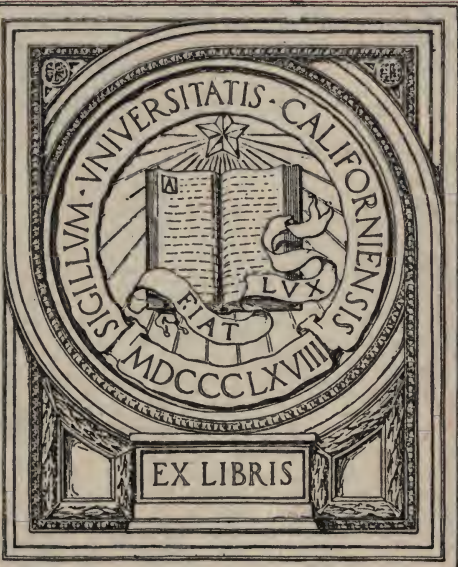


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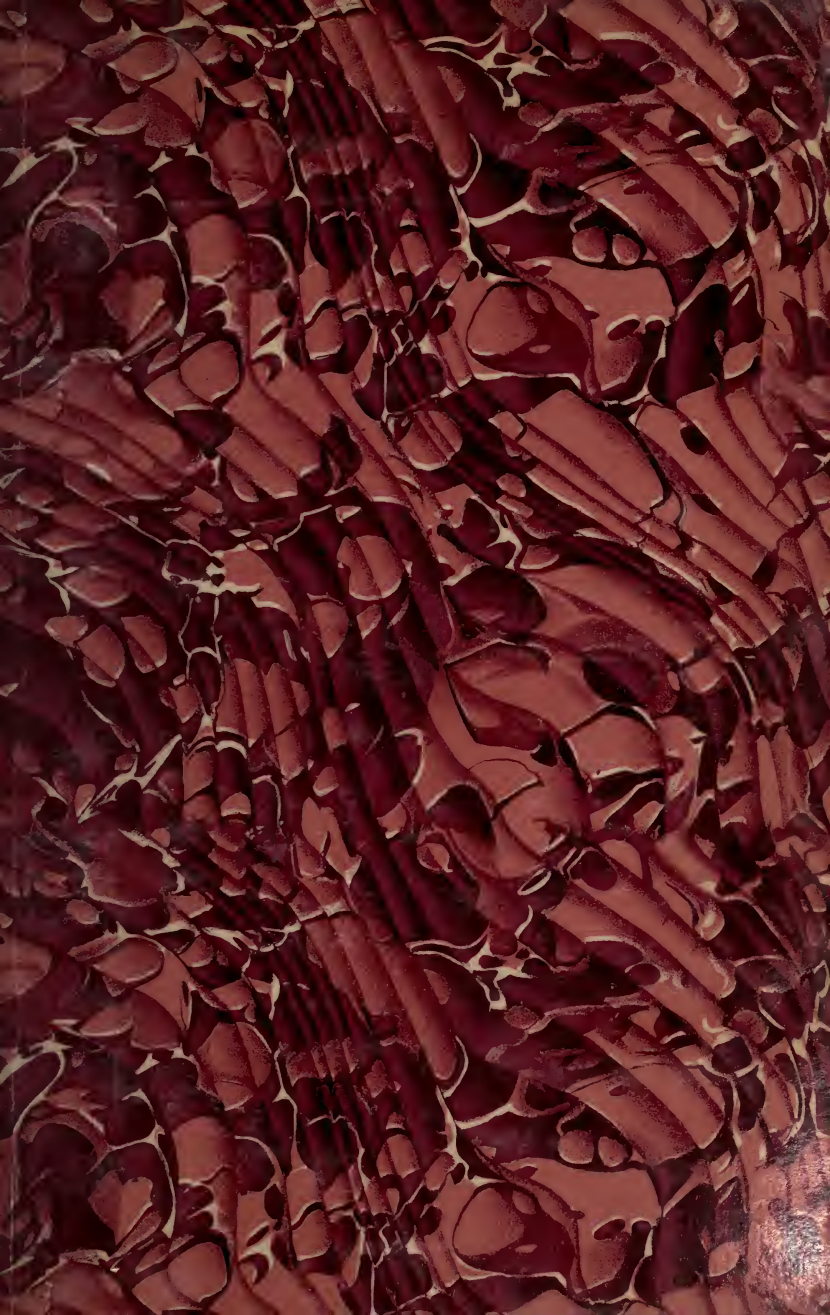


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PIGS IN CLOVER

SEVENTH EDITION.

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BY

FRANK DANBY *parent.*

AUTHOR OF "DR. PHILLIPS: A MAIDA VALE IDYLL,"
"A BABE IN BOHEMIA," ETC.

Miss Julia Frankau

*"And each man kills the thing he loves.
By each let this be heard,
Some do it with a bitter look,
Some with a flattering word,
The coward does it with a kiss . . .*

."



PHILADELPHIA

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PIGS IN CLOVER

CHAPTER ONE

CONSTANTIA met him herself at the station with the ill news. Stephen Hayward was a father, but no longer a husband. Angela's travail had ended; and the dull grey life, for Angela's life had in truth been both dull and grey, had gone out in the agony of her motherhood. She was not formed for joy. Stephen, poor fellow, shocked into silence with the news, news that he read in his sister's face, in the grasp of her hand, in her filled eyes, followed her into the brougham without a question. But she told him, nevertheless, in a few sentences all that had happened. She spared him the medical details. Everything that it was possible to do had been done, the doctor said. Stephen's quick mind took in the situation.

"She was thirty-nine, you know," added Constantia through her tears.

"Have you telegraphed to the Marquis?"

"To everybody."

"She seemed quite well when she left town," he said dully.

"I think she has been very happy, dear," she replied soothingly.

Stephen looked at her under his tired eyes. There were tears in Constantia's, and a break in her voice.

"Happy!" he said, "happy. So you think she has been very happy?"

"Yes," Constantia answered hurriedly, laying her hand

in his. "I do think she has been happy. She loved you, Steve—she did really, always."

"I know," he said, and then relapsed into silence. He knew.

The brougham rolled on through the flat, bare country, and the brother and sister had no more to say to each other of their dead cousin, of Stephen's wife. The shadow of her lay chill between them as they drove. That she had been "happy" with him was absurd. Constantia knew instinctively that she had touched the wrong note. But it was sad, it was horribly sad, that Angela was dead; she had been in no one's way.

"How did you get on?" she asked presently.

"They listened to me."

Constantia knew he was satisfied.

"And the division?"

"A Government majority of eight."

"That means dissolution," she said quickly.

"Something like it."

Stephen was never voluble; that was all that Constantia could glean from him at the moment. Brother and sister were very silent in the brougham, and both of them thought of Angela, although the political value of Bulgaria to the Fourth Party was so much more vital to them both. They drove silently home along the bare road which had once been a thick avenue of trees, the road that led up to Hadalstone Hall. Stephen hated all the part of his life that lay in and around Hadalstone. Here he had realised to what his father had sunk both name and estate. Here, as a little child, he had heard the word "Disgrace" thundered in his ears, and had seen his mother wither under the lash of it. Here, as a lad, he had returned to that dim, miserable dream, and found it wealed across her wounded heart. This was his patrimony—disgrace, bare mortgaged acres, and a dismantled house. And yet he could not part with it, and yet, when Angela was to bear him a child, it was here it must be born. His pride was rooted in the place.

He turned to Constantia when the Hall was in sight.

"The luck of the place follows it," he said. "I suppose she hated being here?"

"She liked being here. Again and again she said she was glad she was at Hadalstone. You know, Steve," she added beneath her breath, almost in a whisper, "it was here you first met."

She laid her hand upon his arm. He took her hand.

"You are a good soul, Con. You and Angela were always too good for me."

"I am very proud of you, my dear. I have always been proud of you," she answered with simple truth.

He knew his unworthiness of these two good women's love and trust, but intellectual pride and consciousness of strength were perhaps better than the virtues with which they credited him.

"Is the boy all right?" he asked Constantia.

"Boy! What boy? I beg your pardon; my thoughts were wandering. I meant to tell you, it is a girl."

"Good heavens! How like Angela to have a girl."

Then he was silent, perhaps ashamed to have remembered at this moment her characteristic awkwardness. The ten years between the days when as a boy he had made love to her, and the hour when he riveted his claims on the family by leading her to the altar, had developed his knowledge of her. A dull woman, plain, with the respectable ideals of the *bourgeoisie*.

The old butler stood in the hall with gloomy face; all the blinds were drawn down. Last night's scene in the House was clear to Stephen against the background of this gloomy old home of his. There had been his triumph; here was his misfortune, misfortune others had made for him. In the Hall, in that first moment of arrival, he had a bitter feeling towards even Angela, towards his dead wife. His place at Westminster he had won for himself. She dragged him back here, now, in the moment of his triumph, to drive it into him that this was his heritage.

A little later he went alone into the death chamber. It was just as it had been in his mother's time; on that carved mahogany four-poster he had seen her pale dead face. The scent of death in the room, he remembered that too; and the old servant who had said:

"Don't grieve, Master, don't you fret. Poor lady, it's well she's gone; for she couldn't forget what your father had done, and where he'd spent two years; and 'Keep my boy abroad; don't let him know; don't let him hear,' was what she said to your uncle, time after time. Although she longed for you, she would never let you come."

It was in this room the veil had been lifted, and he knew that, though the blood of all the Haywards was in his veins, he was, nevertheless, a felon's son.

How the cold of the room went through him now, he shivered as he stood. There was no old servant in the room now, he was alone. But the words were there, they hung about the shabby draperies, he felt them as he approached the bed where the sheeted figure lay, stiffly defined. He could not raise the sheet for a moment; he stood still and remembered.

Poor Angela! Even death had not beautified her,—and Stephen was ultra-sensitive. High cheek bones, and dead sunken eyes, blue stone, thin sunken mouth, blue too, pinched nose; the grave clothes lay flat on her flat chest.

"A badly-made woman, and too old to have had a child," was the thought that rose in that logical mind of his. Then he stooped and replaced the sheet, not without reverence. Dutifulness, when he was at Hadalstone, lay on Stephen as a garment, a garment worn in defiance of, and in revolt against, Jack Hayward's lawlessness. Having reverently replaced the sheet, he lingered in the room a few moments, and tried to give his thoughts to the dead woman.

Death gave Angela no dignity, as it had given her no beauty. Stephen remembered he had thought it strange that she had failed to see the humour of his making love

to her. It was not because there were ten years between them, for there were ten years between him and Con, and Constantia was a woman whom any man might have wooed and wed.

He stood in the chamber where Angela lay dead, and tried to think tenderly of her.

The family interest—she had secured him that. The few years of their married life had been years of uninterrupted political growth. And he was grateful, he knew he was grateful. Never from him had she had an ungentle word. Her blood circulated slowly, she was awkwardly philanthropic, socially shy. But he reproached her for nothing, contradicted her never, she had lived at his side and he had disregarded her with complete amiability. No differences of opinion had vexed their short married life; for Angela had no opinions, and Stephen had not been interested as to whether she shared his. There was no common ground between them whereon they could stand to quarrel; they had had no quarrels. When he had realised she had no sense of humour, he even discontinued laughing at her.

When he left the room, remembering these things, he thought he had been good to her, that he had done his duty by her.

But her death was badly timed. Angela had always had a tendency to do the wrong thing at the wrong time. There were, there ought to be, crises at St. Stephen's. His place was there now; every hour he was away might count against him. There were so many men, so few places.

He grudged the time she lay dead above ground. Outwardly he did everything that was correct. Inwardly he chafed, walked up and down the library like a caged animal; waited feverishly for telegrams, despatches, fresh editions of the newspapers.

Con understood him and left him alone. But she was a dutiful woman, it was instinct with her, not revolt, and, before he left Hadalstone, she brought the baby, the little,

ill-timed, unwanted girl, for him to see. He was in the hall, the trap was at the door. He looked at the baby, of course, fastidiously, distastefully, fidgeting with his necktie, adjusting the collar of his coat, obviously nervous and bored with the duty before him.

"Seems a trifle unnecessary," he said, with a perfunctory glance, preparing to retreat if more were expected of him.

"Yes," answered Constantia, somewhat doubtfully; the bundle in her arms moved her, it was so small and light. "It is very weakly; it ought to be christened, I think."

He looked at it. Out of a puckered red face two blue eyes wandered pathetically on to a motherless world.

"Singularly ugly, isn't it?" he asked again.

"I think it is like Angela," she said, bending over it tenderly. Angela was not so plain to her; she was just Angela, Stephen's first rung. Con did not realise that she had damned effectually in its father's eyes the little thing she held in her arms.

"Ah! have it christened by all means. Do the right thing, Con; you know I'm up to my neck in work."

He got away from Hadalstone, from Angela's baby, as quickly as he could. He pictured her afterwards, for many years, Angela's daughter, flat-footed, full of platitudinous commonplaces, a figureless girl with lank hair. Picture and reality, however, were very different.

Stephen had no time for domestic life after his wife's death; as a matter of fact, he had little inclination for it then or before. Politics and salmon-fishing occupied him ostensibly, but there was a trace of his father in him nevertheless. He was no saint, but, realising the value of the world's good opinion, he maintained his own self-respect, and acquired theirs, by his apparent acceptance of popular standards. The greater part of his life was lived in public, a small part in supremest darkness, the rest with Constantia, who did more for him than wife or secretary, and looked upon him always as a sacred

charge. She read an excessive sensitiveness into his complexities, affairs of State into his rare absences, and gave him every latitude.

There was no room in his life for Aline Victoria Ernestine Hayward, as they had christened Angela's baby. Practically he handed her over to Constantia, who had arranged his marriage, dreamed over his career, and lived her life believing in his power to rehabilitate their branch of the Hayward family. The Hayward family was her religion, Stephen her god. Constantia took up the little burden that Stephen had laid upon her as she had always gladly taken up Stephen's burdens, and did her duty by it conscientiously.

Poor little baby! it lived at Hadalstone. Stephen saw it at rare intervals; and it happened that on three out of four of these occasions, when Stephen's parental promptings brought him to Hadalstone, it would develop the usual infantile ailments. Therefore he never corrected his first impression, never dissociated her from her mother—until too late.

In fourteen years Stephen visited Hadalstone about half a dozen times. He always spoke amiably of the child, and to her on the rare occasions when they met in the darkened sick-room; and, when she was convalescent, he would send her, or Constantia would send in his name, toys, cakes, money. The name of father became synonymous in her youngest days with pleasant things. Later, it became synonymous with great ones. Stephen's footsteps scarcely wavered during Aline's childhood. The Fourth Party collapsed and the brilliant leader with it, but Stephen Hayward found safety and possibilities under a Liberal Government.

It was but for a short time, however. A great political landmark was swept away; an old man in his dotage had put his hands on a mighty lever—the love of the sons of the Empire for the mother that bore them. The machinery moved, groaned, turned, and Liberalism was shattered and scattered in the first rotation of the wheel.

Other men were flung here and there in the revolution, moved by strange cranks. Stephen was flung back into the arms of the Party with which he had originally been associated,—the Party of which Lord Sarum was the head. He drew his cousin with him, and thus the Marquis of Jevington, and his sons and nephews and cousins and all his relations, found themselves standing shoulder to shoulder in their strong, united effort to stop the mischief that the dotard had done.

Of all those relatives and lieutenants of the great house that stood shoulder to shoulder supporting the leadership of Lord Sarum, there were few more active, or more valuable, than Stephen Hayward, with his thin, nervous face and clever, cynical tongue, the son of that old black-guard, by courtesy, Lord John Hayward, who had been the family disgrace and the family scandal in days gone by.

After the final defeat of the Home Rule Bill, Stephen Hayward's position was assured. The Marquis was again in the Cabinet, and his brilliant cousin was Under-Secretary of State. If he had to wait for place, he had never again to wait for appreciation. Much that he had wanted, it seemed to him, he had achieved, although he was a poor man, and his poverty still galled him. By this time the whole family, that family with its many ramifications and its great name, were satisfied that Stephen Hayward was one with it.

They had their own way of showing their appreciation and their respect, as, in early days, when the old Marquis had supported him and encouraged him, they had had their own way of showing him the cold shoulder, of letting him know that his father rankled with them, and that he was his father's son. Now, not only the Dowager, but the Countess of Whittendone and Lady Sarah Comnerlies, and all the aunts and cousins buzzed around him, and exhibited their satisfaction with him. And they began to be interested in Aline, and to cross-examine Constan-tia about her, and to interfere in the selection of her governesses, and her dresses, her education, and her mode

of life. The Duchess even, who, although she was but a distant branch of the family, was the real head of it since the death of the old Marquis, undertook to present Stephen Hayward's daughter when the time should come. In the meantime, she remembered Aline was her god-daughter, and worried Constantia by letter to be careful of the girl's deportment.

No more than her brother, had Constantia had much time for Aline in the stirring years of Stephen's political life that followed the establishment of the Unionist party. For, now in office, and now in opposition, Stephen's talents, Stephen's brilliant militarism, never went unrecognised. He was listened to, he was waited for, the aroma of the "coming man" hung about him. Everything was expected of him, and some things were feared. He became at once the strength and the weakness of his Party. They could not reckon without him, nor quite with him. In those years whilst the baby at Hadalstone was growing into girlhood, Stephen Hayward became a personality, and although he had as yet held no office higher than his under-secretaryship, there was not one that seemed too high for his wayward abilities.

Constantia's income was vital to Stephen, his own was ever precarious; the house in Grosvenor Street, which had come to her with that income, was his London residence. And there together they lived, and she watched him with ever gathering pride, and never wavering faith. Youth, beauty, and love, Constantia Hayward had relinquished that she might help Stephen; all of these went past her in the years in which Aline grew to girlhood. Now that she was fifty and grey, and the claims of the child were pressed upon her, it was still Stephen that held all her maiden heart.

As Constantia could give time and attention to Aline, so could Stephen take some measure of rest in that short summer session of 1893. Once more he was in the Opposition; once more a fickle and ill-informed electorate had entrusted the Empire to weak Liberal hands. It was a

time of waiting; there was little to be done at the moment but watch. Stephen went fishing in Scotland, and Constantia paid a round of country-house visits. To both of them it tasted sweet in the mouth that, where they once were tolerated and pitied, now they were esteemed and envied. About them both now was that social assurance that told of achievement. They were quietly triumphant, and accepted the position they had won, Stephen with reticence and Constantia with dignity; but there was no doubt it illuminated both their lives. The early autumn of '93, although Stephen was in Opposition and their finances were somewhat straitened, was one of content for them both.

Whilst Stephen had had his short spell with the rod, Constantia had found time for a flying visit to Hadalstone. To-night in Grosvenor Street they met again, and Stephen thought this tall grey lady with the slender figure and calm face graced his home completely. She filled the faded drawing-room for him with that distinction which gratified his taste. Their companionship was perfect, because all of this brilliant, strange brother of hers that Constantia saw but dimly she had the sense and courtesy to leave untouched; there was no listening behind the doors of his character to discover his æstheticism, his interest in the higher philosophy, his few experiments in classic tradition. She was in sympathy with his opinions and politics, with his ambition and the recoil from his father's history that had prompted it. To-night with her grey hair and her face still maidenly, in her grey velvet with its rose point kerchief, she seemed to him the epitome of a cultured womanliness. The slight touch of austerity that hung about her, that was as the aroma which clings to the dead leaves of faded roses, became her well. His appreciation of her included it.

When he gave her his arm into the dining-room he almost told her so. They did not often bandy compliments, this brother and sister, but Stephen, as he led her downstairs, said:

"You are looking very well, Con; London seems to have agreed with you."

"I have not been in London; I have been at Hadalstone," she answered quickly.

"At Hadalstone!" he exclaimed with surprise. For in their autumn plans this visit had not been projected. And then he frowned, for all of his pride and none of his happiness was at Hadalstone, and his daughter there was but a vague responsibility to him, less real than the shadows, his father, his poor mother, his dead wife. "You did not tell me you were going to Hadalstone."

"I had not intended to go, but Aunt Mary seems to have paid Aline a flying visit,"—Aunt Mary was the Duchess,—“and she wrote me such a long letter about Miss Clare and Miss Clare’s flirtation with the curate, and Aline’s education, and general childishness, that I thought I ought to go down myself and see how things were.”

"And you found—?" he asked, unfolding his dinner napkin, contemplating his soup.

"A certain amount of justice in her complaints—too much justice, in fact."

Constantia was a woman of the highest principle, and, although the Duchess had found fault with her, she could give the Duchess right.

"Poor Con," said Stephen, with whimsical sympathy. "Aunt Mary on the war-path! Didn't you tell her you were my secretary, and had no time to spare from your selfish brother?"

"No, dear," she said, looking at him affectionately, "I told her nothing; but I went down to see, and I do think we ought to make some change. Miss Clare is a nice girl and a good girl; her flirtation with the curate turned out to be a quite legitimate engagement, quite suitable too, but Aline——"

She paused a little. She and her brother had a certain sympathetic understanding. He had come home full of plans for an electoral, or by-electoral, campaign.

He had been staying with the Marquis. Lord Sarum had been there, and together they had made a survey of the political horizon. All saw the death-cloud hovering over the head of the poor old man who was trying to steer the ship, the very machinery of which had been altered past his senile understanding. They saw his successor, and knew him for a negligible quantity. Openly, Stephen had discussed with them the Disestablishment of the Church in Wales, but, in moments of rare intimacy, Lord Sarum had admitted that he did not think the new Liberal Party had any real hold on the country. No promise had been made to Stephen, but he understood that the post he coveted would be his for the asking when the country should awake to its interests, and give its honour into the keeping of the Conservative leader.

He had come home full of his visit to the Marquis. He and Constantia had not spoken of it yet; they had a hundred things of which to speak. Aline was so very subsidiary; the child, she was only a child, held no conscious place in the minds of either. Constantia felt the want of tact in commencing to speak of her, and of plans for her, until they had discussed the position.

"Well," he said, "Aline! what of Aline? Surely she hasn't taken the measles again?"

"I think she ought to have finishing governesses, masters;" then she added hesitatingly, "Do you think—what do you think of moving her from Hadalstone, of bringing her up here? She is quite strong now."

There had been a fiction associated with Aline's early childhood that she was delicate, that London was impossible for her, that the fine bracing air of Hadalstone was necessary to her rearing.

"Here!" Stephen's face expressed Stephen's distaste.

"She ought to have governesses and masters. Aunt Mary says she is musical——"

"No! you don't mean it! Angela was musical, you remember." His dismay was not all assumed, although

perhaps exaggerated to disarm Constantia's reproof. Angela's music had been indeed a trial to brother and sister; the Continent had taught them too much.

"Will she practise her scales whilst I am dictating?"

"Oh, perhaps," Constantia hesitated. It would be a thousand pities, she thought, if Stephen should be inconvenienced, the charm of their mutual life interrupted. "Perhaps a different sort of governess, a finishing governess down there."

"Of course"—he pushed his plate away—"Of course, a finishing governess, that's the thing."

He had enjoyed an excellent dinner. Constantia was a restful woman to sit opposite, the best of companions, cultured, not too intellectual, devoted to him, assured that he was the most brilliant of his sex, and that the only position suitable for him was head of the State. Also the electric light, a new installation, was admirably shaded, the handsome room looked at its best in the red reflection, its shabbiness was concealed; the white cloth threw into relief the Queen Anne silver with the Hayward crest, the rare cut glass that he had collected himself. The Board of Trade that his cousin had hinted at was not perhaps all he had expected, but Brodribb wanted it, and Stephen would get it; and Stephen, who had been named with that prominent Conservative, had Whig enough left in his Unionist clothing to be glad that it would not be wrongly placed. Altogether the son of Jack Hayward, looking round him at things in general, was not dissatisfied. To bring a child into the house, a girl-child practising scales, with Angela's lank hair, big feet, general awkwardness, would be to spoil his life; he really felt it would spoil his life to have the child meeting him on the stairs, filling the place with her incongruity.

"Perhaps I am selfish; you have made me so," he said to Con affectionately. "I don't want anything to interrupt our life together."

Neither in truth did she. She was so proud of her brother, of her position with him; she missed nothing

that other women had of husband or children. Stephen was all-sufficing.

And, after all, it would have been awkward to bring Aline to town just now. For Stephen and Constantia were engaged six weeks deep; and, notwithstanding Stephen's occasional official income, there were always debts and difficulties about money in the Hayward family, and no room for unlimited expenditure on a retinue of maid and governess and tutor, and, as it were, a whole establishment for Aline.

So it was settled that, for the present, she should remain in the country, and that Constantia, with the assistance of the Duchess, who would then be satisfied, should secure for her a superior governess to replace the somewhat frivolous and inferior Miss Clare.

After this decision was happily reached, Stephen began to enjoy his evening, to talk to Con and to listen to her, to make plans for his coming office, and frame speeches with which to meet his constituents after Christmas.

CHAPTER TWO

THAT was how Fräulein Eckelstein came to Hadalstone Hall sixteen years after Angela's death, to stand in the place of mother, father, brothers, and sisters to Aline, to be her companion, to fill the life of a girl, a girl who, though Stephen had forgotten the fact or its significance, was Lord John Hayward's granddaughter, and might (this was only problematic, yet it should have been taken into consideration) have inherited from him as well as from Angela. Moreover, let it be understood at once, anything less like his daughter than Stephen's mental picture of her at this moment it would be impossible to find.

Fräulein Eckelstein arrived one dull autumn evening, and Aline, rather shy, in her short school-room dress and pinafore, her long fair hair down her back, and her blue eyes still misty with the tears shed over Miss Clare's departure, was in the hall waiting for her with eager expectancy. It was a dull life the child had lived at Hadalstone, and even the coming of a new governess was an excitement. Miss Clare had been there ever since Aline could remember; she was a kind and gentle creature of the recognised nursery-governess type, curiously ignorant, and very sentimental. She nurtured romantic attachments, sometimes to the ritualistic rector, and sometimes to the elderly doctor's *locum tenens*, and always to the Honourable Stephen Hayward, whom she had seen on rare occasions. She and Aline talked of him frequently in the key Constantia set, regarding him as a king amongst men, in intellect as in character, a Bayard of the nineteenth century. That she had finally given her heart and hand to the curate was, as Constantia had said, completely suitable.

Aline expected Fräulein Eckelstein at least to share the opinion of her little world; but the very first evening she was disillusioned. Fräulein said:

“I haf not heard of your father; I haf not seen him. Your aunt it was I saw.”

“But you know how great my father is; you know he might have been in the Cabinet if he had remained with Gladstone?”

“I would haf you know there is no great statesman in England; no man is like the Count von Bismarck. You haf much to learn.”

Fräulein Eckelstein was a treasure. Constantia had been most careful in examining her credentials, and the Duchess had agreed with her that they were really beyond reproach.

“A treasure, my dear. The very woman for poor Angela’s girl; I congratulate you on having secured her,” said the old lady, out of the wisdom of her eighty years. “I see by her papers that she is certificated here as well as in Germany, and that she was with the Von Orlandoff girls. Very charming girls they were, I remember. One of them married Cecil’s nephew, and the other is in Rome—Princess Plom. You could not have done better.”

If Aline had inherited anything from her grandfather, she had certainly inherited from her father his fastidiousness, his æsthetic sense, his refinement of sensation; that one saw at once in her delicate, high-bred air, in her childish daintinesses and dislikes. But there was no one to note Aline’s dislikes; she was very childish for her sixteen years, and shy. She only knew what Miss Clare had taught her.

She waited for her new governess in the old hall. Almost the first words of Fräulein Eckelstein were to complain that it was draughty. It was of oak, black with age; the supporting columns of the wide staircase had been carved by Grinling Gibbons, but the panelling of the walls that held the ancestral portraits had been there two centuries before his time.

"Draughty!" repeated Aline, with wide eyes, wondering. She was a child of the open air, the pale rose of her young cheeks was sun-kissed, wind-caressed, her fairness browned a little through its transparency.

"It is very draughty; we will not linger here long. I will go to my room now. We will not begin work until to-morrow. I do hope that the school-room has south aspect. Now, you show me my rooms. We will be very good friends, and you will work hard, eh! but to-night I must rest; I haf my neuralgia. I will haf supper in mein own room."

That was the first Aline heard of draught or of neuralgia. Miss Clare had been a healthy English girl, notwithstanding her leaning to romance and sentimentalism.

"I do not like the bedroom you haf given me," she said the next morning, "there is dirty stuff on the walls; the bed is wooden, wooden. I cannot sleep."

That she disparaged the tapestry hangings of the second-best bedroom, and its bed of Spanish mahogany, hurt the child somehow. She loved her home, there was nothing else for her to love; decayed, dilapidated, bare it was, yet she loved it, knew its history, and the history of all its rooms.

"I'll tell the housekeeper," she said quietly; "she will change it for you. Perhaps you would like to choose one. We have twenty-seven bedrooms," she was proud of that; that twenty of them were uninhabitable seemed of no consequence. "I chose yours for you; I thought you would like it. The tapestry there is Dutch, and so is the chest in the corner. It was Captain Thomas Hayward's room, the one who fought at Leyden in the sixteenth century."

"It is very dirty," said Fräulein Eckelstein.

She was a tall woman, had mittens on her bony hands, and a shawl over her sloping shoulders. She was truly an excellent creature, but she had ruined her system in her youth by cramming a very small brain with dry cachets of learning. She was conscientiously anxious to feed her

new pupil on the same pabulum. It had not been thought necessary in her case to wash it down with the milk of human kindness; there was no milk in her.

Among the idiosyncrasies that Aline hated most was Fräulein's habit of wearing a black silk apron, and of constantly using her pocket-handkerchief. Every time her bony hand drew her handkerchief from her *glacé* silk pocket the child's teeth were set on edge. Then, Aline loved England,—that was in the Hayward blood, their inalienable inheritance; and Fräulein disparaged England in favour of the Fatherland, from which, by the way, like so many of her compatriots, she had voluntarily exiled herself from the meanest motives. She found the climate insupportable, and she excluded as much of it as possible. Aline's lesson time was a continuous struggle to keep awake in a room from which all draughts and all air were shut out relentlessly.

Fräulein's digestion played as prominent a part in her conversation as her neuralgia.

"It is your English cookery, your vile English cookery, that I feel; the beef and the mutton, the mutton and the beef, ach! and so hard. I haf pain in my chest—and your puddings—I cannot eat them."

She grumbled continuously, the meals were made unappetising with gross comment. She took a daily constitutional with her pupil conscientiously, and she found fault all the time. The park was damp, the climate was—English. Goloshed and generally mackintoshed, her nose red, cotton wool in her ears, she persistently grumbled, and Aline found her walks were spoiled for her as her meals had been. In lesson time Fräulein grumbled also, not without cause, at Aline's ignorance, inattention, stupidity. She said it was so English; only in England could a girl of fifteen, nearly sixteen, know nothing, absolutely nothing. Ach! it was terrible, horrible.

Fräulein Eckelstein prided herself on speaking English perfectly; nevertheless, her accent grated on the child's ear. She grew to hate it so desperately that any other

accent, local, cockney, Yorkshire, grew soft, attractive to her, by contrast, and this was another of her misfortunes.

It is important to realise Fräulein Eckelstein, for a certain amount of sympathy is necessary in reading Aline's history, and to live with Fräulein Eckelstein was a misfortune, nothing less. These German governesses, excellent creatures, good teachers, soul-deadening companions, press hardly on their sensitive pupils, even when tempered with mother, father, brothers, sisters, home; endured without these mitigations, they are simply stupefying; and Aline, if she spelt better, was still less intelligent at the end than at the beginning of Fräulein's ministrations.

Until Fräulein Eckelstein came, she had been a happy child, if a lonely one. There were butterflies, flowers, and bees in her garden, squirrels in the woods, hares in the heather. There was everything a child could want, except fellow-children. She was ignorant, perhaps, but sweet and wholesome, loving nature. She grew depressed before Fräulein had been a week in the house, almost before she had turned the flowers and the birds out of the schoolroom, remnants of woodland rambles, and had had white linoleum nailed on to the schoolroom table, and marked out a daily course of study on a ruled sheet of paper. Soon everything about Fräulein Eckelstein, her German self-satisfaction, the interest she took in her own health, her blatantly bad digestion, her constant colds, her ugliness, everything about and pertaining to that certificated treasure, became alike intolerable to the sensitive, growing girl. A year found her reading and writing improved, she remembered a few dates, she could do a simple, a very simple, sum in arithmetic, and she knew a little, a very little, German grammar, but it found her also grown out of childhood, not yet into womanhood, and with her character all awry and deformed; the pressure had been in the wrong places and the result was disastrous.

Aline became introspective, cried constantly, had spasms of acute self-pity. She was motherless, her father did not love her, at least, he did not come to see her; she read his name in the newspapers, treasured the paragraphs about him, the reports of his speeches, made a cult of him, and dreamed constantly of emotional moments in which he would figure. She was very much alone; her distaste for her governess extended to the way she walked, the way she ate, and sat, and spoke, and breathed.

After her sixteenth birthday Aline got over her weeping and her fits of melancholy, nature reasserted itself in a measure. But she never got over her distaste for the German woman, while the image of her father, which had dominated her morbid period, had not died out of her mind.

Fräulein Eckelstein, for all her certificates and knowledge, was provincial, plebeian, narrow-minded, ill-bred. Because she was all this and more, Aline spent no time with her that she was not compelled to spend; and the governess was glad of many hours to herself. She wrote long letters on thin foreign paper to friends, former pupils, relatives, long letters with involved sentences, and verbs that played hide-and-seek, long, verbose, unnecessary letters; it was her only relaxation. She thought it literary and appropriate, and in a measure dignified. She did not grumble in her letters; she endeavoured to impress upon her correspondents the grandeur of her position.

While Fräulein Eckelstein wrote letters, Aline was either alone or went for long rides with old Sam Shingles, who had been stud-groom to Stephen's father in the days when there had been a stud, racehorses, and a training stable at Hadalstone Hall, and all the paraphernalia that had spelt Stephen's ruined inheritance and blasted name. Sam taught Aline to ride, he gave her respite from Fräulein; he was part of the tonic that cured her of morbid weeping. He talked to her of the good old days when

her grandfather was alive, and the Hunt met nearly every week in the Hadalstone woods, when the stables were full of young 'uns, and there was never a year when Hadalstone had not a string of horses at Doncaster. He had the tact to omit the time that came after. He let Jack Hayward's difficulties, forgeries, expiation, lie in the grave with him. The old stud-groom remembered nothing of his old master but his generosity, and easy ways, and the handsome face and figure that had brought the women after him.

This was much more interesting than French verbs. The gallops through the woods, the whiff of fresh air in her face as she leaped gate or bar, the rise and motion of the animal beneath her, were rest and refreshment and new life after Fräulein and the stuffy, overheated rooms. And she liked hearing about her grandfather.

It was all right as long as Sam Shingles rode with her; she got nothing but good from her two hours' canter, air, and exercise. She was stupid and dull with Fräulein; for her taste was violated, the air was vitiated, and the guttural German voice outraged her delicate Saxon ears. She learned as little as she possibly could, and, if Fräulein Eckelstein had not been a truly indefatigable teacher, even that little would have been less.

So Aline talked to her maid, played sometimes with the vicarage babies, and envied them their father, who kissed, and dandled, and spoiled them; she was consoled by the cheery doctor for her enforced hours with Fräulein, and, until she was approaching her seventeenth year, she lived practically without further companionship. In letters, and during rare visits, Constantia excused Stephen for his apparent neglect: "his country claimed him," she said. But Aline felt he was the one thing in the world that belonged to her, and she longed always that he should love her, write to her, notice her, come to her. She was lonely in her seventeenth year; there were gardens and woods, and wide stretches of moorland, but she was a girl-child, and these were not enough. Aunt

Constantia was vague and indefinite as to when she or her father would come; she forgot to hold out prospects of Aline coming to them. The family visitors were few and far between. The Duchess's appearance remained a unique visitation, and Aunt Constantia promised Aline no immediate change. She was to be "finished." At eighteen, or perhaps a little later, the Duchess would present her. In the meantime, she was told to work hard at her studies with Fräulein.

It was a critical moment for Jack Forrest to appear upon the scene. Aline, in revolt at Racine with a German accent, and Schiller in a voice like a nutmeg-grater, had begun to read penny novelettes, threepenny gutter fiction, *Family Herald Supplements*, borrowed from the silly, sentimental London servant who acted as maid to her. She grew as romantic as Miss Clare, and she longed for adventures. She longed for adventures! And fate, or Stephen, or perhaps an unfortunately wise decision of the Jockey Club, sent Jack Forrest to Hadalstone.

There was nothing whatever attractive about Jack Forrest; he was a hard-featured, dun-coloured, under-sized man of about thirty, who chewed a straw, and wore high collars, and looked like a prematurely decayed stable-boy. Even Aline, keen for novelty and experience and perhaps emotion, was disappointed in his appearance the first time she saw him. Jane had talked about his coming in mysterious undertones as she brushed that golden hair at night. Aline had listened open-eared; there was a mystery, and Jack Forrest was the hero of it. Her interest was quickly aroused, her feelings no less quickly excited. Jane was a comparatively newcomer at Hadalstone, but Mrs. Dean had been there in the time of Stephen's father and mother. Aline resorted to Mrs. Dean for further information. The housekeeper's room had been the harbour of refuge for Aline ever since her babyhood; there jam was to be found, and sweet cake, and gossip about the glory of the house in those bad old, good old, days, when Mrs. Dean and Sam Shingles were

hardly middle-aged, and that fine, dashing, rakish grandfather of Aline's was alive.

Mrs. Dean was in her dotage, garrulous, indiscreet, in the first stage of senile decay, but still she alluded and maudled, instead of speaking out. Aline was a child with her head full of impossible, unnatural, kitchen-maid romances, and the romance of Jack Forrest seemed to touch her nearly. She misunderstood it, of course. The sordid intrigue between Mrs. Dean's daughter, who had been housemaid at the Hall, and that wretched debauchee, Stephen's father, was something it would have been impossible for her to understand. And Mrs. Dean, with all her garrulousness, was careful not to mention her own relationship to the newcomer. All that Aline took in was that Jack Forrest was an unacknowledged son of the House; that he had been neglected, sent away from Hadalstone, and his return in a menial capacity was a tardy act of reparation of her father's doing. She had seen little, known little of her father; she hardly realised of what she suspected him. She was under the spell of the penny novelette. "An unacknowledged son of the House" was the romantic euphemism with which she clothed the *ci-devant* stable-boy. And the House, the family, her grandfather, were all of extraordinary importance to her.

But she was very disappointed with Jack Forrest's appearance the first day he came to Hadalstone. He was not a romantic figure in a Newmarket coat, unnaturally light, and a billycock hat unnaturally curved.

Here is the history of his coming to Hadalstone.

About the time that Sam Shingles ceased to be the nominal head of the defunct Hadalstone stables, Stephen, busy and overworked in London, received an ill-written, indifferently spelt, communication that he showed to his cousin. He took the letter to the Marquis and asked, "Is it true? Do you think it is true?" For Stephen, although he knew so well that his father had been a black-guard, knew little of details, and nothing of the house-

maid and her child. The present Marquis of Jevington had been a man, and in his father's confidence, when Stephen was a little boy at school.

"What does it matter?" answered the other carelessly, having skimmed the letter. "The fellow says he is your father's son; he asks for help on that ground. It is very likely true," he added drily. "Surely it is not a great shock to you that it is very likely true."

"No," Stephen answered, not letting his cousin see he was stung, hiding his sensitiveness, his wounds that never healed; "it is not a great shock that my father had an illegitimate son. But this fellow is a peculiarly notorious blackguard," he went on, after just a little pause to take breath. For it hurt, it always hurt, that his father had been—himself. "He has just been warned off the turf."

"If he had written you before, you might have arranged something with the Club?"

"It is a particularly bad case. He pulled the beast up just under the judge's nose. Not the first time either; I heard all about it from John."

John was the eldest son of the Marquis, in age Stephen's contemporary; he was absorbed in racing, and one of the Stewards of the Jockey Club.

"What does he want you to do?"

"He wants me to lend him some money. £1000 is the sum he names; an insolent letter. There is no doubt his mother was in service at Hadalstone; I remember her faintly."

"You can't let him starve; you must find something for him."

"I thought perhaps you could employ him at Culpepper. I asked John, but John says he won't touch him; he's a thorough scoundrel."

"No, I can't do anything; I have too many claims on me. Send him back to Hadalstone; that's where his mother came from. Make him groom, gamekeeper, or steward; surely you can find some sort of sinecure that

will enable you to give him a small income without appearing to be blackmailed. He certainly could not do any harm at Hadalstone."

The sapient Marquis thought he could not do any harm, and in the end Stephen offered him Sam Shingle's sinecure. It was a curious, unfortunate, almost dramatic coincidence that the only post at Hadalstone into which Jack Forrest could fit with any approach to suitability should have been vacant at this moment. Jack Forrest accepted it, since nothing better offered. He would see his grandmother; he had a sneaking respect for her, a respect his mother had forfeited many years ago, before she disappeared in the vortex of Piccadilly Circus. His mother had told him the true story of the trick she had played on her old master at Hadalstone, and twitted him with his likeness to his real father, a stable-boy, whose brief stay at the Hall had been terminated by a kick from a restive racehorse. The truth had been kept from the respectable Mrs. Dean; the shock of her daughter's behaviour had been softened to her by the Master's generosity. The girl flaunted her shame in the village until Stephen's father died, and her boy had been a familiar at the Hall in those days, and was constantly in and out of that same housekeeper's room where Aline now made herself at home.

It was natural that on his return to Hadalstone, after nearly eighteen years hard-lived disreputable years, Jack Forrest should seek out his grandmother, natural, too, that Aline should see him there; but all that followed was unnatural, horrible, almost incredible.

The mystery about Jack Forrest, that hint and innuendo created, was, in the face of Aline's ignorance and innocence, responsible for her interest in him. She could not but take an interest in him since she had gathered, easily, that he was a "son of the House," and since the House seemed to her in her retired and lonely life of such paramount importance. Jack Forrest, the housekeeper's room, Jane's hair-brushing confidences, were all so much

more vital than Fräulein Eckelstein. She began to live vividly in the romance she was creating.

Jack Forrest looked better on a horse than anywhere else. The first time Aline had seen him she had been chilled, disappointed; but in the saddle, his limited legs in gaiters, a cap replacing the cockney billy-cock, and gloves on the rough hands, it was possible, though even then it should have been difficult, for the halo of romance slowly to transfigure him. And riding with Aline was the only one of Sam Shingle's duties that Forrest actually performed. They rode together daily. He taught Aline a few things about horses that Sam had forgotten, or had never known; he was a man of very few words, a silent man who chewed rather than talked, but for the moment his few words spoke praise. He told Aline she had the makings of a fine horsewoman, he praised her courage, once he praised her figure.

Nobody suspected danger; it was impossible to suspect the child, so fair, with her proud carriage, and delicate high-bred air, of having anything in common with the ex-jockey. Mrs. Dean and Jane had talked much of Jack Forrest before he came. It was dull in the country, and they had few things to talk about, but, after he came, and he had had tea once or twice in the housekeeper's room, they left off talking of him, or even thinking of him. He was one of themselves, and not a bright one. His habit of silence alienated them. He lived over the stables where Sam had lived, and his spare time seemed to be spent in the public-house. A boy brought Miss Aline's horse up to the house every day, and Jack came up with it, mounted her, and they rode out together, just as it used to be in Sam's time, only Sam used to bring the horses up himself without the assistance of the stable-boy.

Together they rode away from the verbs and the translations and Fräulein Eckelstein. Jack Forrest was a man of little education and low wit, but he knew how to hold his tongue; he had learned it in the training stables. Into this thin-lipped, clean-shaven, silent man, then, with small

eyes close together, and impenetrable face, poor Aline read an epitome of all her novelettes. He was the rightful owner of the Hadalstone estates, her father was the usurper, she herself an interloper. If he was silent, he was thinking of his wrongs; if his words were strange, unpicked, his accent unaccustomed, it was their fault, the Haywards' fault, for neglecting him in his youth. She was not a clever girl; she did not, as will be seen, become a wise woman. In her extreme youth and ignorance, in her loneliness and dislike of the one companion with whom she had been provided, she was amenable to any sort of temptation, exposed to any danger that should threaten her. Rightful heirs, unacknowledged and despised, were common enough in penny novelettes. Even in a book that Aunt Con had given her was the story of a Scotch laird who posed as a groom to win his sister's love and confidence. Aline's imagination, roaming in narrow limits, called Jack Forrest Jack Hayward, and tried to see in him a hero of romance.

It was not entirely Jack Forrest's fault. He was not responsible for the muddle-headed child's wrong information, or wrongly understood information. He was not the sort of scoundrel that he appeared to be by what followed, but he was "dead broke," and suspended from riding, and he had a scheme, every broken-down jockey has a scheme, and it wanted money to work it. Stephen had written him a curt letter, and given him the post at Hadalstone and two pounds per week. The scheme or coup was connected with horses and faking; it could not be worked from Hadalstone. Forrest tried his grandmother, but she had no savings. Wages were not high at Hadalstone, they were not even paid very regularly; and what little she had, had gone from time to time to that poor painted woman, Jack's mother, who walked the town, until, five years ago, she had walked into the great Silence.

And Aline threw herself at his head, literally threw herself at his head. He told Stephen so, in that one interview he had with him, that too late interview, and

Stephen's bitter incredulous contempt made it seem absurd. But it was true. The child had beautiful thoughts, she meant to give him back the inheritance of which he had been robbed. She was always thinking of how this could be accomplished. She puzzled over it, and thought of it, night and day. Wild schemes of appealing to her father were quenched by her limited knowledge of how he stood in the matter. It seemed as if Stephen, having been his father's heir, must be concerned in the wrong that had been done to Forrest. She was hazy about the story, and thought of the broken jockey as "Cousin Jack." Her heart beat high when the right thought came to her some few weeks after he had arrived at Hadalstone. There was a wonderful flush in her peach-like skin, a brightness in her blue eyes, when riding with him on the day that the light had dawned. She turned in her saddle quickly, as the great thought took shape, and asked him:

"Are you married; have you ever been married?"

The man was low class, but sharp enough. On the answer he gave her she slowly, with heightening flush and brightening eye, told him her fine thoughts. Often, since he had discovered her misinformation, they had discussed his "wrongs;" and he followed her meaning quickly now.

"By Gad! she's not a bad bit of flesh, and he'd have to fork out then," was his unspoken answer. And then he played his easy part. He told her he was not married, and he would like well enough to marry her. His part was easy to play, because Aline gave him all the cues. He had not quite understood the "tack" she was on at first, but she talked more and more freely to him, and he followed where she led. Very little was required of him. The horrible sacrifice seemed the simplest matter to Aline. She promised to marry him almost before he had made up his mind that the "spec" was a sure one.

"You'd better not mention anything up there," he said. Up there, accentuated with a jerk of the head, meant the Hall.

"Of course not," she answered quickly; "we won't say a word until afterwards."

"After we're spliced, you mean?"

"When I can go to my father."

"I'll have the banns called at the next village," he said, looking at her out of his little close-set eyes with something of interest. She had, to use his own vernacular, "snapt him up at a word." He did not realise the weeks of misguided thought that had led up to that moment.

"In the books they always have a special licence."

"By Jove! she's goin' it," was the unspoken comment; but he said, "Yes, I know; but a special licence costs money, and——"

She interrupted him hastily.

"Oh! I've got plenty, ever so much, in the bank and at home. My father always sends me money, and I never spend any."

They rode on together in the spring, the hidden sun making warm and sweet the perfumed air. Jack calculated that Stephen could not give him less than £1000, and the coup could be brought off with half. Aline was excited, not at all frightened at what she had done, but proud of herself rather. She talked her thoughts aloud.

"I shall go to my father afterwards." She had a strange picture of her father in her mind, so had no fear of the quiet sarcasm that might have met her. "I shall say to him: 'now you may embrace me, father, now you may look with pleasure on your child; she has righted the wrong you have done.'"

She broke off from her grandiloquent speech, and said, with a touch of wistfulness in the blue eyes which she turned toward Forrest:

"He has never cared for me, or for Hadalstone. I think it must have been because of you. I think he must have felt remorse, and here it haunted him most."

Jack nodded, and went on with his straw.

"You'll keep it quiet," he said.

"I must not say to *you*, 'on the honour of a Hayward,'

but, on *my* honour," she answered, and rode home, big with her secret, proud, excited. She was a child, playing at being the heroine of one of the penny novelettes. She was very happy in her play. Forrest hardly figured at all in his proper person; he was "the rightful heir," that was all.

Nobody noted the excitement, the delight, under which she lived during those few days whilst the man was in London getting the licence. She was playing at make-believe, as happy children always play, but was not, unhappily, playing, as they do, on equal terms; and the play turned to earnest before fear dawned. She might have told Jane, might have confided in her maid; they did that sometimes in books. But Jane failed her at the critical moment. Jane was sulky and silent because her young man (he was the butler, and at least sixty) had toyed with the kitchenmaid. She brushed Aline's hair and put her to bed, but she did not talk, she was too full of her own trouble, and Mrs. Dean had gone down another step on the road to senility, so Aline had no *confidante*.

Fräulein sat in the schoolroom through the spring day, with the exhilarating sun shining on the windows, trees budding, birds singing, and she set the child abominable tasks of translating long, involved, verbless German sentences. She said Aline was more inattentive than ever. They had been long days for Aline, without even a ride to which she could look forward; for Forrest was away, and Fräulein said she must not ride. It was "*pas gentil*" — "*pas gentil*" with a German accent. Long, restless, interminable days! Aline was so excited that she could not listen or learn, or even pretend to; she was living in a world of ruined castles and wicked earls and disguised heirs. It was agony to her to sit still and be nagged about German verbs. She cried over her lessons, angry tears, but Fräulein went on grinding, and said she was "*unverschämt*." She began to count the hours which must elapse before she could get rid of Fräulein,

began to count the hours when, through Jack Forrest, she should emancipate herself from German verbs and accents.

On the very last day of all, Fräulein made her put "*Die Glocke*" into English verse. Not a word of it did she understand in English or in German. Her brain would not work. She rebelled, flung her book on the ground, she would not, could not, learn any more, she said. Her head was aching, she cried in her unrest and excitement, and threw her book on the floor, when nothing would come of—

“Ob das Spröde mit dem Weichen
Sich vereint zum guten Zeichen”

but

“If the mass well blended be
Then will the bell sound properly.”

Fräulein with guttural indignation ordered her to her room; and Aline rushed away in a frenzy of desire to tell her that by to-morrow she would be away from her and free. Free! that was what the girl thought when she rushed out of the room.

Fräulein Eckelstein took out her blotter and began to write letters. The scene had agitated her, she thought it might bring on her neuralgia, it was necessary not to be in arrears with her correspondence.

Aline did not go to her room. She went instead into the garden, where the scents soothed her, and the wind kissed her hot cheeks; there were buds on the rose-trees, green leaves and green blossoming on the lilac, the birds cooed to each other as they paired. She was soothed and calmed.

To-morrow was to be her wedding-day. It was Friday; Forrest had been away since Sunday. They were to meet by the coppice at the bottom of the garden after breakfast, just before lessons,—Aline had arranged that. They were to go to the next parish by train, John had

arranged that. She knew all the programme, she was not frightened, she had no misgivings; the week had been long, too long. *The* dramatic moment, the moment she was waiting for, was when she should go to her father, holding her husband by the hand, and should say, "I have Righted the Wrong,"—with capital letters. She dwelt on that moment all the time. Her father, not Jack Forrest, was prominent in her mind, and had been, though she scarcely knew it, all the time. Stephen, the politician, with his cynical face and proud position (to be an Under-Secretary of State seemed a proud position to Aline), who who had been so little of a father to her; it was round him her young thoughts naturally clustered.

She had been wonderfully happy in her newly discovered play, in having found out why Stephen had neglected her and Hadalstone. She did not, of course, realise her mental attitude, but the image of her father, seen through Aunt Constantia's adoring eyes, was mirrored in the ether of her dawning soul. All the rest was play-acting. She was mentally dressed up and performing a part, the Married Woman, the Saviour of the Family, the Heroine; of Jack Forrest, of her playmate, in truth, she thought but little. Her father was the chief of her romance. Patrician and patriot, his name spelt to her the definition of the Ideal, and she longed, with that curious intense longing unloved children have for love, that her hero should love, notice, approve her.

She was going to marry Jack Forest to free her father from remorse, to make him love her, and tell her she had done well.

That night, the night before the wedding, she sat by the window. A dark night it was, the moon only edging the clouds, with no stars dawning through their darkness, nor in the grey depths behind them, all her thoughts were of Stephen and what she would say to him. She thought of what she would say, perhaps, more than of what he would answer. But she imagined he would fold her in his arms, and kiss her; she blushed in the darkness at

the idea of the kiss her father would give her. These were her thoughts on the eve of her wedding.

She went to bed with that blush on her young cheeks, and a tremulous, happy smile on her lips. She had forgotten all about Forrest, except that she would take his hand and lead him to her father. She slept the sweet untroubled sleep of childhood, although in the morning she was going to marry Jack Forest, and she had never so much as touched his ungloved hand.

If ignorance, downright abysmal ignorance, of anything in the world but how to do sums badly and German exercises worse, constituted innocence, then was Aline Alexandra Victoria the most innocent of children, and, if such innocence was what Constantia thought desirable, then was she justified in her avoidance of boarding-schools.

But in such case, when we pray, those of us who do pray for our babies, that they should "keep innocency," is it a merciful God who leaves our prayers so oft unanswered?

CHAPTER THREE

ALINE ALEXANDRA VICTORIA HAYWARD married Jack Forrest at Little Hempstead, next parish to Hadalstone. She was a month short of seventeen years old. Forrest had procured a special licence. There was not the slightest difficulty about getting the ceremony performed. The bleer-eyed country parson, hanging on to his stipend twenty years after his capacity for earning it was exhausted, made them man and wife without comment, thought or spoken. He hurried over the beautiful words, mumbling them with unseemly haste. His comfortable library chair called to him; he was back in it, and fast asleep before Aline had done more than realise that, when Jack Forrest took the liberty of kissing her, he smelt of tobacco and made her feel sick. This was when she had been married an hour.

The story this book has to tell is not the story of the married life of Aline and Jack Forrest. A week of it, told truly, as it dare not, and must not, be told, might be trusted to destroy the dangerous germ of romance in some girl-reader's heart, and set her mending stockings, or even sweeping floors, with trembling thankfulness for an employment, independent and solitary.

Impatience at Fräulein Eckelstein, sentimental dreaming over her father's personality, and the excitement provided by kitchen literature, were all Aline knew of emotion at the end of May. Before the beginning of June, she had learnt terror, pain, disgust, a horrible self-loathing, and shame in its most degrading form. She cried nearly all the week, not the light passionate tears of childhood, but the bitter ones of a miserable dawning womanhood. She was sick several times, she had fits of shud-

dering when the jockey came near; she changed from a pretty child, with her proud little head in the air, and her blue eyes bright and sparkling, into a white-faced fevered girl, who looked as if she had just come out of a hospital ward, and ought to be back in it.

That was the condition in which Stephen found her after she had enjoyed the title of married woman a little over a week.

It was not entirely Jack's fault. He had not been intentionally unkind, or callous, or brutal. He was not wrong in objecting to Aline going off to find her father immediately after her marriage. He recognised what an absurdity any claim to the Hadalstone estates, or the Hayward honours would be. He did not tell Aline this, which was considerate of him; but he told her that Hadalstone was mortgaged up to the hilt, and wasn't worth "a two-penny damn"; he also informed her that illegitimacy was a bar to succession, and explained to her what illegitimacy meant. He was a man of few words, but now they were coarse ones.

He went to the public-house, or inn, at Little Hempstead for the honeymoon, took a bedroom over the bar, and used the bar parlour for sitting-room. They had it to themselves, with its white cotton antimacassars, its smell of stale beer, its engravings of the Queen and the Prince Consort behind fly-blown glass in early Victorian wooden frames, its stuffed fish in cases, its dirty cruet-stand on the mean mahogany chiffonier. Here he smoked his pipes, and drank his gin, and spelt out the sporting papers. He did not mean to be unkind; he swore, under his breath only, that, for a miserable, puling, white-livered wench as he ever saw, commend him to the girl he had married.

From cursing Aline to himself to cursing her openly was an easy transition.

There is little doubt that, if his marriage had lasted another week, he would have thrown things at her when she sat on the sofa, with frightened eyes in white face,

staring at him as if she were magnetised, and alternating this with fits of wild sobbing and hysteric shudders of repulsion. A "damned good hiding," which was already simmering in his mind, would have followed in due course; after which she might have grown acclimatised and settled down, bruised and battered morally and physically, until she was soft enough to be moulded into the shape of the life that lay before her. For she was barely seventeen, malleable, the daughter of first cousins—a decadent by inheritance.

The Honourable Stephen intervened, however. Diminishing majorities, difficulties in keeping the House together, signs of weariness and inorganism in the front benches, warned the political prophets that a General Election was at hand. The Grand Old Empire-Breaker had entered a larger kingdom; and, as Lord Sarum and the Marquis had jointly predicted, his successor wielded an uncertain sceptre. A popular Derby win delayed matters a full twelvemonth, but that was not foreseen in the early spring. Preparations were being made on a large scale for a complete bouleversement of the position. The Opposition Leader was in request when Ministers had to be heckled, or wavering constituencies informed as to what should be their future course; and Stephen Hayward was one of his most valuable lieutenants. The Easter recess had been full of stump oratory. It was on a hurried visit to Grosvenor Street, between instructing Huddersfield and educating Fife, that Stephen received Aline's grandiloquent letter, written the night before her wedding.

His sense of humour almost overcame his paternal irritation. She would "right the wrong and bring Jack Forrest to him, and together they would throw themselves at his feet," she had written. It was a long letter, very grandiloquent, not quite coherent, indifferently spelt; she had written it in an excess of admiration at her own heroine-like conduct, and she thought it quite magnificent in style and phrasing. Unfortunately it was not very

clear. Stephen did not really understand the step she contemplated. He cursed Jack Forrest and his father's errant fancies, he meant to show the letter to Constantia but forgot, he dictated a few lines of brilliant badinage in reply. Aline would not have understood the tone if she had received the letter, but of course she never did receive it, for she had already left the Hall. Stephen forgot to show the girl's letter to Constantia because he was immersed in business.

It was an anxious, harassing time. He was absorbed in business, making speeches, sending telegrams, canvassing for his colleagues with all the energy of a man who, most valuable as a free lance, yet dreams fitfully of the sweets of office. And the thirst for power had grown on him. When the Liberal Prime Minister should retire into his well-merited obscurity, Stephen's hour would come, he thought. To this end he threw himself into one bye-electoral campaign after another. To this end he worked feverishly, impetuously, in the manner he had made his own. He had forgotten all about Aline and her letter before he had finished dictating the reply. He had barely an hour to get through his correspondence and catch the express to Delamere. There was only a borough election there, it is true, but Mildmay had been beaten last time by over four hundred votes. To turn a Liberal majority of four hundred votes into a Unionist victory just now was not unworthy the effort even of a Stephen Hayward. Stephen had promised to speak for Mildmay, to explain the policy that actuated the Opposition. So he hurriedly dictated the answer to the childish scrawl, and he meant to tell his secretary to enclose it to Constantia, who was in Scotland. He duly caught his train, and it was only a week later that he remembered anything about Aline and what she had written. He had even forgotten that he must discharge Forrest. The next time the matter was brought before him he got it full in his face, like a blow.

He had had a busy week with Lord Mildmay, the local

agent, and a house full of lady and gentlemen canvassers. They had entertained the Primrose Leaguers, visited the doctors and lawyers and clergy of the county, performed all the slightly degrading social tricks that the neighbourhood and the outlying parish expected, and to-morrow they hoped to reap the reward. To-night they had returned from a meeting in the Town Hall only just in time to dress for dinner. Stephen's letters, a pile of them, were on his dressing-table. He would have left them until later, but, as it happened, Aline's childish handwriting caught his eye, reminding him of something he had forgotten; it was unusual for her to write to him. He tore open the letter; perhaps he had a presentiment. It was written four days after the wedding, and had followed Stephen round the country. There was no grandiloquence in it, and it was very short.

“DEAR FATHER,—I have married Mr. Forrest, and he won't let me come to you. Do come to me; it was all a horrid mistake. I wish I was dead. What shall I do? Your broken-hearted

“ALINE.”

Stephen, standing up in stiff-fronted evening shirt, his tie not yet on, and his valet waiting with his dress-coat, read the letter twice, and stood with it in his hand.

His face changed, the nervous intellectual face grew haggard and troubled, the keenness went out of it, the eyes looked dully back into an old trouble, the lips trembled. At that moment he did not remember Aline was his daughter so vividly as he remembered she was Jack Hayward's granddaughter; that the inheritance his father had left him, flung its sinister bar across his path at the very moment the way to the goal seemed clear. He crushed the letter in his hand; almost unconsciously a curse broke from him, stifled into a groan. His secretary's apology for not having heard him distinctly, the man's attitude, pen in hand, his vacant cough, however, helped Stephen to pull himself together for the moment.

"That will do," he said abruptly to the valet, dismissing him. "Get on, if you please, Mr. Jenkins, with the next." He opened the rest of the letters, dictating steadily, finishing first his correspondence, then his toilet. His mind, that distraught, far-seeing mind of his, was working all the time.

"Nothing to be done to-night, nothing to be done at all; mustn't spoil the meeting; Mildmay's chances are improving, and it would be a useful seat for us to win. I can't do any good here in the morning; they'll have made up their minds by then, and to see me driving about with Mildmay will make no difference. I can get from here to Little Hempstead. What the deuce can her governess have been up to? Constantia ought to have saved me this sort of thing, but she would go up to Scotland just at the wrong time. I've half a mind not to go at all; she has made her bed, let her lie on it. But I must not have a scandal, just at this moment. The man's capable of anything. I had better see him. What a fool the girl has made of herself. I suppose they only want money from me; God knows where I'm to get it from. They must undertake to emigrate; I can't have a broken-down black-leg of a jockey calling me 'father-in-law.' Perhaps it can be hushed up. The last thing one would have expected from a daughter of Angela's," and so on.

Not a thought of pity for the girl, though it was a pitiful letter enough. But Stephen was as yet so detachedly a father that, on his journey to Little Hempstead next morning, all his thoughts and fears and annoyances were for himself and the family, and, perhaps, a little for the Party.

He thought he had lived down Lord John Hayward, but the whole wretched story would be raked up again. It was a tedious railway journey, with many stoppages and changes, drizzling rain, and dilatory guards at obscure local stations. With damnable persistency the thought haunted him that, if the Press got hold of the story, his father's name and Jack Forrest's career would

be on every tongue. The wretched girl! why, if the man was anything, he was her uncle. "Good God! the thing was not even legal!" he said to himself.

At length, the train steamed into the little station of Little Hempstead, with the name stiffly written in white stones set in a border of green plants.

The solitary porter directed him to the inn, "not five minutes from the station," he said. Stephen asked about the returning trains; he did not think the task before him, so unsavoury, so distasteful, would take long. It was still raining, a gentle persistent summer rain, a trifle, perhaps, but this added to his annoyance.

There was a porch to the inn, through the window on the right he could see the labourers conversing over their beer. Their deep voices and the fumes reached him where he stood. The proprietor stood behind the bar in shirt-sleeves.

"Is Mr. Forrest within?" Stephen asked, his disgust quickening round the lines of his mouth, and showing in his voice.

"Yes, sir; I think so, sir." The lessee of the Little Hempstead Arms had been a butler, and knew a gentleman when he saw one. "Allow me—through here; first door on the left."

"Through here" was a dark passage behind the bar. Stephen's hat nearly touched the ceiling. The proprietor opened the door for him. He did not think he would have done so for a visitor to Jack Forrest; he knew the jockey, and his reputation, but the shrinking bride he had hardly seen.

Stephen saw his daughter in the muggy, evil-smelling parlour, saw her instantly in the corner of the rickety horse-hair sofa. It was one of the moments when Forrest had been explaining matters to her, and she was staring at him with her terrified eyes. All her misery was apparent in those wide eyes, it showed too in her cheeks, white and sunken, it quivered round her pale lips, and trembled in her little childish hands, which she clasped

and unclasped as she stared at Jack. He was puffing away at his pipe.

"A damned good hiding, my gal, that's what you want, and I've half a mind——"

Aline never took her eyes off his face. She had been crying day and night for hours at a time. His voice had roused her from a sobbing, half-stupefied slumber. He had had it all his own way with her, and had let her cry, but now her miserable face had begun to get on his nerves. He culled a few choice epithets from his stable days, used a word she had only before heard applied to Mary of England, and she sat up and gazed at him with that look of fascinated terror which, together with the length of her eyelashes, the colouring of her hair and her slender figure, arrested Stephen's attention immediately.

"Beautiful! My God, beautiful!" That was what she was, and the very image of his mother, his mother as he remembered her before he had been sent to France. His heart gave a quick throb. His daughter! why had he never realised it? For the space of a second after the door opened the jockey kept his seat, replacing his pipe in his mouth. Then Aline saw her father, half rose as if to go to him, sank back on the sofa, covered her face with her hands, and broke into hysterical sobs.

"She's bin goin' on like that for four bloomin' hours," said Forrest, rising and pointing at her with the stem of his pipe. "How would you like it? I want to know how you'd like it." This was his apology for the arrested words Stephen had heard.

"I don't like it," said Stephen under his breath, and went over to the girl.

"Aline, look up, child; speak to me." He rested his hand a moment on her bent head. Like silk, like soft, abundant silk, it felt under his hand. She was unhappy, unhappy as his mother had been, and how was he better than his father? The twinge of remorse, compunction, pity, that went through him was the birth of a new emo-

tion. "Don't cry, my child," he said. And the "my child" was as a sudden thrill. So slender she was and beautiful and sad; she was suddenly dear to him.

"Take me away; take me away from him," she said, and clung to him with those small childish hands, speaking wildly. "Oh, take me away, father; take me away from him. I want to go away; I want to die. Oh, father!"

"Hush! hush!" his tone was strange to himself, his voice soft. For in his heart was that strange thrill, the thrill of his fatherhood, that overmastered for the moment the politician in him, overbore the higher philosophy, and revealed a phase in common humanity that touched him poignantly.

"Oh, yes! you can take her away if you like; I know I should be damned glad to get rid of her," said Forrest sullenly, knocking the ashes out of his pipe against the mantelpiece, and eyeing Stephen.

"Will you take me away, will you, will you, will you?" She was clinging to her father hysterically, shaking all over, wild with fear and hope.

"Yes, yes; hush, it's all right; be a good girl; don't cry. I'll take you away; don't fear."

This was not what he had expected or intended. He was moved so suddenly, so completely, by her trembling, sweet lips, by the taper fingers of her clinging hands, that he was hardly master of himself.

"You damned scoundrel!" He turned upon the man with sudden fierceness. Forrest was watching the pair out of his little closed eyes, and thinking. "I'll take you away," said Stephen to the girl, in a different tone, half ashamed of his ebullition of feeling.

"Scoundrel, or no, you can only take her away if I choose; she's my wife, you know," Forrest said. "You be careful with your 'scoundrels,'" he grumbled.

The girl shuddered against her father, and he put his arm around her. Then he said again very gently, leaning down so that she could hear:

"You'd better let me talk to him alone. Can't you go upstairs, anywhere?"

"You won't go without me?" she said agitatedly. "You won't?"

"I won't move from this room until you come down again."

She had to pass Forrest to reach the door; it was a pitiable sight.

"Half an imbecile, that's what she is, half an imbecile. You'd think I'd walloped the life out of her, wouldn't you? I dare say you do think so. But, so help me God, I've never laid a hand on her, much less a stick. Flung herself at my very head, she did, and now——"

"Look here," said Stephen abruptly, "it's a question of money with you, I've no doubt. Nobody knows of this infernal marriage, if it is a marriage. What will you take to go your way and let her go hers, to hold your tongue, and let me see what I can do to annul the whole business?"

"Oh! the marriage was right enough, worse luck."

Stephen kept a difficult control over himself.

"What will you take? that's the question; what will you take?"

"Take to let her go?"

"Yes, to let me take her back, and keep the matter quiet."

"Take? Just what I'd have took at first—a thousand quid. I didn't want the girl; it was her idea all along; but I thought that would make you fork out, and it seems I was right. Miserable little devil! I'd give her to you for nothing if I could afford it."

The two men were in strong contrast; a foot and a half in height between them, and several centuries of culture; yet the little jockey in slippers, without a collar, saw, no less than the other, the full strength of his position.

"Not but what I could lick her into shape; I've had some skittish fillies in my time, and broke 'em in."

"I haven't got a thousand pounds with me," said

Stephen sharply. "You know what you've done is illegal; you'll have to lower your terms."

"Not a penny; what do you take me for? Legal! you'll like to stand up in court and say I'm your brother."

"It's a lie; if I'd seen you before, I should have known it was a lie. Whatever my father was, there is not a drop of his blood in your miserable veins; I could swear to it."

"That's as it may be; you'd have to prove it. What's the good of talking? You'll have to give me the money."

"If I do, will you clear out, get out of England, never let me hear of you, or see you again?"

"Well, I expect you'll hear of me. Jack Forrest is pretty well known, and I'm not going to give up riding, if that's what you mean. But give me the money, and you can do what you like with the girl—there, isn't that enough for you?"

"What guarantee can I have that you won't blackmail me?" asked Stephen irritably, trying to think where he could raise a thousand pounds. He habitually spent about four times his income; there were always a hundred calls on his ready-money, and a chronic over-draft at his bank.

"That's not my game," said the jockey, resuming his seat, his misshapen hands spread out on his knees, and his ferret face contemptuous, "not my game at all. The girl threw herself at my head. You can take her back, 'ush it all up; there's nobody need be the wiser. The clergyman that married us was half asleep, and not a soul at the hall knew what was up. I never was one for women. But I must have the money. Why, man," his nefarious scheme began working in his head, and his face brightened, "with a thousand pounds, I'll tell you what I can do. I can break——"

"Do! what does it matter to me what you do with it?" the other broke in impatiently. "Will you keep out of my way and the child's way? That is all I ask of you now. That you'll do something disreputable goes with-

out saying; but I don't want to be connected with it, that's all. Will you disconnect yourself at once and for ever from me and mine if I get this thousand pounds for you?"

"And damned glad to do it. Do you think I've had a pleasant time hangin' round that hole of a Hadalstone, or sittin' up here bein' cried on? It was none of my doin' from first to last. I wrote you fair and square as man to man, asking you for a thousand pounds, and you put me off with a letter that I wouldn't have flung at a stable-boy, and two quid a week." The jockey felt he had been injured. "Fork out, and that ends it; it would have ended it before it began if I hadn't been down to my knuckle bones at the time, and obliged to take what I could get. You'll have to come to my terms now, thanks to that slut, and my price is a thousand pounds, and I won't take a bob less."

The irresistible logic of the situation was not lost on Stephen. If he had not seen Aline and remembered that she was his and Angela's and the family's generally, he might have told Forrest to go to the devil, and let him and his wife fight it out. That is what he had meant to do, what had been in his mind in the train; to promise them an income and ship them to Australia, seemed vaguely the aim of his journey. "Keep the matter out of the newspapers," was the definite refrain of his thoughts. But matters had shaped differently under the influence of the girl's misery and beauty, and the strange thrill of memory caused by her likeness to his mother.

He cut the interview as short as he could; the atmosphere he was in was intolerable. He promised all the man asked; it seemed to him he had no choice, if he wanted to take Aline with him. He undertook to send a cheque within three days. At first, Forrest meant to refuse to let the girl go until he had the money, but he was tired to death of her, he had begun to hate the very sight of her, she made him feel mad, and he really did not want to try his drastic remedies if he could "kick

her out" instead. His "scheme" was much more important to him than the girl, and, of course, he realised he had the whip-hand of the pair.

Stephen found Aline outside the parlour door; she had been unable to get further. All her being trembled with one question. "Will he let me go?" Her lips could scarcely form the words.

"It is all right, it will be all right; you need never see him again."

Stephen knew instinctively the answer she wanted to hear, he devoutly hoped he was justified and accurate, but he feared, doubted, thought he had made a fool of himself, and had opened the door to endless annoyance and exactions. The position was forced on him, and he accepted it, that was all.

He telegraphed to Constantia, and he took Aline to London, to the house in Grosvenor Street; there was room for her there, after all, they found, now that it was too late. Not governesses nor masters they wanted for her, however, but doctors and a hospital nurse and all the paraphernalia of illness. Constantia, who travelled from Scotland at express speed in response to her brother's telegram, found, instead of the gentle, affectionate child she expected to see—for Stephen's message only told her that Aline was in town and wanted her—a restless head, on a white pillow, with fevered eyes and incoherent tongue, raving of unspeakable things.

Constantia went down to the library after her visit to the sick-room. Stephen was walking up and down.

"Well?" he asked.

"Tell me about it, Steve; I don't understand."

In a few short sentences he told her.

"What is the man like? What on earth is the man like?"

"A wretched little blackguard."

What could they say to each other, this brother and sister, with their father's history between them? Constantia had mothered the young politician, been secretary

to the poor one, watched over him; for him she had borne her gathering years in maidenliness, and grown concentrate on Stephen's career. They had fought on uphill together; that they never spoke together of what made the fight difficult, of what, even now, made the ultimate issue doubtful, left it no less certain that both of them remembered constantly. Now they feared the world would remember; they feared that when the short Liberal day was done, and Lord Sarum came into power, Lord Sarum would remember. Miserably, Stephen walked about the room.

"A wretched little blackguard, looks like a stable-boy. You would not have imagined it possible."

"Couldn't you have sent them to Australia, and hushed it up? But, no," she added quickly; "I see it would have been impossible."

In the hearts of both the thought lay heavily, that, perhaps, they had not done their duty by the girl, and both of them, notwithstanding what she had done, felt tenderly towards her. Compunction left them now, unready of speech to each other and without decision.

"Do you blame me, Steve?" said Con unsteadily, after a pause.

"Not more than I blame myself," he answered impatiently; "no, of course not."

"Fräulein?"

"She tells me Fräulein knew nothing; nobody knew anything."

"If it is possible——"

"Possible, or not possible, we are bound to try——"

"To hush it up?" She looked at him anxiously.

"To keep it quiet, at least, until after the General Election. What a brute I am! After all, even now I am thinking more of the elections than of the child. That's been the mischief——" Hurriedly he walked up and down, and the short sentences fell from him in jets. "Myself and the party; myself first, I suppose—the country, perhaps, yes, certainly the country, but myself

with it, always myself. I suppose that was at the root of our father's life too—utter selfishness.”

“Stephen,” she laid her hand on his arm, “don't—don't blame yourself. I cannot bear it; if there has been neglect, it has been my neglect. You left it to me; I thought I had done what was necessary.”

“No,” he shook off her hand, and the comfort she wanted to give him. “You would have brought her up here two years ago. It was I who would not have it. I feared she would practise her scales! Good God! if I'd only let her practise her scales over my head.”

So Stephen talked, for his daughter, bearing the stamp of his unhappy mother in her young unhappy face, had forced a sudden way into his heart, and made it sore. “She is such a child, such a baby—we have let her fall into such a morass.”

“You are going to try and pull her out, you are going to fight for her?” she said quickly.

“I am going to do my best. I am going to get her release from that scoundrel if it costs me my last penny—and my name.”

“No, no! Stephen,” she cried. “I couldn't bear that. You will hush it up, pay him anything, you won't imperil your position.”

Wild thoughts of resigning, of throwing up his position, of retiring into private life, had come to him in the gloom of that evening. But Con's distress, Con's appeal, showed him the folly of any precipitate action. If they could keep it quiet, this desperate, disgraceful marriage, and still save the child the consequences of her folly, they would do so. That was the possibility, the one hope to which they clung after their hour's talk. They must face the certainty of a perpetual blackmail, if, by submitting to it, they could guard the girl's secret, their own secret. This was their decision.

That night Constantia wrote to Hadalstone for Aline's clothes, announcing incidentally her arrival in town. In a dignified letter she dismissed Fräulein Eckelstein, in-

forming her that, although Miss Hayward was welcome at her father's house, neither she (Constantia) nor the Honourable Stephen Hayward, were satisfied with not having been notified of her arrival. Constantia took a certain risk in writing thus peremptorily, but the risk was justified. Fräulein Eckelstein knew nothing. Jack Forrest and the young lady had disappeared simultaneously, but nobody at Hadalstone thought of connecting the two events. Fräulein accepted unquestioningly the explanation that the girl had grown tired of the solitude of the country and had joined her father and aunt without leave, and, trembling for her recommendation, if it should be known that a young lady under her charge had "run away," even to her father, in a copious answer, full of split infinitives and hide-and-seek verbs, she begged the secrecy that would have been begged of her. So far they were safe. The illness, too, that would pass. The old family doctor, incurious, was satisfied with a halting explanation, and comfortably diagnosed "shock to the system."

Within two days of Aline's arrival in Grosvenor Street, the silence of Hadalstone, and the acceptance of Grosvenor Square were secured. There remained only—Jack Forrest. It was all very well for Stephen and Constantia to face vaguely the possibility of blackmail, but certain it was that a thousand pounds must be found immediately. This was a ridiculously small sum for Aline's freedom, if they could persuade themselves that even for this sum they were securing it. But, between them they had not a thousand pounds lying idle at their bankers, nor had they securities on which they could raise such an amount. Yet, whether it represented the full purchase price of security, or merely an instalment, its payment was imperative.

Constantia, when the first two days had gone safely by, and it seemed that no one was the wiser for the girl's escapade, began to breathe more freely, and to consider the pecuniary question, to talk things over with Stephen,

and suggest expedients. Theirs was not by any means a wealthy family; even the Marquis had estates to keep up commensurate, at least, with his income, and Stephen had already received as much help as he cared to ask from both his uncle and his cousin. He could not go to them for this sum. He ran over in his mind a list of people whom he might ask for the loan, and he rejected them one by one. Then, being absolutely at his wits' end, he commenced to reassure Constantia. He told her not to worry, the money would be all right. When she was reassured, he lay awake all night, going over impossible channels wherein he might possibly find one thousand pounds.

On the third day after he had brought his daughter home he received a letter from Jack Forrest, asking him when he might expect the money. It was perfectly civil, but Stephen detested the necessity of replying to it; he hated the sub-suggestion that he had been dilatory in keeping his word.

He wrote curtly back that a cheque would be forwarded on the morrow, pressure of business accounted for the delay—public business that would not wait.

Then he breakfasted, and again reassured Constantia, went for his morning canter, and later to the club for lunch. Whom he met at the club, and what happened there, must be told in another chapter.

Suffice it now that Jack Forrest received, not a cheque, but a thousand pounds in hundred pound notes, and his mean little eyes sparkled when he opened the registered packet, and straightway he began to make calculations with a stump of pencil in an uneducated hand. All his calculations came out exactly as he thought they would, which is not surprising, since he reckoned his gains as many people count their chickens! When he had finished, and ceased poring over his dirty little bit of paper, and had enjoyed again the rustle of the crisp notes Stephen had sent him, he said to himself:

“If it comes off crooked, all the worse for Stephen

Hayward." This really summed up the situation, but left out one factor, which, as it happened, was the very one that ultimately decided the matter. The factor omitted was Providence. "If it comes off crooked," said the jockey, thinking of his scheme, his coup, which now, at last, he had the money to work, "all the worse for Stephen Hayward!"

It will be necessary to see where Stephen obtained that thousand pounds, and on what terms, before one can definitely pronounce Stephen "none the worse" for his experience; but there need be no delay in summing up the situation as far as it affected Jack Forrest, blackguard, ex-jockey, and racing tout.

He took himself and his ten notes to Friston, where the friend upon whom he relied for help in his scheme superintended Lord Ralming's racing stables. This other scoundrel was quite prepared to discuss the business, and over a hearty lunch they did discuss it. After the lunch Jack tried Jemima over the hurdles, not that he had any chance of being allowed to ride her in the race about which they were plotting, for the exclusiveness of the Jockey Club was complete, but he wanted to see what the filly could do in experienced hands, with a view to her not doing it.

Then it was that that most wonderful accident happened, a bit of luck the Haywards could never have expected, a coincident at which even a novelist might hesitate. He took the filly into the field, rode her for all she was worth, and stopped her by his new trick, a trick which, more slowly performed, was to be the crux of the coup. But Jemima crossed her legs, she came down heavily, and over her head, as neatly as possible, came Jack Forrest, that capable jockey, an inexplicable accident. He had ridden for ten years, been over water and over fences, he had won or lost, as it suited his book, but he had never before met with an accident. He never met with one afterwards. His ample luncheon may have unsteadied him, or it may have been the effect on his

nerves of his recent experiences, or the weight of the notes he carried; or, perhaps, that unknown factor, Providence, was working for Aline, or saving Stephen Hayward for the Conservatives; or it may have been, as the editor of *The London Sportsman* said to his sub., that the god who watches over newspapers knew they were short of half a column. Whatever the cause, the effect was supreme. Jack Forrest's neck was broken; he never spoke, and never moved after that successful trick of his was successfully accomplished. Whether it was the concussion that killed him, or the shock to the spinal cord, was the subject of discussion that entertained twelve farmers and a medical coroner for a whole afternoon.

The London Sportsman, out of gratitude, gave Forrest a handsome obituary; the writer never mentioned he had been suspended, but enumerated the races he had won, recounted his good seconds, and filled up the half column without difficulty.

Stephen was not a reader of the racing papers, and it was John, eldest son of the Marquis, who told him the news. Not that John thought it was of any particular interest to Stephen, though the latter had once questioned him about Jack Forrest; it was simply that John had nothing to talk about at any time but racing or horses, and, meeting Stephen, it was natural for him, with the vague memory of that question, to say:

"Did you see that that fellow Forrest you once asked me about was killed at Friston, jerked out of his saddle? I'll bet ten to one he was at some trick or other with Jemima; the filly broke her legs."

Stephen could not believe it at first. He borrowed the paper as unconcernedly as possible, and, while he was reading that absorbing half column, he heard no more of the things that John was telling him. He parted with his cousin abruptly, anxious only to get home to Constantia with the news.

"Hullo, you've run off with my paper," John called after him, as Stephen jumped into his hansom with a hur-

ried nod of farewell. Then he went off grumbling because he had forgotten to note the odds against Isinglass for the Spring Handicap. Stephen, reading and re-reading the half column, could hardly believe his good fortune, could hardly credit his freedom. On the way home he stopped the cab, and bought all the sporting papers. Each of them had something, if only a line or two, about the inquest. There was no manner or shadow of doubt that Jack Forrest was really dead.

When he arrived home, Stephen sent for Constantia to the library, put the papers into her hand, pointing out the paragraph, then gently pushed her toward the door. At a glance she seemed to gather the startling import.

"There, go now," he said, "you can read them at leisure. There is no doubt about it, no doubt at all. I am very busy. I've done nothing these few days; I must get to work. Send Jackson down to me, will you? He has been very worried about my neglected letters. What! crying, Con? Well, I shouldn't have expected it of you."

"It's too good to be true!" She was not crying, but there were tears of thanksgiving in her eyes. "I'll take these up to the child, half her illness is fear. I suppose she deserves her punishment, but it is pitiable to see her."

"Deserves, nonsense!" said Stephen, with quick irritability. "Don't let me hear you say that again. 'Deserves!' it's we who deserved punishment; and now we haven't got it, and are not going to get it. The whole incident can be forgotten. We'll make up to the child for our neglect."

Stephen was softer to the girl in his heart than Constantia; but then, Constantia was a woman, and had been in the wrong.

From that day Aline's recovery to health was rapid. She clung to her aunt during her convalescence, and won on her through her weakness. The motherliness in Con-

stantia, which had been lavished on Stephen, was hard to awaken at the call, at the need, of her niece. She had so nearly wrecked Stephen's career, so perilously nearly. Very slowly her affection for the girl revived, at the best it had been a poor thing, with Duty at its root, and a certain jealousy cramping its growth. Constantia was a cold woman naturally. Aline clung to her, but could get only a limited hold; she got chilled herself in the contact.

However, Constantia was bent now on doing her duty to Aline. She made plans, an autumn in Florence, a winter in Rome, no presentation until the next season. In everything Aline acquiesced humbly. Her body grew well quickly, her mind was paralysed by what she had gone through; still she clung chilly and forlornly to her Aunt Constantia. Preparations were made for their journey abroad, Aline always dumbly acquiescent. Jack Forrest was dead; that was all that seemed to have reached her intelligence.

It was arranged that Stephen should follow them after the recess.

As they were just about to start on their journey, Constantia, neat and prim in her tailor-made clothes, standing in the hall amid the piled-up luggage, waiting for Aline and the maid, sprang upon Stephen at last the question he had been waiting for during the last three weeks.

"By the way, Stephen, I never asked you, I forgot to ask you; *where did you get that thousand pounds after all?*"

It was what she saw in his face that made her leave the luggage, and follow him into the library. She had read, in the report of the inquest, that in Jack Forrest's pocket a thousand pounds in Bank of England notes had been found. She knew these must have come from Stephen, but, in the midst of preparations for the foreign tour, and the social and household arrangements, she had forgotten to ask her brother from whom, or how, he had

obtained the money. Stephen, when he smiled in answer to her question, and evaded it, had a curious whimsical look of guilt. Where could he have obtained it? She followed him into the library, and repeated her question. He held the door open for her.

“Now, don't faint; don't excite yourself unduly——”

“Be serious, Steve——”

“I will—I was—I am——” but his expression seemed to doubt how she would take the news. “As I remarked—don't faint—I borrowed it from Karl Althaus.”

CHAPTER FOUR

STEPHEN HAYWARD had excellent reasons for withholding from his sister the name of the gentleman from whom he had borrowed the money, excellent reasons for breaking it to her gently when she asked him point-blank, and even for fearing that she might faint when he told her what he knew she would regard as a painful and unfortunate indiscretion — that he had borrowed from Karl Althaus.

Constantia Hayward, whom her flippant young relatives looked upon as a stiff old maid, was of course nothing of the sort. But, being a Hayward, and estimating, perhaps overestimating, the family importance, she had certain narrow codes by which the family should support it. The misfortune of her father's character was not to her what it was to Stephen, her pedigree overrode it. Governing these codes or creeds was a dislike to the social laxness which had allowed what Lady Violet called the "pigs in clover" element to intrude into the circle, where, in Constantia's estimation, blood should have been the only credential. Constantia was strong on "blood" and its privileges; and she thought that among the privileges held by the Haywards was the right of exclusiveness. Incidentally, she wished them to set to society generally the example of keeping their drawing-rooms and their visiting lists free from outsiders.

It was no question with her of whether these lived in Piccadilly or in Park Lane, in Grosvenor Square or in Belgravia, whether they were Americans, Germans, Dutch, or Englishmen, whether they had changed their names or retained their patronymics, whether they were millionaires or multi-millionaires, whether they professed

the religion of the country they inhabited, or whether they acknowledged, if they did not conform to, the restrictions of a more ancient faith. She did not care whether they were railway kings or Chicago sausage-makers, Australian squatters or South African mining magnates. She did not gamble, so their habits did not attract her, she did not personally require money, so their liberality did not appeal to her, she had more than she desired of society, so their hospitality had no charm for her.

At first it had been a joke among her friends, later it had been recognised that Constantia Hayward had absorbed all the family pride, and left none for her relatives. But when others of the family followed suit the matter became somewhat serious. It was a large, independent family, with many ramifications, it had more than one member in the Cabinet, more still in the House of Lords; there were Haywards in the Diplomatic Service, at the Admiralty, in the Services, everywhere. If they and their women set to work to keep out social intruders, to form a holy of holies, a cave, an inner circle, to which birth and breeding gave the only *entrée*, they were capable of doing it; they could build a barrier that should mark a fixed demarcation line between the best people and the second best. It was serious, because the best people—some of the very best people indeed—wanted money, and the newcomers, who wanted position, were prepared to give it. But these insisted on a place among the exclusives; some of them put the accent on the first syllable, and they would not pay for lower places. If the Haywards would not meet them, would not entertain them, would not be entertained by them, the difficulties of the poor Marquises, and Earls, Honourables, and Baronets, who were trying to assist them to realise their laudable aspirations, were enormously increased.

Everybody had been trying to influence everybody else all through the season before Aline's marriage. Would the Duchess of Alncaster receive Mr. and Mrs. Bernard P. Coots, whose rose ball had cost them ten thousand

pounds, or would she not? Dared the Lady Dorothea Vespris allow the Drovingtons, who were popularly supposed to own half Australia, to open their doors in Grosvenor Square, and take poor Lord Swanerton's Scotch estates off his hands, in vain? Would the De Vere Ponsonbys refuse to hunt the wily fox on the Cottesdale hills now that that ennobled foreign banker, Lord Redmayns, had taken Cottesdale?

Would society, under the guidance of the Haywards, allow Karl Althaus to erect his temple in Park Lane, and refuse to worship at the shrine he put up for them?

Constantia had her partizans and her opponents, even in the family, of which, by the way, so many members were impecunious, but her heart was set on the crusade, and she fought hard; with her it came next to Stephen's career, it became to her a mission, the part of the debt her father had left undischarged. It was not the black sheep of society she wished to keep out, it was the sheep that belonged to another flock altogether. The exclusion of the *nouveaux riches* became an obsession with her. Having neither husband nor children, she wished to take Society, with a capital S, under her protection, and keep it safe and shepherded from stray cattle. It had been her absorbing interest in this campaign, perhaps, that had led to her neglect of the call to be read between the lines of Aline's weekly letter from Hadalstone.

Karl Althaus, with the set that followed in Karl Althaus's wake, had been recently her principal *bête noir*, her dominant fear. Accident had thrown him in her way, and his tall, rather clumsy figure, his massive head, with its plentiful hair, wiry, shaggy, grey, and his keen eyes, were not to be overlooked. They had met at a crush, the ball at the Countess of Kintaille's. Positively and certainly on mischief intent, Algy Cardargan had brought him up to be presented to her.

It was Karl himself who related the incident to Stephen. Karl had not resented it; on the contrary, it had made him roar with laughter.

“ She drew herself up—a very fine woman, your sister ; she didn’t bow, she just tilted her head a shade. ‘ My acquaintance is already sufficiently large,’ she let out, as if she were a refrigerator bunged up with ice. Her acquaintance was already sufficiently large. I said, ‘ Well, madam, surely I’m large enough even for your acquaintance.’ She didn’t smile ; she just passed on. I don’t think, between ourselves, you know, Mr. Hayward, that your sister has got much sense of humour !”

Stephen had humour ; he enjoyed the anecdote. Firstly, his sympathy with this particular crotchet of Constantia’s was very perfunctory, secondly, this newcomer, this Karl Althaus, really interested him. He was picturesquely different from the club men, politicians, and parasites, from the men trained at one school, and cut out of one pattern, with whom Stephen habitually consorted. And Stephen’s history and early training had put him a little apart from those who should have been his boyhood companions. He had a world of experiences unknown to them. He was more akin at heart to this outsider. Even had Stephen backed up Constantia loyally in her social crusade, it would have been difficult to avoid speaking to Karl Althaus in Mildmay’s smoking-room ; it was rather difficult, in fact, to speak to any one else, for Karl’s grey, massive head and deep voice dominated the room. He had a way of monopolising the conversation, and, when Stephen Hayward was in the room, he directed his talk as far as possible to him. A very interesting man Karl Althaus ; Stephen found him increasingly attractive as a companion, he was so natural, so genuine, so positive. He was paying a flying visit to London. He spoke much of South Africa, and South Africa, a year before the Jameson raid, was even then the topic of the day. He knew his subject thoroughly, and everything he said was said well, that is, with emphasis, and conviction, and a certain rough eloquence. But Karl knew other things beside South Africa ; he was a buyer of pictures, a collector of bric-à-brac ; he had no culture, but

a fine, instinctive taste. Stephen soon found it was worth his while to take Karl with him to Christie's. What Stephen had learned Karl knew without learning. The two men, so acutely different, were strangely sympathetic.

Stephen had not told Constantia of his growing friendship with the big South African. Karl may have laid himself out to attract Stephen, but that Stephen was attracted was due to no manœuvre of Karl's, it came about naturally. They met at the club, for Constantia and her set had not been successful in keeping Karl out of the Carlton, they had met at picture-galleries and private exhibitions of works of art, they had grown, too, into the little intimacies of congenial club acquaintance. Therefore, when Stephen had turned over in his mind every one to whom he could apply for Jack Forrest's thousand pounds, and had rejected them all, had searched every channel, and searched in vain, he permitted himself to remember that that big, eager colonial acquaintance of his had, time after time, suggested, even insisted, that he was flinging away opportunity after opportunity, wasting a fortune in not investing or speculating in mine or land shares under his direction. Stephen had hitherto brushed aside all such suggestions. He had neither capital to invest nor credit with which to speculate. He was incorruptibly honest, because, both in his limitations and his strength, in his instincts and in his ambitions, he was the embryo of an English statesman.

But now he was a father also, and that pretty, heart-broken girl belonged to him, and looked to him to bring her freedom, an expensive purchase, for, that the thousand pounds would be only an instalment, Stephen had no doubt. He could not know that that restive mare was going to complete the deal.

For two days he listened to the bulletins, heard the distant sound of moans as he hurried to his rooms, met Constantia red-eyed on the stairs, saw the trim hospital nurse busied about her work, and felt that he alone was **doing nothing**, that everything remained for him to do.

He recognised it as a fortunate coincidence that the first man he met when he turned into the Carlton on the day he received Jack Forrest's letter of reminder was Karl Althaus. Stephen would have passed him with a nod, but somehow his mind was relieved. There is no doubt these rich men, these men with the rumour of many millions surrounding their personalities, have a certain irresistible attraction for the impecunious. Stephen had discussed this curious magnetism, but he had never felt it. He had always been poor, but he had never wanted money as keenly as he wanted other things. He wanted money badly now, and Karl's big body, strong face, and deep voice, seemed like a promise. Still, he would have passed him with a nod.

"Now, then, that won't do, Mr. Hayward; one would think you were your sister, eh! passing me by like that. Goin' in to lunch, are you? So am I; we'll have a snack together. The African mail is in; things are getting very tight up there, your people won't be able to keep their eyes shut much longer."

Stephen smiled.

"Tight, are they? Eldorado played out?"

"Eh! You may laugh; that's what you fellows do, you never notice the sky is getting dark until a thunderbolt falls on your head. Here, waiter, chops and potatoes for two."

Stephen unfolded his napkin, surveyed the bill of fare.

"What's the good of that? Eleven times altogether I've seen you lunching here. You take five minutes looking down that greasy bit of paper, and then you order a chop, and a whisky and soda."

Stephen laughed as he abandoned the menu, and leaned back in his chair.

"You seem to know my habits."

"Oh! any one would notice a habit like that. Now, what a pity it is, Hayward—you'll excuse me dropping the mister, I can't get my tongue round these ceremoniousnesses—what a pity it is you're such a *squacamish*

fellow over money matters. Here, you, waiter, I'll have a pint of Bass. There never was such a time as now for making money."

Stephen surveyed his chop, and Karl watched him.

"What do you call squeamish?" he said, looking up.

"Squeamish? Well, I call it squeamish, knowing me as well as you do, that you never take advantage of it."

"Take advantage of it?"

"I've told you, well, a dozen things, hinted at others."

"Oh! I don't speculate," said Stephen weakly, playing with his knife and fork, seeing the opening, yet shrinking from it.

"And why not?"

"No money," he said briefly.

"That's a reason for speculating, not for leaving it alone. But I wasn't talking of speculating, *certainties* I mean, man, *certainties*."

"Are there any?"

"Dozens, when you've got Karl Althaus at the back of you."

Stephen went on with his lunch, although all the time he was thinking of that thousand pounds, wondering if he could ask Karl Althaus to lend it to him, it would be a small sum to such a man, or whether he should ask Althaus to show him how to make it, or whether, after all, he had not better do anything rather than become involved in pecuniary transactions with what he and Con had always called "the gang." It was a strange coincidence that Karl Althaus should have begun at once to talk about speculation. It was not so strange as it seemed to Stephen, for neither Karl, nor Karl's set, habitually spoke of anything else. Stephen was absorbed and perplexed, his chop was dry and tasteless, he grumbled at it. Karl, shrewdly observant, said:

"You've got the hump to-day, you're out of sorts. What's wrong?" Stephen looked up and met Karl's grey eyes, one of them a little bloodshot.

"Well," he said whimsically, "you've hit it. I have

got the hump, I am worried." He pushed his plate away. "I must get out of this. I've been overworked. A couple of days with the rod will put me right."

"Bosh! Overworked! Who minds overwork? Why, man, I've——" And here followed a wonderful relation of fifteen consecutive days in which Karl, with an average of three hours' sleep in the twenty-four, had outwitted a big Company, and netted half a million of money.

Stephen listened with interest keener than, and different from, any he had hitherto given to Karl Althaus's financial stories.

"What do you think of that for work? Overworked!" Karl flung his grey mane back in contempt.

Almost involuntarily Stephen said:

"I think I'd do fifteen days' work like that if I got as well paid for it."

Karl took the cue he had been waiting for very quickly.

"Do you want money?"

And still Stephen fenced.

"I suppose every one wants money, more or less."

"Stick to the point. I've an idea you're in a fix, want a lump, perhaps. Do you think there's a better man in the world to come to than Karl Althaus? Eh!"

"I suppose you are used to people consulting you about money matters?"

"Consulting me!" Karl laughed outright; the chair creaked as he put his back against it and laughed. "You bet! Consultation you call it! Why, they drag it off me, put their hands in my pocket and pull it out, they dip into me as if I was a lucky bag. Consult!"

"So you've a fine contempt for your fellow men?"

Karl answered quickly:

"Contempt? Not I! They can't want it worse than I've done, and they can't do worse to get it either. But come, now, what do you want? How much do you want? I'll put you on the right horse, never fear."

Stephen took a sudden resolution, dropped his nonchalance, leaned forward, and said hurriedly:

“ I do want money, want it badly—a sum—and at once. Your ‘ good thing ’ is of no use to me. I shouldn’t know how to take advantage of it, probably, and, anyway, I suppose it would be an affair of weeks. The money I want will be of no use to me if I don’t have it to-day, to-morrow at latest. Will you lend it me? That is the question. You know something of my affairs—I—I—am pretty sure to have a large augmentation of income one of these days.” The slow blood mounted to Stephen’s face when he alluded to his possible promotion. “ I will pay you back, and with interest, as soon as I am in a position to do so, but I have no security to offer, none.”

“ A large sum?”

“ Large to me.”

“ A hundred thousand?”

“ Good God, no. I want a thousand pounds.”

Karl smiled; it was a charming smile, frank, engaging, one might almost say sweet; his teeth were so sound and even, the curves of his thick lips so generous. Otherwise he was a plain man, although impressive. A man of about forty-five, his grey, thick hair crowning a strong, clean-shaven, mobile face. He did not look like a gentleman, perhaps, but he had a personality. He stood out from the ruck of men as something bigger, stronger, more important than his fellows. His hands were brown, with square finger-nails; Stephen’s, white and tapered, looked like a woman’s beside them. He rose from his chair.

“ Come on, come up to my rooms with me. I’ll write you a cheque. It’s absurd, absurd for a man like you to be short of a thousand pounds. And I’ll show you what to do with it? you mustn’t throw it away in paying things; tradesmen can wait, they’re used to waiting.” Stephen, following him out into the street, answered, shortly, almost sullenly, it seemed to Karl:

“ But it isn’t tradesmen.”

“ Not tradesmen?” Karl linked his arm in Stephen’s as they walked down St. James’s Street together, talking

confidentially at the top of his voice. Stephen was ashamed of himself for feeling ashamed of Karl.

"Well, well, now! Not tradesmen, eh? I remember when I was selling winkles off a barrow in Hoxton——" The rest of the anecdote reached Stephen confusedly, for Algy Cardargan bowled past them in a hansom, and Algy looked at him and his companion with amusement, curiosity, surprise. "Damn him, with his 'I'll tell Con' expression," Stephen said to himself irritably, and so he lost the Hoxton story.

Stephen knew something of Karl Althaus's taste in bric-à-brac. The sumptuous rooms in Piccadilly were but an ante-chamber to the palace building in Park Lane, he had heard.

"I'm staying in these diggings till they've run up my shanty in front," was Karl's apology, as he put his key in the door. Bronzes and majolica were in the front hall; a Velasquez, two Teniers, a Rubens, hung in the square, top-lighted, inner one. The screen, behind which was the door that led to the study, was hung with Raphael Morghen engravings and Rembrandt etchings.

"And did you really sell winkles at Hoxton?" was Stephen's involuntary exclamation.

Karl, leading the way into the library, answered indifferently, turning round as he spoke to look at his pet Turner—he never came into the room without a glance at that wonderful sea and sky: "I can't remember whether they were winkles; they may have been mussels. I know they were in a saucer, and there was a bottle of vinegar attached to the show, and some pepper; and then that fellow bilked me, as I was telling you coming along——"

"And now you're building that great big palace in Park Lane?"

"And hobnobbing with a future Prime Minister! Never you mind about that, there's nothing in that. It is only the first few thousands that take the blood out of you, the rest is easy enough. Money's like rabbits, when you've got a start, you simply let it breed. Mine's breed-

ing. I'm going to make this cheque for a couple of thousand," he said, seating himself at the writing-table, "and then I'm going to show you how to make it breed."

Stephen was uncomfortable, he didn't sit down. Suddenly the Turners arrested him; he had a cultured eye.

"Those are the Abbotsford Turners," Karl said, noticing, as he wrote, the restless footsteps halt. "I've picked 'em up one by one. Some cheap, some at the price of their weight in diamonds, some off dealers who put on an honest profit, some off collectors who knew they'd got a buyer, and opened their mouths till you'd think the top of their heads would come off. Here you are." He had been writing as he spoke; now he rose and held out the pen and slip of paper to Stephen. Stephen put out his hand—and hesitated. It was acutely necessary for him to have the money. Without it, to-morrow Jack Forrest might be sitting in the library in Grosvenor Place, straw in mouth, obstinate and cunning, insisting on his right of access to that miserable little girl upstairs. But still Stephen hesitated, for it seemed the price of his peace, of his independence.

"Althaus," he said desperately, "why are you so good to me? Why are you lending me this? Have you got anything in your head? Are you trying to buy with it something that I shall never be able to sell? Don't think me ungrateful. I'm desperately in need of money, but——"

"Well, you can put it up. I don't want a title,—at least not yet, and I don't want you to help me to get into Society. Society is much more anxious about me than I am about it, so you can make your mind easy. Tut, man, don't make an ass of yourself. What's two thousand pounds to me? It's not a button off my coat."

"But you want something—you haven't resented my sister's attitude; I see you know all about that."

"Yes, yes, and that she calls us 'pigs in clover.'"

"No; that was the famous *mot* of Lady Violet, the Duchess's daughter."

“ Well, any way, I know all about it, and about the social crusade, and I don’t care a damn ! ”

“ And you single me out—— ”

“ Yes; I single you out. But it’s not because of your blue blood or your social privileges. ”

“ Well, I’m in the Opposition—— ”

“ I know. But that won’t last. Hayward—— ” Karl leaned forward and put his hand on Stephen’s arm. “ You can take it from me, if I do want something off you, it’s something you will want to give, and will be proud of having given. They wanted you, you remember, on the Charter, on the Board; you wouldn’t come. Well, ” he spoke seriously—he was suddenly serious, “ I want to give you a hint. There’s trouble brewing over there—trouble they don’t understand here, won’t listen to. True, you’re in the Opposition, but the time’s not far off when you won’t be. We want a friend over here—a friend in power—— ”

“ My dear fellow, I don’t know what you’re trying to tell me. I am not quite sure I want to know. But you haven’t quite the hang of English politics; you’ve come to the wrong shop. If I’ve any idea of what you’re hinting at, it’s to the Colonial Office you ought to be addressing yourself—to the Marquis of Ripon. Here, ” he held out to Karl the cheque he had given him, “ if you’re lending me that on the strength of any power I have, or may have, in South African affairs—— ”

“ Put it up, man. I know what I’m doing. I am lending you the money because I like you: I’ve lent bigger sums for worse reasons. I know all about Ripon and the Colonial Office; we’ll work that another way. But you’re a Hayward, and your boss is well in with Sarum. Sarum has been Prime Minister before, and will be again, Jevington is a Privy Councillor, and you lead him by the nose. You see I know all about it. I don’t want to bind you to anything, but if the time comes when life gets insupportable for us up there ” — “ up there ” meant in Johannesburg, Stephen knew—“ and we have to take mat-

ters in our own hands, we may want a friend at Court. Will you be that friend?"

"I don't know to what you are committing me," said Stephen slowly.

"To nothing," answered the other sharply. "I'll put it in a nut-shell. I don't know what steps we are going to take; I don't know how much more we are going to stand, nor what we are going to do. Six weeks before I started I had no more notion of what was on hand than you have, but I met a woman in Cape Town—well, I won't bother you about that, but it's the woman who wrote 'The Kaffir and his Keeper,' and, if I hadn't known beforehand, she'd have taught me then, that you can't afford to let things go on as they are. My way isn't clear. I've seen two or three of the leaders, but their way isn't clear; we've all of us got divided interests. But I have an idea in my head that Rhodes means business this time. Now, when the time comes, if ever the time should come, when that idea matures, and we take action, we shall want some support at home, tacit, any way moral, support and countenance. I don't care a curse who forms the Government; I don't suppose we'll want the Government exactly, though we may; but what we're pretty certain to want is Parliament, and I suppose I'm not going far astray in thinking there are large sections in both Houses led, directly or indirectly, by the Haywards. That's what we might want—representation, a friend at Court. If I send you a message asking for it, you will send me a sign, a 'yes' or 'no,' that I can understand? If you're no longer in Opposition, and, mind you, we may wait for that—why, all the better."

It seemed a little thing to promise, though Karl was in such tremendous earnest about it, solemn even. It made Stephen Hayward thoughtful; it must be borne in mind that it was as an Imperialist he had originally won his spurs.

"What you want me to do is this: If you fellows out there decide upon endeavouring in any way to force the

Transvaal Government to redress those grievances you talk about, you'll send me word before you take action, and on my reply you'll base your proceedings. Is that right?"

"Quite exact. Send us a word, a sign. Let us know where we are with the people at home!"

"But I may have no power, no place."

"Oh, rot! We're talking sense, we two. You'll do it?"

"I think so. Yes; I don't think I am promising anything I cannot perform. I think, if all you want is to know our views at home on any action you may take, I may promise you shall hear them from me," answered Stephen slowly, not without reflection, carefully, and after consideration.

"Then,"—Karl subsided into his chair, he had been watching Stephen with some anxiety, "that's all right. Now I'll teach you how to make two thousand pounds breed a hundred thousand. But, first," he leaned forward, touching him lightly, sympathetically, "what's the trouble?"

Stephen was not naturally communicative—he had never been in a position to afford it; the question startled him. He had hardly yet grasped the meaning of the first request, nor known why he had acceded to it. Karl was so—so crude. Stephen hesitated.

"Oh! of course you needn't tell me unless you like. Of course, if you would rather keep it to yourself, why—there the matter ends. But I've dealt with more blackguards in my time than you have, and I play most games of chance better than most men; that's how I'm here. You're in trouble—you want money—it isn't tradespeople; I know that well enough—knew it when I asked you, your position would keep them quiet, and besides there's never any hurry about honest debts. Ergo, you're in a mess—blackmail. You'd better let me see you through."

It was impossible to resent the words. Karl's voice and

manner were full of kindness, of real interest. The big man looked strong, helpful, and he had dealt with many blackguards, no doubt. The impulse was strong in Stephen to consult with him, to ask his advice, to be guided by him in dealing with Jack Forrest.

Who could guess that Providence would take the whole matter out of his hands, that by this time to-morrow all fear from Jack Forrest would have been at an end, and the secret safe?

"Well," he began, hesitated again, stopped short.

"There is a man," suggested Karl helpfully.

"Yes, a blackguard, a broken-down jockey, a—" and then followed slowly, sometimes helped out, sometimes embroidered by Karl's quick apprehension and ready sympathy, the whole pitiable, discreditable story.

Karl got up and walked about as Stephen had done. He was startled. It was not the card he expected to find in his hand. He had a standard of honour, a curious standard of his own, very different from that of other men, and he did not want to have to use a woman in his game. It was a card, a good card, and it had taken a trick, but Karl walked the room impatiently.

"I was sure it was blackmail," he said, almost to himself; "that I was sure of."

"Why?" said Stephen thoughtlessly.

"Well," answered the other slowly, still off his guard, "you're not always in your place, your health is a trifle more precarious in the Press than your doctor admits. I guess you're a man like the rest of us, you've got a non-political side to your character, if you do keep it out of sight."

The color slowly mounted to the thin, fair face.

"These non-political qualities of mine, to which you so gracefully allude, exist only in your imagination," said Stephen, rising. "I must be going, I think——" Karl pushed him back into his chair.

"Don't be huffy, man; I meant no harm. We'll talk this over. I'll find a way out for you, never fear. I know

rather more of this Jack Forrest than you do, I fancy. He was no more your father's son than I am, to begin with."

Stephen allowed himself to be persuaded to stay, and the two men discussed, from the different standpoints of their different natures, the way to deal with the situations which, as it happened, never arose. Karl recovered the confidence his unfortunate allusion had so nearly forfeited.

After they had discussed Aline, they discussed finance, and Stephen began to change his views about money-making, to hope that it might not be necessary to be dishonest in order to become rich. Also he began to understand Karl Althaus a little, and the qualities that had placed him where he was, and to be less satisfied with his own progress, and his own talents in achieving, what, after all, seemed at the moment so vague a success.

But he only thought this when Karl brought out a case of miniatures by Oliver, and made him envious of many things money could buy.

CHAPTER FIVE

It was Karl Althaus's money that gave Aline her divorce, although it was only accident that made the decree absolute. A period of anxiety followed, the waiting for eventualities. It was impossible to say at first whether the secret had been, or could be, safely guarded, but, when three months had gone by and nothing had occurred, no whisper penetrated, no shadow from the past fallen athwart their path, Constantia took heart, and Aline, clinging to her, moved slowly out of sight of the precipice that had yawned before her.

She and Constantia went to Rome, to Florence, to Nice, to the Riviera, and the Italian lakes. Constantia took the girl wherever society congregated. She wished her to be *en evidence*, to be seen as a child, with her dress short, her hair hanging down in ringlets. Scandal could never touch a life lived from the beginning openly, and in the sight of men and women. All the family, who had promised themselves to be kind to Angela's child when she came out, blamed Constantia seriously for letting her be seen at so early an age, but Constantia had deliberately arranged her alibi, and bore rebuke with unwonted meekness.

The pair were back in London early in the year, and then Aline was put under the care of governesses and masters, conventionally educated people who taught conventional things. She was very grateful, deeply grateful, to aunt and father. That her gratitude was silent made it no less genuine. She would have done anything they asked of her, but all they asked of her was to mould herself into the form that society demands. All her impulses were dead, and her spontaneity; she was still dazed, and sometimes she hardly realised her deliverance.

It was arranged that there should be no presentation until the following season, but there were many young friends coming in and out, young cousins and relatives, and now and then there was a night at the Opera, always a Sunday parade in the Park. It seemed that Aline was never out of sight. Her cousins found her cold, some of them used another word and said stupid. Lady Violet, the most flippant of the cousins, said she was like all old maids' children! But, that they saw her and talked of her was enough for Constantia; she wished Aline apparently to pass before their eyes from childhood to womanhood, and she achieved her object. Never could the girl's relatives believe but that they had watched her grow up innocently.

From childhood to womanhood she grew, apparently in the open, grew into a young model of her aunt, an acknowledged beauty, though somewhat too stately, a thought cold, but with the Hayward carriage and the famous Jevington instep. Nor Stephen nor Constantia could find fault with her demeanour, and when, in her nineteenth year, she was presented by her aunt, the Duchess of Alncaster, there was neither whisper about her name nor shadow on her fame; her correctness was as unquestioned as her beauty. She had taken all the varnish those conventional instructors had given her; she had become cased in it. She may have become cramped, but the experience of the natural growth had proved so nearly fatal that all her desire was for restraint. Her immobility helped to spread the varnish thicker, it slowly hardened in the atmosphere about her. Her individuality shrank and withered. She was all conduct and all deportment, and, though, perhaps, it were harsh to echo the judgment that called her stupid, it did not appear that her intelligence had developed very notably since her illness. She was indisputably dull. She echoed Constantia's sentiments, but without Constantia's conviction, and she joined, as far as her youth and subsidiary position permitted, in Constantia's crusade. She refused introductions to mil-

lionaires, and even had been heard to repeat quite gravely Lady Violet's oft-quoted *mot*, that they were only "pigs in clover."

"I cannot think what Constantia and Stephen mean by it," lamented the Duchess, successor to that old lady who had interfered in Aline's education. "The girl, with all her beauty, is not in the least attractive; Stephen has no means of providing for her, and the only class of men who would be likely to take a fancy to her she has been taught to consider beneath her notice."

"Oh! Constantia is mad on blue blood and *noblesse oblige*, and all those exploded old notions," answered the flippant cousin, "and as for Aline, either she has no mind at all, or she has not the pluck to exercise it. She is not allowed to talk to anything under four-generation men, and she has nothing to say even to those. She watches old Constantia out of the corners of her eyes as if she were frightened of her, and she moves with the mechanical precision of clockwork. She is not a girl at all, she is only an automaton."

"Her mother was not clever, but then, she was not handsome either, and she had thirty thousand pounds," said the Duchess reflectively. "If Stephen had not spent the thirty thousand pounds, there would be more excuse for the way they have brought the girl up; and, as for Constantia's money, in the first place it is very tightly tied up, and in the second I did not think she had any of it left."

The Duchess was not famous for her consistency in argument, or, in fact, for anything except the amount of bugles she managed to concentrate on her unwieldy person, and the open manner in which she had rejoiced at the disappearance of her husband's mother.

"Why did Constantia never marry, mother? You say she had money, though you don't seem to know what has become of it; she certainly must have been a very good-looking girl, and she is not within a hundred miles of being as stupid as Aline."

"It is really most disrespectful of you to speak of your aunt as old. She is sixteen years younger than I am, very little over fifty. As a matter of fact, your Aunt Constantia remained unmarried because she wished to devote herself and her income entirely to her brother Stephen; it is only an income, by the way, and goes back to the family after she dies."

"But there must have been a love story!"

"I never heard of one." The Duchess was a gossip, and the Lady Violet was peculiarly modern, therefore it was not so unnatural, as it would have been in the eighteenth century, for the mother to give the girl an outline of the conduct and career of Stephen's and Constantia's father. Lord John Hayward was almost historical.

"Con has never really left Stephen," the Duchess rambled on. "I think poor Angela must have felt quite an outsider."

"Well, any way, Aline is not devoted to anybody, so there is no excuse for her being unlike other people. When she goes into a ballroom everybody looks at her, but when she goes out they all heave a sigh of relief. She won't have been out two years before it will be absolutely impossible to get a man to speak to her. Dick says he felt as if he were in Earlswood when he took her down to dinner the other night."

"Your father does not think her stupid at all," the Duchess said, with that complacency with which she usually regarded that hereditary legislator, the Duke of Alncaster, "he says she is only shy."

"Poor girl! if father is going to be her advocate her last chance is gone." This was unfilial on Lady Violet's part, but not incorrect, for the Duke was a bore, and, if a bore talks enthusiastically about a dull person, the two become segregated within their zone of unrelieved tedium.

But Stephen and Constantia heard none of the current comments on Aline. She had apparently done all that they asked of her; she had seemingly forgotten the episode intervening between her leaving Hadalstone and her

coming to them in Grosvenor Square. The Dowager had been pleased with her appearance on returning from the Continent, and had commended the girl to her son, and her son's wife, and the latter had duly and dutifully presented Aline. It was enough for Stephen and Constantia that no shadow should rest on her youth. That neither of them found her companionable each thought was due to the intervention of the other. In truth, both their lives were full without her. Although the ministry, which seemed to be tottering when Aline returned to them, was still standing when she made her timid bow to her Sovereign, Stephen was none the less hopeful, none the less full of electoral and Party affairs.

He had also other interests now. Karl had not persuaded him to joint the Board of the Chartered Company, nor any other directorate, for Stephen held the strongest possible opinion as to the necessity of separating politics from finance. But Karl had allotted certain shares to Stephen, and, when Stephen remonstrated, Karl said he was sorry he had misunderstood him, he thought he was interested in the water-supply of Johannesburg. Stephen was annoyed, but admitted that, when Karl had spoken of a system of irrigation and waterworks for Johannesburg, he had expressed himself favourably. Still, he objected to his holding, and, on Karl's advice, directed his bankers to sell his allotment. The allotment had been at par; the market price was promptly four. Stephen thus unexpectedly, and, through no fault of his own, became possessed of capital. This capital he invested on Karl's recommendation, and both Constantia and Aline benefited indirectly by the resultant dividends.

When Karl left England, an event that ante-dated Aline's presentation, he did not lose sight of Stephen's interests, nor his interest in Stephen. They corresponded, and Stephen, profiting by this as far as he legitimately could, half as far as Karl considered he might, became ever more convinced of his correspondent's shrewdness in money matters.

It is strange, but true, that the Duchess and her shrill and attenuated daughter, the Lady Violet, were little more interested in Aline, in her own and father's fortunes, than was Karl Althaus up in Johannesburg, trying to reconcile irreconcilable elements, and full of big affairs. He was one of a crowd, seen in England as shadows, hardly real, in Cape Town more vividly as struggling figures on a dim horizon black with war clouds. Karl had had no desire to meddle with politics—politics were forced upon him. His life had been spent in money-making; to wrench himself away, to divorce himself from his life's scheme, was not the work of a day. When the National Union, representing the intelligence of Johannesburg, first invited him, as one of the capitalists, to join them, his reply had been an unhesitating negative. He had his hands full enough, he told them, without Imperialism, or Anti-Krugerism, to complicate his dealings.

But, on his way to England, before that memorable visit during which we have seen his endeavouring to persuade Stephen Hayward of the importance of South African affairs, he had stayed a month in Cape Town, and there a little woman, whom he had sought for far other reasons, had taught him, in some subtle way that little women have, that there were things in life more worth having than money or works of art. Among the things she had taught him were worth the having, and which, under her influence, he had begun to dimly realise, was his place in the Empire, his stake as an Englishman. When he had spoken to Stephen of what would or might come, he spoke out of the wisdom that little woman had taught him. It was an old story now, told often and differently, but, in truth, the position of affairs in the Transvaal while Karl Althaus was in England laying plans, whilst Aline was making her unfortunate experiment in matrimony, and Stephen Hayward his first in finance, was well-nigh desperate.

The two races, Boer and British, were living, side by side, under almost impossible conditions. Authority was

with the first; industry, intelligence, capital, with the latter. The struggle was inevitable; that Karl Althaus should be involved in it was due to Joan de Groot.

Karl Althaus, before he had stopped at Cape Town on his way to England, had been satisfied to fight the Boers with their own weapons. He, too, had subsidised, undermined, bribed, intrigued. Meanness and lying, craft and diplomacy, had been the weapons with which the heads of the great mining industry had met the Chadbands of the first Raad. But, after Karl had met Joan de Groot, and, through her, had met the men who were moving, impelled by a motive, perhaps patriotic, perhaps personal, towards a great end, he seemed to see his way more clearly, and it was a different way. There was a luminosity in the soul of the big South African millionaire that made him reflect a little light very largely.

It is easy to understand the source of that light. Before Karl went to England, the authoress of "The Kaffir and his Keeper," and the Prime Minister of Cape Colony had, jointly and separately, persuaded the multi-millionaire that his financial interests were threatened by Boer ambitions, Boer aggressions. He went home fully persuaded that something must be done. What that something was had not been fully explained to him. But he had been advised to pour into the ears of certain men the position of their fellow Britons in the Transvaal; and it had been pointed out to him that, through their connection with Lord Sarum, the Haywards as a family, and Stephen Hayward in particular, represented more than their or his immediate position. Hence his seeking out of Stephen, for Karl believed in men, not multitudes. And he returned to South Africa in good spirits, for he considered he had tapped the source of power, obtained the key to the future cabinet.

He told this to the Prime Minister of Cape Colony, who met him on his return, eager for news, strong, and full of indomitable purpose, quite ready for reinforcements. The Prime Minister carried him off to Groot Schurr, and took

two days to extract from him all he wanted to know. His plans were fairly clear. The game lay as on a chess-board before him. This big, unwieldy knight, this Karl, whom he had been moving, must be brought again into position.

"A weak Government like this isn't of use to any one," Karl told him. "I tell you the Liberal Party has gone to pot over there, it's weak, it's vacillating, it's decayed, it's effete. It's the strong Opposition you've got to tackle, not the falling Government."

"You're right, Althaus, you've got the ropes at once. Liberalism is dead as a door nail. It spells Individualism, and, thank God, England can't stand that as a political standard. The Government is doomed. The Haywards and Job Chesham will divide the power when the time comes. You couldn't have done better than tackle Stephen Hayward; he has got all the brains of the family. I'm not saying much, but one might say a bit more and not go off the truth. Chesham is a friend of mine; Chesham knows pretty straight what is going on over here, though I can't bring him into line with our way of tackling it."

"And what is your way of tackling it? That's the point you've left me a little hazy about. You must have something up your sleeve; it's not a fighting force up there."

"You'll see soon enough. You'll join us, you say, whatever we decide?"

"Well," Karl answered bluntly; "I promised Mrs. de Groot, and I'm not going to back out."

"What we are aiming at is the Transvaal for the Empire. What they are aiming at is South Africa for the Transvaalers. What we've got to do is to try and hold out until the Unionists are ruling the roost over there. What we've got to be prepared for is being unable to hold on until then. Do you see?"

"Not as clearly as I should like to. But, as I told you, I'll go it blind. What do you want me to do?"

"Use your position to force the knowledge of theirs

upon your fellow-countrymen. Tell 'em you made a fortune, because, when you were not helped, you helped yourself. Do you understand?"

"Helped myself, did I?"

"Of course, and I've helped myself. And we're where we are. Well, England is not going to help the Johannesburgers unless they show they can help themselves. Go up there and preach it, that's your ticket; ram it down their throats, make 'em get ready."

"Right you are; I said I'd go it blind, and you've got the deal."

"Teach 'em not to show their teeth, but to keep them filed. D'ye understand? When I'm ready, and you other fellows are ready with that lesson, we can go on."

"Bechuanaland?" suggested Karl.

"That's my business," answered the empire-maker.

Karl waited a day or two longer in Cape Town. He had to meet Van Biene, for Karl Althaus was a man of large affairs, and Van Biene was his lawyer. Also he wanted to see Joan de Groot, wanted desperately to see that little woman again. But, whilst Karl had been paying his flying visit to England, the authoress of "The Kaffir and his Keeper" had gone up country with her brother, and Karl, to his bitter disappointment, missed the encouragement and approval on which he had counted securely.

By the time he returned to Johannesburg events had begun to move. He found himself in the midst of a population inflamed, uneasy, ominous. At Cape Town the air had been full of rumours, at Johannesburg the rumours faded before ugly facts. The taxes wrung from the Uitlanders were being spent on arms; a big fort was building at Pretoria; the men, who were not allowed a voice in the government of the land they had enriched, were ordered to fight under Boer leadership, to wrest territory, the possessions of natives, for their tyrants.

The town was in an uproar over the question of the commando. The men refused to obey the order to fight,

and were taunted as cowards. Karl heard the Boer opinion of rheineks, of Englishmen; it was forced down his throat, and now he no longer cared to swallow it. He helped with his purse the men who were standing out. From the authoress of "The Kaffir and his Keeper" he had seen in a new light the treatment the natives would receive from their conquerors. From Stephen Hayward he had gathered incidentally, but no less definitely, that neither Rhodes nor Joan de Groot overvalued their birth-right. No Englishman should fight to win slaves for the Boers if he, Karl Althaus, could prevent it.

For that moment, however, revolution was averted. The Commissioner came up, some display of firmness was made, and the obnoxious order was withdrawn. But Karl began to see his way ever more clearly, and, wholeheartedly now, he threw in his lot, and the lot of his firm, with the National Union. This was in the autumn of 1894, when the Derby win had secured the Liberal party an unfortunate renewal of the lease of power, and no Imperialist could safely rely upon the Government at home for support or countenance.

The word came to Johannesburg from Cape Town that the National Union must lie low, must wait and watch. It was all new to Karl Althaus, who was a financier by instinct and ability, and only a politician by accident. He had been told he had done well to secure Stephen Hayward and his interest, but after all, they must wait until the party Hayward represented came into power before they attempted to profit by any aid from him. The visit of Loch to Johannesburg was the culminating situation in the first scene of the revolt of the Uitlanders.

Karl went back to finance, it was a *milieu* in which he found himself more at home. For the time being the National Union resolved itself into a talkee-talkee club of journalists and lawyers, and vexed his soul with dialectics.

The offices of the Goldfields Company in Johannesburg were the headquarters of the association. There, in the

big room with the oriel window that commanded Simmonds Street, Karl discussed the situation, for the thousand and first time, with Louis. Louis had come from Kimberley at his summons, and come gladly. South Africa was the wrong environment for Louis Althaus. He had often told Karl so, and Karl had released him whenever it had been possible. Karl had summoned Louis now to Johannesburg, but had given him to understand it was *en route* for home.

The offices of the Goldfields Company had been erected with some pretentiousness, some attempt at architecture. The room in which the Althauses had their interview was furnished as an office, but handsomely, with oak furniture and green leather chairs, maps of various properties adorning the walls. Beyond was the clerks' room, the room where, in the days to come, the Reform Committee were to sleep and guard—nothing, not even the personal safety that was their first consideration.

Karl, as usual, walked up and down while he talked, big, vehement, overwhelming. Louis, contemplating his own slender foot, caressing his imperial, wandering in fancy already to Poole's, and giving a careless retrospective glance over his wardrobe, felt a twinge of pity for his brother by adoption, because, although he had come straight from London, the tweeds that he wore were so evidently of Cape Town cut.

They had got through their greetings, warm ones, for these two, save for each other, were alone in the world. And now they would be together but a few hours. Karl had received instructions from Cape Town to "slow down," to keep for the present to strictly constitutional lines in case of any agitation, to forget the wild talk that had been prevalent and encouraged before the Commissioner's interference. But Karl came into line with difficulty, he saw many points that escaped the wire-pullers in Cape Town. An idea had been put into his head, and there it stayed obstinately. He told Louis all about it, that in his opinion there was now only one way to secure

good government and justice, and that way was armed revolution. The inspiration had been given him, and he could not rid himself of it. That he should select Louis as a confidant was characteristic of Karl. He had, notwithstanding many shocks and incidents that should have opened his eyes, a very tolerant view of all Louis Althaus's failings, a very high opinion of his abilities, a great admiration for his charm of manner and indisputably handsome person. For Louis was the antithesis of Karl, there was not the slightest suggestion of roughness about him, he was so supremely polished that one could almost see him glisten; even his clothes had a gloss on them.

"You must get to London, Louis. I don't think Rhodes, or any other of them, has quite grasped the situation up here; any way, I was not prepared for it. There is no end to the villainies they are perpetrating. The last move to prevent us getting a judgment if we get a verdict kills any possibility of justice. The Union are petitioning the Landrost again; they might just as well petition Malacho."

"Why on earth are you mixing yourself up in it? That's what I can't understand."

"Oh! you'll soon understand that. It's life and death to the gold industry."

"Twaddle."

"I mean it."

"Well, go on. What am I to do?"

"Go home, and get public opinion on our side. It's Rhodes's belief that, when there's a change of government, there will be a change of policy. I've broken the ice; practically I've secured Stephen Hayward; but there must be some one on the spot to use the right moment when it comes."

"Why Stephen Hayward?" interrupted Louis, looking up quickly from the consideration of his really elegant foot and ankle. "Why not Stanley? He was the last Conservative Colonial Secretary."

"Oh, they will have to give the loaves and fishes to the

Unionists. I know what I am talking about. He's the best man they've got, a nice fellow too, knows more about marks on china than any Englishman I ever met."

"How on earth did you get hold of Stephen Hayward?"

"He was in a bit of a mess, and I helped him out; he helped me once. I was making a fool of myself over a *famille verte* vase, Ming period, the cleverest fake you ever saw."

"In a mess?" Louis questioned Karl with interest. "What had he done? how did you get to know?"

"No, no, nothing at all; nothing to do with himself. He's got a daughter, some trouble with his daughter, it's all right now."

Louis curled the ends of his moustache and looked self-conscious. It was a way he had when women were mentioned. He had infallible theories, and unfathomable interest in women. Whenever he heard of a woman who was, or had been, in trouble, he had the air and, in truth, the belief that, whatever the incident, it was only accident prevented him from being the hero of it. Karl did not satisfy his curiosity about Aline Hayward, he was vexed with himself for having mentioned it, and tried to slur it over and erase what he had said. But Louis made a mental note, and only permitted the subject to be changed when he had no choice.

Louis's interest in revolution was very perfunctory. Karl had talked to him of little else since his arrival, and yet, notwithstanding Karl's enthusiasm, he had stirred none in Louis. Of course, he would buy arms, Louis liked buying, patronising, playing at power, and he would keep Stephen Hayward informed of every step they contemplated, or, at least, of every step they took. All this he promised Karl.

Louis was glad to get his orders for London. South Africa was no field for him; he knew that. He and Karl had been continually separate since he had reached adult age. London, Paris, Vienna, had been Louis' so-

journing places. He had generally carried out Karl's instructions straightforwardly, recognising, instinctively perhaps, either how much he owed the older man, or how impolitic it would be to play him false. The firm had grown into a large one with colossal international interests. Louis, trusted implicitly by Karl, had frequently been the latter's agent. Forgetting how simple his instructions were, how clear, and, remembering only how everything had prospered with him, Karl had grown to look upon Louis, notwithstanding some disappointments, some shocks even, as having something of his own fibre. These shocks, disappointments, divergencies, had obstructed him in his desire to make Louis a partner in the firm, but pecuniarily the younger man suffered little from the exclusion.

Louis had no misgivings as to his power to carry out the diplomatic work of which Karl now spoke, and with which Karl now entrusted him. Louis had no doubt of himself. He appreciated Karl's success, though he was apt to attribute much of it to luck. But all Karl's qualities he saw in himself transmitted into something finer, more delicate, more tactful. There was nothing of which Louis Althaus did not think himself capable. That he had achieved nothing in no way interfered with this estimate.

He had a way of talking of Karl, and of Karl's goodness to him, that somehow or other made all this obvious.

"There's no one like my adopted brother Karl," he would say, "he has been father, mother, everything to me since we were both left orphans." Then, with that deprecating shrug of his mobile shoulders—one of the foreign habits he had acquired, that went with the imperial and the dark moustachios, he would add, "But much as I appreciate him, I must say"—and the things he felt himself compelled to refer to were all true. Karl wore shocking boots, square-toed, hideous, his clothes were very often atrocious, he was loud in public places, he had more than once played poker through an evening and night right into the following day, he could drink

a tumblerful of whisky neat, and he very frequently did. These were unimportant details, and Karl's friends smiled at them, but women noted with an approving eye the difference between Louis Althaus, gentleman, and Karl Althaus, millionaire. They were a little sorry for Louis that his adopted brother should not be more worthy of his refined taste, and they thought well of him because he cared so much for his unfashionable guardian.

Karl rarely spoke of Louis except to his intimates, and never discussed him, but all Johannesburg and all Pretoria and all Cape Town, in fact, all English-speaking South Africa, knew that Karl Althaus loved this elegant Louis.

Having discussed, in its various phases and aspects, the revolution that was to be engineered, without Karl realising how very vague was Louis's interest in the imperial side of the question, and how very doubtfully he regarded the value to the firm of the economical side, the brothers found time, before Louis left for Cape Town, to discuss business matters.

Karl's habit of walking about when he talked fidgeted Louis, but, when Louis was not personally contradicted or crossed, or made to see his shortcomings, he was a man of imperturbable good temper, the unreliable good temper of the completely self-satisfied. He never complained that Karl's restlessness was unpleasant to him. He sat on the easiest chair in the room, and faced the light, and listened.

"Do you remember the Geldenrief, Louis?"

"Do I remember a mine that cost us a quarter of a million, that panned out before we'd got back the expenses of the prospectus! Not that I think you were clever over that affair. You could have kept back the report until the market had absorbed at least half the shares. We could have got out with the loss of a hundred thousand."

"And damned every other venture we ever put out! No! no! There's only one way of doing big business, if

you want to go on doing it, and that is to do it straight. I found that out a bit late, but you can take it from me there's no doubt about it. But that's not the question. The reef was on the land right enough, I always knew it was; we got down a hundred feet, and—it pinched out."

"And you sent out the report, and on the strength of the report the shares went down to half-a-crown, and the syndicate lost its money."

"Exactly. Well, suppose I know what direction the reef took, and that——" Karl suddenly came over to his brother, lowering his voice, "and that it is about the widest, richest, finest reef on the whole of the Raad."

Louis looked up, and there was greed in those soft eyes, round those thin lips under the dark moustache, in the lines that tightened about the mouth, and there was eagerness.

"And the syndicate, and the shareholders know nothing?"

"No, nobody knows it but you and me."

"What do you suppose it's worth?"

"Millions, Louis, millions."

"And you're worrying yourself about the franchise!"

"Oh, rot! I don't care a damn about the franchise; I've told you so before. I care for our rights, I don't care a damn about how we get 'em. The Geldenrief is a case in point. Under decent Government, it could have been worked at a profit until the Company and everybody had got to know what nobody knows now but me and, perhaps, one or two other people. That Bewaarplatzen scandal was the first nail in the coffin of the Geldenrief."

"What are you going to do?" There was no doubt about Louis's eager interest now, it narrowed his eyes, hardened the lines round his mouth; he was still handsome, but the poetry went out of his beauty. The face disappointed when one looked from the broad forehead down to the narrow chin. In his happiest moments it was the broad forehead and splendid eyes that attracted attention. But, when one talked of money, it was the

lower part of the face that seemed to come into prominence, a certain Mephistophelian cunning became manifest, the lips grew thinner, and seemed to contract. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm goin'—" Karl resumed his restless walk, "I'm goin' to show the syndicate that trusted Oldberger, Althaus & Co., and the jobbers that hold the shares, and the public that bought a few of them, I'm goin'"—he burst out with, he shouted, "I'm goin', by God, I'm goin' to make all their fortunes." His voice fell again as he emptied his glass. "I don't know how I'm goin' to work it. For, though I went up three months ago with nothing else in my mind, something occurred—" he hesitated, "many things occurred, to put it out of my mind."

He tossed off a tumbler of whisky and soda, from which the soda had been omitted, and he pushed the bottle over to Louis, but Louis shook his head; he was abstemious.

"What do you think of that?" Karl asked.

But Louis did not commit himself.

"I should like to hear more about it."

"So you shall. You remember we leased the land from Piet de Groot; we wanted the whole estate, but the farm he refused to sell, talked a lot of twaddle about his grandfather having reclaimed it, and his father and himself being born there, and all the rubbish they do talk when they're going to swindle you. Well, we got a lease of the land, and of a certain amount of dumping ground. I got an inkling of this reef business" (the inkling had cost Karl three months' hard work, and about ten thousand pounds in hard cash), "and I claimed the ground. Then this wretched Bewaarplatz business was dragged in, brought before the Groundwet, and there it sticks. Meanwhile——"

"Meanwhile?"

Karl, always restless, was exceptionally so just now.

"As I've told you, I got in with the crowd who mean to make the Groundwet listen to reason. The Geldenrief

has nothing to do with politics, but perhaps it showed me more clearly than anything else could have done how we're all being swindled. I couldn't touch the Bewaarplatz without De Groot's leave. De Groot's a member of the first Raad, second cousin or something or other to the old thief——"

"Then what chance have we got? How are we to get hold of it?"

"I'm coming to that." But he didn't come very quickly, though Louis's attention was fully riveted.

"Piet de Groot's got softening of the brain, creeping paralysis, they call it, and I—I've met Joan de Groot."

Karl's face softened, his voice grew husky; he took another pull at the whisky before he went on.

"Louis, did you ever meet Mrs. de Groot? She was up here for a few months, an Englishwoman, sister of John Finnes, the Cape Town Advocate-General. She married Piet when she was seventeen. He treated her like the brute that he is, and she left him; she was in Pretoria for some time."

"Do you mean the woman who has just published a book called 'The Kaffir and his Keeper'?"

"Yes. Did you know her?"

"No. Not my line of country—a wretched, little, scribbling half-caste."

"Oh! don't be a fool."

Louis was absolutely surprised; he got up from his seat.

"Oh! sit still, I beg your pardon, but I *have* met her."

"Well! what has she got to do with us?"

"I'm coming to it; give a fellow time. Louis! she's the most fascinating, charming, delightful woman I ever met in my life, and, damn it, she's as honest as the day."

"But what's she got to do with the Geldenrief, that's what I'm waiting to get at, that's what I want to know?"

"The reef goes under the farm, dips on the curve, and widens out, and the widest, richest of it, we reckon, is just under Piet's farm. We've got the shaft, we've got

the machinery, we've got nearly two hundred thousand pounds lying on the outcrop, and—Piet won't deal!"

Then Louis's eyes questioned as well as his voice.

"And she——"

"Inherits the farm under her marriage settlement."

"Phew!" Louis sighed with relief. "Well, if she's got it, we've got it, I suppose. You know her, have seen her, been with her, got her promise?" he asked eagerly.

"Never so much as asked her for it. Went there on purpose, and hardly mentioned it, forget, in fact, whether I did or didn't. She drove it out of my head, drove everything out of my head. I meant to see her again when I returned on my way up here, but she was at Wynberg; I just missed her."

"Drove a million out of your head! A little, scribbling Dutchwoman!"

"What's a million more or less! Louis, I'll show you the woman she is. Poor as church mice, the lot of them, mind you. Began with nothing, and have got it still. Well, ever since that book of hers came out, she has been overwhelmed with offers from London newspapers to give her views on this and that and the other question. Five thousand pounds I offered her, five thousand golden sovereigns—and I don't believe the woman has got five hundred in the world—to give my views on a certain subject instead of her own. The Jackson affair, in fact. She laughed at me, Louis! So help me, God! she laughed at me. Did you ever meet a woman like that?"

"I've met every sort of woman," answered Louis, with a caress of his moustache and a softening of the eyes.

"Oh! I know you've been a devil of a fellow 'for women," Karl had had reason to know it ever since Louis was fourteen, "but have you ever met a good 'un? I don't mean one like this, for there isn't such another, but one you couldn't ask for the things you most wanted of them?"

"Never," smiled Louis. "Never," he repeated, with a satisfied laugh.

Poor old Karl! Fancy comparing himself with Louis where women were concerned.

"I suppose you want me to tackle her."

"I'm damned if I quite know what I want. We'll have to make little Joan a rich woman, whether she cares for it or not. She's just as mad on a united South Africa under the British flag as Rhodes is. Half the interest she took in me——"

"She did take an interest in you, then?"

"Was due to the fact that she was keen on the capitalists joining the National Union."

"I begin to see daylight; I begin to see the meaning of your new-born patriotism."

"I knew she was right," said Karl sharply; "I knew we ought not to sit down and see our country shoved in the background."

"And the Geldenrief dumping ground claimed," interposed Louis with a laugh.

"A man may have a dozen motives. I'm opening myself out to you. If I want the Geldenrief, I only want my own. We've spent two hundred thousand pounds upon it, and Piet doesn't make three hundred a year out of the land. It doesn't seem to me justice to let it lie waste like that. I tried to persuade Joan, but I couldn't make her see it. You must take it on now; you're a better talker than I am. We must make her a rich woman, whether she wants it or not."

"And get a bit for ourselves."

"I'd like the old syndicate to get their money back, and a bit over; I don't deny that. When we bring the Althaus Bank out next year, I should like to have the Geldenrief Deep as an asset; I don't deny that either. But I couldn't ask the little woman to promise me the reversion of the farm as the price of my throwing in my lot with the revolutionists. I couldn't do it. I am in with them now, all the way; she can take it how she likes. I don't want you to do anything but persuade her that, when she gets possession of the land, it's too good to graze sheep on."

“Never fear; I’ll persuade her.”

“And don’t stay too long in Cape Town. For, now that I’ve thrown in my lot with these fellows, I’m hot on it. I never put my hand to a failure yet; and when I put my hand to getting the Transvaal for Great Britain, Great Britain is going to get it. Because Joan—because Joan de Groot is Joan de Groot, I couldn’t take the matter of the farm any further; because Stephen Hayward thinks himself under some sort of obligation to me, I couldn’t force him into compromising his position by showing any active sympathy with us over here; but we might make her one of the richest women in South Africa, and we might make him one of the most-talked-of men in England. Do you see my point? Will you tackle them? I must stick to my post here; but you’re such a clever fellow, I think you can do anything with them. I own I want to play Providence to them both, with or without their consent. Do you think you can take it on?”

“Think! my dear fellow—*think!* Give me a task worth doing; tackling a woman or an English politician is child’s play. Tell me, does any one else know about the Geldenrief, and Mrs. de Groot’s marriage settlement?”

“Not a soul.”

“It was rather a risky thing leaving her up there without any sort of promise, if you gave her a hint.”

The whisky was beginning to have its effect on Karl.

“I wouldn’t have left her there if I could have helped myself,” Karl said, almost to himself.

Louis whistled. This was a new development for Karl.

“Oh! that was it, was it? That’s her school?”

Karl turned on him roughly. “No, that wasn’t it. Little Joan de Groot is as virtuous as she is honest, and that’s saying a great deal.” He thumped his big fist on the table. “And any one who tempts the one or the other has got to reckon with Karl Althaus,” he shouted.

Louis soothed him easily enough, and went on talking. Presently he learned enough to know that the “Gelden-

rief Deep," for so he began to think of Piet's farm, was protected by its lease. Its owner would not sell, had vowed he would never sell his grandfather's and his father's grave, the oasis they had wrested from the wilderness. But Van Biene, who had drawn up Joan's marriage settlement, had drawn up also the lease of the out-crop, and, by a covenant in the latter, if ever the farm was sold, the Geldenrief Company was to have the first refusal.

Louis's journey to England, Louis's mission to Stephen Hayward, seemed to him of little importance in comparison with Piet de Groot's homestead.

CHAPTER SIX

THAT Joan de Groot had impressed Karl Althaus was strange, but the effect Karl had had upon Joan, less elemental, was perhaps even more remarkable. He came into her life at a critical period. The publication of "The Kaffir and his Keeper" marked the end of her girlhood, although she was eight-and-twenty, and had been a married woman nearly eleven years. The transition time between that ending girlhood and commencing womanhood was Karl's opportunity, an opportunity of which he remained ignorant always.

Out of the dull, poor parsonage in Devonshire Joan and her brother had emigrated, he to take up the post of second master at the newly erected Cape Town College, she, nominally to keep house for him, actually because there was nowhere else for her to go, nothing else for her to do. But her inveterate childhood's habit of thinking of something else rather than of what she was doing at the moment; a habit that had left her educated only in strata, layers of ignorance alternating with golden veins of knowledge, rendered her as incapable a housekeeper as she was a pupil. Some kindly-meaning, bungling friend of her brother's arranged the marriage with Piet de Groot, and supplemented her sixty pounds per annum with a simple trousseau. Van Biene drew up the settlements, whereby the farm was left to her and her children.

The girl had an irregular, indefinite sort of imagination that made her see pictures where there were only words. She was quite pleased to be married, and more than pleased at the prospect of going to her husband's farm with him; she saw a wonderful pastoral scene, set

in wild veldt stretches, and a kindly, patriarchal Dutchman, full of simple talk of sheep and of the land. She was tired of the life with her brother. She thought she could dream uninterruptedly, with only this bearded farmer to talk to her, now and again, of his herds and his crops. Piet de Groot, however, was as utterly unlike the picture she had formed of him as the dry and arid ostrich-farm, with its milk-plants, stony kopjes, and scant vegetation, dying in the red sand, under the hot sun, was unlike the green undulating English land she had seen in her mind's eye; and she was as incapable of fulfilling her duties towards either of them as she had been of conceiving them. It was two years, however, before the untenable situation came to a natural end, separating husband and wife, but leaving to each of them a certain respect, a certain surprised understanding of the other. After that time Piet made himself comfortable with the aid of a woman of his own people, and henceforth Joan had nothing to complain of except neglect, and of that she never complained, for solitude, freedom to dream amid infinite space, was all her slow mental growth demanded.

She dreamed over the books and newspapers her brother sent her, developed so slowly that it was five more years before she realised how clear her dreams had grown, how much more vivid they were than any of the gross realities surrounding her. She had taken in her impressions, however, and when, through her magnetic pen, she spread them before a wondering world, their success was instantaneous, as remarkable as "Evelina" had been, as "Jane Eyre" or "Scenes from Clerical Life."

Her book succeeded by dint of its simplicity, and a realism that had in it nothing of coarseness, nothing of exaggeration. The instinctive art by which the scenes were selected, each calculated to show special characteristics of the country or of the people, was remarkable; the effect produced was startling. Reading this book, one

heard the swish of the sjambok, and saw the red earth under the karoo bushes dyed redder with the blood of the black man. To those intense blue skies, arched over the Southern Continent, ascended the cries of the enslaved; the heavens were rent with them, there were sudden storms, and the earth was convulsed. The rough egotism of the Boers was vivid in the book, their brutalities, their cunning also; one saw their strength, but one turned sick at their hypocrisy. One realised through Joan de Groot's pages the superficial religion that taught the Boers neither virtue nor charity; their Biblical learning that yet left them a prey to every superstition, while the lessons of cleanliness in the Old Testament were as little regarded as the lessons of mercy in the Now. It was a nation that passed before the reader's eye, a winding pageantry of ignorance, strong and menacing, a danger to civilisation.

On the strength of the book's success, and urged now by her brother, who had discontinued teaching, and was secure in his position both at the bar and as a Progressive member of the Cape Parliament, Joan left her husband and the farm, and went to live with her brother in Cape Town. Their house was within a stone's throw of Government Gardens, it was a villa, green verandahed and low, nestling at the foot of Table Mountain. From the window of her bedroom she could watch the grey mists softly settle on the mountain, the distances grow dense and impenetrable. In the shadows she could dream her dreams. But in the front of the house, on the stoep, life moved vigorously, and everything that was strenuous and active in Cape Town grew and developed under the stimulus of her interest, in the orbit of her ready sympathy. It was not a narrow political ism, a Tweedledum and Tweedledee of local affairs, that held either brother or sister. Imperialism versus Africanderism had been his clarion call to office. And Joan too, self-exiled as she was, with a Dutch name, was a passionate patriot, and her book itself had been less to her than all that lay beneath

the stirring symbolism of the flag that hung unfurled above her.

Party feeling ran high in Cape Town fully a year before the policy was defined which made party feeling subordinate to imperial feeling, and Joan de Groot was not the only woman who was looking and listening and spending her quota of intelligence in trying to grasp or vary the situation. "The Kaffir and his Keeper," and her brother's appreciation, gave her a definite position. In the forcing-house of that appreciation she grew slowly and sweetly to fill the place she had made for herself. Their little home was the centre of the Progressives, the stronghold of those who opposed the formation of the Bond, and exposed continually, in Parliament and out, the tendency and the teaching of its Leaders. But Joan's slight form, her small eager face, with its crown of wavy brown hair, her light blue eyes and moving lips, curved and soft and red, won more than intellectual tribute. The house was ever full of men, men used to the light ways of Cape Town women and girls, men of the Louis Althaus type, officers from Simon's Town and Wynberg, as well as from the barracks. Yet she was safe from all these, for, if she was not quite without coquetry, she learnt easily to fence and parry, she enjoyed her tributes, and, if she had a child's heart, she had a man's brain. The womanhood in her had not yet reared its dangerous head above the level of the white sheets on which she wrote her tales of love or war.

The story of "The Kaffir and his Keeper" had caught the public ear; its politics and its local colour had opened the magazines to her, and made her realise the quickening delight of journalism, when the immediate note of her sounding pen echoed back into her ears, swelled by acclaiming, contradicting, chorusing voices. Delight, joyousness came to her with the realisation of her capacity for expression, the pleasure of putting her thoughts into rhythmic phrase was sufficient to fill her days, the temptation to sacrifice the thought to the rhythm was the great-

est temptation she had ever met; that she yielded to it taught her nothing. There was no room or need in those full days for amorous adventure, until the coming of the Althaus into her life began to teach her that even journalism and rhythmic phrase, politics and imperialism, were not all-sufficing. Already, perhaps, she was instinctively beginning to look around for fresh material, throwing out feelers, weaving spells, when she made the acquaintance of Karl Althaus.

She knew of him, of course, even before he came to the house; he represented an important interest; and he knew of her, for, as we have seen, she was Piet de Groot's wife, and the remainder of Piet de Groot's farm was vested in her.

Karl Althaus was a new type to Joan, a new experience, notwithstanding her two years in Cape Town. For, though all kinds of men visited the house, and conversed upon the stoep, few of the mining magnates at this period found it worth their while to conciliate or fraternise with the Cape Town parliamentarians. Karl's absolute passion for money-making, his completely unstudied, almost unconscious, unscrupulousness, and the massiveness of his grey head, interested her. Somehow or other he enlarged her horizon. That he fell in love with her at first sight, that she influenced him and made him forget all for which he had originally sought her, she failed to realise immediately. He was forty-five years of age, and in the most personal sense no woman had ever touched him. His life had been too full of money to have room for sentiment; and love without sentiment had made but little variation of his daily pursuits.

In Joan's presence he had forgotten Piet's farm, which would one day be hers, also the possible value of her pen to many causes he had at heart, and all the machinery for the moving of which he had meant to use her. And he interested her, there was no doubt about that. His large personality, his overwhelming volubility, his visible strength and brain power, the way he persistently sought

her, made his month in Cape Town memorable to her

He told her much, for he was ever a man who loved the sound of his own voice. He taught her, without intention, things he would perhaps have left untaught, had he known the use to which she meant to put them; how the Government concessions were being obtained, for instance. She always listened to him, drew him out, encouraged him to come again and again. She liked listening to him, though nothing he wanted seemed to her quite worth the having. Money and power were both unknown wants to her, but the strength with which he wanted them appealed to the strength in her. So she drew him out, made him talk, which was in truth not difficult, and learnt to respect everything that was respectable in him, and to enjoy his society more than that of other people.

She was so young in her ways, so ingenuous in her innocence and ignorance of the world, it was difficult to reconcile her personality with the reputation her almost miraculous book had given her. It was inspiration, genius, a unique, almost unconscious efflorescence. This Karl Althaus could not see or know. He saw only a dainty little woman, with puzzled eyebrows and animated, questioning face, lithe movements, quick and graceful, instinct with vitality and the joy of life. It was strange to find her so apt in argument. Karl's intelligence went under before hers; she saw not only quicker, but further. With Karl's instinct for self-preservation she had little sympathy; the devil would have gone unlighted to bed had he depended on Joan de Groot for candle. The jargon of "constitutional means," the shadow grasped by the mining interest whilst the substance was escaping them, she rejected disdainfully. Unlike the majority of her sex she lacked diplomacy, her simplicity of thought suggested that if, as Karl told her, and, indeed, as she well knew, the policy of the Transvaal was to make residence there impossible for self-respecting Englishmen, then the outraged and insulted Uitlanders should fight,

fight not only for their own rights, but for the honour of their country.

She it was who had urged Karl Althaus along the path that led from sufferance to revolt. The talk of the men who gathered on the stoep of that little house was subdued in the presence of their host, the Advocate-General, was subdued too when the Prime Minister, big and silent and attentive, was with them, but it flamed now and again in short gusts of indignation when Paul Kruger's name was thrust as a lighted faggot amongst them to fire them with the knowledge of his contemptuous tyrannies and injustices. And, with little Joan to fan the flame, Karl too had become ignited.

During those days in Cape Town, Karl Althaus drank more whisky, and played poker for higher stakes, than he had ever done before. Joan excited him in some way that his forty odd years of experience failed immediately to explain to him. He lived that month in a whirl; it was the month before he had gone home. It was not until later he had fully realised that which he told Louis in Johannesburg. In England too he had become cooler over it; he had had the leisure to realise all Joan had taught him. At the time he knew nothing, except that there was a little woman whom he had meant to use, and that she laughed at him and left him dry-mouthed, with a deep thirst on him which even whisky did not quench. Joan knew before Karl did what it was that ailed him, and that what he was learning was not only what he owed his country; but, because she was a novelist first, and only realised her womanhood afterwards, this merely touched her lightly.

He talked to her of his mother, and the paralysed woman lived for her in the clear illumination of her imagination. He told her of Louis, not only of his birth and parentage, but of his beauty and charm, for men who are in love like talking about those they have loved only less, and Karl had loved no one but Louis. He told her of mines and combinations of financiers, and advised

her of forthcoming swindles, and she laughed at him that such things should move him. He talked to her of his people, when she talked to him of patriotism, and then she had a glimpse into his great heart. There were many such conversations.

Joan was looking for a subject for a new story. Karl, always egotistical, was autobiographical to Joan. She said to him one day:

"Yours must have been a varied life, Mr. Althaus; you must have had some strange experiences?"

"Experiences! I believe you. I've seen things that would make your hair stand on end, eh! and stop there too; swindles! my word!"

"Oh! I don't mean financial things, I mean personal things—things that have influenced you, made you. I want to get the recipe, the ingredients of millionaire-making. I think I must evolve a millionaire for my next book, and I want to know how he feels from the very start. Tell me, are you alone in the world? Have you no father, mother, sister, brother?"

"Brother! oh, yes!"—Karl's face lit up—"Don't you know my Louis?"

"I haven't been long back, you know. No; I did not even know you had a Louis. Is he your brother?"

"Well, no blood relation, but all I have belonging to me, all the same. Louis's mother was a Christian."

"And you, is it true that you are a Jew? That interests me; that really accounts for you."

"Yes; I belong to the ancient people," he said abruptly. "I am a Jew by birth, by instinct, by sympathy. Judaism is to me what England is to you, part of myself, the best part. Jews helped me when I was a child, and, when I was a grown lad, a starving one, Jews helped me again, and that only because I was one of themselves. They kept my mother, my poor old paralysed mother, kept her with me and for me; that makes me hand and heart with them."

"So you are a Jew! I heard it, but was not sure. I

did not feel sure it was true. It is a wonderful religion!" The word set her mind roving eastward.

"No, no; there you are wrong again! It is not a religion at all; it is a thing of forms and foods, a race habit. There's no religion in it. When you've said they would not accept the Christ, you've summed up their faith."

Karl had never heard of Jewish ideals, the ideals which have preserved Judaism intact through the ages. He was only now awakening to ideals of any kind.

Joan took his meaning quickly.

"Not a religion, only a negation, a great negation?"

"Yes. I've stood by more than one deathbed where there's been a priest, Catholic or Protestant, Quaker or Calvinist, and they all had religion. We have only symbols. I remember"—Karl began to walk up and down, to become reminiscent consciously, "I remember my own mother's deathbed, but there was no religion there, nor faith, nothing to hold on to, nothing about the hereafter, no word I understood at all. And I was such a wretched little fellow, so heart-broken over it. They mumbled over her in Hebrew, and I didn't understand one word. I saw an Italian organ-grinder die once, when I was a boy, down in a mews in Houndsditch. Just when he drew his last breath and half-opened his dying eyes, a priest came in hurriedly, flung himself on his knee by the bed—a filthy truckle-bed—the whole place was filthy—and held up a crucifix. You should have seen the look in the glazing eyes of that dying man, I've never forgotten it, the hope, the life that came into them. It's the dream of my life to see such a look in the eyes of a dying Jew. Ah! you've got a religion, we've only got a tradition, an obstinacy, and even that our priests tell us of in Hebrew."

"Why in Hebrew?"

"That's it! Why in Hebrew? They say all their prayers in a dead tongue, dead as the religion they don't preach."

"It has kept you a race apart. I remember now, I

have read about it, 'separate in your synagogue.' You ought not to complain of the Hebrew, the idea is so picturesque."

"That's it again, a picturesque idea. Poetry if you like, but not religion; it don't help you when you're going out. An empty thing of ceremonies, without the great Sacrifice, or the lesson of Love, without the Cross, and without the Crown, and no Christ to intervene for sinners. Ah! I've heard it all since. Such a wonderful story; the 'story that has moved the world,' Stead called it. I wish I could believe it. '*God gave His only begotten Son to save sinners.*' There's an idea for you! In the Jewish quarter in Whitechapel, it isn't told, it isn't known. There's forty thousand pounds spent a year in converting heathens, and until I was nineteen I never heard anything about Christ excepting that His mother must have been—but there, I won't insult you by repeating it. My poor mother loved me, I was her only son, and I should have known what the love meant, and the sacrifice. I am a Jew, but there are times when I'm just on fire to tell that story properly to all the youngsters who've got nothing to hold on to but their Passover cakes. Mind you, I'm not pretending that I believe it; I heard it too late for that. Faith comes in childhood, or not at all; and when I was a child I believed in fried fish and fasting once a year. It was all I'd been taught. I don't believe in Christ, but I'd give half a million if I did."

Karl, who was a man of contradictions, now selling winkles, now buying Fragonards, professed, and boasted of, his Judaism, but, in all his moments of restlessness and rare depression, he longed for Christianity and its early lessons, for himself and for his people. When Joan was trying to teach him patriotism, and succeeding, it seemed to him that he had many other claims upon him, and not the least of these was the obligation of his lack of faith.

"I wish to God we were popular, sought after, thought

much of, I could do it then, go over to the other side I mean. You understand me?"

"Oh yes, we always understand each other. You lack the courage of your want of opinion," she said smilingly.

"Your sharp—I suppose you wouldn't help me?"

"To retain South Africa for the Empire?"

"Are you a religious woman?"

She colored at that: "No—yes—I don't know."

"That book of yours, now—that's full of it."

"You must allow for a little literary insincerity."

"Well, you want to retain South Africa for England. Do you care about winning a nation, a big nation, mind you, over to her Church?"

"You want to convert the Jews!" she asked him.

"No! I want to keep them just as they are. Give me a Jew rather than a Christian any day in the week; he's got more guts in him, I tell you that. I'd like to keep every custom and habit and ceremony he's got, but I'd like him to know about Christ; I'd like to give him a chance."

"Why, you are not a Jew at all. You have the missionary spirit." Joan was interested, almost excited, by what she read into him, his limitation and the causes of them.

"And not the only one. Why, little woman, believe me,"—Karl spoke impressively, and accentuated his words with restless hands: "There are hundreds of Jews, the salt of the Jewish race, the cultured ones, who heard it earlier than I did, and who know it is all true. They feel it, and they accept it, but they can't admit it, can't profess Christianity openly, because there is a prejudice against Jews, a *Judenhetz*. As long as that is about we must fight under our own flag, whatever our convictions. Put, if ever the Jews are honoured *because* they are Jews, the very best of them will come out into the open, take their hats off, and shout out in their synagogues: 'I believe in Christ; thank the great God, I can say it now; I believe in Christ!'"

"You're laughing at me . . . it's no laughing matter to some of them. Judæa is to them what England is to you; and they can't give her away because the Boers or their neighbours shout 'Jew' or 'Uitlander' in their faces, and shake their fists. Say now: why should I mix myself in your quarrel, if you've nothing to say in mine? But there, there, little woman, you needn't worry; I've only given you what is in a corner of my mind; I keep it in the background generally, but I like you to know all about me. I'll take part in what's coming on here, I'll do what you want me. We're Englishmen as well as Jews, and you needn't be afraid."

That, briefly, was the spark that lit the flame in the woman, who at this time, at least, was little more than pen and ink. She wanted Karl on paper, and saw that it was not as a man she must hold him up for men to see, but as a nation. The atmosphere and background of her last book was Boer, the atmosphere and background of her next must be Jew. Everything in Joan's life went by the board during the last part of Karl's stay in Cape Town; she had to see him, learn him by heart, read into him his people's history. "The making of a millionaire" should be the title, for sub-title she would call it "The Book of the Jew." She examined and cross-examined him endlessly. And he exposed himself as unconsciously to her as a chloroformed patient to the surgeon; for her little hands and feet, her brown hair and smiling eyes, bewitched him, and he unclothed his very soul at the bidding of those mobile lips and varying dimples.

Concretely, the sum of his biography is soon shown. But concrete facts were not to Joan's taste, neither did the story reach her brain that way.

That Karl Althaus, was the son of a Wardour Street bric-à-brac dealer did not interest her. It was only with the death of the bric-à-brac dealer, before he had time to make provision for wife and child, that Joan's sympathies began to stir and visualise for her the sharp little

Jewish boy and his widowed mother. She saw vividly that great-hearted mother of Karl's, after the week of mourning was over, her eyes still red with weeping, her heart still liquid with tears, setting herself to earn a living for herself and her child. Karl was then only ten, a big boy, clever beyond his years. Mrs. Althaus went a little further east, to live near her relatives in the Whitechapel Road. There, since she knew nothing of the fine arts, and her parents had kept a fried-fish shop, she opened a Kosher provision store. Karl went to the Jews' Free School in the mornings, but in the afternoon he would help to cut the smoked salmon into thin slices, to fry the plaice that they sold all through the evening at twopence a piece, to bottle the olives that came over to them in casks, to take the large yellow cucumbers out of the big pickling tubs. He was as happy as the day was long, and so, in reality, was that fat and perspiring widow. For the business flourished, and Karl, her Karl, was the quickest, the most industrious, the best, the dearest of boys, the envy of all the mothers in the neighbourhood. She told him so often; she was expansive, voluble, and she had only her Karl to whom she could talk freely.

Joan understood it all, the happiness of the then, and the pathos of what followed.

One day, it appeared, there came begging into that prosperous provision shop, a Polish Jew, a refugee, a ragged figure with handsome eyes and an unpronounceable name, a man who whined out his sorrows in Yiddish, who cried and said he was hungry. Because she was a Jewess and he a Jew, after the benevolent fashion of her race she fed him, she gave him of her husband's clothes, she put money in his pocket, and took him by the hand. He came back again, and yet again, sometimes he begged, sometimes he only admired her fine figure (of nearly fourteen stone), her handsome son, perhaps her thriving business and untiring industry. He came and came, and, at last, notwithstanding the advice of her friends and relations, he came and he stayed. She mar-

ried him, and from that moment her fortune, and the fortune of the little provision shop, failed. Ludwig's surname was unpronounceable; in the shop they called him by the name that was over the lintel, soon it seemed to become his; there was nothing he would not take, not even a name. He ate, he begged, and wheedled and whined, but he did not work. She worked for them both, for all three of them, worked early and late. Karl watched her; he did all he could, but he was at school half the day, and his stepfather wheedled all the money out of the poor woman's pocket, presently out of the bank, wheedled and whined, ate and drank and smoked, bought luxuries, bright waistcoats and neckties that grew greasy. He had a perpetual cough, maddening to listen to, he made a market of it, and the good woman with the big heart nursed it, tempted his appetite with delicacies, sat up with him in the night, worked for him in the day. Yet she had time for her boy, kept his clothes neat, let him see he was still the idol of her heart. But Ludwig absorbed all the savings; sometimes, too, it grew difficult even to renew the stock. He would have begged, for he liked begging, she worked instead, overtasked her strength. She knew she had made a mistake, and it preyed on her mind. When Ludwig's cough could have let her sleep, the knowledge of it kept her awake. The poor fat Jewess, with her black fringe, and coarse features, for so Joan pictured her, and pictured her correctly, lay awake through many nights thinking how she could contrive to satisfy that insatiable *schmorrrer* she had married, while her Karl should not go short. Black fringe, perspiring face, coarse hands—yet Karl Althaus loved his mother as dearly, as desperately, and as jealously, as Stephen Hayward had loved that delicate, aristocratic lady whose heart his father had broken. Karl watched Ludwig, the Polish beggar, out of his keen Jewish eyes, and saw him spoil his mother's rest, eat her earnings, wear the fruits of her toil. And the mother knew he was watching, and they would speak together of everything

else, theirs was a communicative, voluble race — but of Ludwig Karl never spoke to his mother.

The rest of this story Karl spoke of more lightly to Joan, and some of it Joan guessed, and some of it, alas! she never guessed, and was never told.

For the great misfortune, the great tragedy, came, it was inevitable it should come, but it came so soon. Karl was barely twelve, and Ludwig had eaten his mother's bread, and begged her savings, and dressed himself out of her toil, and coughed her out of her rest, for two whole years, when one day she fell, fell down in the shop in the very act of serving a customer, struck down by an unseen hand. Henceforth she was debarred for ever from work, from giving the help she loved to give. She became a dead body living, a burden where she had been a blessing, locked in hideous death-in-life, powerless, paralysed, dumb. A few jerky, incomprehensible words, like the tick of an old clock that had run down, and two live eyes, were all that were left of her.

She lay and watched ruin creep round and about the home she had made. Who shall ever write the anguish of the paralysed? This strong, good woman, struck down in her prime, iron-bound ever after and almost speechless, lying in that front room over the shop, heavy with odours, dingy and forlorn, watched for two long years, ere death tardily released her, everything she valued lost, and everything she loved neglected. Ludwig, her husband, cried over his bad luck, begged with slobbering tears, and whined and stood about, doing nothing, not selling, not buying, simply doing nothing. Karl's anguish forced him into premature manhood. He was only twelve years of age, but he tended that mute figure of a mother, bore with Ludwig, who tore and lacerated his feelings, and poured vitriol into the open wounds he made.

Ludwig talked of the strong brave mother as a "burden"; the boy, proud in his swelling heart, heard their poverty spoken of, their straits exposed; all he did was nothing, they were *beggars*, for Ludwig said it hourly.

And Ludwig went from bad to worse. That martyred, mute, unwieldy figure, neglected save for the boy with the large tumultuous heart, who took his strange place so uncomplainingly, saw, from her heavy flesh prison, idleness turn to viciousness, viciousness to crime. For, to her mind, that chaste and virtuous mind that is the heritage of Jewish women, it was a crime when Ludwig brought another woman into the house that she had kept holy with cleanliness and honest labour. Ludwig brought another woman into the shop, and into the parlour behind the shop, and finally into the bedroom over the shop. For when vice and poverty join hands they dance lewdly over decency. The paralysed Jewess had kept it all so clean, and Karl was there. She could make no movement to oppose, could bring no words of indignant protest over the heavy tongue and paralysed throat. No word, when these two polluted her home, no word, when they corrupted her poor overtasked boy, and taught him to steal, whom she had proudly taught to work, the boy who kissed her still, as he had always done, night and morning, stroked the heavy motionless head, and washed her face tenderly, the broad face that lay agonised with staring eyes. Perhaps he read, poor boy, who learnt to read so quickly, the anguish in those fixed eyes. With the precocious knowledge of the slums the position was clear before him.

Nevertheless, he worked early and he worked late, he put up with the treatment of a dog and the food of a dog, although a place was offered him where he would have had civil words and the money he earned. He went hungry, rather, for he was not going to leave his mother. He knew how she had worked for him since his father's death. Some children would not have known, but Karl knew.

The foreign woman that Ludwig had brought in (I follow the language of the Jewish quarter, though, in truth, she was English enough, a gutter girl of loose life and free tongue) learnt to know that she could depend

upon Karl when she could not depend upon Ludwig. She learnt to value him, and not to nag him, to overwork him still, but to show him surreptitious kindness, and, even once, not many days before the end, to put her arms round him and kiss him, rather wildly, and tell him he was a good little chap, and she wished to God his father was like him.

A few days after that kiss Karl had to run in all haste for the next-door neighbour, and there were yells and shrieks in the house, and then strange quiet, and a shrill wailing cry. Karl was in the room, there is nothing hidden among the poor, and the wretched woman called to him. He stood beside the bed; her face was white and drawn, and the life was ebbing away from her with every breath she drew.

“’Ere; you’re a good sort, Karl. Look after the kid a bit. ’Es just as well without me, p’raps, but Ludy’d let him starve. Will yer take care of ’im, Karl; will yer? I ain’t bin bad to you, not as bad as I have to most. You’ve looked after your mar, will you look after my pore little kid?”

“I’ll look after him,” answered Karl solemnly. He had never hated her, she hadn’t called his mother a burden; he had not so much resented her position, he had only resented that she did not work. “Me and mother’ll look after him.”

For the paralysed woman was never wholly dead or silent to Karl, he was always watching and waiting for the day when she should speak again and be well. He often talked to her, said words that penetrated perhaps, though no answer came, only broken sounds.

“I’ll look after him,” said Karl. And we shall see how Karl the man kept the word that Karl the boy gave by that sordid death-bed.

Karl took the baby from her when she was dead, held it in his arms a little, looked at it and wondered at it, stroked its tiny hands, put his cheeks against the soft downy head, let it creep into his heart, where it stayed

for ever. Afterwards he laid it by his mother's side, and tended them both. It seems incredible, but neighbours helped, good, kind, greasy, gossiping Jewish girls and women, chaffed him, and taught him, and helped him, and saw them through the next few months. Not one of these did Karl forget in his later prosperity.

The shop was let; only the one room retained. There Karl, and the paralysed woman, and the baby lived, or starved together. The Board of Guardians helped them at last. But it was a case difficult to help; for Ludwig pleaded illness, and would do nothing, and Karl fought that his mother should not be taken away from him, and the baby, that had no right there at all, lay beside the paralysed woman, and set up its own false plea for tolerance.

The Jewish Board of Guardians is an organisation with its roots deep planted in the throbbing heart of humanity. Goodness radiates from it and the charity that ignores logic. Its almoners understand and keep its unwritten rules. Karl Althaus, wheeling a barrow, running errands, helping a Punch and Judy man, bringing home his daily pence, fighting for home as a man might fight, won from them the man's privilege to keep his mother with him. The fight was hard because of Ludwig; nevertheless the Board of Guardians paid the rent, and allowed them ten shillings a week.

But Ludwig wanted so much, and there was little for mother and the baby, so Karl knew what it was to go hungry. Once he went nearly forty-eight hours without food; that is how he learnt pity, learnt never to say "No" to a beggar who pleaded hunger. It is not easy to be honest when there is abundance all around, when there are warm-smelling bakers' shops, tempting things on barrows, or exposed on the pavement, and from the hooks that butchers use. Karl, in the streets, learnt the morality of the streets, they were his public school. Often after he had tidied the room, done what he could for his mother, and fed the baby, he would go back into the streets where

he had been the livelong day, they would grow grey, and cold, and unreal, and his head would feel large and empty, his eyes a little dim, because he had given all he had earned, and his growing boyhood starved. These were the times temptation came to him. He could not beg. Everything he earned Ludwig took from him, now on one plea, now on another, and all that Karl could keep back from him went to buy the milk and beef-tea that kept his paralysed mother alive.

Eighteen months he worked and starved, and stole perchance, but never begged, resolution and strength growing in him the while and an indomitable greed. All around he saw what he wanted; wherever he wheeled his barrow, or led the dog round to collect the coppers, or held horses, or sold newspapers, all around he saw money, and the things that money could buy.

Then she died, the mother died. The Jewish women who came from the synagogues muttered their prayers in Hebrew, but showed the poor body no respect when they took it from the bed. They made an alien of him, though it was thirty years before he voiced himself to little Joan de Groot in Cape Town. The neighbours who in all kindness said to him:

“It’s a good thing she’s gone; now you’ll be free,” made an exile of him from the quarter. He had loved his burden, hugged it to him, never forgot how she had worked for him. He knew it better every day; he remembered lying in bed in his baby days, and seeing her stitching away by candle-light to make him his velveteen suit for Saturdays. Ludwig had pawned the suit; but, when Karl saw his mother at last dead, indeed, cold, with closed eyes, he remembered it; how she had worked at it after her long day’s toil was done, how she would come ever and anon to his cot, rumpling his curls with her large hand, while she kissed him, and told him he must go to sleep now, and he should have a brave suit for the Sabbath. To him she wasn’t a fat and greasy Jewess, with a black fringe; she wasn’t a poor paralysed figure

eaten up by bed-sores, cruelly wasted and hideous; she was just "mother," the best thing the world ever showed him. They said:

"It's a good thing she's gone, at last," and that broke him down, sent him away from Whitechapel, away from the people who did not understand.

Karl Althaus, the multi-millionaire, who laughed at Stephen Hayward for being short of a thousand pounds, and at Joan for being scrupulous at accepting five thousand, did not find people very ready to understand him, then or ever. A big heart and a grasping fist seem incongruous.

He had a wondrously diversified career after the death of his mother, and sounded every note in the gamut of privation. He had Louis to keep as well as himself, Louis, the little by-blow of the Whitechapel provision shop. He had promised Louis's mother, and he kept his promise; though oftentimes hungry Louis cried himself to sleep in the arms of hungry Karl.

Karl was a pawnbroker's assistant at the beginning of his more prosperous period, and saved his wages to buy old pledges to resell; he was clerk in a foreign bank by the time he had put Louis to school, and paid for the funeral of his stepfather, who died of consumption in the Jewish ward of the London Hospital, begging to the last. When Karl worked his passage out to South Africa, before the first annexation, he had with him money of Messrs. Oldberger and Sons, and they had not lent it to him. A year's school fees for Louis had been paid in advance out of that money. But he paid it back very soon, and wrote Messrs. Oldberger a manly letter, telling them of his acute necessities. The firm forgave him, they were of a forgiving race; presently they began to do business with him, and finally, which makes it more curious still, Karl became their partner.

Karl Althaus was at the birth of the goldfields; he also had prospected successfully for diamonds. Is it possible to make millions honestly? Karl did not know the mean-

ing of the word, never learned it. But he was untiringly industrious, orientally generous, and he had graduated in sharpness in the streets of Whitechapel. He swindled natives, bamboozled Dutchmen, turned over the money he had annexed again and again. In early days he played "heads I win, tails you lose" all the time. In later times he made the chances even more certain.

Karl lived in South Africa from 1875 to 1881. Then he came home with a strange story to tell, and tried to get a hearing for it at the Colonial Office. He failed, failed absolutely, hammering at the iron-bound door of officialdom in vain. Karl guessed, even then, that the time would come when they would have to listen, when that which he had to tell them would otherwise be thundered into their ears by guns, and shrieked at them through the red blaze of battle. He knew it, many men in South Africa knew, or guessed, but neither he nor they got a hearing; the Boer delegates had it all their own way, and the miserable Convention was signed that made our countrymen helots where they should have been heroes.

Karl did not care very much. There was no money to be made by political success, and things had not progressed far then. The slim and wily Dutchman kept a show of justice, and ever promised decent government. The times were not ripe, the grain not garnered, the guns not bought.

Karl, received in London Society with the courtesy his wealth demanded, and at the Colonial Office with the indifference that the thing he had to tell failed to justify, returned to South Africa to get more gold whilst it was possible. He had learned a great deal during his visit.

He went back and held a candle to the devil, and the devil rewarded him royally for his courtesy. He bribed and robbed and intrigued with the Boers, not against them: he obtained concessions. Every one connected with him grew rich, but always he grew richer.

Then the dogs he fed took to snarling, and he could no

longer listen to men who told him that the English nation does not want to be well served, she wants simply to be allowed to sleep, peacefully. For he met Joan de Groot, and learnt that there were many better things than money; patriotism being among them. And, as we have seen, Karl went to England again, and tried to find out for himself who was right. Because little Joan de Groot had touched his heart, or his imagination, in some strange way, he concluded that it was she. Then he made plans, and of all the plans he laid, none seemed so good to him as the one that touched Stephen Hayward.

But during the month Karl was in Cape Town, talking his autobiography to Joan de Groot, he had as yet made no plans.

Of course these two talked politics as well as biography. They had different standpoints, different motives, but, nevertheless, they arrived practically at the same conclusions.

The two races, English and Dutch, must live side by side under the English flag. The weapon of power had been put prematurely into a hand unfit to wield it; it must be taken back. This Joan persuaded him. England should be the paramount power in South Africa, and England must assert this now with loud insistent voice, before the newly-formed Bond should have time to weld the party whose watchword was South Africa for the Afrikanders. Karl recognised, although perhaps he over-rated, the power of Joan's pen. He wanted her to write home what they both knew. He told her how to place and marshal her facts. He had his private ends to serve, of course, and at first all of them meant only money. Seeing this, she remained firm against his arguments.

She would only write what she felt or what she saw, and, because she was conscientious and literary in the finest sense of the word, she wrote but slowly, and little of what she wrote seemed to her worthy of publication. Karl knew, better than Joan, that, if she for ever hit the tin tacks of fact with the light hammer of feminine

argument, she would never build a platform. She must screw in wild injustices, exaggerated histories, she must make a dust and a whirl about her work, he told her.

But she would only write as the mood seized her, and the little provocative woman laughed at his arguments, and flung his thinly-disguised offers of bribery back in his admiring face, and clashed her wit against his with bewildering lightness. Karl would have given her everything. Whether by way of bribery, because he wanted her pen as his mouth-piece, or whether it was simply that when a little woman bewitches a big man he wants to lavish on her out of his abundance, even out of his poverty if he be a big poor man, Karl did not know at first, though Joan suspected. Yet she took nothing from him in kind, only experience and sensation, and gradually a dawning, shaping thought.

Before that nebulous thought took shape, however, Karl had left Cape Town.

All that he said to Louis about Piet de Groot's farm had been in his mind when he had come to Cape Town, but all of it had been forgotten whilst Joan was teaching him: It revived, momentarily, when he went to say good-bye to her, and his "good-bye" was characteristic.

"I'm off to England."

"Business?"

"Business and politics are synonymous just now. One thing—or two," he looked at her in the little pause between that "or two," and she reddened; "I want before I go. I want to get in touch with your husband——"

She did not know why she had flushed, but still his eyes were seeking hers.

"Piet is ill; he is in Pretoria just now. Dr. Wolff is treating him."

"You are not with him."

"He is not alone."

Karl understood, having heard something of the story.

"I want him to lease me the farm, or sell it."

"I hope you will be more successful in obtaining your

other desires than you will be in that," she said quickly, thoughtlessly.

"Do you?" he answered, and the undercurrent of feeling between them made her hurriedly continue talking, so that only the surface should be skimmed.

"Piet will never sell the farm while there's breath in him."

Karl kept the conversation for the moment where she had led it.

"He'll have to. The deep-level of the Goldenreif is under it."

"That won't even interest him."

Karl grew impatient.

"Now then, little woman, don't talk twaddle. He's ill, and not very strong in his brain-pan when he's well, but he's not ill enough to be allowed to browse his mangy ostriches on a hundred millions of gold quartz."

"As long as life is in him he won't sell the homestead. Why, when he settled it on me on our marriage, he made me promise I would never part with it. And then, you know," she added, twinkling her blue eyes at him, "he is not in love with your methods, since you tried to do him out of the Four Acre because he had let you use it as a dumping ground for a few years."

"Oh, I know how he feels towards us. I know how they all feel towards the men who brought the money into their bankrupt, starving country; but they are getting to the end of their tether. I tell you," he spoke bitterly, "they are nearing the end, putting the nails in their own coffins. Bewaarplatzen, indeed! Thieves!"

And she laughed at his bitterness, at his indignation.

"Oh, yes; it's a desperate thing, to want to keep what belongs to one when Karl Althaus wants it for himself."

The light laughter, or the womanliness of her, standing there, so small and brown and wilful, moved him on a sudden to her side.

"Joan! Don't be frightened, child, little woman; why, I was not going to hurt you."

He had caught hold of her, for Karl was primitive. He had startled her. It was not the first episode she had passed through, or provoked; but Karl was so big and not young, and she liked him so much.

"I'm not going to hurt you." His face was tender, if his touch had been rough. She left her hands in his, then, though her heart beat fast, and her breath came quickly.

"That's right, take it quietly. I must speak; you'll have to listen. I'm going to ask for something; but you won't, I know beforehand, you won't give it me. Damn it! you're such a good little woman!" She stood quite still now, though his voice was thick, and his grasp on her hands tight.

"You were quite right in what you said just then. It's pretty desperate to keep from Karl Althaus what he wants."

He stopped for words a minute. As she saw his agitation she grew suddenly calm, her hands resting in his; some comprehension, some sympathy even, were in her blue eyes as she watched him. He recovered himself.

"I want *you!* God! if you only knew how I want you! You are right not to struggle, dear; I wouldn't hurt you, you know that, well enough. Now tell me, is there anything, anything on earth I could give you, that would make you come to me?"

The slow colour mounted on her cheek, flushed up to her eyes, and blinded them. She shook her head.

"Come; you want fame, money will buy fame. You're such a little thing, and the world is such a big place; you ought to have some one to take care of you. Joan, let me take care of you, let me. I'm pretty rough, but I minded my mother, and I've minded Louis. I'll be so careful of you, dear, not a breath shall blow on you. Can't you do it, dear, can't you?" She only shook her head, but her eyes were full of tears. Seeing them, he released her hands:

"Never mind, then; don't cry." He walked away

from her, turned his back to her a minute. When he faced her again her tears were falling.

"Don't cry. I'm a blackguard ever to have thought of it. Nothing you have said, nothing you have done, warrants it, I know that; don't you think I don't know that? Come"—he went up to her again—"leave off crying. I cannot bear it, I tell you; you're driving me mad with it; forgive me, you'll have to forgive me," he said gruffly.

"Oh, I'm proud, proud you want me," she cried. He knelt before her then, and took both her little hands in his roughened ones, and kissed them.

"You are such a good little woman. I've nothing to tempt you with. I'm only a coster-boy in your eyes, I see that; all my money doesn't help me with you."

Suddenly she put her face down, and kissed him lightly on the cheek, and over the slow flush of his face that followed so quickly she put her released hand.

"Karl, I'm proud, I can't help it, I'm proud you like me. It's impossible; you know it's impossible. There's Piet, and I don't, I don't love you, Karl." Her cheeks too were hot.

"If it hadn't been for Piet?" He was standing again now, out of breath as if he had been running, moved by that sudden kiss, and shaken to the depths.

"If it hadn't been for Piet, dear; if it were not for Piet?" Again he knelt, and laid his hot lips on her little hands.

"I don't know. I don't love you." She left him her hands. "But you are strong and so different, and I think, I do think you're good, except about money. And no one else has seemed so interesting, and I am glad you want me, and——"

He did not give her time to finish her sentence. The big man had risen and caught her in his arms.

"Joan, if ever there is no Piet, if ever you are a free woman, may I come to you again? Do you know that kiss you gave me of your own free will, my sweet, the only kiss I've ever had, since my mother died, that I

haven't paid for, that kiss has somehow made you sacred to me. Give me another, little Joan, kiss me once on the lips. Tell me that I may come to you again some day. Do that, and I'll let you go, and I'll never come to you again, never, until you are free, or unless you send for me. You don't know how I love you; I love you enough to do without you."

But, though his lips sought hers, they only brushed her cheek. She struggled against him, and he released her as soon as he realised it. He looked at her, but she averted her eyes.

"You couldn't do it. I'm a rough chap, whisky soddened. Never mind; give me your hand again."

She gave them both without a word.

"I'm off now. But I want you to remember, never to forget, that you've got a pal in Karl Althaus. I'll come to you again some day when you are free, not until then. God forgive me for having soiled you with such a thought as I had in my mind. You forgive me, too, I know that, dear; know it by that kiss. Bless you for it! I'll come to you when you are free; but I don't suppose it will be of any use?" There was an interrogative note on the lingering words.

"I don't know." Her voice was stifled.

"Well—perhaps. I dare not stay—God bless you."

And he was gone, with a slam of the front-door that might have been heard at Government House.

CHAPTER SEVEN

JOAN missed Karl, but she was a writer first, and a woman afterwards, and, until the afterwards, all her experiences took the form of phrases, and grouped themselves into sentences and paragraphs. The nebulous thought with which Karl had inspired her was that the race story, written so often, must now be written differently. It was the Jew in Karl that had moved her, she thought, for that she had been moved momentarily there was no doubt, and it was to sympathise with the strange lurid race that dominated the business quarter of Cape Town. Karl had been fond of talking of Jews; he had contrived to make their claim insistent. Now, as she walked abroad, she saw, behind every pair of sharp, black eyes, behind bald heads and prominent noses, in stooping, shabby forms and coarse accents, she saw that large intelligence, that big heart, that gentle kindness of Karl Althaus. She saw the restless hands eager to grab, ready to give. She saw, for Joan's light blue eyes were wires to her brain, and telegraphed truly, that there pulsed beneath these sordid, grasping, greedy Jews, who walked the Cape Town streets and congregated in its market-places, a wealth and warmth of goodness, of generosity, of which the colder, slower, Northern men were scarcely capable. She saw them often dishonest, never brutal, with the lowest standard of honour, and the highest ideal of Brotherhood.

But she missed Karl for hardly more than a week. Almost before her hand had forgotten that painful pressure of his big fist, almost before her cheek had lost the flush where his rough face had touched her, Karl had become a figure-head; and the next book, the "Story of the

Jew," began to quicken in her, a Jewish novel—the Jewish novel! That was what filled her nights and days; she was big with it, as a happy woman with child. It had no shape or expression as yet, but she felt the life in it. All the people, all her friends, who were not Jews, spread their vapid personalities and weak wiles, their dull talk, before her in vain. She walked about among her fellow-men and women as one walks with shadows; nothing was real but the book she was going to write, the "Book of the Jew."

Thus it was that, when Karl sent Louis to her, she was malleable, ready, eager. Karl had told Louis "there is a little woman in Cape Town—" and he had shown his heart to his brother. There was no room in it for doubt, or fear, or suspicion of Louis. All the world he could suspect and doubt, perhaps fear, before he grew too powerful for fear, but Louis and he were alone together in the world. Karl loved him loyally.

When Louis left Pretoria for Cape Town *en route* for England, he had his instructions. He was to influence Joan de Groot, an easy task, to tackle the English Government through Stephen Hayward, an enterprise not unworthy of his talents.

Van Biene was jackal, lawyer, creature, anything one liked to call him, to the Unterwald gang. Louis sauntered into Van Biene's office the morning he arrived in Cape Town. After a few preliminary business details had been run through, he asked:

"Can you put me in the way of meeting a Mrs. de Groot, a writing woman; she is married to a man whose farm we've got to get. Karl gave me a letter to her, but that is too formal a business."

Van Biene, little old ferret that he was, looked sharply over his spectacles at Karl Althaus's representative.

"She's not with her husband, and has no influence with him. Your brother knows that."

Louis, in the easy-chair, surveying with some pride the patent leather shoe that covered the "best instep in South Africa," smiled, caressing his dark moustache.

"Karl couldn't pull it off. But you would not call poor old Karl the best man in the world to tackle a woman, now, would you?"

He gave another upward turn to that dark moustache with a hand, small, well shaped, sinewy.

"Come, out with it—where is she to be found? I expect I'll know how to make her work in our interests."

Louis's self-satisfied smile and manner, his shiny, immaculate clothes, the whole, handsome, assured air of him, irritated the old lawyer. Van Biene's little mouth was all awry, as if he had tasted something nauseous, when he answered:

"She's not your sort at all. You really should not waste yourself on a woman given up to literature and politics. She is not an adventurous woman. Curl up your moustaches from now till doomsday, they won't appeal to Joan de Groot."

Happily Louis could catch a glimpse of himself in the mirror over the mantel, and he smiled again at the reflection. He need not put himself out of the way to be civil to old Van Biene, they had half a hundred holds over him.

"Had a look in in that quarter yourself, old man? She seems very attractive to fogeys. Even old Karl was impressed. But go on, hurry up, I've no time to waste. I'm off to England in a fortnight. Whom does she visit?"

"Give up the idea. She can't help us. If she could, I am not sure that she would. You've nothing to bribe her with." Van Biene shot another disgusted glance at Louis. "She won't notice your clothes, and if it had been a question of money—I believe you'll allow Karl could bid as high as you can."

Still Louis smiled. The old lawyer's irritation with him was nothing new.

"Oh! you notice they fit, do you? Poole's best cutter!" He felt where the well-pressed trouser exhibited its regular seam, patted his chest where the double-breasted waistcoat showed there was a waist to consider. "But

get along; spit it out." Louis's refinement was one of the garments he only wore for special occasions. "You've got to do what I ask, so why make such a fuss about it? Where does the woman hang out? I haven't got the letter with me. If I can't meet her about, I shall have to make a formal call."

Still Van Biene hesitated.

"She's got ink in her veins, not blood. They've all been at her; your brother Karl wasn't the only one that had a story to tell. But nobody moves her; you leave her alone with her books. You'll do nothing with her, and then you'll grow spiteful. I know you."

"I believe you're frightened to bring us together. By Jove!" he got up and walked round the lawyer, surveying him with some interest, "I never looked upon you in that light before. Somehow or other, you never struck me as a Don Juan."

"Don't make a fool of yourself."

"And what does Mrs. Van Biene say to it, eh?"

A lecherous, treacherous fellow, Van Biene thought Louis Althaus, scarcely white; his contempt was mingled with hatred. Yet, if he did not give him the asked-for opportunity, some one else would; there was no difficulty in meeting Joan de Groot in Cape Town society.

"If you are really set on knowing her, you can dine with my wife to-night. Mrs. de Groot and her brother are both coming," he said sullenly. Louis patted him on the shoulder.

"Why didn't you say so before? What a man you are, to be sure. I'll be there—ta-ta. And, if I notice anything, I'll not say a word to Mrs. B."

"Phew!"

Van Biene breathed again, the office was clear of Louis. But he sat down to his desk with some presentiment of evil, some uneasiness. Joan was eclectic in her innocent flirtations, and the wizened old lawyer had a keen brain, and an appreciative wit. His dry cynical humour, his knowledge of men, had made him a congenial companion

to her. There was a sympathy between them that neared friendship.

"A lecherous, treacherous fellow," he thought, "but she'll see through him."

Still he worked uneasily. He knew more about Piet de Groot and his farm than Louis did. But what he knew Louis might soon learn, and, if what he had heard was true, then Joan might indeed become essential to the interests of the Unterwald Company, in which case, better Karl than Louis to play the game for them. The lawyer was uneasy, for he appreciated Joan, perhaps guessed where she might be weak.

There was no doubt about Louis's good looks. His dark eyes were Spanish in their sleepy depths, his brushed up moustache and slight imperial kept the foreign contour of his face, but his fair skin was English, pale and clear. The hair had retreated a little on his temples, he wore it brushed back, without a parting, lying as straight and sleek as the valet could make it, but at the nape of the neck you could see the end of the wave it had, and his neck was firm and white, his head splendidly set upon it.

Van Biene watched from the window Louis's graceful saunter down Adderley Street. His grace had in it something feline to Van Biene's old eyes, but he knew he saw him differently from the way others did. Louis was tall and lean of flank, his back was straight with a fall towards the waist, the slight slope in his shoulders, the easy movement from the hips, were part of the fine make of him.

"Damn him! he looks like a gentleman," said Van Biene, when he left the window and went back to his papers.

That evening when, for the first time, Joan met those dark melancholy eyes, she saw little else. They were brown eyes, blue in the whites, brown in the centres, there was depth in them and melancholy, they spoke, they seemed to tell a history; they brought "Thaddeus of Warsaw" to her mind. She was only a writing woman at the beginning of that dinner, and she thought here was

another chapter for her book, the agony of Poland, vibrant, inarticulate.

"I wanted to know you," was all Louis said, as he bowed over her hand with that graceful half-foreign gesture of his. "I came here to-night on purpose to meet you."

"I am flattered." Joan was used to compliments, but to-night, somehow, she was not at her ease with Karl Althaus's adopted brother.

"I am glad I asked Mrs. Van Biene to send us in together." Joan was glad too. It was absurd, but she was glad. She knew so little, with all that she had written of love, and written well, that she took no warning when, as she laid her fingers lightly on his coat sleeve, she felt a thrill run up her arm, a thrill that ended in her heart, in a slight shudder, in an accelerated breath and pulse-beat.

"I am glad to meet Karl Althaus's brother," she answered, and blushed, remembering. For an instant his eyes met hers, and she wondered if indeed she was glad because he was Karl Althaus's adopted brother. But for a little space she spoke of Karl breathlessly, and Louis looked at her; his pointed tongue now and again moistened those thin lips of his, his hand caressed his imperial, brushed up his moustache until the ends were feathery and light against the transparent skin, and his eyes were melancholy and impenetrable. Everything about him had a subtle indefinable attraction and charm for the girl-woman, who had been for a short time the wife of Piet de Groot, and for the rest had thought that literature was life.

Afterwards Joan knew that it had been a strange dinner. She had eaten nothing; there had been an unusual nervousness about her. She had torn her menu into little bits and played with the pieces—she remembered that, but what they had said to each other she could not recall. It seemed to her she had scarcely looked at him, yet she knew that those dark eyes had starry centres, she knew his voice was soft and low, she heard again the slight roll of his "r's," as if they left his tongue reluctantly.

And the poor little clever fool, going home to lie awake and dream, with a soft hand-pressure coming back again and again always with its own thrill and message, thought it was all because the quickening idea was embodied, and that the Jew of dreams was incarnated to make her book live.

A writer, born, not made, has this apart from other men and women, a power of detachment, an impersonal double sense that visualises the picturesque, the apposite, and sees it apart from its surroundings, framed and made separate. The writer born, not made, can sit by the deathbed of a beloved one and forget the dying, see the dear face on the pillow, listen to the laboured difficult breathing, hideous with the hoarse death-rattle, and be filled with naught but the difficulty of translating the scene into phrase, of grouping the sentences so as to make the room with its medicine bottles, its white-capped nurse and drug-smells stand out, solemn and cold and clear in the black and white sharp outline, the shadowlessness of print.

Joan sat at that dinner-party, the deathbed of so much that was strong and self-reliant and powerful in her, the deathbed of her girlhood and her untroubled heart and her innocent spirit, and, as she nervously shredded the menu card, she mentally described the dinner-table, the flowers and white napery, the silver dishes heaped with fruit, the shaded candles and the glass, saw it always and merely as a chapter in the "Book of the Jew." Only she never fore-saw in print the vague unrest that throbbed its warning to her; she could neither search for nor find a phrase to meet her quickening pulse.

There is a mystery known to all who know men and women, to all who have insight into, sympathy with, or understanding of, their fellow-travellers, but it is blank and incomprehensible to the Pharisees, and to all who would read and run at the same time. This is a mystery that fills the divorce courts, mocks the incredulous, and sets at naught all creeds and convictions. It is that a

certain something, subtle, sweet, and rare, not a perfume, not a touch, but an echo of both, light, elusive, all-pervading, is the special property of some loose-living men, a property that is beyond the reach of analysis, but recognisable in the freemasonry of the passions by all who have realised its existence. It is as the candle to the moth, as the rose to the butterfly, as the magnet to the steel. It is a surface lure of sex, it is an all-compelling whisper, almost it seems that to hear it is to obey. But some ears are deaf to it, some few dull ears. Van Biene, wizened and bitter and old, knew of this mystery; he knew it well, knew too that Louis Althaus held the key to it in that sleek head, that strait back and those sloping shoulders, those lean flanks and nervous hands, knew that the co-respondent, no less than the poet, is born, not made. But he thought Joan's ears were deaf,—he hoped Joan's ears were deaf; so dull she had proved to other men who had tempted her with other wiles.

On the evening of the dinner-party he watched those two, watched the bright alertness fade a little out of the woman's face, and her lids veil her eyes. Out of the corners of them she would look now and again at Louis, but it seemed that she too was nervous, Van Biene missed her low laughter. He noted the small fingers mechanically tearing up the name-card, then the menu. And all the time Louis talked in a low voice, disjointed talk it seemed to the old man watching, and Louis's wonderful eyes were full of softness, and his voice with the burred "r's" sounded musical, and the atmosphere in which these two apparently sat apart from all the others seemed charged with electricity.

For those two there was nobody else at the dinner-party; Louis absorbed Joan, and was absorbed by her. Van Biene ground his teeth at them, but knew he was powerless.

There had been cross motives running in Louis's subtle handsome head, when he had asked for the invitation, when he had entered the dining-room. But Joan herself

blotted out her farm that evening with Louis no less than she had done with Karl; there was not a doubt about that. Her charm surprised him out of his scheming. He was not too absorbed, however, to notice Van Biene's expression, and his vanity was all alert. That Joan was what she was, excited it further. Karl, steady old Karl, rough old Karl, had had a fancy for her too, he remembered, and he laughed to himself at the thought that Karl should rival him here. The woman was made for him, he felt that immediately; he tried to convey it too. He knew many tricks and subtleties to awaken light thoughts in light women. Joan's innocence, ignorance, instinctive purity, missed them all. Quickly, very quickly, he saw, he realised that, if success was to follow him, he must, as he worded it to himself, begin at the beginning; it was a new language he must teach her. He had not hoped for all he saw.

He had expected to find the celebrated authoress a mere writing-machine, an ink-stained, bony thing, not even young. In reality, she was as delicate as a Cosway miniature, with an eighteenth century piquancy in her grace. Joan wore green that evening, a soft dress, with some white stuff, still transparent, draping the shoulders. But the shoulders themselves were whiter than the stuff that draped them, a wonderful creamy white. On the left side Louis saw there was a dimple, they had not got as far as the *entrées* before he knew it was there for him. Her arms were round, like a baby's arms, and again there were dimples in the elbows, and slender wrists, and small hands with tapering fingers, and Louis's heart, though it was as wizened as Van Biene's figure, beat fast.

"Is it true that you only care for pen and ink, that you want to write, and not to live?" Louis Althaus talked ever in questions.

"It seems the same thing to me," Joan answered simply. But that was at the beginning of the dinner, for very soon the mystery of Louis touched her senses. "I have never cared for anything or anybody I know so

much as I have cared for the things and the people I have imagined."

"I am sorry you have cared for the people you have imagined."

The delicate colour stole into her cheeks.

"Imagined I cared," she interpolated and smiled, but nervously. Was he familiar, impertinent? She hardly knew; at any rate, when she had time to analyse her feelings, she thought she would find she had material for a new chapter.

"But in real life," he persisted, his voice low, "in real life, have you ever cared?"

The voice and the words penetrated, or perhaps it was the dark eyes, soft yet searching, and all at once Joan knew she was lonely, and that love, love of which she read, of which she wrote, had been nothing but a pulseless word, colder than print. Her loneliness shuddered through her, and then was gone, and the low voice with its burred "r's" filled its place.

It was a short dinner, a shorter evening. Louis never left Joan's side. The drawing-room, heavy with flowers, the women in their *décolletage*, in their diamonds, the loud-voiced men, the music, swayed about her, and seemed unreal, absurd, negligible. She hardly grasped the purport of the things he said to her, of the things he compelled her to answer. In some strange way he made her conscious of emotions which, until this evening, she had never known were possible to her. And the bright elusive womanhood, which had bewitched Karl, Louis saw shy and wild, and he wanted it, as men want always to bring down wild things. Every trick began to tell, every move "to come off," but, as the evening wore on, he forgot to be tricky and studied. What there was of man in him woke up and wanted her. He was amazed at himself. What he had meant—but he did not stay to remember what he had meant; only, as he walked back to the hotel that night, he said to himself that he was in love, and he knew it was for the first time, and even to Louis Althaus

it seemed that the summer night was more beautiful than ever summer night had seemed before.

And Joan!

It was Louis who had put the cloak about her shoulders, who had whispered passionately in her ear:

“We shall meet again; we *must* meet again.”

She heard the words as one hears far off the strain of some sweet distant music, entrancing, strange, exciting. She heard them until she fell asleep. She understood nothing of what had happened to her, why her heart beat fast, why her pulses throbbed, why her cheeks glowed in the darkness. It must be because she had found the hero for the “Book of the Jew,” she said to herself, as at last she dropped into happy dreams.

Three days passed before they met again, and, in the meantime, Joan found a strange paralysis had overtaken her pen. For hours she sat with it suspended over a blank sheet, whilst no thought came to her, no phrases framed themselves; she was conscious only of a restlessness, of an excitement, for which she had no name. She left off trying to write, and took long solitary walks instead; she became certain it was exercise she needed. Her brother had often told her she led too sedentary a life. Now she abandoned her pen altogether. When the solitary walks only tired her, and the charm of Nature vanished, when the Victoria Road with its tropical foliage, flamboyant with blossoms, and the sapphire sea that glittered in the sun, and the turquoise sky that hung above it, actually began to pall upon her, began to spell unrest, excitement without cause, the atmosphere seeming too clear and searching, she turned her footsteps towards the business portion of the town. She threw herself feverishly into her household duties, made daily pilgrimages to Cartwright’s stores, selecting groceries as if they had suddenly become of vital importance. Then, too, she took a strange interest in her toilette; all at once her dresses seemed old, or shabby, or unbecoming. She spent one whole morning at Stuttaford’s, trying on rich stuffs, dis-

carding pattern after pattern, dissatisfied, but not knowing why.

She hardly thought of Louis, at least, she hardly knew she thought of him, but the set of his handsome head and his dark eyes, followed her about, and pursued her awake or asleep, followed her into Stuttaford's as into Cartwright's, became mingled with the clothes no less than with the household stores.

Twice a week the military band played in Government Gardens; there too Joan walked, or sat, noting the faces that she knew, evading the acquaintances who would have monopolised her, a solitary figure, watching. To herself she said she was pursuing the idea, trying to track down the inspiration that only a week ago she had found in every Jewish face and form, but, if indeed it was that she sought, it eluded her perfectly.

When she saw Louis there was a rapid flow of blood to the heart, and then a reaction. He was not as handsome as she remembered him; he looked better in evening than in walking dress. Hurriedly she said these things to herself. Her bow to him was quite slight. She thought he would have passed on; she made no motion that there was room on the seat beside her, yet he stopped before her and spoke.

"They are playing very well to-day," she said, as if both of them were thinking of the military band.

"Ver-ry," he said, with the "r's" just as they had echoed in her dreams. "I knew we should meet again," he added. "May I sit down?"

He did not wait for permission. When he sat down by her side Joan thought that, after all, he was just as good looking by daylight. Only the hat covered the broad forehead, the lower part of the face was narrower. His eyes spoke eloquently; his gaze at her was intent. "At last!" he said.

"You had difficulty in finding a seat?"

He would not follow her lead, would not keep the conversation at her level.

"Did *you* feel that we should meet again?"

"I don't know; I don't know. Oh! why do you talk so strangely to me?" A school-girl could not have answered with more confusion. Why had he not let her talk commonplaces, and get quiet in her heart, which now beat too loudly? She was not well, she was quite sure she could not be well, her nerves were playing her such strange tricks.

"Have you thought of me, missed me, wanted me?" said Louis. "All the world has been different with me since I met you that evening. I can't talk rubbish; I can't pretend; I must know what you have been feeling. Tell me, did it mean anything to you that at last we had met? Did it seem to you like that, that at last we had met, found each other? There has never been anything but you in my life, I swear it."

"I don't know," she answered timidly. And Louis's heart swelled, for, was she not the cleverest woman in South Africa, the authoress of "The Kaffir and his Keeper"? Van Biene had defied him to win her, and old Karl had failed. Yet, here she was, flushing and paling, and, if his own heart was beating fast, well he knew that hers was beating faster.

"Karl has spoken of you to me so often," she said weakly.

"Don't talk to me of Karl; don't talk to me of any one but yourself. Come, let us go for a walk together."

"Down Fleet Street, like Dr. Johnson?" she said, with a nervous laugh, but rising, nevertheless.

"Not like anybody but ourselves," he answered.

"I suppose I am very wrong to take it for granted you want to be with me as I with you. Tell me, am I wrong? Have you thought of me since that night?"

"One always thinks of a pleasant evening."

"Don't put me off; I don't want generalities. You have never been out of my mind for a moment. Have you thought of me at all? I must know." There was no response, and he continued earnestly. "Don't let us

stand here and talk in the midst of people. I want to be alone with you. Do you feel that? Do you feel we have thousands of things to say to each other?"

"It is very nice here," she said, moving on nevertheless.

She liked walking by his side. Considering his appearance alone, he was a man by whose side any woman might have liked to walk. There were other people walking up and down, and several bowed to Joan. Louis's hat was off half-a-dozen times in as many minutes. All Louis's ways had that half-foreign suggestion about them that appealed to her; he took off his hat to the veriest stranger with a bow, with a graceful movement. She liked him better with his hat off, then she saw the sweep of the dark hair above the low brow; even the slight shrug of the shoulders, as he turned to her again and mutely complained of the interruption, she found fascinating. He moved in his clothes so that one saw how the muscles ran beneath the skin, saw his litheness and grace.

"I can't talk surface talk to you," he said; "I don't know why. You noticed that, even the first evening? We seemed to have met before, to understand each other at once?"

"Don't talk in questions — I don't know — I haven't thought at all; I've been busy. What have you been doing? what do you do? Do you want all the same things your brother does? I don't mean for South Africa, I mean for yourself. Do you collect pictures, and heap millions upon millions like Pelion upon Ossa, and go on doing it because it has become a habit?"

"Do *you* think I am like Karl?"

She cast a side glance at him, caught a smile and returned it. No; he was not like Karl, she felt a throb of disloyalty, for, if Karl had been rough, he had been sincere. He was coarsely moulded, badly built, big and heavy, but he had been gentle with her, good to her. Louis beside him was as "Hyperion to a satyr." But she ought not to have smiled. She was sorry she had smiled

back, and he caught her regret and answered it before it was spoken.

“He is a good fellow, there is no one like old Karl. But you must not make me jealous of him. You ought not to have met him first.”

In the valley, through the afternoon, they walked and talked. Louis was no pedestrian, but a little way up the green precipitous side of the dominating mountain they wandered together. Then the shadow of the quickly descending mist hid the turquoise sky, hid the wild truncated top of the Devil's Peak, laid its chill warning on them, so that their footsteps halted. Into the mist Joan walked presently, but to-day, to-day at least, she turned back. They parted at her brother's door.

The love idyll between these two took no time in the making. It sprang into life almost full-born. Perhaps the hot African sun was responsible. Certainly the barriers that convention has erected between man and woman seem lower in those southern climes, less difficult to leap, more easily demolished. The situation came upon the woman so suddenly, so unexpectedly, that the outposts were carried before she knew a sentinel was needed. He had found the weak place in her defence; he was in the heart of the citadel before she realised the necessity of hanging out a flag. She found the days empty and blank when they were without the sound of his voice, the touch of his hand, the desire in his eyes, even before she had realised that his eyes held a desire, and that in her trembling lips and fearful heart was the response.

For a week they met and talked, met accidentally, and had sausage and eggs together at Wronski's in Adderley Street, met by appointment, and in Louis's light Cape cart went the Kloof drive, or when they wanted a long day together, they found themselves lingering in Father Peck's strange Caravanserie at Musenburg. In the curious sign-board that swung from the lintel there they saw a mutual message, and read it to each other. The sudden hail storm—a South African hail storm—each

drop a menace—that bound them prisoners there, rejoiced their hearts; and when, on leaving, an asp in their path uplifted a hooded head and danger barred their way, they had less thought for what it symbolised than the huge Kaffir who made an end of it. With or without excuse they met, and talked, and met again, finding daily in each other's society the something that each felt a necessity of existence. For three weeks they met and talked, realising strange moments and the thrills that silence holds in sudden twilight, and then—then Louis voiced their feelings.

It was at home, in her own little drawing-room, with its books and flowers and the nick-nacks that women gather around them, that Louis became explicit. Joan had been trying to work, and was holding a piece of embroidery in unsteady hands; so little had Louis said until then. His elbow rested on the mantelpiece, he was looking down upon her bowed head, with its wavy crown of brown hair, looking down on the small fingers; his words had been few, and she could still pretend to work, but of his presence she was keenly conscious, every fibre of her was conscious of his figure, of the way he held himself. She had no need to look upon him, so plainly she saw him, though her head was bent over the silks.

“It won't do, Joan,” he said at length. “What is the good of pretending? You are not working; you can't work whilst I am here. Look up.”

She obeyed him; her work lay upon her lap; she looked up and met his eyes, and, seeing what was in them, dropped her own again with crimsoned cheek.

“Do you know where we're drifting?” he went on. “I am sure of myself; are you sure of yourself? I warn you now”—he ought to have warned her before—“there can be no going back for us two. There has never been a woman in my life before.”

It was true; whatever the man was, he spoke the truth to her then. There never had been another Joan, and all he had known or ever felt of love was concentrated

on her, while everything else for the moment he had forgotten. It would come to him again, but this week he had remembered nothing but that Joan de Groot was the one woman in all the world for him, that this married woman with the purity of a girl, this genius with the heart that had never been found, this delicate, shy wife who had no husband, was the goal to which all his flirtations had tended, the *cul de sac* to his dreams of delight, the end of his strayings into the gardens of love.

"I warn you now; every time I see you it becomes more impossible for us to live without each other. I told you the very first evening, although you did not believe it—I saw you did not believe it—that love is pain."

"Ah!" she hardly saw it now, though she watched him, and listened to him. If he threatened her with love's penalties, did he not tempt her with love's delights? When his arms were around her, and the soft surprise of his thin lips taught her more than his threats, she remembered that against Karl's arms she had struggled, but now there was no resistance in her; so beautiful he was, and passionately tender.

"Joan, in a week I am going to England. Am I to go alone? Am I?"

But the anguish of her surrender was not yet, not nearly yet. She could still struggle against him, deny him. She could plead with him, and every plea he answered. All the sophistry of the seducer was at that thin tongue-tip of his that moistened his lips. He was gourmet, not gourmand; delicately he would have his feasting, and the full flavour of it he would realise. He had tact and self-restraint, he met her reluctance with an assumption of his own, led her after him, gently, retreating only when he was sure she would follow. He weakened her moral fibre so slowly, so imperceptibly, that she thought she was growing philosophic, when in truth she was only growing weak. He blotted out thought, and gave her sensation in its stead; she vibrated at his touch as violin strings at the hand of a musician; he swept the

strings, and wonderful chords from her passionate heart, from her luminous brain, answered his delicate fingers. It had been easy to win Joan's love, easy to deepen and widen it, until it engulfed and drowned everything but her woman's modesty; but the rest was not easy. A hundred times under the spell of his eyes and wandering lips, and encroaching hands, she vowed herself to him, and promised him everything. A hundred times in wild reactions she begged him with passionate tears and timidities to give her back her promise. No other man could have won this woman from her virtue. Always he met the moods half-way. If she did not care for him "in every way," if she was not as sure, as he was, that life meant nothing for either of them apart, then she was right. He would not take her in a mood; she must come to him because she wanted him as he wanted her. He was an artist in his rôle.

"If you don't care for me to touch you, then you don't care for me. If, when you kiss me to-day, you repent it to-morrow, then you don't love me."

Once she doubted herself. Once, when there had been a wild scene between them, and a wilder reaction, and she was all unstrung and trembling, she flung herself on her knees beside him, where he sat on the sofa—his head on the cushions, averted from the woman who had encroached him—and asked him, with tears, with agony in her voice:

"Louis, you know me; Louis, is it true? I *want* to give myself to you; I want to do everything you would have me do—but, I can't—I can't—Louis, don't I love you? Is that it?"

With all his good looks and all his culture, Louis Althaus was the descendant of that wheedling, ringleted son of a weak race that is no longer a nation. Easy tears came to his eyes, and these she could not look at.

"I dare not think. I am afraid—Ah! Louis, help me!"

"I will, I will;" his arms were around her again, his

dear breath about her. "You do love me—I know you love me. It isn't that. I have not given you time enough; we must wait. Don't think you fail in love for me,—but you are a good woman, and so innocent, and it is hard; but oh! Joan"—and the rest was only breathed.

Always in her dreams and in her waking hours, until the day she died, with it still murmuring to her dulling ear, she heard the soft burr of the "r" as he whispered "*in every way.*"

Then came the voyage. For the trick Fate played Joan was to send her an invitation from the newspaper with which she had been corresponding, to come to England for the arrangement of her permanent appointment as South African correspondent,—and this at the very time that Louis must leave for England. Then, if Louis had even had an eleventh hour repentance, if he had faltered in his purpose, or realised the nature of the woman whose life he was taking into his keeping, there came to him Karl's last instructions, and, according to his own superstitious reading, took the matter out of his hands.

"This ought to reach you the day before you start," Karl wrote. "Good-bye, old chap, and God bless you! I know you'll do the best for us, but Heaven knows if you'll be in time. I am losing touch with the fellows here; there is the lot that want to fight, whatever the cost, and these there is no holding. They are importing arms, and talking wildly, so that the old man can get to hear everything that is going on. And Rhodes is sick. I am overwhelmed with anxiety. All our interests are involved, and all our interests seem threatened. Have you seen Joan de Groot? Don't lose sight of her. I haven't managed to get hold of Piet. But it's no consequence; he's on his last legs. We'll make her fortune for her whether she likes it or not, if only these beggars will make up their minds what they want to do, and let me get to work. And we'll see what she says when she finds herself a rich woman. England ought to know what we have got to put up with just now. If it's a ques-

tion of fighting, and it's bound to come to that, we must be supported from headquarters. Get home as quick as you can, there's a good chap, and wake them up at the Colonial Office. A blasted Boer policeman shot a man at Pretoria yesterday for protecting one of his boys from being sjamboked to death. We'll make a test case of it. But look out for squalls."

Karl's instructions were definite, "Don't lose sight of Joan de Groot," he had written, and Louis told himself that he had never disregarded definite instructions from Karl. He took his passage on the *Arizona*, and he wrote Joan a line.

"I won't see you again until you have made up your mind, at least, as to whether you are going to England. I won't say a word about how I feel. It is sixteen hours since I have seen you, but I answered your question quite truly. You *do* care for me. How much or how little, I sometimes know, but I sometimes doubt. Words say very little to me, and as yet you have only given me words. Will you 'lay your sweet hands in mine and trust me'? If I go alone, our lives are parted for ever; it is not in my nature to go on caring for a woman who can't love me as I want her to. And at the end of your life you'll know you have missed everything that makes life worth living. If you let me take your passage too, on the *Arizona*, I shall bind you to nothing, everything shall be as you wish; you know I only want you to be happy, and I want to see you every day. But I shall never ask more than you want to give me, or sooner than you want to give it me, so only that I know your love meets mine.

"Answer this by bearer. Am I to take your passage, yes or no. If you say 'yes,' I am for ever, more than ever, and *in every way*—Your
LOUIS."

There came no answer, and Louis, hurrying on his preparations, in a fever of watching and anxiety, saw the hours slip reluctantly past. He would not go to her. His vanity, or his knowledge of women, told him not to; and he left her to fight her fight alone, now that he thought he

had made her victory impossible. He was not sure, not absolutely sure. Of every other woman he had been sure. To such a man as Louis Althaus nothing had been easier than the wooing and winning of light women.

But Joan was not light. He realised she would give herself to him, if, indeed, that giving became inevitable, because her mind was conquered no less than her eyes, because she saw that in a woman's life there could be but one man, and Louis Althaus was surely the one man that could be her lord and lover. If she saw this, he knew she would not stay for convention, for the atmosphere of Cape Town was not conducive to conventional thinking.

Still the answer to his letter tarried, and Louis suffered his suspense as small natures suffer great things. Sometimes he saw her all fire and ice, full of sweet surprises, with the most delicate appeal, with the most elusive charm of reluctance. Sometimes he saw her as a mere journalist, with ink in her veins, a phrase-maker only, and he considered how he could punish her because she had made him feel. At these times he would remember Piet's farm, and would frame letters to Karl, ascribing to her the faults she had not committed, suggesting there should be let loose against her all the agents whose unscrupulousness would make their success certain. Then again he remembered that he loved her; his vanity no less than his desire was all expectant and sensitive. He was cold and shocked in his desire and his vanity when he thought it possible he might set sail without her.

And Joan? Joan knew, from the moment she got his letter, that she must go—must, must, *must*. His hold on her was complete. For three weeks there had been nothing but Louis in the world. She could not live in a grey world of shadows, looking out at phantoms through dreary eyes, holding a nerveless pen in a cold unguiding hand. The world was Louis Althaus; this was the book she would write and the life she would lead, for he epitomised for her the people to whom he only half belonged, and it seemed to her now, looking back on the episode

with Karl, that his people were her people. Her emotionalism, which had hitherto found expression only on paper, her imagination, which had roamed loosely in vague phrases, her defective education, which had given her the poets, and hidden from her the philosophers, all helped to her undoing. She made an honest effort in those two days whilst Louis waited, she endeavoured to interest herself still in her brother, his visitors, politics, the party, but these were all shadows. She tried to write, sat for hours with a pen that made no move over the paper, dipped it again and again in the ink that dried on its point unused, whilst the brain held no guidance for it. She could think of nothing but Louis, and of him, in truth, it cannot be said that she even thought. She felt him and his demands, him, and what he had taught her, his words and looks, in every weakened fibre that he had left unstrung.

And strangely, unfortunately, sentences she could not compose, could never have composed, haunted her, and influenced her.

“I will speak thy speech, love, think thy thought,
Meet, if thou requirest it, all demands,
Laying strength and spirit in thy hands.”

To this little woman, so infinitely ignorant, so gifted, and so untrained, came the poets, tempting her with voices that followed her singing into dreamland. Why should she doubt?

“Where the apple reddens, never pry
Lest we lose our Edens, you and I.”

Why should she hold back?

“Take in season,
Thought with reason,
Think what gifts are ours for giving.”

Why should she alone not know the

“Beauty and music of an altered world”?

Why should she remain ignorant of the bliss he promised?

“Ah! shouldst thou live but once love’s sweets to prove,
Thou wilt not love to live unless thou live to love.”

Was it not true that

“She that shuts love out, in turn shall be
Shut out from Love, and on her threshold lie
Howling in outer darkness”?

“In outer darkness.” Could there be a more apt description? What had there been in her life before she met the Alhouses? A few dreams, and a book she had already half-forgotten, a brother, to whom at first she had been a burden, a brother, whose life was full without her, a few acquaintances, a possible fame, nothing, emptiness, shadows. Her mind had no fight in it; reason as well as instinct was on Louis’s side. She loved him, and he wanted her. Her heart had no fight in it. It was in truth an empty heart, with little memory of mother in it, or of loving sisters, no nestling child’s head, nothing. There were only her woman’s instinct and her woman’s modesty to save her; and Louis had had such wonderful self-restraint, he had shocked neither. Now he stayed away.

No woman feels pity for another woman who has such a decision to make, and makes it wrongly. But Christ had pity for the Magdalen, and His “neither do I condemn thee” seemed but as another poet’s singing voice, mocking her gently for holding back.

Once the decision was taken, however, once the voyage had begun, she put doubt and unhappiness out of her mind, and gave herself, as such women as this do give

themselves, with no restraint, no conscious thought, save how to meet his every wish.

She had never answered Louis's letter; she could not frame the words with which to answer it. She came on board at the last possible moment. Louis's doubts made his certainty tumultuous. Yet he must have credit for his virtues; his tact, his self-possession, were perfect when he saw her. His greeting was that of a friend only, his lips had surface words, but his eyes spoke and thanked her, and his magnetic hands, as they grasped hers, brought the easy flush into her cheek; but all he said was to inquire about her luggage.

John Fiennes came to see her off, and many friends; not Van Biene, unfortunately. Van Biene might, even at the eleventh hour, have uttered some word that would have drowned the echoes to which she had been listening, but Van Biene was in Kimberley, and there was no warning word. John Fiennes was glad Joan would have company. Quite lightly he commended her to Louis's care, no less than to the captain's. Quite gravely Louis promised his services.

It was a dream voyage, with nothing in it but love and the immortals. All the surface emotionalism of Louis, exquisitely presented in wonderful poets' voices, seemed to broaden and grow deep. She read to him, and it seemed to her that she read of him. She threw into this *simulacrum* of a man, this hollow hero, all the passion that Browning voiced, and all the sentiment that Tennyson sang. There was always the personal undercurrent, the application of lines, there were always eyes and hands meeting before wonderful sunsets, or on moonlit evenings, amid stormy seas or in the sunny calm of foam-flecked waves.

Joan passed into that empty vessel by her side all the romance that had made her novel a success, all the sentiment that was as fresh as if she had been seventeen instead of eight-and-twenty, all the emotions that had hitherto had no outlet but her pen. And the empty vessel,

transparent as glass, beautiful of shape, and delicate and rare of make, took all she threw into it and reflected exquisite colour. Louis had made love to many women, and many women had made love to him, but never one of so large a heart, so wide an intelligence, so strong a personality. If *he* had known her superiority she might have bored, oppressed him; if she had known it, she might have given him all this, but fed his vanity, his self-love, his sensuousness, with something of contemptuousness, with something of condescension. But she knew nothing except that he made infinite things seem clear to her, brought her close to God and to the poets, illuminated dark passages, and made them full of glowing meaning. Such women deny nothing to the man they love. Such men as Louis Althaus intently demand everything.

The quick voyage came to an end, but between those two that had occurred which made the voyage's end seem but as a step forward on the journey they would make together, a journey that was to lead through Elysium right up to the gates of heaven. That is what Joan felt, and, when Louis was with her, taking prismatic colours from her brave spirit and surrender, that is what Louis said he too was confident about.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE dream voyage had come to an end; and life had begun; life that was to lead along flower-gemmed paths, bedecked with shining dew, through green avenues of trees with sunlit tops, and sweet winds swaying in the branches. The path along which they should wander hand in hand right up to the golden gates of heaven stretched itself brightly before them.

) And they walked on it a little way.

For a wonderful six weeks Joan and Louis roamed the Continent, spending Christmas in Dresden and New Year in Paris; in February they were at Nice, and they only reached London, where they ought to have been in December, when St. Valentine's day had come and gone. To Karl and to people who expected him Louis had written of illness; intrigue had a charm for him, even if it were only for intrigue's sake. But now the necessities of the case quickened his invention, and the fever of which he had written became quite realistic in his letters.

Louis took a cottage about half-an-hour's journey from London, near Bushey. A desolate little cottage it looked in February, but in summer it would welcome creeper and woodbine. It was squeezed into the corner of a village, within sight of a common, within sound of the church bells. And there again "love sang to them, played with them, folded them close from the day and the night." As he had promised her, he proved the most exacting of lovers—for more than a week. She must not write, she must not even read save aloud to him. He quoted back to her that she must think his thoughts, and in lightness she mocked his "r's" and "spoke his speech." Enwrapped, enfolded, enveloped, she was ready to lie warm

and quiescent in the very core of his heart, giving herself to him in a surrender that made her glad of every little charm he discovered.

But soon, very soon, he ceased to tell her of this little charm or that, for the man was mean in the very soul of him, and thought "I must not let her know how beautiful she is." And she missed the telling, for she was a novice in the game he knew so well, and wistfully she would ask, "Do I satisfy you; am I all I ought to be? I am so ignorant. Help me, Louis, darling; teach me, make me what you want me to be." For answer he took all the sweets of her nature, keeping her always a little hungry for his caresses, calculating with her, as he found her generous arms heaped up with fruits for his more easily assuaged appetite.

But even this could not help him. She was so lavish in the giving, such an amateur in love, that the word satiety was thundering in his ear before he had time to recognise its whisper in the distance. Before three weeks had passed he had grown restless in the cottage, in the village, critical of the accommodation, of the commonplace parlour, of the daily menu, of the very air. In truth, his time for poetry was over; London lured him, and Poole's called to him, Bond Street was in his blood; his patent leather-shod feet wanted the pavement, his sleek handsome head was made for a high hat. And he had a hundred glib excuses. There was business; Messrs. Oldberger and Althaus claimed him, and he had his mission for Karl to fulfil. She knew something of that mission—she had, in fact, inspired it—and she was eager to help; but brain and pen were captive.

He held her by indissoluble bonds through the magic of the flesh, the chain that eats into a woman's heart and holds a man's conscience lightly in its weakest link. The chain was gold as yet, brilliant and uncorroded, set with rare jewels; it hung about her grandly, and the glamour of it was in her eyes. She never questioned when he found the cottage unhealthy, and the common, which held

a thousand charms for her, cheerless and damp. She was not unhappy in solitude; she was as one intoxicated with mandragora.

But the opium dream in its highest, its first supreme perfection, lasted so short a time.

Louis had indeed business in town, business apart from Poole's and Scott's and Tremlett's, and the other sartorial artists whom he regarded as of paramount importance. He had Karl's instructions to fulfil, and he called on Stephen Hayward; but Stephen was still in Scotland, and there was nothing to be done but to await his return, nothing political, that is to say. To Louis, at least, that matter did not seem urgent. What appeared really urgent, however, were the affairs of the "Geldenrief," for Joan no longer quite eclipsed her farm in his view, and both now assumed clearly their relative degrees of importance.

It is necessary, in order not to misunderstand Louis's intelligent survey of the position, to give a rough outline of the way in which the "Geldenrief," like many similar enterprises, was launched on its Stock Exchange career.

Karl Althaus, during one of his earliest expeditions to Johannesburg, had acquired the option of a piece of land belonging to Piet de Groot, and had had it thoroughly prospected. There seemed little doubt that it was gold-bearing, and Karl exercised his option, and became the owner of what was substantially the "Geldenrief." But money was required to develop it, and money is a thing that millionaires make a rule of never finding themselves for experimental purposes. He sent title, particulars, details, to his firm in London. The price of the mine was nominally fixed at five hundred thousand pounds, and a syndicate was formed to work it. This syndicate became the possessor of two hundred and fifty thousand pound shares which were pooled, and an undertaking was given that they should not be placed upon the market for a given period. The other two hundred and fifty thousand pound shares were in the hands of Messrs. Oldberger and Althaus, who doled them out through the medium of brokers

at prices varying from ten shillings upwards. Messrs. Oldberger and Althaus had launched the Ge Sult mine in a similar manner; it had paid big dividends, returned bonuses to the shareholders, and the shares stood at thirteen. They had also exploited the Kopjefontein with ten-pound shares which were now about twenty-five. Dozens of other more or less successful enterprises testified to their acumen and their judgment. There was consequently no difficulty in placing the "Geldenrief." Options in large lines were given to jobbers at various prices. Dealings commenced in the shares at ten to fifteen shillings premium and rapidly rose to two and a quarter. Then bears were trapped and allowed to depress prices. Messrs. Oldberger and Althaus put in their own clients as buyers, and, in the usual way, a market was made and the shares freely dealt in.

Karl had left that part of the business to the London branch, but, as soon as he was informed that affairs were in train, he had started work at the mine. He ordered machinery, he engaged a manager, he sank a shaft. Altogether he spent something like one hundred and fifty thousand pounds. But, as he told Louis, the mine proved a disappointment, the vein was thin, the gold not in payable quantities, and, before the syndicate's time-limit had been reached, cable communications from the manager, who was an honest Scotchman, made the shares practically unsaleable. The shares from two and an eighth fell to par in one day, and before two settlements had passed they were at a discount; and then, no amount of paragraphs, contradicting reports, or "tips" from jobbers whose books were uneven, succeeded in galvanising them into life. There was some ill-feeling manifested over the matter. The syndicate thought it had been badly treated, the report prematurely published, their interests not considered. There was no doubt that, one way or another, the loss which the firm had sustained was not to be compared with the loss that had been inflicted on the syndicate.

But all this was many years ago. "Geldenriefs" had dropped out of the official list; they were quoted occasionally at 2s. or at 4s., or some such nominal price. Messrs. Oldberger and Althaus had found ways of compensating their friends and clients, and the syndicate, all five of them rich men, had practically forgotten to bewail their loss.

On his way up to London from Bushey, Louis realised that his instructions from Karl were not at all clear. The Geldenrief, instead of a failure, was going to turn out a big success. The machinery was there and the shaft sunk. That the reef had been struck, that the deep of it, the rich quartz, lay under the De Groot farm, he understood; but, beyond explaining how matters stood, beyond telling him not to lose sight of Joan de Groot, Karl had given him no definite instructions. Louis loved money at least as much as Karl did. He envied Karl his extra millions; his own was a princely income, yet Karl's generous arrangements for his benefit always seemed to him to fall short of his deserts and his needs. Karl had so much, why should Karl have the "Geldenrief"? After all, the farm was his, or, at least, it was Joan's, which came to the same thing. He had not been a month in England, not three weeks at Bushey, before Joan's farm had eclipsed Joan in his thoughts, and the Geldenrief had become more vital, more prominent with him, than she.

So it became necessary for him to go to London. And happily, at first, she listened to the sparrows twittering their high pathetic notes in the budding trees around the Bushey cottage, and spent glad days in dreaming of her lover.

After his formal call on Stephen Hayward, Louis had gone direct to Throgmorton Street. They hardly expected him; Louis was Karl's nominee, they understood that at the office. He had been three weeks in England, but this was the first time they had seen him. He was not more popular in Throgmorton Street than he had been with Van Biene. The clerks, authorised and otherwise, looked

up to him, copied his coats and waistcoats, and noticed his boots and trousers; but Israel Oldberger and Israel's brother Sam were unimpressed.

"I thought we should have seen you before," said Sam, after the usual greetings had passed.

"There's nothing to do in town before April," was the casual answer.

Yet Louis showed an inquisitiveness and curiosity about the business of the firm that irritated old Israel. Louis questioned, doubted, cross-examined, talked about everything except the "Geldenrief." When he had wasted an hour and a half of the busiest time in Throgmorton Street, he asked Sam to go out to lunch with him. Israel signalled Sam to go; he had had about as much of Louis as he could stomach, and why shouldn't Sam have a champagne lunch at Louis Althaus's expense? Israel was glad to get rid of them both, for he was not a talker himself, and Louis's voice had so rasped his nerves that he couldn't even endure his brother. And Sam was safe enough. Louis had asked a great many questions, but Israel Oldberger was pretty sure he had got very little information.

Sam Oldberger, very bald, rather stout, full-visaged, hook-nosed, and red, led his smart partner through the shivering crowd of brokers and bare-headed jobbers, with books and pencils, hurrying along the dull, narrow street. They talked in pairs, in groups, young clerks rushed about; there was no spring in the Throgmorton Street air, it was dull and close, it smelt of finance. Louis looked about him, and smiled now and again at an acquaintance, caressed his moustache, and was possibly a little surprised, in the "Thieves' Kitchen," to find himself of so little moment. But every one was intent apparently on lunch, certainly on his own personal affairs. Louis and Sam, at a table by themselves, were able to converse about Cape Town matters quite uninterruptedly. They did so for a little time, until Sam was well through his share of the wine Louis had ordered, and the oysters had been suc-

ceeded by the steak. Then, casually, Louis, who had been playing up for it for two hours, asked:

"Do you remember the 'Geldenrief' mine that we worked? We syndicated half the shares. Do you by any chance remember who they were? I was talking it over with Karl the other day; we had quite a little dispute about it."

"Remember? Of course I do; good cause to. They made fuss enough about it, Heaven knows; as if one is bound to win every time. Fancy your brother forgetting!"

"I did not say Karl forgot; I say we disputed about them," interposed Louis hastily. "Just run through the names, will you, and I'll check them."

Louis took out his notebook, a very elegant thing of gun-metal, with "Louis" inscribed in diamonds, and enveloped in a diamond device like an india-rubber band twice twisted.

Sam told off the names, and Louis wrote them down.

"Phillips and Jorrocks, Althaus Abrahams, Aronson and Ascher, Lisson Barker, Charlie Bloby."

"Quite right." The pocket-book closed with a spring, the pencil with its diamond top replaced. "Pretty pocket-book, isn't it? Mrs. Rex gave it me—Prossie Rex, as we used to call her." Louis laughed as he recalled the title he had bestowed on the unfortunate woman who had had a preference for him, whom one of her protectors had married when he had attained fortune, and whom she had decorated as his generosity had not deserved. "She is quite in Society now, isn't she? I saw her described in *M.A.P.* as 'one of our South African hostesses.'"

Louis laughed, and Sam thought—well, Sam had drunk nearly a bottle of champagne, for Louis was always abstemious—so he did not formulate his thoughts; but he was vaguely sorry for Mrs. Rex, whose history, however, was not unfamiliar to him.

"Were we landed with any of the shares ourselves? Did we keep any?"

"Well, I can't say we were landed with them, but your brother wrote over we were to do what we could to save the situation. He did not look upon the report as quite convincing—you see, it was before the true value of the Witwatersrand was understood; that put everything else in the background—and he said he was ready to take back a few shares. I bought twenty thousand myself; they averaged me seven-and-six."

"Quoted at two-and-ten last time I saw them mentioned in the list," said Louis.

"A jobber offered me a line the other day at three-and-nine."

"But you did not see it?"

"No; once bitten twice shy." And Sam smiled at his own shrewdness.

"Who was the jobber?"

"Oh, big people in their way—Boyle and Marris."

Louis said casually, "Karl's rather sick about the whole thing. There is not a red cent in the mine. He thinks it will go against him in this new bank business."

Messrs. Oldberger and Althaus had in contemplation to open a bank in Johannesburg, the scheme was in the paper stage—five millions capital; it was only awaiting the signal from Karl.

"I don't see why it should; it was straightforward business."

"He talked of taking anything there was left off the market. He's a bit of a Don Quixote, you know."

"Well," said Sam, "he's welcome to mine if he'll give me what I gave for them."

"Very philanthropic of you. You'll sell him an article worth one-and-ninepence perhaps, for seven-and-six certain?"

Sam had been on the Exchange for many years. His sly little eyes grew bright.

"If you mean business, if you're dealing, make me a proposal."

"No; I come to you."

“ I’ll sell my lot at six-and-three.”

“ Well, come. I’ll admit to you that Karl funks the talk there will be about the Geldenrief when the bank is started. And”—reflectively—“ I think he’s got an idea of standing for Parliament. Anyway, he’s given me a kind of roving commission that if I can buy the mine back for him at something like a hundred or a hundred and fifty thousand, he’ll put the loss in his own pocket.”

Of course, the mischief of it was that it was just the kind of thing one might expect of Karl Althaus. And Sam Oldberger had lunched, and six thousand pounds were worth having; so, in the end, the deal was done.

It would be tedious to follow Louis through the next few days. They were spent in and out of offices, in manœuvring, in freely using Karl’s name. The transaction between Sam Oldberger and Louis Althaus was hardly complete before the jobber who had offered a line of ten thousand at three-and-ninepence was approached, and, after very clever handling, was induced to part with his parcel at four-and-six. Louis had to instruct a broker, and naturally the broker was not to let it be known for whom he was dealing. Simultaneously the syndicate was interviewed, and the syndicate very readily cleared out the rubbish at prices averaging eight shillings a share; that is to say, four of the syndicate yielded to the representation that Karl Althaus wished to reimburse them their expense, to save them the complete loss; while the fifth, Althaus Abrahams, winked at Louis, and told him he’d take fifty thousand pounds for his shares, not a penny less. He wasn’t going to salve Karl Althaus’s conscience at a shilling under that price. But then, before Louis had got to Althaus Abrahams, the market, cautiously as it had been worked, had realised that there was a spurt in Geldenriefs, and the shares, from being unsaleable at three-and-ninepence, were fifteen shillings, strong buyers.

Louis was in able hands. Messrs. Oldberger and Althaus turned sellers of Geldenriefs. One whole afternoon

a jobber, who was their recognised nominee, announced this to all whom it might concern. He undertook the operation of "banging" the market. But Louis and his supporters were not the only long heads on the London Stock Exchange. His tactics answered less well than they deserved. He sold about five thousand shares at prices varying from ten to fifteen shillings, but, buying back twenty thousand, on balance, proved an expensive game. He settled with Althaus Abrahams at his own price, but he failed to secure more than one hundred and twelve thousand of the floating shares. The last line was bought at over a pound. Altogether he had to part with close on two hundred thousand pounds, a mere flea-bite to a Karl Althaus, but a serious sum to the millionaire's dependent, representing practically his liquid capital. They were four eventful, exciting days that Louis had passed, and he returned to Bushey exhausted with his labours.

"It's a beastly journey down here," he grumbled to Joan, who was awaiting him with glowing eyes and tender expectation. She knew he was engaged in business; she could not know or guess the nature of it. "Arms and ammunition" filled the small spaces in her mind that passion left free.

"But worth it when you get here, dearest?" she answered, helping him off with his coat, relieving him of his stick, hanging about him with a thousand little womanly offices and endearments. He said nothing to the contrary, but he was unusually silent that evening, and distracted.

Louis was such an infinitely smaller man than Karl. It seemed to him now that he had put all his eggs into one basket, and he could not tear his thoughts from the prospects of the Geldenrief. Three weeks on board ship, six of continental travel, three in this "cursed hole," he and Joan had been together. And now it was April. How the time flew! Meanwhile, what of Piet de Groot? What guarantee had he that Karl was right about the

mine? And the farm—what if Piet de Groot got well? What if the deep level of the Geldenrief could not be bought?

“You have had a busy time in the city, dear, an anxious time?”

The little dining-room looked cosy to Joan. Outside, the branches that tapped on the window were laden with buds. Inside the table was spread, the white cloth held a bowl of primroses, in addition to the primitive collection of plated spoons and dull metal knives. Joan saw the primroses only, Louis the table equipments. No, Joan saw yet more; the primroses were in a basin of hawthorn blue, a lucky imitation, the pure white paste of which, with the rich blue, satisfied some inward sense. And the sun set luxuriously that day in April; a red glow from its sinking struck the casement window, and lit all things in the exquisite, strange twilight, the slow English twilight that she loved.

“But you forget all cares and worries when you come here.” She was standing at the window watching the sunset, and talking to him; she could not see his lowering face. His temper was new to her, strange as the man himself; his true ego had been hidden from her by his beautiful shell.

“I always dreamt of a home like this, Louis,” she said.

“Then I’m afraid you’ll have to leave off dreaming,” he said irritably. “The place is infernally inconvenient for me. And what time do we dine? You said seven, and I hurried to get home. It’s fifteen minutes past now, and not a sign of anything to eat but a decayed cruet-stand.”

“I’m sorry.” She turned quickly then. “I thought you would hate to dine until the light had faded. Dinner came up, but I sent it down. I told them not to come until all the red had gone out of the sky.” She could not keep her own eyes from the window. “Louis, come over here; I am sure this will rest you more than a vulgar steak.”

"Good heavens! you haven't ordered steak again? That's three times this week; and Sam Oldberger could think of nothing else for lunch yesterday."

Still, he moved over to her side, though he could not share her humour. Unfortunately, he could no longer pretend to. Yet she was important to him, vital, in fact.

She took his hand, mechanically he put his arm around her waist, and they stood together, silent for a moment. It was Joan who broke the silence; she shivered, her hand in his grew cold.

"A web is woven across the sky;
From out waste places comes a cry,
And murmurs from the dying sun."

"Louis, all of a sudden this reminds me of 'In Memoriam.' Come away; ring for dinner. I don't like it any more. As you say, I am a 'woman of moods;' I'm tired of the sunset."

The dinner was bad, hopelessly, inexplicably bad. And the woman of moods, rapidly infected by her companion's silence, was cold.

"I don't know why," she said, "but I feel as if I had been a light, and had been blown out; it's a most curious feeling."

"Well, that's the difference between us. I feel as if I wanted a good 'blow out,' something to eat. Really, Joan, can't you manage to feed a man when he comes home?"

She laughed; her dull mood was after all a superficial one. "I don't think housekeeping is my strong point. I never can think of anything to tell her to get except what we had yesterday, and, as she always suggests steaks or chops, there is not much variety from what we had yesterday. You don't really care, do you?" she added coaxingly, then got up from the table and went round to him, put her face against his cheek, and took the fork from his hand.

“What’s the matter with the pudding, anyhow?” She turned it over on the plate.

“It’s only burnt where it isn’t raw, and it makes me sick to look at it.” He got up abruptly, displacing her with some roughness. “This can’t go on, Joan. The place is beastly inconvenient, the cooking is filthy, and I’ve a thousand things to do.”

Fear at her heart gripped coldly. “Not go on?” she echoed questioningly, as she fell back from him.

“We took it for three months, didn’t we? Another two months here would finish me, I reckon. The woman can’t cook, and you can’t housekeep. I’ll tell you what we’ll do—don’t look so scared.” He drew her to him again, his good-humour returning as he thought he saw a way to secure his own comfort. “I’m not going to desert you.”

She sighed as she nestled in his arms and smiled at him. Fear had shaken her momentarily as if it had been some living thing; it had shaken her and was gone, but she was weak from the strange experience. She did not admit this to herself; it was physical only, it had passed, and now she nestled in her Louis’s arms and smiled.

“No; but seriously, dear, I am needed in London, at the office. You know, when Karl is at the Cape there is no one here but me—no *head*, you understand.” If Israel or Sam Oldberger could only have heard him! “We are full of new business, large business too, and I ought to be on the spot. Then, there is the row over there that you know I am working for here; which reminds me I must run down to Birmingham and see about those guns. Hayward is away, but there is a fellow at the Colonial Office that I think I can get at. Karl is making an ass of himself with the Opposition. It is all very well for Karl to say that, as far as imperial matters are concerned, the Government is only a figure-head, and the Haywards have all the power, but when your figure-head is Colonial Secretary, you can’t ignore the power he’s got.”

“You think you ought to be in London?”

"I know I ought. It isn't only the day-time I can use; there is more work done in London in the evenings, over a little dinner at the Carlton, or a grill at the Club after a play, than in many a city office. It's that I'm missing; it's all that that you've put out of my head." He stooped and kissed her lightly.

"I must not be in the way, I must not stop your career."

"No; I'm dependent on Karl, as you know."

She knew, because he had told her. She knew instinctively how generous Karl would be. And she had wronged that big-hearted protector of Louis's. Always the idea was dimly with her that she had wronged him in some subtle way, in so nearly caring for him, in not immortalising him and his people as she had meant to do, in taking Louis, in absorbing his love. Always she had this vague remorse about Karl, and would nestle closer in Louis's arms to forget it.

"You must act in Karl's interests, you must do as he would have you do."

"H'm! yes," said Louis, with a mental reserve. "I ought to be on the spot. I'll tell you what I think of doing. You know Karl's old rooms in Piccadilly are still furnished and ready. As a matter of fact, he expects me to occupy them until the house is finished. And he has an excellent man there. I think I shall go up for a bit."

"Oh, Louis!"

"Well! what is the 'Oh, Louis' about?"

"I could not—I could not—live in Karl's rooms."

Louis, who had never for a moment intended she should, caressed his moustache and thought things over. Joan was a fascinating little woman, sweet as a child, soft and small, and, of course, she had the farm; he did not want to part with her. In many ways she suited him better than any woman he had ever met; but she was a wretched housekeeper. "In Memoriam" is all very well, but a man wants his dinner. She could never make a home for him, not the sort of home he had in his mind,

sensuously luxurious and well ordered. He drew her closer to him and pondered.

"I don't know what there was between you and Karl, between you and old Karl. I've never quite fathomed that. But, of course, if you feel you can't come with me to Piccadilly, and mind—I don't think you are wrong—I understand your feelings."

"I knew you would," she murmured.

"Well, the fact remains, I've practically no choice. Karl expects me to be in London this season, and he expects me to occupy his old rooms. I've no excuse for not doing so."

Another pause fell between them; she played with his watch-chain.

"No, dear!"

"No, I've no choice. But I don't see why you shouldn't stay on here for a bit, until the end of our tenancy for instance; and, meanwhile, I can be looking about me, finding the right crib for us both. Karl will be coming over himself in the autumn, and by that time we must have settled some plan. Yes! I think that's best."

He was caressing her now. How sweet, how intoxicatingly sweet, were Louis's caresses, so gentle, so full of expectancy. Passionately she seized his hand and kissed it, kissed the soft palm. And he laughed at her and patted her, and realised every impulse of the innocent sensuousness that he awakened in her.

"There is no reason you should not come up to me every day. You could lunch with me, you know. It would be just the break from my work that I want. Not at Karl's rooms; I'll arrange something. Tell me; you will not be unhappy, if you stay here and come up and see me every day?"

"I don't think I can ever be unhappy! You love me," she answered earnestly, with complete conviction. "The last three months have made me feel there is no such word in the dictionary of my life as 'unhappy.' I love you, you

love me, and you are you. How can there be unhappiness for either of us?"

She kissed him softly.

In the end it was decided so. Louis should take up his abode in those luxurious rooms in Piccadilly. Joan should remain in Bushey, visiting him daily, or almost daily, as he could, or might, arrange. She was still completely content. Her dream life and her real life were so intermingled that she already saw those solitary hours filled with him, no less than those meeting hours, ever full of dear delights.

CHAPTER NINE

SOON after that conversation Louis ceased to live at Bushey, ceased even to go there, save on a dull Sunday, the Easter Bank Holiday, or for a rare flying visit. Instead, Joan went to him in London. Louis was a man of small economies, and all his outer refinements left intact that which lay in the nature of him. It was a strange London that he showed to Joan. She had to meet him, at obscure restaurants, at unfrequented eating-houses, at small hotels, where, in private rooms, stiff with obtrusive velvet furniture, horrible with long pauses between the courses, with the leering waiter knocking ostentatiously before he entered, the glamour of love began to fall before her blue eyes, and the reality of it to lurk hideously in the background of her drugged mind.

Yet always she loved him, though sometimes she writhed under his exactions, and her bruised modesty and wounded womanhood began to see that passion was ugly, even if Louis were beautiful. But he was beautiful—like myrrh unto her. From every meeting she went away full of his charms and sweetness, full of his lips and himself, happy in her complete abnegation to him, in her degradation. She learnt to cry in those days, when she was telling herself how happy she was; she cried silently, long, often. But she was gay when she was with Louis, because to be dull with him would mean that she was not happy with him; not to be happy with him would mean that she reproached him, and Louis could not bear reproaches. In her eyes, at least, he must be perfect. He gave her to understand this; and she followed wherever he led, still sleep-walking, still with dream-closed eyes,

her love, like the strength of Antæus, ever growing as it touched the earth.

It was not only underground London, however, that Louis showed her, not only in obscure eating-houses that they would meet. Some happy days, before Louis's world had come to town, they sat on the painted wooden chairs in St. James's Park and gazed at the shining water, watched the delicate tracery of the young green spring come to life on the brown branches, felt within their hearts the budding and bursting of the blossoms, and turned to each other sympathetic eyes. If there had been depth enough in the man's nature to hold the woman, or generosity enough to recognise his limitations and let her do the holding, their history might have been written differently; for she touched all his shallows, and he never loved another woman better, or as well. Almost any man must have loved her, in her surrenders, in her sweet submissions, for all that she was, no less than for all that she gave.

After they had ceased to occupy the cottage at Bushey together, Joan had suggested the resumption of her literary work. She suggested it perhaps half-heartedly, for her brain was not working well yet; she was feeling acutely, dreaming irresponsibly, thinking not at all. But it seemed to her she had many vacant hours; she ought to present her letters of introduction, she ought to visit her publisher. Louis would let her do none of these things. It was a newspaper excuse that had led her on board the *Arizona*; but, before they had touched at Madeira, she had written, under Louis's dictation, a letter declining the proffered post. Sometimes now she would tell him wistfully that she would soon forget how to write. Always he would reply, "A good thing, too. You'll get wrinkles round your eyes, ink on your fingers, and what the deuce for? There are any amount of books, and who wants to read 'em? Wretched little hacks in attics do the newspaper work, and women that nobody wants write books. What is there to be got out of it?"

I know a man who did a sporting book. It took him two years, and they gave him a hundred pounds. He told me so himself. We gave him more than that in a fortnight for writing a prospectus for us. Why on earth should you write?" These are the things he said to her, perhaps not all at once, but a sentence or two each time she approached the subject. And she did not want to reason with him. What woman wants to reason with a man who has taught her passion in the first months of her learning? Not little Joan, the dreamer, with no pen in her hand, and living for the first time.

About the letters of introduction Louis was equally autocratic. It was necessary Louis should go into society; it was equally necessary apparently, perhaps even more vital, that society should not hear of the existence of Joan. It is possible he enjoyed their stealthy meetings, and relished Joan's reluctance, his power over her, and the debasing of her to his level. But the debasement never touched her spirit. The sequel showed that, the inevitable sequel.

While town was still half empty, when the business of the Geldenrief was finally concluded, and all the transfers were safely locked up at Louis's bankers, Joan was, next to his clothes, again his most absorbing pursuit. He found himself once more in love with her as soon as they no longer dwelt under one roof. Now she represented the farm and rare moments; but he was not a man to love generously. He invented little causes for quarrels and questionings, he perplexed her. To keep himself amused, interested, occupied, these so-called lovers' quarrels were necessary. He could not doubt, or pretend to doubt, her love; so he seized upon her habits for pretexts. And the woman who can quote "In Memoriam" to a hungry stockbroker is not one with whom it is impossible to quarrel. Joan, for instance, was habitually unpunctual: time was one of those things of the importance of which she had never been convinced. She thought it was sweet of Louis to care if she was late for

this or that appointment, but it did not seem serious to her, and when he talked about it, she listened with only half her ears. The other half heard only the musical low voice of the man she loved; what he *said* escaped her often.

As time went on, however, this very confidence, this sweet, unquestioning trust, commenced to irritate him. But it was not until he was in London, and one roof no longer covered them, that he determined to teach her, as he expressed it, that she must not take liberties with him, that his dignity must be preserved, and her lower place recognised. One day press of traffic in Oxford Street—a fallen cab-horse, perhaps, too, a delayed start—made Joan twelve minutes late, and during those twelve minutes Louis, in all the glory of immaculate morning costume, had walked up and down the little passage that led from Regent Street to Mill Street. There were strange lines on his face when, at last, the little woman, hurrying breathlessly, came in sight, full of smiles and expectation. But she had touched rock this time, and he would not listen. His dignity demanded that she should be punished.

“I am awfully sorry, Louis; the cab-horse fell down; the——”

“I am very sorry, too,” he said viciously, those mean lines round his mouth which she had never before noticed, altering him, so that even she could see his beauty eclipsed. “I am sure you could not help it. But I had an appointment, a most important appointment, that I gave up to meet you, and I had only an hour to spare. It is scarcely worth while to lunch together now. I’ll go round to the Club. I suppose you can get home all right?”

“Yes; I can get home all right,” she answered mechanically, and turned to go.

Like most sensitive people, when Joan felt deeply she became tongue-tied. The shock of his drawn mouth with the lines in it, ignoble ones, spiteful, small, petty, was

more than his words or actions. She knew instinctively he had no other appointment.

She was out of sight before he realised that he had expected tears, protestations, humble apologies. He knew women so well, but Joan had still surprises for him, and, though he loved her in his own way, he hated her for having taken him at his word, for not having stopped to argue with him. For a week he kept completely away from her, for a whole week he left her alone in that country cottage, without a letter, without a visit, without a word.

Eyes that weep much see clearly: something was washed away from Joan's eyes in that week. And, for the first time since she had given herself to her lover, her mind moved a little, though still it moved more in imagery than in reason. All that week she saw pictures of Paolo and Francesca going together into Hell, with their arms entwined, their eyes on each other's face, happily defying pain, thirst and heat and agony forgotten. She, too, felt the thirst, the heat, and the Hell flames leaping up and scorching her feet; but not into Louis's eyes did she gaze to find liquid food, not with the glory of his love could she hope to vanquish pain. Right into the gloomy pit itself she looked, and she looked into it shuddering and solitary.

Joan had still a poor, bedraggled, painful pride left to her; Louis had the ineradicable obstinacy of a small nature. It was she, of course, who yielded, for in her heart she did not doubt that he loved her, although, after he had stayed away from her for a week because she had kept him waiting for twelve minutes, he was never again the perfect, divine Louis of her dreams. When the week had dragged itself out, she put her hurt pride where all her other virtues had gone, and wrote him a little letter asking for forgiveness, forgiveness, though she had not sinned; a letter with her love in it tremulous.

"DEAR LOUIS,—I was wrong. Don't punish me any more. I am sick with crying—" it began.

When he read her pitiful letter, he said to himself she had had her lesson. His heart swelled; how well he understood the management of women! For the future she would be more—more humble, she would know her place better; he would have less trouble with her. He had missed her, too, and vaguely, only vaguely, had been conscious of a certain uneasiness. For he must not risk anything.

Louis was still buying Geldenriefs—buying Geldenriefs had become an obsession with him. And he had muddled things, too. Louis, seeing others as he saw himself, trusted nobody. Another and yet another broker executed his commissions. He thought himself cheated, now of a turn, now of a sixteenth, in the price. He thought his scheme had got wind, and hurriedly sold to allay suspicion. He was wretched when he had parted with the shares, and could not rest until he had bought them back. There were over a hundred thousand still in the market, and he hated the idea that anybody else should make a profit out of them. He was such a small man in business. He did not know that often to give away money is the way to make it. Without Karl he would have been selling matches at a street corner for the ready cash that he understood. His last action had been to buy the call on twenty-five thousand, and the shares were now at two and five-sixteenths! The Stock Exchange is vibrant as a galvanic battery fully charged. Through all its sensitiveness it felt that Geldenriefs were “going better,” and that there was a “rig” on. Nobody knew why, nobody stayed to question values. But the jobbers put the price up and up, and recognised that there were always buyers.

The week, full of Geldenriefs, empty of Joan, had softened his temper toward her; he had achieved his object, her letter moved him, he allowed himself to be moved by it, he answered it in person.

“You are sorry, I know you are sorry. But I was right, you feel that I was right, to think you could not

care to see me if you could not even come to me at the time I told you?" was what he said to her.

She satisfied his petty pride. She ought not to have kept him waiting, she admitted it. It was quite true he was overwhelmed with important appointments, whilst she had nothing to do but obey his wishes. She perceived that he insisted on her seeing that, she was awaking to him slowly.

"What does your man Browning say?"

'Meet if thou requirest it all demands,
Laying strength and spirit in thy hands';

and you couldn't do a little thing like keeping an appointment punctually!"

She could not argue with him nor defend herself; she could only be glad he was with her again. She could only try not to realise what his conduct had meant, try to keep her eyes shut a little longer.

The next occasion on which Louis felt it necessary to assert himself was even more trivial. To Louis, being a dressy man, the right waistcoat, the latest thing in trousers, the curve of his hat-brim, the colour of his neckties, and the fit of his boots, were all vital matters. Joan, on the other hand, was careless, almost untidy, about her dress, anyway completely indifferent. So, during the first days of their life at Bushey, Louis had given her a list of fashionable establishments she was to go to for this or that article of attire, and told her which fitter she was to ask for, what details she was to insist upon. And smiling, yet hardly believing that he was serious, but happy that he cared, she had scrupulously carried out his instructions. But, a few days after their reconciliation, the days being cold and damp, she wanted something loose, womanish, comfortable, and bought a dressing-gown in the village shop. He surprised her in it, coming down one day when the brokers and jobbers had combined to upset him, and he wanted the companionship of some one who thought

him perfection. He wanted soothing. She was curled up in the dressing-gown on the sofa, looking small and pale and pathetic; but she sprang up to meet him. A month ago she had said the word "unhappiness" had no meaning for her. If she was indeed still ignorant her face belied her. Her lips were tremulous, there were dark shadows beneath her eyes, the colour had vanished from her cheeks.

"Joan! What do you call that thing?"

"What?—oh!" her voice shook. He bewildered her, in very truth; so joyfully had she sprung to meet him.

"What a fearful thing! Do you mean to tell me you got it at Eugenie's?"

"My—oh, my tea-gown, Louis!"

"Oh, is it a tea-gown? I thought it was a bed-gown. Good Heavens! how can women choose such things? Eugenie ought to be ashamed of herself; it makes you look sallow—and as for figure, well——"

"I did not get it at Eugenie's, Louis; don't be angry, dear. I'll change it."

She moved hurriedly, she was all tremulous, frightened of him or of herself. She could not face another scene.

"Let me go and change it."

But Louis was inexorable; he persisted in arguing on the heinousness of her crime in going anywhere but to Eugenie's, when it was to Eugenie's he had told her to go; he liked argument, he thought he shone in argument. He said the same thing over and over again; that was his idea of debate. Had not he told her not to shop anywhere but at Eugenie's? It meant that she no longer cared to please him. It meant the beginning of the end, the "little rift within the lute."

It was not only that the thing was ugly, common, horrible, it was that she no longer cared to do what he wished! His trick of easy tears, his surface emotionalism, turned the absurd episode into tragedy; and Joan, who had not been used to weep easily, found her eyelids burning too.

He stayed away from her again after that, and she had time enough for the burning tears, which fell when she was alone, to wash away more illusions. She soon knew, after he had begun to sulk with her and stay away from her, and give her room in which to focus him, that three-fourths of him were woman. But when she knew, she loved him still because of her virile brain.

She burnt the dressing-gown; she began to know that never would he hold out the generous olive branch, began to suspect that all the generosity must be hers, but still, as we have seen, she was a good giver, and she went on giving.

Many episodes such as the foregoing marked the passage of the spring. These quarrels and reconciliations were the savour of Louis's days; they were piquant sauces to the staling dish of his desire.

And as for her, had he not warned her that love was pain? But she suffered it gladly, for still she could say to herself, "My lover is like myrrh unto me, all night he has lain between my breasts—my lover is like myrrh unto me."

The time came when Louis, receiving from Pretoria the cable he had arranged for, announcing that Piet de Groot was indeed dead, awoke to the consciousness that as yet he had not mentioned the estate to Joan, nor made any distinct effort to obtain the reversion of it. The cable arrived during one of those, now ever more frequent, occasions when he was punishing her with his absence for some little lapse from the strict code he had made of her duty toward himself. It drove him in haste to Bushey.

If on such occasions she never met him with the penitence he expected, she never met him with sullenness nor resentment. Knowing, in truth, how well she loved him, and, ever unwitting of her supposed love-crimes, she accepted suffering from his hands as she had accepted joy. She had given herself to him; and as yet there was no repentance.

To-day, however, when he came to her with the knowledge of Piet de Groot's death, he found her in a strange mood. He had something to tell her, but she too had something to confide, with him she had to share an unhappy knowledge which nevertheless filled her with a strange, a tremulous delight.

Of what was nearest to them both neither spoke at first. Joan was dreading the usual explanations of his conduct in which Louis revelled. They were reflection-glasses to the pettiness of his soul, and ever she wished to turn her head away, so that she might not see, and ever he forced her back with insistent talk and justification.

To-day she was spared this.

"Don't let us argue to-day, dear," he had said to her. "I am tired, out of spirits. I miss you when you are not with me. What a pity——"

It was so difficult for him, even to-day in this tender mood, to avoid saying what a pity it was that she was not different.

But she said it for him. Their little sitting-room was gay with daffodils, and he had come to her and said he had missed her.

Outside the window was a nesting robin; Joan had been watching it when Louis's brougham drove up, and she showed it to him. She had smiled when he asked her not to argue with him to-day, but he had not seen her whimsical, sad smile; still it lingered on her lips and in her eyes, and, when he kissed her to-day, he kissed her again like a lover. She turned to him so gladly, he put his arm about her and kissed her hair. She was beginning to know him, but still the very breath of him was sweet to her. She laid her head a moment happily against his shoulder; she was anxious to satisfy all his exactions, and would have been all a man could want if only he had dealt with her honestly.

"Have you missed me, little Joan?"

"I always miss you when you stay away from me. What else have I?"

"Give me some tea, will you? then we can talk."

"Are you going to stay?" she asked him, with an eagerness she could not disguise.

"I think I can squeeze in a day. I must; I want rest."

"Do I rest you?" she asked, nestling against him.

"You are sweet to me—sometimes."

"Oh, Louis!"

"Well, we won't talk about it just now. I'll go up and wash."

"And I'll ask Mrs. Forbes to make you some hot, buttered toast."

"Growing into a good housekeeper at last?"

"Into anything you would have me grow," she answered passionately, tears being not far off. And he laughed, well pleased with her mood.

They had tea together, tea and daffodils. She waited upon him, and he had the grace not to tell her that the butter was salt and the tea too little drawn.

"Do you remember our first tea at Musenburg?" she asked him.

"I remember everything."

He drew her down on to his knee. In that position they could talk. She hid her face against his coat. She dared not say "Oh, Louis! why are you not always like this?" In truth, the fear of him, of those reflecting glasses with which speech endowed him, had lain upon her lately like a nightmare. To hide his soul from herself was almost a prayer with her. For, sweet was his breath and soft were his lips, his straying hands magnetic, and when, as now, he held her in his arms, it seemed to her she had nothing, nor words nor self, to tell him how she loved him.

But she could tell him something, now, to-day; whilst he was like this, she could tell him something.

"Louis," she began, and hesitated.

But he also, in his mood, thought he must ask her, tell her, something, and being, in fact, more feminine than she, was the first to speak out.

"Tell me, Joan," he said, caressing her hair; "tell me, I want to know, we have never spoken of it, but I want to know; do you ever, have you ever, thought of your husband since we have been together?"

Joan winced, put her head down quickly against his shoulder, and the answer came muffled and low, "Often—lately."

But for the space of a second, more acute than anything, was the flash of remembrance of a blue sky and a sapphire sea, and a voice low and tender, saying passionately, "Never call him 'husband' again. Never say it, darling, I can't bear it. You have never had a husband; he is blotted out. I can't hear the word from you; you ought not to have said it."

In wonderful moments since then, Louis had breathed "wife" into her ear, but she had, as he had bidden her, dissociated the word "husband" from her memories of Piet de Groot, and the pang of it coming now from Louis was like a knife.

"What have you thought? Have you heard anything? What have you heard?" he asked eagerly, and then, remembering, caressed her. "You must not mind telling me; I suppose you write to him regularly; I knew you would do what was right. We mustn't hurt him."

"Oh, Louis!" the words escaped her, and she caught his hand, and looked up. "You say we must not hurt him. I used to say that too. But I—I have prayed this month past, every night on my knees, every morning, there has been an unspoken prayer in my heart, every hour of the day, that God would—take him. Oh, Louis! Can't you guess? Have you guessed? Is that why you are speaking of him now?"

There was a pause, she felt his hold on her loosen. He caught her meaning in an instant, the recoil was involuntary. Then he remembered himself, and gathered her closely in his arms, and she hid her face in his breast.

"Why did you not tell me before?"

"I haven't seen you for four days—and I was not certain."

"I have had so much to do, I could not come."

"Are you glad? Are you sorry?" she murmured.

"How do you feel about it?"

Her temper was so sweet, her knowledge of him as yet so circumscribed by her love for him, that she forgot for the moment all the drear, hopeless days, all the exhibitions of tyranny and of temper, everything, but that which imagination rather than facts had taught her. She answered him as she would have answered him three short months since.

"Nearer Heaven. It is yours, part of you, something you have given me that nothing can take from me; a gift from God and you, 'the divine gift of God upon love that deserves!' It makes the old Greek letters on the ring you gave me stand out like a flame, against all the darkness there has been—*εἷς αἷς*. And now you lie so close to me, so close within me, that I can even bear your absences, because you have left me something of yourself. Oh, Louis! how I've wanted to tell you! Oh, my love, my love, what a oneness it is, you and I and he!"

"So you've made up your mind it is a 'he,'" he smiled, but his smile was forced. However, she was out of his ken now, and, with her head against his breast, she could not see his thin lips tighten.

"My little Louis," she murmured; "oh yes, I see his eyes about me always, and his little hands stray up to touch me. I feel his sucking lips against my breast. What you have given me! what you have given me!" And a silence fell between them, the while she held the cooing baby in her heart, and Louis held them both.

The man against whose breast she lay, whose lips caressed her, gentle in every movement, and three-fourths of him woman, followed her thoughts and was moved, because the pathos of it rippled over the easily touched surface of him like a wind. But, in his shallow depths, with those telltale lines showing round his mouth, his

inner self was muttering "she wants De Groot to die; she takes it for granted I will marry her. What a cursed nuisance it is that she should be in this condition. How on earth is it to be kept quiet? I suppose she won't try and get rid of it. I had better not tell her just now that De Groot is dead. The farm must wait; if it is hers, it is mine. There is nothing to be gained by telling her just at this moment that De Groot is dead."

And then he was sweet with her, questioned her as a woman might have done, and seemed to justify her.

He could not leave her alone at Bushey for the next few days. She thought it was sweet of him when he told her this. She surely wronged him when she saw him other than he was now. The revolt against her, for what she had told him revolted him, so strangely sensitive are such men, made him more tender to her, but she could not know it was the revolt. She was a woman of moods, emotional; and he seemed to make the spring about them rare, as if the sunshine sparkled in bud and breeze, as if the heavens were open and the scented winds, enveloping the tall tree-tops, were fanned about them by the branches.

The next day they were wandering together round the pond on the Common, when the name of De Groot fell again between them. There were ripples of sunlight on the water, the mother ducks were waddling proudly round their little quacking broods. Almost one heard the growth of things, the rustling undergrowth of the spring, the sap rising in the trees, all the new life of the year quickening in the pulses and flushing in the cheeks.

Joan's spirits, that day, were as light as the hearts of the birds that sang joy about their fledglings. Light, too, shone in her blue eyes, about her lips, her humours played about Louis, she was the old Joan that day, as for twelve hours Louis had been the old Louis. Phrases even formed themselves again for her, and a whole story of home life in England was as an atmosphere in which her spirit moved. She was exultant in her coming motherhood;

shame during that one short hour was as far from her as from wedded mothers. She was in the heart of the growth of the year. As they walked together her shoulder touched his arm, as they stood together to watch the little broods her hand slipped into his.

“Isn't it wonderful to be alive? Isn't it wonderful to give life? Watch the pride of that grey waddler; she carries her head erect and quacks, literally quacks with the pride of the seven downy little things. I wish the drake were with them. I feel a weird desire to see Mother Duck and Father Drake waddle up the aisle of a parish church with the seven daughters following in their wake. This is the time of the year one hears the appeal of the church bells across green fields, and the smell of the ploughed land is everywhere. Are you in a sentimental mood, Louis? I am. I want to go back to the *Arizona*. I want to sit on deck and watch the waves disappearing under the ship, and remember all my dreams. I want baby to know of them. He will have found the Holy Grail; he will come straight to me from Heaven, with the light that never was on sea or land in his shining eyes—eyes like yours, but young, with starry centres—and in his dimpled baby hands will be the torch of Peace. He will be as an angel in the house. Nothing I do or say will vex you again, for all the spirits of Harmony will play about his downy head, and be wafted from his sprouting wings. He will teach us faith, too, Louis; he has taught it me already. What things he will coo to us, lying smiling at us together. Oh! I see such wonders, such glories through his shining eyes. It wasn't through flower-gemmed paths and under leafy trees we were to walk hand in hand to the gates of Heaven; it is through my baby's eyes we shall find them, and beyond will be the kind face of God, smiling on us because we loved each other so.”

And it was Louis Althaus who listened to her confidences! It was the last time she spoke her soul to him. As she spoke and walked by his side, he noted that the

trimness of her figure was gone. Momentarily his mind projected itself into the future, a few months hence, and the picture of her then walking by his side nauseated him. But uppermost in his mind this afternoon was the thought that he must speak to her about her husband and about the farm. He could not make up his mind, could not bring himself, to tell her that De Groot was dead; but he must have her promise, her written promise, to transfer the land to him. He must make himself master of the situation. He had not faced the problem that must arise when Karl should find him in possession; but, that he must be in possession, must be master of what Karl had called the kernel of Geldenrief, he felt in every grasping fibre of him.

And the woman would have a claim upon him, a double claim. He glanced at her out of the corners of his eyes, and he resented her having that claim upon him. Never before had such an incident vexed Louis's amorousness. He felt bitterly that Joan ought not to have done it.

Then, as if she read his thoughts, she too grew silent, but presently said to him abruptly, for she was a woman of moods, and the spring day seemed closing coldly about them, the heavens withdrawing their glory, and the early dusk hiding the young greenness:

"Louis, yesterday you asked me about Piet. I could not answer then. Why did you ask? Have you heard anything?"

"Heard anything? what should I hear?"

"I did not know; you have many correspondents in Cape Town; he was very ill when—we left."

"You would be more likely to hear than I should, if anything had happened to him."

"Oh, no; before I left I wrote to him, and told him what I was going to do. I said 'good-bye' to him for ever."

"What!" He turned on her; he could not believe he had heard correctly. He was stunned, he could not get

out another word; the mine, the farm, Piet's will, were racing about in one little whirlwind in his little mind.

"Yes! He had been giving me an allowance. Looking back now, I know I was a bad wife to him, an unloving wife. I told him so, told him that I was alone to blame, all through. I told him I knew, now I knew, that I had wronged him always."

"How—dared you!"

She looked at him, amazed, startled, not understanding; yet she could see that he was struggling with some emotion.

"I could not do anything else; surely, I could not do anything else?"

"And you concealed it from me?" It was anger, passion, that emotion she could not understand. Oh! there must be another scene between them; her heart turned sick within her.

"Dear, I did not conceal it. It was nothing to speak of between you and me. It was between me and Piet. I said good-bye to him; I told him everything was my fault. Then I came to you—free!"

"Good heavens! how awful, how unpardonable, to give away our secret, *my* secret. And you knew how wrong it was, how wicked, that is why you never told me, never consulted me."

His words came with difficulty, he was choked with anger and dismay; he could have struck her as she walked beside him, something in her gait, a slowness, making evident the misfortune that she had a claim upon him. He would have liked to fell her to the ground; he hated her, he felt he hated her.

"How could I consult you? It was before—before I went on board the *Arizona*. How could I tell you?" she asked bewildered. "You had said to me, 'never mention his name to me;' those were early days with us, and I thought you meant it." This was the first touch, the first word, of bitterness that had passed her lips.

He turned on her furiously:

"Much you care what I meant, or what I wanted. Any excuse is good enough for a woman when she wants to lie to you."

"Louis!" She shrank as if he had struck her, and henceforth was silent.

"Yes, lied; it was nothing else. You've kept this fact, this vital fact, concealed from me all this time. And you pretend you thought I wished it. A lot you care for what I wish. You can't even keep an appointment with me; and look at that dressing-gown you bought. You don't care for me, nor for anything in the world but your cursed writing. I can imagine the sort of tale you pitched about me in your letter. Our life together has been a farce, a fraud, from beginning to end, with that between us."

He had no real words for what angered him. How could he tell her it was the question of her husband's will, her husband's easily altered will, the farm, that so moved him? She was spared that a little while. Meanwhile the dressing-gown, the broken appointments, anything and everything, served as pegs upon which to hang his angry eloquence. He raked up every difference of opinion, every paltry dispute they had ever had, with which to assail her.

"It was my secret as much as yours; you had no right to tell him. I'll never trust a woman again. You are all alike; there is not one of you to be trusted. If ever a man and a woman have a secret the woman blabs it—I've seen it again and again—or she gets into a mess, and out it has to come. What a fool I was to think you were different. You wrote him behind my back. You did not care what became of me, you didn't care if it ruined me!"

"Ruined you!" she echoed, startled.

"What do you think Karl would say if he knew? He had not grit enough to do it himself; but do you think he'd be pleased about it?"

But it was not of what Karl would say that Louis was thinking; it was of what Piet de Groot would do, had

done, of how it would affect himself, of what he should do. Should he tell her? Should he ask her? What of her marriage settlement? What of the farm? The man was beside himself for fear he had spent his hundred and twenty or thirty thousand for nothing, for fear his schemes would come to naught. His self-control was gone; he railed at her like the unspeakable thing that he was. It was the first time his evil temper had been completely articulate. She walked dully beside him, the gathering clouds lowering upon her; she was cold and sick.

"Let us go home," she said, shivering, "let us go home, Louis."

"Home! a nice home to ask a man to go to, and with a woman he can't trust. I wonder how many other people you have written to; perhaps you've pitched Karl a yarn, too. I suppose you told him I led you away——?"

Words could hardly pass the hysteric boundary of his throat. Her slower gait and heavier tread angered him greatly, for, indeed, her heart was stone, and her feet were leaden-weighted, and she could scarcely walk. He had really lost control: at heart a coward, in brain a fool, he saw no way out of the quandary in which he was plunged.

He left her abruptly at the door of the cottage—without a touch of the hand, without a word to palliate what he had said; he went away, and left her to see, as tear-washed eyes see, to what she had bound herself, to whose son she would give birth.

There is nothing in the world so cruel as the cruelty of a man towards a woman for whom his passion is dead. There is no power so absolute as the power for torture that a woman puts into a man's hands when she gives herself wholly to him, with no tie between them but her love and his honour. Joan had kept nothing back, had left nothing between herself and desolation but Louis and Louis's love.

After that hour by the water, and all she had told him, he left her in total, absolute silence, left her to the terror of loneliness and the torture of outraged pride, to sleep-

less nights and days sick with disappointment, full of phantom footsteps and postman's knocks that brought her nothing.

Her brain rejected him, even if her flesh ached for him. The dawning knowledge of the degradation she suffered in loving him was as a worm in her brain, boring its agonising way.

If she could then have written as she then could feel, the scarlet letter might have flamed afresh as a warning beacon to weak women. Her self-respect was tortured; in her own eyes she was defiled.

CHAPTER TEN

LOUIS'S passions were short-lived, feeble things, his sullen resentments were more lasting. He fed and nurtured his grievances until they grew fat and bloated, vampire shapes that filled the air and stank, then his conscience grew ill through them and died. The time would come when the strong wind of expediency would arise and blow them temporarily away; but, in the meantime, Joan was left alone. The woman in the cottage at Bushey sat by herself and watched the sky, dreary now and grey, and watched the rain beating down the buds, making little rivulets down the casement window, soaking through the ill-fitting joints, puddling on the sill. She sat alone, and thought and thought, and her body yearned for her lover, while her brain saw him clearly, not quite clearly though, for, as yet, she knew little of what he wanted of her, and nothing of the farm. But what she saw of him in that painful brain made her flesh a torture-chamber to her, wherein she lived with screws on her temples and racks on her limbs, and awaited his coming without hope of delivery thereby.

For, of course, he would come again, this Louis, so beautiful, with the sensuous appeal against which she had no resistance, with the mean shrunken soul that, perhaps, was moving against her heart within that babe through whose eyes she was to have seen straight up to the gates of Heaven!

A month passed, and she sat by the cottage window and watched and watched, but never came her lover,—a whole empty month. She lived through it, but it killed her strength, almost her courage.

Many things happened to Louis Althaus in that month.

To her nothing happened. Nothing came to the woman but pain, always more pain for Joan, the fallen, carrying her unborn bastard, loving her lover, and knowing him abominable, mean, yet longing for the sound of his voice, the touch of his hand, his mere presence. Brain and body fought over him, and the brain never won.

Louis, in those luxurious rooms in Piccadilly, decided, when his temper had cooled, on cabling to his confidant in Johannesburg to get particulars of De Groot's death and De Groot's will. It would be three weeks before details could come to hand. Meanwhile, Joan must wait—no matter what she said or wrote—Joan must await the coming of that news for his forgiveness. His forgiveness, it seemed to him, would be a great thing even then. He resented having been forced into plain speaking, he resented being still without definite possession of the farm, he resented Joan giving him any trouble; that is how he worded it to himself, "giving him any trouble." Then he calculated his chances afresh. De Groot had been ill when he got his wife's letter. Had not Karl said his illness was general paralysis, locomotor ataxia? Could a man suffering from locomotor ataxia alter his will? Louis's brilliant perpetual health, Louis had a wonderful physique, was permitted to suffer a temporary eclipse while he sent for a doctor and cross-examined him as to the mental effects of locomotor.

"Nervous fellows they are, those South African millionaires," said the fashionable physician, talking to a colleague that evening; "the life they lead plays the very deuce with them. I was with a fellow just now, as healthy a man as I ever examined, a man of about thirty. He had got it into his head that he was a general paralytic—what do you think of that?—a general paralytic. There was not a symptom of locomotor he did not think he had, or was going to have. And he questioned me and cross-questioned me about his mental capacity, whether I would certify him as fit to make a will, how long after the disease made its appearance he would be fit to make a will,

and I don't know what besides. He was luxuriating in it. I assure you the fellow was as well as I—better, for he's got fifteen years the pull of me—and he's looking forward to mental decay and physical deterioration as if it was a question of to-morrow. Nerves! why, they're made of 'em."

That is how medical history is made!

And now it was May. Parliament had reassembled, Stephen Hayward had returned to town, and Karl's letters were insistent that representations should be made at home as to what they were going through, what the Uitlanders were being made to bear in the Transvaal. The position had altered in every way for the worse, Karl wrote, since Louis had left South Africa.

"Make Stephen Hayward ask a question in the House about the Van Voeren case; I send you the report. Mrs. Simpson—you remember Mrs. Simpson, the wife of the man whom we picked out as a test case in the commando question—well, she found a Boer policeman in her house with one of her Kaffir girls, and ordered him out. *He kicked her to death.* Don't make any mistake about it. I've got it all down, black on white, from an eye-witness. The man was convicted and sentenced to death; but the new law Kruger made came in, and they respited him. Now he's let off with four months' imprisonment! Rub that in, will you? And it's only because Mrs. Simpson was an Englishwoman, and her husband had rather gone to prison than on commando.

"I wish you could come across Joan de Groot; she might work it up into something. It's just the stuff for the Nonconformists, who won't move in the matter of these swindling concessions and the strangling of the gold industry. There will be a lot of good blood shed if nothing is done at home. The National Union means business. I shall have to pay Eloff, the old man's nephew, something like a hundred thousand pounds, on one excuse or another, before I can even get the Bank properly started."

In London, already in May, Parliament had re-assem-

bled under the guidance of the tottering Liberal Government of 1895, and the doors of Society were flung open. Louis's "open sesame" was that big house now dominating London, as it rose broad and solid before the Park, a house, generous wide and high, of simple elevation, of fine taste, a house marking an epoch in architecture, as well as an epoch in finance. And it was the boom time in South African mines; fortunes were made in a day, in an hour. The South African Bubble, prismatic and beautiful and alluring, rose before the gaping mouths and avid eyes of the heirs and heiresses of impoverished English acres. Of political affairs in South Africa, of the Uitlanders' grievances, of the National Union, of the state of public feeling, no one in London cared—and Louis cared less. What did politics matter while the mines vomited the red gold into his and Karl's pockets? "Live and let live" was his motto, he said when he was asked, personally he had nothing to grumble about.

Constantia Hayward and her Crusade were mocked and jeered at and derided this particular season. She and her niece could go nowhere without meeting men with unpronounceable names, with impenetrable accents, masquerading now as Germans, now as Dutchmen, yellow men with bitten nails, and Mongol cheek-bones, men with whisky concessions, rich and fat with the dregs and refuse from the black man's drunken orgies, men with bald heads, black eyes, vulture noses, men, aye, and women too, whom no country owned, and no race claimed, the slime, the scum of nations. They blew the bubble of the South African mines with their fetid breath until it hung, gold-hued and glittering, high over ruined homes and bankrupt castles.

Constantia, with Aline in her wake, passed scornfully through the serried ranks of the gold-bringers and the gold-seekers.

In these ranks there were women who had been of the Cape Town pavement, but were now dwelling on the inside of the doors of Piccadilly, instead of loitering before

them; women, driving through Bond Street, in emblazoned carriages, with feathers in their fashionable bonnets, diamonds and pearls round their dishonoured necks, wearing their borrowed plumage of changed names; but harpies and harlots nevertheless, with hard eyes and painted smiles.

Among such men and women as these, Louis Althaus was a king. He had every external grace, an air slightly foreign, but distinguished, a fine figure, melancholy eyes. The sleek hair had worn a little further from the forehead than when he was here before, and there were a few lines round the eyes. But all the Althaus stocks were higher.

Louis had a certain limited social tact or instinct; the little burr or roll of the "r's" went well with the imperial, with the manner, a little too polite, perhaps, towards the men, a thought familiar, confidential, but infinitely charming, they said, towards the women. Other South Africans were courted for their wealth, for what they gave, or presaged, for tips or entertainments, but Louis, handsome Louis Althaus, gradually was invited to intimate dinners, to theatre parties, to river excursions and race meetings, because the women liked him.

And the man had a vanity. Joan in her suburban cottage, who had given him everything she had, and now was bankrupt of allurements, had rivals among the most fashionable and most beautiful hostesses in London. Louis's charm, Louis's appeal, was to the senses, and it is in the senses that all these society women live.

He relegated Joan to the background of his mind during the three weeks that he waited for news from Pretoria. He had recovered from the ungovernable passion into which the news of her confession to her husband had flung him, though he had not forgiven her. He prided himself on never forgiving. But, once his temper had grown calm and his thoughts about her coherent, he waited with certainty for the day when she would write and implore him to return to her. Then he would per-

haps play Sultan, then he would perchance stretch out the sceptre. Everything now depended on the news from South Africa, not the political news, old Karl was making a ridiculous fuss about that, for everything would go on as everything had always gone on, and the firm would always grow richer. He was acting on instructions, buying and forwarding guns and ammunition, but he treated the matter lightly, notwithstanding. He did not for a moment seriously believe in revolution.

The news that he was waiting for was news about De Groot's will, and the farm that held the deep of the Geldenrief. Joan, without the farm, had ceased, for the moment, to be desirable; besides she was always there; there was no need for hurry about her.

Louis was not without rich food for that social vanity of his; and the existence of this made Joan's position precarious. For, wonder of wonders! one of his conquests was the Lady Violet Alncaster, daughter of the fifteenth Duke, and cousin to Aline Hayward, Stephen's daughter. This conquest, this strange victory, absorbed Louis Althaus for the first fortnight of the time that Joan was waiting and watching by the window. It was Stephen, himself, who had introduced them, for Stephen had not forgotten his obligations to Karl. He had called on Louis in Piccadilly, he had invited him to dinner at the Club, he had even strolled in with him to the Opera, and taken him up to his uncle's box.

Lady Violet, getting on now for seven-and-twenty, and vixenish, saw that he was a very handsome man, graceful too, with eyes eloquent of admiration as they fell upon her meagre charms. Louis's eyes were always eloquent in their unfathomable depths. "It was indeed a privilege," he murmured over her hand. And Lady Violet, sharpened through the social mill, knew of the atmosphere of millions in which he was supposed to move, knew too that her betting-book could not pay her milliner's bills, and that her brother was the sponge who soaked up the family resources.

"I am delighted to meet you," she answered. "You are the first millionaire I have come across. How does it feel to be rich? The Alncasters have always been poor."

"Rich in many things," he said, speaking low.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," she answered carelessly, thinking he meant in honours, in history; but soon he let her know that it was the beauty of their daughters he had meant. This type of man has only one method with women. Violet had never been a beauty. Even the papers on her *début* had forgotten to call her "the lovely daughter of the Duke of Alncaster." Her angularities, her impossible shoulders, flat chest, high cheek-bones, and thin nose, had made it obvious that it must be as a wit, and not as a beauty, she must attract attention. That evening at the Opera, however, when Louis was introduced into the box and looked at her with longing eyes, she felt complacently that, perhaps, after all there was something beautiful in her aristocratic air. While they listened to Melba singing, she felt Louis's eyes full upon her in the sentimental passages; when they left the house Louis attended her to her carriage. Bareheaded he stood by the window and gazed upon her until the coachman whipped up the horses. For the first time in her aristocratic life Violet felt she was the heroine of a romance.

Louis followed up his glances with orchids. He had a philosophy about women. "They are all 'on the take,'" summed it up. "Start with compliments, get to flowers, sweets, then they reluctantly accept bonnets, and you're there; after that comes jewellery, but it always ends up with money, and the cheaper you get off, the cleverer you prove yourself."

This man Lady Violet Alncaster permitted to take her to tea at Lady Claridge's garden-party. His admiration amused her. She thanked him for the orchids. He said the only pleasure he had had since that night at the Opera was selecting them. The refreshment tent had seemed quite attractive after that, and she remained with him, following the tea with an ice. When they strolled off to-

gether to listen to the music, he had already asked her who dressed her, and complimented her on her charming figure.

The attitude he adopted was one of despairing admiration; he had found it almost invariably efficacious with these high-born ladies. In their anxiety to persuade him that nothing was hopeless, that, great and beautiful as they were, they were still to be won by boldness, they soon reversed the tables and made love to him. Having seen nothing he desired to gain, his modesty remained fascinatingly prominent. But, socially at least, he had netted nothing so big as Lady Violet, nothing nearly so important. The stage in which Lady Violet began to make love to him, when he was always retreating, and she was always advancing, commenced within a week of their first acquaintanceship. Louis's hall-table in Piccadilly was littered with cards, for it was soon understood that where Louis Althaus went Lady Violet Alncaster liked to be also. Her friends were amused, for this sort of folly was not what they had expected of her, or to which she had accustomed them, and they watched the entertainment she provided with open encouragement.

Louis was intensely proud of himself. His moustache and his imperial received more caressing attention than ever before. His mirror was more assiduously cultivated, and his satisfaction with it more pronounced. Joan's chances looked poor, for Louis had begun to reason with himself as to what he owed her, as to what he risked by leaving her. And, as the days went by and she did not write and beg for forgiveness, he argued that she was committing a love-crime, that she was obstinate, that she was behaving abominably to him, that she deserved to be punished for what she had done. The way she was behaving was not his idea of love; Louis was great on love's duties, and there was nothing he would not exact. He argued with himself about Joan, and there was only one side to the argument. She *ought* to write to him, to be abject, and own she was wrong to have written to her husband behind

his back. How dare she sulk with him? How dare she be proud with him? She was—but Louis's thoughts are unwriteable. The girl, she was nothing more than a girl when she had come to him, had lain in his arms and given herself to him because he would have no less; and the word that rose in his mind when he convinced himself that she ought to be humble with him cannot be written.

Joan's chances looked poor, as Violet showed ever more and more plainly that he need not be over-modest in the wooing of her. Only Louis's taste was on Joan's side, for he had taste; and all of it had been with Joan. She was a woman to any man's taste, with her delicate graces, the poetry of her soul, the flashes of her intelligence, her supple tenderesses. More and more she came back to his mind as the days went on, mornings in the Row, luncheons in fine houses, with softly moving servants, tables bedecked with flowers and old silver, all the doors of Mayfair open to the son of that Polish adventurer and the gutter-girl from Whitechapel. His cultivated taste was with Joan. He saw Lady Violet as she was, a shrewish thing, beginning to turn sour; he revolted from her. Her title, her position, moved him, though his vanity almost lifted him above them; that they attracted him to her, even superficially, was because, feline that she was, she purred over him, and he liked being purred over.

Karl, over in Johannesburg, heard of Louis's social success. It was Karl's way to hear of everything. He was proud of the position the handsome fellow had achieved; he took it for granted that Louis was working for him, was carrying out his instructions, was impressing society, that part of it which was influential, with the knowledge of the crying needs of South Africa. He took care that nothing was wanted, pecuniarily, for Louis's social campaign. He wrote to him that he knew they could do nothing immediately, but that there would be a General Election in the autumn, though it might come before, any day, in fact; there would then be a redistri-

bution of seats and of power, the Unionists would rake the country and Stephen Hayward would be in the Cabinet. Stephen Hayward, he insisted, must be hand and glove with them, with the National Union. Karl wrote also of Sir Henry Loch's visit, and of all they had hoped it portended, and of the disappointment.

Louis had hardly time to read the letters, dull letters, they were to him, having little in them about money. Karl had tumbled accidentally, as it were, into Imperialism, had grown into intimacy with the Great Imperialist, and found at last a great aim for his great heart and understanding. He was learning love for his country, now that out there it seemed weak, despised, despicable. Karl thought he loved money, money only, but to his surprise now, at the root of his heart, pulling at it, he found England. And he wrote passionate letters home to Louis, who barely had time to read them, who pursued Society, Lady Violet, and the gratification of his vanity, who lived luxuriously, and was learning to drive a four-in-hand.

Only one thing hurt Louis; it had merely amused Karl, when Karl was in London, but it hurt Louis. That was the Hayward attitude. Anywhere, everywhere almost, that Lady Violet Alncaster went, Louis could go, but the open sesame had no effect on the Hayward door, and this annoyed, worried, and irritated him. He could not bear that he should be barred anywhere. It fretted a little of the varnish off him, and made him show a glimpse of the material of which he was composed.

"I should like to be introduced to your sister," he said once to Stephen. "You don't entertain at all, I'm told? Can't you persuade her to let me drive her down to Ranelagh one day? I've got a coach."

Stephen, who was busy with the prospect of a General Election, was slightly amused. But Karl and he between them had accepted Constantia's attitude as a joke, and he willingly included Louis in the jest.

"Not a chance, my dear fellow; she is as firm as a rock about it. The kingdom of Heaven—half-a-dozen dull

houses where nobody wants to go—are to be shut to the *nouveaux riches*.”

“I might persuade her.”

Stephen laughed. “Not you; I’ve tried it myself. But, after all, *cui bono*? Do you want to go to the Templegroves or to the Arlingfords? Because if you do, you must have strange tastes. No, my dear fellow, leave it alone. My sister has little to amuse herself with now but her exclusiveness, and her crusade against outsiders, and I like her to be amused. Why, I beat up recruits for her, and strongly persuade all the dullest hostesses in London to be guided by Constantia, and to close their doors to the *nouveaux riches*. They wouldn’t go there in any case, you know, so, when my hint is carried out, nobody is hurt, and my sister is pleased. Tell me now, what news do you get from the Cape? What is it you are all agitating for? Can’t you make millions fast enough?”

Stephen spoke with interest. Again he was entertaining Louis at the Club. He did not quite like the fellow, and this was only the second time he had been alone with him, but Stephen was a politician, and South African affairs had always interested him; he too had had letters from Karl.

“I suppose you’ve heard from my brother. Karl is a bit of a faddist, you know. Kruger has trodden on his toes in some way or another, and, like a fool, Karl has joined the National Union. I told him what a fool he was to do it. Now nothing will satisfy him but that the English Government should back him up.”

“What is the National Union?”

“Oh! a few discontented journalists and lawyers.”

He sketched their aims; Louis was as ill-informed as he was traitorous. Yet Stephen listened to him with interest, and was led by him. Karl had written: “My brother will give you details.” All that Louis told him, however, made light of the crisis, ignored the seriousness of the situation, described the conduct of the Boer Police as on a par with that of the Metropolitan Brigade,

and left Stephen Hayward under the impression that the members of the National Union were the Hooligans against whom they made war.

In fairness to Louis Althaus, it must be admitted that this was not wilful misrepresentation. Nothing that was not personal to himself interested him. He spoke as he felt, as he thought. Karl was a great man at finance, but why the deuce need he meddle with politics? Stephen could not know that Karl's adopted brother was so totally at variance with Karl's own feelings and opinions. He concluded that the letter he had received—very temperately had Karl written to Stephen—was an exaggerated version of public feeling, that Karl's object in writing it was merely to give him, Stephen, and his party, a pretext for attacking the Government. But they had other weapons.

He hoped Louis would give him the pleasure of his company another evening at the Club. He apologised for having to go to the House, he asked Louis if he would care to accompany him; he was sure of a seat in the gallery for distinguished strangers. Louis regretted his inability to go, pleading another engagement. Louis was not fond of being an onlooker, and, listening to a debate, however lively, and on whatever topic, was not his way of amusing himself. He preferred to go on to Castlemaine House, where there was a reception, and where he would meet Lady Violet. He must ask Violet about Constantia Hayward and about the Crusade.

Castlemaine House, where once Johnson had dined, where often Sir Joshua Reynolds had been entertained, where Topham Beauclerc had made love to the outraged wife of Sir Richard Vane, and George III. had commented on the extravagances of the table, was now the town abode of a wealthy brewer. Doves circled above its flat roof, and made strange noises that broke in upon the music. Portraits of brewing worthies and their ancestors filled the frames made for Stuart kings; modern imitations of Chippendale's designs took the place of

Jacobean furniture. In the library, whither Violet led Louis after the dance, there was hardly room for historical associations; it was overfilled with curtains and upholstery, and unused modern books in impossible modern bindings.

"Are you going to the fancy-dress ball at Templegrove House?" Louis asked Violet.

"I don't care about it. I suppose I shall have to go."

"I don't like your going," he said softly. "I don't like your going anywhere where I cannot be with you."

"Oh! if it comes to that," she said, and hesitated.

"I know. The Duchess is one of Miss Hayward's supporters; she will not invite any but aristocrats," he answered with a short laugh. "She is your aunt, isn't she?"

"Yes. You would like to go?"

"I like to go wherever you go."

The tip of her nose and the lobes of her ears grew pink; it was the famous Alncaster blush.

"I think—I think I could get a card for you."

"Only if you would like me to be there."

"What would you go as?"

"I should first ask you your costume."

"Oh," she said lightly, "Xantippe has been suggested."

"Not if I went. I should ask you to go as Beatrice."

"To your Benedict?" The idea was not displeasing.

"To my Benedict."

"For one night only?" She was coquettish.

"That would be as you might decide."

It would be a great feather in Louis's cap if he could get an invitation to the famous fancy-dress ball at the Duchess of Templegrove's.

The Duchess of Templegrove was almost the only serious ally Constantia had secured; and the position of the Duchess was exceptional. After half a century of blue-blooded poverty, twenty odd years of a more than suspected marital infidelity, she had been released by Provi-

dence from her obligation, and had taken salvation at the altar from the hands of her ducal lover. Because the Duchess of Templegrove had so completely forgotten that impecunious shifty countess, whose identity lay hidden amongst her strawberry leaves, she had decided to hold her court in that very holy of holies where reigned the chaste Constantia; or, perhaps, it was because she had not forgotten. And Constantia, whose social conscience permitted no evil thought of a lady whom her sovereign had always received, brushed aside the talk that buzzed about this strange reputation, and welcomed her with outstretched hands.

But, whereas Constantia's aim was set on the blood boundary, Society roped in, and secured for the nobly born and excellently bred only, the Duchess's extreme anxiety was for the chaste, the untarnished, those who wore their woman's crown of virtuous life shining purely on their brows.

Therefore, when Lady Violet, who was her niece as well as Constantia, asked her for a card for the famous fancy-dress ball that was to mark the re-opening of Templegrove House, too long closed during the faithful bachelorhood of the Duke, she did not stop to ask, as Constantia might have done, for the pedigree of the gentleman in whose name it was to be made out. Perhaps, had she done so, Louis would still have had his card; for, if the Duchess of Templegrove feared anything, it was Lady Violet's sharp tongue, and, if the Duchess hoped for anything, more than her marriage had given her, it was that Violet's ancestry should solidify the title, and Violet's influence should redeem the character, the misspent youth, of the vicious son who bore her first husband's name.

Lady Violet got the invitation for Louis Althaus without any difficulty.

Nothing was impossible, nothing was even difficult, for him, he thought exultantly when the coveted pasteboard was in his hand. The same post—the very same post that brought it—brought his South African mail. And

it told him that not only was Piet de Groot dead, but his will was unaltered. The farm, then, was his, Louis's, the farm that Karl had wanted. Or, at least, if it was not his, it was Joan's, which came to the same thing. He was exultant in his prospects, in his ability; everything, it seemed to him, he could do—everything.

He must see Joan to-morrow, meanwhile——

CHAPTER ELEVEN

TEMPLEGROVE HOUSE was the centre of London on the night of the ball; it took a whole posse of policemen and a couple of men on horseback to keep back the crowd of sightseers. Royalty was expected; not only the Prince, but the Princess had promised to appear in costume. Crushing up that historical staircase, illumined in a rare blaze of light, came the fantastic crowd. Exquisite faces of women under quaint headgear, under jewelled crowns, hung with strange symbols in gold and gems, smiled with the joy of the masque, laughed in the triumph of their beautiful hour. Amongst them Beatrice—viperous, vixenish, bored—looked with sharp eyes, with pale face, incongruous, for the tardy Benedict.

But, indeed, her Benedict had not tarried. An hour earlier, almost among the first arrivals, Louis, brave in slashed velvet, in pointed shoes, in doublet and hose, carrying his hat gracefully, as he bore his figure, a Benedict without world-weariness, had mounted those same flower-decked stairs, and had found, facing him, in sudden surprise, an unexpected Beatrice, passing fair, and more than passing tall.

Stephen, with a side thought of poor Constantia locked up in Grosvenor Street with the grim demon of influenza, gravely presented his daughter. Aline, always cold, never particularly gracious, acknowledged the introduction as Constantia would have had her do, with the slightest possible inclination of the head, and an indifferent glance that did not linger.

Aline was in a dress of white brocade, richly embroidered in gold, with a crimson velvet overdress or tunic, lined and trimmed with ermine; the jewelled stomacher

was met by the rows of pearls that hung around her throat, her quaint Venetian cap with the white veil flowing from beneath it like a mantilla, was also thickly sewn with pearls. She was very fair that evening, and the young face, vacant, expressionless, cold, with chiselled features, caught Louis's eye. Some wondering thought or remembrance, as Stephen said, "My daughter," lay at the back of his mind. Her eyes were almost on a level with his own, he questioned them, and the indifferent glance transfixed his own definitely.

"Your costumes go well together," said Stephen mischievously. "Beatrice and Benedict, are they not?" Stephen had a very school-boy humour at times, and, although he did not like Louis Althaus, he thought it would do Aline no harm to talk with him for a few minutes, and it would be something to tease Con about when she got well. It would serve to show her she must not relegate the duties of chaperon to him.

"I am representing an Italian lady of the thirteenth century, not Beatrice," Aline answered indifferently, as if she were saying a lesson.

"Dante's 'Beatrice,' perhaps," said Louis, in that soft voice of his, and then, lower still, the Beatrice with the "sweetest eyes were ever seen." When those eyes turned on him he held them until they wandered. No woman should look upon him indifferently. "Sweetest eyes were ever seen," he repeated; "poor Beatrice—she had suffered *too*," he murmured, as the Marquis, in crusader costume, claimed Stephen's ear. For now he began to remember.

"This gay scene, this laughing crowd is incongruous to you, is it not? May I have a dance?"

Aline, with her secret locked in her breast, shut in by her reserve, and silent, looked up, suddenly startled, and then away again. He meant nothing, he could mean nothing—and yet. She looked hesitatingly at her father; the Under-Secretary of State was talking eagerly. Louis went on murmuring in his low tones, and now, at least,

he had the satisfaction of knowing that he had secured her attention.

“Looking around us at a Catherine, an Imogen, a Mary of Scotland—all these beautiful modern women impersonating all those martyrs of sex—is it not odd to think that, perhaps, locked in the breasts of many of them are stories, modern romances, some, maybe, sadder, stranger, at least, than the old ones?”

“Who was Catherine? Why do you ask me?” The questions rose involuntarily to her pale lips. He offered her his arm.

“They are forming for the minuet—allow me?”

With a hesitating look at Stephen, who was too absorbed to notice it, she went agitatedly with Louis.

The girl was of that unequalled type, completely English, fair of complexion, with golden-brown hair, eyes that had been blue in childhood, but were dark now, under long lashes, and mouth that could hold a secret though it let out one, with its short, upper lip, and full lower one, both softly scarlet. Louis Althaus's heart did not beat faster as she laid her hand on his arm, but he racked his brain to remember. Here, on his arm, by his side, was something Karl had told him, something that might be necessary, useful, vital to them. Some secret was enclosed in that cold, high-bred figure, in that fair head with its quaint head-dress of velvet and pearls. It was his luck, he felt exultantly that it was his luck, to have been introduced to her, that this was another of Karl's cards on the table for him to play with. Whether he was to be in partnership with, or antagonistic to, his brother, it was as well to have the trumps in his own hand. He wished he could remember exactly what Karl had told him about this girl. Never mind, she should tell him herself. He looked at her as he led her through the strange company. He must make her tell him herself; he had no doubt of success. When had he failed with a woman? And this was a charming vestal. She looked like a Madonna, surely he remembered she had been a

naughty Madonna, yet the lamp that lit the holy of holies was in her hand. She should guide him where he chose; nobody should shut their doors against Louis Althaus, there was no reason in it. He really thought there was no reason why any one should shut doors against him. They watched the minuet together, her hand resting lightly on his coat-sleeve.

"Why did you ask me about these women all having stories?" she asked him abruptly. She had not been watching, she had only been trying to think.

How easy women are! His thin lips smiled under his moustache; he drew his arm closer to his side, as if he would have pressed her hand against it.

"Do you think they have?"

"I don't know; why should I know?"

"How well you women keep your secrets!"

"What secrets? I haven't got any secrets," she stammered; then she drew herself up, cloaked herself in her coldness, and copied Constantia's voice. "Will you take me back to my father, please?"

"Don't ask me to take you back to your father. I want to know something; I want you to tell me something. Are you frightened of me? Do you want me to go away because I know you have—have had a secret?"

The colour flushed painfully in her cheek, went down again, and left it pale.

"I don't know—I don't know what you mean." She was trembling, and all the maturity had gone from her face and expression, which were piteous now and child-like.

He drew her a little out of the crowd.

"I am very sorry, very sorry." The little burr on his "r's" softened all the sentence, and his voice was full of tender solicitude. "I have distressed, upset you. You are faint; the heat, too—lean on my arm; the conservatory is just at the side. We can sit down there and talk. You shall not be sorry, I promise you shall not be sorry that I know."

It was a child's face she turned on him, not a woman's—a frightened child's; he was exultant at the success of his move.

"Good heavens! if I could only remember what it was Karl told me," was in his mind, as he piloted her through the crowd to where a green forest of palms made dusk and solitude about them; that Karl had told him nothing made the reminiscence difficult!

"Who—who told you?" She clutched at his hand; she was nothing but a distressed child. He held her hand and soothed her.

"What does it matter who told me? What does it matter how I know? Don't look like that. Sit down here by me. Shall I get you a glass of water?"

"No, no, stay with me, tell me." She was almost in tears. He patted her hand, caressed her, and soothed her with voice and touch, and her hand clung to his.

"For two years, two whole years, nobody has spoken to me about it. He is dead, you know; you are not going to tell me he isn't dead! I can't bear it—I won't bear it—I won't go back to him—he has sent you?"

"Nobody has sent me."

"What does he want—what must I do?" She wrung her hands. "Oh! I am frightened; take me back to my father. I want to go home, I want to be with Aunt Con."

Louis was amazed. The cold and stately Beatrice was like a baby crying before it was hurt. He understood women, but children were strange to him.

"Who told you? Oh! who told you? Aunt Con told me nobody knew, or would ever know."

"Nobody has told me; don't be silly. Nobody is going to hurt you. I know everything, but I'm not going to do you any harm. Only you must do as I tell you."

"I always do what people tell me," she answered forlornly.

In another five minutes he had begun to understand—to understand what no one in the world about her understood, what even Constantia shut away from her knowl-

edge, and Stephen had no time more than to suspect. Locked up in speechlessness, under that conventional mask in which they had encased her, was only the outraged child whose mental growth had stopped. Fair and stately as she looked, with that young patrician air and proud demeanour, she was empty of spontaneity, or conscious volition, *she always did what she was told*; that was the pathetic keynote of her attenuated will.

Louis's wonderful eyes got behind the mask. At first she shivered and cried in the nakedness of her soul before him, the poor conventional garments slipped so easily from her trembling fingers. But soon there was some fearful pleasure in it; his words were so gentle. Then, in the green solitude of the palms he was kind to her. He had even kissed her, they were not a kissing family, the Haywards, she clung to him and kissed him in return, and promised thenceforth she would do only what he told her. It did not seem worth Louis's while to investigate very closely the nature of the secret she held. There is only one secret between a girl and a man, Louis thought.

"You are happier now, dear?" he asked her gently, "now that you have some one you can talk to about it." Indeed she felt warmer, happier, but she wanted him to stay with her, to kiss her again. With tact he garmented her soul for her again, and when he led her forth she was clothed conventionally as usual, with her head erect and her lips almost firm.

He led her back to her father, then he sought a moment's solitude in the crowd. His thoughts were wandering, his success exhilarated him. He appeared to have unlimited knowledge, power, strength; his vanity fed voluptuously on his powers. He did not arrange his thoughts sequently. But, it seemed to him, he had all that Karl had wanted—Joan de Groot, a lever with Stephen Hayward, the Geldenrief, everything. He had never doubted his own cleverness, now he was half intoxicated by it. He thought kindly of Mrs. Rex, of Joan, of all women. Only of Lady Violet Alncaster, to whom he

owed his presence in this throng of princes and nobles, he never thought at all!

Lady Violet was not used to being forgotten, ignored. She had sought him everywhere; at last she had seen him emerge from the conservatory with Aline.

"How now, my Lord Benedict, hast been with Hero?" she said, stopping before him and addressing him.

Louis bowed low before her.

"Will your Grace command me any service to the world's end?" He had studied his part, learnt portions of it by heart, to impress the forgotten sender of the ticket.

"I have been looking for you everywhere," he went on glibly.

"In the conservatory with Aline Hayward?" she retorted shrewishly.

"Oh God! here is a dish I love not. I cannot endure my Lady Tongue." Lady Violet flushed furiously.

"I beg your pardon, the quotation came too trippingly. Forgive me. Mr. Hayward left me with his daughter, and she was faint, unwell; I remained with her until now."

"A brilliant companion for you!"

"Is she? I was not interested."

She believed him, but his defection had chilled her feeling for him. In truth, it was flattered vanity rather than feeling. Lord Dolly had called Louis a venerated cad in a gilded frame; John, her cousin, had said he was no more like a gentleman than an oleograph was like an oil-painting. Everybody had been surprised at seeing him here, and many had commented upon it. Violet felt that she must have fought well for him to have got him an invitation. That he was not humble at her feet had exasperated her. Many things had combined to put her in a quarrelsome mood. She had danced the minuet with Lord John, but John had asked where was Aline; and Lord Legoux, of whose future connection with herself, notwithstanding her flirtation with Louis, she had little

doubt, had stumbled into the house early in the evening in a state that necessitated his sequestration for repairs. John had told her this, the self-satisfied and remarkable Lord John, who, as the family had recently decided, was to marry poor Angela's daughter.

Now that she had found Louis, somehow or other, whether it was because of what people had said, or of what she herself had noted, or whether it was owing to that unlucky quotation, she too found him oleographic, she discovered suddenly that his charm had gone from him. As a matter of fact, he was not quite himself, he was rather excited and more natural, more the genuine Louis, than usual. He was careless with her, as Louis was apt to be careless with what he thought he had secured.

Of course he bent his graceful head, and looked unutterable things, and paid her compliments, but his thoughts were not with her. These two had not begun where they had left off. Very soon they ceased even pretending; Louis forgot his rôle, wandered a little, talked of the people, the costumes, the scene, generalities. Lady Violet was bored by him. Yet nobody came up to separate them, for Louis had few acquaintances there, and Lady Violet few friends anywhere. So they were left to each other. This embittered her, and none of her acquaintances, and few of her relations, escaped the vitriol lap of her tongue. Scandal was a poor feast, but it was better than going away empty; and Louis blundered, perhaps because it was inevitable he should blunder sometimes, perhaps only because his thoughts were elsewhere, and his tact failed him.

There are many things that all men know, and no gentlemen say. Louis Althaus said them.

"Lady Coromandel as a Carmelite nun!" ejaculated Violet, as they stood to review the pageant. "It only wants Lord Killrowen as monk to make the picture perfect."

"Is that so? I thought I saw them together the other

day, in a strange part of the world too." He had been with Joan; poor little Joan, he found himself thinking of her constantly to-night, notwithstanding how badly she had behaved to him. "Supping together in a private room in an obscure restaurant. I met them coming down the stairs. Pretty risky, wasn't it?"

Lady Violet rather curdled up at that. It is one thing to talk scandal about your friends, quite another to have details thrust under your nose. It made her quiet, and her fancy, it was never anything more, for Louis Althaus, became suddenly something of which she was now ashamed. Nevertheless she went on with her flippant talk.

"Wonderful diamonds Kitty Stephens is wearing."

"Yes, I heard some fellows talking about them at the Club the other night. Bischopschwein is a millionaire."

"Oh, there is nothing in that," she said hastily.

"Well, perhaps not, but personally, although I do believe in platonic love, I don't believe in platonic jewellery. The Duchess now," as their hostess came within their view, "had the discretion to be poor, and even in debt, until her husband died."

Then Lady Violet thought Lord Algy had been right; the man was a cad, and she never wanted to see him again. It was unfortunate that Louis saw no change in her sentiment towards him, and put down to pique or jealousy her abrupt dismissal. For he might, it is possible, though not probable, that even then he might have repaired his blunders, or smoothed or glossed over their effect. But he noticed nothing except that she had been annoyed at his inattention; which was unfortunate, for there came a time when her distaste for him precipitated a crisis.

His mental attitude changed when he was again with Aline. Even whilst he had been talking with Violet his thoughts had been occupied with Aline, wondering how he should contrive to set her at ease with him, establish something in the nature of confidential relations. The

difficulties in his way, difficulties he in no way underrated, made him eager for success. The girl was half frightened of him; he saw that when he claimed her for supper from her surprised cousin, the heavy sporting son of the Marquis.

"You're surely not goin' to supper with that fellow?" said Lord John, and hurriedly she answered that she was.

"Why, what will Constantia say?"

"I don't know," the tone was dejected; Aline's lips, usually so tightly closed, were tremulous, her eyes had more expression in them than usual, and it seemed to John that she was unhappy over her supper engagement. He had no time for more, because Louis, hat in hand and persistent, was bowing before them. Aline withdrew her hand from Lord John's arm and walked off with the charming Benedict.

"I can't make out what has come over all you women," John said discontentedly to his cousin Violet a few minutes later, when he had emptied his tumbler of champagne. "You're all alike. Here's a fellow like this Althaus, not one of us, in any sense of the word, with the manners of a hairdresser, and the bow of a dancing master, yet, just because he's got a pair of handsome eyes, a confounded way of making himself at home, and a disgusting habit of quoting poetry, you all run after him like a flock of sheep. First you, Violet, who've got brains, though you are such a shrew, and now Aline, who really has been better trained, and ought to know a bounder when she sees one, even if it's only by force of contrast."

"By comparing him with her brilliant cousin John," Violet interpolated mockingly. "Don't grumble about it. Show your jealousy another way. Cut him out; propose to Constantia for Aline's hand, in correct form to-morrow morning, and make a clause in the contract that she shall not be allowed to speak to any one without the express permission of her noble husband John, the Autocrat."

John flushed a little under his thick skin, and a little

flicker of resentment showed itself in his dull eyes. He had already proposed for Aline, and Violet knew it. His father's wishes, Aline's coldness, her difference from other flippant maidens like the one by his side, had persuaded him that she would grace his future position, and he had made his formal proposal at the end of her first season. But the thought of marriage was horrible to Aline, difficult even to Constantia and Stephen. Her story would *have* to be told, and neither John nor his father might accept it with equanimity. The girl had begged to be allowed to refuse the proffered honour; and she was still so young. On the plea of her youth the elders procrastinated, delayed their answer, asked John to refrain from pressing the question, and John, the phlegmatic, refrained. He was not ardent; he was in no hurry. He had thrown the handkerchief, the result was in no doubt. How could they, or anybody, do better, or as well? He was even satisfied, secretly gratified at the correctness of demeanour of his proposed bride, the reluctance of her maidenhood, it all fitted in with his priggism, but it soiled her to put the tips of her fingers on Louis Althaus's coat. He grumbled to Violet, whom, years ago, when she was straight from the school-room, fresh and bright, he had had some dim intention of training for the same position to which he now destined Aline. It was in pursuance of that abandoned intention he had assumed the post of mentor over her, lectured her on the enormity of speaking flippantly to her mother, of talking about things that she ought not to know, of smoking cigarettes, of the hundred and one little freaks that so speedily developed when she had emerged from the chrysalis stage. They had desperate quarrels, and it was after one of these that he decided she was not the wife for him; he made this announcement to her and she laughed at him and called him a prig, her lightness shocked him further, her conduct irritated him. She was fast, she flirted—Lord John retired definitely, and Violet, secretly piqued, deteriorated, and grew sharp-tongued, as we have

seen her. A sort of truce was patched up between them, however, and, though they never met without dispute, they sought rather than avoided the opportunity of finding fault with each other.

“Do you include me among the victims to Louis Althaus’s fascinations?”

“Why do you call him *Louis* Althaus, why not Mr. Althaus?”

“Why not Mr. Althaus, or Herr von Althaus?” she repeated mockingly; “simply, my dear coz, because he likes to be called Louis Althaus, or Louis——”

“Pish, you can’t make me believe you call the fellow by his Christian name.”

“There’s a brother Karl; they generally speak of them as Karl Althaus, or Louis Althaus, to distinguish. That is really why.”

She was grateful that he did not believe she called him “Louis,” and threw him the explanation in acknowledgment.

“You needn’t be frightened about Aline; she’s not Con’s pupil for nothing, she’ll be ashamed of herself to-morrow for having been unable to avoid speaking to him, and Con will rub it in. It looks like one of Uncle Stephen’s tricks,—just to get a rise out of Constantia by telling her what happens when she leaves him to do the work of chaperon. You know he hates it.”

“Why isn’t Aunt Con here?”

“A sudden attack of ‘flue.’ In the ordinary way Aline would have had to stop at home, but, with the Duchess, you know,” she mocked Constantia’s prim speech, “whose aims are the same as my own, my dear niece will be safe not to meet any discordant element under her roof.”

“And how is it that she isn’t safe—how came the fellow here?”

Violet looked at him. Inclined to be stout, not quite up to the middle height, with heavy brow, and outdoor complexion, he nevertheless represented the romance of her

youth. She always wanted the good opinion she always forfeited.

“ I suppose that he or some of his people have backed bills, or lent money, or whatever it is they do, for Lord Legoux, and this is his mother’s way of showing gratitude,” she answered after a moment’s hesitation, then glanced down again at her plate, and went on dissecting her quail, and relieving it of the unnecessary aspic.

“ If you’re going to marry Legoux, why don’t you do it, and pay these things for him, and keep him straight?” John was growling; it was horribly distasteful to speak of these disgraceful transactions, and to think of Aline knowing them. John would have tried to keep all his women-kind in Eastern seclusion, behind bars. And Violet, though she gave him a look that some men might have understood, did not tell him *why* she did not dower Lord Legoux with her fortune, or why she had procrastinated with her fate until his was decided.

Meanwhile, Louis had sought Aline again, had murmured in her ear, had sufficiently engaged her attention, and now was supping with her. He found however that he had not, after all, produced quite the effect on Aline that he had intended. He could read again reluctance, fear in her face, but he could read also a desire to be with him, to hear what he had to say, to know what he would do.

CHAPTER TWELVE

WHEN Louis got home, rather excited, exultant, his half-formed plans, and the assistance he would force from Stephen Hayward's daughter, caught fast in the meshes of his vanity, he found Joan's delayed letter.

"Louis, my Louis, I can bear it no longer. You haven't left me for ever? you could not be so cruel, could you, dear? I have been wrong to doubt, to torture myself, and hurt the child perhaps. But, if I am wrong, if you did mean—Oh, Louis, I am crying to you. Help me! Once you loved me,—you loved my weakness better than my strength; there is nothing but weakness left. Help me through these few months to come, I cannot bear them else. I am frightened—don't despise me for being frightened. I am so alone—no woman has ever been so alone and at such a time. *I fear, I fear, I fear.* Oh, Louis, be kind to me just a little while, whatever you mean. I am not afraid of the pain or of death. I wish I were dead, if indeed I have lost you. I am ill, ungainly, ugly, and you are you, my love, so beautiful. How can I hope to keep you? But I am starving for the sound of your voice, the touch of your hand. *Pity me!* If you have left off loving me, don't let me know it for these few months at least. I am half mad with loneliness and terror. If I were not mad I could not write, for you have left me alone during these awful days and nights, and for nothing. Oh, my lover, how could you do it? Is it because I have nothing left to give or offer? My brain is dull, my body distorted; like a beggar, then, I will ask alms of you, a little care, forgiveness, if I need it, some strength of yours to lean on now that I am all weakness. You would not refuse a beggar alms, none of you ever do; throw me

a word. How often I feel for you in the darkness and the emptiness—always. Did you mean six months when you said '*For Ever*'? Was I the fool who did not know the game you played, the language you spoke? But, if indeed this be so, for God's sake, for the child's sake, let it mean another three. Forgive me, I am wronging you—you only meant to punish me for not telling you everything I did. You did not mean to leave me—it is only your way, your strange way of loving. Hope is coming back to me as I write, your beautiful eyes will read, will grow soft, my love—forgive me, love me. I can't argue with you; you are right always, whatever you do, whatever you say."

Success had made him soft. These dear women, poor things! It was two in the morning; his eye wandered doubtfully to the clock and the looking-glass behind it. How Joan would love to see him in his Benedict clothes; it was a pitiful letter. His brougham was still at the door. James had waited to hear the orders for to-morrow. Should he? He hesitated—poor Joan!

And he knew now the will was all right.

He had his key, he knew the door would be on the latch. She felt for him, poor little woman! and his place was empty always; it was pathetic. She would love to see him in his fancy dress; and he was too excited to sleep, the music was still in his ears. He went into the bedroom, brushed up his moustache, settled his hair, adjusted his knee-buckles.

Rolling through the silent streets in the brougham with its rubber-tyred wheels, he thought kindly of himself. How easily he was moved, how quickly, after all, he forgave, although it was against his principles. The very moment she wrote to him he went to her, though it was three in the morning, and he was in fancy costume. He had not even stopped to change his dress. She would appreciate that; she would be grateful for that. When he put his latch-key into the door, quietly as he did it, a blind was lifted, a face looked out—a hundred times

every night, a thousand times every day, that face had looked out. He smiled up at her.

Her eyes were sunken, her face was lined and seamed, she trembled and shook in his arms. And but a few months since she had been such a bright, sweet woman. Even Louis was moved by her aspect. It was pitiful to see the efforts she made to recover herself. She had been awake so many nights, her nerve was broken, a month of solitary confinement would shake the nerves of a strong man, and she was a weak woman and ill. But soon she made the effort to pull herself together, to meet any mood in which he had come to her. How clearly she had begun to see him; it was for praise he had come, for admiration. She wanted to satisfy him, to keep him from arguing; she knew that whatever he had come for she must give him. Above, below, around, in all the world for her just now there was nothing but this man. Mentally and physically she was weak, she groped in blindness, tottered; there was nothing but him to hold on to—a figure that dodged her, drew away from her clinging hands, thrust her into deep water wherein she drowned, whilst he looked on for the safety of his raft, his substantial selfishness. But just now, in the darkest moment, when the sea of sickness and loneliness had broken over her and nearly overwhelmed her, when the sky was black and the sun and moon hidden, he had come. Of course, again she held out clinging hands, answered his demands, yielded under torture.

“That’s right; pull yourself together. After all it’s not such an immense time since I was here, and you know you ought not to have written——”

“Don’t—don’t——”

“I won’t, we won’t discuss it, not now. What do you think of my fancy dress? I knew you would like to have a look at it. You feel better now, don’t you? I meant to have my photograph taken to-morrow for you, but the reality is better than the photograph, isn’t it?” He gave her another light caress, went over to the looking-glass,

pulled down his doublet. "The tights fit well, don't they? I have a woollen pair underneath; it's a tip I learnt from an actor. Well, are you satisfied with me? Eh?"

"Nobody in the room could have looked like you." She was regaining her balance; her eyes began to focus him. How handsome he was in the short doublet, all slashed and richly broidered; his head rose from the ruff in splendid strength and vigour, his face was a little pale from fatigue, but the dark eyes were brilliant, he smiled on her, or on the reflection he saw.

"I dare say you wouldn't have been the only one to say that," he said, smiling in pleasant remembrance. "The most beautiful girl in the room, the daughter of the Honourable Stephen Hayward, was my Beatrice; I went in to supper with her. One of the photographer fellows who were there told me I wore my clothes better than any of the men he had taken."

What did it matter to Joan what he said? The sound of his voice was enough; she was no longer alone. His voice was in the room, his presence filled it. He talked for half-an-hour of himself and of the ball, talked himself into good-humour.

Lying by his side later, the dawn coming greily through the window, she tried with all the brain that was left, to show him her anguish, to make him see what her pain had been. It was not that she had any real hope or belief in him; he had killed all that. But it pleased him to-night to play the lover, and in her desperation she made her appeal. His coming like this had satisfied nothing, shown her nothing, if she had been nearly drowned in her loneliness, she was still wet and shivering, almost in despair as she held on to him. Yes! she must try and make him understand.

"Louis! You are very good to me to-night. You say you still love me. Perhaps you have not meant to be so cruel; but you don't know what it is to be ill, and not able to think, and to be alone all the time."

"Well! you are not alone now. Go to sleep; haven't

I been good to you to-night? What's the matter with you now, anyway?" He was sleepily good-humoured.

"I can't sleep. I have forgotten how to sleep. Louis, listen, I am desperate. Don't go away to-morrow and not come back. I don't know how to bear it, the watching for you, not knowing if you are ever coming, not knowing what I should do; all the day I watch, and all the nights. My baby, too, Louis, all his movements are the heaving breaths of a baby that has been crying too long, and I can't soothe it. It hurts me so that I can't take it in my arms and soothe it. Oh, Louis! don't make us cry all the time; already all the brightness has gone out of its eyes, its breaths are convulsive. Louis! if it should die, crying; it belongs to us! Whenever I try to think, I think of that—that it will die crying."

"Go to sleep now—go to sleep now, there's a dear; don't nag. You'll feel better in the morning. I am very tired; this is the third night this week I have danced after midnight. Let me go to sleep. I love to feel so tired and to go to sleep." That was all Louis could find to say, though he kept his arms drowsily about her, and felt vaguely, sleepily, that after all it was a dear little mistress he had here.

She let him sleep on; it was impossible to talk to him, impossible to make him understand. But here he was—and he had loved her, he was here beside her, her awful solitude gone. She listened to his steady breathing, still he was "like myrrh unto her." Presently she felt calmer, safer, left off trying to reason, or think. At last she too slept.

They breakfasted together.

He came down fresh, debonair, smiling, he had let her wait on him, and get out his things, he declared he had not missed his valet. He talked all through the breakfast-time, of himself chiefly, with something thrown in of her failings now and again as a make-weight, but always with the air, with the free admission, that for the moment she was forgiven.

The coffee was good, the bacon and eggs were not conspicuously bad, and he had that wonderful sense of self-satisfaction that made him feel at peace with all the world. He had made Joan happy, poor little woman, poor dear little woman. It really was good of him, he thought, to have come straight here last night; no one could say he was not thoughtful and kind and forgiving, even generous. Last night he had indeed had a triumph, a veritable triumph, and on Saturday he would see Aline again, but, immediately Joan had written him properly, he had come to her. He talked about the ball to Joan, he told her about Lady Violet and the Duchess, and, when he told her of the old love story, and of the Duke's fidelity, her eyes glistened and his own met them sympathetically; it was not difficult for Louis to look sympathetic.

"And now they are happy? He knew she gave up everything to him. He loves her better for not saving her self-respect at his expense?"

It was a wistful question that she put to him—she wanted his spoken answer, it was a question she had so often asked herself. She got it with a smile to illumine the words. "Of course, of course, you know that."

"You've told me so."

"And isn't that enough?"

She smiled, she sighed her answer. Looking at her tenderly, he thought how she had gone off, how old she looked, with wrinkles at the corners of her eyes; he thought what a fool a man must be who marries his mistress, and then he went round to where she sat, put his arm around her, and kissed her cheek.

"What questions you ask; how hard you are to satisfy," he said.

"There is nothing in the world I want except your love."

"And didn't last night tell you you had it?" She could not explain to him all over again what she needed, what she missed. She must take her punishment bravely; she knew now something of what she had done.

"I suppose I am very exacting," she said mechanically.

"You forget what calls I have on my time; it is not only business, though there has been an awful rush these past few days, there's hardly a moment not occupied. I'm engaged three or four deep every night this week. Then Saturday there's Ranelagh"—he could not resist talking about it—"I dare say I shall drive Stephen Hayward and his daughter down."

"The Beatrice of last night?"

"Yes; I am rather anxious to see how she looks in the daytime—a beautiful girl in the evening."

"Have I to be jealous?" she asked, with a smile; but, strangely enough, that pain she had not felt, her nature was too simple, Louis's love-making was too recent; to suspect him of loving another would have been impossible to her.

"You need never be jealous," he answered hastily. "Have I not told you there had never been a woman in my life until I met you? But Karl wants me to get in with the Haywards; it's vital to the cause that the Haywards should be in it."

"I know."

"Now, come and sit down and have a cosy chat. There's something I want to talk to you about." Could there be a better time, a better occasion, to clinch that little matter of the transference of the farm?

The breakfast things cleared away, she settled herself in her favourite position on a stool at his feet, her head resting against his knees, his hand caressing her hair. That last month seemed like a dream, an unhappy nightmare. If it were not the Louis of which she had dreamed, it was a dear Louis, nevertheless; and one who loved her in his own way!

"You remember when we last spoke?"

Did she remember!

"Yes," she answered, in a very low tone.

"It was about your husband——"

"Don't call him my husband," she whispered hurriedly,

for now her breath was coming very quickly, and her heart was beating fast. For hope is hard to kill, and for what had he come? He went on, soothing her with his hand.

"You knew he was ill."

"Yes—yes—you've heard?"

"Hush, hush! I've heard little or nothing. I want to put a case to you."

"My dear," she had his hand against her lips, "say anything—tell me anything—Piet is—is—go on—" He went on, not missing his cue.

"Yes, he is ill, very ill—Karl writes it to me; he writes me also about the farm."

"Yes—go on."

"Don't be impatient," he chided her gently. "You would like to do something for me, wouldn't you?"

"*Something*, my lover, my sweetheart, anything, everything! But what can I do? what?"

"Well, it is possible, it is just possible, if De Groot never got your letter, if—if, in short, he knows nothing of what we are to each other——"

Her head, that had been raised in question, sank again upon his knees. What we are to each other! what we are to each other! what words! and Piet ill, perhaps dying! How sweet the touch of him, his dear hands, one she had in hers, crushed against her lips. Louis was satisfied with her attitude; he went on:

"It's just possible, I say, if he knows nothing of what is going on, that he will remember what a brute he was to you——"

"He wasn't a brute to me; I was a bad wife to him. I know now," she interposed softly, rubbing his hand up and down against her cheek.

"Let me speak for once; don't interrupt me every time I open my mouth. I say, if he remembers how he behaved to you, it is possible, just possible, that he may try to make amends to you by leaving you the farm."

At that she left off her caressing movements and sat

up. "He settled the farm on me when we were married," she said, surprised.

"Did he? Well, I want you, just to please me, and because I know Karl would like it—Karl has been very good to me, and I should like you to do something for him—to sign a paper. I had the thing drawn up some days ago, for I knew you would never say 'no' to anything I asked you." But when his hand sought her hair, she had shrunk back a little, and was gazing at him. "A paper," he continued easily, "saying that in the event of the farm coming to you, you would let us have it, let Karl or me have it, on certain terms."

He drew a paper from his note-case; but she had risen to her feet, and was standing up, watching him, startled, her thoughts bewildered.

"Here is the paper, it gives you five hundred shares in the Geldenrief mine, five hundred fully paid shares; you will be quite a rich woman," he said, banteringly, running his eyes over the paper he had opened. "You've only got to put your name here; we can call up the slavey to witness it. Here, where's the ink? It's a wonderful thing you writing women never do seem to have a pen and ink handy!"

"I'm not a writing woman any more, nor a thinking one," she said, putting her hand to her forehead, trying to grasp clearly what he was asking of her.

"Read the paper to me, Louis, read it; I don't understand."

"You need not bother to understand; you've only got to sign it."

"But what has the Geldenrief mine to do with me? What have I to do with it? Read it to me."

He was rather proud of the wording of that paper; he had drawn it up himself. It had a legal-sounding phraseology, was full of "whereas" and such words as "mesuages, tenements and hereditament," of "provided that" and "in pursuance with." He read it rather slowly, with emphasis on all the long words, his rolling "r's" length-

ening them. When he had finished and looked up, she was smiling.

"Where did you get that paper, Louis? Some one has been hoaxing you; it's a burlesque, it's a farrago of nonsense."

The lines round his mouth showed.

"Since when have you been a judge of law? This is a legal instrument."

"Don't be vexed, dear. My mind doesn't work as it used. I've grown stupid, I know; but, if the farm belongs to me, and comes to me from Piet, how can I have five hundred shares in the mine when he wouldn't even let your brother have it surveyed for gold?"

She was irritating him, but he controlled himself for the moment.

"Well, say it is a farrago of nonsense, say there is nothing in the paper at all, sign it all the same, sign it to oblige me."

"I couldn't do that; you see, dear, as far as there is any sense in it at all, it binds me to an impossibility."

"What do you mean by an impossibility?"

"I mean that it binds me, if I become possessed of Piet's farm, to sell it for the very purpose he most disliked."

"But would it be his wishes you would want to carry out or mine? Think well before you answer; you know I don't regard these things lightly."

His mouth was hard, his narrow chin aggressive; her heart sank, she knew him in this mood. She answered gently, so gently that the tone almost soothed him.

"I would give my life for you; you know I would give my life for you."

He came over to her and put his arm around her, the paper still in his hand.

"What is the use of arguing? 'Let's contend no more.' Karl wants this paper signed; even if you are right, and it is waste paper, it can't do any harm."

She responded to his caress, and moved closer to him.

“But don’t you see, darling, it would be leaving Karl under a wrong impression, making him think that when the farm came to me he would have it for his own purposes?”

“But if his purpose was *my* purpose?” Louis had hard work to control his irritated voice: he hated to have to plead to her.

“If it was your purpose, his purpose, my own purpose, it would make no difference. If, through Piet not knowing, not having had my letter, he should still have left the farm to me, or if it, nevertheless, comes to me under my marriage settlement, I would not take it—I could not take it. You know I could not rob him, because he was dead—because he did not know what I had done before he died. You would not let me do it, Louis”—she appealed to him—“you would not, dear; say you would not wish that I took anything from his hand, from any hands but yours. Those five hundred shares would burn and stain. Darling—because I am what I am—darling, you would not have me do that; say you would not.”

“Oh! I can’t argue with a woman.” He disengaged himself from her. “You’re all wrong; I haven’t time to argue with you. If you can’t see it for yourself, it is waste of breath for me to try to show it to you. You own you can’t think, that your brain doesn’t work, then why not let me think for you? To whom do you owe anything—to me or to him? Tell me that. Don’t you know I wouldn’t ask you to do anything against your own interests?”

“Surely there is no question of interest; it is one of right and wrong.”

“And who made you the judge?” he asked rudely.

She feared, she dreaded the scene she saw impending.

“It’s always the same when I tell you anything, or ask you anything. You hold your tongue, as if I wasn’t worth arguing with. I want to thrash this matter out.”

“To thrash this matter out” meant that he wanted to say the same thing over and over again. Her heart sank,

but she tried to convince him. She followed him to the window.

"I told James to be here at eleven; it's past that," he said. "There's no good my wasting my time here."

"Louis, dear," she said, touching his arm very gently, "I want to argue, I want to try and explain myself. Will you listen? Don't be angry with me before I begin, don't make up your mind to be angry with me."

"Oh, I'll listen right enough. Fire away; but you must hurry up, for I'm due in the city."

"Louis, dear, whether this paper is good in law or not, I don't know, you do; and you tell me it provides that if I ever inherit or become possessed of Piet's farm, I undertake to sell it, or give it to your brother, in consideration of five hundred shares in the mine he proposes opening there. Is that right?"

"Quite right."

"Well, I dare say I expressed myself badly before, and you did not understand what I meant."

She was speaking very quietly now; she was the same Joan, almost, that had refused to share in any of Karl's schemes, and had described them to him by their right name.

"We will say, for the sake of argument, that this possibility, this remote possibility, comes true, that Piet is dead, that he has left no will, or one made in ignorance, and that the farm has become mine by law. Dearest, if I had been his wife, his good and loyal wife, I should have kept it; but, even then, I know, I do know I should have felt myself bound to carry out his wishes respecting it. The wishes of the dead are sacred; their very powerlessness to enforce them makes such wishes sacred. I think I should have had to leave the farm as he wished it left—an oasis of green in the mining country, the untouched land he inherited from his father, which his father's father found and reclaimed, and in which their graves lie. I gave him no son, but if I had inherited his land, I think, as long as I lived, I must have kept it green

for him. But now—now—as it is—Louis, dear”—for she saw his face was set, and knew she had not moved him—“I could take nothing from Piet for myself, who have so dishonoured him; for our son, who must never—oh, my God! if he should ever know and judge——”

“Nobody need ever know.”

“I know,” she said, in a lower voice, pausing; then hurriedly she went on: “If now by a quibble, an ignorance, the farm should lapse to me, notwithstanding everything, I would give it back at once, immediately, to the next-of-kin, to the Government, to anybody. I would not, could not, gain advantage by stealing from Piet dead what Piet living would have died rather than give me. Oh, Louis! I am hoping so hard that you will feel as I do; and my words are so poor. Ever since I’ve loved you words have failed me, and I can’t find a quotation to meet this.” Her lips quivered; she tried to force through the ghost of a smile. “Won’t you help me?”

He tried, he really tried, to follow her; for, in this contest between them, it was essential to him to win, and, by following her, he might find the clue that would lead him to victory. But it was difficult to him to grasp what she meant, to see from her point of view. Of course, her sense of honour differed from his; there wasn’t a drop of good blood in his veins to help him to read her. At last he gave up the intellectual effort, and used instead his easy methods.

“You may be right. You reason as a woman reasons, but you may be right.”

“God bless you, dear.” She put her hand out, and he caught her to him. “You would have seen it before, but I talked so badly. I am ill, overtired. It is a bad time for me just now,” she said, leaning against him, hiding her tear-tired eyes.

“I know, I know. Well, we’ll say you are right, feeling as you do, thinking as you do. But what about me? Am I not equally likely to be right? Am I never right? Tell me that.”

How could she go on talking? What words were then left to her, leaning against him, his arms around her?

"Well, am I right?"

"God knows," she said wearily.

"Yes! but that's no good to me. I want you to know."

There are truths stranger than fiction, trite as the saying is; every day there is an incident that proves it afresh. For weeks she had waited for him; last night he had come. There was no resentment in her, only gladness at his coming. To-day she knew why he had come, and the baseness of it. Yet, standing there with his arms around her, feeling his breath on her hair, she forgot, for an instant, the reason of his coming, and all but his strong comeliness. Her passion for him was like a swelling chorus of tumultuous music, the sound overwhelmed her, drowned her intelligence, beat upon her ears. He knew his power with her, and had his victory in sight; he laid a light kiss on the waves of her hair, and it thrilled through her.

"So you love me all the same," he said, "though I'm never right?" Her lips framed no answer.

"With your heart and soul?"

"Ah!" She looked up then. "You have it, with my heart and soul." He caught her back to him again.

"Then love me with your conscience too."

It was like Louis to leave her five minutes later without another word about the farm, or about the paper he wanted her to sign, like Louis, too, to be supremely content and assured and self-satisfied.

"I shall have the paper signed before I'm back in Piccadilly," he said to himself, rolling citywards. "The impertinence of the woman to set her will against mine. Well! they're all alike."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WITHIN an hour of Louis's leaving her, Joan heard that De Groot was indeed dead, that he had been dead three weeks, and she learnt, too, that Louis knew it, and had known it all the time. The letter reached her almost before Louis's carriage was out of sight, it was from Van Biene's partner in Pretoria, and it told her that her husband had died with his faith in her unbroken. The will, the assignment of the farm, everything, came to her that day from the offices of Van Biene's partner in Pretoria.

"You know what were his views about the land," wrote Jonathan van Biene. "You are not bound in any way, but he wished it to remain as it was. His father's grave is there, and his grandfather's; he wishes to be laid beside them. He has provided otherwise for Mrs. Sannig and her children. Only the farm is left to you."

Joan was not a very strong woman at the best of times, and now her mental as well as her physical strength was strained under the novel conditions. When her mentality was at the lowest ebb, and the better half of her brain was paralysed, phrases came instead of thoughts, not her own, but other people's. To-day, with Van Biene's letter in her hand, and Louis's parting words in her ears, the phrase she saw was Heine's:

"She was a harlot, and he was a thief,
But they loved each other beyond belief."

The last part of it did not seem to ring quite true, but the first came again and again; it seemed, indeed, the only thing she could remember, as she sat on the sofa in that little suburban sitting-room, with the deeds of poor Piet's

farm in her hand, and her stunned brain trying to realise her position. Here was Piet's farm in her hand, the farm that Louis wanted. She knew Louis's obstinacy, and the paper stared at her, and she was weak, or felt she was weak, for she loved him with every despairing pulse that beat his worthlessness into her consciousness, where he had set again the impress of his grace and beauty. He had not left the room an hour, yet already she was yearning for his return, for the sound of his voice, for the touch of his hand, for the mere sight of him.

For a long time after he had left her she sat looking at the papers. The one gleam through the black clouds about her, the one distant possible hope, had been, that, if Piet died, Louis would marry her before the child was born; then, perhaps, she could influence him; then, perhaps, the pain she suffered through him would become only a memory. She did not know the value of the asset she had, but she knew that everything Louis wanted became vital to him; he could brook neither contradiction nor denial, and, above all things, he could brook nothing from her.

Sitting very still, her hands folded, the paper on her lap, she tried to think closely of the problems before her. She began to realise that this time the issue between them was vital, that Piet was dead, and Louis knew that Piet was dead. He had not asked her to marry him, he had asked her to give him Piet's farm. Could she do it? That was the question,—not what he would do with it afterwards; that she already knew, and she could not be sophisticated with herself. He would do with it everything that Piet would not have had him do. The poor dead man! he could not protect himself now against the Althaus encroachments, could not protect the land which had become his father's at the time of the great Trek, which they had reclaimed from forest, and planted, and made their own. What was hers was Louis's; Louis was right there. But could she do it? Her magnetised mind held phrases better than pictures. "She was a harlot and he

was a thief," wound in and out among the problems of facts and possibilities. If the worst came to the worst, if Louis made her marriage with him dependent on her accepting the legacy, and giving it to him or Karl for mining, could she keep firm, seeing how she loved him?

The sun rose high in the heavens, and the warmth and perfume of May were outside that casement window. Inside it seemed dark, and she shivered a little. Her dinner came up and she tried to eat. Another phrase, this time one of her own, came back to her. "I told him he must kill my conscience if he wanted me to do this. How easy it is to him. What has he not killed?" She could not put it into words.

What was left to her of her womanhood? Where was her modesty, where her delicacy, reserve, pride? How easily now her eyes were filled with tears, and once she had not known what it was to cry. Where were her dreams? She dared not dream. Would he marry her? Did he mean—? She could not look backward or forward and be sure of anything. What little things they were that had made him cruel to her; and how cruel he had been. It was not strange that, after last night, after that morning episode, she could not think clearly. The documents on her lap, with their scarlet and green seal, the rustling parchment and unfamiliar stamps, were as living things in the room, living things that stood between herself and Louis.

And without him she could not live; that was what she thought. She knew her love was one with herself. She knew she was not strong enough to deny him anything whilst the magic of his personal fascination was with her, whilst his voice echoed in her ears, his kisses lingered on her lips, his breath anæsthetised her brain.

But she was honest. She shuddered at the thought of rearing Louis's babe with Piet's money. What Louis had said to her about the value of the shares in the mine had turned her sick. She had never thought much about money; the Althaus obsession had always been incom-

prehensible to her. Instinctively she felt that Louis was unscrupulous, was less scrupulous even than Karl, and Karl spoke of robbery very lightly.

Heine's phrase ground itself in, and she reflected miserably, "If I had only myself to think of, if I were not going to bear him a child, I might let myself yield, for I am of no consequence—a worthless woman, light, lost."

Whilst her love for Louis had burnt purely, whilst her faith in love was still a white flame, she had never thought of herself thus, but now—now—. The woman was honest. Women who label themselves so proudly might deny this virtue to her, but, nevertheless, it was hers.

On her lap lay the papers with which she might bring back her lover. But in her womb stirred the babe that was his, and passionately she knew she dared not give him birth, if now she robbed the dead man that the child might know a father. Hope and pride in him were gone, her poor baby, that was Louis Althaus's son. But when he should come into the world he must come with no further stain from her.

"If I have nothing to give you, my baby, no clean name or heritage, at least, when you lie in my lap, you shall look up at me, and know I have not done this thing to save myself. You shan't come to me and find me thief as well as harlot. Oh, my little son, my baby! would God I had died before I had conceived you!"

She broke down, and cried miserably enough, with her head pressed against the hard pillow-roll of the horse-hair sofa. But, realising that her strength was limited and the necessity for action lay before her, she checked her tears. The papers had fallen to the ground, she picked them up. How the thought dragged at her heart that Louis wanted them, and yet she must hold them back from him. She must put herself out of danger, beyond the temptation of yielding; she knew her weakness, she must make this thing impossible.

If she were in South Africa now, if only she were in Cape Town, she could have gone to Piet's executors;

forlornly she thought she might have pleaded to Karl Althaus. Then she saw in fancy the grey strip that had lain between her and Table Mountain as she had steamed over the Bay on board the *Arizona*, and a sudden homesickness came upon her, she longed for the shelter of her mountains. She remembered the visits from Karl. Dimly she knew she had more to hope for from Karl than from Louis; dimly she felt the elder, rougher brother loved her the better. What was hers was Louis's; she had given him, and must always give him, everything. But the farm was not hers to give; she must dispossess herself of it quickly, immediately, she must put it out of her power to give away what was not hers.

Van Biene's letter must be answered, but this was not her Van Biene, her friend in Cape Town. The two were brothers, partners; surely if she wrote to the one, to that wizened, little, old friend of hers in Cape Town, he would understand what she had not been able to make Louis see.

The ink was dry in the pot, and the pen in the ornamental inkstand was rusty. The hard, empty blotting-book that lay on the woollen mat was equally impracticable. She had to fetch everything from her own room, but when, at last, she had collected her materials and sat down, she found the words flowed easily enough. She told Van Biene that, when she left Cape Town, she had left De Groot for ever, and that now she was about to become a mother, that Piet, not knowing what she had done, had left her in possession of his farm, but that it would be an infamy to her to keep it, owing it to him. She wished to relinquish all claim to the farm; she wished it to go to his next-of-kin, to his brother, to Mrs. Sannig, to anybody who was Dutch and would keep it intact as he had wished, and she begged the lawyer to put the matter in hand at once.

Her appeal to Van Biene was to his friendship; it was an appeal that was touching in its simplicity.

"I implore you not to argue with me, not to endeavour

to persuade me differently. I am going out now to see a lawyer, I am going to do all I can, but I depend on you to do the rest. I have no one I can trust but you. For the sake of old times, those old times in dear Cape Town when I was an honourable woman, and a happy one, and you were my friend, do this for me now, immediately, and cable me. I feel I may ask you this—cable me as soon as you can that I have no part or lot in Piet's property."

With action came a feverish desire to be accurate, to be exact. She rang and asked to see the landlady; she told her she wanted a lawyer, she must see one that very evening. Fortunately the landlady could oblige her. The gentleman who helped her with the lease of her house, a very nice gentleman he was, and quite a friend of hers too, seeing that her sister was his housekeeper, and he lived almost round the corner, so to speak, in Bushey Terrace.

Would she give Joan a letter?

Why, of course she would, or, better still, if Joan would like to go round with her to see him, why, it was a fine night. She'd like nothing better than a chat with her sister, and if Mr. Frere was at home, and doing nothing, the chances were he'd see Joan. He'd do almost anything to oblige Mrs. Gamble, that's what they called her sister, though she had never been married, but——

Joan was out of the room and back again, with coat and bonnet, before her landlady's garrulousness had time to establish itself. But she suffered it gladly during that strange walk down the narrow country lane to Bushey Terrace. Listening even with half an ear to the woman's chatter was better than hearing only the repetition of one dreadful phrase.

It was a fine night, cold although it was May, the sky cloud-driven with fitful stars, the moon hidden, but making light the heavens. The lanes were muddy and still, the trees showed black against the grey of the sky. Joan listened to all the details of her landlady's family history, and the sister's numerous love affairs. During

that walk she became glad in what she had done and was doing, in her steady outlook, in the cool sweet air. She could even smile as she listened somewhat abstractedly to mysterious hints as to the possibilities of Mrs. Gamble ultimately winning the affections of the very gentleman they hoped to see to-night.

Everything fell out propitiously. Mr. Frere was at home, and would see them. Mrs. Gamble, a facsimile of her sister, fat, in black silk dress and gold chain, volubility making mobile her lips, and desire to impart confidences making mysterious her manner, ushered them, after inquiry had been made and permission given, into the study, where the lawyer, in comfortable morning coat, in cosy easy-chair, enjoying his cultured leisure among his books and prints, was awaiting them.

Mr. Frere was a man of about sixty, thin and spectacled, dry and tall. He looked at Joan, and she smiled and bowed.

"This lady," began the landlady, "she's my lodger, sir, and I will say——"

The old gentleman recognised an equal, and placed a chair for her.

"You would like to have a chat with your sister," he said, waving both the landlady and the hopeful sister out of the room before either had time to finish a sentence. Joan, feeling young for the moment, had smiled. The hopes of Mrs. Gamble, coupled with the illusion-dispelling appearance of the old lawyer, appealed to her sense of humour. But her smile quickly faded, and the old man saw wistful eyes, blue as a child's, in a small drawn face, and a figure that told its own history.

"You want help, advice?" His generous hand advanced. Joan saw the movement and her eyes filled.

"Advice," she said quickly, "only advice."

"You are in trouble. I have a daughter about your age; she is out in South Africa," he sighed, "wanting advice too, perhaps, poor thing! Her husband is in Mashonaland——"

He wanted to set her at her ease, noting the easily filled eyes, the lips rather tremulous. He spoke another sentence or two. She rested her arm on the table, shaded her eyes with her hand, and spoke low:

"It is about a document I wanted to see you about, some documents I've brought with me. There are certain estates—in South Africa. They belong, they may belong to me. It is not on a supposition I am acting. I have all the papers with me."

His quick interest abated a little.

"You want to make claim to an estate?"

She kept her hand up, her face was working; it wasn't easy to talk.

"No, it is an estate that I am entitled to, it was settled on me when married; my husband is dead. He was dying, he must have been dying, when I left him. I want to relinquish my claim—these papers—I want to assign them. I don't know how to put it. I ought not to have them—it is a mistake, it is all a mistake. Help me to get rid of them."

Then his voice was very gentle.

"You want to relinquish any claim you may have to your husband's, your late husband's estate, on behalf of yourself—and your child?"

Her hand dropped, he saw her eyes. They were dry, though the painful flush made the small drawn face most piteous to see.

"On behalf of myself and my baby."

"My dear child—you are only a child yourself—have you considered, has any one told you——"

"I haven't a soul in the world to speak to me."

"How long is it since you left your husband?"

Joan, thinking of the time when she had left him in thought, and separated herself from him finally, answered:

"Less than a year."

"A year—and he?"

"Died, knowing nothing."

"And you want him—the world to know?"

"I don't want to take what doesn't belong to me—or to let—to let my baby."

"You would brand it illegitimate rather! Forgive me—I cannot help you if I cannot speak plainly to you."

"Neither he nor I must take what does not belong to us, not even a name." The voice was steady now, although it was low. How right she was! Conviction grew on her as she gave it words.

"The law would be on your side."

"Perhaps; but all the wrong would be there."

"I want to help you—I should like to help you—but—I am a lawyer."

"It is good of you to advise me, to want to help me. I see you do. I have been very lonely, perhaps I ought not to have come like this. I don't want you to advise me as to whether I am right or wrong—I am so sure. I want you to advise me how to make it certain that I cannot go back, to make it impossible for any temptation to move me." The thought of Louis, perhaps pleading to her, was like a mountain that she must climb, she, who already lay exhausted at the base.

"Here are the papers." She handed them to him. "I am going to send them back to the lawyers over there, but I want to make it sure, so sure, that nothing can undo it. I know I ought to sign something, or draw up something. Can you help me? Will you help me to that? That is what I have come to you for."

He glanced through the documents. "I am not well versed in South African law." He hesitated; he was a lawyer out of harness, but he was a lawyer still, and this was an extraordinary step she contemplated. Of the value of the estate she knew nothing, but to rid herself of it summarily did not appear to him feasible.

"You must face the possibility that your son, if you have a son, may one day reproach you with parting with your property. What is the nature of the estate, what is the approximate value? Is it a tempting one? What is the danger of delay? Surely you are exaggerating the

danger of delay? I am anxious to help you, but the way does not seem clear to me."

"It is land, a farm, I don't know the value. It is a simple thing I want you to do. You say you want to help me. There is only one way. Draw up a paper, binding, legal, impossible to break through, that rids me of all interest in my late husband's estates." She was feverish in her desire for freedom from the burden of Piet's trust.

"What do you propose doing with this paper if I draw it up for you?"

"Sending it to my husband's lawyer."

"Is he your friend?"

"I think so. It is because I think and hope he is that I shall send it."

Very gently he asked:

"Telling him your motives for such strange action?"

The painful flush that had ebbed flooded her cheeks again.

"I have kept nothing back."

The pitifulness of it, her youth, womanhood, condition, the story he read through it all, made the lawyer's reluctance sympathetic. She urged her case on him with broken eloquence, with wordless pleading. He read the story through her anxiety. Her soul shone through it too. Against his judgment, against all his experience, against even his will, he finally drew up the paper—a short one, a mere relinquishment of title in favour of a next-of-kin unnamed. All the time he was writing he tried to persuade her of the folly of it, but for answer all she could urge was her subtle, secret fear that, if she did not make herself safe, some power would be used, some influence brought to bear, which would make her false to herself, and to the dead man who had trusted her. He felt all that was behind her halting words.

"There, you would have your own way—I hope you will not live to regret it. Now I'll call up your landlady to witness your signature."

“Thank you—thank you.” She wrote her name with trembling fingers, and took up the paper. “And I may take it that this ends it, ends all my interest in the farm, now and always, and nothing can upset it?”

“If that paper goes into the hands of Mr. Van Biene, and he wishes to help you, I *think* you may have achieved your object! Mind I don’t know—I *think*; you must not rely upon it.”

Joan gathered up the rest of the papers, all those elaborate, sealed documents from Pretoria, and held out her hand in farewell.

“Good-bye, and thank you. You don’t know how much I thank you. You have been very good to me.”

He held her hand a moment, and said very gently:

“But are you wise? Are you quite sure you are acting wisely? I am afraid for you; I don’t think I have been kind to you—quite the contrary. You are young, frail, you have perhaps a hard time in front of you.”

Her eyes filled, her hand shook in his; she knew the time that was before her without Louis.

“Have you—forgive me if I pain you—have you money enough, are you sure of help? My child, I am an old man, a stranger to you. You are doing a brave thing, a noble thing, perhaps, I don’t know, I cannot judge; you have told me little. But have you counted all the cost?”

“Oh! I want to keep my hands clean, I must keep them clean for the boy’s sake. I feel he will understand; I can go through until then.” She almost broke down. Her womanly craving for love, for understanding, fastened itself passionately on to her coming child.

She left the lawyer soon after that, but drank a glass of wine to please him, and talked a little of commonplace things. He felt the appeal of her; and she made a friend of him, as she had made friends in the old days out of lovers, admirers, mere partizans, everybody. Mr. Frere was neither emotional nor demonstrative, he was over sixty years of age, a lawyer and an Englishman; but when, on that evening, she gave him her hand in parting,

he put his thin lips upon it and, as she went out, he said "God bless you!"

Joan posted her letters and her papers, and that night she slept peacefully and well, as if she had come out of a storm into a calm, safe harbourage. And now no longer she seemed to hear the crying of a babe. All was rest and calm, for the spell of her imagination lay softly about him, and she thought the soul that was coming to her straight from Heaven rejoiced in sweet reconciliation, that at last her weakness was overcome, and the dead man's faith justified.

She slept peacefully and calmly that night, although she knew, as if the world held no other fact, that between her and Louis all was ended. There was no doubt or hope; it was like a death sentence with no possible reprieve, no mercy. That she knew, too, but still she slept in utter exhaustion, for the first time in many weary months, without self-loathing and contempt, without a speechless longing, without being torn asunder by her love for Louis and her knowledge of him. That night God gave her sleep, even as He gives His beloved sheep. If then she could have slept on and on and known no awakening, it would have been pardon; but, from her sin, as from her sentence, there was no escape.

Louis was not the man to be beaten easily in anything upon which he had set his heart; neither his vanity nor his self-respect was of the nature that would prevent him trying to wrest from his mistress anything that she might wish to withhold.

He waited, expectant of the document and the loving letter. When neither came, he repaired to Bushey without delay.

Joan thought this would have been spared her. She had made her plans and slept, in the belief that she had time before her, that he would not come to her again until she had expiated her offence, that he would, in fact, with this big stake in front of him, pursue the same tactics that had served his purpose well enough when merely

his appetite required titillating, so little she realised him, even now.

She had barely dressed and breakfasted, and had not yet commenced her packing, when his brougham drove up, and he was with her. The cruelty of another, a final, scene between them had to be faced. It would have been so easy had she only had him to fight, but she had herself. Even this morning, seeing him in his well-fitting, grey morning suit, with his air of health and the smile in his handsome eyes and under his well-brushed moustache, she knew she loved him, and, when he kissed her his gay "Good-morning," she felt as if she had no strength with which to deny him.

"Well, old girl! how's the world with you this morning? I couldn't sleep; you oughtn't to have worried me about that paper, the beastly thing haunted me all night," was the way he began.

She had exhausted reason, he would not listen to reason. She had exhausted caresses, Joan knew that she could not now move Louis with caresses. Tears were left her, but this morning her eyes were dry.

"I can't sign that paper, Louis," she said to him in a low voice almost immediately, before he had time to say more.

"Can't sign?"

What use going over the weary scene, the weary day? She tried to tell him the farm was no longer hers; he would not listen, perhaps she did not try very vigorously. Her voice was low, her words were few, compared with the torrent that Louis poured upon her. For the whole long day he tortured her, sometimes with tears and fondlings, sometimes with mean reproaches and threats. Some of his words bit into her, the wounds ached for weeks, ached almost unbearably. He let her see what such men as he think of women who give them what they ask.

She saw him as God saw him, and all her mind rejected him. Still, she was as a beaten thing before him, bruised,

bastinadoed, crawling, because she loved every breath of him. He reminded her of words she had said to him in the abandonment of love, as a lever to wrest the dead man's vineyard from her!

He told her that if she did not let him have the farm she ruined him and ruined Karl; he told her all about the Geldenrief, that is to say, he told her that all he had in the world was invested in the outcrop, that the outcrop was valueless without the deep, that the deep lay under the graves of her dead husband and his dead forbears.

He could not see, she could not make him see, that those brave old pioneers, those sturdy farmers who had reclaimed the soil from waste, had the right to their quiet burial place beneath it, that, weak woman as she was, she could not steal those rights from the powerless dead hands to give them to him.

All day he talked, all that long endless day, going away, or making a pretence of going away, and coming back before she had time to feel that at last, at last the pain of it was over.

"Remember," he said to her, coming back for the fourth time to that little dingy dining-room where now it seemed to her the sun had never penetrated, "remember that what I say, I mean. If you send me away, without doing this little thing for me, this one little thing I ask of you, I have done with you for ever. From first to last you have disappointed me. Nothing you could say would undo what you have done. You remember the dressing-gown, and the way you kept me waiting; and writing to the fellow without telling me. It is of him you are thinking now, his wishes, not mine. But I would have forgiven you, forgiven you everything, if you had done what I told you about this. Mind, I don't say everything would be as it was between us, you have ruined the chance of that, you are not the woman I thought you—you have given me every trouble. But I will be to you, as far as I can, what I have been before. Think well before you answer. If I leave you now—I leave

you for ever, *for ever*; don't make any mistake. I mean what I say."

"It is always 'for ever' with you, Louis," she said wearily, not facing him, standing at the window, her old attitude, looking for light. The sun was shining, but there seemed no light, only a glare, and it hurt her eyes, they ached and burned. She went on staring at the sun, physical pain helped her.

"I don't want any reproaches," he said hastily, "never mind what I said or did; the question is, what are you going to do? Am I to go?" (Three times he had asked her and she had made no answer, and he had gone, but she had not called him back, and yet he had returned to her, for he badly wanted the farm, and his own way.) "Tell me that, once for all, am I to go? Don't stand staring there; tell me, am I to go or stay?"

She had been so buffeted and beaten about that awful day. At first she had tried all a woman could try to open his eyes, and make him see the thing he was doing; she had failed so completely to penetrate the folds of his greed, of his stupidity, of his egotism, that now there was no strength left in her. She had gone down in the fight.

She turned from the window as he asked her, and faced him. The sun was still in her eyes as she looked at him, standing at the door, hat in hand, but his figure seemed to sway a little, dark and indistinct before her. She sat down for safety. The room, too, swam a little and was dark. She wanted to be alone, to be quiet; she was tired, desperately tired of Louis's voice.

"Go," she said, "go. I want to be alone."

All the day she had argued with him, wrestled with him. She was so tired and weak, she knew it was over, but she must have rest, solitude. All the day he had argued with those wearying arguments that held no reason. Now she wanted him to go. She knew nothing so definitely as that she wanted him to go. He could get nothing from her but that:

“Yes, yes, I understand that you are going, and you are not coming back; don't say it again, Louis, don't stand there saying it; go, go, go! I am tired.”

There, against the table where she sat, she dropped her head into her arms, and, though he stood there talking, threatening, even beginning to argue the morality of the case all over again, she never raised it. He thought he would go over to her, put his hand on her head, coax her. But she was dishevelled, unwieldy, he hated her, again he hated her. He could not control his feelings. He went out and banged the door after him; she heard the bang dully, but it meant he was gone—and she was glad he was gone.

With all Joan had suffered, and had still to suffer, through this man, this day had been the worst. For she had been face to face with the skeleton of her passion, and it had grinned and gibed at her almost fleshless. The thing she had loved was loathsome, the flesh that clung to it noisome. This day she had lived with the real Louis, and this day she was clear-brained, and knew what she had done.

An hour after Louis left the cottage at Bushey, Joan left it too.

When, three days later—for Louis's “for ever” had lasted three whole days—he went down there again, there was no face at the dining-room window, no curtain drawn aside from the casement upstairs: Joan had gone. She had taken him at his word. She was gone.

The landlady could tell him nothing, though he cross-examined her with all the skill of which he was capable. She had nothing to tell. Mrs. Grey—for so Joan was known, Louis had not lent her his name—Mrs. Grey, an hour after he had left, had packed up her things, had had a cab sent for, and driven to the station. She had left no note, she had left no address.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

JOAN was gone, had disappeared, leaving neither letter nor other trace, neither explanation nor excuse. Of course, Louis was dumfounded; that he was startled out of complacency expresses it but mildly. He had gone down to the cottage, after the lapse of three days, with a whole bushel of new arguments, convincing, irrefutable. Joan must see that he had right on his side, she must be made to see it. By this time, he thought, she would be fearful of the consequences of her action, or lack of action, she would be passionately glad of his coming; in that mood he would clinch the matter, he would leave nothing to chance this time, he knew how to deal with her, and when.

This was the mood he had gone down in, and he found her place empty. Because he was a fool he bullied the landlady, even insulted her in his rage. She must know where her lodger had gone; she had no right to let her go without telling him.

“I tell you I don’t know naught about her. She said she was going, and she packed up her things and went. You’ve no call to stand there abusing me. The poor thing wasn’t too happy whilst she was with you, that I’ll be sworn, and if she’s gone to those that will be kinder to her——”

“I don’t want to hear your opinion.”

But he had to hear it, and it rankled with him, as he drove off after his unfruitful journey. His anger against the landlady evaporated before he reached Piccadilly, but against Joan——

He would show her what he would do; he wouldn’t wait until she came back and pleaded with him. He had

done with her. He was glad to remember her condition, he was glad to think she would suffer. His rage against her because she was not there to listen to his arguments made him almost irresponsible. Still, being Louis's rage, there was sufficient lull in the whirlwind for him to remember the material injury he suffered from her departure, to remember and seek to minimise it.

It is unnecessary to follow the workings of his mind during the twenty-four hours that elapsed after he knew that Joan was out of his reach. His letter to Karl shows the result. Karl had never failed him.

"I don't know if I have done right," he wrote to his brother, "but I bought up all the shares I could get of the Geldenrief. I did it for two reasons. In the first place, I thought it advisable that the Althaus Bank should come out with flying colours, enabling the financial papers to say that all the Althaus companies were at such and such a price, were doing well, in fact. And in the second, I remembered what you said about using the machinery, and getting at the deep through the outcrop, your idea that the vein was broadening out, and that in another hundred feet it would be payable. Altogether, I thought the right thing to do was to get as many shares as I could. I put them in my name, but, of course, I did it on your account; I knew you would not let me lose through it. I'll keep the figures until I see you; it has cost me something like two hundred thousand, but then I've secured control.

"I've met both the Honourable Stephen Hayward and his daughter. Hayward seems to have taken quite a fancy to me; I have dined with him twice, and, of course, I've been introduced to his daughter. There seems no doubt that he will have an influential position in the new Cabinet, and, if you are really in earnest about taking the Transvaal, I don't suppose I shall have any difficulty in getting him to stand in with us. He told me you had been advising him as to his investments. If there is going to be a row over there, you had better cable him to get

out of all his holdings; if he does this, it will compromise him, and he'll have to back us up. About the daughter, now—you know, dear old chap, I would do anything on earth for you, or for any cause you've set your mind on. It's the best blood in England when all's said and done."

The pen dropped out of his fingers. Why shouldn't he, why the devil shouldn't he? His anger with Joan, his inability to face the situation with regard to the Geldenrief, had brought him within sight of a strange possibility, but each time he looked at it he averted his eyes. His very anger with Joan left him unfree from her. But the written words forced him to consider the possibility of repairing his fortunes, fortunes that Joan's actions had made precarious, and of repairing them through another woman. "It's her own fault, it is all her own fault," he said to himself savagely, as he took up the pen again and went on.

"If I were to marry Hayward's daughter there wouldn't be a house in England not open to us. What do you think of it? Of course, we should have to come to some different business arrangement, naturally they would want something big in the way of settlements, and a partnership,—I suppose I can count on a partnership in the bank? Of course, I know you have always been liberal to me, and that I am your heir and that sort of thing; 'What's yours is mine,' I've heard you say, and, when I acted for you in the Geldenrief matter, I had it in view, but still, if I am to marry, I ought to be independent. Anyway, write me your views. I won't let the grass grow under my feet meanwhile. Things are on the boom here, and no mistake." Here followed a list of prices and comments. The most worthless hole in which any digger had ever prospected and been disappointed was quoted at that time at a figure it could hardly have supported if it had been a pocket filled with diamonds. At the end of the letter Louis expressed his conviction that now, this moment, this very moment, and no other, was the crucial time for bringing out the Althaus Bank.

The letter finished and despatched, the things that he had said in it became vital, they dodged and pursued him. Until the affair of the Geldenrief was settled, he felt poor, his income of about fifteen thousand a year, his free quarters, his prospects, did not prevent him feeling poor, now that he had so foolishly locked up his capital. Not that he admitted he had been foolish. He had every right to look upon the De Groot farm as his own, and Karl's judgment was never at fault; the farm must be a marvel of richness, His uneasiness, notwithstanding the arguments with which he plied himself, could not be shaken off. The worst of his trouble was that, when he had given a hint to Sam Oldberger about the deep of the Geldenrief, Sam had said, "Thank God, then, we are free of the outcrop." He had been unable to force Sam Oldberger to admit the value of the outcrop and its machinery, as an item in considering the deep. He loathed Sam for his opinion, but it stuck nevertheless.

It forced itself upon him that the only way out of his troubles was to marry Aline Hayward. Karl would make a liberal settlement; Karl would recognise that he was sacrificing himself for the sake of helping the Uitlander cause. And, looking at the thing, it began to have its points. It would be something of a personal triumph to force the stronghold of exclusiveness. Louis Althaus never ceased to resent that there should be certain families who preferred to keep their houses for themselves. He saw no humour in the "pigs in clover" phrase.

As he wrote to Karl, he did not let the grass grow under his feet. He asked Stephen to drive down to Ranelagh with him for the next meet of the Coaching Club, and to bring his daughter. Stephen was too busy, he wrote, it was impossible for him to accept Louis Althaus's invitation. In truth, each time he had met the man he had liked him less, and everything he heard men saying of him confirmed his judgment—the men whose opinions he valued, that is to say. Louis's popularity was, after all, a limited one, and the things Stephen could not help

hearing made him regret that Louis Althaus could say he knew Stephen Hayward's daughter. Louis's familiar club-room conversation on the subject of women was appreciated by few, the majority resented it.

Louis was furious when Stephen declined his invitation to Ranelagh, and yet another, asking him to dine with him, to meet a few friends at the Savoy. Altogether, he was in an irritable frame of mind after he had despatched his letter to Karl. Everything seemed to combine to annoy him.

He drove a gay quartette to Ranelagh in place of Stephen and his daughter, with whom he had hoped to grace his turnout at the meet, and the gay quartette had been practically all sufficing. He was not yet an enthusiastic whip, and having his arm pulled nearly out of its socket for four hours did not improve matters. Then, at Ranelagh, he came face to face with Constantia and Aline—and Aline, with her aunt's face rigidly set at his approach, although he was accompanied by Lord Dolly, had made his the barest, the tiniest recognition, had been oblivious, or apparently oblivious, of his glance. She bowed timidly, but to Louis it seemed she bowed coldly, she averted her eyes from him, and was afraid lest Constantia should notice that she bowed at all.

Louis practically forced Lord Dolly to present him to Stephen's sister. Karl's experience under similar circumstances had amused the millionaire; but Louis was not amused at being snubbed, and he resented Lord Dolly's entertainment at his expense. Even the Lady Herodsfoot, who cooed up to him a moment afterwards, and asked for a seat on his coach on the way back to town, and told him how his greys had been admired, and what the Prince had said, failed to compensate him for the Hayward attitude. He walked about with Lily Herodsfoot for the remainder of the afternoon, and, although she found him unusually silent, she was quite satisfied, for she used her supposed intimacy with the millionaire's brother as a bait to fish for renewed credit, and she knew

they would be paragraphed together; but Louis was not satisfied. He began to feel women bored him; he missed Joan's adoration. Lady Violet, looking shrewish in the cold sunshine, said a bitter word or two to his companion, and Louis resented her too. She had so obviously forgotten the terms they had been on scarcely a fortnight since. It was all the Hayward fault, the Hayward influence; he would be even with them yet. Joan had only herself to blame, whatever he did; it was she who had left him.

He let the man drive on the way back. He sat on the box-seat with Lady Herodsfoot, displacing his other guests; Louis's manners fluctuated with Louis's temper. Lily Herodsfoot had her dressmaker to consider, but she winced a little at Louis's methods during that drive. She reminded herself that she looked upon him only as a means to her dressmaker's end, but she wished vaguely that her own rakish Jack had been rich enough to afford her fidelity to himself. But that, alas! was impossible. So she praised, and wheedled, and persuaded Louis into better humour, and, when she arrived in Grosvenor Square, her last words were to remind him that she expected him at her reception that evening. It was no temptation to him that there would be baccarat afterwards; perhaps another reason for Louis's failure to enlist the sympathies of those men of the world he most frequently met, was that he had none of the thoughtless liberality of the gambler.

He was in half-a-dozen minds about going to the Herodsfoot reception. So many houses were open to him in Mayfair, in Piccadilly, in Belgravia—why should he bore himself with this silly, little woman who had fallen in love with him? But in the end he went. He had had a set of waistcoat buttons made, the very smartest things that had ever been seen, enamelled buttons resembling white piqué, but with a diamond in the centre. They are comparatively common now, but Louis Althaus invented them, they were seen for the first time in the season of

1895 at Lady Herodsfoot's reception. They almost restored Louis's complacency, they certainly drove him to the reception. It was sure to be crowded, the best people were certain to be there; it was quite possible the buttons would have a line of comment in some Society journal, they really were unique, and in perfect taste.

When, at that crowded fashionable reception, chance found Louis standing next to Aline Hayward—Constantia nowhere to be seen, and the girl practically alone—he thought the buttons had brought him luck. The Duke, Lady Violet's father, was nominally in charge at the moment—he had meant to take her to the supper-room, but an opportunity occurred of inflicting a country neighbour with his views on sheep-rot, and, whilst he button-holed his patient listener, he forgot Aline for the time being, and Louis rose to the occasion. His voice was in her ear, soft, with the rolling "r's," his breath against her cheek.

"At last! you will allow me?"

Her hand was on his arm even as she started with timid, quick recognition of his proximity. He knew the way of the house. He led her skilfully, piloting her through the crowd, and they were out of possible sight of Constantia, and in the angle behind the stairs where the crowd was thinnest, before the Duke had time to notice that he was posing to an audience of one instead of two.

"How unkind you were to me this afternoon," Louis said to her reproachfully. "What have I done to deserve it?"

"Oh! you ought not to have brought me away like this. I don't know what Aunt Constantia will say."

He pressed her arm.

"Hush! never mind what your Aunt will say."

"But I ought."

"Don't you like being here with me?"

"I did not tell Aunt Con I danced with you the other night. Father thought I need not tell her. That is why I couldn't speak to you this afternoon; she does not know I know you."

"Then it wasn't because you had forgotten me?"

"No," she said shyly; "I hadn't forgotten you."

"And you don't dislike me?"

Standing in the shadow of the stairs he went yet a little further. Her hand was on his arm, he put his right hand over it.

"Do you dislike me?"

She liked his hand over hers, although she was nervous with him to-night, more nervous than she had been before; but he was so gentle and kind, the other night he had kissed her. Constantia knew nothing of it; but Constantia kissed her rarely, her father perfunctorily, night and morning. Louis was sweet and gentle and kind. Their solitude was not complete enough for him to venture far, but she nestled against him, and her arm was pressed against his side. Nobody had ever seemed so kind to her.

"Did you think I should be satisfied when you bowed to me like that?"

"I did not know what I was to do. Aunt Con is so kind to me; she has always been so kind to me."

"Am I not kind to you? Don't you know I want to be kind to you?"

"And you don't think about that—that——"

"I shall never remember it, never remind you of it, believe me." Abruptly, suddenly, she said to him, *à propos* of nothing.

"They want me to marry my cousin John."

"And you?"

She paled. "I don't want to. Oh, I don't want to, so badly."

"Have you told them so?"

"I have told Aunt Con; but she thinks I ought, she thinks it will be good for my father."

"Does Lord John know——?"

"No!" Her inclination was towards him, and again he pressed her arm.

"Do you want me to help you?"

"Oh! can you?" Her eyes pleaded with him childishly.

"I can do anything. You must leave yourself in my hands."

"I don't want to marry anybody."

"Would you rather marry me than Lord John?"

She was silent for a minute or two after that.

"I don't want to marry anybody," she said blushing, wavering. And the difficulties about his project fixed his intention irrevocably, at least, almost irrevocably. Constantia drove in the final rivet; for a wave in the crowd, an ebb in its surging movement, exposed Louis and Aline to her view. Aline, whom she was seeking, for she never liked her to be long from her side, was under the rose-festooned staircase, under the tropical plants, side by side with "that polyglot adventurer!" They were all "polyglot adventurers" to Constantia, all the South African magnates. Of course, she knew it was possible to meet such people at Lady Herodsfoot's, but she did not think she would see one of them side by side with Aline.

"Oh! there's my aunt," exclaimed the girl, holding herself suddenly away from Louis, nervously erect and anxious.

"All right; don't worry, I'll take you to her. Leave yourself in my hands."

"Your niece was quite alarmed lest you should miss her," he said in his most fascinating manner, with just that little turn to his moustache, just that look, melancholy, appealing, presupposing intimacy, that he had found so effective. "I promised I would find you for her; I hope you have not been uneasy on her account."

Constantia was equal to the occasion. "The man was odious," she told Stephen afterwards, "he simpered at me, he leered. How they can tolerate such people is more than I can understand." She recovered Aline from him without the smallest acknowledgment of his speech, of his courtesy.

"Damn her," said Louis to himself, under his breath. "If I thought it would do me any good, I'd take the girl away from her now—under her very nose. I'll make her look at me before she's done."

"John, will you see if our carriage is there, please? Aline is indisposed, tired."

Aline had not spoken; but the appeal in Louis's fine eyes touched her, if it did not touch her aunt. She was sorry for Louis, being only a child with a child's heart.

"I couldn't help it, Aunt," she said timorously.

"I know, dear." Con was never harsh with Aline, she always felt she owed her something, some motherliness that had failed her, that made the failure in her.

"How came you with that fellow?" asked John, as he stood beside them in the hall waiting for the carriage to be announced.

Con answered for her. "It was your uncle, he is so absent-minded. Aline was with him, but he was button-holed by Mr. Fowler, and they left Aline alone. Somehow or other John knew that Aline was not like other girls, that she wanted more care perhaps. It did not repel him, he thought girls should be timid, dependent, feminine.

"May I come up in the morning?" he said, as he put them into the brougham, "I want to speak to Stephen."

"Indeed, John, I shall be glad to see you," answered Constantia cordially.

Aline thought of Louis's promised kindness, of the warm pressure of his hand, of his handsome eyes. Constantia thought how good it would be to hand Aline into John's strong keeping. To-morrow he would ask Stephen again for his answer. She would strongly urge an affirmative, if necessary she would insist. Aline should marry John, and then she, Constantia, could let her conscience rest. She would have achieved all, and more than all, that Angela could have done for her daughter. The Marquis's son represented more than his father's political position. He meant vast estates and safety, and event-

ually the Marquisate. Surely she had redeemed any disregard of Angela, any neglect of Aline in those early days. There would be no recrudescence, no possible recrudescence of that ugly past once she was John's honored wife. And no one would ever be the wiser.

It seemed as if everything would come about as Constantia had wished, for the very next morning John sought Stephen in his study and formally asked again for his daughter's hand; and Stephen, duly coached by Con, and strengthened by his knowledge of his chief's approval, cordially promised his support. Nothing was said about the jockey; Stephen had almost permitted himself to forget him. There was a question as to whether Aline on this occasion would do what she was told, would obey orders; pressure, of course, must not be used. But Aline could be gently reminded how she had fared when she had acted for herself, she could be tenderly urged, if not coerced, into accepting the proffered honour. It was no new thing, it had been understood by her for some time.

John stayed to lunch, and after lunch they left him alone with Aline.

"I don't want to be married, John," she said piteously.

John did not very much want to be married himself; but he wanted much less that Cecil, his younger brother, or Cecil's "beastly boys," should ever inherit the family estates.

"Oh, we shall shake down together all right," he said easily, "I don't suppose we shall be much in each other's way. And you've got to marry some one or other, all girls do." She realised that. "You'll be just as well off with me as here; your father and Constantia have always palled in together, you're only in the way with them. I've got to get married, too, you know, on account of the succession, and I hate the sort of girl, like Vi, who takes care of herself, and smokes and bets. You don't smoke or bet, do you?"

"No; I don't do anything Aunt Con does not tell me," she replied ingenuously.

“Well, we can go and tell her, then, it’s settled, can’t we?”

But Constantia did not leave them long enough alone to necessitate their going to her. She joined them in the drawing-room in a very short time.

“It’s all right, Aunt Con; Aline says she’ll have me,” John said. Constantia was expansive in her satisfaction; she kissed her niece, tendered her cheek to John, and promptly sat down at the little writing-table that stood in the bow-window, the bow-legged writing-table with the wonderful Louis Seize mounts and red lacquered interior, and worded the announcement for the papers.

“A marriage has been arranged, and will take place at the end of the season, between Lord John Cranbury, eldest son of the Marquis of Jevington, and Aline, only daughter of the Honourable Stephen Hayward, and the late Lady Angela Hayward.”

The very next day the announcement was in *The Times* and *The Morning Post*. Louis saw it, naturally. All his cards, or Karl’s cards, seemed slipping from him. He lost his head in the emergency. He thought Karl would think him a boastful fool when he read his letters, together with the announcement which would probably arrive by the same post. He hated Karl to think him a fool. If he had an expressed contempt for Karl’s clothes, habits, Imperial sympathies, he had a very real and deep-rooted respect for his judgments, for his opinion. He always wanted Karl’s good opinion, the very steps he had taken to lose it had been taken with a view to acquiring it. He wanted Karl to think him a very clever and dashing fellow, diplomat and financier. He would have cheated him of the mine so that Karl should have admired his sharpness. He had heard Karl admire the astuteness of the people who had cheated him. Now Karl would think him a fool. Yet Louis was sure that Stephen Hayward liked him, even if his exclusive sister had, perhaps, persuaded him not to show it. Why else had he invited him twice to the Club? It never struck

Louis that it was for Karl's sake; Karl was such a rough diamond, not Stephen Hayward's style at all, he thought.

In his vanity, in his anxiety to right himself with Karl, Louis went to Stephen, sought him at the Club, ran him aground in the reading-room.

"I want to speak to you," Louis began. Stephen put his book down resignedly.

"My dear fellow, I am quite at your disposal."

"We can't talk here."

The room was fairly full. Buried in easy-chairs, or sitting upright in leather-covered ones with wooden arms, behind newspapers or wrapped in vacuity, were half a score of fogies. Stephen looked around.

"Seriously now—I want to speak to you seriously."

"Are you sure it isn't Ripon you want?" Stephen said, with a twinkle in his eye. Stephen was too content, too happy in the coming marriage, in the coming election, and his prospects, to remember to resent Louis. Louis, when he had talked South African politics with Stephen, had openly given it as his opinion that Karl was wrong in thinking Stephen Hayward had any influence or power in the Cabinet or out of it, was wrong in applying to anybody for ministerial support in Pretoria, except the Liberal Colonial Secretary.

"No! no! it's a private matter. It's nothing to do with South Africa. I wish you would come up to my rooms; they are not five minutes from here."

"You are living in your brother's old rooms, are you not?" said Stephen, getting up and stretching himself. He remembered those rooms, and the Abbotsford Turners; the only things he had ever envied a millionaire were those Abbotsford Turners and the Oliver miniatures. He really wanted to see them again. It did not seem a great matter to stroll with Louis Althaus a few doors down Piccadilly. He did not wonder what the man might have to say to him. So many people had something to say to him since the doom of the Liberal party had been sealed, grievances to air, or claims to accentuate. He

had the ear of Jevington, and it was supposed that Jevington influenced Lord Sarum. He did not like Louis Althaus, but then there were so many people he did not like.

"When is your brother coming home?" he asked Louis. "That is a very remarkable man, that brother of yours," he said.

"Do you think so?" said Louis, surprised. "Roughish, isn't he? Old Karl, I shouldn't have thought, now, you would have cared for old Karl; but I tell you what, he is one of the richest men in South Africa, one of the very richest. It's about that, it's something about that," he corrected himself, "at least, that has some bearing upon what I want to speak to you about."

"Oh!" Stephen elevated his brows. Certainly he did not like Louis Althaus.

The rooms looked very much as they did when he was in them before. The screen was still hung with Raphael Morghen engravings, the Abbottsford Turners continued to adorn the panels in the oaken library.

"I am not at all sure the setting isn't too heavy. Not at all sure I wouldn't prefer a dead level wall, neutral tinted canvas, and just the pictures without that distracting carving."

He spoke his thoughts aloud, thoughts that had been with him when he was last here, and he had envied the millionaire so few of all his possessions.

"Oh, you are looking at the pictures," said Louis indifferently, leading the way, but turning round and intercepting his glance.

"Stumers, I suppose? Karl goes in for art, you know. His father was a bric-à-brac dealer. It runs in the blood, I think. All the Jews either buy or sell works of art. Curious, isn't it? I've often noticed it."

"You wanted to speak to me?" answered Stephen coldly, not taking the offered seat. He wished he had not come; what a cad the fellow was! How different from his adopted brother. He took out his watch.

"I forgot I had an appointment. I really can only spare you a couple of minutes. I have to meet my future son-in-law."

"Yes; it's about that I want to speak to you."

"About—*that?*" Stephen grew nervous with his amazement, and dropped his glasses. "What on earth—I beg your pardon."

Louis interrupted him smilingly.

"You are surprised that I want to speak to you about this engagement. Would you be surprised to hear my brother had told me all your daughter's story?"

"Very," Stephen said. He was surprised, startled almost out of composure. "Very," he repeated, his face flushing.

"Not that it makes any difference to me. No! I'm not the sort of man to bring a girlish escapade like that up against her."

The colour slowly deepened in Stephen's face.

"I said to Karl at the time, girls will be girls. If I took a fancy to her, it wouldn't stand in my way."

Stephen was so rarely angry. He was startled now to know how angry he was; his breath was coming irregularly, his heart beating quickly.

"What is it you want with me, Mr. Althaus?"

Louis, with his egregious smile, his complete self-satisfaction, thought he was getting on swimmingly; it was with almost a patronising smile he answered, subsiding gracefully into a seat:

"I want you to break off this engagement with her cousin; I want you to give your daughter to me instead. No, please," he raised his hand, "please don't answer quickly. I know it is a surprising request. You think I hardly know her—you think that old affair——"

Louis wanted to blurt out how very rich was Karl; he remembered that the Haywards had nothing, practically nothing.

"I think," said Stephen, cutting into the other's explanatoriness, "I think you are insolent, sir, insolent!"

And he turned on his heel to leave the room. He really could not trust himself. Louis rose too.

"Insolent! Insolent! What do you mean by insolent?" he hurried out. "*Do you know how much we've got?*"

Stephen stopped a moment, and looked at the man before him. Did he know how much they had? The very phrase explained the possibility of his daring to make such a proposition to him, Stephen Hayward; the very phrase calmed him. Louis could never have comprehended how Stephen's blood had boiled within him, how little his estimate of the class to which Louis belonged really differed from his sister's. That the fellow should dare to ask, to contemplate, a Hayward alliance, that he should so misunderstand the toleration with which his presence in Society had been met was incredible!

"I have nothing to add," Stephen said coldly. "Let me pass, please." But Louis stood between him and the door. Furious he was, too; his fury drove the blood from his cheeks and lips, his mouth grew spiteful, the pupils of his eyes contracted.

"What do you think Lord John will say to that old story? Wait a minute, wait! What will her aunts and uncles say? Supposing I were to—" Stephen waved him aside contemptuously.

"I neither know nor care what any one will say about some old unauthenticated story you have fished up. I do your brother the justice of believing he has had no hand in your attempted blackmail. My daughter's first marriage was a misfortune"—Louis did not know there had been a marriage; Aline had been confused in speaking, and his foregone conclusion had been unshaken. The blow staggered him; he moved forward a little in his astonishment. Stephen used this opportunity to get nearer the door, finishing his sentence, coolly, with his hand on the handle—"but still, the misfortune of that marriage was a trifle compared with the disgust with which she and I, sir—yes, she and I—would look upon an alliance with

you." He got even cooler as he spoke. With his hand still on the door handle, he added calmly, "I beg to decline your offer—it was an impertinence."

The door closed behind him. He got into the hall, the street, but he recovered slowly. He had had an instinct against Louis, a loathing. He reasoned with himself. He would not thus have answered Karl, though Karl had wheeled a barrow in the streets; it was not entirely class prejudice.

"Phew! the fellow makes me sick," was his reflection. He got back into the shelter of his club, and tried to analyse his rage, and rid himself of its effects. His self-respect had been outraged by Louis's proposal.

Louis's anger at the refusal of it, and the manner of the refusal, was of a different calibre. It seemed to drive Joan and her claims completely out of his head; he could think of nothing now but how to be revenged upon the Haywards. Even the settlements that Karl was to make became subsidiary to this. He would marry the girl—he would marry her with or without their consent. He swore it to himself. His desire for revenge brightened his wits. He lost no time in putting himself into communication with Aline; he had not to invent anything new, the old methods were good enough. He had but to tell his man to seek out the Hayward's maid; he had but to mark his course, and bribe it open for him.

The weeks that followed were for Louis full of intrigue, plot, and self-control. It was the July when the boom was at its height. The Althaus Bank was launched under wonderful auspices, launched at three pounds premium on the one pound shares. Louis put many of his friends in at par. Not that he liked giving anything away, but his intellect was sharpened just now, and he saw the necessity. Society sought him, hung about him, open-mouthed, with gaping eyes and pockets; with gold he plied the avid women, and with soft words and smiles. They sympathised with him when he complained of the set the Hayward faction made against him. One or two

bold ones spoke to Constantia about him; unfortunately Stephen had kept his counsel about Louis's proposal. When his rage grew cold, and the emotion of the moment had passed, he smiled at himself for having been so moved. He did not think it necessary to provoke a lecture from Constantia by telling her what his imprudent acquaintance had made possible. He had no thought of danger for Aline, for, with Constantia and John, it seemed to him she was well guarded. It struck him, of course, at the moment that Louis, being a cad, might hint at or tell the old story; but, when the days went by, and he heard nothing, he set down the threat, or implied threat, as an empty one, spoken in the heat of the moment. "We both lost our tempers," he said to himself. "I dare say the fellow isn't as bad as I made out; anyway, he has nothing to gain by gossiping."

The fellow had nothing to gain by telling the story, everything to gain by knowing there was one. It was through Aline's fears he worked, through her undeveloped will and understanding. Con's vigilance was eluded in crowded assemblies—for every crowded assembly had now the privilege of numbering Louis Althaus among its items—on race-courses, where rare chaperons were deputed to take Con's place, and John played vigilant escort when the horses were not running, or after they had passed the ordeal of the judge. But Louis was vigilant while John's horses were being gently walked about the paddock, were kicking at the starting-post, or flashing past the judge's chair in this or the other order. Aline got used to the low voice in her ear, came to look for Louis's beauty, his gentle love-making, his arguments, to scheme, too, to be alone with him where he could kiss and caress her, and fill her poor cramped mind with visions of him. Undeveloped child, or arrested woman, there were yet in her many capacities that neither Stephen nor Constantia had recognised; neither of them were psychologists. Everything she ought to have remembered she had forgotten. She was dangerously receptive to Louis's love-

making; a doctor might have warned them, but no one warned them. And Louis, professional almost in his recognition of temperament, moved her subtly and warily, but very easily, as he wished her to be moved.

Aline took morning walks with her maid—a maid susceptible to sovereigns. And John was careless in his security; the trousseau was being made, wedding presents were being received. After Goodwood he and Aline would borrow the Duke's place in Scotland for a short honeymoon.

"You don't mind if I have some fellows up for the twelfth, do you?" asked John of his bride that was to be. "We shall be pretty sick of each other by then, and it will just come in at the right time. Con will come and help you with the women. What do you say?"

She said she was quite satisfied. She was quite satisfied with everything—clothes, presents, arrangements generally. She had somehow or other brightened and softened, she looked charming. Some of the alertness of her childhood seemed to have come back to her.

"Is she in love with you?" Lady Violet asked John satirically.

"Seems like it," said John contentedly, glancing over to where she sat at dinner, at the right hand of his father, the diamonds in her hair reflected in her eyes. Her lips were brilliantly scarlet, she was not talking—Aline rarely talked, but she looked happy, excited, bridal.

"She's rippin' handsome, isn't she?" asked John admiringly. "Of course it was the Governor's idea, he can't do without Stephen. But it's turning out very well. There's nothing in the room can touch her for looks." He had all the sense of proprietorship and satisfaction, in glancing at her across the table, that he would have had if, in his own stables, he had found a possible Derby winner. "And she'll come on, too, you'll see, she'll fill out," he said reflectively. He was not at all emotional, but he tried to catch Aline's eye across the table. He would have liked to signify his pleasure and approval, but he failed in

catching her eye; she had forgotten John. He drank his wine and finished his dinner contentedly enough, nevertheless.

"What a little cat you are!" was all his comment when Lady Violet cross-examined him as to Aline's social and intellectual powers. He was quite satisfied with both. "Every inch a breeder," was his own comment on the girl's aristocratic air and pose. Who the deuce wanted an intellectual wife. Not John; he talked horses with Vi, in which she was acute, Ruff's Guide, in which she was well-read. Lady Violet and he had a thousand things in common, but Aline seemed an ideal wife for him.

He supposed she was in love with him, though she shrank from his rarely offered caresses. He rather liked her for that; he was not a particularly demonstrative man himself, and it suited his idea of the fitness of things that Aline should be cold. So he talked to Vi and looked at Aline, and was supremely content, after the ladies had left the room, to linger over his wine and continue his racing gossip with the Hon. Jack Alford of the Turf and Jockey Club, who sat on Committees with him and was also versed in form.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

It is extraordinary what actions are possible for a well-guarded young lady with a venal maid.

Aline, with the love-light in her eyes, was happy that night at the Duke's dinner-party. That morning her maid had done the shopping alone. She had taken Aline to Karl's rooms in Piccadilly, where Louis now reigned lord and master, and she had fetched her from those rooms two hours later. Half a year's wages she earned as easily as nothing, and there was plenty more to come, Louis told her, if she held her tongue and did as she was told. Louis—but it is never worth while to analyse Louis's feelings. Aline's society made him remember Joan, and when he remembered Joan he was uncomfortable, almost more than uncomfortable by now.

He wanted to see Joan again, he wanted her to write to him; he realised that she had a hold on him, he knew that what he had told her was true, that he had never loved another woman so well. It was with difficulty, always increasing, that he pushed the memory of her away from him.

As for Aline, the girl was dull of wit, but she put it in his power to make Stephen regret that word "insolent," she made it possible for him to take revenge on Constantia for her contempt, on John for his indifference, on the Hayward clique and family for their ostracism. What form his revenge should take was a detail about which he was not particularly clear. If his was an evil temper, it was a temper no stronger nor wider than the man himself, it was, so to speak, a small, evil temper. Getting his own way soothed it. He was in half-a-dozen minds as to his course of action, when Karl's cable came

in answer to that very letter, the possible effect of which had driven him to speak to Stephen so hastily. Karl was reckless in cabling to Louis :

“Overjoyed at proposed marriage nothing could suit better secure Imperial interest. Cabling Hayward will make any arrangements for settlements he requires.”

Thus Karl acted the *Deus ex machinâ*, and precipitated matters prematurely. The cablegram arrived in the evening, the very evening, in fact, of the ducal dinner-party. Louis calculated, and calculated correctly, that the one intended for Stephen would have been sent to Westminster, and Stephen would not receive it until the morning. As a matter of fact, Stephen was in Scotland, on a hurried visit connected with the Council of Education, and it was a week before he read the message, which was then no longer cryptographic.

As it was, Louis thought he was bound to act precipitately, and therefore he blamed Karl. All the following morning, when he was getting a special licence, making arrangements at a convenient church, instructing the maid and securing Aline's presence, he was blaming Karl for driving him into premature action, he was thinking of Joan, and feeling encumbered with the prospect of Aline's companionship. He had it ever in the background of his mind, where he had thrust Joan's image, that she would forgive him his hasty marriage, that she would know it was Karl's fault, that he would one day, one vague day, ask her for sympathy, and let her comfort him for having been thrust into such a position by Karl's impulsiveness.

In the meanwhile, he completed his preparations, went back to Aline in Piccadilly, found her waiting patiently for him with her maid, drove them both down in his brougham to the little church in Margaret Street, and was married before he had quite decided what should be his next step.

Stephen's absence in Scotland, of which they told him, assured him safety from discovery for a few more hours.

He sent the maid back to Grosvenor Street to smuggle out such clothes and jewellery as were possible.

There would be a hullabaloo, there was bound to be an outcry. John, strong and stalwart, might take active steps. Louis did not specify what steps John might take, but he said to himself that anything in the way of a fracas would be undignified! Louis was not handy with his fists, and, like most men to whom libertinism was a habit, he had in early days known the taste of a horsewhip across his back. Taking everything into consideration, "facing the music" made no appeal to him.

On the other hand, it would be interesting to hear the details of Karl's proposed settlements; he had no doubt of Karl's generous affection, but there was nothing like certainty. The season was so nearly over; it was impossible for him to appear at Ascot, shooting parties were hardly in his line, and there was nothing in the mining market to keep him in England. The flotation of the Althaus Bank, and its extraordinary success, seemed to have been the signal for a general diminution of business, for a general fall in values, or fictitious values. The orders from South Africa, couched in enigmatic language, all spelt "stop," or "go slow," anyway they put the damper completely on speculation, and encouraged, at least in the Althaus office, the opinion that the bears were in for a field day, and not before it was their due. They shortened sail in the Althaus office, and prepared for squalls.

Altogether, there seemed nothing to detain Louis in England, nothing to prevent him taking his aristocratic bride to his brother, to receive personally his congratulations, and anything else with which he might wish to endow them.

Louis, not being introspective, did not contrast, more than he could help, his voyage in the *Arizona* with Joan on his way to England with his voyage in the *Memphis* with Aline, eight months later, on his return to South Africa.

Aline had the manners and habits of her class, was carefully dressed and attended by her maid three or four times a day, was coifed and manicured, sent forward with her parasol and her handkerchief to take her seat on her deck-chair, and was even supplied with a novel and a footstool. Louis became proud of her; he told her pedigree, or, at least, her relationship to the former Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to as many of his fellow-voyagers as gave him the opportunity. He introduced people to her, often he stood by her chair. At first he had drawn her attention to sky and sea, to phenomena of salt spray and colour-effects; it had given him pleasure to remember the things Joan had said to him, and to repeat them, imagining himself poetic, and an observer of Nature. But Aline's lack of interest gradually chilled his reminiscent ardour. Aline's lack of interest seemed her most prevailing characteristic. He frequently yawned when he stood attentively by her chair, yet he was more satisfied than he had expected to be with the wife he had won. After all, her birth and breeding impressed him, and that she had no conversation and no mind did not detract from her value as an addendum to his personal consequence. Her maid was brighter, smarter, more appreciative, altogether better to Louis's taste, as a companion. They had frequent consultations together as to Aline's toilettes and other things. Altogether, though the voyage back seemed infinitely longer than the voyage out, it was not impossibly tedious. There were many ladies on board, one or two of the smaller fry of Cape Town financiers, and Louis's self-esteem was always being fed and petted and his temper kept sweet. Aline was still in love with him, very happy and content. Under Louis's dictation she had written to her father and Aunt Con to tell them so. She hoped they would forgive her for not awaiting their consent, but she could not bear John, and she loved Louis, and often Aunt Con had said she wanted her to be happy, and, then, many great families had their origin in wealth, so the line of demarcation Aunt Con

had drawn was merely an artificial one. Louis had been very proud of the wording of Aline's letter; the last trace of irritation against Stephen and Con went as he dictated it. It gave him back his self-confidence.

Karl met them at Cape Town, and came on board in the tug.

"Well, Louis, old boy, well, so you have brought your wife out here for her honeymoon."

"Dear old man," Louis answered affectionately, "I didn't feel I was properly married until you'd seen her, and given us your fraternal blessing!"

"Oh! you shall have my blessing right enough, and something besides." They shook hands, patted each other's shoulders, were altogether a little more demonstrative than Englishmen would have been.

"It was a splendid move, an excellent move, nothing could have pleased me better; and you seemed to have fixed it up so quickly too—taken time by the forelock, eh! and tweaked it. What did Stephen say to the hurry, and that stiff sister of his? It was awfully good of him to send us the sign we had been waiting for. How did you manage to persuade them? You must tell me all about it. I suppose it was the Jackson affair that clinched it; they can't afford to sit still and let the world see that Englishmen can't count on their Government when they are wronged and oppressed. I was surprised to get your cable that you were coming out. No waiting for settlements or anything. Hayward never answered my message; took it on trust, I suppose. Well, he won't suffer for it, nor she either. He's behaved well to you, Louis, and to us," here he gave another pat, "and we'll behave well to him. Now, where is the girl? Hang it all, Louis, just to think of you as a married man! I suppose I may give her a kiss. Why, it doesn't seem so long ago that you used to kiss me 'good-night' yourself, no, nor an age since we slept together under the counter at Abrahams, the pawnbrokers. You forget that, I suppose? It was almost my first place, and I took it for four bob a week on condi-

tion I might have you to sleep with me under the counter. How you used to nestle up, 'Lulu cold,' you used to say; it was 'Lulu cold' and 'Lulu hungry' most of those days. And now I am asking whether I may give your wife a kiss, and she Stephen Hayward's daughter! Yes, times have changed for us, haven't they?"

Louis was quite ready to be sentimental; he had yet to break to Karl that he had not waited for Stephen's consent—and then there was the Geldenrief—

"But you've always been good to me, old fellow, though I've been a trouble," he answered affectionately.

"No, no, never a trouble—a bit of anxiety perhaps, but we won't talk of that now; you're all I've got belonging to me anyhow. I don't feel it's a sister you're going to present to me, I feel it's a daughter; you've been more like a son, haven't you? And I haven't been hard on you, I hope I haven't been hard on you, because you've got a different nature from mine, and live differently. It's all over now, eh? Benedict, the married man. Is she pretty? I've arranged for you both at the hotel. I didn't know what your plans were. And we've got a heap of things to talk over; it's not all roses over here just now. But we must see you finish your honeymoon in peace."

Then, amid passengers with luggage, and sailors, Kafir boys, and the bustle of landing, appeared Aline, calm and fair and collected, in her neat serge costume, her hat, her veil, her gloves, all as if fresh from Piccadilly, and Susan in close attendance, with her leather jewel-case.

"Oh, my word!" ejaculated Karl.

"All right, isn't it?" asked Louis, lipping with his proud air of proprietorship.

"Aline, this is my more than brother, my guardian, Karl Althaus, the millionaire."

"Well, he might have left that out, mightn't he, my dear? Glad to know you," said Karl.

She put out her hand in its grey kid glove, a small hand that lay in Karl's huge paw, and attracted his eye:

there seemed no occasion or opportunity for that contemplated kiss.

"I am glad to know Louis's brother," she said. "Is that Cape Town; do we land here?"

"Yes, that is Cape Town, and this is Table Bay." Karl felt a pride in his South African home.

"It seems very nice," she said, in that ladylike, uninterested way that Louis thought was such good form.

"Nice, oh!" Karl faced the mountain for a minute. It was crowned with mist; behind those mists was hidden more than a continent, an empire. Karl's heart was full of empire just now, and his head of dreams; he was growing beyond money, and the land he looked on was great with promise.

"Louis," said Aline, "my cabin box has not been brought up yet. Susan told the men not to touch it until you went down."

"All right, I'll see about it; take care of that gangway. Karl, see to Aline, old fellow, will you, whilst I look after the things? I told them not to turn them upside down; I don't want everything spoilt."

"Yes, I'll see to Aline. Take my arm, dear. You don't mind my calling you dear, do you? I dare say Louis will have told you he's been more like a son to me than a brother. I nursed him when he was a baby; he sat on my knee to learn his letters, used to cuddle down too, and pretend he was asleep, so that he shouldn't have to learn. He was a sly little chap, but affectionate, I believe you. But you don't want me to prate about your husband, I dare say you've heard all about it; you'll be glad to get on dry land again, I should think. I always look on the trip as a rest, but I suppose it's different with you."

Aline had nothing to say. Susan answered for her. She never let her mistress far out of her sight.

"Yes, indeed, we shall be, sir, cooped up in these cabins, hardly room to turn round."

Karl did not encourage Susan's loquacity. He looked

after Aline, and then returned to help Louis with the luggage and through the customs.

"I won't dine with you to-night; I'll leave you by yourselves. But how about to-morrow? I want a talk; I'm at the old rooms. Will you stroll over after breakfast?"

"Oh, come in to-night. Aline is sure to go to bed early. What do you think of her? What did she say to you?"

"Not talkative, is she? A bit of her aunt about her, isn't there?" Karl said slowly.

"But she's got the air, the right air about her, hasn't she?" Louis rejoined eagerly.

"Louis, you're such an affectionate fellow, have you done this for me? She's—it's got into my head that you've done this for me; it's just like you. Tell me——"

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense!" but not in a tone to carry conviction. Why shouldn't Karl think he had sacrificed himself on the altar of fraternal or Imperial interests. "Don't worry about me. Aline is all right, just the wife for me; and now you've got the connection you want with the Government. Stephen Hayward will be Prime Minister one of these days, everybody says so. It's only a question of time."

"Well, well, I'll see you later. But my mind misgives me, my mind misgives me."

It did misgive him. Karl, accustomed to deal with men and matters, always ready with a certain penetrative summary of the people before him, had hoped to find a strong, good woman side by side with his brother, one who would lead him, guard him, keep him from straying backwards to those Cupid's gardens, of his dalliances in which Karl had always known. Aline was not a strong woman, he saw that in her wandering eyes; that she was not a wise one he saw too, not one who would share the responsibility he had always had with Louis, she was one who would add to it rather. Karl perceived all that.

"She hasn't kept simple and straight herself, as a girl should," he thought, remembering the old story. That

she was fair and stately in her cultivated carriage did not compensate him for all he missed in her; and his mind misgave him as he drove away.

He had meant to leave them alone together that evening, but his restlessness made it impossible. Louis welcomed him warmly in the hotel sitting-room, was affectionately glad to see him, and ordered up the whisky bottle and cigars, remembering all Karl's tastes.

"That's just what we wanted, a good old cosy talk. Aline went to bed directly after dinner, tired out, you know. I don't think she's very strong, but Susan looks after her—a good girl, Susan. Did you notice her? So you can smoke away with an easy conscience, and they'll air the room before we want it in the morning."

Louis's fastidiousness foresaw the room filled with fumes of stale smoke and whisky, and provided against it. He took one easy-chair, Karl taking the other. He lit a cigarette, Karl a green Havana. Louis had his coffee and his liqueur at the small table by his elbow, Karl filled half his tumbler with whisky, added a dash of soda, and put it on the ground beside him where he could reach it easily.

"Now tell us all about it. I'll unfold my budget when you've done; mine's full enough. I've been hanging about that stoep at Groot Schur for the last week. That's the biggest man we've seen in our time, Louis, the very biggest."

"*You* tell me all about everything," Louis interposed, stretching himself out lazily and comfortably, "mine can keep. I'm married and done for, that sums it up; you've got far more interesting news. What about the Bank, and what's the meaning of the Concessions' Account that we paid ten thousand into, and what has brought business to a standstill in Throgmorton Street, and lots more whats? Go ahead!"

"I'm glad to have you back," said Karl; "I haven't a soul I can talk to as I do to you, Louis. But I wish I'd brought you up differently; I wish I had known what I

know now when you were a little fellow, and would have taken it in."

"Oh! well, I dare say I know more than you think; but what's it all about, what's wrong?"

What Karl Althaus had to tell his brother is an old story now, trite and stale and almost forgotten. For years Karl had thought only of money, and of how to acquire it, of land and how to become possessed of it, but his big heart and big brain wanted only impetus and opportunity to open to finer truths than that money is power. Joan had given the impetus, circumstances the opportunity, and the Prime Minister of Cape Colony had indicated the direction.

The grievances of British residents in Johannesburg had reached the culminating point. The laws made by the Boers to suit the Boers pressed ever more hardly on those whose interests were not represented in either Raad. The position had become intolerable. Moved partly by genuine patriotism, partly by the counsel of the woman he loved, a little perhaps also by self-interest, Karl Althaus had definitely joined the party of revolt. But he hardly anticipated serious opposition; it was a big game of bluff that he thought would be played, with cannons for counters. The coming of Stephen Hayward's daughter meant that the British residents in Johannesburg held the fifth ace; and the fifth ace was Imperial support.

"What have you told Stephen Hayward?" Karl asked Louis. "When I got your wire, when I knew he had given you his daughter, and that you were both on the way out, I took heart. I went up to Rhodes with the news. 'Stephen Hayward has given his daughter to my brother,' I told him, 'I asked him for a sign, and he has given his daughter to my brother, and sent them both out here.' I suppose, by the way, it was Stephen's idea you should come out here, and be on the spot when the row came?"

"You know, Karl, you may be very well up in the politics of the Rand, but you know precious little about politics

in England, if you think Stephen Hayward represents the Government."

"He represents the Haywards, and the Haywards represent the country, all that is best and most constitutional in it."

"Stick-in-the-muds, that's what the Haywards are. You'll never get the Haywards to move."

"We must, Louis, we must. It's life and death to South Africa, it's life and death to British interests here. I do believe it's life and death to British interests throughout the world if we lose South Africa; and lose it we shall if these eighty thousand Englishmen are left to their fate, to be trampled on, oppressed, fired at and taunted when they threaten reprisals, intrigued against successfully when they appeal to their Commissioner, thrust on one side when they expose their grievances, forbidden to bear arms, to live free, deprived of suffrage, their rights ignored."

"Draw it mild, old fellow, we haven't starved out here."

"No!" Karl said bitterly, "because we've run with the hare and hunted with the hounds, because we've forgotten we were Englishmen. But I'm sick of truckling, they think less and less of us through it. We've got to fight 'em, or anyway frighten 'em. That damned fort at Pretoria has got to be seized."

"You're such a surprise to me in this mood, I don't know what to say; it seems a storm in a tea-cup to me."

"It will be a hurricane by-and-by."

Karl told Louis everything, walking up and down the room, now in glowing sentences, now in disjointed phrases. He talked far into the night, with the longing a man has for sympathy, for comprehension, from his own kith and kin.

Louis, at first amused, grew tired, then bored; he yawned, he looked at his watch. Karl went on talking revolution, Louis drowsed in his easy-chair, answering yes and no, murmuring sympathetic agreement, longing

for Karl to exhaust himself. But Karl woke him suddenly when, *à propos* of nothing, he said:

"Tell me, you never told me, if you saw anything of Joan de Groot in London. I hear you went over in the same boat; did you get friendly with her? Hers is the very pen we want now and must have. What is she doing? Where is she?"

"Joan—Joan de Groot," stammered Louis. "Where is she? Where?"

"Yes, man, where, and what is she doing?"

"I don't know."

It was the truth, he did not know. His mind followed the question—she and her unborn child, where were they?"

"Karl, I don't know. I tried to find out, I wanted to know, it's not my fault." He was agitated; Karl saw he was agitated. "She gave me the slip; I swear to you I never meant to lose sight of her like this——"

Karl did not understand his agitation; there were tears in Louis's eyes and his voice was unsteady, even his cheeks had flushed a little. "I never meant to lose sight of her. I wish to God I knew where she was. You have heard something——"

Karl went over to him.

"What a sentimentalist you are," he said, "what a sentimentalist. I begin to think that any way I had educated you, you would have turned out the same. I tell you of the biggest bit of Empire-making that has been done since Clive was in India, and you yawn your head off. I ask you the address of a woman that I told you to keep your eye on, and because you haven't got it you are half hysterical. Never mind, old chap, if you have lost sight of her. One woman at a time for you, I suppose, and you were completely taken up with the present Mrs. Althaus."

Louis's smile was sickly.

"But I'm disappointed" Karl said, walking up and down again, "I must admit I'm disappointed. I thought

you two would have become friends. I thought you'd have given me news of her. I told you before, didn't I, Louis? she's the one woman in the world for me. And she's free now."

He grew silent a minute, thinking of her. Louis's heart was beating fast; what would Karl say if he knew——?

"There is no good writing to her, I shall wait till I go over. I'll find her out—I'll ask her again."

Louis was sick with fear, perhaps with shame. Karl went on talking. "Everything she taught me, everything. Do you know those lines?—

'Ever the faith endures; England, my England,
Take me and break me, I am yours,
England! my own.'

She taught 'em to me, made me repeat them after her as if I'd been a child. You ought not to have let her out of your sight or out of your knowledge. She is such a brave little woman, but she has very little money, my mind mis-gives me—I can't understand about the Geldenrief, I think she may have got into bad hands. Louis, as I'm talking I'm getting frightened for her. You must have heard of her, you ought to have heard of her. Isn't she writing anything? How is she living? What is she living on? Who's fighting her battles for her? Oh, Louis, with all your love-making, you don't know what it is to have a little woman like that, all life and sweetness, tugging all the time at the gizzard of you." He stood still a minute, miserably, silently. "I wanted her, how I wanted that woman! Never as badly as I do now. I'm an old fool to you, I know I'm an old fool, but she kissed me once—of her own free will—God bless her. Louis, you ought to have brought me word of her. You knew how it was with me." Louis stammered out that he did not know, had not guessed.

"Oh, yes, yes, I told you. I must own—you won't

think less of me, will you? or that I care for you less—but I must own that some of the reason why I was longing so to see you, to have a good old talk, was just to hear you say where you had left her, how she was looking. What did she say to you, Louis? I've got a thirst on me when I think of her." He finished off his whisky at a gulp.

How had she looked? What had she said to him? Louis, even Louis, could not meet his brother's eye.

"I dare say she's all right," he got out. "What do you mean by 'she has no money,' and about the Geldenrief? She's got a good income—the farm is hers."

"No, no! the farm is ours."

"*Ours?*" he exclaimed, unguardedly, thrown off his balance.

"Yes, didn't I write you? It is that which has bothered me, that's what I don't understand. She renounced the farm in favor of the next-of-kin, that drunken half-breed Josephus de Witte. We've bought it off him for eight thousand pounds."

"*Renounced—renounced?*" he muttered, growing pale.

"Wouldn't have anything to do with it, she wrote. Van Biene told me about it, he wouldn't show me her letter; it gave no explanation, he said. I can't make it out; of course, I shall preserve her rights. But I get puzzled sometimes; like to-night, for instance, I get uneasy. What became of her? What is she doing? If she's married again I should have heard—I do believe she would have written to tell me. It would be just like her to renounce the property if she had married again, but no! she would not have done that either—not so soon, at least. I thought you would have brought me news. I shan't be able to stand this much longer; I shall have to go over." His hand shook a little, Louis saw it by the drink in the tumbler.

"I'm sorry, Karl, I'm sorry, it wasn't my fault, dear old Karl; I'm sorry." He was still fumbling with words, dazed at what he had heard.

"Oh, never mind. I must get used to it." He emptied his glass.

"But the Geldenrief? Then I was right to buy up the shares?" He was anxious to press, to pursue the subject.

"We could have dealt with the deep without touching the outcrop. You've paid about two hundred thousand for a hundred and fifty thousand pounds' worth of machinery, and not the latest either. I don't blame you, old fellow, you meant well, we all make mistakes, but you might have let me know what you were up to. It will right itself, I suppose. If what we're projecting for comes off, it will pay to work a lower grade ore, and the Geldenrief may still yield a dividend. I shall do nothing with the land until I've found the little woman, until I've got to know what she wants, what her meaning was. She always had compunctions as to how she had treated De Groot; I suppose that was it. But you look pale, old fellow, tired. I've kept you up too long, first with my politics, and now with my love affairs. But I have no secrets from you. I'm off, now. I've got to go back to Johannesburg in a couple of days; I've got all my instructions now, the way is pretty clear. Good-night, old chap, take a long morning, you look done up; it's that confounded cigarette-smoking. And don't you worry because you've lost sight of Joan de Groot, I'll find her, never fear, I don't suppose there's anything wrong. I'm a fidgetty old fool. You know I always fidget over you, if you're out of sight too long, if I don't know where you are, and what you're up to. Good-night!"

But Louis had a bad night, with troubled dreams, uneasy sleep, and, though he called up to his aid all his grievances against Joan, the shape and substance had gone out of them, they could not fill the room, they could not shut out her small face, her wavy hair, her words, "Louis, if your 'for ever' meant three months, let it last a little longer."

What had become of her?

What would Karl say if he knew?

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WHAT followed made history.

Louis and his wife had arrived in South Africa on the eve of the Jameson Raid. Karl, interesting himself in the uprising that was being engineered from Cape Town, tried to carry Louis with him. Louis, fearful lest Karl should rush home on a search for Joan, fearful lest Karl should suspect his loyalty in the matter of the Geldenrief, fell, or pretended to fall, in with his revolutionary sympathies.

Owing to Karl's trust in him, owing to Rhodes's habit of leaving all details to trusted lieutenants, Louis, after Karl had gone back to Johannesburg, came to have more power in his hands than any other man of the whole party. The way he used his power was to invent codes, intrigue with contractors, undermine petty officials, delay and bungle.

The arms Louis had ordered failed to arrive, the ammunition Louis had provided failed in quantity and quality. Up in Johannesburg grave faces counted men and arms, and looked at each other bewildered. Everything waited.

Then the young hot-heads, impatient and restless on the borders of Bechuanaland, grew tired of waiting. They moved—they were beyond recall. Older hot-heads, big with great purpose—South Africa to be won, and the heel stamped on the serpent-head of treason—were beyond reason. The Empire-maker's half-hearted cry of "wait" fell on ears deaf, purposely deaf, to its echo. A small man in a big moment precipitated the crisis. Through Louis's instrumentality, that word "wait" reached Johannesburg in a tone of thunder; it died away before it could catch that brave little band that looked to Johannesburg for reinforcements and support.

When Louis heard that Jameson was moving; when a foolish official high in the Cabinet told him this, told him also that the whole plot was discovered, the leaders were all known, that peremptory orders were being despatched, that Willoughby and Jameson would be treated as invaders of a friendly State, practically as pirates, that they would be shot, that Johannesburg rebels would be similarly treated, that the British Government was cabling sympathetically to Kruger; a panic, a paroxysm of fear came over the man, he dreaded he knew not what. He cabled Karl: "Flotation indefinitely postponed. London takes all shares," and then, terrified at what he had done, and at what he had left undone, picturing Karl in prison in Pretoria, himself implicated, he hurried Aline and Susan on board the first steamer that sailed, and was half-way home before he had regained his nerve.

Karl interpreted Louis's message that Jameson too had been stopped! and he persuaded his colleagues to accept his interpretation. Nothing synchronised. What Cape Town already knew, Johannesburg heard too late. For those words, *London takes all shares*, coming to him from Stephen Hayward's son-in-law meant to Karl Althaus that the Home Government was prepared to give active support. He hurriedly left for Cape Town to get further instructions.

When the crucial moment came in Johannesburg, when at length they heard there that Jameson had *not* been stopped, that he was marching forward, expecting reinforcements to ride out to meet him, there was no Karl Althaus on the spot to dominate the situation. There were weak men, and cold-blooded ones, there were poltroons, and there were wisecracks, there were the men who said that ten thousand rounds of ammunition would last the rifles less than an hour, there were men who recalculated for the hundred and first time all the chances against them, there was every one to counsel delay, hesitation, inaction, to counsel the safeguarding their own individual interests. There was no man, no big, brave, un-

selfish man, to muster what arms, what fighting power, they had, and to march out with these to join the heroes who had advanced to their aid.

The desperate muddle that then ensued has now culminated in our peaceful possession of the country we have won again and again. But no such vision of the future compensated Karl for the news he heard when he reached Cape Town. There he heard of the great disaster, of the brave little band looking for the reinforcements that came not, of the lost lives, the surrender, the arrest of his friends, his companions, the men he had led into danger, of the Reform leaders in gaol, and Kruger malignantly triumphing over the "tortoise that had put out its head." It was heartbreaking to Karl Althaus, literally heartbreaking. He had never been ill in his life, but he broke down in Cape Town, when he heard all Van Biene had to tell him, all the newspapers were full of, when he realised the ruin of his hopes and plans.

Breakdown takes unromantic forms, and Karl Althaus was never a figure for romance. He got a chill on his journey up, he had been forty hours without food, he was in a state of the intensest, most deplorable, depression. Two hours after his arrival in Cape Town he was in bed with an acute attack of dysentery. For a full week events went on without him. He had a magnificent constitution, but he had tried it severely. He was a wreck at the end of the week. Nevertheless, he wanted to go back.

That hotel at Sea Point, the best hostelry in South Africa, to which they had brought him in his sudden illness, was for him as a prison. All day in his agony the sun blazed into the windows of his bedroom, and the sea swelled smoothly and glassily in the bay beyond, and sun and sea seemed part of the fever which consumed him, and part of the barrier which lay between him and the men by whose side he should have stood. All the days and nights of that week he wanted to go back; raging in the enforced confinement of his sick-room, he was the despair of his nurses and the terror of his doctor.

They told his state to a man who valued Karl Althaus—there were many such in Cape Town, but this man Karl Althaus valued.

This man came from his own misery in Groot Schur, and sat by Karl's bedside.

"You want to get back; but there's nothing to be gained by going back," he told Karl, who, as he lay and looked at his friend, listened, and began to feel alive again, because here was Rhodes, shading him from the glare of sun and sea, and with Rhodes was strength.

"The Commissioner has gone up; I saw him before he started."

"What did you tell him? what did you say to him?"

"I told him I didn't care a damn what his instructions were, or what authority he'd got; but if a hair of Jimmy's head was injured——"

He could not sit still and contemplate such a possibility. He turned his back to Karl; nobody should see his face, when he thought of Jimmy, of what might happen to him.

"Go on, for mercy's sake, go on," said Karl from his sickbed. Rhodes turned round at that; Karl could see the sun had dazzled his small bloodshot eyes.

He took out a cigar, and lighted it with shaking hand, forgetting he was in a sick-room. "I told him if a hair of Jimmy's head was hurt, aye, or of any of them, I'd power enough left—I'm a broken man, but I've power enough left—to—to raise hell in the land. I told him if he didn't bring him back to me here safe, I'd arm every black in Rhodesia;" he puffed vigorously at his cigar, but his hand shook as he held it, "and in Bechuanaland. I told him—I'm a broken man, but I've got millions of money behind me, and half a continent of fellows that—that still trust me, and if she goes back on us, the Mother Country"—he was speaking slowly, and Karl hung on his words, every note in that deep husky voice shaking through him in his weakness, "if she goes back on us,"

he bit his cigar almost in half, but his voice was lowered, not raised in his terrible excitement, "I'll arm every black in the country and send them war whooping with rifles, and with maxims, and with cannon, until there isn't a Boer left living in the b——y country. That's what I told him." He puffed at his cigar and cursed it because it would not draw.

Karl, lying in bed, too weak to move, watched the big man, and took comfort. They were restless men, those pioneers; Rhodes had come to sit with his sick friend, but sitting was impossible for him for long.

"I've been an Englishman," he said, pulling himself up, a strong man, over six feet in height, and fleshy; he flung out his arms, looked at his big fist, and repeated, "I've been an Englishman, though South Africa made a man of me. I was a rotten puny boy when I left England; she nurtured me badly, had no suck for me, shoved me out. I've dreamt of her, fought for her. Karl Althaus!" he never raised his voice, "if through her delay, her damnable calm and red tape, there is a hair of one of those men's heads injured, I'll pull the place down upon her, I'll make hell through the length and breadth of the b——y continent, I'll——"

Then he broke down and flung himself on the easy-chair by Karl's bedside and groaned; the bed shook and the room shook, but Karl was comforted.

Karl, weak and shrunken, grown grey of face, put out a shaky hand.

"Cecil, old man, keep up, everything depends on you now."

"No, I'm broke, I've resigned. I'm a damned fool to talk as if I had any power left." He lifted up his head, but the gleam that had been in his eyes when he talked of vengeance had gone out of them, and he looked what he said he was—a broken man.

"But we *must* do something—I must get back—this blasted illness—" Karl moved with difficulty, with groans of weakness, the sweat breaking out on his forehead.

"That fool is keeping liquor from me, making me as weak as a rat. Cecil, I can't sleep—those poor fellows!"

"Ah!"

"Blast this illness."

He could not lie in his bed quietly, he turned and tossed and cursed his body. He was desperate to get back to Pretoria, it seemed to him he had deserted his post, he wanted to be shot, he would rather have died with the troopers who had fallen, or been in prison with the others, than be here. To be here in safety, in bed in Cape Town, made him rave and curse, made him swear—and cry.

The other man had told him there was nothing to be gained by going back; but if Rhodes had told him he ought to go, he could not have moved. The world was all black that afternoon to those two, not because they had failed, both of them had before that faced failure, and worse, but because through them their friends were in jeopardy. The big man was in worse plight than Karl. He had a reputation, and he had lost it. He had a friend, a friend who was dearer to him than himself, or his ambitions, or any country—and his friend was in danger. Still it was he who recovered himself first in this interview. He had come here to comfort Karl because he heard that Karl was ill and broken. And Karl sobbed in his bed, lost his self-control before the other, and raved.

"This won't do—this won't do, old man." Rhodes put his hand on the bed-clothes. He was of a different race and hardier. "Here, I've got a flask with me, have a pull. Damn the doctors; there's only one of them who knows everything."

Ah! that friend of his, how gentle he was, and he knew everything!

"We've got to face the music, there's lots to be done, though I think it's better done here than in Pretoria. Here or at home. Pull yourself together. I'm no good to anybody. I don't know what to be after until I know Jimmy's safe. Curse it! what fools we've been."

Silence fell between them now and again. They said a few disjointed words, first one of them and then the other. They could not see daylight. They had been so strong, and so self-reliant. They had meant to win an Empire, and they had ended by wrecking a community. On their strength and self-reliance the others had counted. They had withdrawn the plank when the swimmers were in deep waters. They tried to talk things over, but disjointed words and phrases were all that came. Their friendship was riveted in the silences that fell between them—in the moments when neither of them could face the other. When they parted they had settled nothing.

That night Karl Althaus nearly went under. He had a relapse, and he shivered on the brink of death. In his sick man's fancy the smell of death was in his nostrils, and the room was cold. He wanted Louis, wanted something of his own near him. He had nursed Louis more than once through childish illnesses, and held him in his arms through fevered nights. He wanted Louis now to put a warm hand in his; they were turning grey and cold and he wanted some one to pull him back from the brink. But there was no Louis there; Karl shivered the night through alone. In the morning hired hands were fetched. He was cared for, but not by the boy who had always been his care.

He asked for Louis, and they had to tell him of his brother's hurried flight, of his disappearance. Heaven only knows what Louis had feared, but, immediately the news of the abortive raid had reached him, he had fled the country. Letters, papers, telegrams, accounts, all had been left behind, and everybody concerned was incriminated. Karl, with the facts staring him in the face, said to himself only that Louis always had been a bit of a coward; he pitied him because he was not stronger. But, when his friend came to see him again, he concealed his soreness of feeling and defended Louis, saying his brother was right in considering the position of his wife.

That second coming of his friend was the end of Karl's

illness. Rhodes burst into the room in something of his old impetuous manner, with his face alight. He did not wait for the Doctor's permission, nor did he hear the nurse's warning. He was waving a thin cablegram, the broken look had gone; he was himself again, great, though not quite sober perchance.

"It's all right, old fellow, all right. She's moved, she's moved, that dear old blessed Mother of ours, she's stretching herself, she's waking up. Hurrah! look at this . . ." Karl stretched out a feeble hand, but the other read to him, his voice deep with satisfaction, and just that wonderful husky note in it again that told of his emotion:

"'Two regiments ordered to South Africa. Flying squadron mobilised.' What do you think of that?"

Karl's weak smile was eloquent.

"I thought that's what you'd think. Fairfield wires, straight from the Colonial Office. And they've claimed all the prisoners for trial in England."

"But why have they mobilised—how—what has happened?"

"What has happened? A miracle! Kaiser Billy has done the trick; he thought she meant it when she slept on, and let us sweat. He played a dirty German trick. He thought she was asleep, and he gave a kick. 'Codlin' your friend not short,' was his game. And lo! and behold, he's kicked her into life, and she's awake, and looking over here at us. He cabled Kruger to congratulate him on his escape,—and she woke up and flung the Convention at him. Good old Kaiser Billy. We're all right now. I'm too full of business to go into detail; I've got a thousand things to do before I get away. And I must get away. If Jimmy's got to stand his trial he mustn't stand it alone. You must get back as quickly as possible——"

"I——"

"Of course. Never mind being ill—they'll lift you on board. I've taken your passage on the *Dunvegan Castle*. She sails to-morrow, so you've another night to get strong

in. That precious brother of yours will only have ten days' start of you after all. You'll have to teach him to keep his mouth shut."

The man was so full of his news, of the rapid shifting of the position, the panorama of events having moved so quickly, that he had no time for Karl's protest on Louis's behalf, nor for hesitation on his own. There wasn't a trace of depression or doubt left in him. The very moment he had the news that the regiments were being sent out, and the fleet had been mobilised, the very moment he knew the supine old Mother in the sea had stirred and moved, and stretched out her arms to her sons, his buoyancy carried him triumphantly through the months, the years; his intellect reasserted itself, and he saw the inevitable end.

"We've got her, Karl; she won't go back on us now. As sure as there is a God in Heaven the British flag will wave over a united South Africa. There will be any amount of time wasted, red tape unwound, and talkee, talkee, but in the end we'll make 'em see where the country was drifting when you and I stepped in to save it for them." He talked rapidly as he filled the sick-room and flooded it with promise. The mantle of prophecy was upon him; he saw through the years.

"Two damned fools we've been—two damned fools, they'll call us. We shall hear it is all our fault while they blunder on with their diplomacy. But we've woke 'em up, Karl, my boy, we've woke 'em up." He shouted to-day at the sick man, who could have shouted back too with joy, because he was going to be moved, going to be taken out of bed, and into the air, and made strong and well again. He did not know what was going to be done with him, or why, but he was infected by the other's enthusiasm, and the shadow of sickness rolled away before the warmth and vigour of the strong man who was happy in what he saw or foresaw.

"What am I to do at home? You must tell me what I am to do."

“ Sit on the steps of the Colonial Office and shriek our justification:—the Drifts, the Bewaarplatzen, the education, the franchise, the prohibition to bear arms. Sit and shriek; work the press. Oh, it’s all right. She won’t go to sleep again over this job. Two damned fools, they’ll call us; but they’ll call us patriots before we’re dead, see if they don’t.”

We have lived to see the words come true, lived to hear one of the “damned fools” hailed as the greatest Englishman of the nineteenth century. But the great Englishman, justified to-day in his foresight and confidence, died before the time had come for him to wear his laurels. He lies on the summit of the mountain, and dominates men’s minds, sways their judgments, and illuminates their imaginations; living he never wore his laurels.

On this wonderful morning, when he heard that the answer to Kaiser William’s congratulatory telegram was the shipping of two regiments and the mobilisation of the fleet, his heart swelled with pride and satisfaction. He was ready to face the music, to face any kind of music they might make about him, to take full responsibility for all blunders, and full blame for all mistakes. He wanted to take everything upon himself, so that all others concerned might go free. But he had inevitable preparations to make and business to conclude. Karl must go alone, and he would follow as soon as it was possible.

“ But don’t you make any mistake; Chesham is the man for us, he’s proved himself every inch a man. Your Stephen Hayward has fizzled out—that was another of our mistakes; Chesham ought to have been in it from the first, not Hayward. Your brother promised everything in his name, and, when it came to the pinch, there was nothing to show for it, and Louis bolted home with the daughter on the first hint of danger. I asked him, asked him myself, caught hold of the skunk—I beg your pardon—and tried to get him to go straight up there, up to Johannesburg, with Stephen Hayward’s daughter, and

lead the rebellion. They couldn't have repudiated us then."

"He was bound to consider her safety," said Karl loyally.

"Safety!" contemptuously. "She would have been safe enough holding the forts at Johannesburg with her husband by her side. With an English Minister's daughter inside the British lines, and defiance flung in the face of Kruger, even with the High Commissioner to back him, every loyalist in South Africa would have flocked to help them, and that ape-faced hypocrite in Pretoria would have yielded all they asked for. I see it clearly enough now."

He grew almost dejected again, thinking of the blunders that had been made. He was ever a man of moods, easily depressed, easily elated, but with a wonderful power of prophecy, of which we reap the fulfilment.

In the midst of his work and his troubles, for the waters were very stormy, and no one had yet reached port, he found time to superintend Karl's removal to the *Dunvegan Castle*, to pat him on the back and shake him by the hand, to put life and spirit into him. For Karl was humbled; he had not the Empire-maker's gifts of prophecy and prescience. He was tortured continuously by his sense of his own shortcomings, by his own failure. He felt he had been faint in the fight; his heart had not been in that call to arms—he knew that, and, when the crucial moment came, he had not been there to meet it.

Of course, at the last, he remembered when and how he could help. Van Biene was instructed that no money was to be spared in Pretoria; he had *carte blanche* for everybody's expenses. It seemed to Karl that all he could do to compensate the Reform leaders for the troubles he had brought upon them was to pour out his money in their service. Even at the last he would have gone back to share their trial and their punishment with them, had it not been made impossible for him.

He was carried on board, but his constitution tri-

umphed, and before they were three days out he was on his feet again. By the time they landed there was no trace of illness about him; he was ready for the work that was before him.

He was a little sore with Louis for his flight, and a doubt of the younger man played about him and plagued him. Van Biene, as well as the Empire-maker, had come to bid Karl farewell. From Van Biene he got Joan de Groot's address, the address from which she had sent the papers, and Van Biene had fluttered his doubts into actuality.

"He has never explained to you why he bought those Geldenriefs, has he?" Van Biene had asked casually, for Karl had few business secrets from Van Biene, and it was not the sort of transaction that remains hidden.

On the voyage home Karl wondered often why Van Biene had asked that question about Louis and the Geldenrief immediately after he had given Joan de Groot's address. Had there been a chink wherein they could enter, a weak place in Karl's loyalty towards his adopted brother, the fluttering doubts would have made entrance. But there were no weak places.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

KARL ALTHAUS landed in England the third week in January. Nothing was then being spoken of in London but the Raid, everywhere they were applauding the conduct and diplomacy of the Colonial Secretary. The feeling against the German Emperor was deep, but the expression of it was loud.

Stephen Hayward at Glasgow had gloried in our "splendid isolation." The phrase flattered the public pride in our national unpopularity. It was obvious that South African politics had at last won a hearing. At Glasgow and Manchester, at Newcastle, at Birmingham, at Wolverhampton, the spokesmen of the Government had nothing to tell their audiences so interesting as the truths about the Transvaal. They had no difficulty in persuading their fellow-countrymen that, whether they called it filibustering or the passionate patriotism of a forlorn hope, the leaders of that ill-fated expedition were heroes. And, come what might, their countrymen would stand by and applaud them, and hold them morally harmless. Jameson and Willoughby leaped into public favour at a bound, a position that they have never since done anything to jeopardise. In the light of to-day, the sequel to their trial reflects credit on the august host, who threw open the gates of Sandringham, and welcomed one of them as his guest, straight from the prison where he had expiated his mistaken bravery.

It was not necessary for Karl Althaus to shriek the Uitlanders' grievances and the raiders' justification into the public ear. The public mouth was shouting it. There was no such sympathy for the Reform Leaders, and it was with infinite difficulty that any show of justice was

gained for them. Their position was misunderstood, through a series of blunders, and through one man's incapacity; they had been made to appear cowards when in truth they were only fools. Karl heard his race and his religion attacked because that which it had been impossible to do had not been done. The press and the public were too eager to exalt Dr. Jameson and his band to stop and inquire into the real causes of the disaster. The rashness, the impetuosity, of the attacking force were understood and sympathised with. The actual situation of Johannesburgers and the true reasons for their inaction were not understood. Karl made himself hoarse metaphorically by shrieking it, but the truth of it hardly got as far as St. Stephen's, it certainly never reached Printing House Square, and outside London it was lost in the enthusiasm for the men who were being conducted to their trial in Bow Street through an admiring throng of onlookers.

Of course, also in the light of recent events, the attempt to occupy, with five hundred Borderland Police and a guarantee fund of sixty-one thousand pounds, a country that has taken over four hundred thousand soldiers three years to conquer, at a cost of one hundred and seventy millions, seems phenomenally brave or abnormally foolhardy. But the "women and children in danger" excuse, though more subtly than realistically true, nevertheless carried conviction.

The palace in Park Lane was ready now for the occupancy of its master. It had been understood that the flat in Piccadilly was at the disposal of Louis and his wife, but, on Karl's arrival in England, Louis and his wife were not there.

The affair of the Raid had displaced everything else in Louis's mind, and he had bolted precipitately. By the time he had assured his own safety at sea, he had told himself that Karl would remain in Johannesburg. When he had heard Karl was in Cape Town he had felt sure that his brother would not leave South Africa until the Reform

Leaders were tried. When, finally, there was no doubt Karl was in England, Louis felt certain that if Joan, too, had remained there he would have heard from her. Karl had no clue to her whereabouts, he was sure. Anyway, Louis, watching to see which way the wind blew, thought he could observe the meteorological direction best from Monte Carlo. There was perhaps a little constraint in the letters the brothers interchanged. Louis wrote affectionately, expecting praise, or at least appreciation of his conduct of the business of the London firm; the London firm had been fully apprised, and was practically clear of stock. The heavy fall in the mining market some days before the Raid became a matter of inquiry afterwards. Karl had loved money all his life, and was essentially a business man, but he was not glad or proud of Louis's forethought about the affairs of Messrs. Oldberger and Althaus. His letters were constrained.

Karl was unhappy in that big house in Park Lane. The tradespeople who waited deferentially on his doorstep, the curiosity dealers who thrust their treasures upon his notice, even the great ladies who left sympathetic pasteboards with a view to the adjustment of their dressmakers and bookmakers' accounts, afforded no consolation for him. He wanted an interview with Stephen Hayward, but Stephen Hayward was in Glasgow or Manchester, and difficult to follow. He wrote Karl quite curtly, suggesting that she should see the Colonial Secretary.

Karl saw Mr. Chesham, and put that gentleman in full possession of all the facts, coming away from his interview fully satisfied that at last Transvaal affairs were in good hands. Yet, until he had seen Stephen, there was much that he could not understand. Of course, when Karl Althaus had made up his mind that he must and would see Stephen, Stephen had no escape. The very night he came back to London, Karl was walking up and down Grosvenor Street. Neither the cold nor the sloppy wet, nor the fetid Mayfair atmosphere of dust-bins and decay, had prevented him from making it his daily walk.

When Stephen's cab drove up, and the portmanteau was lifted down, and the neat statesman stepped out, Karl spoke to him:

"Hayward, I must know why you avoid me—why you answer my letters curtly. What have I done to you, man? If I have done anything, why don't you want to have it out with me?"

Stephen was taken aback. He had always liked Karl, and he was under obligations to him. That Louis's action had been prompted by Karl seemed difficult to believe when the man was standing before him with the same straightforward look and outstretched hand, and accents that carried confidence.

"Why don't you want to shake hands with me?"

Stephen put his hand out.

"It's a cold night," he said, and shivered slightly; "I've had a long journey."

"Damn the night. I want an explanation."

"Well, give me time to have some dinner; the doorstep of my own house when a fog is coming on is a bad place for explanations. And really, you know, I think the situation explains itself."

"Will you meet me at the Club at nine?"

"I don't want to turn out again," Stephen said weakly.

"Will you see me here, in your study, at nine?"

"There is really nothing to be said between us."

"It is my right, and I insist. We parted friends; on my part nothing has been done to forfeit it."

"Nothing! Good heavens! you call it nothing?"

The door was open, the footman had taken down the portmanteau, the butler had paid the cab. "But there, I'll hear what you've got to say. But not here—I'll meet you at the Club in an hour."

Karl let him go.

Stephen, perhaps in order to elicit his own views, perhaps because, even in that brief interview, Karl had become too insistent, too impressive for him to ignore, told

Constantia during dinner of the meeting, and of the appointment he had made. Whilst the servants were in the room she could say nothing, but he noted with compunction the flush that came to her elderly grey face, the tremor in the delicate hands. Constantia had aged twenty years since Aline's second transgression, since John had been jilted, and all her plans proved abortive.

He deprecated her anger, for that she was angry he could see.

"You are very angry?"

"You know what I feel about them all," even her voice had aged, had grown thin, and lost its most gracious notes.

"But I could not help speaking to him on my own doorstep. It is difficult to forget how much ease of mind I owe Karl Althaus."

"Ease of mind?"

"Dear old Con," he said gently, affectionately. He even went round to her, and patted her shoulders, and stood there a minute. "We have not spoken of this; there are so many things we have got into the habit of not speaking about."

"Not always on my account, Steve."

"No, not on your account, Con," and he sighed, paused a moment—"through following Karl Althaus's advice I have been able to redeem Hadalstone——"

"But at what a cost, Steve, at what a cost!"

"You mean——?"

"You ought to have been offered the Irish Secretaryship, you would have been offered the Irish Secretaryship."

"You think they have an idea——"

"That you have touched pitch? I am sure of it. And now this man has turned up again, is seeking you out. Don't have anything to do with him, Steve, don't. I have a presentiment—I had a presentiment from the first moment I saw him, him and his horrible brother, that they would do you harm."

"I can take care of myself, Con; you know, dear, I can take care of myself."

"I've always tried to take care of you, haven't I? of you and yours," she said with a smile, and a sigh.

He was touched, he laid a light kiss on her forehead—truly her life had been given to him. And to-night he noted with a strange pang that youth had gone from her, even gracious age had gone from her. She was palsied as if with old age, she had grown thin.

"Poor old Con," he said. "You can't get over it."

"It was a fine end to my Social Crusade."

"Don't you think, perhaps, the Social Crusade was a mistake, that we were not—not quite the people for it?" he said to her very gently.

It was because she had realised that, because she thought it, that she had been so overcome, so prostrated by the event. But it was hard to own it, even to Stephen. Instead, she tried to get him on her side, tried to make him promise he would not meet the man to-night. And it was with difficulty he got her to see it was his duty, yes, his and hers, to investigate, to make inquiries; not to let the girl go from them as if they had, indeed, no love for her, as if she were quite responsible, quite like other girls.

He had no anger against Aline in his heart, nor any feeling but pity, and a hope that she was not unhappy. Certainly, in the first flush of his indignation at the elopement, he had cursed the Althausens, root and branch, their race, and everybody connected with them. It is the misfortune of the Jews that one of their community cannot misbehave without earning opprobrium for their whole body. The prejudice is still very vivid and real, however it may be glozed over by civilised thought and cultivated reason. Stephen had, by now, reasoned himself out of his mental attitude; and he tried, but unsuccessfully, to reason Constantia out of hers. His quarrel with Karl was of a different nature. He had considered the situation impersonally. It seemed to him that, of her own

free will, Aline would never have left the shelter of her home, and abandoned all her conventions; it seemed to him that pressure must have been brought to bear upon her. And that pressure, Stephen more than suspected, remembering Louis, and his interview with Louis, must have been the threat of revealing the old story.

From whom could Louis Althaus have heard the old story but from Karl, and what motive could Karl have had for telling it but to secure his alliance, this Hayward interest, on which he had ever placed so exaggerated a value? This was what had moved him to deep anger against Karl, who had been his friend, his treacherous friend. He was hot with anger and indignation against him because he had done this mean thing, used his knowledge of a weak-minded girl's secret as a lever to work upon her fears. For this is what Stephen thought—had persuaded himself to think.

To-night, when he saw Karl on the doorstep, heard his voice, and ignored his outstretched hand, it did not seem so easy to believe. And even as Constantia talked, and tried to move him to indignation, so did he become less and less sure that Karl Althaus had done this thing for which he was harbouring resentment.

At the Club, later on, when Karl's big figure and rugged features came in sight again, he had a certain impulse to apologise, to hold out his hand and say: "I beg your pardon." But Karl gave him no opening, he offered no greeting. He had been walking about since he had left Stephen, in the cold February fog; he could not understand it at all, he had done nothing but good to Stephen. As far as he knew, there had not been a deal through him, or through his firm, that had not come up trumps.

And yet the man refused to shake hands with him, didn't want to speak to him.

"Damned if I can understand it," was his last comment, as he gulped down his dinner and prepared for the interview.

Stephen was waiting for him in the smoking-room. From this very room Stephen had followed Louis to Piccadilly, and there had contemptuously refused him as a suitor for his daughter. Karl's cablegram as to the settlements had reached him after Louis had abducted the girl, for abduction Stephen considered it. How rashly he had concluded Karl had been a party to the act! Here, face to face with the man himself, it seemed he had jumped to a rash conclusion.

"Well, what's the offence? What have I done?"

The rugged features and tangled thatch of grey hair, the searching eyes and unaffected manners had not altered. What, then, had altered? They were practically alone, for the fog was filling the room, and they stood in the shadow of it.

Stephen had to recall his anger, his bitterness. He advanced, he half stretched out his hand.

"Not me! You've refused to shake hands with me on your own doorstep. I'm not asking any man twice. But what's it all about? That's what I want to know. What have I done to you?"

"You don't think I've any cause for anger against you, any grievance?" asked Stephen quickly, but feeling, nevertheless, doubtful and in the wrong.

"Not to my knowledge, not through my fault. I suppose"—Karl moved over to the fire, stood before it—"I suppose Louis gave you the tip?" He was getting at it slowly, he had been turning it over in his own mind on his way to the Club, and whilst he had been bolting his dinner, and he thought he began to see daylight. "You got the tip about the Raid, and you sold stock—a bear? And they've got to know, and have rounded on you? So you round on me, but what——"

"Not a stock, not a share. Since you wrote me it was time to give over speculating and invest what I'd made, I haven't had a transaction," Stephen said earnestly. "I've sold nothing since the Bank shares; you know what I made over that. I'm quite ready to admit you've been

a good friend to me in the past; I know what you've done." He flushed, and the flush hurt Karl.

"Don't be a fool, Hayward. I'm sorry I asked you that, if it isn't that; but I can't make out what has come between us. You're not the man to blame me for what happened out there, to make it a personal matter. I never got it straight from you what you expected us to do. By hurrying on the marriage and sending them out——"

"What—what——?"

"Without waiting for settlements or anything."

"Good heavens!"

"Giving your daughter to Louis, and sending——"

"Giving—giving— I would rather have seen her dead at my feet a thousand times——"

"Hayward!"

"Do you mean you don't know?"

"Know what? Get on, man, what are you trying to tell me, what are you telling me? Get on, for God's sake, get on. Didn't you give her to Louis? Didn't you send her out to us as a sign, didn't you?"

He caught hold of Stephen, it seemed as if he would have shaken him; but Stephen was glad of that rude hold on his shoulder, of that impatient questioning.

"I beg your pardon, Althaus. Forgive me, I've been a fool, of course I've been a fool."

"Didn't you send her out to us?"

"I don't know how I could have been such a fool as to think you knew. Gently, now, gently," he smiled under that impatient hand.

"Louis didn't lie to me?" It was a horrible thought.

"He ran away with her. She was engaged to her cousin. Of course you did not know; I was a fool to suspect you. But the man threatened me, I suppose he threatened her, with raking up that old story; nobody but you knew it—I thought—forgive me, old fellow."

Karl's hand had left his shoulder, the blow was so unexpected; Karl reeled under it, caught his breath, he sank into a chair.

"Wait a minute, I haven't got it clear—wait. They ran away! But I cabled you, Hayward, I cabled you myself."

"I got the message a week after they had left!"

"But——"

"I'm sorry, Althaus, I'm a thousand times sorry. Try and look at it from my point of view. You knew this secret, no one else knew it, and you wanted my political support, for what it was worth."

"You thought I betrayed the secret I'd got from you?"

"The man knew it."

"Not from me—an unguarded word perhaps! But Louis, no! I don't believe it of the boy! I don't know what I meant to do myself when I started on you. But you've knocked me out of time; neither of them said a word—so you never sent her! And you thought I'd arranged it—you wouldn't speak to me, you didn't want to speak to me!"

"But I do now; that adopted brother of yours is a scoundrel."

"No, no."

"What's the use of not looking facts in the face? If he were your real relation, if he had any real hold on you——"

"Man alive, he's all the hold I've got. I've brought him up from a baby. You don't know what it is, you fellows, the way we care about each other——" Karl's voice broke.

"Well!"

"Oh! I know, I know all you're going to say. But I must hear his story. He didn't do it to harm me, did he? Whose interests do you think he had in his mind? He may have blundered; I brought him up badly, I wasn't so straight myself. Leave off trying to turn me against the boy; you're not the only one that's been at it. But no one can come between me and Louis. It was me he was thinking of; I can see that clear enough. He ought to have told me he had stolen her, but, after

all, he knew what she was wanted for. And at the end you see he thought of her, and of you; he wouldn't commit you——"

"I suppose it never strikes you he thought of himself?"

"Leave it off; it's no good. I know the boy; there may be cleverer fellows than my Louis, but he has got a good heart, I tell you. You knocked me out of time for the moment, but I'm coming round. Threatened her! You bet she didn't need any threatening. Why, the women have been round Louis like flies about honey ever since he's been so high," Karl said, placing his big hand about a foot from the floor.

He was trying to convince himself, to reassure himself, as he talked. Stephen saw that.

"You can't let him go?" he asked curiously.

"He was thinking of my interests; he has always been true to me. He half ruined himself at that very time over a mine we've got hold of. He was guarding the name; he likes to hear people speak of the Althaus stocks as A1."

Stephen was sorry for Karl, sorry he had suspected him of underhand dealing, sorry he had tried to take away his confidence in the blackguard to whom he had given his name. Sore and angry as Stephen was over the marriage, over his daughter's second betrayal, her deception, her flight, he could turn aside from the contemplation of his own wrongs to consider Karl. The millionaire was so obviously startled and thunderstruck by the discovery of the treachery of which Stephen and Stephen's daughter had been the victims, and of course he had *not* betrayed the girl's secret. Thinking things over, he remembered Louis had started, had been surprised at something in that interview. Karl had spoken the truth, he had let fall an unguarded word, and the traitorous fellow had seized upon it. Stephen set himself, strange politician that he was, to the diplomatic task of restoring Karl's balance, and establishing the *status quo ante* in their relations.

He succeeded; but the assault on Karl's loyalty to Louis this time had been severe, the edifice was shaken.

The two men talked far into the night. They talked no more of Louis or of Aline, but of patriotism and Imperialism. Stephen saw far into the simplicity and into the strength of his companion; there was no subtlety about Karl; he was as ready to talk of his failure with the Reform league as he had ever been to talk of his early poverty and privation. He made no complaint of anybody; the delayed guns, the miscalculated ammunition, the misunderstood, badly worded telegrams did not dwell with him as grievances. The thing had been muddled, there was no good looking at details, crying over spilt milk; to wipe the slate clean as quickly as possible was all that he wanted to do. And he felt he had been at fault, somewhere.

But Stephen, listening, loathed his son-in-law with a great loathing, and wondered at Karl's blindness. That there was more for Karl to learn he suspected, although his ignorance of much in Louis's history made him look for the scent of it in the wrong direction. Louis's treachery he understood, Louis's motive he could not quite see.

Karl walked home with Stephen, because of the fog, because he did not want to be alone, to think, to examine into that shaken edifice of his trust in Louis; and he knew Stephen still was his friend. He smothered the slender figure in his own fur coat, made him put his handkerchief over his mouth, held him by the arm and led him carefully, showing him he resented nothing, showing him he was glad in their renewed intercourse, showing him also, but this unwittingly, how the revelation of Louis's turpitude had affected and hurt him. His heart was heavy as he walked back alone to that palatial mansion in Park Lane. The shaken citadel of his confidence in Louis made all the world about him unsteady. He could not but feel he had been treated unfairly, and that by Louis. Why had no confidence been given him? He

solaced himself by trying to make excuses to himself, even as he had made them to Stephen, but somehow they rang false and empty.

Louis had been travelling, moving about, showing his wife the Continent, or the Continent his wife. In any case, with Susan to accompany them, Louis had, as he announced to Karl, taken his belated honeymoon. Karl had not answered his letters, but Louis had not taken that seriously; Karl was always desultory in his correspondence. And Louis, like a child who knew he deserved punishment, was glad to keep out of the way of the authorities. Karl was the authority he feared most. It was his fault the arms had not arrived in time, the ammunition was short, Jameson had been expedited, and Johannesburg delayed. He had muddled matters, he knew it well enough. He had been half-hearted, as he was always half-minded. He had been impulsive and enthusiastic in Cape Town when he thought it vital to keep Karl in South Africa; he had even had short bursts of enthusiasm when this or that interested speculator had persuaded him that if the Chartered Company, Gold Fields, and De Beers seized the Transvaal, all their properties—the properties in which he and Karl were so largely interested—would be tremendously augmented in value, and, rich as they all were, they would double or treble their possessions. If they had less freightage, no duty on dynamite, and fewer taxes; if they governed the country themselves in safety and economy, it was a mineralised Piccadilly they would have, a Tom Tiddler's ground, on which no one but themselves might pick up gold.

But he had grown doubtful from time to time, afraid of the oligarchy, of having to fight, of disturbing the state of things under which they had, so far, done so well. All his actions were guided by all his changes of points of view. Now he had ordered arms, now he had hesitated at forwarding them, now he had calculated the ammunition required, now he had neglected to provide it. In short, he had muddled.

Of course he was ready after the event to exonerate himself, and, as many prominent people were ready and anxious to accept all responsibility, he and his commissions and omissions were left in the background.

Before he returned to England from the Continent to which he had fled, he had persuaded himself that he had no cause for self-reproach, that he was a very fine fellow and deserving of some of the public appreciation that was being lavished on Jameson and Willoughby.

For the moment, too, he had forgotten what had first led him into the imbroglio, forgotten Joan and his anxiety lest Karl should find Joan. The larger events of which the papers and the public mind were so full had eclipsed her.

He was surprised not to find Karl waiting for him at the station, disappointed to find no greeting or message from him. He had apprised Karl by telegraph from Paris of his return; he fully expected to see him on the platform at Victoria, to learn that the rooms were in readiness, to be welcomed as usual. Karl had had occasions before this to be vexed with Louis; but Louis had always kept out of the way a little while, and been greeted open-armed on his return. Louis had been more than a son to Karl; prodigal or otherwise, he had been all the older man had had to care for.

Louis looked well and handsome and self-satisfied when he arrived at Victoria Station that March evening; he was thoroughly self-content. The ensuing London season, he thought, would see him no less the hero of it because he was married to Stephen Hayward's daughter, and he had been instrumental in providing for the Expedition against the Transvaal. He understood that all but the Reform Leaders were to be lionised. He was surprised and a little chilled that Karl had not met him at the station, and, failing an invitation and direct intimation, he went to the Savoy Hotel instead of to the rooms in Piccadilly. But he was not surprised when, almost before he had finished dinner, his brother was ushered in.

"This is good of you, Karl; I half expected you at the station, but I suppose you never got my wire."

"Oh, I got your wire right enough."

Louis was dining in his own private room, alone with his wife. Karl had come there to talk to him, to talk straight to him, because he could not let things drift, because he wanted to have it out with Louis and know why he himself had been deceived. There was something else in Karl's mind—something he had not voiced to himself, something that tore at him, and clamoured for utterance. But there sat Louis, handsome and happy and well-groomed, with his wife at the bottom of the table, and waiters in the room. The position was difficult, impossible. It was like Karl to rush round to the hotel, suddenly and impetuously to make up his mind to put everything before Louis, to hear what he had to say for himself—like Karl too not to consider the difficulties.

Louis got up quickly from the table, greeted him warmly, looked evidently for the same affection, and was eager to show his.

"It's good to see you again, old chap. I only heard you had been ill when I got to Madeira. I ought to have been with you. How often you nursed me through illnesses when I was young, and never gave me a chance in return. And now you just managed to be knocked up when I was out of reach. You are all right now, aren't you? You're looking fit." He surveyed Karl affectionately, with obvious interest. "I believe you've put on flesh, and you've got smartened up. What's come to you? I'm hanged if that isn't a Poole coat."

Karl could not but respond. He had come there to question Louis, to make him explain himself, perhaps to be reassured by him; and here was Louis, with eager welcoming voice and outstretched hands. All his life he had loved the handsome fellow, and been proud of him and of his affection. What a man does for over thirty years, habitually, becomes so ingrained that to change conduct is to change individuality. He shook his brother's

hand—he was glad again in the young man's beauty and health. He thought he had been a traitor to doubt him or his affection; the hand-shake lingered.

"Go on with your dinner; don't mind me," he said hastily. "You're looking well too."

Louis knew—knew in a moment. That sympathetic, adaptive faculty of his, one of the secrets of his successes with women, told him his brother had come there to quarrel with him, to upbraid him. Round and round the cage of his little mind flew his little thoughts. Was it details of his management in Cape Town? Was it the Goldenrief? Was it—was it—Joan?

But, quickly as the little thoughts flew round that little mind, quicker still was his determination that, whatever it was his brother had come to upbraid him about, he should deny it, he should defend himself; and his first defence, and, as he well knew, his most potent defence, was his affection. He resumed his seat at the table, and he went on talking. He told Karl how he had missed him these six months, pressed whisky and cigars on him, talked little of his journey and much of his longing for Karl's scanty letters. He wholly ignored Karl's silence and uneasy attitude.

"And now, old fellow," he said, pushing his plate away and his chair back, "I am ready for our chat. I see you want to tell me no end of things, and Aline won't mind if I ask her to leave us."

Aline never minded. She had been thrust further and further back from Louis's confidence, but his confidence she had never had. Her dull mind had taken in more quickly than Joan's intelligent one that she had made a mistake in her marriage. Things that would not have jarred on Joan hurt Aline. If the analogy of the Princess and the Pea does not quite fit the situation it anyway suggests it. Aline knew that Louis was not a gentleman, and she also knew that he was too intimate, too familiar with her maid. A more normal woman would have shown active resentment, Aline's was passive. She left

the two men easily enough to their talk, when the table had been cleared and the waiters had withdrawn.

"And now draw up your chair, and let's be comfortable, and tell me all about everything."

"I have had a long talk with Stephen Hayward," Karl said uneasily. How he hated to find fault with this handsome, debonair fellow; but he must get to the truth, he must find out why Louis had left him under the impression that it was with Stephen's concurrence he had brought the latter's daughter to Cape Town.

Louis smiled, turned up the brushed end of his moustache, stroked his imperial, took his cigarette out of his mouth. He saw his influence reasserting itself, that, whatever Karl had felt recently when he had entered the room, would come from him now with reluctance, with toleration, as, indeed, Karl had always treated his peccadilloes.

"Oh, so you have seen Stephen! And you have heard that Aline and I didn't exactly wait for his consent to our nuptials, and you're angry with me because I didn't tell you before?"

"It wasn't fair," said Karl reluctantly; "you know it wasn't fair, Louis. I suppose it wasn't true—" He hesitated, he could not bring it over his lips to ask Louis if he had used a secret that he knew concerning the girl as a lever to wrest her consent from her.

"What isn't true?" asked Louis, blowing smoke-rings lightly from his cigarette.

Louis was immensely relieved at finding it was Aline, and neither Joan nor the Geldenrief, about which Karl was going to upbraid him. The mere shred of a conscience he possessed had not been touched by his behaviour to Stephen. There, at least, he felt himself completely justified.

Karl answered him, but not without going over to him and standing by his side, to soften the words he nevertheless must speak.

"True that you dragged up that old story?"

"Oh, that is what he said, is it?"

"You didn't do it, Louis?" Karl pleaded with him to deny it.

"What does it matter what I did or what I did not do? You are such a fussy fellow. Anyway I married the girl, history or no history, so what the deuce have they got to complain of? Sit down, Karl, give us your hand first," he held his up to him, "and don't drag the red herring of my running away with Aline across the path if you have got any real fault to find with me. Come now, I can see you are hipped, out of sorts, what have I done? I thought there was something when you didn't turn up at Victoria. Who has been making mischief between us? It's that precious father-in-law of mine, I suppose. He told me I was insolent, insolent when I asked him to give me the girl. I think I have taught him a lesson, and I have not done with him yet."

"But it was a dirty trick," persisted Karl, "if you used that secret, those few words I let fall, the trick of a scoundrel. You didn't do it, boy, tell me?" his voice pleaded for the contradiction.

"Scoundrel, indeed! That's a tall order. You have done some Kaffirs out of concessions in your time, to say nothing of some little Stock Exchange tricks. Don't come the high horse over me, Karl. I know you have been a very good brother to me, but I am hanged if I should call you a saint."

"To take advantage of a half-witted girl like that!"

"I say," said Louis, flicking his cigarette ash, and with a certain assumption of dignity, but watching Karl very closely, "I really can't allow you to speak of my wife like that. Aline has got her wits about her right enough. You ask Worth."

"Damn Worth! Why didn't you tell me it was run-away match?"

Louis was watching Karl, because it seemed to him that there was something else underneath his restlessness and obvious distress. Karl was unlike himself. Less self-

confident, less overwhelming, than usual. Somehow or other he seemed to have shrunk. It was not within Louis's capacity to realise what a blow it would be to Karl to find him completely unworthy; and Karl had said nothing to lead Louis to suppose that he had any clue to the way in which he had wronged him most.

"You were mad enough for the Hayward's support in your enterprise, and there was no other way of getting it for you. It was not my fault if you deluded yourself into the belief that the Haywards had rushed at me with the girl. That is the worst of you, Karl," looking up with the sudden idea that it was best to carry the war into the enemy's camp. "You do jump to conclusions. That Raid business, now; you know you jumped at the conclusion you were going to be supported from home, and then you jumped at the conclusion that you were not, and rushed back without waiting to think how bad it looked. It looked awfully bad, you know, that you were not with the others."

Karl was startled. "Well, of all the infernal—" and then his sense of justice choked and silenced him. It had looked bad, even to himself.

"There is no good getting in a rage, old chap," went on Louis, smiling at the success of his manœuvre. "You'll know I'm right when you think it over; you ought to have stayed and seen it out."

"But you—you wired for me!"

"Oh, hang it all, you are my brother, my more than brother. I was bound to give you the tip that the bubble had burst; but I didn't expect that you would think only of yourself, I really didn't. I thought better of you, old man. Of course it doesn't make any difference, I mean I don't care for you any less—we've only got each other. But it didn't seem the right thing to do to leave them to bear all the brunt."

Karl, after he had tugged at the window-blind and thrown open the window, and muttered that it was "infernally hot," found himself voicing his justification.

“There seemed nothing to be done there at the moment. I thought Jameson had been stopped, and everything was held over, we all thought so. There were two thousand rifles, and less than half-a-million rounds of ammunition, there were seven Maxims, and nothing to serve them with. It was a hopeless muddle, and Wolff nowhere to be found. Then your wire came, and by ‘Flotation postponed’ of course I thought the whole thing had been put off. I was bound to find Wolff, and to see Rhodes and try to get things straight. If there was to be fighting we weren’t half prepared. Everything had been muddled. I never guessed, never dreamed, that Jameson would move whether we sent for him or not. Do you think I would not have warned the women, have taken them with me? There were dozens of women in Johannesburg, and, when it came to it, the Boer guns were trained on the place, and there were forty thousand people in jeopardy. Do you think, if I had guessed, I wouldn’t have seen that at least our own women, the wives of the Reformers and their friends, were in safety. As it was, I told Lady Sarah to be prepared; I expected to be back within the week.”

“Oh! that’s all very well. But I can tell you I’ve heard people say very nasty things about it, even about your telling no one but Lady Sarah! One woman is as good as another, people say, and why did he only try to save the aristocrat? Never mind, old man,” he stretched himself out, and put his arm over his shoulder in the old familiar way, “it’s no matter to me what you do, dear old Karl; I am glad to see you again.”

“Well,” Karl answered, mollified in spite of himself, by that caress—he could not help being proud of Louis’s cleverness—“I suppose you are satisfied. You think you have made a fool of your old brother once again, that I am not to say a word about that runaway match of yours, so that you may forgive me for making a fool of myself over this Johannesburg business, and now that it is all straight between us, you want to leave it to me to try

and make things right between you and your father-in-law."

"To tell you the truth, I don't care a damn whether you do, or you don't. I don't suppose I shall want Stephen Hayward, and, as I understand you control his money matters, you can make it worth his while to behave decently to us if you think it worth doing. But I am not going to kootoo to him. He owes me an apology, after all. I should think I am good enough even for his daughter," and Louis strolled towards the glass and surveyed himself with unmistakable satisfaction. "Why, I could have married Lady Violet Alncaster; I never told you about that, did I?"

"No, but we will leave that over a bit. There are one or two things that ought to be cleared up between us. Don't be hurt at what I'm going to say, Louis. But the Geldenrief, now, how about the Geldenrief? See, dear boy, don't mind if I am a bit upset to-night, I have had a lot to worry me, and there are things I don't understand; Van Biene hinted at something, and I must admit I'm troubled in my mind. Nothing must come between us. You're right there. When you bought those Geldenrief shares did you know anything about the deep, anything you had not told me? Louis, forgive me for asking you, had you met, talked to, heard anything from, Joan de Groot?"

The name drove the colour from Louis's cheek, "Joan de Groot?" he repeated.

Karl, who had never been a dull man, was struck by that change of colour, by that halting answer. He spoke sharply now in his anxiety: "Joan de Groot—you were on the same boat with her, you travelled home with her; you talked about the farm? I told you not to lose sight of her, to get clear with her. Come, where is she? She did not answer my letter. My mind misgives me that there has been some foul play there. So help me God, if I thought—but there, as I told you, I'm not myself to-night. I don't know what has come over me."

Louis faced the position, not without a craven fear at his heart, although he put a bold face on it.

“Keep calm, don’t lose your head. Of course I travelled over with her. Of course we talked about the deep. Who do you think put her up to renouncing her interest in it? But there, I never get any gratitude for what I do; and, as for the woman——”

“Ah!” Karl drew a long breath, he was still looking at Louis, and whatever he had feared, he never feared more than at that moment.

“The woman was nothing but a——”

The word had not time to pass his lips, it was choked in his throat. Karl had his big hand on him.

“You fool, you blasted fool, what are you saying?”

As once before, Louis’s temper overmastered Louis’s reason.

“Take your hand off me, leave go my throat,” he twisted himself free. “You don’t know anything about women, how should you? I don’t know what has become of her—on the streets, I suppose, women are all alike——” But again there was no time for the word to pass. This time Karl nearly strangled him, shook him like a dog, the grey eyes were suffused with blood, and it was blood Karl saw through them; there was murder in his heart. Louis put out his hands to defend himself, wriggled himself free again, had not the sense in his blind rage and fear to keep his venomous mouth shut.

“I dare say you know all about her; she spoke of you as if you did——” His white face was set in malice; Karl dashed his fist into it, a blow strengthened by the fury of his outraged love as well as by his overmastering anguish. For a second the little woman was before him, her hand against his mouth, her cool cheek brushing his as she stooped to him, the little body he had held, but which had never rested in his arms. A sob broke from him, he turned and fled, rushed from the room; it only came to him afterwards that under that blow Louis had gone down like a stone, only a vague impression was

with him as he rushed away, of a prone figure, huddled and still.

It took an hour or two of hard walking before he remembered that. His rage and his anguish held him fast.

All the quiet of the broad embankment, all the calm of the shining river, and the cold of the wind-blown March night, were needed to quench the hot fury that was in him. But the sky was full of cold stars, and gradually the cold cooled him. He walked rapidly as far as the Houses of Parliament, then his steps began to linger. He leant over the parapet, and gradually the flowing water soothed him. Into the flowing water he looked and saw visions—not of Joan, he dared not, he must grow calmer before he dared to think of the little woman who would have none of him, who yet haunted him.

Thirty odd years he had cared for this Louis, nursed him in his arms when he was a baby, forgiven all his boyhood's faults, helped him through his scrapes, been proud a little of Louis's weaknesses in his young manhood, forgiven him and loved him, and looked after him. Loving and caring for Louis was the habit of a life-time, ineradicable.

His hot sudden rage now fled as suddenly as it had arisen. He began to reconsider what had happened, and, seen in the retrospect, it appeared that nothing had happened. He knew before he went that Louis had married his wife without Stephen's leave, but Louis had been galled by the Hayward attitude, perhaps by the word "insolence"; Karl did not condemn him for being galled.

But there was something else; what had the something else amounted to? He did not know Joan, could not have known her, save on that short voyage; and now he was ignorant even of her whereabouts. A fortnight Karl had been in England, he too was ignorant of her whereabouts. He had written to the address Van Biene had given him, but he had had no answer. He had allowed himself to fly into a rage because Louis had spoken lightly; but what could Louis know? He had been mar-

ried, he had been out with him in Cape Town. The boy was always quick tempered; he had met him, Karl, with affection, and how had he responded? Only with fault-finding, with reproaches.

Quickly he had come away from the hotel; slowly, very slowly he retraced his footsteps.

As he went he remembered little things about Louis, absurd little things. One day, twenty-six years ago, he had pushed half a bun into Karl's mouth, tried to push it in with both his little fists. "Bun for Karl," he had said; Karl had a lump in his throat even now when he recalled it. He had been hungry, half starved, for a year after his mother's death Karl had been half-starved that Louis should be well fed, but Louis had pushed the bun into his mouth that day, and he had choked over it with gratitude and love for the beautiful little fellow who had had all he wanted of his dry cake, but who, Karl thought, had read his hunger. Louis was eight years old before Karl left England for the first time. All these eight years he had shared Karl's bed, now under a counter, now in a common lodging-house. Karl had been years, literally years, in South Africa, before he had forgotten the feel of that little downy head against his arm, before he could rid himself of the habit of expecting a good-night kiss, and listening for the tired murmuring of the baby he had promised to look after.

"I promised I'd look after the kid," he said to himself forlornly, as slowly he walked back to his hotel. "What a mess I've made of everything. I've had the bringing up of him, nobody ever interfered with me. God! how fond he was of me when he was a little chap. It was 'Karl' here, and 'Karl' there, all over the place, until I cleared out in a hurry and left him behind. He'd have done anything for me. That was the beginning of it, leaving him behind. I wish now I'd never let him out of my sight. I expect if I'd been his real brother things would have been different between us, and I never even made him a partner——"

Nobody in the sitting-room, darkness, and nobody to be seen. He rang, and the waiter went to inquire the number of Mr. Althaus's bedroom, to tell him his brother wanted to see him. He must hear if Louis was all right, if he had injured Louis, before he went home. The electric light was turned up, and Karl waited—five minutes—ten—waited until impatiently he rang the bell again, and again sent up a message.

"The gentleman is very ill, and can't see no one, and there's no message."

He scribbled a line on a card. "Give that to Mrs. Althaus." He must know that Louis was all right, that he had not hurt him, at least not materially.

Aline came down in her elaborate white bed-gown, her hair hanging in two plaits, fair, very fair, with blue wandering eyes, and lips loosely hung.

"You wanted to see me. I came directly they brought me your card. I had gone to bed."

"Louis, how is Louis, tell me?"

"He has a doctor, and Susan is nursing him. Some one knocked him down. I heard the doctor say he would have a fine pair of black eyes in the morning. What has he been doing?" She asked as a child might have done, coming close to Karl. He took her hand.

"Never you mind, dear, you just go up to him and tell him I want to see him. Tell him his brother can't sleep until he has seen him; remind him we've never gone to bed ill friends yet."

But Louis never faced a situation. He would not see his brother that night.

And, before the next day had grown warm in its sunshine, Louis and Aline had left London.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE next morning Karl, coming down to breakfast, heavy-hearted, heavy-headed, for it had needed a great deal of whisky to wash out the remembrance of what had happened between him and Louis, found on his plate the letter he had sent Joan de Groot, returned by the post-office "not known." "Not known" at the address Van Biene had given him!

It startled him, his hand shook over it. "I'm overdoing that whisky," he muttered, for his mouth was dry, and his stomach rose at his breakfast, and his thoughts were incoherent. Where was she? Where on earth was she? What was the mystery or secret? What had Van Biene meant about the Geldenrief, by connecting Joan and Louis and the Geldenrief? What the devil did it all mean? He must pull himself together, he must find out.

There was no doubt he must find out, get face to face with what was puzzling and worrying him. Louis would tell him nothing, perhaps Louis could tell him nothing, anyway he had cut himself off from that source of information. He could not get Louis out of his head; remorse and clamorous doubts fought for mastery.

The coffee was filthy, the food seemed to stink: "Bring me a bottle of Clicquot '84 and a soda-water tumbler," was his order. He knew how to pull himself together, and he must pull himself together. He was maddening himself with what he suspected, and he knew—nothing. Karl couldn't stand it.

When the champagne had done its work, he faced the situation. He must find Joan—the situation concentrated itself in that, he must find the little woman. When he

had decided this, his head grew lighter and his brain clearer. It ought not to be difficult to find a woman in London. He must take up the clue where it was dropped.

The champagne disposed of, the kidneys and bacon ignored, his head clear, he flung himself into a hansom, his impatience, his desire for action, would not let him wait for the brougham. He drove down to Bushey, to the cottage, which had been creeper-covered, woodbine-welcoming, with casement windows, tree encircled, where Louis and Joan had lived and parted. It was forlorn enough in January; the creeper was brown in its branches, showing damp-stained wall, the trees were bare against the winter sky, the windows, closed against the weather, were small and light-obscuring.

It needed some skill in eliciting information, some tact and self-control to gather from the garrulous landlady that at the date Karl mentioned she had had a lady staying with her. It needed some exercise of credulity for Karl to believe that Joan was using a name neither her own nor her husband's. On the verge of the mystery he shut his ears to it. He could not—the man was suffering intensely—he could not push his inquiries to learn who visited her, what manner of man it was who came and went, and of whom the landlady spoke with such garrulous anger. Who visited the lady? Who were her friends? What was her occupation? He took hope when he heard that she had no occupation, that she was not a lady with a pen in her hand, covering reams of paper, phrase-making, and revelling in ink. He took hope; he might be on the wrong scent. She wrote to Van Biene from here, but she may not have been here nevertheless.

“Did she, did this lady go nowhere, see nobody, do nothing?”

“Nobody, nor nothing, sir; leastways—” He did not question her as Louis had done, so she told him the little that she knew. The visit to the lawyer then came out, and hope grew obscured again; it was a lawyer who

must have drawn up that paper she sent to Van Biene. His next visit was to Mr. Frere.

The lawyer did not keep his guest waiting, the card was an open sesame. Karl's name was not strange to Mr. Frere, nor to any Londoner. What the millionaire wanted with him he could not guess, but he did not keep him waiting. An old man, Karl's sharp glance took in an old man, rheumy-eyed, a gentleman though, with thin hands and prim, loose clothes. Karl went straight to the point with him.

"About six months ago you drew up a paper for a lady, who forwarded it to Mr. Van Biene, a lawyer in Cape Town."

"Won't you sit down?" Mr. Frere's attention, his interest, were riveted immediately. He had thought of his strange client more than once.

"You remember her?"

"Perfectly, perfectly. She sat where you are sitting now, stood at first though, until I made her sit down, poor thing!"

"Why 'poor thing'? What was the matter with her? What do you mean?" he asked quickly.

"May I ask, are you a relation of hers?"

"Oh, go on, man—don't stay to ask questions, answer them. Why do you call her 'poor thing'?"

"She was in great distress; it was obvious she was suffering. She was keeping back some story, some disgraceful story," he said reflectively, seating himself, motioning his visitor to a chair. But Karl could not sit down.

"Tell me all you know. For God's sake, don't beat about the bush."

"I must know by what right you ask, what right you would have had to her confidence?" asked the other, fumbling among his papers, adjusting his glasses, looking at Karl inquiringly.

"Oh, damn you lawyers and your caution. Can't you see I don't want to do her any harm. Good God, man,

show a little humanity. Why do you call her 'poor thing'? In hell's name, what was wrong with her? Who—but no! Go on."

Mr. Frere looked away from Karl. He had seen Joan had been suffering that day; it was not less easy for him to note Karl's anxiety, his restlessness, the high note in his voice. He beat on the table with his fist.

"I want to know where she is?"

"Well, I can answer you that at once. I do not know. Since that day she came to me with the paper you speak of I have never seen her."

Karl gave an impatient sound, took a restless turn about the room, his voice was rough when he spoke again, the high note had gone out of it, it was rough and hoarse, not loud.

"What trouble was she in?" he said.

"She was about to become the mother of an illegitimate child." Karl was almost incoherent with what rose in his throat.

"Impossible! I tell you it is impossible." The hoarse voice rose, "It's a damned lie." Mr. Frere could not resent the words, there was a sob in the voice that spoke them, an entreaty for denial.

"She told me so herself. 'The child must be honest,' she said. 'I'll keep nothing, not even a name that doesn't belong to him. Get rid of the estate, I cannot look upon my baby's face until I have cleansed myself from it, from the lie the inheritance of it means.' Those were her words. I tried to persuade her, but she was very much in earnest, very unhappy. So I wrote the paper for her."

Karl looked at the old lawyer.

"She was terribly in earnest over it," Mr. Frere said, still fumbling among the papers, still avoiding Karl's eyes.

Karl fell into a chair then, heavily, his head went down upon his arms; for the moment he could not confront the daylight in the room. There rose before him again the dear little face, the wavy brown hair, the blue eyes that brimmed with fun, the mobile lips; the dimples—and the

little svelte figure—and the little white hands—and the brightness and the charm of her. A sob shook him; he forgot to be ashamed. Presently, abruptly, he raised his head.

“How do you know it was illegitimate, man! How do you know that?”

“Her husband was only just dead, she told me,” the lawyer answered drily. Karl hid his bloodshot eyes again, but not for long; soon he pulled himself together, soon he began again his restless walk.

“I must find her, I must get to the bottom of it,” he was speaking to himself.

“The man——”

Karl turned on him fiercely.

“What man? There is no man I tell you, there’s some damnable, hideous blunder somewhere. But what am I staying here talking for?” He shook himself free from the thing that had fastened on him, the fear. “I must get to the bottom of it;” adding, under his breath, “My little Joan!” Then, “You’re a lawyer, you were kind to her—were you kind to her?”

“I think so, I tried to be.”

In the end the old man fetched his overcoat and his goloshes. He lived carefully and guarded himself, but he went out with Karl in the cold to search for her; for to every one Joan made appeal, and he had not forgotten her piteous blue eyes, her poor eloquent figure.

Six months since she had last been heard of! Who could help them in the search?

Six months ago the gate of the cottage had closed behind Louis, and she had heard the wheels of his brougham roll luxuriously away, as she lay on the sofa all numbed and quiet, though there was a singing in her ears and a great sickness upon her. For she saw to what she had given herself, and realised him, and prayed for death. Numb she lay on the sofa and prayed for death. But the infant stirred in her womb, and she knew it was life and not death she carried about with her.

And she loathed the child she bore within her for one instant, one shuddering terrible instant that brought her face to face with abysmal horror. But in the recoil she grew strong, and clearer in her mind, and saw her duty, and knew that she was nerved to it.

That she was a burden and disappointment to Louis, that he wished never to look upon her face again, that the child which was coming to them both must come to her alone, were not words only, they were facts to face. And she was brave, a very brave little woman, when she was well; the weakness of her womanhood was upon her, but her spirit gathered itself together, and she was brave still. She could not debase herself further, the coming child made it impossible; she could pass out of his life. That was clear to her, comparatively easy; the rest must wait, must take its chance. Each step was a step in the dark, and the first one must be made with her eyes shut.

She did not let the night go down upon her determination. She ate her solitary dinner, made herself eat, there was work to be done before she dared sleep again, and strength she must have or she could not act. The landlady, who was summoned to her, was sympathetic. After all, if she was to lose her lodger, there could not be a better time than May, the season was in full swing, the backwash of it might land another even more desirable, and a little more chatty, into Bushey Cottage. She did not ask any questions about her lodger or her "husband's" strange ways or erratic comings and goings. She had kept a furnished house too many years in the neighbourhood to be inquisitive. So she heard without comment that Mr. Grey had been suddenly called abroad, and that Mrs. Grey proposed joining him at Southampton. She helped poor Joan to pack up; they looked up a train. Joan gave the requisite touches to the story with realism, the trunks were labelled Southampton, the cab was directed to Waterloo.

That she changed her mind before she had turned out

of Baker Street was nothing to the imperturbable cabby; ladies were most always changing their minds, he thought.

“Drive to Islington,” she said.

“Any perticklar part of Islington, ma’am?”

Why Islington? It was the first name that occurred to her. It seemed to her quite the other end of London, and all she wanted was to be quite the other end of London, out of Louis’s way, hidden. But even the cabman was a force to be reckoned with; his curiosity, it seemed like curiosity, must be satisfied. And the worst of it was she could not remember a single street in Islington, and she did not even know if Islington had streets; perhaps there were only squares there, or terraces. The man, not getting a reply, drew the cab up to the curb and lumbered down from the box.

“I beg yer pardon, ma’am, but I didn’t hear wot you said, wot part of Islington was you for?”

“I can’t go on to Southampton to-day. I will go into lodgings; drive me where I can get lodgings,” she answered faintly.

“Would you like to go back where you came from?” he asked, being a family man himself.

“Oh, no, no! As far as possible, I must—I must get to Islington.”

“Well, it ain’t very near Waterloo,” he commented, as he climbed into his seat again. “S’pose she’s ’ad a row with the landlady; looks rum though.”

She roused herself, when, after an apparently interminable time of noise and jolting, he pulled up again.

“This yere’s the Kingsland Road; there’s a bill in most of the winders, if so be it isn’t any perticklar apartments you wos looking for.”

So ignorant, so inexperienced was the poor little woman, that she took the first apartments they stopped at, paid the cabman all he asked, and felt grateful to him for helping to carry the luggage upstairs. It was a slatternly woman, poor Joan’s new landlady. All that luggage! A week’s rent in advance, a ready agreement to

give what was asked; she didn't want a reference, not she, though she mentioned it as a point in her favour, more than once, not only now, but later. Joan gave her name as Mrs. de Groot; she was glad to get into the dingy rooms. The bedroom, first floor back, looked onto a mews, the drawing-room, first floor front, faced the tram-lines. But, notwithstanding dirt and noise, she was thankful to be there, she felt less degraded than she had felt for months; she breathed more freely.

It was the beginning of a time very easy to imagine, very difficult to endure. The dismal houses in that long Islington street, each one a copy of its neighbour, here and there one conspicuously dingy, here and there one conspicuously cleaner, and yet grimy and poverty-haunted, grew slowly into her consciousness. It was all part of her terrible loneliness. One day she remembered why she, ignorant of London, had said "Islington" haphazard to the cabman. It was Karl who had told her of Islington. Somewhere near there his mother was buried. She remembered he had told her of the funeral, of the Hebrew prayers. Impelled by some strange curiosity, she asked where was the Jewish cemetery; she dragged herself to Ball's Pond Road, spent an absorbing half-hour seeking for an insignificant grave in that dreary little God's acre, and was questioned at last by the inquisitive little Hebrew who had been watching her.

"Grave of a Mrs. Althaus? Lord bless yer, yes; yer couldn't miss it. There it is, monument put up by her son, twenty years after they had both been dead and buried and forgot. Related to the family?"

The fountain of Joan's tears had dried up, but her eyes smarted when she saw the marble Karl had erected. So much care he had for the dead, so little his brother had for the living. It added something to her loneliness to see the magnificent tribute, "To the memory of Karl Althaus and Johanna his wife. *'Happy he with such a Mother! Faith in womankind beats with his blood, trust in all things high comes easy to him.'*" The rest of the

inscription was in some strange lettering that she could not read. She remembered Karl had asked her once what they had written upon her mother's gravestone, and she had told him that "*With Christ, which is far better,*" was inserted on the simple cross in that Devonshire churchyard, where father and mother lay in one common grave. Karl had walked about the room, repeating the simple words to himself.

"Beautiful," he said, "beautiful! I don't believe a word about it, but it's beautiful all the same. And you feel they are up there, in Heaven, with Christ? God knows where my poor old mother is. I put up a stone to her two years ago; the man who writes me prospectuses found me the words for it, they weren't true as far as I'm concerned, but I think she'd have liked 'em. Somehow or other they've had more meaning since I've met you, little Joan."

That is what Karl had said to her a few short months ago.

All that evening she cried, cried herself sick, in the miserable Islington lodging. The slatternly landlady, when she brought up the badly-cooked dinner, remonstrated with her.

"It ain't good for you and it ain't good for 'im that's comin'. We've all got our troubles——"

"You're very kind."

"Nothin' to speak of," which was true, "but I'm sorry for a young critter like you. I don't ask no questions, but if your 'usband's left you, why, it's better than 'avin' one as knocks you about. An' if you 'av'nt got a 'usband, why, all the freer for you when you've got over your trouble. So long as you've got plenty of money, wot do it matter about the man? I s'pose you've got plenty of money to see yer through?"

The inquisitiveness of the lower orders is extraordinary. Joan's tears dried up. The landlady was in a friendly mood.

"'Ere, draw up yer chair an' eat it while it's 'ot." It

was very unappetising—a bit of mutton without gravy, served on a tablecloth that showed marks of the coffee the wretched maid-of-all-work had spilled over it in the morning, flanked by a dish of potatoes and greens under one broken cover.

“ I didn’t cover up the meat, thinkin’ you’d set on to it at once. I ’av’n’t ast you before, but I s’pose you’ve got everythink ready; you don’t expect me to look after yer, for that I wouldn’t undertake. An’ ’ow long will it be before, if I may ask?”

“ I—I—don’t know.” Joan flushed crimson. The landlady was impertinent, intrusive, slatternly, but—she was a woman.

Before the evening meal was over, before the landlady had shuffled off in her heelless slippers, Joan had remembered with a pang of dismay that it would be some time yet before her troubles would reach their climax, that she had forgotten to think of, or to provide for, nurse and doctor and clothes, that all her experiences had not succeeded in making her practical. She had reckoned to meet the immediate future with what she had in her purse. After that—could there be an after that? she wondered miserably—there was her pen. But now she learnt she could not wait to provide for her needs until that afterwards.

It was not entirely Louis’s fault; she had been proud, had paid her own bills. He had laughed and told her to come to him when her store was exhausted, the last moiety of her allowance from De Groot, the last instalment she had had from her publishers. Perhaps he had had an exaggerated consideration for her susceptibilities; but she had kept that little stock of pride to draw on, and he had been sensitive to her wishes in this matter. He had not had time to teach her that she could freely take; he had been occupied in proving to her that she must freely give. And his attitude had given her pleasure. But now——

Before she went to bed that night she wrote a few

lines to her publishers, and went out by herself to post it. It was Saturday night in Islington Causeway. She was conscious of endless traffic, and the iron rails of tram-cars, costermongers bawling their goods under the wild flare of naphtha lamps, noise, and the brushing against her of common women and men with evil-smelling pipes. There was a public-house at the corner, a horrible effluvia was wafted to her at the red letter-box; this was the world in which she found herself, the *cul de sac* to her vista of Paradise. She shuddered all the way back to the lodging-house, and found herself still trembling when she got up to her rooms.

It was difficult for her to think, but it seemed to her that all the suffering in the world was borne by women. She had met them bruised and battered, in drunken misery, reeling; to-night her own burden was well-nigh unbearable.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

IT was the publisher to whom Joan had written who gave Karl the clue for which he had been two days searching. Mr. Frere had done his best, but his best was police stations and hospitals, infirmaries, and charity organisations, a horrible best. "Her publishers may know, the publishers of 'The Kaffir and his Keeper'" was his last hopeless suggestion, and, as it happened, it was the one that put the thread into their hands.

Karl had met many types of men in his time, men of divers business pursuits and modes of life—Barabbases of all shades and opinions—but a publisher was new to him. And the gentleman who had made half a fortune over "The Kaffir and his Keeper" was, unfortunately, not a fair representative of his class. The front room on the ground floor, where Karl kicked his heels in impatient waiting, was dirty and untenanted, the window decorated with fly-blown periodicals; behind the counter was a shabby boy, cadaverous, a very Smike among clerks, who promised dubiously to inquire if Mr. Jones could see Mr. Althaus. Mr. Jones hardly saw any one, and Mr. Francis Jones was out. He went away doubtfully and slowly; but his doubt was turned to awe and respect by the time of his rapid return, for now it had got into his dull head that the visitor was the South African millionaire, and there seem no wits so dull that the glitter of millions cannot brighten them.

"This way, sir; Mr. Jones will see you at once," said the boy.

Karl followed him up the narrow, dirty, wooden staircase, to the office, murky from the uncleaned windows, where, like Dickens's "dirty old man in a dirty old house,"

the wizened old scoundrel sat laying snares for young authors.

With Karl he put on the airs of a literary man. He hoped he had brought him a book on South Africa, which he was anxious to publish at his own expense; but when he knew the real object of Karl's visit he grew insolent.

"The authoress of 'The Kaffir and his Keeper,' oh, yes! I know her address well enough. She wrote me two or three weeks ago, or months, perhaps, asking for money, royalties; what do you think of that, sir? I published the book at my own expense; I paid everything, advertising, proof corrections, everything. Look at the puffs I got out, look at the criticisms. Why, I made her fortune over that book, and now she has written me for the royalties that were due to her. Did you ever hear anything like that?"

"Well, I hope you sent her what she asked you!"

The publisher barked at him, showed his yellow fangs, and barked almost in the extremity of his indignation at being asked for money.

"Royalties! why, the woman is in my debt. The book never paid the expenses, books never do."

It cost Karl an immense amount of self-control to sit still and listen whilst Mr. Jones explained the half-profit system, and why a book that had run through six editions in four months had become a loss. But when he realised the miserable scoundrel he had to deal with, he dealt with him as he had dealt with scoundrels all his life. He was within reach of Joan now—she was alive, in communication with the publishers; he could afford to delay a short time with the information, to investigate how she was being cheated, to take at least one of her affairs into his strong hands. He let the publisher tell his own story, give his own figures of expenses of publishing and advertising: Karl was in his element with figures. Then he asked abruptly:

"So you would not bring out another book by Mrs. de Groot; you would not take the risk?"

The keen little eyes twinkled as Mr. Jones admitted that he was prepared to take the risk, as he explained how much less advertisement would be necessary. He even offered twenty-five pounds for the copyright. Karl undertook to open negotiations for him on this basis; he was completely self-controlled, and secured the address that he might discuss the subject with Mrs. de Groot. Then he rose to go, but not without showing his gratitude to Mr. Jones, who asked him about the mining market, by giving him the "tip" he angled for. Having given it, and being prepared to go, he came back to impress its value upon Joan's publisher. "They must go up," he said; "don't buy a few shares, and be satisfied to make a thousand or two. A man at your time of life ought to put himself outside the necessity of work. Put the pot on, go for the gloves. It's not one of those things there is any doubt about."

It was not; Karl knew that. He went away with the satisfaction of feeling that the man who had cheated Joan was in the fair way of receiving punishment for it; he knew quite well the market prospects of Chartered at eight! The man ought to have been kicked, but Karl thought he had done better than kicking him. He had not a twinge of conscience about it, never had, only laughed under his breath when he saw the name in the Gazette seven months later.

The address was in Islington. It was in Islington he had wheeled that barrow of which he had spoken to Stephen Hayward. He tried again to remember what it was he had wheeled about Islington, and what sort of neighbourhood it was. He was in his own brougham now, and many rich men would have tried to forget the days of the barrow. Not so Karl, he was never ashamed nor sorry for the work he had done. All his doubts and fears for Joan were chattering and chirping about him, were loud and ear-splitting, they had prevented him sleeping or eating or resting these last few days; but he shook them away with an impatient toss of his head as he looked

out of the window, seeing tram-lines and poor gentility, with tenement houses, all grey and dull, and big factories and warehouses, all smoky and unprosperous. There was another figure he saw sometimes with Joan's; but that he dashed away from him, that he would not contemplate, that he could not bear.

"It was in the summer; I recollect the smell of the tram-lines. I was wrong about winkles, I was never such a fool as to sell winkles in the summer; it must have been strawberries."

A man with a barrow was trying to sell something, calling out his wares. Karl recalled the cry, and let down the window with a bang.

"Pull up. Can't you hear when I speak?"

The coachman brought the horses to a sudden standstill, and the smart footman jumped down. He touched his cockaded hat, but his master's head was half out of the window, and he was shouting to a costermonger:

"Here, you, hi!"

The costermonger looked across, and the footman was ashamed for his master.

"Go over there and stand by that barrow, and look after it. I want to speak to the man."

It was very disgusting, but Karl always knew how to get himself obeyed. The smart footman minded the barrow, to the infinite delight of three or four ragged urchins and some slatterns, and the coster came over to the brougham.

"What have you made to-day?"

The man didn't pull his cap; he was a sturdy coster, hoarse and direct.

"Ninepence, guv'nor. At it since four."

If he had been a boy, it was in Karl this moment, on his way to Joan, to have taken him from his barrow, charged himself with his future, tried to bribe Providence; but he smelt of drink, and was slouching and disreputable and hopeless.

"Ah! well, I wheeled a barrow once; here's a sov-

ereign for you." Then he put his head in, and, before the coster had recovered from his astonishment, the footman was back on the box, and Karl was once more on the way to Joan.

The Islington Road is the longest, dreariest street in the whole of London. The brougham pulled up at a miserable house, narrow-gutted, with no curtains, and dirt enough on the windows to make them unnecessary. The brougham, the footman's bang on the wretched knocker, quickly brought out a little "marchioness," cap awry, draggle-tailed, smutty. Karl was out of the brougham almost before it stopped.

"Is Mrs. Grey here?"

The maid-of-all-work stared at him.

"No, she ain't. Nor never hasn't bin; don't know no such a name."

"Oh, yes! I forgot, I meant Mrs. de Groot; is Mrs. de Groot here?"

"Then why don't yer say wot yer mean." But the little slut was pushed aside by her mistress, gaping and curious, with no collar on her rusty black dress, an elderly garrulous slattern. "Who is it he's askin' for?" The girl had only been there a fortnight; the lodgers of yesterday were unknown to her.

"Oh! Lord knows. Sellin' Bibles or sewin'-machines, I shouldn't wonder."

"You get back to your work."

Karl raised his hat. "I was inquiring for a Mrs. de Groot." The publishers had made no mention of another name; it must be that she had resumed her own.

"Oh, Mrs. de Groot! Step in, will you?" She led the way, and Karl followed her through the narrow oil-clothed passage, into the reek of the house, into the stuffy front parlour.

"Is she here?"

"Not exactly here."

"Thank God for that," was his quick thought. "But you know where she is?" were his words.

“ Yes! You come in here, sir, an’ I’ll tell yer all about it.”

This noble gentleman,—Karl, with his carriage and footman, seemed a noble gentleman to the Islington lodging-housekeeper,—merited the greatest attention. And once more Karl was patient whilst a flood of talk was poured over him. She stood in the parlour with her arms akimbo, and told him all about her lodger.

“ Yes, she was ’ere sure enough, nigh on five weeks, an’ if I do say it myself, I nursed ’er like a mother, I did, though me ’ands was full at the time, an’ I’m a widow woman myself, an’ I never ast no questions, not me. P’rhaps,” inquisitively, “ the gentleman would know what I am alludin’ to, but I never ast ’er where ’er weddin’ ring was, nor nothin’. She was took bad one night. I fetched the doctor to ’er myself, an’ after he’d bin up talkin’ to ’er a time—I’d ’ave gone up with ’im, but you see I’d other lodgers in the ’ouse. It’s a ’ard life mine, sir, you can see that for yourself, with no one to look to but myself.” Here followed a little biography. “ Well, after that man ’ad bin with her p’rhaps ’alf-an-’our, the girl fetched me ’ome—I’d just bin round to ’ave a drop. I don’t believe in ’avin’ drink in the ’ouse with gels about. I don’t know whether you agree with me, sir, but that’s my plan, an’ she always knows where to find me. Well, she brought me back, an’ I come in ’ere, an’ ’e says to me, the doctor says, ‘ Mrs. Maggs,’ says ’e, for ’e knows me, ’twas ’im mended my leg when I broke it come a year ago last Micklemas. ‘ Mrs. Maggs,’ says ’e, ‘ you’ve bin very kind an’ attentive to Mrs. de Groot, an’ she’s dooly grateful; but seein’ she’s so ill, and not like to be better afore she’s a sight worse, I’ve advised of ’er to go into a nursin’ ’ome round ’ere, as I know on, an’ I’m goin’ round to see about it, an’ I’ll fetch her there, by-an’-by. Now, you just go up an’ ’elp ’er with the packin’, there’s a good woman, an’ you’ll get a week’s rent, an’ a week’s notice, an’ that’s better than ’avin’ an inquidge in the ’ouse, wich is wot’s very likely to ’appen.’ ”

"Where is the home?" asked Karl quickly. "Who was the doctor?"

"I'm comin' to that, sir, give me time." There was no way out of it, he had to give her her own time; she rambled on.

"I'm glad to hear you were so attentive to her," he broke in as soon as he was able, taking a five-pound note out of his pocket. "Here, buy yourself something to remember her by. Where's the address, did you say?" Never were five pounds less honestly earned, but he got the address no more quickly even then, and mixed up with it eventually were a few details of Mrs. Maggs's personal history, and a wholly gratuitous assurance that so long as Maggs was alive he always voted Conservative. "As true as I'm standin' 'ere," she said, "'workin' man or no workin' man,' say 'e, 'I'll vote for the 'Ouse o' Lords.'"

Karl got away at last.

The Home was a corner house, green verandahed, white curtained, spotlessly clean, the little gravel path that led up to the door was freshly rolled, the green grass plot on either side closely cut, tended evergreens were in the tiled window-boxes.

"Is Mrs. de Groot in? Can I see Mrs. de Groot?" The door was not opened by a parlour-maid, but by a trim hospital nurse.

"Mrs. de Groot? Yes, sir, indeed you can. We were only saying it would be a good thing if she had some friends, some one to rouse her. You know she has been very ill?"

Karl did not know what he knew, nor what he feared. He waited in the neat little room with its light wall-paper and portrait frames, its antimacassars and green flower-pots, whilst the nurse went to prepare Joan for his visit. He was hardly master of himself when he followed her upstairs, he found himself trembling. He told himself he had only just recovered from an illness.

When Karl Althaus had last seen Joan she was queen-

mistress of Cape Town society, her small head erect, her bright eyes full of laughter, full of life and intelligence, with a certain alertness and joy of the world, giving an impression of more vitality, more conscious pride of her vitality, than any woman he had ever met.

She was lying on a sofa now, her eyes were quenched and tired, there were crows'-feet round them; her mouth had a pathetic droop, her figure was listless.

"Karl—is it Karl?" she said. She was so weak, past surprise or shock. Submerged in suffering, she had hardly come to the surface, to the knowledge she was still alive; it was the mere remnant of a woman Karl saw before him, but he knelt before her, knelt down by the sofa, put his broad hands over those white skeleton ones of her's, and stayed there a minute, wordless, with bowed head, with his big shoulders shaken, with his eyes too dim to see, with his voice past control.

"Why didn't you tell me? why didn't you send for me, Joan, little Joan?" were the first words he got out, and they sounded like a sob too.

"I'm better now; don't cry, Karl, don't cry." She drew one weak hand away and laid it on his head, on that grey, thick thatch of his. "How thick your hair is; they cut mine off when I was ill."

He got to his feet in a moment or two; the frailty, the timbre of her voice, so weak and altered, warned him that his own emotion must be controlled. He drew a chair beside the sofa, a low one. She did not resist when he took her hand in his, and held it there while he sat, now and again putting his lips upon it, hiding his eyes from her; more than one salt drop fell upon that little hand.

"So they cut off your hair?" Still there were clusters of it, heavy over the white brow.

"It's growing again now."

And then silence.

In the cage by the window the canary burst into chirping song, and a little whimsical smile came to Joan's pale lips.

"He has more to say to me than you have."

"My dear, my dear!"

She watched him a little while, strong and comforting he looked, although his voice was strangely shaken, his words so few, his eyes so bloodshot. But how had he come? Who had sent him? The weak heart began to beat, the pale face to grow whiter, even the lips to lose their colour. She made a movement; Karl saw the direction, had poured the brandy out, held it to her lips with his arm making a pillow for her head, quicker than a woman could have done. All his strength turned into tenderness.

"Lie still, you'll soon be all right, touch of faintness—nothing when you're coming out of an illness. I had it myself in Cape Town. Gulp it down. Don't like it, eh? I suppose it is pretty bad."

When she had forced down the dose he had given her, he put the glass to his nose.

"Thought so—poison—One Star? Must see about getting you something decent to drink."

"Don't go," she gasped out.

"Go! Not me," he said. "Why should I go?"

"Oh! but if you knew, if you knew."

She was not past the shame of it, the painful red showed through the wan cheeks, and the eyes filled. Her hands went up to hide her face. She buried it in the pillow. Karl, unnerved, dropped the glass, damned it, put a caressing hand on her shoulder; she felt the tremour of it.

"My dear, my dear," he said again, not master of his voice; he could not bear to see her ashamed before him. "Don't speak, don't try to speak. God knows I don't want to hear what you've got to say. But you won't hide away from me again, will you? You'll let me help you? Oh, Joan, my little love, my little only love, don't hide yourself away from me because you've been in trouble." And then, emboldened, he had both arms about her, and his wet cheek next her wet cheek. "That's right, let old

Karl comfort you, poor old Karl, who hadn't the luck to help you through it, whatever it was, but who is here now."

Presently they both grew calmer. Karl was able to walk about the room a little, to stretch himself, to clear his voice and throat.

"I am not ill now, only weak—and I didn't expect you. You haven't told me—how did you find me—who—did anybody send you?" said Joan from the sofa.

"Nobody sent me. I had to find you; you know I told you I'd come to you if ever you were free——"

"Oh! don't, don't. You don't know what has happened! Karl! oh, Karl!" and the shame seized and shook her with sobs.

He left off walking about, he had his arms about her again, his voice was as deep as his heart was large. He whispered to her:

"Hush! hush, my darling, don't cry, Karl knows, Karl understands. Some villain has stole a march on you, God curse him! Do you think it matters to me, do you think it makes any difference between us? Some day perhaps you'll tell me about it, and he'll get his deserts, but to-day, to-day, dear, say you're glad because I'm here, rough old Karl, who loves you, who wants you never to cry any more. Hush, hush, darling, I can't bear it." Gradually her sobs ceased.

"How good you are."

"Good!"

"But you mustn't call him a villain. It was my fault, mine."

"Never mind, dear, never mind."

"Oh! but I must say it. I had known him such a little time."

"Don't talk about it."

"And there was no one like him. I've heard you say it, there was no one like Louis."

"Louis!"

There was a noise as if something had broken in his

ears, and his face grew swollen and red. All his warnings had not warned him. Louis! the word beat upon him, throbbed in the room. His hands clenched and unclenched themselves mechanically, he swayed on his feet, and Joan's face was indistinct. Her weak voice went on:

"You must not be angry with Louis. Karl! don't be angry with Louis. I had known him barely three weeks. What wonder so light a woman held him so short a time."

Her heart had grown soft, not hard in her suffering. She remembered only the lover who was "like myrrh unto her." She had no thought of him that was not mingled with the craving for his presence. Even his name helped her, and here was Karl, who loved him too. Hope was like wine in her veins.

"Tell me about him, Karl, tell me. He has forgiven me?"

"Eh! What!" He was coming to himself, the room was growing clear; but now his face was paling, settling into rigid lines, his eyes looked wild, fierce, and strange.

"I ought, sometimes I think I ought, to have done what he asked me. It was for you he wanted it. Karl," for he had turned his back upon her, she could not see his working face. "Karl, are you angry I did not give him the farm?"

"Wait a minute, wait a minute, dear." The hideous thing was true then, it fastened on him. And the whole truth was here before him; he had but to keep calm, keep quiet—the foul deed, the full ugliness of it was going to be shown to him—if only he could keep quiet, if only the blood would leave off beating in his ears. Back to the low chair he came, and this time it was she who sought his hand, and held it.

"Karl, was I really wrong? I think I was ill then, but even now it seems to me—you know how Piet hated the mining—and he was dead, he could not protect himself."

Karl's voice was strangled in his throat, but Joan noticed nothing; she was pleading with him to find her wrong.

"Louis wanted you to make over the ground to him?" Karl got out.

"Yes, I suppose you instructed him; it seemed impossible for me to do it. I was wrong, perhaps I was wrong."

"Tell me clear, try and tell me clear."

"He loved me at first, he did love me, Karl, nothing to do with the farm."

So she had doubted too! He heard it in her asseveration. He had dashed his fist in Louis's face, and then crawled back to say he was sorry. What a fool he had been not to kill him, wring his neck, the viper, the vermin! The veins swelled on his forehead.

"And when you wouldn't let him have the ground——"

"I left him, he didn't leave me, he didn't desert me, don't think it, Karl. He was disappointed in me. I didn't want to be a drag on him. I knew he was dependent upon you, I knew he wasn't rich——"

"What!" he shouted, screamed it almost. No one had ever seen Karl Althaus like this before. He had risen from his seat, his face was purple; but still he saw her, terrified, white.

"Go on, go on. *He wasn't rich——*"

"Karl."

"I'm beside myself. Don't mind me—he wasn't rich, you say. For God's sake get on. Oh, my God, don't tell me he left you without money! Oh, my God, the thing I've reared!"

She was frightened then, would say no more, would have retracted what she had said, she began to realise that Karl had come to her in ignorance. She began to plead to him then, not for herself, for Louis.

He tried to get hold of himself, not to let himself go. The treachery was unspeakable; he had loved the man as more than a brother, had given him his confidence, had trusted him. But the woman must be thought of first; what was she saying?

"Little woman, I'm floored. There's no good trying to hide it from you. It's done me; I loved the boy——" He

might control his words, but his voice was beyond control. "This room is so infernally hot——"

He was rushing from it, but she struggled to her feet, and held out her weak hands.

"Karl, you mustn't go, I can't, I can't let you go. Promise me you won't hurt him, you won't go to him."

He caught hold of her or she would have fallen, made her lie down again, was gently rough with her, and reproached her for over-exerting herself.

"You won't go to him?" was all she answered, putting her arms round his neck and holding him. Anything he would have said to sooth her, anything.

"I only want air, dear, let me go. I'm stifling in here, look at me."

She looked at his red face, and into his reddened eyes.

"Promise me you'll come back before you have seen Louis."

"I'll come back, I promise to come back."

"Before you have seen Louis?"

He drew her arms down gently from about him, laid her back on the pillow.

"I promise. There is no hurry; Louis can wait."

"When will you come back?"

"To-morrow. I must be alone now. Believe me, I must be alone."

"And you won't see Louis until you come?"

"No."

He was not in a hurry to see Louis; there was no hurry over the score that must be settled between them. He was glad to get into the streets; the close little room, and the sick woman pleading for Louis, were too much for him. He was no figure of romance, this poor Karl. The first thing he did was to look for a public-house, and to gulp down a dram that would not have steadied most people's nerves. But it steadied his a little. Then he retraced his steps, and got from the nurse the address of the doctor who had been instrumental in removing Joan from her dirty lodging-house.

He got clear as to the history of her struggle then. It was true, it was shockingly true, that she had fought poverty as well as illness. The baby who had lived one short painful week owed even its burial to the samaritanism of strangers. The doctor himself had been responsible for her at the Home. Delicately he told Karl he had friends who were interested in the case; but Karl was rough in his acknowledgment, not a roughness that repelled the doctor.

"Fifteen thousand a year the fellow had, he never had less than that. It wasn't enough for him to break her, but he left her like this."

The dead baby cried to Karl. The passion of vengeance was like the taste of blood in his mouth, the passion of pity was like a sword that pierced him, as he tore out of the doctor's small house as he had torn out of the small room that held Joan. He couldn't get air enough or whisky enough. But it was the whisky that sobered him finally when he found himself at home, in his own room, with steadier nerves and more comprehensive thought, and the ruin of all the best that life had given to contemplate calmly.

"I'll look after the kid," he had promised Louis's mother, and the "kid" had been father, mother, sister, brother to him. Curious the incidents that came to him as he sat alone, his limbs stiff, his locomotion paralysed, gazing at the past with staring eyes, the empty bottles and the overturned glass, and the dawn creeping into the disordered room, epitomising his wretchedness. Himself and Louis, Louis and himself, he saw the two figures together through many vicissitudes, the boy always clinging to him, he felt the cling of the warm little hands still; a few maudlin tears found their way down his nose. He was not drunk, his legs might be unsteady, the muscles of his face working rigidly, but the things he saw were quite clear to him. He had been hideously betrayed, ill-used; but it was not of himself he was thinking.

Did Joan know Louis was married? or must he, must

Karl, tell her? And would she still plead for him when she knew?

What must he do, what could he do to heal her wounds, to make her forget what she had suffered, to bring health and strength back to her, to make right the thing his Louis had done?

CHAPTER TWENTY

JOAN had *not* known; but, when she learnt that Louis was indeed married, she easily persuaded herself, she tried to explain to Karl, that it was for *his* sake, for the sake of the Hayward interest, and the Hayward support, that Louis had done it. Karl said Louis's wife was half-witted. Joan dwelt on that, there was just one little thing she could not face. But the power of seeing pictures that was coming slowly back to her made it unnecessary she should see Louis as husband to this half-witted girl of whom Karl spoke. He had carried her off to get for Karl what Karl wanted. The marriage ceremony was part of the sacrifice; Louis was no woman's husband but hers—all this she persuaded herself.

Karl listened to her the next day, and the next, and the one after. For, soon he found there was no pleasure for him like the painful pleasure of hearing her talk. Again and again he went back and listened to her, and never contradicted nor argued. He renewed his promise, and was even made to swear it, that he would not seek Louis out to injure him. So far he promised. He made his mental reservations, began to see his way a little clearer, and visited the sick woman every day whilst pursuing it. Flowers, fruits, and wines were lavished on her. The samaritans were compensated, the doctor made rich for life, the Home endowed—all this Karl could do for her. And she clung to him, there was no doubt she clung to him, in her weakness and convalescence, flushed at his coming, paled at his going, watched for him, and clung to him.

Karl, going back every day to that big empty palace of his, was ever more oppressed by its size, by its empti-

ness. He had built it for Louis, for himself and Louis, he had never pictured himself alone in it. He told Joan how lonely he was. She was lonely too!

"You could write there," he said wistfully. "There's a big room with a bow-window looking right on to the Park, and never a sound would come to you. I'd never disturb you."

For some plans Joan must make, something must be decided when she was strong enough to think. Already she had been out, Karl had fetched her in his victoria. Wrapped up carefully, propped up by pillows, protected, Joan looked again on that world which had so nearly receded from her. She told Karl of her visit to the cemetery in the Ball's Pond Road, of how she had stood before his mother's grave. Nobody would have believed the rough fellow could have been so moved. Later on when they drove out he took her to see a little marble cross he had ordered; the carving and the inscription were yet to come, he told her.

"Shall we put, '*With Christ, which is far better*'?" he asked gently, when the tears his thoughtfulness had started ceased their healing flow. "I remember you said that was on your own mother's stone. I thought I'd wait to ask you."

"He was baptised."

"I know; you called him Karl, the doctor told me."

"Louis always said he must be called Karl."

They drove on a little in silence.

"I want to have something else put on it, Joan." Under the rug he took her hand. "Do you know what I want?"

"To put on the marble?"

"Yes, dear. It is '*To the memory of little Karl.*' I want to put '*To the memory of little Karl Althaus.*'"

Still she did not understand, only her face seemed to grow smaller and more pathetic, and unshed tears darkened her eyes. She could not answer him. He went with her into the house, each day she had grown stronger. At

first he had carried her upstairs, then he only supported her, now she walked alone with only his arm to steady herself by; he dared not wait until she was independent of him. He followed her into the room, helped with her unswathing from her wraps.

"Joan, I'm all alone in that big, empty house of mine. I ought to have been your brother-in-law. I'm the nearest to you, you know you've got no one nearer than me. Come and make a home for me. I'm a rough fellow, but I know how to keep out of your way when you don't want me. It's a beautiful room to write in; I've told you it looks right over the Park. Some days perhaps you'll dine with me, sit at my table; you know what it would mean to me, just having you there. Will you come?"

She was weak in health, a little weak perhaps mentally. She had been through deep waters. But since Karl had come she had felt the comfort of warm human sympathy, and the forlornness had left her. Only six weeks ago the poor half moribund baby had been born to her; she could not yet face the burden of her own life, she realised vaguely that she was not fit, not yet fit to face it. It was a resting-house he offered her, she thought, a space in which to grow strong.

And he pleaded well.

"I built it for two, for him and me, and now I'm alone in it."

In her soul she had built a pleasure-house for Louis, and been alone in it.

"I'm not well enough to move," she said weakly.

"No, but you'll grow strong there. Both of us are alone. I suppose it means asking you to take pity on me, but I've thought it over every way, and I don't see a better way out. You don't know what it is to walk about that damned house when I leave you, and think what a mess I've made of things; they are ghosts I see there, ghosts."

She had made a mess of things too.

"I've got to begin all over again. I was always look-

ing for Louis, and Louis's children, to get a family around me. Whenever I was money-making, I thought it would be good for them. Whenever I thought over what I'd got, I thought how I'd spend it on 'em, how the boys should go to Eton, how they'd look to me for treats. I thought of the country estate I'd buy; an infernal fool, you'll say, of course I'm an infernal fool! But all the house is full of Louis and those children of his; I planned it that way. It haunts me now; it's ghastly. All of it gone into one little grave. Let me put the name, let me put 'To the memory of little Karl Althaus;' I expect it's to the memory of all the Althauses there will ever be. And take my name yourself, Joan. It's not much of a name, but you've got a greater right to it than ever he had."

She was trembling.

"What are you asking me, Karl? What are you asking?"

"Nothing you need mind giving, nothing. Just the right to take care of you, that's all. Give it me, little woman, you'll never be sorry, I can promise you that."

He was standing beside her, not touching her.

"If there was a better way, a better way for you I mean, I should see it. My heart is in my eyes, Joan, when I'm looking at anything for you, and I've faced this fairly. 'Twill be heaven to me to have you there, but if it weren't best for you too, I'd do without it. Come, say yes."

He had made up his mind whilst hers was unstrung, feeble. Still she made it clear to him, it was always clear to him, that she had nothing to give him. He made it clear to her, however, that he asked nothing from her but the right to take care of her. And Louis was married! She could see Karl was angry with Louis, she could not see all his cause, but she could influence him until his anger cooled, she could do something for both of them. Since she had known the Althauses, they had swallowed up her life, there had been nothing else since she had known

the Althaus. And to sum it all up, she was too weak to take care of herself, and she felt that she would never grow strong again, and that it did not matter what became of her. Whenever Karl left her she cried, because she felt so feeble, and could hardly move, and thought she would never get better. Whenever he was with her his strength revived her, and his voice put courage into her, and his big presence comforted her. And he wanted her, he wanted her so badly, he said, and nobody else wanted her. So, in time, he won, won a half comprehending consent from her to take his name.

Because, with strong men words become actions almost before they are shaped, before she had realised quite what he had meant, she found herself at the registrar's with him, vaguely repeating the formula that turned Louis Althaus's mistress into Karl Althaus's wife.

The next few weeks were spent by the sea. Instead of the scantily furnished "Nursing home for poor gentlewomen," Joan found herself in a palace. Instead of a hurried attention from an overworked nurse with four other patients, she had a day nurse and a night nurse to herself. There was a physician from Brighton who came twice a day to see her, there was a great man from London who consulted with him, there were unheard-of luxuries to tempt her appetite, elaborate contrivances to give her air without exertion. The whole cultivated intelligence of half-a-dozen people was brought to bear upon the simple problem of restoring to strength and health this poor little woman who had been so buffeted and beaten by fortune.

Gradually her health was restored, and then Karl brought her to London to make a home for them both.

She lived in his house, in that grey solid temple he had erected to himself in Park Lane. The green grew round it, the trees he had planted flourished, and grew tall. Ever through the windows the panorama of the Park stretched its paths and green spaces before Joan, to rest her tear-tired eyes. Slowly her vitality and strength and

intelligence returned to her; but her beauty never wholly returned. Always there were, always there would be, lines round her eyes; and she was worn, wrinkled, she had dried up with the blast of the furnace through which she had matured. But still it was a dear face, and it filled the empty house for Karl, and made it home. Karl had never had a home since he had been a man, and he grew to strange happiness in it. She lived there, and it became as a sacred place. He was no bridegroom, but he was a happy man who had a home, with a woman in it who filled his heart.

But the world has a way of interfering with strange happiness, of disapproving of what it fails to understand, of being impertinent and inquisitive, and resentful of being ignored; and Karl had ignored the world—there was no doubt about that.

Society was ready to be entertained at the house in Park Lane, Society heard with a shock that there was a lady installed there; the thing was whispered, but the sounds spread, the whispering voices swelled into chorus, then the clamour grew loud, and reached Stephen Hayward's ears.

"Have you heard anything about the Althausen? about Karl Althaus?" he asked Constantia carelessly. Stephen had learnt wisdom since the day when he suspected Karl of underhand dealings, but he had not been able to impart much of it to his sister. He veiled his interest in the question, sauntered into her room, took up the quarterly she had laid down and made a comment or two on an article in it, before he asked the question about the Althausen. Constantia was more in the way of hearing gossip than he, and the kind friends who had laughed at the climax to her endeavour to straighten out Society, would have been sure to bring to her such a titbit as that.

She was not the woman she had been.

"Why do you care, why do you want to know?"

"I like him Con. I can't help liking him. So would you if you knew him. Why are you so obstinate, dear?"

He was very gentle with her, smiled and shook his head at her, his reproach was half in jest.

"He is a thorough good fellow, a gentleman too, for all his want of a coat-of-arms." The last sentence had the bitterness of which Stephen had never cured himself; his own tarnished coat-of-arms never gave him the pleasure in contemplation that it gave her.

"Am I obstinate? I don't think I am obstinate."

"You haven't heard from her again?" he ventured.

"No! Only the one letter you saw; her handwriting, but his letter."

It struck him that Constantia was a little lonely, that the girl, even as she was, would have softened the loneliness of his sister's age. The years between them seemed to stretch ever a wider gap; his daughter might have bridged it. The poor girl! if her face was a little vacant, her ways were very gentle; he had missed the young figure about the house, the sense of responsibility, even, that it brought with it. His disgust for Louis never spread to the girl; he missed her, he thought perhaps Constantia missed her too.

"You would not punish her for what was not her fault?" he said tentatively, fidgeting with the paper, putting it down.

"She doesn't want me, she has her husband," she answered slowly. Constantia was lonely too. Stephen saw that. He went on more hopefully.

"The story is about at the clubs—I thought you might have heard it—that Karl Althaus is not living alone in Park Lane. He is not at all the sort of man to make himself a scandal, to contract a vulgar liaison. I haven't seen him for the last five or six weeks. My own affairs——"

There was no need to tell Constantia that. She knew his own affairs had not been going well, that the promotion he had looked for had not come, that his diplomatic visit to Berlin had been a mere sop, a mere excuse for leaving him out when there had been something to be

given away. She knew that he was in sight, not of the success he had earned, to which he was entitled, but of an obscurity, of a being passed over, that he had not been prepared for.

"It strikes me as possible," he went on, "as just possible, that it is Aline who is there, that he is shielding her, or looking after her for some reason. I heard, too, he had quarrelled with his brother. I don't know how these things get about. I thought I'd go over, and look him up, but there is no use my doing so, if your mind is set against her, if you won't see her."

She looked at him through her glasses, she wore glasses now.

"I'm getting an old woman, Steve, an old woman. I'm not so sure about things as I used to be. If Aline wants me, if Aline is in need of me—I failed her many times, I fear, poor child—I am ready. She can come back here. Angela would not have done more for her than I would have done, than I will do; but don't ask me to see him."

All the vale of poor Constantia's declining years was, nevertheless, full of doubt. Would Angela have done more for her, could Angela have done more for her? She knew the answer. It was hidden from Stephen, but she knew it. Angela would have loved her little daughter; Constantia had only loved Stephen.

"Very well, then, I will go over. It's a mare's nest, I've little doubt it's a mare's nest they've got hold of, and it's Aline that Karl is looking after."

So certain was he that when he asked for Karl, and was shown up, not to the library, as heretofore, but to the drawing-room, and had a back view of a figure in white draperies on the sofa protected by a screen, he made a step forward, spoke Aline's name, or had almost spoken it, when Karl's outstretched hands and hearty voice checked him.

"This is good of you, Hayward. By Gad, Hayward, I'm glad to see you. Joan, my dear—she has been very

ill, you know. Don't get up, Hayward will excuse you. She wants a lot of care—" Karl's smile when he looked down upon the fragile little woman that lay there—not Aline, but a fragile little woman, with a wide intellectual forehead and pathetic eyes—was a revelation to Stephen. His very voice had altered, it was quiet, with a depth in it, with a note of tenderness, of overwhelming anxiety and tenderness, that it was difficult to hear unmoved.

Stephen, being a man of the world, did not allow his surprise to escape him. He took Joan's hand, and hoped she was on the road to recovery, and congratulated her on her view from the window, and was altogether apparently at ease and at home in the situation. But he was inwardly almost overwhelmed, not because he was a stern moralist, or because he had thought Karl Althaus a saint, but because, after all, the gossip had been justified, and the little woman—well, did not seem quite the type that one would have expected to find in the position.

Of course it was absurd of him, he realised it had been absurd of him, to be so sure it was Aline Karl was guarding. Aline, of course, was still with her husband, still with that cad who had taken her away.

Stephen accepted a cup of tea from the invalid, who sat up to pour it out, and explained that her invalidism was a thing of the past, that now it existed chiefly in Karl's imagination. She said a pretty word or two of acknowledgment, by the way. Stephen found her fascinating. He got under the charm of her personality very soon, and he perceived her rare intelligence. It transpired in half-a-dozen sentences that she was from the Cape, and well up in the political affairs of the Colony; and they talked South Africa with rare pleasure and enjoyment. He noted Karl's pride and contentment as he lay back in his easy-chair and watched them.

It was almost the first afternoon Joan had felt well enough, or been considered well enough, to come down to the drawing-room, and Karl seemed so glad, so pleased, too, when his friend was announced, that Joan could but

feel happier and more like her old self than she had done before.

Stephen was carrying away the impression of a pleasant hour, when he remembered the incongruity of it, and what people were saying. He could not understand the situation even yet, could not credit that it was as people said.

Karl had gone downstairs with him. They turned into the library. "You were surprised, Hayward?" he asked. The pride had gone out of him a little. It struck Stephen he didn't look altogether happy or at ease.

"Well, yes, I had heard something of it, of course, but all the same——"

"You didn't expect to see me in the character of a married man, eh?"

Stephen hesitated, turned as if to say something, but thought better of it. After all, he shrugged his shoulders; it was no affair of his. She was a nice little woman, a clever little woman too.

"I think you are very fortunate," was what he finally got out.

Karl sighed at that, looked at Stephen doubtfully.

"I suppose I'm not the sort of fellow you would have thought she would have married?"

"She? But I don't know who she is. I've never met her, have I?" He was bewildered, and why did Karl harp upon the word marry?

"You must have heard of her. She wrote 'The Kaffir and his Keeper,' and those articles on 'Religion and Slavery' in the *Times*."

"Good heavens! Did that delicate little woman write 'The Kaffir and his Keeper,' and—and—?" After all there was no good making another muddle, no good not "speaking out." "When did you get married, Althaus, why have you kept your marriage a secret? Are you married?" he asked abruptly.

"What do you mean, what the devil do you mean?"

"It's not I," he said quickly, "not I only, old chap; I heard something. I did not credit it; that is why I came

here to-day. You say you are married, then why, why the secrecy?"

Karl reddened.

"I suppose they're asking?" he said.

"Is it to be wondered at?"

"Hayward——"

"Don't confide in me," Stephen put in hastily. "My dear fellow, I don't want to know. If you had not put it that way I should never have asked."

"But I want you to know. I want everybody to know. Good God! what are they saying?"

Perhaps Stephen had a certain curiosity. She was a charming little woman.

"What has become of the Turners?" he asked, as he flung himself into a chair prepared for a confidence; "that's a Wilson over the fireplace, isn't it?"

"Yes, the others are still in Piccadilly. I haven't had time to arrange things yet."

He had not had time to arrange even his thoughts, he had forgotten the world.

"What are they saying?"

"What do they always say under the circumstances?"

"You don't mean——"

"They say you are living here with a lady——"

"With my wife."

"Where did the ceremony take place? Why does nobody know her? Wherefore the mystery? You make me speak; I'm not trying to force your confidence. I did not credit the thing when I first heard it, I came round to ask you what it meant. There I found you and—her!"

"I've been a fool, I see I've been a fool."

"Is she your wife?" It was interest now, not curiosity that prompted him.

"Thank God, yes. But she has been very ill ever since we have been married. I took her away, we've only just come back; I never thought about that, about what people would say. I wanted to keep it quiet for a bit, I had my reasons for wanting to keep it quiet."

"They ought to be strong ones. Am I to go on questioning you? Am I to ask what they were? You can check me you know; if it's a delicate matter, I don't want you to tell me. But if I can put anything right, help you in any way, well, you know the boot has been on the other leg long enough."

Karl could not quickly make up his mind. Of course he saw in a moment the mistake that might have arisen, that it was not problematic but certain, he hardly realised. And the mistake must be put right. But how much must he tell Stephen? He was perplexed, and Stephen, seeing that he was perplexed, spoke then with more earnestness than was habitual to him, perhaps more sympathy.

"I needn't tell you, I don't think I need tell you, that I shall respect any confidence you choose to place in me; but there may be something here in which a man of the world, a man of this particular little Mayfair world, can be of use. If you care for me to know, I should be glad, Althaus, I should feel it a privilege to be of use to you."

Stephen thought of unmortgaged Hadalstone, of his secured income. And he had done nothing for Karl, nothing. He was a proud man, it would solace his pride if he could help Karl Althaus; in a delicate, trickish social matter, as this seemed to be, he might find the opportunity to show his gratitude.

Karl made a dash at an explanation.

"My wife was a Mrs. de Groot. Her first husband was a Dutchman. We were married recently, in Islington, at a registrar's office."

There was a want of frankness in Karl's manner, a note of embarrassment.

"But what—then why——?"

"Wait a bit. The fact is, the matter touches you in a way."

"Touches *me!*"

Louis's name was nauseous to Karl's lips, the thought of Louis was noxious in Karl's mind. Daily it became more so, as he watched Joan struggle back to health.

But Stephen would have to be told something, he was Louis's father-in-law, some explanation was due to him.

"There was a bit of land." How it all halted, how difficult it was to tell! "Her husband owned it—it passed to her. A scoundrel—some fellows—wanted it—Louis—" Karl floundered, but Stephen thought he began to see daylight.

"If you are trying to break to me that my precious son-in-law is a scoundrel, and that you've only just found it out——"

"But I've got to get even with him." Again Karl's eyes were bloodshot, and the veins on his forehead swelled.

After all he was on fairly safe ground with the "bit of land;" he need not tell more of the story than that, the ugly mean story.

"It was the deep of the Geldenrief. He bought the outcrop against me, thinking to get the deep from her. Everything he had came from me——"

There he broke off. Everything Louis had come from him, and everything Louis had taken from him. He lived in the house with Joan, under his roof he sheltered her, but nightly his arms were empty, and never would it be otherwise. He could be brother, protector, friend, but between them for ever was Louis, and what Louis had done. Something he must tell Stephen.

"The Geldenrief outcrop isn't worth twopence, and the deep I've given her back. I've got money enough, I've given her back the deep. I can break him. I'd like to wring his neck. His father was a wrong 'un, and his mother. I ought to have guessed how he'd turn out. I've promised not to lay a finger on him—Stephen, he's a real wrong 'un, a damned bad 'un. Thinking of him drives me mad." He got up and walked about the room.

"He robbed her?"

"Of everything."

"I suppose she knew nothing of business."

"Oh, it wasn't that—" then he stopped short.

"He doesn't know you have married her?"

"That's it," he stopped his restless walk abruptly. "That's it, you have hit it. I didn't want him to know—yet."

"But you've not seen him lately, you have had some sort of a difference?"

"I didn't know of this. It was over his marriage we quarrelled. Damn him, damn him, damn him!" Karl dug his foot into the carpet, smashed a paper-knife in his hand, flung away the pieces, swore again, groaned.

"Stephen, what am I to do?"

"Announce your marriage, have your wife presented at court," answered Stephen promptly, rising, stretching himself. "Hasn't he counted on inheriting your wealth, sharing it? Won't this marriage be a sufficient blow to him, what are you waiting for, man, what is there to wait for?"

Stephen had no thought of his daughter, of the alteration in his daughter's prospects. He only thought how best to help Karl, how to straighten out matters for that nice little woman upstairs. He did not try to learn more than Karl told him.

Of course there were difficulties to overcome, difficulties Karl himself had created.

In the ordinary way Constantia would have helped them out, but Stephen hesitated at asking her to present Karl Althaus's wife. He told her the circumstances, however, and was surprised to find how comparatively mild she was, how comparatively easy to persuade that the authoress of a book which had actually captured the novel-reading world about two years ago was worthy of presentation to Her Majesty. She would not do it herself, could not, even now, stultify herself and her mission to this extent.

"Besides," as she told Stephen, with rather a painful smile, "if I have to present a Mrs. Althaus, it ought not to be this one." Which speech Stephen deemed of happy omen for Aline.

But Constantia, not being antagonistic, and Stephen and she owning magnificent poor relations, and Karl Althaus

a practically unlimited banking account, with the exercise of a little tact and social delicacy, the matter of Joan's presentation at court was duly arranged.

One of the difficulties was Joan herself, when the project was first mooted to her.

As she grew stronger and her mind clearer, her position too began to grow cruelly clear. When Karl told her that she was to be presented at court she shrank from it.

"Oh, no, Karl, not that, not that. Let me live in retirement, let me live in solitude. I can't face it, you know I can't face it."

She saw this hurt him, though when she pleaded with him he had no answer. He saw no flaw in her, he knew she was fit to face the world. Yet he would not, could not, urge her to anything that would trouble her. He only grew more restless, looked unhappy, brooded; she thought he brooded over what his Louis had done to her. He wanted her to face the world. She could give him so little, do for him so little, but this she could do, she could nerve herself to this effort. If harm came of it, if he and she lost instead of gained by the move, at least she would have tried to please him, and shown him her desire to do so. He wanted to see her back on her pedestal, that pedestal of womanhood and purity from which, in his eyes, she had never slipped; but, deep down Joan knew, as woman do know these things, that no pedestal, however high, could be tall enough to conceal the flaw that was on her. If he would put her up for all the world to see, then all the world might see the stain.

But when she hinted or urged it, it hurt him. So, in the end, she yielded, for, why should she hurt him? Rather, far rather, would she risk that curious, questioning eyes should hurt her. If Karl, therefore, thought that diamonds and feathers in her hair, a train, and Her Majesty's gracious acknowledgment of her curtsy, would stamp out the past, why should Joan, poor clear-sighted Joan, deny him this false hall-mark of her value?

So she was dressed by Jay's in a real lace petticoat and

a train of fine velvet; she wore a parure of diamonds for which a Marie Antoinette might have sacrificed a kingdom—or a minister—and looked in all her fine feathers, what in truth she looked without them, a delicate little woman with a network of wrinkles round her wistful eyes, a pathetic droop in the corners of her mouth, an air of fragility and aloofness which effectually distinguished her from the young and frivolous *débutantes*, the happy brides, and the ambitious matrons, who thronged to Buckingham Palace on the same June day.

Still, her individuality gained her a certain distinction. In any case Society would have accepted her; the Hayward approval, the Althaus millions, would have given her the *entrée*. Even Constantia admitted that it was fit and becoming Society should on rare occasions permit genius to consort on equal terms with birth, and "The Kaffir and his Keeper" had undoubtedly been a work of genius. In the presence of Joan, the sceptics forgot to say that, of course, it was written by some man or other, but, when she was not present, they instanced the fact that it remained the solitary proof of her talent, that she had never written anything else, to prove that she must have been assisted in it. Nevertheless, she was received, even run after, and she achieved what is called a social success.

But Joan was no longer happy among people. The *naïveté* and charm that had been hers in Cape Town were lost; she was shy and constrained, conscious of her false pretence. Her success was due to *réclame*, to Karl and Stephen, perhaps not to anything she herself said or did. A stray allusion, an untoward anecdote, brought the sudden red to her cheek, the sudden tear to her eyes. She grew paler, thinner, in a month of the season's gaiety, and Karl took alarm.

She had also grown nervous with him, she avoided his glances, evaded being alone with him; he could not fail to notice it.

"She's taken a dislike to me. I've blundered some-

how, she is going back, not forward, I'm just about making another mess of it," was his explanation to himself; but he sought for opportunities to put her at her ease, to restore her confidence, to get her to tell him what ailed her.

It was during this time he made his arrangements about Louis, definitely dissociated himself from him in business, returned his letters unread, and communicated to him, through a solicitor, that he had done with him. In fact, he could not have trusted himself in an interview, the interview that Louis, relying on the old power and the old love, had asked for.

When Louis heard of the presentation of Karl's wife, when he knew who that wife was, he ceased to press for an interview. Karl, influenced by Stephen, was satisfied for the moment to go no further in his vengeance. Louis had money enough to live on, Karl had been too liberal in the past for Louis to have any immediate difficulties about money. When he wanted more, he would be unable to make it; everywhere he would find the ground had been taken from under his feet. That was all Karl did, cut him off from himself, and tried, very hard, and somewhat unsuccessfully, to forget his existence. He did not want to be hanged for murder, and there were only two ways open to him. He made a settlement on Stephen's daughter, on Louis's wife, a settlement of which only Stephen and the lawyer knew, a provision in case Louis's character developed. Stephen understood the spirit in which it was drawn up, and was grateful, but he told Karl he could now provide for his own daughter, that he was anxious to do so, that both he and Constantia were anxious for reconciliation. Karl's impatient persistence in the deed made further argument impossible. He could not bear the mention of Louis's name.

Neither man contemplated any possible reprisals on Louis's part. They were short-sighted, they felt secure, they looked not an inch beyond their noses; and under their noses at the moment were only Joan, and the Com-

mission that the Radical papers had forced upon the Government, to report upon the Raid.

Joan had grown pale, and weary of the season, and Karl watched her wistfully, followed her about, endeavoured to interest her in the coming Commission, in a big scheme he had on hand for bringing Oberammergau to the East End, and he tried to bring back the smiles to her lips. He did not guess, at first, that it was this very watching, this very care he had for her, that was bringing that curious frightened look into her eyes, that curious shrinking when he approached her. There was nothing of his care for her that she missed, there was nothing of her gratitude that failed.

"Don't you think you could start writing again?" he asked her one day, wistfully. "That book now, that 'Book of the Jew' that you told me about, don't you think you could get on with it? I'd take you down to the East End, show you the sights, local colour, don't you call it? I could give you local colour for your book." He remembered how once she had told him the joy it was to her to trace the words on paper, when thought turned into phrase.

"Oh, Karl, don't ask me to write. I was so happy when I wrote."

She burst into tears. But when he wanted to take her hands from her face, to let her cry on his shoulders, to comfort her as he had done when she was ill, she had shrunk from him, thrust him from her, and rushed from the room.

"God, she hates me!" he cried, and stood bewildered. What had he done, or left undone? Why did she repulse and dread him?

It was her clear sight that was moving her, her restored intelligence had begun to see what Karl had done for her, what sacrifice he had made in this marriage, this preposterous marriage, into which she had been hurried. She knew all he had done for her; but it was a preposterous marriage.

Karl loved her! Not like the brother, whose part he assumed, but like the lover, whose privileges he would never claim. She saw it in his eyes, sometimes, when, unawares, she raised hers and met them, felt it when they drove home together in the brougham of an evening, and parted in the hall, knew it when, in strange moments, she saw a flush in his cheeks, an involuntary movement, and a sudden fearful beating of her heart betrayed him to her.

She trusted him completely. Nevertheless, the day might come when he might ask—no, he would never ask—but when, in return for his care, his unselfishness, duty, answering unselfishness, might force her to give from pity, from infinite comprehension, that which to another she had given in love.

At the prospect she shuddered, and her dreams became haunted, and she wanted to hide herself from his sight. Karl's eyes, which seemed to her pleading eyes, Karl's wishes, which she thought she read there, Karl's hand on her shoulders, all outraged her; for in her life there was, there could be, but one man.

She had caught a sudden glimpse of Louis in Bond Street, seen the wide shoulders, the poise of the handsome head, and again she was back in the past, and all of it was dim but the dear touch of him, when he had first loved her, when life had opened glowingly. Now life was empty, there seemed no hope in it. After she had seen Louis once more, and this time the dark eyes had met hers, the hopelessness was full of anguish. She knew that her marriage had outlawed her, even from memory. And what she had felt for Louis in the past was not dead nor exhausted.

Oftentimes, when Karl's footsteps overhead woke her from a sudden dream, and she realised of whom she was dreaming, she wished she was dead, she wished she had died with her baby.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

HAD Stephen Hayward's career not been at stake about this time, he might have been able to help, might have seen more of what was going on. As it was, he was absorbed in his efforts to persuade his cousin, and to cause it to be represented to Lord Sarum, that neither his daughter's marriage nor his notoriously augmented income justified the suspicion being cast upon him that he knew of the Raid, or had in any way taken advantage of it. That the former Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs was one of the ablest men on their side of the House the new Government knew, but the sensitiveness, the extreme sensitiveness, of the public conscience in regard to the character of their statesmen was reflected in a certain party aloofness or party coolness of which Stephen had begun to be aware. It was inadvisable for him to make himself conspicuously Karl Althaus's friend, inadvisable for him to become associated in the public mind with the South African capitalists. He had to walk with extreme wariness, and his footsteps had better take him, for the present, past the Althaus door.

Karl had only himself to rely upon in his fierce endeavour to understand Joan's attitude, his miserable effort to find out what ailed her. He lavished diamonds on her, but his diamonds made matters worse, he saw that. They went out a great deal, and they entertained a great deal, and Joan grew paler and wearier. He insisted on a week's quiet, and took her away with him to Paris; the shrinking, nervous manner she had begun to show when alone with him grew more pronounced. He began to lose heart, to grow depressed, and, as ever, when Karl Althaus grew depressed he harked back to his unfaith, and talked Judaism

with a sort of rage at its limitations. He was supremely uncomfortable, and he had a sort of idea that Christianity would have helped him. He felt that curious alienism of the Jew, felt it was that which was estranging Joan, was at least standing between him and his complete comprehension of her. When he got on this topic he was quieter, less obviously seeking for an explanation of what Joan could not explain, less embarrassing, so she encouraged him to talk to her about it.

He got it into his head, in this restless, unhappy time, when the little woman who shrank from him occupied his thoughts by day and through troubled, sleepless nights, that if he felt his limitations so acutely he should do something to minimise other people's. This was what started that futile scheme which brought Karl so much undeserved obloquy. Yet, in the idea there is a germ that may some day bear fruit.

Karl's idea was not to convert the East End Jews, but to teach them the story of Christ and let that convert them. Societies and missionaries had been a complete failure, at least that is what it seemed to Karl, because he was a man grown before he had heard of the Disciples. He thought, nevertheless, that he had found a way of teaching Christianity to his fellow-countrymen in Whitechapel. He wanted to give them, these poor brothers of his, the belief he longed for but had never attained, because he had seen it bring happiness to death-beds and comfort to survivors, and no amount of money had been equally efficacious. He was shy of his own idea, because, not having personally accepted the Gospel, nor being anything but ineradicably a Jew and an unbeliever, it was difficult for him to explain his attitude; and with the people who could best help him he was least in sympathy. It was only the Nonconformists, the Christians who have the greatest simplicity in their faith, that he had found able to grasp his mental attitude; and it was only the Romanists who, through the medium of sensation, could convey what he wanted to teach.

He was like a man who, drunk with champagne, learns that pure water can quench thirst, that, try as he may, give as he can, the people are too many for him to fill with wine, and some of them must ever go thirsty if he could not teach them of water. His wealth was champagne to him, and he was even now and always exhilarated with it; but this Christianity that soothed death-beds was water, and if he could give his people that, it was an inexhaustible well, and they would thirst no more.

Ever since he had begun to be a rich man he had wanted his mother back again, to ply with luxuries. But Joan had written on her mother's grave, "*With Christ, which is far better.*" He wanted to feel like that, he wanted his people to feel like that.

He was confused, because nothing is so confusing as the endeavour of a teacher to impart a knowledge which he does not possess; but he worked out a plan which seemed picturesque to Joan, and capable of being turned to political account by Stephen, who had a new Education Bill in the back of his mind, and had realised, when at the Local Government Board, some of the difficulties presented by alien immigration. Oberammergau gave Karl his inspiration.

He would build and endow a national theatre for the performance of miracle plays, of Passion plays, of plays illustrating stories from both Testaments. On Saturdays and Sundays it should be open all day, it should be in the heart of Houndsditch, and the Jews should be bribed and tempted to come by stories of Ruth, and tableaux of Hagar in the wilderness; they should be taught the habit of coming, and then, when it was their resort, their habitual resort, the Story he wanted them to know should be gradually unfolded.

Karl had a thousand charitable schemes for his people; his contribution to the Board of Guardians, gratefully large and unstinted as it was, hardly represented what he was prepared to do. There should be schools and hospitals, nursing-homes and homes for the dying, maternity

charities and orphanages; but all should be in connection with his theatre, the theatre, where, in a language, the very poorest, the very youngest, and the most neglected, could understand, the language of scenery and circumstance, the "story that had moved the world," should be borne in upon them morning and afternoon and evening. He had it in his mind to engage great actors for the parts, great artists for the scenery, great musicians. And everything they should see for nothing, those poor Jews, who now heard the story only in adult life, when, like Karl, it was too late for them to realise it. As a race he would help to keep them apart; their food, their language, their ceremonies, he would preserve. But they should hear Christ was born for them, and died for them; they should hear His message.

This scheme, crude and absurd in the telling, nevertheless had a purpose and a poetry in it that made Joan's life harder. This big man, with his simplicity and all his unsatisfied longings, she could read more easily than he read her. She, no more than the religion he failed to grasp, had power to help him, or at least, if she had the power, she had hardly the will. The situation between them was strained, at times almost to breaking point. The stronger she grew, the more the thought of Louis rose and dominated her mind; and Karl's dumb love for her, Karl's touch, even his presence in the room, made her longing for the other more and more intense.

She tried to be sympathetic with Karl in his strangely inconsistent scheme. He would buy land in the East End for his theatre, he commenced buying land.

"You see, Joan," he said, talking eagerly to her with the plans in his hand, and an appointment with the architect actually made, "you don't get a chance of believing a thing if you don't hear it till you've grown old, and sceptical about most beautiful things, and are always looking, so to speak, for hall-marks, and authentic signatures, doubting everything. If I build this theatre, mind you, and fill it with little children, and let them see the Na-

tivity, and the Wise Men coming from the East, and the Resurrection, and all the rest of it, they won't forget it, they won't pooh-pooh it; it will just sink into their minds, and it will stay there—" He was always wistfully asking for sympathy, for assurance.

A short interregnum there was in Joan's poor literary life, when Karl re-inspired her, when she started writing again with the big scheme for inspiration, when she sat in that many-windowed square room which overlooked the Park, and tried to repay him for all he had done for her, by making him the hero in that "Book of the Jew" which was faintly projected, which seemed still to have life in it, even if it were a life she found it hard to kindle.

But Louis was in London. It was that, it was the rare hurried glimpses of him in the Park or in crowded assemblies that paralysed her pen, made her days tumultuous, and her nights sleepless. That fine façaded Park Lane house held an unhappy man and an unhappy woman, living, the one in his artificial complication of the White-chapel conversion scheme, the other in the make-believe of her literary work, but each of them distracted by the other, and owning it in guilty glances, averted faces, strange silences, awkward moments.

Great love has great insight. Karl began to understand. He had known for a long time that he wanted his wife; he began to know it was that which she feared. He did not suspect she had seen Louis, for he thought Louis had left London, and had not been in town since the night when he had knocked him down. Chance, which had given Joan her distracting glimpses, had left Karl in ignorance. Not knowing she had seen Louis, not fearing anything but that she feared himself, he made his sudden plan, and saw—yes, saw *relief* flash into the tired eyes, heard a sigh break from her, a sigh of relief.

"Do you think you could get along without me for a bit? I don't like the way this thing is going on over there. I'm uneasy about the way they are conducting the trial; I don't trust the judge. I've got a lever I could

use with Kruger, even now, and I could use it better from Cape Town than from here. The boat goes Thursday; I'd like to slip over for a spell. They could get on with the theatre plans just as well without me, and you—you'd be all right for a bit; you could get ahead with the book."

He had seen the relief lighten into her eyes:

"Of course I should miss you."

"Eh! oh, of course. But you think I'm right, don't you? You think some of us ought to be on the spot?"

"Not Pretoria! You don't think of going to Pretoria?"

"We must see how the land lies."

She was glad, there was no doubt she was glad, in the prospect of his going. That had been her first thought; it swallowed up everything else. She would be alone; she would be free from watching, loving eyes, she would be free from the good-night kiss that Karl gave her sometimes, that she always dreaded, free from the shy brotherly touch that had no touch of brotherliness in it, from the nights when Karl's restless footsteps over her head filled her with remorse, when the cessation of them filled her with terror. She would be free, the days and the nights and the house would cease to hold this anguish of conflicting passions.

Something of this she tried to tell him before he went. When he was actually going, every other feeling was subordinated to remorse.

"You have been so good to me, Karl, and I—I have given you nothing."

She broke down at his going, and sobbed in his arms.

"I'm not ungrateful, I understand, I know. Karl, come back to me soon. I will be different, I will try to be different."

He soothed her and caressed her hair.

"There, there. What is there to fret at? I'll soon be back. There's no talk of gratitude between you and me. I don't want anything of you."

He lied; she felt it in the sudden beat of his heart, the sudden tightening of his arms. "I only want that you should put on a smile, and be the old Joan, and be happy with me."

"When you come back——"

She felt his goodness, all his sacrifice.

"When I come back," his voice was hoarse, "it shall be as it was before I went away—just as you wish, everything as you would wish."

"Oh, Karl! why aren't you different?—you make me ashamed. Why was I never worthy of you?"

"Nonsense," he thrust his emotion into the background, spoke gently:

"You mustn't have morbid ideas, dear, mustn't let me go away and think you're brooding. Perhaps——"

But, even in this her softened mood, when he held her in his arms, he would not say that, perhaps when he came back, perhaps when she had had time to think things over, when she had grown accustomed to the knowledge how well he loved her, she would let him love her. He would not say it, not leave it as a dread in her mind, a duty to which she must nerve herself. He finished his sentence differently to what he had meant. His voice was gruff and broken:

"Perhaps when I come back we'll give up this town life, try the country, and see if you don't do a bigger thing even than 'The Kaffir and his Keeper,' with our English fields and hedges to help you."

So the moment of their farewell was over, and, if Karl took his last kiss from her lips instead of from her cheeks, losing control for one half-second, he realised, before he was in the train on the way to Southampton, that, with all her tears, or remorse for her coldness, there had still been no response from those lips.

And now again Joan was alone.

Louis knew it, knew it almost before it was an accomplished fact. It was in the air that Karl Althaus was going back to South Africa to use his personal influence

with Kruger on behalf of the Reform Leaguers, and that he had secured a passage on the *Berwick Castle*. It was in the evening papers the night before he sailed. Of his actual departure Louis assured himself.

All those titled friends of Louis's, all those Society ladies who had found him attractive, had not forsaken him because he had married Stephen Hayward's daughter, or because Karl had quarrelled with him. Many of them did not even know that Karl had quarrelled with him. That was how he came to be at Lady Herodsfoot's reception two nights after the *Berwick Castle* had left Queenstown. Karl had wished Joan to go out during his absence, to go on living her life as she had been living it.

There was nothing dress could do that it had not done for Joan that night. Karl's absence had already taken a little of the strain from her eyes. Then, she had written a few sentences, and the ring of them was pleasing her still as she mounted the stairs, there was a certain curve in her lips, and a dreaminess of expression. Louis watched her from his point of vantage, he had thought she would come, and he watched for her. She had regained her figure, once more it was attractive, slender, yet svelte and full of curves.

The French artist, who was responsible for her toilette, had undraped the white shoulders below the top of the arm, cutting the dress as our grandmothers cut their low evening bodices. The little face set on the delicate throat was pathetically small, and the blue eyes were wistful eyes, but Louis was satisfied with what he saw.

She was still desirable,—and she was his, of course she was his; she had been stolen from him—Karl had stolen a march upon him. He watched her coming up the stairs, and, when the sudden heart-beat told her he was there, and she looked up and saw him, she saw the old Louis; his hand was brushing up his moustache, a smile sat on his lips. When that hand of his was stretched out to her she did not touch it, she was speechless, she

bowed her head only, but the crush on the stairs imprisoned her and held her, and his voice had lost no charm.

"At last!" he said; "at last!" Then stairs and people, flowers and music became confused and indistinct about her, and only Louis's voice and face were clear. His "at last!" was a low murmur for only her ears. By his side was Aline in her tall, patrician fairness.

"Your wife?" said Joan, and this time she put out that trembling hand. It was cold, too; Aline felt it was cold through her glove.

"You are Louis's brother's wife?" said Aline.

Louis's brother's wife! The words were strange enough with Louis smiling there, his handsome eyes and lips smiling at her, no less beautiful than she had ever seen them. How the smooth, thick black hair lay back from the white forehead. In the imperial, in the brushed-up points of the moustache, there were touches of grey.

"You and Joan ought to see something of each other," he said, still looking at Joan with that smile. "This is the first time you have met, but Joan has heard of you. I told you of Stephen Hayward's beautiful daughter, you remember—at the fancy-dress ball?" he had the insolence to add.

She remembered, she was stunned with memory.

They played the farce through. Aline, dull to what went on around her, was attracted in some unusual way to this little woman, pale, and with such cold hands, wife of that strange brother of Louis's, who sat up all night drinking whisky with him in Cape Town, who was so rough, and unlike any one she had ever met. Louis left the two women together, he made the opportunity to leave them together. He could afford to wait his time.

Joan could not reject the advances Aline made. She had been told the girl was not quite like other girls. Very soon she penetrated into the truth of it, and was subtly glad, without knowing why, and interested in her.

"I want to come and see you. I may come and see you?" Aline pleaded, as they parted. Not a word had

Louis said, not a word to her alone. Some one else had taken her to supper, and called up her carriage for her. Mrs. Karl Althaus never lacked cavaliers, and Louis had stood aloof. It was in the hall they had met again and Aline had made her request. The Society shibboleth came so easy, so pat.

"I shall be charmed," answered Joan. She said the words over to herself as she sank back into her carriage and laughed hysterically. She would be charmed—if Louis's wife came to see her. How strange it sounded, how strange it was, and the evening was stranger still. Why was she excited, what agitated her, filled her veins with fire, shook her, and banished thought?

Of course Aline called on Joan, she called the very next day; used as a pawn, she made her unimportant move. The link that bound these two was magnetic between them. Aline came constantly to Park Lane during the next week or two. Louis never came at all. The works of art, of which the house was so full, drew Aline, who had grown up in an atmosphere, dim with crystallised centuries. The bronzes, the tapestries, the few ivories, held her wandering eyes, and Joan followed her about from room to room, and tried to see what it was she missed in her, what it was that set her apart from her fellow-women, and wondered too—but checked herself wondering—if Louis knew she came, if Louis sent her. She knew he could not come himself, to Karl's house, and she set down to wounded feeling and delicacy of conduct that which in truth was but part of a scheme, a deliberate plan. For always she misjudged Louis; how could it have been otherwise?

The Turners had been sent over from Piccadilly. They hung, until Karl should come back, in the picture-gallery, in strange juxtaposition to the Fragonards. Joan, groping in the dark after Aline's intelligence, took her in to see them. She hardly paused before them, but the amorous light of the sun-lit Fragonards drew and held and fasci-

nated Louis's wife. The poor brain that lay behind the impassive beauty of the young patrician saw, unrepelled, what the painter had tried to convey. There was something, unhappily, that had not died in her when her sentient youth was killed.

"They tell of great joy. Don't they tell you of great joy, and sunlight? We had two at Hadalstone in the drawing-room. A woman and a man and Cupid, roses, and always the wonderful sunlight. In those others there is no life, only dead scenes, gorges, waterfalls—" She shivered. "I hear them drip. I hate to hear water drip monotonously."

And Joan, calling it the "novelist's instinct," the "study of psychology," calling it anything but by the right name, listened to and was endlessly interested in Louis's wife.

"Do you love pictures?" asked Aline of her.

"Only those that are never painted," she answered vaguely, seeing them.

"When I was going to marry my cousin John, he wished me to be painted. I didn't want to hang on a wall and stare. I didn't want to marry my cousin John, and secure the succession."

"And you are glad that you did marry Louis?" hazarded Joan nervously. Then she hurried to another question, and would not listen to the answer, and felt her cheek burn; she knew she must not, dare not, pry into Louis's married life.

But always she had the longing to see him, to hear his voice again.

"Are you going to Lady Herodsfoot for Goodwood? Do come. I want you to come," said Aline on another day.

"Are you going?" Joan asked guiltily; for she had had an invitation, and was wavering, and dreaded where her wavering would take her.

"Oh, yes; for the week. My cousin Violet is going, and perhaps John. I would like you to know John. I

could not marry John—" She begged Joan to come to Goodwood.

Louis thought it was he who prompted every move, who stood behind, directing, guiding it, but it was not entirely so. Somehow these two, Joan, who had never had a woman friend, and Aline, who stood outside friendship, had a curious affinity; something they held in common, these two women who loved Louis Althaus. Aline, who lived in silences, the gentle girl who had lost her way so early, and Joan, who talked all her life, with pen and ink sometimes, but eloquent always, would have been drawn together however they had met. Joan told herself this, constantly.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

It was a very smart party Lady Herodsfoot had gathered together for Goodwood. Jack and she always knew how to do the right thing; the worst of it was they so seldom had the wherewithal to do it. But Jack was very easy-going, and he credited the story of this wonderful bargain of a house, and the bit of luck at bridge, and all the little miracles that made it possible for him to go through the week in style. The only members of the party that made him elevate his eyebrows were Louis Althaus and Karl Althaus's wife; he could not see exactly how they fitted in. It did not suit Lady Herodsfoot to explain to her Jack that one of these two *was* the party. She said Lady Violet Alncaster was coming, and so was Legoux, and anything like a revival of the flirtation between Violet and Louis Althaus which had amused them all so much a season or two ago, might bring matters to a point.

"Oh, well, if the Duchess suggested it," said easy-going Jack, "I suppose you could hardly say no. But I should think that Althaus would be rather bally awful in a houseful of people for a week on end."

Lady Herodsfoot promised to keep him out of the way. The extraordinary part of it was that Lady Herodsfoot really thought it was on Violet Alncaster's account Louis had taken the house, had asked her to play hostess, and made everything possible and convenient; for so he had meant her to believe. Once his opportunity had come, once he and Joan were under the same roof, with a week before him, he had no doubt he could put matters right between himself and Karl. His vanity was not cured, neither was his hopefulness for the future. When Joan was completely under his influence she would work Karl

for him; that she would come under his influence again he read easily enough in her nervous avoidance of his eyes, in her want of self-possession.

The Goodwood house party had all the right ingredients. There were two duchesses, with Lady Violet and Lord Legoux, a foreign royalty from Germany and an Indian Prince, two or three racing women without their inconvenient husbands, the owner of "Saltpetre," and two other members of the Jockey Club, a couple of the racing women's addenda, and the Althauses. Jack Herodsfoot was a capital host.

Louis had taken the largest and best house in the neighbourhood; there was a chef from the "Savoy," and there were a couple of four-in-hands for driving to the course. He had a big stake to play for, and although he was not reckless in money matters as a rule, he made an exception here. People talked, of course, people talked, about the Herodsfoot income, and the Herodsfoot *ménage*; but the Indian was conspicuous in attention to the hostess, and Louis kept himself discreetly in the background. It was the second day before Joan arrived.

She was incongruous there, it struck her so the very first evening when the gabble at the dinner-table was all of racing, and the gabble in the drawing-room followed it closely, and four tables of bridge were started as soon as the men came up. She had no place there, she watched them a short time from her vantage coign on the sofa, then rose to retire, thinking to escape inconspicuously. The window offered the easiest exit—through the French window to the garden she slipped.

But when she had stepped through the window, and was in the moonlit shadows of the old garden, her footsteps lingered. It was an exquisite night, the heat of the day had turned to cool languor and restfulness; stillness was in the depth of the dark green trees, the air was odorous with the breath of exhausted flowers.

It was where the trellised rose-beds gave on to the shelving bank of green turf that she saw Louis; she stood

still, she saw him! But now they were alone, with only the moon and the broken shadows on the path, and the stillness. She stood, uncertain, but he made a quick step forward.

"At last, at last, Joan," he said again, and would have caught her to him, but she put out both hands to push him back. "No, no—Louis!" He would not let her hold herself away from him; not her fear, not her reluctance, but that which was at the back of both, he knew when he drew her to him.

"My Joan," he said, and kissed her lips—no, not kissed, he rested his on hers, and had his arms about her, and made her remember what they had been to each other. For one obliterating moment nothing was real but his arms, and his dear breath, soft lips, soft eyes; everything else was forgotten, and she only felt she had found life again.

It was only a moment, a flower caught by a drowning woman as the rushing stream hurries her to destruction. He met her reaction, that was Louis's talent, met the recoil and revolt.

"Leave me your hand, Joan, there is no harm in that—leave me your hand," he pleaded, and though hers trembled, he held it.

"Don't think I would hurt you. You ought not to have left me, you know you ought not to have left me, but I am not going to reproach you." She left her hand in his; how little he had altered! "I searched everywhere for you; I've been wretched without you, miserable. You ought to have thought of how I should suffer. You are the only woman I have ever cared for. You have spoiled my life; but I don't care for that. I don't mind being ruined!"

"Ruined!" The word startled the echo from her.

"Don't you know that Karl has flung me out, discarded me? I don't care, but Joan——"

"But he promised me——"

"Well, never mind what he has promised you—he has

broke me, broke me. But, Joan, it isn't that; let that go. Why do you want to take your hand away? Oh! Joan," and now he had caught her to him again, "I've been so miserable without you, so miserable——"

How could she resist him?

He did not woo her, he only reminded her, and bewildered her, and begged to her.

"I know you are thinking of your duty to Karl, but you owe me something. You knew nothing about love until I taught you. You could never love anybody but me, could you, Joan?"

And indeed she never had.

"I tried all I could to find you, but Karl was urging me about securing the Hayward interest. He forced my hand. Joan, you know I tried to find you."

"Leave me go, Louis; don't hold me, leave me go."

"I won't touch you. But don't tell me you've forgotten me, that I am nothing to you now, that Karl has robbed me of you too."

Every other feeling and emotion in her was subordinated to the wish to tell him that Karl had not robbed him of her. Karl was the better man, the better lover, but it trembled on her lips to tell him that she was still Louis's Joan.

"I will never interfere between you, but you must let me see you sometimes. I must have you to talk to."

"Louis, it's all wrong. I can't bear it, let me go." Her voice was faint. Never had she been able to resist him, never, she had only been able to flee from him.

"Although you left me like that, I forgave you at once, immediately. I never bore you any malice. I knew you did what you thought right. I did think, I own I thought, you ought to have let me be the judge. And look what happened. We got the farm all the same. But I swear I never left off caring for you, Joan. I must, I must," he held her to him, "I must hear you say that you have never cared for anybody but me."

And she never had.

That was the danger of it. The man's voice, though her brain rejected his arguments, always touched her heart, his presence always moved her senses, her defences were all down before him, and he saw into every weak, unguarded place.

That night in the dark garden he made her promise, he wrung from her a promise, that she would not avoid him, that she would let him talk to her, that they should discuss the position. He moved her by his desire for reconciliation with Karl, by telling her of his love for her, and his unhappiness without her, he moved her through all her starving womanliness and faithfulness to him. There had been no other man in her life. He moved her by the fervour with which he told her they would not wrong Karl, would only talk, and be together sometimes, and wrong nobody.

That was the first evening. Her dreams were broken that night. She wandered with naked feet on rocky ground; hanging precipices, gloom and danger were around her, and she heard Karl calling to her, she struggled on toward his voice, stumbled and fell, struggled on again, bleeding, and ever desperate and crying as she went, but ever stumbling and falling, then she woke to find she had been crying in her sleep, and her pillow was wet. Three times she dreamed that dream, it was all the night held for her.

The Goodwood party flirted and raced, played bridge and talked scandal. Soon it was smilingly recognised that Louis Althaus was very attentive to his sister-in-law; yet Aline clung to Joan, and refused to understand at what Violet hinted, and other people smiled. And Louis manœuvred for short interviews, and pressed his claims, and made her life bitter sweet, and poignant. But that they "would not wrong Karl" was the phrase their interviews heard oftenest. So the week sped along, until Friday came. To-morrow the party would break up, to-morrow Joan could get free, go back to Karl's house, and be alone with her memories there.

But on the last day of the races a soaking rain drove the party to an early return, and, whilst some of them sought their bedrooms to repair their bedraggled condition, to preen their feathers and dry their curls, and others had found that daylight was no bar to the joys of a "heart" call, and in the gaiety of their afternoon spirits were declaring "withouts" on spade hands, Lady Violet prompted by some malevolence, some lingering spite about Louis, followed Aline to her bedroom, and pointed her wit in such a manner that it precipitated the inevitable catastrophe.

"Let us have tea up here, Aline. Send Susan down for it."

She had followed Aline into her bedroom, somewhat rudely displacing Joan, who had had the same intention. Joan hesitated, then turned her lingering steps away, perhaps guiltily glad.

"I can't play bridge in the day-time, and if I sleep now I shall be awake half the night, so I thought I would come in for a gossip," began Violet.

Then followed the little talk about horses that made Aline yawn, then about dress, which woke her up again, and then about people.

"Who made the Herodsfoots invite your sister-in-law here? She is awfully out of it."

"I don't know. I asked her to say yes to her invitation."

"Oh, you asked her to say yes!" Violet laughed maliciously. "So that is the way of it, is it? Have you and John ever met since you chucked him overboard?"

"Not until yesterday."

"When he came up to the coach, and they asked him to join our party this evening?"

"Yes."

"That was Louis Althaus's idea, I suppose."

Aline hesitated. "I don't know."

"What are you playing at, you two? Did you want to meet him?"

"I? Oh, no."

"I never asked you about your elopement. How did it come about?"

"My—elopement? My elopement?"

"Yes, your elopement. Why did you chuck up John in such a hurry and bolt with Louis Althaus?"

"I—I don't know."

"If you fell in love with him, why don't you want to keep him?"

"To keep him?"

"Yes. Why do you let him take on his brother's wife?"

"His brother's wife?"

"Oh, don't be such a fool, Aline. You must know what I mean. Everybody's talking about it. They're together, morning, noon, and night."

"Joan?"

"Joan?" repeated Violet mockingly. "Really, Aline, sometimes I think you must put it on, that you cannot be such a fool as you look. You must have noticed them during the last four days, seeking every opportunity to be together. If they are not on the drag, and they have only once been with us, they find room in the dog-cart; if one has a headache, the other stays at home; and evening after evening they moon about the garden together. You don't mean to say you have not noticed it. Where are your eyes?"

"Joan and Louis," repeated Aline more stupidly than ever.

"Yes, 'Joan and Louis.' You don't suppose he would be above it, do you? You don't look upon your husband as a saint, I suppose. But mind," the little vixen said, leaning back in her chair luxuriously, "that's the difference between him and one of us. *He* chooses his brother's wife for his carrying on; it's playing it too low down, you know. I suppose they have got a standard, those outsiders, but it's a different one from ours. There is something about Louis Althaus—I don't say there isn't; as you know, he and I were very good pals once upon a

time. But I should never have thought of marrying him. That's where you took my breath away. I'd as soon have thought of marrying a crossing-sweeper. That is, I mean if I wasn't broke, or in any sort of a mess. Were you in any sort of mess ever?"

"I?" But of course she flushed.

"Yes, you! I know Constantia looked after you like a dragon from morning to night. But what on earth should have made you throw over John and run away with the crossing-sweeper, I mean, with Louis Althaus, if you were not in a mess, is more than I can understand. If John does come here, do you think you and he will foregather? Do you think, if he sees your husband running after another woman, he will return—well, I won't say to his first love, because I rather fancy I was that, but to his second?"

"Violet," said Aline earnestly, standing by the easy chair and laying her hand on her cousin's arm, "I cannot quite follow what you are saying; you know I am not as quick as you are—what do you mean about Louis and about Joan?" Violet laughed at her.

"I mean, my dear," mockingly, "I mean that your husband and your sister-in-law are engaged in a very pretty little flirtation together, always supposing it's not more than a flirtation—and I want to know whether you are going to console yourself with John; and the reason I want to know is——"

"Oh, I know, I know," said Aline impatiently. "I am not so simple that I don't know, that I have not always known, you like John." And then Violet flushed too a little and said:

"Like John? Oh, rubbish! We've always been pals, one must have somebody to quarrel with."

Aline brushed it impatiently aside. "But what do you mean about Joan and Louis?"

"Are you in love with him still? asked Violet curiously.

Aline flushed at that, but made no reply. She cross-examined her cousin abruptly, impatiently. Lightly and

jeeringly Violet, nevertheless, managed to make her understand that it had been noticed in the house that Joan and Louis were engaged in what seemed to that light, superficial crowd as a flirtation.

Neither the word "flirtation" nor the substance of it was understood by Aline. Her experience was as limited as her mental capacity; love-making had only one meaning to her, and Joan—it seemed impossible to connect Joan and Louis in that way. She had no one to whom she could speak of the dreadful thing that Violet had told her.

The tired, noisy party who had played bridge all that wet afternoon, played again all that pouring evening. Joan had not come down to dinner, she had a headache, she stayed in her room. Aline went up to her, sat by the bedside, put her head beside her on the pillow, tried to nurse her and take care of her, comfort and make up to her in some vague way for the horrible things that Violet had said. But Aline did not soothe away Joan's headache, or make her any happier. Neither the handkerchief dipped in eau de Cologne, nor the darkened room, nor the timid ministrations of Louis's wife, helped to make Joan's pain less.

For Aline talked.

"You don't like this noisy party, do you? you haven't been at home or happy here. They are not nice, not really nice, but they are all going away to-morrow, all of them. Louis has taken the house on for a few days; he thinks I ought to have quiet. You'll stay with us, won't you? It will be so nice, just us three. Perhaps Louis will go to town on Monday, then we'll be alone together, you and I; you won't mind being alone with me, will you, Joan? You don't mind because I am not clever, or like those others. You are fond of me, are not you, Joan? I always think you are." She nestled up to her, and Joan put her arm around her, and answered her mutely, and felt her eyelids smart with the tears that rose as she lay with her arms round this poor wife of Louis.

Aline had the mind of a little child, and the nature of

a little child. This grown-up person, so much wiser than she, was in pain or trouble. Some one had hurt her, that was all Aline had gathered from Violet, some one had tried to hurt Joan; so she would cuddle up to her, and comfort her and make her smile and look happy again. Louis's wife had the sweet ways of a child with poor Joan, who suffered under the petting, and was silently moved and well-nigh desperate through it.

What had Louis said that afternoon, when, turned away from the refuge of Aline's bedroom, Joan had been met by him, had gone with him into the library, and been weak with him.

Everything about him was sweet to her, his eyes and lips, his arms in which she had so often rested, his shoulder that her head had pressed, the crisp curls, tinted now with grey, that curled into his neck, his small warm hands. She loved him, perhaps, as men love women, and he had beauties that men see in women, rarely women in men. His ears were set flat to his head, beautiful ears, often her kisses had lain behind them.

And she had been weak with him.

She had belonged to him in a way that banishes a woman's greatest and most powerful protector. The man had made her his, with infinite difficulty, perhaps—with the breaking down of the barriers one by one, with tenderness and with tears, with prayers and protestations, perhaps with gentle force, but he had made her his. And before him all her fortifications were down. Woman's fortification is not her virtue—for woman's virtue is the same as man's virtue, no more, no less—her fortification, her bulwark, is her *modesty*; and Louis had coaxed and wheedled, sacked and undermined, left it fallen and ruined before his exactions and encroachments, made her utterly defenceless before him, and been satisfied with nothing short of this.

And to-day he had confused her with argument, weakened her with tears, tempted her with kisses, made her **promise—**

What had he made her promise?

To-night, with Aline's soft cheek against hers, Aline's ministrations about her, Aline's childish love and confidence echoing in her ears, how could she remember what he had made her promise!

"You will stay on with us, do stay with us, Joan." Aline pleaded, and all through a sleepless, feverish night, after Louis's wife had left her, two voices pleaded.

"What harm should we do to Karl? You will let me come to you. Joan, I am ill, I am quite ill with longing for you, I can't sleep——"

Louis's speeches came back to her disjointed, her ears, her heart were full of them; her throbbing pulses echoed them!

On Saturday the party broke up.

Joan and Aline watched the departing guests from the window, the brake full of chattering women, the brougham for the Duchess of Templegrove and the Duchess of Alncaster, the dogcart with the impatient horse champing at its bit; all the cheerful confusion and adieus. It had been decided, it seemed to Joan it had been decided for her, that she was to remain behind, that she was not to go with the rest of them. Her maid had not packed; there was no place reserved for her in the brake. After yesterday's rain the sun shone brightly on the scene, the ground was all cut up by the horses, the metal of their harness shone. Lady Herodsfoot had a blue marabout feather in her hat, the bugles on Violet's stout mother gleamed like the harness of the horses. Joan noted a hundred little things in colour juxtaposition—the yellow gravel, the yellow silk frou-frou of some one's petticoat, a clump of yellow sun-flowers, then, some notes of scarlet, poppies and the horses' head-bands, Lord Legoux's button-hole, given him in derision, the same flowers as Lady Violet's waist-belt; small things to notice, but, as she watched at the windows whilst the party drove away, they aroused vague, momentary interest.

And now they were all gone.

Louis came in from the hall.

"At last."

She had heard him say that before, but less lightly; she knew his limited vocabulary.

"At last we've got rid of them, now we can begin to enjoy ourselves. Aline, did you say good-bye to your aunt, I saw her looking round for you?"

"I forget—yes, I think I did. She kissed me, some of her beads came off on my lace blouse. Look!"

There was a tear in it, and an entangled bead or two. Louis laughed.

"Well, I suppose you want to change it. We shan't do anything until after lunch."

Joan would have left the room with her, but Louis, divining her intention, intercepted her.

"What! Frightened of me?" he said, when they were alone. His smile, reminiscent, satirical, challenging, was a smile that hurt her. Nevertheless it was a smile that sat on the lips she loved. "Don't you want to be alone with me? What a strange little woman you are. You don't mean to say you are frightened of me, Joan?"

She began to answer, with strange stammering words:

"Yes, of course I am, or of myself."

"Nonsense!" He put his arms about her. "Whom are we going to hurt? What a fuss you are making. One would think I had never been in your room before. What an extraordinary little woman you are."

"I wish I was dead," she said, and burst into tears.

"You don't mean it, don't snuggle your head down there." For, of course, she had not disengaged herself from him. "You are spoiling my coat. And you know we are going to be happy together. There, don't be silly, have you ever cared for anybody else in your life? Of course you haven't. Tell me, has there ever been anybody but me?" And he drew the oft-told answer through her trembling lips.

That was how Aline saw them. For, when she got up to her room, Susan was nowhere to be found, and, of

course, she could not change her blouse without assistance. She came back, therefore, and saw her husband with his arms round Joan, and his head bent lovingly over her. Joan had been crying. When he hurriedly released her, and paled, and began to make some incoherent excuses, Joan went on crying. So it was to her Aline went.

"What is it, Joan? What's the matter, Joan?" And Louis's arms were replaced by Aline's.

Louis slunk out, leaving the two women together; he thought Joan could compass an explanation good enough for Aline. He damned the interruption, but lighted a cigarette and got his hat and sauntered into the garden, making sure it would be all right. It was wonderful how he understood women. Joan had made a terrible fuss about her loyalty to Karl, but he had soon shown her that it was himself, not Karl, she had to think about. He thought of Karl, as he sauntered in the shade and threw away his cigarette, and let his mouth harden into mean lines, remembering Karl had knocked him down, had sent back his letters, and cut him off from the firm; only these things he remembered.

Meanwhile, Aline asked Joan why she cried, and Joan tried to answer her.

"Because I am wicked, Aline; because I can't be faithful to the man who has been so good to me; because the very bricks of the house would cry out if they knew,—because. Oh! because I am so wicked." She burst into fresh tears, and flung herself onto the sofa, and sobbed.

"Lady Violet said you were wicked," Aline answered slowly, in perplexity. "At least that is what I think she meant. I didn't believe her. What have you done? Joan, why don't you pray about it? I pray sometimes, God seems to listen now; he used not to. But now I pray I may be kept from harm, and nothing ever happens to me. Shall I pray for you, Joan?" She knelt down by her side. Joan sobbed on with averted head, and the

simple one went back to what that frivolous governess had taught her in happy childhood, and repeated the Lord's prayer.

"Lead us not into evil, but deliver us from temptation, for thine is the power——"

"Oh! don't Aline, don't, I can't bear it——"

It was unbearable. She gave the other a little caress, but it was unbearable, unthinkable.

"What did Lady Violet say? Tell me, tell me quickly."

"Are you angry?"

"No. What did she say?"

Aline could not get her thoughts together as quickly as Joan wanted.

"About you—and about Louis?"

It was unbearable. And it was a lie, a cruel lie. She had done nothing, nothing yet to justify any woman calling her wicked. She said so passionately; and Aline told her she believed it, she knew it.

"You won't be wicked, Joan, will you? You won't ever be wicked? It makes everything slip about, and away from me, and frightens me." Her own words frightened her, and set her trembling, for she was not quite as other people, and she grew white, and some inward terror seemed to seize upon her; she was palsied and grey and shaking, and she frightened Joan in her turn, who had to rouse herself and forget her own trouble, and chafe her hands, and get her warm, and give her air, and altogether exert herself to check what seemed likely to culminate in some sort of a seizure. Again and again Aline repeated, in frantic excitement: "You won't be wicked, Joan; you won't be wicked?" and clung to her, and begged of her. And Joan promised, promised at first hurriedly, and then seriously, and finally solemnly, and so in the end reassured her.

Joan and Louis lunched together. Aline was exhausted, Joan had given her into Susan's keeping, and explained she had been over-excited, hysterical. Susan had had her like that before, and understood what to do,

had, in fact, a draught that she gave under the circumstances. In her own way Susan was devoted to Aline; it was a way that had made the girl Louis Althaus's wife, but, since marriage was decreed for her, was not Louis as fit as John? So it seemed to Susan, and, nevertheless, she cared for Aline. And now the girl was lying down, calmed, and slowly recovering under her care.

Joan was very quiet during that lunch, her thoughts were abstracted, her words few. Louis watched her and felt satisfied. He could not question her before the men. He read her short answers, her abstracted thoughts, as he wished to read them. He had no misgivings.

But Joan had seen herself reflected from other eyes; and she had made a solemn promise. Dimly she began to see her way, a dread way, but the only one. Seeing it filmed her eyes, and made them misty, made a loud sound in her ears as of breakers on a gaunt shore, and a throbbing as of an engine getting up steam for a long journey. She would not look at Louis; nothing must stay her from her journey. His voice was muffled among the noises that she heard.

An hour after lunch she spent in her own room, on her knees. But she found no help; for, between her and help stood Louis, with his Mephistophelean smile, reminding her, always reminding her, of what she had been; and his lips were thin, and his smile was cruel, but she loved him. With his wide shoulders, and well-set head, and dark eyes, he stood between her and her prayers. So, at the end of the hour, she rose from her knees; her legs trembled under her, and she did not see very clearly before her. Everything was darkened, and she saw through a mist; but the path that she must follow was deadly clear.

They met for tea at four. Aline had rested, had recovered, had forgotten all that had passed, but her eyes sought Joan's wistfully; and, reassuringly, if wearily, Joan smiled back on her.

"It's all right, dear," she whispered to her, hurriedly.

"All right, have no fear." For Louis's step was at the door.

They went out driving together, all three of them. For so Louis had arranged.

The day was warm and sunny about them, with blue sky overhead; little white clouds, big white clouds, mountains of white clouds swept the horizon. All the country was richly green, all the trees were thick with leaves, all the fields golden with heavy swaying grain, the full summer of the year was heavy about them.

They drove. Louis talked—of the scenery, of the racing, and of the party. He exalted himself, and sang his own praises; it exhilarates a man to be in the company of women who love him. How well he had arranged everything! He dwelt on the work that the stables had put out, he explained his organising powers, and he did not disdain to tell them what the week had cost him.

And both women were silent.

Joan hardly listened to him, but he filled her eyes. How he eclipsed the rough, unwieldily figured Karl! His face was more than handsome; through the clear pallor of his skin one saw the superb health, saw it too in his easy grace, in the movement of his sleek limbs. His dark eyes were beautiful, and his little well-set ears. He took his hat off more than once that the gentle summer breeze should cool him; how fine the sweep of the dark hair from the white forehead, from the straight pencilled brows. When he saw her looking at him, he smiled; in that narrowing jaw, beneath those thin lips, she caught a glimpse of his even teeth, his pointed restless tongue; she averted her eyes, felt the sudden rise of a sob in her throat, and knew how he moved her.

Joan, later on, in her white evening dress, with pearls round her slender throat, diamonds sparkling in her hair, threw off for a short space all that was troubling her. There was a red spot on each of her cheeks, and her eyes shone. Louis looked at her often, and though her eyes

fell before his, and there were no answering glances nor smiles, he thought he understood her gay mood, and was triumphant and cynical and impatient. Aline sat at the bottom of the table, her eyes wandered uneasily, her hands and face twitched a little, for, as the dinner progressed, Joan grew more and more unlike the Joan she knew.

"Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," was the toast she pledged Louis across the table. "You remember, I always quote when I leave off thinking," she said lightly.

"So you've left off thinking? Well, that's one good thing done. Women ought not to be allowed to think, there ought to be a law against it, they always think the wrong things; it's the way they are made. Here's to Cape Town and the old days. Fill Mrs. Althaus's glass. Do you remember Government Gardens, Joan?"

Did she remember! She remembered everything of the old days.

"How mad, and bad, and glad they were, but oh! how they were sweet," she quoted.

"Plenty more where they came from."

At that she laughed hysterically.

To Louis she seemed the old Joan that evening, gay and young, pelting him with old phrases and the old quotations. The tarnished treasury of her happy days was ransacked to-night, and the baubles flung out, in recklessness, and an anguish of fevered haste. He saw no tarnish on the baubles, he saw only the glitter.

To Louis, Aline at the bottom of the table added a zest to each allusion, and a savour to what lay before him. Joan's feelings, too, were poignantly affected by Aline's presence.

Joan, in this mood, so light—Louis thought her mood light—careless, a trifle hard and shameless—seemed more and more desirable to him. The hardness would die out, he knew how to move her, how to work upon her; already he felt the little flushes of his coming triumph.

Now he encouraged her to talk, made her fill her glass again and again, urged her with champagne. The dinner was all too short.

When the women went into the drawing-room, Joan's cheeks were still redder, her eyes were brighter. She rattled on a little to Aline, but Aline was frightened of her, shuddered from her. Yet, when they parted they kissed each other, those two women. Joan's kiss was long. "Good-night, Aline, good-night," she said. And Aline shuddered and ran from her, for Joan's cheeks were so hot, Joan's hands were so hot, Joan's breath came so quickly, and Aline rushed from her as from an impure thing. And Joan laughed when she left her, sat by herself in the big drawing-room and laughed.

Inside she was all trembling, frightened, much more frightened than Aline had been.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

SHE did not stay in the big, empty drawing-room by herself, laughing, for long after Aline had left her. She would not wait until Louis had finished his cigarette, everything had been said between them, everything. She had remonstrated and prayed, and tried all she was able to resist him. But the enemy was within, not without; it was herself she had to fight, not Louis. And her fighting days were over, there was no pure-souled little baby coming to her, with starry eyes, no little pure baby to fight for, this time. A sudden rush of tears blinded her as she stumbled upstairs quickly to her room, quickly, as if she heard footsteps in pursuit. With panting breath she rushed to her own room and flung herself into a chair, and waited until the painful heart-beats had stilled their loud uneven pulsing. But the terror that was upon her made the stifling difficult, and presently she found herself listening to it, consciously trying to calm, to quiet, her heart and breath. When she realised what she was doing she laughed again, hysterically; why should she try to be calm?

She looked round the bedroom, chintz-covered, lavender-scented, with its four-post bed. The sight of the bed sent a sudden shudder through her; she could not stay the trembling that seized upon her, she put her head down upon her arms, hid her eyes, and had a moment's thrill, a moment's ecstasy and then—remembered and arose. The blinds were still undrawn, it was barely nine o'clock, the maids were still at their supper. The wide windows looked on to the broad sweep of upland, it was purple, not green, in the light from the rising moon.

She had drunk too much champagne, and she was

trembling, and the loud throbs of her heart were in her ears and in her head, shutting out thought; yet she must think. She went over presently and stood by the window, and tried to think.

"The wages of sin is death."

It was no use to let words rise and bubble on the surface of her mind, she must think.

She was weak, and loved Louis Althaus, and could not resist him. She could run away from him, she had run away from him once; but the world was not large enough for her to hide herself from Louis, so it was out of the world she must run. Must she?

"Set His canon 'gainst self-slaughter."

That was another bubble, she brushed it aside impatiently. She stood between Karl and Louis, and satisfied neither of them. If she went from them, they might come together again, but without those two what had she to live for?

"Scorn delights and live laborious days."

She let that stay with her a little. She could write, she knew it as she gazed at the wealth of the summer night, and felt it exquisitely. She could see the mists rising from the ground, the cowering flowers and drooping grass bending before it, to rise to-morrow morning refreshed, dew-laden, to sparkle before the morning sun, every detail she realised and knew she could phrase. She could write a better book now than "The Kaffir and his Keeper," her eyes were wider open, what she had said vaguely then, she could say vividly now. But to-night—to-night—Louis! Her cheeks flamed hot.

Karl had married her. How clearly she saw into the chivalry of what he had done! What a beautiful nature he had, this uneducated South African millionaire! It was the fashion to jeer at such men as Karl Althaus, but what a man he had been to her! How low and ill and miserable she was when he came to her; all that she fore-saw then was only hunger or charity, for at the time Karl found her she could not work. She had received charity,

charity had buried Louis's baby. Karl had taken every care from her. He loved her, he wanted her—as *she wanted Louis*. Karl had gone away; he would not plead, he would not ask, he effaced himself. Karl did not talk of sacrifice, did not tell her he was ill, ill with longing. Karl was a man, strong, he put himself on one side; he thought of her, of the woman he loved, he went away so that she should not see he suffered. But she saw, nevertheless.

The panther in Louis, the mere beast, she saw too. *And the beast within her leapt to it!*

To-night——

And by to-morrow she would be the word that decent women will not speak. The word would be reflected in Aline's eyes, and in the eyes of all the world about her, and in Karl's when he returned. She shrank and shivered at the thought of Karl's face; it would not be reproachful, she thought, it would be appalled, horrified, then pitiful. She could not face that pity in Karl's honest eyes, nor the trouble that would be there.

Could she not subdue the beast in her?

But to-night—now—in an hour——

There was only one way out of it—only one. Karl had sacrificed himself, effaced himself, gone away. She must follow him, but on a longer journey.

And no one ever faced grey Death with more horror.

She had written of that which no woman knew better—of the solitude of the soul, of the loneliness of each of us, as we walk side by side, with the men and the women who think they are our friends, and know our thoughts. She had written of the loneliness, and had felt it. Now it froze upon her. A sudden wild longing for Karl came upon her. He would protect her, guard her, forgive her. But no man could protect her! For she longed for Louis; she could not lock her door against him—hear his footsteps, and lie still. Her cheeks grew flushed again and hot. Nothing she could deny him—nothing. Once before she had fled because she could deny him nothing, but

this time she must go beyond reach, beyond possible reach.

Down the avenue, she could see from her bedroom window, the road lay grey. The trees were laden with the summer haze; it lay on their tops, it was cold among their branches. Beneath the grey mist, in the garden under her window, the flower-beds were as graves. And she wanted to live, desperately she wanted to live, her eyes filled and overflowed with pity for herself. She stood, gazing, and the tears streamed from her eyes, because she wanted so to live, and dared not, and the flower-beds were as graves, dark mounds in the moonlight.

She turned away from the window at length, saying her "good-bye" to the world. Good-bye, to all the world held for her, to fame and love, and all it held in sea and mountain, in sweet spring and splendid storm, and wind-swept skies, good-bye to Nature. With eyes that streamed and trembling hands, she shut the window; she had said good-bye, she shut it all out, and moved away from it, moved stiffly on her frozen feet. She was shivering.

But she got to the medicine chest, and nothing was steady about her, neither hands nor thought; her teeth chattered.

The champagne had helped her nevertheless, not enough to disguise the taste of the opium, but enough to nerve her to the gulp; the taste lingered, nauseous and sickening. Quickly, very quickly, her brain grew as unsteady as her hands had been. She got to the bed and lay there, flat on her back, for a little time, and terribly frightened. Then slowly a beautiful phrase shaped itself in the darkness, and helped her into calm:

"After life's fitful fever she sleeps well."

Now all she felt was the bitter horrible taste in her mouth. Everything else was calmed and quieted by the

drug, but the taste in her mouth was horrible, nauseating. The horror of what she had done seized her, and convulsive shuddering and a white sweat of terror broke over her.

In another drifting hour heart and mind grew torpid, and she ceased to know or suffer. Then came semi-consciousness. She wanted to tear at the thing that held her. She had changed her mind, she must get up, what had she done? The anguish that seized her was ungovernable, her half-paralysed hand, so heavy and difficult to move, got at the bell, and pulled, and pulled—and pulled. The knob came off in her hand, and the room swam round her, and then grew dark and peaceful. She had no taste, no smell, and she smiled to herself in the dark.

“After life’s fitful fever——”

She had pulled the bell—it was an electric bell—she should have pushed the knob, she smiled to herself in the dark, growing sleepy now, and calm again. It was stupid of her to have pulled the bell, but her hand and arms were too heavy to move, and all of her was heavy. How intensely dark and quiet it was; she opened her eyes—the darkness swam and floated, and made her feel sick, so she closed them again. How peaceful it was, how restful! *“After life’s fitful fever——”*

But the bed was too high, she could not get low enough in it; she was sinking, but she wanted to sink lower, she would feel better on the floor.

And then a long silence, the silence of oblivion, and again a vague consciousness. How high the bed was! She wanted to go lower, get quieter, there was another convulsive shuddering, and Nature’s effort to reject the poison. When this was over, in semi-consciousness, she saw a crawling Reptile of Fear, with viscid eyes, and tongue that slobbered red saliva, it sickened her with its odour, it was the odour of dead desire. Overpowering, the Thing crawled about the room with ribbed and

heaving sides, and she lay there shuddering at it, not knowing its direction, as it moved, a hateful yellow light shone through and about it. Then the reptile turned beast, and she recognized it—and tried to shriek. *It was the beast in Louis!* It would spring on her—and its mate was dead—and stank in the bed. With gasping, painful breath and shudder she lay; and in the room, now visible, now crouching, hiding, more fearful still, was that dank, viscid beast, lurking, feeling for its dead mate.

Its mate was coming to life! She struggled against the drug, she was bound, and gagged, and choked, and again convulsions seized her.

Louis's knocking, Louis's soft knocking, penetrated. But it was the knocking on her coffin that she thought she heard. They were the nails in her coffin being driven in. They were fastening her down, suffocating her; she fought for breath, for strength to shriek, fought in her dying, with gasping breath, to still her lover's gentle tapping—drifting through agony into deep unconsciousness, and thence to cold death, her last pang coming from his hand, as her first had come.

THE END

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