored expression, was feeling in his waistcoat pocket. He produced a small glass bottle, extracted from it a tiny pellet, and proceeded to dissolve it in the glass of water which had stood neglected at Number Four’s right hand.

“Now, Miss Molloy,” he said, but Molloy caught him by the wrist.

“What the devil——” he stammered, and Number Two laughed.

“My dear Molloy,” he said, “how crude! You might know me better than that.”

He held the glass to Renata’s lips, and she took it and drank. When she had set down the glass, she felt her way to a chair and leaned back with closed eyes. The room seemed to whirl about her. A confusion of sound was in her ears, loud, angry, with sentences that came and went. “If she heard,”—then another—“How long was she there? Some one must have seen the door open.”

“Who did, then?” Then in the harshest voice of all, “I don’t care if she’s Molloy’s daughter fifty times over, if she heard what Four said about The Process, she must go.” Go where?

There was something cold and wet touching her shoulder. The cold seemed to spread all over her. Now her father was speaking. She had never heard his voice quite like that before. And now the man in the fur coat, the one who had given her the glass of water:

“Yes, certainly, elimination if it is necessary. We’re all agreed about that. But let us make sure.” His voice had quite a gentle sound, but Renata’s heart began to beat with great thuds.

“Miss Molloy,”—he was speaking to her now, and she opened her eyes and looked at him. His face was of a clear, even pallor. His eyes, light blue and without noticeable lashes, looked straight into hers. The veil was gone from them. They held a terrifying intelligence.

Renata sat up. The crowd of men had cleared away. She, and her father, and the man in the fur coat were in an angle

formed by the table and the black screen, which had been drawn close around them. Her father sat between her and the fire. His head was turned away, and he drummed incessantly on the table with the fingers of his right hand. Beyond the screen Renata could hear movements, and it came to her that the other men were there, waiting. The man in the fur coat spoke to her again. His voice was pleasant and cultivated, his manner reassuring.

“You are better now? Please don’t be frightened. I am a doctor; your father will tell you that. Being wakened suddenly like that gave you a shock, but you are better now.”

“Yes,” said Renata. She wished that her heart would stop beating so hard, and she wished that the man in the fur coat would stop looking at her.

“Now, Miss Renata, I am your doctor, you know, and I want you to answer just a few questions. You have walked in your sleep before?”

“Yes,” said Renata—“oh yes.”

“Often?”

“Yes.”

“What was the first time?”

“I think—I think I was five years old. They found me in the garden.”

Molloy let out a great breath of relief. If she had forgotten, if her account had differed from his—well, well, their luck was in.

There was a whispering from behind the screen. Number Two frowned.

“And the last time?”

“It was at school. I walked into another dormitory and frightened the girls.”

The man in the fur coat nodded. “So your father said.” And for a moment Molloy stared over his shoulder at him. “And to-night? Do you dream on these occasions?”

Renata was reassured. Every moment it was more like an ordinary visit to a doctor. She had been asked all these questions so often. Her voice no longer trembled as she answered. “Yes, I dream. I walk in my sleep because of the dream; now to-night....”

“Yes, to-night?”

“I dreamt I was back at school, and I thought I heard talking in the next dormitory. You know we are not allowed to talk, and I am—I mean I was a prefect. So I got up, and went to see what was the matter, and some one pulled the screen away, and there was such a light, and such a noise.” She put out a shaking hand, and Number Two patted it kindly.

“Very startling for you,” he said. “So you opened the door and came in and heard us all talking. Can you tell me what was being said?” His hand was on Renata’s wrist, and he felt the pulses leap. She spoke a shade too quickly:

“I don’t know.”

“Perhaps I can help you. Your father, you know, travels for a firm of chemists, a firm in which I and my friends are also interested. We were discussing a new aniline dye which, we

hope, will capture the markets of the world. Now did you hear that word—aniline—or anything like it? You see I want to find out just what woke you. What tiresome questions we doctors ask, don't we?"

He smiled, and Renata tried to collect her thoughts. They were in great confusion.

Aniline—annihilate—the two words kept coming and going. If her head had been clearer she would almost certainly have fallen into the trap which had been laid for her. Molloy stopped drumming on the table and clenched his hand. With all his strength he was praying to the saints in whom he no longer believed. Behind the screen twenty-three men waited in a dead silence. Renata was not frightened any more, but she was tired—oh, so dreadfully tired. Annihilate—aniline—the words and their similarity of sound teased her. She turned from them with a little burst of petulance.

"I didn't hear anything like that. Oh, do let me go to bed! I only heard some one call out...."

"Yes?" said Number Two.

"He said, 'The door, the door!' and then there were all those lights."

CHAPTER II

Jane Smith sat on a bench in Kensington Gardens. Her entire worldly fortune lay in her lap. It consisted of two shillings and eleven pence. She had already counted the pennies four times, because there really should have been three shillings. She was now engaged in making a list in parallel columns of (*a*) those persons from whom she might seek financial assistance, and (*b*) the excellent reasons which prevented her from approaching them.

Jane had a passion for making lists. Years and years and years ago Mr. Carruthers had said to her, “My dear, you must learn to be businesslike. I have never been businesslike myself, and it has always been a great trouble to me.” And then and there he and Jane had, in collaboration, embarked upon the First List. It was a thrilling list, a list of toys for Jane’s very first Christmas tree. Since then she had made lists of her books, lists of her clothes, shopping lists, and an annual list of good resolutions.

Jane stopped writing, and began to think about all those other lists. She had always showed them to Mr. Carruthers, and he had always gazed at them with the same vague benignness, and said how businesslike she was getting.

Dear Cousin James—Jane was rich instead of poor when she thought about him. She looked across at the trees in their new mist of green, and then suddenly the thin April sunshine dazzled in her eyes and the green swam into a blur. Cousin James was gone, and Jane was alone in Kensington Gardens with two-and-elevenpence and a list.

She opened and shut her eyes very quickly once or twice, and fixed her attention upon (*a*) and (*b*) in their parallel columns. At the top of the list Jane had written “Cousin Louisa,” and the reason against asking Cousin Louisa’s assistance was set down as, “Because she was a perfect beast to my darling Jimmy, and a worse beast to me, and anyhow, she wouldn’t.”

In moments of irreverence the late Mr. Carruthers—*the* Mr. Carruthers, author of five monumental volumes on Ethnographical Differentiation—had been addressed by his young ward and cousin as “darling Jimmy.”

Professor Philpot came next. “A darling, but he is sitting somewhere in Central Africa in a cage learning to talk gorilla. I do hope they haven’t eaten him, or whatever they do do to people when they catch them.”

It will be observed that Miss Smith’s association with the world of science had not succeeded in chastening her grammar.

Jane’s pencil travelled down the list.

“Mr. Bruce Murray. In Thibet studying Llamas.”

“Henry”—Jane shook her head and solemnly put two thick black lines through Henry’s name. One cannot ask for financial assistance from a young man whose hand one has refused in marriage—“even if it was three years ago, and he’s probably been in love with at least fifteen girls since then.”

“Henry’s mamma—well, the only time she ever loved me in her life was when I refused Henry, so I should think she was an Absolute Wash Out—and that’s the lot.”

Jane folded up the list and put it into her handbag. Two silver shillings and eleven copper pennies, and then the workhouse!

It was at this moment that a stout lady with a ginger-coloured pug sat heavily down upon the far end of Jane's bench. The ginger-coloured pug was on a scarlet leather lead, and after seating herself the stout lady bent forward creaking, and lifted him to a place beside her.

Jane wondered vaguely why a red face and a tightly curled fringe should go with a passion for bugled bonnets and pugs.

"Was 'ums hungry?" said the stout lady.

The pug breathed stertorously, after the manner of pugs, and his mistress at once produced two paper bags from a beaded reticule. From one of them she took a macaroon, and from the other a sponge finger. The pug chose the macaroon.

"Precious," cooed the stout lady, and all at once Jane felt entirely capable of theft and murder—theft from the stout lady, and murder upon the person of the ginger pug. For at the sight of food she realised how very, very hungry she was. Bread and margarine for breakfast six hours before, and the April air was keen, and Jane was young.

The pug spat out the last mouthful of macaroon, ignored the sponge finger, and snorted loudly.

"Oh, naughty, naughty," said the stout lady. She half turned towards Jane.

"You really wouldn't believe how clever he is," she observed conversationally; "it's a cream bun he's asking for as plain

as plain, and yesterday when I bought them for him, he teased and teased until I went back for macaroons; though, of course, a nice plain sponge finger is really better for him than either. I don’t need the vet. to tell me that. Come along, a naughty, tiresome precious then.” She lifted the pug down from the seat, put the paper bags tidily back into her reticule, rose ponderously to her feet, and walked away, trailing the scarlet lead and cooing to the ginger pug.

Jane watched her go.

“Why don’t I laugh?” she said. “Why doesn’t she amuse me? One needn’t lose one’s sense of humour even if one is down and out.”

It was at this unpropitious moment that the tall young man who had sat down unseen upon Jane’s other side, laid his hand upon hers and observed in stirring accents:

“Darling.”

Jane whisked round in an icy temper. Her greenish-hazel eyes looked through the young man in the direction of the north pole. He ought to have stiffened to an icicle then and there, instead of which he murmured, “Darling,” again, and then added—“but what’s the matter?” Jane stopped looking at him or through him. He had simply ceased to exist. She picked up her two shillings and her eleven pence, put them into her purse, and consigned her purse to her handbag. She then closed the handbag with a snap, and rose to her feet.

“Renata!” exclaimed the young man in tones of consternation.

Jane paused and allowed herself to observe him for the first time. She saw a young man with an intellectual forehead

and studious brown eyes. He appeared to be hurt and surprised. She decided that this was not a would-be Lothario.

“I think you have made a mistake,” she said, and was about to pass on.

“But, Renata, Renata, darling!” stammered the young man even more desperately. Jane assumed what Cousin Louisa had once described as “that absurdly grand manner.” It was quite kind, but it induced the young man to believe that Jane was conversing with him from about the distance of the planet Saturn.

“I think,” she said, “that you must be taking me for my cousin, Renata Molloy.”

“But I’m engaged to her—no, I mean to you—oh, hang it all, Renata, what’s the sense of a silly joke like this?”

Jane looked at him keenly. “What is my cousin’s middle name?” she inquired.

“Jane. I hate it.”

“Thank you,” said Jane. “My name is Jane Renata Smith, and I am Renata Jane Molloy’s first cousin. Our mothers were twin sisters, and I have always understood that we were very much alike.”

“Alike!” gasped the young man. Words seemed to fail him.

Jane bowed slightly and began to walk away, but, before she had gone a dozen paces, he was beside her again.

“If you’re really Renata’s cousin, I want to talk to you—I must talk to you. Will you let me?”

Jane walked as far as the next seat, and sat down with resignation.

“I don’t even know your name.”

“It’s Todhunter—Arnold Todhunter.” He seemed a trifle breathless. “My sister Daphne was at school with Renata, and she came to stay with us once in the holidays. I said we were engaged, didn’t I? Only, nobody knows it. You won’t tell Mr. Molloy, will you?”

“I’ve never spoken to Mr. Molloy in my life,” said Jane. “There was a most awful row when my aunt married him, and none of us have ever met each other since. My aunt died years and years ago. I think Mr. Molloy is an Anarchist of some sort, isn’t he?”

“Yes, yes, yes,” said Mr. Todhunter, with violence. He banged the back of the iron seat with his hand. Jane reflected that he must be very much in love if he failed to notice how hard it was.

“Yes, yes, he is,” repeated Mr. Todhunter, “and worse; and Renata is in the most dreadful position. I must talk to somebody, or I shall go mad.”

“Well, you can talk to me,” said Jane soothingly. “I have always wanted to meet Renata, and I should love to hear all about her.”

Mr. Todhunter hesitated.

“Miss Smith—you did say Smith, didn’t you?—it’s so difficult to begin. You’ll probably think I’m mad, or trying it on, but it’s like this: I’ve just qualified as an engineer, and I’ve got a job in South America. Naturally I wanted to see Mr. Molloy. Renata wouldn’t let me. She hardly knows her father, and

she’s most awfully scared of him. We used to meet in the Park. Then one day she didn’t come. She went on not coming, and I nearly went mad. At last I went to Molloy’s flat and asked to see her. They said she had left town, but it was a lie. Just before the door shut, I heard her voice.” Mr. Todhunter paused. “Look here, you won’t give any of this away, will you? You know, it’s awfully confusing for me, your being so like Renata. It makes my head go round.”

“Go on,” said Jane.

“Well, the bit I don’t want you to tell any one is this—I mean to say, it’s confidential, absolutely confidential: when I was at the Engineering School, I knew a chap who had got mixed up with Molloy’s lot. He didn’t get deep in, you’ll understand. They scared him, and he backed out. Well, I remembered a yarn he had told me. He was in Molloy’s flat one night, and it was raided. And I remembered that he said a lot of them got away down the fire-escape into a yard, and then out through some mews at the back. Well, I went and nosed about until I found that fire-escape, and I got up it, and I found Renata’s room and talked to her through the window. It’s not so dangerous as it sounds, because they lock her in the flat at night, and go out. And she’s in a frightful position—oh, Miss Smith, you simply have no idea of what a frightful position she’s in!”

“I might have, if you would tell me what it is,” said Jane dryly. She found Mr. Todhunter diffuse.

“Well, she’s a prisoner, to start with. They keep her locked in her room.”

“Who’s they?” interrupted Jane.

Mr. Todhunter rumpled his hair. “She doesn’t even know their names,” he said distractedly. His voice dropped to a

whisper. “It’s the most appalling criminal organisation, Miss Smith. Molloy’s one of them, but they won’t even let Molloy see her alone now. You see, they think she overheard something. They don’t know whether she did or not. If they were sure that she did, they would kill her.”

“Well, did she?” said Jane.

“I don’t know,” said Mr. Todhunter gloomily. “She cried such a lot, and we were both rather confused, and she’s most awfully frightened, you know.” He glared at Jane as if she had something to do with Renata being frightened. “If I’m to take up this job of mine, I have to sail in three days’ time. I want her to marry me and come too; but she says that, if she runs away, they’ll make sure she heard something, and, if it’s the farthest ends of the earth, they’ll find her and kill her. It seems Molloy told her that. And if she stays here and they bully her again, she doesn’t know what she may give away. It’s a frightful position, isn’t it?”

“Why don’t you go to the police?” said Jane.

“I thought of that, but they’d laugh at me. I haven’t heard anything, and I don’t know anything. Molloy would only say that Renata was under age, and that he had locked her in to prevent her running away with me. Then they’d kill her.”

“I see,” said Jane. Then—“What do you want me to do?” she asked.

All the time that Mr. Todhunter had been glooming and groaning, running his fingers through his hair and depicting Renata’s appalling position, the Great Idea had been slowly forming itself in his mind. Every time that he looked at Jane, her likeness to Renata made him feel quite giddy. The Great Idea intoxicated him. He began to decant it.

“Miss Smith, if you would—you see, if we could only get a clear start—what I mean to say is, South America’s a long way off——”

“Quite a distance,” Jane agreed.

“And if they thought that you were Renata, they wouldn’t look for her—and once we were clear away——”

“My *dear* Mr. Todhunter!” said Jane.

“I could take you up the fire-escape,” said Mr. Todhunter, in low, thrilling accents. “It would be quite easy. They would never know that Renata was not there. You do see what I mean, don’t you?”

“Oh yes,” said Jane in rather an odd voice. “You’ve made it beautifully clear. Renata is in a position of deadly peril—I think that’s what you called it—and the simple way out is for Renata to elope with you to South America, and for me to be in the position of deadly peril instead. It’s a beautiful plan.”

“Then you’ll do it?” exclaimed the oblivious Mr. Todhunter.

Jane looked away. Immediately in front of her was a strip of gravelled path. Beyond that there was green grass, and a bed of pale blue hyacinths, and budding daffodils. Two-and-elevenpence, and then the workhouse—the ascent of a fire-escape in the April darkness, and at the top of the fire-escape a position of deadly peril.

“Of course,” said Jane, speaking to herself in her own mind. “I might try to be a housemaid, but one has to have a character, and I don’t believe Cousin Louisa would give me one.”

She turned back to the chafing Mr. Todhunter.

“Let’s talk,” she said briefly.

CHAPTER III

Jane took down the telephone directory, opened it, and began to run her finger along the column of “M’s.” As she did so, she wondered why the light in public call offices is so arranged as to strike the top of the occupant’s head, and never by any chance to illumine the directory.

“Marbot”—“Marbottle”—“March, The Rev. Aloysius”—“March, George William Adolphus”—“March, Mrs. de Luttrelle.”

Jane made a mark opposite the number.

When Rosa Mortimer married Henry Luttrell March, she thought, and often said, how much nicer the Luttrell would look if it were written de Luttrelle. If her husband had died six months earlier than he actually did, the name in this improved form would most certainly have been inflicted upon an infant Henry. As it was, the child was baptized and registered as Henry Luttrell, and ten years later took up the struggle over the name where his father had left it. Eventually, a compromise was effected, Mrs. March flaunting her de Luttrelle, and Henry tending to suppress his Luttrell under an initial. His mother never ceased to bemoan his stubbornness.

“Any one would think that Henry was not proud of his family, and he may say what he likes, but there were de Luttrelles for hundreds of years before any one ever heard of a Luttrell. And Luttrell Marches is bound to come to him, or practically bound to, because, whatever Henry may say, I am quite sure that Tony will never turn up again.”

The very sound of the aggrieved voice was in Jane’s ears as she unhung the receiver and gave the number. She supposed that Henry still lived with his mother, and that Mrs. March would still keep an indignant bridge table waiting whilst she discoursed upon Henry—his faults, his foibles, his ailments, and his prospects of inheriting Luttrell Marches.

At that moment Henry, appropriately enough, was gazing at a photograph of Jane. It must not be imagined that this was a habit of his. Three years ago was three years ago, and Jane had receded into the distance with a great many other pleasant things. But to-night he had been looking through some old snapshots, and all of a sudden there was that three-years-old Cornish holiday, and Jane. Henry sat frowning at the photograph.

Jane—why was one fond of Jane? He wondered where she was. It was only last week that some one had mentioned old Carruthers, and had seemed surprised that Henry did not know how long he had been dead.

The telephone bell rang, and Henry jumped up with relief.

“Hullo!” said a voice—and “Hullo!” said Henry.

“Is that Captain March?”

“Speaking,” said Henry.

“It’s Jane Smith,” said the voice, and Henry very nearly dropped the receiver. There was a pause, and then Jane said:

“I want to come and see you on business. Can you spare the time?”

“Er—my mother’s out,” said Henry, and he heard her say, “Thank goodness,” with much sincerity. The next moment she was apologising.

“Oh, I say, Henry, that sounded awfully rude, but I really do want to see you about something very important. No, you can’t come and see me. I’m one of the great unemployed, and I’m not living anywhere at present. No, I won’t meet you at a restaurant either. Just tell me your nearest Tube Station, and I’ll come along. All right then; I won’t be more than ten minutes.”

Henry turned away, feeling a little dazed. Being a methodical young man, he proceeded to put away the photographs with which the table was littered. A little snapshot of Jane he kept to the last, and ended by not putting it away at all. After he had looked at it for some time, he put it on the mantelpiece behind the clock. The hands pointed to nine o’clock precisely. Then he looked at himself in the glass that was over the mantel, and straightened his tie.

Henry’s mother naturally considered him the most beautiful of created beings. Without going quite as far as this, Henry certainly approved of his own looks. Having approved of himself, he proceeded to move the clock back half an inch, and to alter the position of the twisted candlesticks on either side of it. Then he poked the fire. Then he began to walk up and down the room. And then the bell rang.

Henry went out into the hall and opened the door of the flat, and there on the threshold stood Jane in a shabby blue serge coat and skirt, with an old black felt hat. Not pretty, not smart—just Jane. She walked in and gave him her hand.

“Hullo, Henry!” she said. Then she laughed. “Or, do I call you Captain March?”

“You call me Henry,” said Henry, and he shut the door.

“I expect you’d like to come into the drawing-room”—this came hurriedly after a moment’s pause. He moved across the hall, switched on the light, and stood aside for her to pass. Jane looked in and saw more pink cushions and pink lamp-shades than she would have believed it possible to get into one small room. There were also a great many pink roses, and the air was heavy with scent.

“I’m sure that’s not where you see people on business,” said Jane, and Henry led the way into the dining-room.

“This is my room,” he said, and Jane sat down on a straight, high-backed chair and leaned her elbows on the table.

“Now, Henry,” she said, “I’ve come here to tell you a story, and I want you to sit down and listen to it; and please forget that you are you, and that I am I. Just listen.”

Henry sat down obediently. It was so good to see Jane again that, if she liked to sit there and talk till midnight, he had no objection.

“Now attend,” said Jane, and she began her story.

“Once upon a time there were twin sisters, and they were called Renata and Jane Carruthers. They had a cousin James—you remember him—my darling Jimmy? Jimmy wanted to marry Renata, but she refused him and married John Smith, my father, and when I was five years old she and my father both died, and Jimmy adopted me. Now we come to the other twin. Her name was Jane, and she ran away to America with a sort of anarchist Irishman named Molloy. She

died young, and she left one daughter, whom she called Renata Jane. I, by the bye, am Jane Renata. The twin sisters were so much alike that no one ever knew them apart. Jimmy had photographs of them, and even he could never tell me which was my mother and which was my Aunt Jane. Now, Henry, listen to this. My Cousin Renata is in London, and it seems that she and I are just as much alike as our mothers were. In fact, it's because Renata's young man took me for Renata this afternoon that I am here, asking your advice, at the present moment."

Henry smiled a somewhat puzzled smile. "Have you asked my advice?" he said; but Jane did not smile. Instead, she leaned forward a little.

"Are you still at Scotland Yard, Henry?"

He nodded.

"Criminal Investigation Department?"

He nodded again.

"Then listen. Renata is in what her young man calls 'a position of deadly peril.' In more ordinary language, she's in a nasty hole. Do you know anything about Cornelius Molloy? That's the Anarchist Uncle, Renata's father, you know."

"There aren't any anarchists nowadays," said Henry meditatively.

"I was brought up on anarchists, and I don't see that it matters what you call them," said Jane. "'A' for Anarchist, 'B' for Bolshevik, and so on. The point is, do you know anything about Molloy?"

"I've heard of him," Henry admitted.

“Nothing good?”

“We don’t hear much that’s good about people—officially, you know.”

“Well, Arnold Todhunter says that Renata is supposed to have overheard something—something that her father’s associates think so important that they’re keeping her under lock and key, and seriously contemplating putting her out of the way altogether.”

“Did she overhear anything?” asked Henry, just as Jane had done.

“No one knows except Renata, and she won’t tell. Molloy goes back to the States to-morrow. They won’t let him take Renata with him, and Arnold Todhunter wants to marry her and carry her off to Bolivia, where he’s got an engineering job.”

“That appears to be a good scheme,” said Henry.

“Yes, but you see they’ll never let her go so long as they are not sure how much she knows. Arnold says she was walking in her sleep, and blundered in on about twenty-five of them, all talking the most deadly secrets. And they don’t know when she woke or what she heard. And”—Jane’s eyes began to dance a little—“Arnold has a perfectly splendid idea. He takes Renata to Bolivia, and I take Renata’s place. Nobody knows she has gone, so nobody looks for her.”

“What nonsense,” said Henry; then—“What’s this Todhunter like?”

“A mug,” said Jane briefly. She paused, and then went on in a different voice:

“Henry, who is at Luttrell Marches now? Did your Cousin Tony ever turn up?”

Henry stared at her.

“Why do you ask that?”

“Because,” said Jane, with perfect simplicity, “Renata is to be sent down to Luttrell Marches to-morrow, and somebody there—somebody, Henry—will decide whether she is to be eliminated or not.”

Henry sat perfectly silent. He stared at Jane, and she stared at him. It seemed as if the silence in the room were growing heavier and heavier, like water that gathers behind some unseen dam. All of a sudden Henry sprang to his feet.

“Is this a hoax?” he asked, in tones of such anger that Jane hardly recognised them.

Jane got up too. The hand that she rested upon the table was not quite steady.

“Henry, how dare you?” and her voice shook a little too.

Henry swung round.

“No, no—I beg your pardon, Jane, for the Lord’s sake don’t look at me like that. It’s, it’s—well, it’s pretty staggering to have you come here and say....” He paused. “What was it you wanted to know?”

“I asked you who is living at Luttrell Marches.”

Henry was silent. He walked to the end of the room and back. Jane’s eyes followed him. Where had this sudden wave of emotion come from? It seemed to be eddying about

them, filling the confined space. Jane made herself look away from Henry, forced herself to notice the room, the furniture, the pictures—anything that was commonplace and ordinary. This was decidedly Henry's room and not his mother's, from the worn leather chairs and plain oak table to the neutral coloured walls with their half-dozen Meissonier engravings. Not a flower, not a trifle of any sort, and one wall all books from ceiling to floor. Exactly opposite to Jane there was a fine print of "The Generals in the Snow." The lowering, thunderous sky, heavy with snow and black with the omens of Napoleon's fall, dominated the picture, the room. Jane looked at it, and looked away with a shiver, and as she did so, Henry was speaking:

"Jane, I don't want to answer that question for a minute or two. I want to think. I want a little time to turn things over in my mind. Look here, come round to the fire and sit down comfortably. Let's talk about something else for a bit. I want all your news, for one thing. Tell me what you've been doing with yourself."

Jane came slowly to the fireside. After all, it was pleasant just to put everything on one side, and be comfortable. Henry's chair was very comfortable, and the day seemed to have lasted for weeks, and weeks, and weeks. She put out her hands to the fire, and then, because she noticed that they were still trembling a little, she folded them in her lap. Henry leaned against the mantelpiece and looked down at her.

"Where have you been?" he asked.

"Well, that summer at Upwater—you know we were lodging with the woman who had the post office—Jimmy and I stayed on after all the other visitors were gone. I expect it was rather irregular, but I used to help her. You see her son

didn’t get back until eighteen months after the armistice, and she wasn’t really up to the work. In the end, you may say I ran that post office. I did it very well, too. It was something to do, especially after Jimmy died.”

“Yes, I heard. I wondered where you were.”

“I stayed on until the son came home, and then I couldn’t. He was awful, and she thought him quite perfect, poor old soul. I came to London and got a job in an office, and a month ago I lost it. The firm was cutting down expenses, like everybody else. And then—well, I looked for another job, and couldn’t find one, and this morning my landlady locked the door in my face and kept my box. And that, Henry, is why I am thinking seriously of changing places with my Cousin Renata, who, at least, has a roof over her head and enough to eat.”

“Jane,” said Henry furiously, “you don’t mean to say—so that’s why you’re looking such a white rag!”

Jane was horrified to find that her eyes had filled with tears. She laughed, but the laugh was not a very convincing one.

“I did have a cup of coffee and two penny buns,” she began; and then Henry was fetching sandwiches from the sideboard and pressing a cup of hot chocolate into her not unwilling hands.

“They leave this awful stuff over a spirit lamp for my mother, and she always has sandwiches when she comes in. It’s better than nothing,” he added in tones of wrath.

“It’s not awful,” protested Jane; but Henry was not mollified.

“I don’t understand,” he said. “Why are you so hard up? Didn’t Mr. Carruthers provide for you?”

Jane’s colour rose.

“He hadn’t much, and what he had was an annuity. You know what Jimmy was, and how he forgot things. I am really quite sure that he had forgotten about its being an annuity, and that he thought that I should be quite comfortable.”

Henry swallowed his opinion of Mr. Carruthers.

“Was he your only relation?”

“Well,” said Jane, who was beginning to feel better, “you can’t really count Cousin Louisa; she was only Jimmy’s half-sister, and that makes her a sort of third half-cousin of my mother’s. Besides, she always simply loathed me.”

“And you’ve no other relations at all?”

“Only the Anarchist Uncle,” said Jane brightly. She gave him her cup and plate. “Your mother has simply lovely sandwiches, Henry. Thank you ever so much for them, but what will she do when she comes home and finds I have eaten them all?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure.” Henry’s tone was very short. “Look here, Jane, you must let—er, er, I mean, won’t you let....” He stuck, and Jane looked at him very kindly.

“Nothing doing, Henry,” she said, “but it’s frightfully nice of you, all the same.”

There was a silence. When Jane thought it had lasted long enough, she said:

“So, you see, it all comes back again to Renata. Have you done your thinking, Henry?”