THE SECRET PLACES OF THE HEART

BY

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CHAPTER THE FIRST

THE CONSULTATION

§ 1

THE maid was a young woman of great natural calmness; she was accustomed to let in visitors who had this air of being annoyed and finding one umbrella too numerous for them. It mattered nothing to her that the gentleman was asking for Dr. Martineau as if he was asking for something with an unpleasant taste. Almost imperceptibly she relieved him of his umbrella and juggled his hat and coat on to a massive mahogany stand. "What name, Sir?" she asked, holding open the door of the consulting room.

"Hardy," said the gentleman, and then yielding it reluctantly with its distasteful three-year-old honour, "Sir Richmond Hardy."

The door closed softly behind him and he found himself in undivided possession of the large indif-

ferent apartment in which the nervous and mental troubles of the outer world eddied for a time on their way to the distinguished specialist. A bowl of daffodils, a handsome bookcase containing bound Victorian magazines and antiquated medical works, some paintings of Scotch scenery, three big armchairs, a buhl clock, and a bronze Dancing Faun, by their want of any collective idea enhanced rather than mitigated the promiscuous disregard of the room. He drifted to the midmost of the three windows and stared out despondently at Harley Street.

For a minute or so he remained as still and limp as an empty jacket on its peg, and then a gust of irritation stirred him.

"Damned fool I was to come here," he said. . . . "*Damned* fool!

"Rush out of the place? . . .

"I've given my name." . . .

He heard the door behind him open and for a moment pretended not to hear. Then he turned round. "I don't see what you can do for me," he said.

"I'm sure *I* don't," said the doctor. "People come here and talk."

There was something reassuringly inaggressive about the figure that confronted Sir Richmond. Dr. Martineau's height wanted at least three inches of Sir Richmond's five feet eleven; he was humanly plump, his face was round and pink and

cheerfully wistful, a little suggestive of the full moon, of what the full moon might be if it could get fresh air and exercise. Either his tailor had made his trousers too short or he had braced them too high so that he seemed to have grown out of them quite recently. Sir Richmond had been dreading an encounter with some dominating and mesmeric personality; this amiable presence dispelled his preconceived resistances.

Dr. Martineau, a little out of breath as though he had been running upstairs, with his hands in his trouser pockets, seemed intent only on disavowals. "People come here and talk. It does them good, and sometimes I am able to offer a suggestion.

"Talking to someone who understands a little," he expanded the idea.

"I'm jangling damnably . . . overwork. . . ."

"Not overwork," Dr. Martineau corrected. "Not overwork. Overwork never hurt anyone. Fatigue stops that. A man can work—good straightforward work, without internal resistance, until he drops,—and never hurt himself. You must be working against friction."

"Friction! I'm like a machine without oil. I'm grinding to death. . . . And it's so *damned* important I *shouldn't* break down. It's *vitally* important."

He stressed his words and reinforced them with a quivering gesture of his upraised clenched hand. "My temper's in rags. I explode at any little

thing. I'm *raw*. I can't work steadily for ten minutes and I can't leave off working."

"Your name," said the doctor, "is familiar. Sir Richmond Hardy? In the papers. What is it?"

"Fuel."

"Of course! The Fuel Commission. Stupid of me! We certainly can't afford to have you ill."

"I *am* ill. But you can't afford to have me absent from that Commission."

"Your technical knowledge——"

"Technical knowledge be damned! Those men mean to corner the national fuel supply. And waste it! For their profits. That's what I'm up against. You don't know the job I have to do. You don't know what a Commission of that sort is. The moral tangle of it. You don't know how its possibilities and limitations are canvassed and schemed about, long before a single member is appointed. Old Cassidy worked the whole thing with the prime minister. I can see that now as plain as daylight. I might have seen it at first. . . . Three experts who'd been got at; they thought *I'd* been got at; two Labour men who'd do anything you wanted them to do provided you called them 'level-headed.' Wagstaffe the socialist art critic who could be trusted to play the fool and make nationalization look silly, and the rest mine owners, railway managers, oil profiteers, financial adventurers. . . ."

He was fairly launched. "It's the blind folly of it! In the days before the war it was different. Then there was abundance. A little grabbing or cornering was all to the good. All to the good. It prevented things being used up too fast. And the world was running by habit; the inertia was tremendous. You could take all sorts of liberties. But all this is altered. We're living in a different world. The public won't stand things it used to stand. It's a new public. It's—wild. It'll smash up the show if they go too far. Everything short and running shorter—food, fuel, material. But these people go on. They go on as though nothing had changed. . . . Strikes, Russia, nothing will warn them. There are men on that Commission who would steal the brakes off a mountain railway just before they went down in it. . . . It's a struggle with suicidal imbeciles. It's——! But I'm talking! I didn't come here to talk Fuel."

"You think there may be a smash-up?"

"I lie awake at night, thinking of it."

"A social smash-up."

"Economic. Social. Yes. Don't you?"

"A social smash-up seems to me altogether a possibility. All sorts of people I find think that," said the doctor. "All sorts of people lie awake thinking of it."

"I wish some of my damned Committee would!"

The doctor turned his eyes to the window. "I lie awake too," he said and seemed to reflect. But he

was observing his patient acutely—with his ears.

"But you see how important it is," said Sir Richmond, and left his sentence unfinished.

"I'll do what I can for you," said the doctor, and considered swiftly what line of talk he had best follow.

§ 2

"This sense of a coming smash is epidemic," said the doctor. "It's at the back of all sorts of mental trouble. It is a new state of mind. Before the war it was abnormal—a phase of neurasthenia. Now it is almost the normal state with whole classes of intelligent people. Intelligent, I say. The others always have been casual and adventurous and always will be. A loss of confidence in the general background of life. So that we seem to float over abysses."

"We do," said Sir Richmond.

"And we have nothing but the old habits and ideas acquired in the days of our assurance. There is a discord, a jarring."

The doctor pursued his train of thought. "A new, raw and dreadful sense of responsibility for the universe. Accompanied by a realization that the job is overwhelmingly too big for us."

"We've got to stand up to the job," said Sir Richmond. "Anyhow, what else is there to do?

We *may* keep things together. . . . I've got to do my bit. And if only I could hold myself at it, I could beat those fellows. But that's where the devil of it comes in. Never have I been so desirous to work well in my life. And never have I been so slack and weak-willed and inaccurate. . . . Sloppy. . . . Indolent. . . . *Vicious!* . . ."

The doctor was about to speak, but Sir Richmond interrupted him. "What's got hold of me? What's got hold of me? I used to work well enough. It's as if my will had come untwisted and was ravelling out into separate strands. I've lost my unity. I'm not a man but a mob. I've got to recover my vigour. At any cost."

Again as the doctor was about to speak the word was taken out of his mouth. "And what I think of it, Dr. Martineau, is this: it's fatigue. It's mental and moral fatigue. Too much effort. On too high a level. And too—austere. One strains and fags. *Flags!* 'Flags' I meant to say. One strains and flags and then the lower stuff in one, the subconscious stuff, takes control."

There was a flavour of popularized psychoanalysis about this, and the doctor drew in the corners of his mouth and gave his head a critical slant. "M'm." But this only made Sir Richmond raise his voice and quicken his speech. "I want," he said, "a good tonic. A pick-me-up, a stimulating harmless drug of some sort. That's indicated anyhow. To begin with. Something to pull me

together, as people say. Bring me up to the scratch again."

"I don't like the use of drugs," said the doctor.

The expectation of Sir Richmond's expression changed to disappointment. "But that's not reasonable," he cried. "That's not reasonable. That's superstition. Call a thing a drug and condemn it! Everything is a drug. Everything that affects you. Food stimulates or tranquillizes. Drink. Noise is a stimulant and quiet an opiate. What is life but response to stimulants? Or reaction after them? When I'm exhausted I want food. When I'm overactive and sleepless I want tranquillizing. When I'm dispersed I want pulling together."

"But we don't know how to use drugs," the doctor objected.

"But you ought to know."

Dr. Martineau fixed his eye on a first floor window sill on the opposite side of Harley Street. His manner suggested a lecturer holding on to his theme.

"A day will come when we shall be able to manipulate drugs—all sorts of drugs—and work them in to our general way of living. I have no prejudice against them at all. A time will come when we shall correct our moods, get down to our reserves of energy by their help, suspend fatigue, put off sleep during long spells of exertion. At

some sudden crisis for example. When we shall know enough to know just how far to go with this, that or the other stuff. And how to wash out its after effects. . . . I quite agree with you,—in principle. . . . But that time hasn't come yet. . . . Decades of research yet. . . . If we tried that sort of thing now, we should be like children playing with poisons and explosives. . . . It's out of the question."

"I've been taking a few little things already. Easton Syrup for example."

"Strychnine. It carries you for a time and drops you by the way. Has it done you any good —any *nett* good? It has—I can see—broken your sleep."

The doctor turned round again to his patient and looked up into his troubled face.

"Given physiological trouble I don't mind resorting to a drug. Given structural injury I don't mind surgery. But except for any little mischief your amateur drugging may have done you do not seem to me to be either sick or injured. You've no trouble either of structure or material. You're —worried—ill in your mind, and otherwise perfectly sound. It's the current of your thoughts, fermenting. If the trouble is in the mental sphere, why go out of the mental sphere for a treatment? Talk and thought; these are your remedies. Cool deliberate thought. You're unravelled. You say it yourself. Drugs will only make this or that un-

ravelled strand behave disproportionately. You don't want that. You want to take stock of yourself as a whole—find out where you stand."

"But the Fuel Commission?"

"Is it sitting now?"

"Adjourned till after Whitsuntide. But there's heaps of work to be done.

"Still," he added, "this is my one chance of any treatment."

The doctor made a little calculation. "Three weeks. . . . It's scarcely time enough to begin."

"You're certain that no regimen of carefully planned and chosen tonics——"

"Dismiss the idea. Dismiss it." He decided to take a plunge. "I've just been thinking of a little holiday for myself. But I'd like to see you through this. And if I am to see you through, there ought to be some sort of beginning now. In this three weeks. Suppose. . . ."

Sir Richmond leapt to his thought. "I'm free to go anywhere."

"Golf would drive a man of your composition mad?"

"It would."

"That's that. Still—. . . The country must be getting beautiful again now,—after all the rain we have had. I have a little two-seater. I don't know. . . . The repair people promise to release it before Friday."

"But *I* have a choice of two very comfortable little cars. Why not be my guest?"

"That might be more convenient."

"I'd prefer my own car."

"Then what do you say?"

"I agree. Peripatetic treatment."

"South and west. We could talk on the road. In the evenings. By the wayside. We might make the beginnings of a treatment. . . . A simple tour. Nothing elaborate. You wouldn't bring a man?"

"I always drive myself."

§ 3

"There's something very pleasant," said the doctor, envisaging his own rash proposal, "in travelling along roads you don't know and seeing houses and parks and villages and towns for which you do not feel in the slightest degree responsible. They hide all their troubles from the road. Their backyards are tucked away out of sight, they show a brave face; there's none of the nasty self-betrayals of the railway approach. And everything will be fresh still. There will still be a lot of apple-blossom—and bluebells. . . . And all the while we can be getting on with your affair."

He was back at the window now. "I want the holiday myself," he said.

He addressed Sir Richmond over his shoulder. "Have you noted how fagged and unstable *everybody* is getting? Everybody intelligent, I mean."

"It's an infernally worrying time."

"Exactly. Everybody suffers."

"It's no *good* going on in the old ways——"

"It isn't. And it's a frightful strain to get into any new ways. So here we are.

"A man," the doctor expanded, "isn't a creature in vacuo. He's himself and his world. He's a surface of contact, a system of adaptations, between his essential self and his surroundings. Well, our surroundings have become—how shall I put it?—a landslide. The war which seemed such a definable catastrophe in 1914 was, after all, only the first loud crack and smash of the collapse. The war is over and—nothing is over. This peace is a farce, reconstruction an exploded phrase. The slide goes on,—it goes, if anything, faster, without a sign of stopping. And all our poor little adaptations! Which we have been elaborating and trusting all our lives! . . . One after another they fail us. We are stripped. . . . We have to begin all over again. . . . I'm fifty-seven and I feel at times nowadays like a chicken new hatched in a thunderstorm."

The doctor walked towards the bookcase and turned.

"Everybody is like that. . . . It isn't—what are you going to do? It isn't—what am I going to do? It's—what are we all going to do? . . . Lord! How safe and established everything was in 1910, say. We talked of this great war that was coming, but nobody thought it would come. We had been born in peace, comparatively speaking; we had been brought up in peace. There was talk of wars. There were wars—little wars—that altered nothing material. . . . Consols used to be at 112 and you fed your household on ten shillings a head a week. You could run over all Europe, barring Turkey and Russia, without even a passport. You could get to Italy in a day. Never were life and comfort so safe—for respectable people. And we *were* respectable people. . . . That was the world that made us what we are. That was the sheltering and friendly greenhouse in which we grew. We fitted our minds to that. . . . And here we are with the greenhouse falling in upon us lump by lump, smash and clatter, the wild winds of heaven tearing in through the gaps."

Upstairs on Dr. Martineau's desk lay the typescript of the opening chapters of a book that was intended to make a great splash in the world, his *Psychology of a New Age*. He had his metaphors ready.

"We said: 'This system will always go on. We needn't bother about it.' We just planned our

lives accordingly. It was like a bird building its nest of frozen snakes. My father left me a decent independence. I developed my position; I have lived between here and the hospital, doing good work, enormously interested, prosperous, mildly distinguished. I had been born and brought up on the good ship Civilization. I assumed that someone else was steering the ship all right. I never knew; I never enquired."

"Nor did I," said Sir Richmond, "but——"

"And nobody was steering the ship," the doctor went on. "Nobody had ever steered the ship. It was adrift."

"I realized that. I——"

"It is a new realization. Always hitherto men have lived by faith—as children do, as the animals do. At the back of the healthy mind, human or animal, has been this persuasion: 'This is all right. This will go on. If I keep the rule, if I do so and so, all will be well. I need not trouble further; things are cared for.' "

"If we could go on like that!" said Sir Richmond.

"We can't. That faith is dead. The war—and the peace—have killed it."

The doctor's round face became speculative. His resemblance to the full moon increased. He seemed to gaze at remote things. "It may very well be that man is no more capable of living out of that atmosphere of assurance than a tadpole is

of living out of water. His mental existence may be conditional on that. Deprived of it he may become incapable of sustained social life. He may become frantically self-seeking—incoherent . . . a stampede. . . . Human sanity may—*disperse.*

"That's our trouble," the doctor completed. "Our fundamental trouble. All our confidences and our accustomed adaptations are destroyed. We fit together no longer. We are—loose. We don't know where we are nor what to do. The psychology of the former time fails to give safe responses, and the psychology of the New Age has still to develop."

§ 4

"That is all very well," said Sir Richmond in the resolute voice of one who will be pent no longer. "That is all very well as far as it goes. But it does not cover my case. I am not suffering from inadaptation. I *have* adapted. I have thought things out. I think—much as you do. Much as you do. So it's not that. But—— . . . Mind you, I am perfectly clear where I am. Where we are. What is happening to us all is the break-up of the entire system. Agreed! We have to make another system or perish amidst the wreckage. I see that clearly. Science and plan have to replace custom and tradition in human affairs. Soon. Very soon. Granted. Granted. We used